NONPROFIT

Grantees Can Now Review Foundations

11.01.17 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD

"Be the first on your block to review a foundation…." writes Ruth McCambridge, editor of The Nonprofit Quarterly. She describes GrantAdvisor.org as the "Yelp" of the foundation world.
It's a "brand-new platform," in pilot phase, that "promises to be an essential breakthrough tool for foundation fundraising in the United States."

Reviewing Foundations Anonymously
GrantAdvisor.org is the brainchild of three philanthropy power players: Jon Pratt, executive director of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Jan Masaoka, CEO of the California Association of Nonprofits, and Perla Ni, CEO of GreatNonprofits.
In describing this exciting new virtual platform, they compare it to "TripAdvisor or Yelp, but for reviewing foundations." Anyone with relevant information can write a review. When a foundation accumulates five reviews, its profile is available to the public.
The "project is the next generation of philanthropic transparency,

> *It'll help foundations to get no-BS feedback and advice that they might not be able to get otherwise. And it'll help us nonprofits not waste our time with foundations that have consistently horrible reviews; we have important things to do, like saving the world."*

Examples of Foundation Reviews
Launched over the summer, some 450 reviews had been posted to GrantAdvisor.org by late August 2017. The comments "... provide clues to the cultures and pacing and quirks of each foundation. They advise, for instance, when you can expect an extended courtship, what foundations are particularly exacting about what and how to respond, and when you may wish to keep your expectations low."
Two representative reviews show what to expect:

> *Review 1: The program staff are very smart, strategic and committed to social change. There was a lot of discussion and revision before we were asked to submit via the online application process. Two challenges: they don't list much staff information on the website, so it's hard to see how they're structured and what people's roles are. Also, staff expressed interest in a project and then stopped responding after a few emails. Ghosting isn't cool in any context.*
> *Review 2: There are very smart people working at this organization who are willing to help. Their channels of communication are open—don't be afraid to ask what you want to you want to know, and be open about the challenges your organization faces.*

Broad Participation is Needed
GrantAdvisor.org provides a "critical missing piece in the funder-grantee dynamics," but it needs broad sector support to be successful. Mr. Vu Le, one of the site's "allies and advisors," makes the case for participation by several constituent groups:

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> *Nonprofit colleagues:...We designed the form to be simple and user-friendly and not take up too much time.... The more reviews we have on this site, the more useful it will be for all of us.*
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> *Foundation colleagues:You may be feeling a little hesitant, but I hope you'll embrace this tool as a way to get genuine and helpful feedback....[A]ssign a Key Contact whose job is to regularly check reviews, respond to them, and bring back information to your leadership team. Also, ask other funders to check it out.*
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> *Associations of Funders: Many of you have been helping funders to examine power dynamics and be more intentional about getting feedback. Please encourage your funding partners to look into GrantAdvisor as a tool for getting unvarnished truth.*
>
> *Donors, volunteers, consultants, and other leaders in the sector: Please ask the organizations and foundations you work with to get involved. If you've worked with foundations before, write reviews.*

Conclusion

There may "likely be a glitch here and there" because this program is in its startup phase, and users are encouraged to provide feedback to the site administrators. Other than the usual hiccups, though, it looks to be a promising concept: "I don't know about you but [it] sounds like pure gold to me."