COMMUNICATION MARK

ASSESS Fact Sheet A: Needs Defined

The statement of needs is the most important part of any grant proposal.

Your proposal is built on a single need, or small group of needs, that your organization is determined to address. If the need is misunderstood by your organization, or if it is poorly articulated, the rest of the proposal will be built upon a faulty premise.

It is crucial, then, that your organization understands how to identify and articulate a need. Clearly, a "need" is a lack of something, or a dire problem or challenge. Yet, many organizations focus on the wrong need or problem, particularly after many years of providing a service without revisiting how it addresses the mission of the organization.

Regarding needs, note that:

- **Needs are *external* to your organization.** Foundations support organizations that make the world a better place. Addressing an *internal* need, such as the need for a new staff person or a larger office space, does <u>not</u>, in itself, impact the state of the world. Those internal needs are secondary and are strategies for addressing needs, unless, perhaps, you are seeking funds for organizational development.

- **Needs have remarkable impact.** If you do not think a need is compelling — if it does not cry out for someone to address it — then a foundation won't either.

- **Needs are measurable.** If you can't measure the extent of a need, it is impossible to tell if a proposed strategy or service will ever make a difference.

- **Needs can be objectively documented.** A foundation will not fund a need that is undocumented. It is never enough to simply state that a need exists. There must be proof. Fortunately, proof can almost always be obtained. When it positively can't be obtained, anecdotes or examples may be used as documentation.

- **Needs are powerful when they are universal and indisputable.** Nonprofit organizations exist, first and foremost, to provide public benefit. The needs that your organization addresses should be as far-reaching and undeniable as possible. In other words, they should clearly be beneficial in the eyes of all — or almost all — people. They should not be written to be critical of a political party, organization or segment of society. There may be exceptions to this rule — such as when an organization is applying to a progressive or conservative foundation — but these exceptions are very few.

- **Needs do not address solutions, or the lack of a product or service.** A classic error is to define a need in terms of a service. For instance, a lack of "educational workshops" or

"health screenings" is not a problem. These are strategies. "Educational workshops" do not necessarily make the world a better place — thus, the lack of such workshops does not pose a problem. However, if it a lack of skill or knowledge keeps a person from obtaining a job that pays a living wage, that is the problem, and "educational workshops" may be a solution. Similarly, all of the "health screenings" in the world may not cause people to lower their cholesterol — but the screenings may alert people that they need to address the problem. Do not address such solutions until after the need is described in order to avoid "leading" the reader.

- **<u>Organizations address needs that are aligned with their missions.</u>** An organization's services must align with its mission. If meeting a need does not align with the mission, there are two possibilities. Either the need should be met by a different organization, or the organization should update its mission to address the need. Of course, foundations do not have confidence in organizations that change missions and strategies willy-nilly, so any consideration of a change in mission should be made with great caution.