



# Journalism Techniques to Spice Up Your Grant Proposals

Mark Goldstein

June 25, 2014

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## Today's Speakers:



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Sam Frank, Synthesis Partnership



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Access these workshop materials and other resources on 4Good and at  
<http://communicationmark.com/interviews.php>

# JOURNALISM TECHNIQUES TO SPICE UP YOUR GRANT PROPOSALS

Conducting Client Interviews

# Overview



- When to use interviews to improve grant proposals.
- How to select a client to interview.
- The three questions to ask during every client interview.
- How to ethically set colleagues and clients at ease about the process.
- Tips for writing a compelling and appropriate client story into a proposal.
- Interviewing "tip sheets" and real-life examples that helped get grants.

# To Be Clear...

- An interview is a one-on-one discussion.
- The goal is generally to obtain a story that favorably portrays an organization project, or provides readers with insight.
- The interview is more than gathering generic quotes that endorse the organization.



# When to use interviews

They can be especially compelling or helpful to

- Humanize a relatively dull or analytical request
- Reduce reliance on data alone
- Tug at the heartstrings in a sincere way
- Describe a service or outcome that is difficult to describe or quantify



# Selecting a Client to Interview

- If you don't work directly with your clients, request help from someone at your organization who does.
- Choose at least 5 people to interview.
- Choose people who are open about their experience with your organization will give it credit for changing their lives for the better.
- Choose people who best resemble your constituents and represent the range of people you serve (gender, household size, age, ethnicity, etc.). Similarly, try to select people who have used the services you most want to promote.
- Choose a person to interview because they best exemplify what your organization does, not just because they have an unusual story.

# Common Interview Concerns



## **Q: What about confidentiality?**

- A: We will explain exactly how information will be used and will ask the client to sign a permission slip. (Names can also be abbreviated or changed.)

## **Q: Will our clients feel uncomfortable or exploited?**

- A: We will make it clear that the client does not have to participate. Most clients are honored to be asked, are pleased to contribute to the organization and want others to know where to get help.

# What to Say to the Client



- Explain that they are examples of the success people can achieve with their own initiative and your organization's help.
- Ask for the best days/times to do the interview.
- Explain why you are interviewing (to raise funds so that others with similar needs will benefit, etc.).
- Set expectations and be clear about how you will use their information (in a proposal, report, etc.).
- Explain whether names/images will be used in print.

# Before the Interview



- Find out about the client from colleagues or data.
- Don't ask clients detailed questions prior to the interview, to avoid getting 'canned' quotes.
- Write down any questions that you wish to ask.
- Determine what information you want to have when the interview is over.
- Know the story that you want to tell post-interview, but keep an open mind. Details provided are more interesting than anything you could have dreamed up.
- Prepare to capture information (prepare tape recorder, camera, video, pad, any other tools).
- Prepare any necessary permission documents.

# The Three Questions to Ask Clients

During the interview, you are essentially seeking the answers to the following questions.

1. What need brought you to our organization?
2. What services did we provide?
3. How did the service improve your life?



# 1. What need brought you to us?



- What incident caused you to seek our help (e.g., job loss, illness, life changes)?
- How did you learn about our organization? Through our outreach? A collaborator?
- What were you experiencing when you needed help? Was a child or other family member impacted? Was your challenge related to current events, such as a company closing or discontinuation of public funding?
- What did it feel like to have this difficulty? To seek help?

# Need Example: Parent Support Center



*Parents who come to PRMC lack community support and their children often have sedentary lifestyles.*

OR

*Agnes Wilson's son Carson Stewart was 8 months old when their family moved back to Elm County. "I didn't have any kind of programs for him, and he didn't have anybody to play with, and I was kind of lost in what I was doing as a parent," Agnes explains. "I knew I wanted to get him involved with other children, because he really hadn't been around a lot of children."*

## 2. What service did you receive?



- Who first spoke with you at our organization?
- Was that person helpful to you?
- Which programs did you participate in?
- When did services begin and end?
- What was it like to learn that you would be able to get the services that you needed?
- How did we work with you to address your needs?
- What helped you the most?
- How much did you pay for services?

# Service Example: Parent Support Center

*PRMC staff visit with parents and provide parenting tips.*

OR

PMRC staff member Susie Miller visits Agnes and Carson regularly. “She brings age appropriate things ...and she explains to me basically what’s going on with him.... She shows me things that I can do to help his development and his learning.... I like to know what I need to do month-to-month. Because, well, I work two jobs, so... my time with my son is really valuable, because I don’t have as much time as, maybe stay-at-home moms do. And I was a stay-at-home mom for about 8 months of his life, and that’s why I felt very fortunate to have this program, because when we are together, I know exactly the right things to do or say to help him along and give him that little push to learn.”

### 3. How did your life improve?



- How is your life different now? What is measurably different than it was before?
- Would you have been able to achieve this change on your own? In the same amount of time?
- Are you still receiving services from our organization or another agency?
- Are you still in touch with staff at our organization?
- Did family members also benefit?

# Benefits Example: Parent Support Center

*PMRC has successfully helped parents resolve transportation issues that impact their families.*

OR

Susie is accessible to Agnes by phone when she has questions, and Susie even connected her with a reputable car dealer when Agnes's vehicle began to fail. "She's the reason I have my car," Agnes claims. "Now I have a car that runs great, it's safe for me and my son, and it's ...more within my budget.... I really think it [PMRC] helps to make *Sam* a better daddy, and me a better mommy, because I really understand what he's (Carson's) going through. Otherwise, I wouldn't."

# During the interview



- Listen very carefully.
- Try to put the client at ease.
- Take notes or record the conversation.
- To save time later, highlight statements for review.
- Ask relevant questions that indicate understanding.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Don't be afraid to ask basic questions. If you don't understand, ask for clarification.

# The interview is done. Now what?



- Process what was said.
- Put key quotes or discussions into a usable format, preferably one that tells a story.
- Share the quotes with colleagues.
- Use the quotes in various fundraising or PR documents, as appropriate and with permission.
- For grant proposals, consider how to use the client's story most effectively. Quotes frequently fit well into the needs section. One-pagers may function well as proposal attachments.

# Questions?



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