

institutionalize. We are faced with urgent questions about internal processes and structures necessary to make our services and campaigns effective. We are examining issues of impact and of accountability. We are struggling to theorize our goals, to make qualitative changes in women's lives and to make changes in economic and

political structures. As never before, many mixed-gender organizations are forced to grapple with ways of introducing into their work a dimension which takes gender into account.

We are confronting these problems in an atmosphere of economic difficulty and a new wave of ideological attack...and of shifting and decreasing funding support.

**SOURCE:**

*Adapted from the ICAE Women's Program Organizational Review by Sue Thrasher and Honor Ford-Smith and a presentation by Honor Ford-Smith at "Up In Arms, Women's Organizations World-wide Confront the Funding Crisis," Toronto, November 1989.*

## Playing the Funding Game

### LESSONS FROM CAFRA by Tina Johnson, CAFRA Secretariat, Trinidad.

When CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action) was formed in 1985 we had no money at all. The secretariat was voluntary. The idea was that those of us who formed the secretariat would concern ourselves with proposal writing and raising funds, which at the time was something that we had very little experience with. We learned a lot quickly.

We went through a lot of problems in learning about the different funders, what the different agencies fund and the language that different funding agencies use. You have to know both what kind of projects they fund and what ways they talk about their projects before you can approach them. The first two projects that we wrote proposals for were on violence against women and on agriculture.

We wasted a lot of time not having done the right research. For example, we sent the violence proposal to several agencies and in one case we discovered that the agency had transferred its focus from the Caribbean to Africa after we had gone through the whole process of writing the proposal; in another case the agency had

transferred its area of interest from violence to some other issue.

For about two years we were not funded and our coordinator and administrative assistant worked without salary. The coordinator worked almost full-time, was finishing off her degree at night and had two children. Getting the projects funded was no solution. We learned that most funding agencies like to fund projects rather than to give institutional support. Funders are much more comfortable with funding projects that have a beginning, a clear end and a written report. They are not so interested in process; they are more interested in something concrete which looks good in their annual report.

When we got funding for the projects there was still no money to pay for the project coordination and administration by the secretariat. That money had to be borrowed from the project. The accounting for the project had to be done in such a way that money was available for administration in Trinidad - not for salary assistance, just for postage, telephone, etc.

Part of the problem was our own inexperience in actually writing budgets. At the beginning we did not put in all the money that was needed for long-distance communication and training. We had two



trainers from the Dominican Republic who had not been budgeted for properly. What we have learned to do is to build part of the coordinator's salary into the project, or build part of the administrative assistance costs into each project.

We have also learned that it is very important to have personal contact with funders. I do not know how many proposals they receive every day from various women's organizations and every other kind of organization. If they meet you and realize that what you are doing is important, that you are very serious about your work and have accountability as well - some financial system in place and books to show them - then they are much more prepared to fund you and also to recommend you to other funders. It is a snowball effect: once you get one or two funders supporting a project, other funding agencies become interested.

One issue now is this question of "self-sufficiency". It is not only a demand from the funders. There is concern about whether we want to be totally dependent on funding agencies, especially when they are beginning to shift money into other areas. At CAFRA we have always argued that it is impossible for a membership network which runs projects in different territories to be totally self-sufficient because even if a particular project becomes self-sufficient, that would not sustain the organization. The agricultural project, for example, may result in the women in the communities setting up self-sufficient projects for themselves but that does not provide CAFRA with any income. I also work at a rape crisis center and we have been asked to become self-sufficient. There is no possible way to organize rape survivors into some income generating project to support the rape crisis center. It sounds a bit ridiculous but that has been asked by one funding agency. There is a need for NGOs in the Caribbean region to get together to meet with funding agencies so that rather than funding

agencies telling us what our priorities should be, what kinds of programs we should develop, we can be telling them what our needs are. We do not want to be in competition with the other organizations. We want to deal with funders in a very honest and open way. We do not want them to be playing us off against each other. We are always asked, "Well, what do you think of this or that organization?" It puts you on the spot because whatever you may think about the organization, you do not want to say that they should not be funded. It is unfair of funders to ask about other organizations, to make you responsible in a sense for whether or not that organization gets funding.

I think it is important to pool our knowledge of funding agencies in a group where we can put our concerns on the table and discuss them in a very open way. It is also very important to be open with funders because they talk to each other as well.

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