



**Communicating Well in Tough Times:
What Foundations Can do to Build Trust and Understanding for their Work**

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For years, most individual foundations -- and almost all small ones -- have taken the position that building public trust and understanding for foundations is a collective challenge -- something that can best be addressed by developing better umbrella information about foundations in a region, or by a concerted outreach effort mounted by a regional or national association in a time of challenge or crisis. Increasingly we understand that while the umbrella efforts are important, feelings of trust and promise are fundamentally built one foundation at a time...that's it's not all about media...and that smaller foundations have just as great a stake -- and capacity to engender support from those they touch -- as larger ones. This session will focus on how to act on that understanding.

This session directly addresses the central theme of the conference: how do we build public trust in the work of foundations. Specially tailored for foundations without communications/media staff, it will look at a variety of relationships -- with the foundation's own board, grantees, community partners and civic leaders, other colleague foundations, and the regional association -- and provide participants with concrete suggestions for ways they can support and manage these relationships, to create a pattern of greater understanding for the work the foundation does and the value it adds to the wider community.

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Communicating Well in Tough Times: Building Trust and Understanding for the Work of Your Foundation

Most foundations have a communications plan that deals with the core requirements of transparency: the 990, grant guidelines, a minimalist annual report. Many have a plan that extends to highlighting the work of grantees, and conveying the mission and work of the foundation in a fuller annual report, and a website. Some support grantees to carry out communications activities to accomplish advocacy or policy purposes aligned with foundation interests.

Most foundations do not have a plan for building and growing relationships with the people who matter most to them, and involving these people in both building the organization and feeling part of its success.

This too is “communications,” and it may well be the sweet spot of efforts to build trust and understanding for foundation work.

Eight Building Blocks for a “Trust and Understanding” Plan

1. Stretch your own thinking about what it means to operate in a digital world.
2. Make yourself a valued knowledge resource for more people than your grantees.
3. Map out “the people who matter most.”
4. Create space for conversations that are not grantor-grantee.
5. Think out loud.
6. Know and share the facts about foundations generally.
7. Equip your whole team to be an effective front line in the trust and understanding effort.
8. Make the top person the chief communications / “t & u” officer.