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FARM MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR A NEW AGE



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Non-Traditional Funding: Experience and Implications

Bernard L. Erven

Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology
Ohio State University

Inadequate funding for Extension programs from traditional sources leads easily to consideration of non-traditional funding. Questions about how to get funds from non-traditional sources are important. However, more important is the concern about distortion of Extension priorities by non-traditional funding. The trap of looking for money from any source awaits budget pressed administrators and Extension faculty. Therefore, all of the following discussion of non-traditional funding is premised on the assumption of a focused mission statement. The educational mission of Extension cannot be compromised in search of new funds.

In Ohio, we have special funding from the Milk Check-Off Program of the Ohio Dairy Farmer Federation to support a special state-wide program in dairy farm management. In this paper, some lessons learned from the non-traditional funding are shared. By way of introduction, three kinds of potential new funding are discussed. Then some guidelines for getting new funding are suggested. Implications for continuing or renewal of new funding are discussed. The paper concludes with some precautions relative to non-traditional funding.

Kinds of New Funding

Although many potential non-traditional sources of funding exist for Extension, they can be grouped under the headings of "Please" funding, "Thank you" funding and "No! Thank you" funding.

"Please" funding, as in please give us money, grows from a carefully identified program need which lacks traditional funding. The need for funds causes an aggressive search among non-traditional sources. This is "grantsmanship." Much of what is known about pursuit of research contract applies here.

"Thank you" funding comes from a clientele group which wants Extension to do something it is not now doing. Typically, the idea for the funding originates with the source of funding rather than with a formal proposal prepared by Extension. The group is willing to put dollars into a program which meets needs the group has identified. Extension accepts the offered dollars because the wants of the sponsoring group are consistent with an existing Extension mission statement. The beauty of this kind of funding is that a thank you letter and statement of a program for effective use of the funds puts the

new money in place. To be sure, "thank you" funding comes less often than "please" funding. Sometimes the news may be too good to be true but therein lies the danger and the need to distinguish "thank you" and "No! Thank you" funding.

"No! Thank you" funding appears to be like "thank you" funding but the funding offered is for a program inconsistent with Extension's mission statement. So Extension says no to the offered funds and does not accept them. A clientele group may seek changes in Extension program priorities by offering funding. More time of Extension faculty favored by the clientele group may also be an expectation of the new funding. "No! Thank you" funding is fraught with negative subtleties. Months or years later the questions may be: Why did we ever get involved in that program? or Why do we spend so much time working with that small clientele group?

New Funding

Non-traditional funding sources have rarely accounted for a significant portion of a county, area or state Extension budget. Therefore, expertise in attaining funding must usually be developed--intuition about fund raising based on work with volunteer leaders and unpaid advisory committees unlikely substitutes for innovative development of new funding plans. The following suggestions may be useful in developing a plan for tapping "please" funding from non-traditional sources.

Image as an expert Proposals for new funding sell both Extension and the reputation of individual Extension faculty. Very important is the cultivation of the idea that Extension has real experts--people with previous accomplishments which demonstrate an ability to deliver the promised educational programs. High quality in-service training, participation in national meetings, publications, and innovative programming and teaching contribute to the image of being expert.

Many Proposals Few proposals will be funded. Submitting ten proposals to five different funding sources more likely results in success than one proposal submitted to two sources. Obvious, of course! However, those new to non-traditional funding may be unprepared for the necessary investment in proposal writing and the steady flow of rejections with a few successes interspersed.

Flexibility Proposals consistent with existing mission statements start the process of getting new funds from non-traditional sources. Non-traditional funders likely want input into program development. To the extent that the funder wants new program ideas and methods tested, adapting proposals will be essential. Pre-proposal discussions with funding agencies and

proposal drafts can involve the donor in the evolution of the project. The flexibility involved in "my proposal" becoming "our proposal" increase the chances of funding success.

Patience Like many other first-time things, elapsed time from idea to money in the bank will be much greater than expected. Relationships must be established and developed, ideas need to ferment, many seeds need to be planted, new allies need to be found, and many telephone calls and letters need to be incorporated into the process. Controlled patience in combination with an aggressive selling plan become important virtues.

"Have I got a deal for you!" Hard sell of the proposals often is essential. Confidence in what is being sold, persistence almost to the point of pestering potential donors, and reluctance to take a final no are all part of the hard-sell approach. Hard sell fits well some Extension administrators and faculty, but others find such an approach inconsistent with the "Extension way of doing things." Careful selection of the people to be involved and the development of the hard-sell strategies may be as important to success as the writing of the original proposals.

Implications for Continuing Funding

Getting a first grant or contract does not necessarily resolve longer-run funding problems. Even if the original funding was of the thank-you type that came with little effort, continuation of the funding is unlikely to be automatic. No single guideline assures long-term funding. Following are some possibilities to increase the chances of continued funding.

Carefully worded written agreement A clear understanding of what a donor or agency and what an Extension faculty is promising to deliver can be best attained through a written agreement. Attention to specific objectives, methods, time tables, reports and plans for evaluation of results makes the development and negotiation of the written agreement important to understanding of expectations by the parties involved. Should disagreement arise during the project or change in personnel threaten to interfere with progress, the written agreement can at least re-establish the original intent of the new funding and how it was to be used.

Colleague support Funding from non-traditional sources likely leads to new programs or at least activities different from what would have been the case with more funding from traditional sources. Colleagues of those involved in the new projects should at least be knowledgeable about what is being done and ideally have opportunity for input. Colleague opposition or even indifference can frustrate the new initiatives planned with non-traditional funding.

Formal advisory committee The many advantages of Extension advisory committees are well known. In addition to help in program planning and implementation, an advisory committee can add credibility to what is being done. The committee can be especially helpful in supporting proposals for continued and/or expanded funding.

Report regularly Keeping the funding source well informed about progress builds support. Reports and the opportunity to respond to reports provides opportunity for shared ownership of what is being done. Reactions to the reports can provide basis for corrective action. If accomplishments and progress are unsatisfactory, making changes before a final report increases the chances that a funding agency will see overall progress as satisfactory.

Deliver what was promised Once the specifics are agreed to and stated in writing, then delivering what was promised is essential. Although this guideline should be no less important for traditional funding, it is particularly important in non-traditional funding if there is to be serious opportunity for continued funding.

Cultivate "expertness" As discussed above, Extension offers experts to non-traditional funders. Therefore, those representing funding sources should grow in their appreciation of the quality and expertise of the Extension faculty involved. Sensitivity to the expert role should be reflected both in formal reporting and informal contacts. Advisory committee members should also develop an appreciation of the expertness of Extension faculty.

Share credit for accomplishments Lots of people feeling good about what has been accomplished in a new and innovative program funded by a non-traditional source should increase chances for continued funding. Credit for accomplishments should be shared as broadly as reasonable. One or two Extension faculty are unlikely to be the sole explanation of a project's success. Shared ownership of accomplishments provides a broad base for support of continued funding.

Other Implications

Non-traditional funding provides excellent opportunities for establishment and continuation of programs not possible with limited funding from traditional sources. However, there are precautions worth noting.

In Extension's anxiousness to attract new funds, agreements may be struck which are too good a bargain to the donor or funding agency. Non-traditional funding means that a funder is leveraging dollars into influence of what Extension is doing. Even though what is provided as a result of the funding

may be consistent with an Extension mission statement, there is the danger that agreements will be viewed as one-sided and thus a discredit to Extension.

In many states, strong ties to county and area leaders is essential to Extension success. Bottom up as a basis for programming rather than top down has worked well for Extension. Many opportunities for non-traditional funding involve state or national organizations. It is difficult for county faculty to cultivate relationships with these organizations without involvement of state level specialists and administrators. Therefore, non-traditional funding provides a challenge to extension's internal communication and makes clear the need for agreement on how contacts with funding sources are to be shared by county, area and state personnel.

Finally, "ownership" of Extension faculty is an ever present danger with non-traditional funding. Cultivating the image that Extension has experts, sensitivity to the interests of funders, explicit written agreements, and share credit for accomplishments have been stressed. But these are the very kinds of factors which can cause special clientele groups being served by the non-traditional funding to believe they now have their own Extension faculty.

Summary

Three types of possible non-traditional funding for Extension are identified. Suggestions for increasing the chances of getting new funding from non-traditional sources include development of the image that Extension has experts, submittal of many proposals, exhibit flexibility and patience and capitalize on the advantages of hard sell. Suggestions for maximizing the chances of continued or renewed funding from non-traditional sources include carefully worded written agreements, Extension colleague support, formal advisory committees, regular reports, delivery of what was promised, continued cultivation of the image of being expert and sharing credit for accomplishments. Precautions associated with non-traditional funding include the danger that Extension will offer too much to donors in return for new funding, too much emphasis on ties with state and national organizations to the exclusion of involvement of county and area Extension faculty, and funding organizations feeling they have ownership of certain Extension faculty.