

**Marcia Sharp Speech Outline
Western New York Grantmakers Association
11/29/01**

“INCENDIARY THOUGHTS FROM LOTS OF OTHER PLACES”

I. Voices in a conversation....

“The greatest thing they did was bring us together and let us learn from each other”. (Grantee)

“They need to get out of the office. They need to get beyond their vision of the civil society to the real social fabrics that have been ravaged.” (Grantee)

“The day you become a program officer is the last day you’ll hear the truth from a nonprofit.” (Program officer)

"These two trends [focused giving and global pressures on corporations] have combined to somewhat marginalize the foundations in the civic and nonprofit life of our community."
(Grantee)

“We don’t know people in foundations.” (Civic activist, former public official in metropolitan area)

“It’s hard, because in some parts of the city there’s nothing on the ground we can work with.” (Trustee, small unstaffed foundation)

“I’ve gotten rejection postcards.” (Applicant)

“In this world you have to engage with government...to get these engines (or what’s left of them) to work for people. Foundations don’t want to do this.” (Criminal justice advocate, statewide)

“I know they know stuff that can help me in my work. But you’d never get it from their annual reports.” (Policy analyst, state legislature)

“How can they ask us to walk up the mountain, and not help us with the equipment we need for the journey.” (grantee)

“I would respect them so much, and I do respect the ones who do this ,if I felt they were in a searching mode... that they didn’t always “know”...that they were Marco Polos in a new landscape.” (grantee)

2. Conversations in an arena where...

- **Huge change is occurring**

- gov’t funding
- technology
- global
- demographics
- etc.

- **Everyone is under great pressure**

- schools, health, welfare, immigration.... “don’t work”
- not enough \$\$
- economy tanking

--war
--fear

- **Everyone (f's and nonp's) needs to learn new ways of working**

- tech competent/culturally competent
- what works, and adapt it
- work faster
- work in strategic alliances
- with different populations
- in "hybrid" structures (public and private, nonp and commercial, etc.)

- **Everyone needs to find ways of getting stronger and more effective themselves**

- financial, managerial, leadership, program capacity
- build and sustain cultures that work
- sustain creativity and innovation

- **Everyone needs to put together their strengths and assets with those of others**

- v. few solutions either entirely public, or entirely private sector
- need to tap market forces
- find out how small and large foundations work together
- collaborate with multiple f's and nonp's

- **There is huge hunger for leadership on sector wide issues**

3. Also conversations from an arena – of nonprofits and foundations working on social change-- where...

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- **Two principal players/'sides' don't know each other**
- **One side doesn't come out of the house**
 - especially biggest houses
 - rules and timetables for getting into houses v. complex
 - lines very long
 - hard to find where smaller houses are/(no signs)
- **And most of the talk and energy between two groups is how to give a grant, deny a grant, or get a grant.**

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUNDERS AND THEIR ACTION PARTNERS IS MOST VITAL RELATIONSHIP IN SOCIAL CHANGE. TOO MUCH FOCUSED ON FUNDRAISING...NOT ENOUGH ON WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN TO DO TOGETHER... DO DIFFERENTLY AND BETTER AS A SECTOR...TO SERVE WESTERN NY AND BUFFALO AREA BETTER.

4. Some suggestions

- **More meetings like today – everyone -- both sides, same room.**
- **More conversation involving both sides that's "above" the level of grantmaking and fundraising – that's about the issues, the problems and the solutions.**
- **More vibrant, ongoing relationships and connections between foundations and their communities.**

--foundations reaching, going out, through staffs, trustees

--foundations getting the community (not just the grantees/applicants, but other stakeholders, people and leaders to) “in

- **More direct foundation action, and more grants to support, convening, listening and learning in communities.**
- **More collaboration involving multiple funders and multiple nonprofits and other players, all as decision makers in defining the problem and the action.**
(Collaboration is more than cutting down on duplication of orgs and proposals).
- **More hard scrutiny of the irony of “Meet one foundation and you’ve met one foundation” and the tremendous pressure f’s exert on nonprofits to collaborate, merge, consolidate, and “get their acts together.”**
- **MUCH more focus (nonprofits can help with pressure here) on foundations asking themselves:**

--What kinds of organizations do we need to be in order to use everything we’ve got...

...grant \$\$, convening power, vision, knowledge, connections, clout, problem solving expertise...

...to the fullest degree, with the most public benefit.

CONCLUSION: We don’t know the “moves” to respond to many of the challenges I’ve posed. Nor did Marco Polo know exactly how to get across China in the 13th century. But he was a seeker, and a navigator, and a leader.