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FUNDING FOR A RESEARCH CONSORTIUM ON SIMULATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses strategies for developing budgets, locating funding sources and enhancing the success of future funding for research on simulation and experiential learning conducted by a consortium of universities.

FUNDING OBJECTIVE

Prior to engaging in a fund raising effort for a research consortium, the actual objectives of the consortium must be clearly stated. The dimensions of the consortium project must be carefully thought out and the methodology must be carefully defined.

Once the methodology has been agreed upon, a carefully crafted budget must be developed which will provide for the success of the project. The budget should actually be three budgets. One budget would allow the project to be completed as planned without extra frills. A second budget should be developed to include the frosting on the project if fund raising is particularly successful. It would include the nice to do things which were left out of the moderate level budget. A third budget would allow a bare bones project to be completed. This would be the fall-back position for the consortium. While the project would still be worthwhile doing, it would fall far short of the desired scope of the consortium project.

The moderate level budget would be the central focus of the fund raising effort. Thus it should be sufficient to enable the complete project to be carried out without loss of results. If the potential funding sources appear pleased with the project and indicate a willingness to be more generous, the high level budget can be broached. If the funding sources indicate that they cannot fund the project in its entirety and thus may not be able to participate, the low level budget may be disclosed or a consortium of funding sources may be proposed.

SOURCES OF FUNDS

Research funds may be obtained from private or public sources. They would most likely be obtained from sources which are national in scope unless local or regional sources could be aggregated to provide sufficient funds and interest. It would be desirable to obtain funding from one source. However funding may have to be obtained from a series of sources in order to provide an adequate amount to support the consortium work.

The most likely sources of private funds are the foundations associated with major corporations. For example, both Exxon and General Electric have provided significant funding for business education endeavors. The Exxon Education Foundation has recently been awarding approximately 27 percent of its contributions to programs

which "improve instructional methods and...disseminate innovations" (Taft Corporate Giving Directory, 1985). Their grants typically range from \$10,000 to \$50,000. The General Electric Foundation contributes about 55 percent of its funds to education. The Foundation's typical grants range from \$2,500 to \$15,000 (Taft, 1985).

Private foundations may also be an important source of funding. Several which may be good candidates include the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. One of the Carnegie Corporation's interests is to advance the use of technology in education. Its grants typically range from \$15,000 to \$500,000. The Sloan Foundation's interest in education focuses on instructional programs. Its grants ranged from \$10,000 to \$100,000 last year (Taft Foundation Reporter, 1985).

Foundations' interests shift over time as witnessed by the massive support supplied to education by the Ford Foundation in the 50s and 60s. Thus success in obtaining funding from a private foundation is tied to finding a foundation which has an interest in the work proposed by the consortium and to presenting the proposal as addressing these interests.

Public funding sources can generally be classified as federal and state sources. Both the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education are federal sources which may be considered. As with private sources, their available funds and interests shift with time. State funds are generally associated with university grants or grants from state departments of education. State grants tend to be in smaller amounts and thus would have to be augmented with other funding sources. However, it may be feasible to obtain university grants from each of the universities participating in the consortium by playing up the fact that the research is an interuniversity project.

FUNDING STRATEGY

As with any group project, one member of the consortium should serve as the lead member for administrative purposes. The lead member would be responsible for coordinating the development of the proposal and for the submission of the proposal and serving as the contact point for the funding agency. Thus it is wise to select an individual who has had prior experience in craftsmanship and who may have contacts within the funding agencies. There is no substitute for internal contacts in the world of grant writing.

The lead individual would also be responsible for the administration of the grant over the life of the project. Prior administrative experience should be a prerequisite for the job. The administrative activities would be much simpler if one funding source would provide the needed funds for the project. However, reality may dictate multiple sources of funds

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to obtain sufficient money to complete the project. In this case, the appeal can be made to funding sources that the project is jointly sponsored which can sometimes reduce the sponsor's perceived risk of participating in the project. However, one may be faced with a situation where each funding source will commit to the project provided the other sources commit with no single source taking the lead and making the actual initial commitment. This situation requires an astute politician among the consortium members to get a joint initial commitment from two or more funding sources.

One key factor to successful fund raising is good proposal writing. The consortium project must be well thought out and the proposal must be complete and tight. The proposal may well be evaluated by other members of the academic community as well as by members of the business community or the governmental community. The proposal must be written so that it communicates the essence of the project to the nontechnical, lay person as well as the technical, critical academic. It will be competing with numerous other proposals which may have merit.

The proposal must stress the benefits of the research to the publics of the funding agency. Care must be taken to show how the research results will contribute to improvements in educational pedagogy. This is critical to the success of the proposal relative to other competing demands for funding.

FURTHER FUNDING

To enhance the success of funding future projects proposed by the consortium, the first project should be perceived by the funding agency(s) as delivering 110% of their expectations. Once credibility has been established with funding agencies, future funds will be easier to obtain. However the first project is the icebreaker and must be done very well. This includes meeting time schedules and providing timely reports of the results of the research effort. No corners should be cut and the complete product as promised in the proposal must be delivered.

A successful track record will go far in insuring the success of the consortium. While the initial funding source may not be interested in or able to fund future projects, the reputation built with the funding source will provide a valuable reference for use in securing funds from other agencies. In addition, the research product will provide a selling tool if it is first quality work.

REFERENCES

- [1] Taft Corporate Giving Directory, David E. Sharpe (ed.), (Washington, D.C.: Taft Corporation, 1985).
- [2] Taft Foundation Reporter, David E. Sharpe (ed.), (Washington, D.C.: Taft Corporation, 1985).