

The Four Things a Grant Maker Looks for in Evaluating a Proposal

Rob talks about the four things he looks for when making a grant: knowing and aligning with your purpose, being comfortable with your good character, understanding your idea, and knowing your track record.

Introduction

Today as part of our ongoing podcasts sponsored by the book [*When Money Goes on Mission: Fundraising and Giving in the 21st Century*](#), we're gonna open the toolkit.

And this is gonna be the first of a series of podcasts from the toolkit, drawn from sections three and sections four of the book.

Each of the things that I'll be going through today are actually covered in separate chapters in the book, but I'm going to introduce them here and then in future toolkit podcasts, we'll go into a more nuanced understanding of each of the four.

The importance of this is where we're gonna be looking at mission philanthropy, that is, what does a giver look for or should look for in a ministry when they're getting ready to give a gift.

It's about leadership and money.



The Four Things a Grant Maker Looks for in Evaluating a Proposal

And so there's four things that I looked at in the many years that I served in an executive director role in a mission's philanthropy.

And the four were this.

Your purpose. For those of you listening, I'm drawing on a board, and I just wrote the word purpose.

The second is your character. The third is your idea. The fourth is your track record.

And if you're familiar with the book, all of these working together should give a fuller understanding of the communion of giving and receiving.

And for those of you actually watching this podcast, you have now realized that I flunked penmanship in school.

Okay, let me take these in order and why they were important as I did my work.



1. Purpose

Purpose is where we connect.

The foundations where I worked had a purpose in giving.

At First Fruit, we had three big ideas of what we were looking to fund. Evangelization, holistic ministry, and leadership development.

And so if you're, and working in the majority world, and in places with less than a first world economy.

So if you fit all of those criteria, then there was at least the beginning of a connection, a place where we could begin the conversation.

If you didn't, then for example, if you were working in western Europe or in any other first world economy, First Fruit wasn't the place where you would find a suitable grant for your work.

As valuable and as led of God as that work might be, all philanthropies, all givers have to limit so that they can understand the impact of the giving that they're doing, or at least most of them will.

And so we start at purpose.



2. Character

And then the next thing I would look at is your character.

If we connected at purpose, if there was a sense that there was some right connection between us, the next thing I would look at is are you somebody we'd want to work with, because as a philanthropy, you're always working with a leader that's directing the mission, and so you're becoming a student of leaders and experts in the field.

And you want to know, is this somebody that I can trust, do you question your successes? Are you a student of your failures?

Do you tell the truth even when it's painful or can cost you dearly? Are you endorsed by people who know you well and are willing to stake their reputation on yours?

If that's the case, if your character appears to be worth investing with, if you're someone that we can trust, then the next thing we'd look at is your idea.



3. Idea

Your idea, often called your strategy, but it's your idea of how you're gonna attack your problem that's elicited in your purpose.

Does it make sense within the content of your purpose?

Now we're going to unpack all of these things so that you understand how these three so far fit together, but if your idea makes sense in light of your purpose, your character is something we can trust in, then the last thing we'd look at is your track record.



4. Track Record

This is looking back to look forward. So we're gonna look at how long have you been at this? What has been the results in the past?

It doesn't matter if you failed or succeeded, what matters is what you did with either. And so what can we learn?

Where are your Ebenezers, that is where are those places where the holy spirit intersected with your work? Where are the things, the challenges you came up against and how did your mission surmount those challenges?

But if you've got a short track record, you've got the same problem every kid coming out of college has, that first job. How do you get the first job so that you can develop a track record?

How do you get that first grant so that you can develop a track record?

It's a paradox, but it's one that we all face at some point. Nonetheless, a track record will also help the philanthropist, the giver decide how much the gift should be, and for what duration, because they can, a new work may only elicit small giving to begin with until you get some

momentums, then a giver can come in and give you some acceleration once your idea has been proven.



Three Questions to Ask Yourself to Develop Your Purpose

Okay, let me take you through these in order in just a little more detail, and then direct you to future podcasts where we go into them in depth.

Now I also want to point out that as you put these four things together, we're working towards a communion of giving and receiving.

That is a place where the giver and the receiver meet at the foot of the cross in a true communion of equals.

There's no difference at the foot of the cross between the wealthy and the poor, between the giver and the receiver.

And what is needed there is trust and accountability, and so what we're working towards in the toolkit is how to build trust and accountability. What are the actual ways to do this?

Now your purpose, when we come back to your purpose, I look for an answer to three questions.



1. What is God Showing Me?

The first of those questions is what is God showing me?

When God gives vision he gives sight. And what I mean by this is you will always, always be looking at the problem. It will bedevil you, you can't get away from it, everywhere you look you see that issue at play.

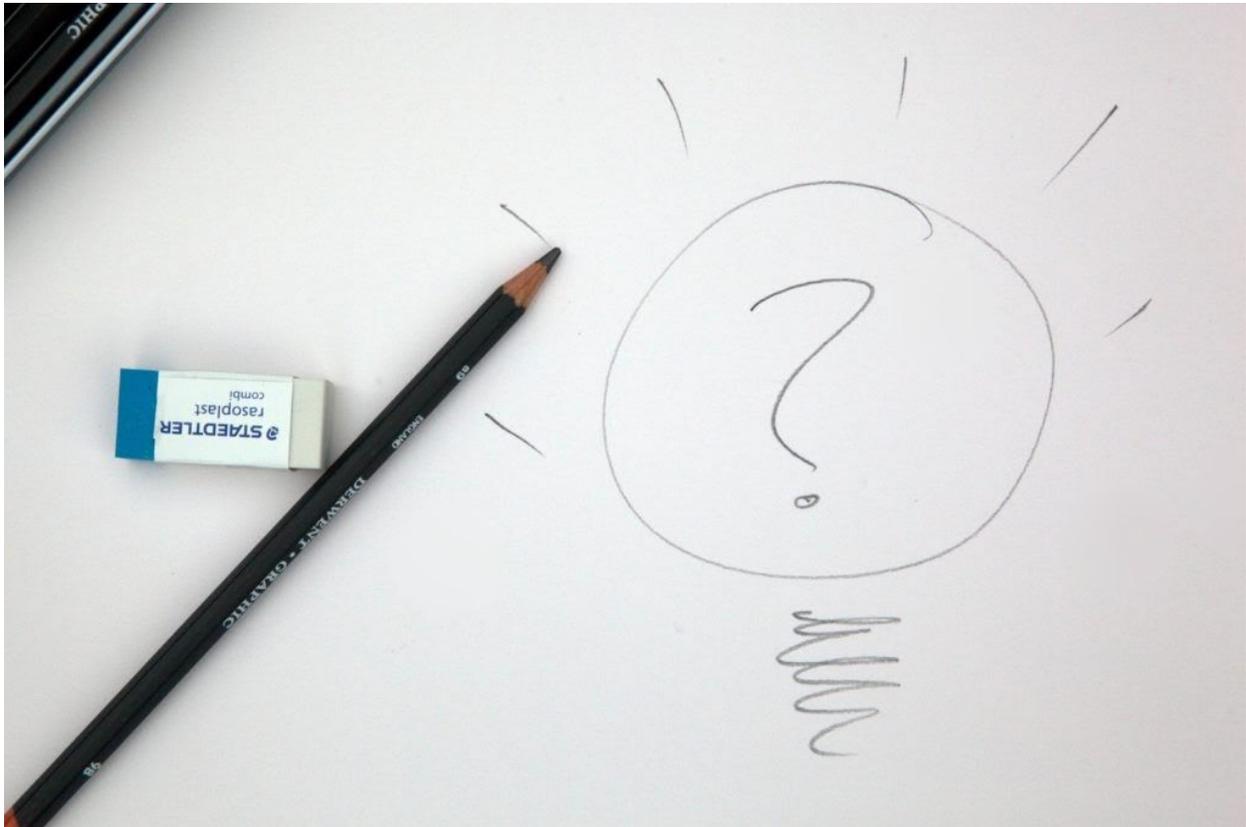
And you start thinking of your solutions. What would I do if I could deal with that?

It's how you answer that question, how well do you really look at what God is giving you sight to see?

Because I believe that for every need on earth, there is a purpose and a ministry to meet that need, no matter what it is. It just may not be your need. It may not be your purpose to meet it, but they all need to be met and they will all have vision to be met and God will bring the workers.

When the scripture talks about we need workers for the harvest, this is exactly it. God is showing us the harvest, He is showing you your part of the harvest to work in.

So how well you answer the first question, what is God showing me, will, and it's the easiest of the three questions, the three questions being what is he showing me, what's he telling me to do about it and how will I know I'm doing it, the second one becomes the more difficult one because we always bring our strategies.



2. What is Your Essential Purpose?

When I was at the rescue mission, we struggled with this question, as I tried to come up with ways of communicating to our givers, what was our essential purpose?

If you boiled everything down, reduced it to its essence, what were we really about? Was it the beds? Was it the meals? Was it the sense of location that we gave people?

Was it the cup of cold water? Actually we actually answered the second question.

Looking at the homeless situation in the town where we were working, which I expound upon at the beginning of the book. We answered the question, we're evangelists to the poor.

Now back then I couldn't have defined for you integral mission or holistic mission, but that's really what we're angling at.

Put it simply, we didn't think we could preach to somebody that was hungry. We thought we needed to give them a sandwich at least if we were to give them some kind of a witness. I can go into more of that later.

But the second question then it that essence of what I'm seeing and what I'm called to do about it.



3. How Will I Know I'm Doing it?

The third, the third question is how will I know I'm doing it?

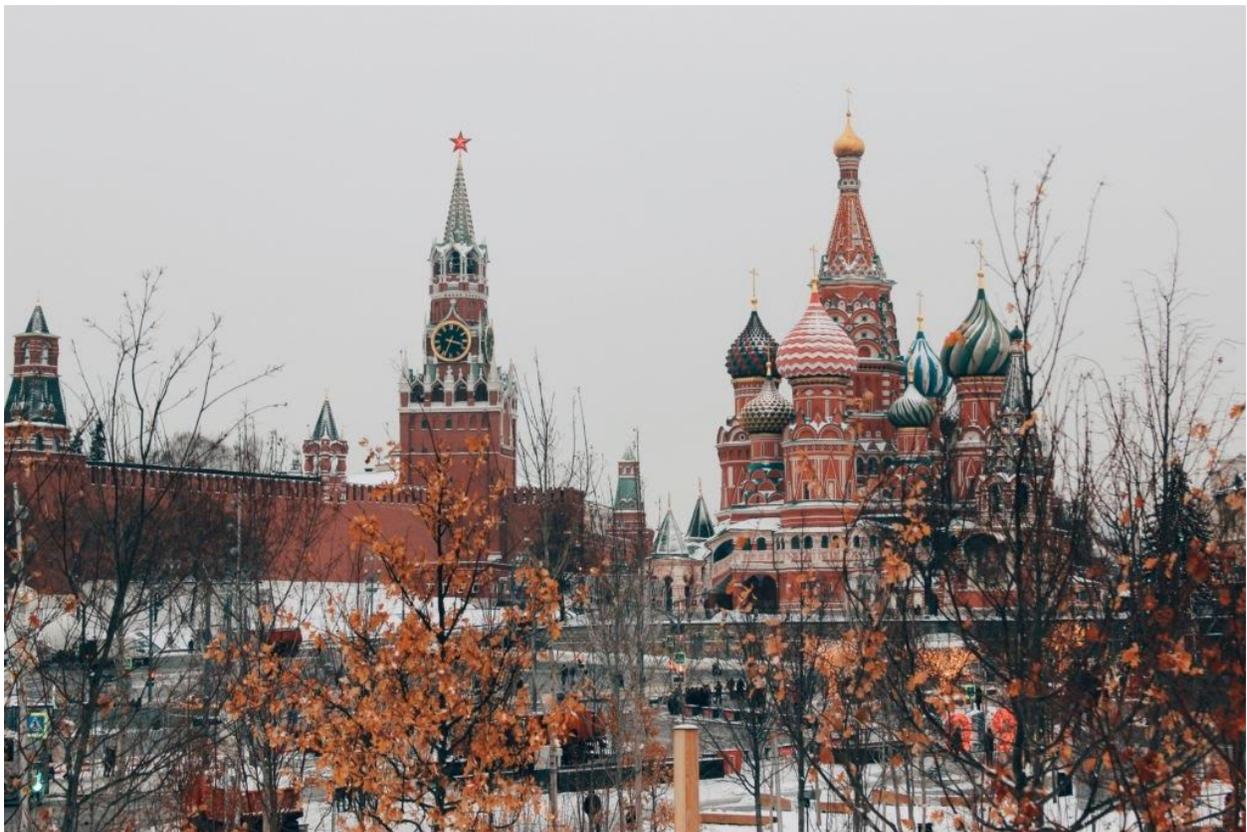
The answer was people are hearing that there's a Savior that cares about them.

They're getting some food, they're getting a place to sleep, they're getting a shower and some new clothes, they're getting a friend, all of those were our indicators.

Not our evaluations but our indicators of how we would know we were going about what we were doing.

You answer those three questions together, like I said we'll go into more depth, and that communicates your purpose.

That one is by far the most important. And we will spend the most amount of time on it. But your character is also very important.



Closing Thoughts

In the book I tell the story of Phil Butler, the first grant I ever made was to follow up a failure of a previous grant that had been made by the foundation just before I came to work there.

Phil had gotten \$50,000 dollars to bring all of the broadcasters that were sending evangelistic messages into Russia during the height of the Cold War to get them together to compare their frequency, the atmos, that is the direction their single sideband radio broadcasts were going, the

type of programming, the timing of the program, get them to put their schedules and such on the table, and no one showed up.

And it was a big effort, they put a lot of money into the research on the Russian listener and the broadcaster had one of the finest studies available and Phil just fell flat with it.

And so the first ever philanthropy meeting I had was fill with 14 single spaced pages of dense writing explaining the failure, and it had the chutzpah to ask for another 50,000 'cause he'd figured out what had gone wrong the first time and how to make it happen the second time.

We actually made the second grant, and it lead to the foundation of Interdev and frankly, one of the biggest missiological breakthroughs of the later part of the 20th century, lead by Phil.

And it was following a failure, but a failure that he owned up to that he studied and he understood. That proved his character and gave us higher trust actually to move with him.

Because what's the tendency when you're meeting with a giver? That's to only tell them all the great stuff that's happened and because it might take too much to explain the other stuff that didn't happen.

Character is about courage, courage to tell the truth.

Your idea needs to make sense in light of your purpose.

Because ideas are in and of themselves prosaic, at the mission it was a dormitory for beds, it was staff to cook the meals and to meet with the people and to minister to those that were coming.

It was a volunteer coordinator to coordinate all the churches that were pouring resources into the mission in terms of time and talent and such like that.

So your ideas are in and of themselves not all that interesting. What makes them interesting of course is your purpose, and then last of course is track record, which we will go into in a future podcast.

Thank you.