

Ending "Crappy Funding Practices"

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For some time now, Vu Le has been telling anyone who will listen about the funding practices of the nation's foundations that are nonsensical and time-wasting at best and harmful and demeaning at worst.

And, since the beginning of the pandemic, this prolific and witty veteran and observer of the nonprofit sector has been publicly naming and shaming the most brazen offenders under the hashtag "Crappy/FundingPractices."

While there's been improvement to some extent – he lauds "all of the funders who are awesome" – there are many funders who still fall short. See, for instance, [10 condescending funding practices funders need to stop doing](#) (February 19, 2023) Vu Le, *Nonprofit AF Blog*. And there are "[several innovative new shenanigans!](#)"

So just a few weeks ago, he urged his many readers to take the next step to deal with "many funders whose [unreasonable and clueless requirements](#) are jeopardizing nonprofits' work and thus harming people." See [Join the movement to end Crappy Funding Practices!](#) (May 15, 2023) Vu Le, *Nonprofit AF Blog*.

The Kickoff

Of the vast catalog of funding outrages he has amassed, he chose just 24 to highlight for the kickoff of his campaign to stamp out crappy practices.

Defined by the [Oxford Languages dictionary](#) as a "vulgar slang" meaning "extremely poor quality," the term "crappy" is quite perfect here. (One of the key virtues of Vu Le is that – on a regular basis – he says the "quiet part out loud.") "Crappy" ranges from the innocent end of the spectrum (ridiculous, time-wasting; just plain maddening) to the more pernicious (paternalistic, harmful – even sadistic.)

Of course, any particular crappy funding practice can fall into several categories; it may, for example, be condescending *and* stupid.

Notably, Vu Le includes for this list *just* three items that are the worst of the worst; that is, the insidious practices that perpetuate the “Nonprofit Starvation Cycle” and the “Overhead Myth.” They are:

- 4. Not funding overhead
- 5. Not funding staff salary
- 6. Restricting the funding of overhead to a certain percentage, usually 10%

Perhaps the reason is that he and other thought leaders have been harping so heavily on those destructive mindsets for a number of years. See, for instance, Vu Le’s *Your crappy chair is not a badge of honor* (October 2017) [“The crappy chair is a hilarious trope in our sector. Everyone seems to have some sort of crappy chair story.”]

“It’s Just Our Policy”

Almost half of the 24 “crappy funding practices” that made Vu Le’s final cutoff can fairly be categorized as nonsensical, pointless, and tending to make you want to punch your laptop screen and then throw it out the nearest window.

This category is my personal favorite, calling to mind an incident long ago early in my 4-year stint in the Exempt Organizations Division of the IRS. I was delivering a packet of documents to a high official on the executive floor of the huge National Office headquarters. The only sound in that long and dreary corridor was my chunky high heels making too much noise against the linoleum floor. Suddenly, I saw a homemade sign on an unidentified door: “There’s no reason for it. It’s just our policy.” The cheerless quiet was broken as I dissolved into laughter, wondering how in the world that message had been allowed to remain up for more than a few minutes.

Highlights of Vu Le’s “it’s just our policy” selections include:

- 1. Excessive requirements for small amounts of funding
- 2. Making nonprofits translate their budget into a funder’s budget format
- 3. Insisting that grant applicants print out and mail in or deliver grant proposals
- 14. Not revealing character limits on online applications at the onset; or 19. Having ridiculous character limits
- 15. Requiring the entering in of information that can be found on an attachment
- 20. Asking for excessive or nonsensical information.

Conclusion

“This list is by no means comprehensive,” says Vu Le. “There are many other things funders do that are annoying and harmful.”

He thinks “... we’ve been nice enough. It’s time to ramp up the campaign and turn calling out #CrappyFundingPractices into a full-fledged movement with lots of people involved”

The details will be determined later, but “it will at least include communicating with folks who are forced to endure crappy funding practices, formulating responses for social media, amplifying these call-outs, creating a “Crappiest Funding Practice of the Year” Award, and also simultaneously recognizing funders who do #AwesomeFundingPractices.”

There’s a sign up sheet, [here](#).

– *Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director*