

PROPOSAL WRITING - *James Temple*

## Simple speak: creating a common language for funder relations

One of the most frequent questions any funder hears from not-for-profits is how to make a strong proposal. Applicants want to know how to get the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Yet many tend to become verbose, unclear and assumptive when they put their thoughts on paper.

Proposals and meetings between funders and recipients often become littered with acronyms. Confusion arises over the big picture. Facts that can make or break the case often take a back seat to the passion expressed about a particular issue or cause.

It's a scenario that I'm sure each one of us has experienced. But what is the root of the problem?

***"The funder and the recipient need a common language to help reduce the potential for friction..."***

## Same words, different meanings

The **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada Foundation's** latest discussion paper, *Capacity Building: Investing in not-for-profit effectiveness*, reveals a disconnect between the language that corporations and not-for-profits use to describe challenges and opportunities that affect both sectors. We find that both funders and recipients are challenged by the perception of power dynamics and how to best articulate the complex issues they face at their organizations.

In the context of proposal writing, these insights help to explain why there is often an "us versus them" mentality around the table: *Why does it feel like the corporation doesn't understand us? They say they want ROI, but I don't understand what they mean by "value." We have great values!*

These observations point to an important focus. The funder and the recipient need a common language to help reduce the potential for friction and maximize the true ROI – *Results, Outputs, Impacts* – of a potential partnership.

## Where mutual understanding begins

At PwC, we believe creating a common language takes three actions:

*Open dialogue* – Never be afraid to ask for clarity or for examples to help you understand what a funder is saying. There is a greater risk to the relationship if you hit a fork in the road and both travel down opposite paths.

*Commitment to "simple speak"* – As Albert Einstein once said, "Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler." Learn about some of each other's buzzwords and why, when

and where they need to be used. Make the commitment to say what you're really thinking – not just what you think your funder or recipient wants to hear.

*Focus on the process, not creating another project* – When working towards an undefined outcome, keep the focus on the process and measure success against how effective the working relationship is. Make sure to emphasize the existing process that the funder and the recipient have already discussed. That will help the grantmaker get the job done and not become confused by a proposal infused with creative license.

Always remember, a great proposal gets back to basics. Hone your communication skills to ensure you're speaking a common language with your funder. That will equip both of you with the right information to turn your proposal into a partnership.

We'd like to hear more about what you think about this issue and how corporations and not-for-profits can collaborate for better investment in not-for-profit effectiveness. Register for one of the joint PwC and **HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector** webinars on May 11 or May 25. ☺



## About James Temple

**James Temple** is the director of corporate responsibility for **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada** and director of the **PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada Foundation**. He oversees a team responsible for integrating good social, environmental and economic values into PwC's decision-making processes. James is a featured presenter at international conferences, speaking on the value of developing strong corporate-community partnerships. He co-chairs the **Association of Corporate Grantmakers** and sits on the board of directors for the **Ontario Association of Food Banks**.

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