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Labor Education for Women Workers

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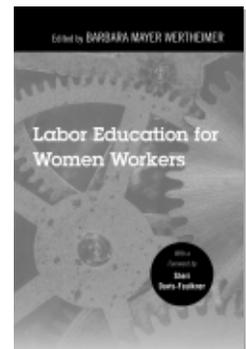
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CHAPTER 20

How Foundations View Funding Proposals on Working Women

By SUSAN VAIL BERRESFORD

Few studies of grantmaking for women's programs exist. However, those that are available reveal a pattern that should be sobering to anyone designing a proposal for a working woman's program. For example, in 1974 one survey found that less than one fifth of 1 percent of foundation funding reached feminist programs.¹ In 1978, a study of six foundations and corporate giving programs that derived their assets primarily from the sale of cosmetics to women found that less than 5 percent of the \$1.26 million granted in 1976 and 1977 supported women's programs.² Further, the study showed that when grants were made to male/female counterpart groups, such as the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, dollars for boys' projects outpaced dollars for girls' by five to one. Another study of government and foundation grantmaking for women's programs found that most funding for these feminist efforts clustered in a few subject areas and excluded as beneficiaries many subgroups of women such as female blue-collar and clerical workers.³

This chapter is designed to help the reader understand how programs get funded, and what can be realistically expected when seeking funding. The first section of the chapter discusses questions the grant officer will

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1. *Foundation News Magazine*, March/April 1975, article by Mary Jean Tully.
 2. *Survey of Six Foundations that Derive Their Assets from Sales of Cosmetics to Women*, April 1978. Available from Women and Foundations/Corporate Philanthropy, 35 South Main Street, Hanover, N.H.
 3. Rosabeth Kantor, Marcy Morningham, Barry Stein, and Meg Wheatley, *Review of Grantmaking for Women's Issues in the 1970s*, a report to the Coordinating Committee on Women's Programs of the Ford Foundation, Ford Foundation, 1970

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have in mind while evaluating your proposal; the middle section offers an example of Ford Foundation funding of a working women's program; and the final section discusses trends in funding for women's programs that may develop in the coming years.

Grant officers usually get many more proposals than they can possibly fund. Most often, the grant officer must work within certain program or geographic areas. Therefore, at the start, many proposals are eliminated or rejected because they are not consistent with the foundation's or grant program's focus. Very, very few foundations or government funding programs have been set up specifically to fund women's programs. In fact, staff probably assume that women's problems are outside the scope of their assignments. Many foundation and government staff will assume that working women have the same high levels of enrollment in educational institutions that women have generally; that working women have easy access to adult education courses offering the kinds of instruction they seek; and that these women do well in school. Therefore, the first question the grant officer has to answer regarding your proposal is: Why is working women's education a subject for this foundation's attention?

Your proposal must educate the reader to working women's special needs. You may want to argue that working women are not getting their fair share of existing educational programs, and include some form of documentation for this assertion. You may want to argue that course offerings are not tailored to women's needs. Surveys of working women telling interviewers what their educational needs are, or data showing course enrollment by sex, are two possible forms of documentation. Similarly, a funder may be swayed by evidence that when women do enroll in traditional workers' education courses, their drop-out rate is inordinately high. All of these facts argue that women are not benefiting equally from existing educational offerings. Many foundations and government programs are designed to fund experiments that help bring about a more equitable distribution of services or an expansion of opportunities to a formerly excluded group.

Another argument for working women's programs may be the recent enactment of legislative or regulatory changes that make working women's education programs especially timely. For example, if a recently issued regulation provides a new requirement to reach out to working women, a program can be described as helping educational institutions comply with the regulation. In the same way, if a recently enacted law requires some form of affirmative action for women, a program can be defended on the basis that it reaches work force women, a group most likely to be left out

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of a program aimed at women in general. In other words, your proposal can argue that the program assists an educational institution in complying with new sex-neutral policies and assures that the compliance effort throws the net beyond the women easiest to reach.⁴

Grant officers may be unfamiliar with special features of educational programs that promise to make them work well for working women. Testing the effectiveness of these features may be of interest to funders. For example, the proposal may do well if it emphasizes the fact that many working women have heavy family responsibilities. Ordinary after-work courses entail a very long day, late evening traveling, safety problems, babysitting that is often hard to find, and so forth. Courses for working women may need to begin early and be located near commonly used public transportation.

Similarly, a funder may need to be educated about working women's lack of confidence when returning to school. A program with special or experimental features designed to overcome this fear may have special appeal to funders. This could mean short courses to try out schooling again; non-credit offerings, which seem less judgmental; separate courses to prevent older working women from feeling out of place among young students; courses that build on material familiar to working women, not on highly theoretical material that may seem unnecessarily bookish at first; or remedial courses on subjects educators often assume working women have already mastered. The rationale for special programs needs to be made clear to the reader, who is probably unfamiliar with working women's needs.

Another convincing answer to "why fund this working women's project rather than something else" lies in the statistics showing the contribution working women make to family support and the link between education or training and employment opportunity. Do not assume that everyone considering your proposal knows that many working women are their own or their family's sole or major supporter. Do not assume that the reader knows how many single-parent working women there are; how dependent these families' self-sufficiency is on the women's opportunities to advance on the job. The reader may also be completely unfamiliar with women's efforts to break out of the pink-collar ghetto. All of these arguments can be directly connected to widening educational opportunities for working women. All can be strong arguments for funding a women's program.

4. For example, tuition aid might be offered to women re-entering the work force after years of homemaking and childrearing. Educational institutions would want to develop special programs to attract these new, subsidized students. Your program could be designed to help the institutions do this.

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This is by no means an exhaustive list. It merely suggests some of the arguments that may justify a foundation's shifting its attention from established program categories to include special projects for working women. Your program will have its own special justification and origin. You need to be sure that these special aspects are clearly described in the proposal.

After establishing the justification for the project, you need to convince the grant officer that your approach makes sense and is likely to succeed. Here, the grant officer will have in mind questions like: Is this a new approach that can not be funded through regular channels and, therefore, deserves special grant money? What is known about similar efforts that suggests the likelihood of success? Who are the staff and leadership proposed in the project? Do they seem to have experience or skills that will contribute to the program's success? What other organizations seem willing to bet on this project? Are there any employers, unions, women's organizations, church groups who are helping with some part of this? Have the program staff given consideration to how the effort might be supported after the grant is over? Can it be worked into regular funding channels? Will it require more foundation or government funding?

These questions are not peculiar to working women's programs. They are some of the considerations that grant officers have in mind while evaluating all proposals. Where women's programs are concerned, these questions are likely to be asked with greater than usual skepticism. Programs that move foundations or government into new areas may at first be subject to unusually careful scrutiny and analysis. Since there are very few foundations funding women's programs—especially programs for working women—your proposal must be unusually compelling.

A case study of a Ford Foundation grant for working women may highlight some of these points. In 1970, the Ford Foundation did not have a grant program designated for support of women's programs. Occasionally women's programs were funded, but these were very few in number and usually small in size and scope. Staff were interested in considering women's grants but had made no decisions regarding special funding focus or groups of women to be served.

In 1972, the Metropolitan office of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, proposed that the Ford Foundation support a study of barriers that prevented women's participation in union leadership and activities. The Cornell proposal noted that women comprised approximately 20 percent of union membership but only 4.7 percent of union leadership. It documented the increasing numbers of women in paid work outside the home, and noted the continuing

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and increasing wage gap between men and women and the fact that union women earn an average of \$1,500 more per year than their non-union counterparts. It discussed the fact that women are now likely to spend a significant part of their adult lives in the work force, and documented the contribution many of these women make to maintenance of an acceptable family income.

Cornell argued that a study of barriers to women's participation in unions might reveal remedies that could be implemented by unions and other institutions. These remedies might help increase women's participation in union affairs, thereby increasing the number of female union leaders, and help to fashion union policies that would benefit women workers. This approach was simple and modest. It appealed to the Ford Foundation staff because it focused on an important problem—economic security for women through employment and leadership in the employment sphere. It suggested a careful look at the factors that might be causing underrepresentation of women in union leadership, and only after this careful study did it urge an attempt to construct remedies.

The research was designed to examine women's involvement in seven unions of varying sizes, involving different industries and different levels of participation by women workers. Cornell would analyze the relationship of women's participation in union activities to their level of education; job status; race or national origin; marital status; age and number of children; membership in other organizations; and the attitudes of male union members and staff.

The proposal described Cornell's special qualifications to undertake the study. These included experience in working with blue-collar and working women, extensive contacts in the labor movement, the presence of a trade union advisory committee, and available consultation of Cornell staff. The two principal staff people were described as having extensive research, union, teaching, and writing experience. In addition, Cornell was prepared to commit faculty time, space, equipment, and overhead to the project. Most important, if the study found a need for an educational program, Cornell was ready to experiment with and implement some of the study's recommendations.

The proposal was favorably reviewed by foundation staff and funded in 1972. The study, which was later published as *Trade Union Women: A Study of Their Participation in New York City Locals* (Praeger, 1975), described a variety of problems women encountered as they attempted to become active in their unions. Problems such as lack of information about union affairs and history, lack of confidence in public speaking, lack of confidence in skills needed for a union job, and fears of added

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responsibilities and burdens, were frequently described by working women. Several of these findings suggested a lack of formal and informal leadership education and training opportunities for union women. Cornell then proposed to design a program of "Trade Union Women's Studies" to fill this gap. The program would include two levels of educational offerings:

1. Brief courses within individual unions to familiarize union women with new subjects, with going back to school, and with basic skills.

2. A one-year Labor Studies and Leadership Training Program for Union Women as an alternate first year of Cornell's ongoing two-year Labor Liberal Arts program (which had been attracting only a small number of union women to its student body).

In 1973, the Ford Foundation funded the first two years of this experimental program, and agreed to evaluate the program at the end of two and four years to consider a total of six years of support if the evaluation was positive. The evaluation was to include review of participants' reactions, the record of their achievements, observation of classroom sessions, discussions with Cornell and other educational leadership, and so forth. During the six years, Cornell was to support a growing proportion of the program's activities, so that at the end of the six years, the basic or core components of Trade Union Women's Studies would be supported by that institution. For the Ford Foundation, this meant that the experiment, if successful, would become part of Cornell's own structure and would not disappear when foundation support was withdrawn.

Trade Union Women's Studies has been successfully developed and institutionalized. The final Ford Foundation grant for its support has been concluded.

Since Betty Friedan published the *Feminine Mystique* in 1963, we have seen a resurgence of interest in the long struggle for women's rights in the U.S. Fifteen years is not a long life for one generation of a social movement. Women have been trying to get their fair share since the earliest days on this continent. We can assume, then, that women's desire for change will not dim in the coming years. However, we cannot know how long current enthusiasm and public attention to women's rights will last. We certainly cannot know how long the meager interest expressed by foundations and government will last.

We do know that a profound social change has occurred. Women will most likely remain in the paid work force. Families will continue to depend on the income of female family members. This will continue to bring vast changes in all areas of society. Barriers to women achieving full equality

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are not likely to be broken down overnight. Therefore, we can probably assume a continuing need for special programs for women to help them gain educational and leadership skills, and overcome discrimination. Thus, while funding fashions may shift away from the current "interest" in feminist programs, programs will still need to be funded.

In designing a proposal, be aware of these shifting foundation and government interests. An outsider always has difficulty understanding what a funding source's particular interests and priorities are. Annual reports, press releases, and newsletters are somewhat helpful, but they often inform the reader about grants already made, not subjects in which proposals are being sought. To keep up with the most recent interests, a phone call to the foundation or government agency may turn up a recent description of new program interests. You might also be in luck and get the information from someone on the telephone.

If you can learn of the funder's current interests, it may be possible to argue for a working women's program under other categories of concern. For example, programs for the elderly may be prominent on the agendas of funding sources in coming years. With a large proportion of the U.S. population falling within the older age group, increasing attention may be directed toward programs for the elderly. If a foundation or government funding program is not restricting its "elderly" grants to services for the elderly, it may be possible to argue for attention to programs that prepare working women for their later years. This may mean experiments with part-time work and education as a preparation for retirement. It might mean such new types of education for working women as education for new careers that can be continued in some manner after retirement.

If major funding sources consider health care a priority, working women may need education for new careers in the health field and education on how to be a more effective health services consumer. Such a special focus need not distort your program from its fundamental objective or concept. It may be a way that you can package and find support for one portion of a larger program. Or it may be a way that you can make a general connection between a funder's concern and your program.

In other words, program operators need to maintain a flexible approach to shaping their programs. They need to remember that funding sources often have gone through many steps to designate a new program area. Trustee or agency approval has been sought, types of grants described, and rough funding limits set. These are not easily changed, even when a superb proposal comes along. Therefore, the applicant needs to relate a proposal inventively to what is available from a given source.

Applicants for government or foundation funds need to set aside a lot

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of lead time. Funding often comes many months after submitting a proposal. Redrafts of the proposal may be needed, new budgets may have to be constructed, special letters of support obtained, and many other requests answered. All of this takes tremendous patience and a lot of time.

Some funders have set schedules for considering applications. Many government and foundation grant programs consider proposals two, three, or four times per year. Applicants should plan their submissions so that if they are approved at one of these meetings, sufficient time remains between the approval date and the program start-up date. It often takes several weeks or longer to get a grant payment. If your program cannot move forward without the grant, be careful not to get caught short.

Finally, before writing a proposal for a working women's education program, some of the general publications on funding ought to be consulted. Many exist, but three that are easily found in most libraries are: *The Foundation Directory* (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation). This is a listing of foundations by state, giving brief information on interests, size, trustees, etc. *The Foundation Grants Index* (New York: Columbia University Press). This is an annual listing of grants based on information collected by the Foundation Center. Judith Margolin, *About Foundations: How to Find the Facts You Need to Get a Grant* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1975). Publications on government funding usually cover a specific agency's program. These general guides to funding and filing applications can be obtained from the agency or its regional office. Often a telephone call to a national advocacy organization for women such as the Women's Action Alliance in New York City or to a Washington-based organization such as the Association of American College's Project on the Status and Education of Women will lead you to a convenient source of information on government funding for women.

It is most important to remember from the start that it will not be easy to raise funds for working women's programs; again, few grant programs are designed with women's issues in mind. Most funders automatically think of women's projects as outside their area. Your application will not only be a plea for your program's support, it will also be part of the continuing education of funding officers.