

OBTAINING COMMUNITY FUNDS FOR DEVELOPING  
MUSEUM OPERATIONS

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Introduction

In this paper, I want to describe two key administrative concepts: (a) the notion of "environment" and (b) the notion of "advantageous exchange".

In describing these concepts, I wish to ask the following questions:-

- How do you find out what is on?
- How do you get on the queue?
- How do you get heard?
- How do you get the goods?
- What do you do when you have them?

Since the answers to these five questions all have something to do with relationships with local government, the paper concludes with some notes on how to deal with your local government council. These notes might be conveniently subtitled "If you are going to sup with the devil, use a long spoon".

I was much impressed by the paper given by Mr. Wymond\* at the COTMA Conference in 1975 and I think it would be useful to recall what was said then, both in the paper and in the workshop discussion which followed because whilst I may have some minor dissent at the edges, I agree substantially with the major propositions discussed:-

1. There is a timely warning that museums cannot continue to operate without injections of funds for both new capital works and recurrent expenditure.
2. There is the perplexing problem of being penalised for success. Because a museum has been able to capture funds for a specific project, it is unable to get more.
3. There are difficulties doing an "Oliver". That is to say, funding agencies do not like organisations like museums coming back and asking for more, especially if they did not ask for enough in the first place or came unstuck in the process of using the funds they were given.
4. There is a need for good documentation by the museum.
5. There is a need for caution about lobbying in case the funding agency adds grant conditions that were not envisaged by the applicant museum.
6. There is a need for caution about hitching your museum to the "local government star", very largely also related to the problems of tied grants.

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\*Wymond, A.P. (1975).- Financing the Railway/Tramway Operating Museum  
Proc. 1st Australasian Tramway Museum Conference, Ballarat p. 12-16

7. Museums should always be informed as far as possible of the advantages and disadvantages of funds from government agencies and the best method of staying informed is to maintain good contacts with the Town Clerk of your local Council.

8. It is important to spend within the grant.

9. It is important to have a good presentation in the museum's dealings both with the public and with funding agencies.

These are the sorts of things that were discussed two conferences ago and I am not sure that there are any further principles I could add to increase that listing. However I would like to build on that as a foundation and suggest some techniques that might help you manipulate your way to best advantage around those points:

"Environment" and "advantageous exchange"

Professor Fred Emery, now of the Australian National University, Canberra, has made something of a name for himself amongst administrative theorists in developing the concept of "environment" and he suggests that organisations tend to move through four fields - a placid randomised field, a placid clustered field, a disturbed reactive field and a turbulent field. The latter is characterised by complexities as well as rapidity of change.

In the museum context, the complexities deal with agencies and with the relationships between and around agencies. These factors are not part of the museum's operation but impinge upon it and make up its environment for it e.g. legal constraints, government policies, operations of government departments, availability of supplies, competition with other organisations for the same funds, manpower, finance, and public relations. It is a paradox that museums preserving the past tend to be placid randomized organisations, highly stable in a placid randomized field (save and except for the usual ups and downs, including the leadership and management committee struggles that always go on within any organisations). However, museums are themselves subject to externally induced turbulence.

The linking pin between our operation which seeks to preserve the past and yet has to relate to the turbulent present is the notion of "advantageous exchange". The success of an organisation increasingly depends on its ability to establish symbiotic relationships with other organisations. Extensive "advantageous exchanges" take place. Museums are active pieces of the past operating in the present. By operation, I do not mean running up and down the track.

As you all know, an operating museum involves a whole range of manpower, skills, equipment, tools, money and insurances. We can call this the organisation. Within the organisation there are a number of subsystems. The objective subsystem-viz. sorting out what you are about; the co-ordinative subsystem - making things fit together; the planning subsystem - how you intend to go about it; and the operating subsystem - actually going about it. If you see your museum as an organisation with subsystems, you can see that in order to service the organisation, the subsystems within it must relate effectively to each other. Differing

forces generated by differing emphases in differing subsystems will tend to make your museum change direction from time to time.

The organisation is influenced by forces outside it in much the same way. Environmental forces can change in intensity and impinge upon the organisation. These forces can include the attitude of governments towards funding, availability of parts, public awareness, and technological change in operating procedures.

Emery's suggestion is that the environment in which organisations exist is itself changing at an increasing rate. More things have happened for good or ill in transport museums in the last five years than occurred in the preceding fifteen years. Organisations of the future will be subject to even more external forces and must be able to adapt and live with change. If the organisation does not adapt, it will atrophy. In a changing environment, any organisation must learn to cope with a changing environment as a natural state rather than as a temporary aberration.

The coping mechanism is "advantageous exchange" which is a nice way of saying "setting up easy-going working relationships with all the forces which impinge upon the organisation".

How do you find out what's on?

Tapping into information systems is the key. Firstly go to your local government council. Its officers usually know what's on because frequently they are used as agencies of government departments with funding programmes. Frequently also they may keep these funds to themselves and do not make loud noises about it. If however they are pushed, in the nicest possible way, a wealth of information will be revealed to you. Many councils have community development officers whose job it is to be the village anarchist. Their purpose is to break down the institutional structures of councils to make them more open and responsive to community requests like those from museums. So seek out your local community development officer.

Many councils either on their own or jointly run information centres. They may not have the information in a "hand-out" but keep leaning on them to find out for you because they are used to dealing with governments and government departments. They can often crack through the bureaucratic front line that people not used to dealing with governments sometimes find intimidating. Members of Parliament have research officers - go to your local M.P. and exploit his research officer. This person will have good access into government bureaucracies. State Governments have information offices - you can go there and find out what is available. But a word of caution. In preparing this paper, I thought I would practise what I preached and went to the South Australian State Government Information Office to enquire about sources of funds for museums. I was given information that was appropriate to the previous Australian government. (There was, you will recall, an election in December 1975 and some of us may have noticed there has been a change in Government).

In the Eastern States, Australian Assistance Plans are operating, albeit greatly reduced, and have been able to set up shop front agencies where you can find out what's on. You can obtain local community information broadsheets that are also often inserted in the local suburban newspapers. In N.S.W. and Victoria in particular, local councils indulge

in Area Improvement Plans, and whilst this money is drying up under the present government's policy directives, there may still be some residual funds available. These can be found out from the local government councils.

Councils themselves often have capital assistance programmes - i.e. they lend money to local groups in whom they have sufficient confidence that the repayments can be met.

The local government council often plays an agency role for unemployment relief schemes. Some State Governments have unemployment relief schemes of various types while the Commonwealth Government has the National Employment and Training Scheme, and the Apprentice Training Scheme. All these can provide labour at a net cost rather lower than any museum could do so operating under its own budget employing its own people. One council I know put on a research officer under a government funding scheme with the sole job of finding out what other funding schemes were available to put on more people to provide assistance for more programmes.

How do you get on the queue?

Not by writing the following kind of letter received from a special interest group - a tennis club - to the local government council seeking financial assistance:-

"The Town Clerk

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Elbow Bend District Tennis Club for which I am secretary. The Netball Club and ourselves spent last Tuesday and discussed the possibility of having a shelter shed erected on our courts at the corner of Father and Christmas Roads. After our discussions, at this meeting we felt the person to approach was yourself and we hope council will see their way clear to erect a shelter shed at this location.

Thanking you in anticipation,

.....Secretary"

Council officers, contrary to popular opinion, are usually very busy, and a letter like this involves them in even more work. It is likely to go to the bottom of the pile. Had the letter set out in some detail where they wanted the shelter shed, how much it was going to cost, what it was to be built out of and included sketch plans, it would have had a much better hearing in the Council Chamber and a much better introduction into the Council Chamber from the council staff.

It is important to keep in touch with the agencies mentioned in the previous section. The Council, your local M.P., the Australian Assistance Plan office and your local community development officer and so on help you get on the queue. It is very important, especially when new schemes are established, to have "shelf plans" available. If you are planning to

increase the standard of the permanent way, build a new toilet block, or increase the canteen, but have no hope of doing it in the next couple of years - prepare the plans anyway and put them on the shelf. If a government funding scheme "falls out of the sky" as increasingly I think they will in most states when it comes around to state election time, and if you can take your plans off the shelf, rush them into the council or other agency involved with the grants, you will find that you will be well placed.

You can also get on the queue by paying attention to timing. Traditionally, government departments work on annual budgets and around May each year there is a big push to get the funds voted for each department fully expended as otherwise the funds for the following year may be reduced by the amount unspent. Frequently, local government councils and other organisations that may be geared up to do projects in say, September of a financial year are unable to take up their funds. The next thing that happens is that they have to write to the government agency such as the Tourist Bureau or the Department for the Environment and say - "Dear Sir - I regret we cannot take up our programme" and therefore these funds stay in the bottom of the barrel and are forgotten by the bureaucrats until the big spend is on around May. If you go to the departments around May, all geared up with a good presentation and good track record of previous grant expenditure and a realistic proposition, the chances are that you will be looked upon as a "blood brother" and those unallocated funds can come your way.

By having shelf plans and paying attention to timing, you can see the notion of "advantageous exchange" coming into play. You are exchanging an advantage to the funding agency by saving the bureaucrats work. You can get their programme off the ground with something tangible to show for it by being first in the queue with a well thought out proposition and thereby help departments meet their expenditure votes. In exchange you receive the advantages of funds for your own purposes.

#### How do you get heard?

By telling people what they want to hear! It is important to speak clearly and precisely. The real life example of the tennis and netball club (only the names were changed to protect the innocent) was not an effective communication, because it had to be translated into a concept plan. Remember that bureaucrats are busy. New schemes are a burden. Designers of schemes want their works to be seen, so they want things to happen fast. This is where shelf plans can be so useful.

I know of one council who had an approach from a community group for an expenditure of \$100,000 that was a Godsend. The council was under very heavy pressure to spend unemployment relief money. There was so much money it appeared beyond the ability of the council to gear itself up and spend it in time. Along came an enterprising group with a project which required very little administrative effort. The council was able to spend its money and the community group got \$100,000 worth of project.

I know of another local group which, when a report was being prepared for the Register of the National Estate, wrote up a short descriptive outline of its operation, complete with photographs and sent it onto its Council. Council bureaucrats were busy - they read the submission

which was expressed in exactly the terms they were using to describe other aspects of the "built environment" worthy of presentation. Consequently they inserted the group's submissions into their report exactly as it was written. The bureaucrats classified it at Division II status. Since the museum had kept its contacts at the Councillor level in good order and condition (discussed below), the end result was that when the report got to the Council Chamber, the Council changed the classification to Division I status because the group had developed a favourable image.

You can also be heard by always writing your reports succinctly. If a report needs technical information to back it up, it must be there, but put it in an appendix. The decision-maker will not be interested in the technical information but he may pass it on to a technician who works with him.

I think it is common knowledge that executives read all the first page, half of the second page and none of the rest of a multi-page report.

Again, I think you can see the "advantageous exchanges" in the sorts of transactions involved in getting heard.

How do you get the goods?

By having a favourable image - but not of course too favourable otherwise you may miss out. The image can be developed through well presented annual reports sent off to your local council, various government departments, M.P.'s and so on. Further aid can come from using the suburban "throwaway" newspapers. Their editors tend to fall over themselves if you provide them with copy, and frequently they will print up everything you give them, though they will not necessarily get it right.

Make yourself available for such things as council inspection days. Most councils tend to rush around their district on one day per year inspecting past achievements and almost always have "heavies" from government departments on board. Museums have done well in grant submissions to state government administrators who had previously inspected the museum while in town with the Council. They would never had done so otherwise and therefore would not have been aware of the museum's activities.

Have a good professional stance and demonstrate management competence. It is also important to avoid intense response situations such as television advertising unless you are carefully geared up for it as otherwise you may get your fingers burnt through being "snowed under" with people. Again there are opportunities for "advantageous exchange" in these sorts of transactions.

What do you do when you have got the goods?

Do what you said you would do! Your staff work must be good. Do not over-commit yourself and get in too deep. When you have finished a project, invite the fund-givers out to declare it open. If they happen to be local M.P.'s and especially at Ministerial level, the public relations apparatus will come out too and set up a favourable "advantageous exchange" to enable you to tap into the next lot of funds that becomes available.

### Dealing with your local government council

Each of the questions I have asked and tried to answer has had some connection with local government. People may feel ambivalent towards their Council and with some reason, but the fact of the matter is that in the quest for community assistance, you are most likely to be dealing with local government. Here are a few suggestions based on observations of how organizations have or have not succeeded.

Councils operate at two levels - the elected level and the operational level. Leave aside academic arguments about who runs the place. In the quest for financial assistance you need to tap into both.

Always work through the Town Clerk. Write to him or make an appointment to see him. He may not be the person to do all the work that your group wants done, but he is the person who calls the tune and allocates the priorities. He may pass you on to the City Engineer or the Electrical Department or whatever, but the important thing is that he supplies entrée to the right people. Once you have an operational contact - keep using it, but always look after the Town Clerk. Always address your correspondence to him for the attention of the technical officer. That way, the Town Clerk keeps getting a progress report on the project as part of his routine because he sees information flowing past. Always work to deadlines. Almost all reports by council officers to their council are put out under great pressure and frequently up to two weeks before discussions take place in the Council Chamber. You will never get the council officer to work for you unless you work for him by providing the information he needs to use without difficulty.

At the elected level, councils tend to work on either a portfolio system or a ward system: With a portfolio system, one councillor is responsible for say, tourism or community development and this is the person you must keep informed. He is the person that you advise that you have written to the Town Clerk for assistance, that you keep in touch with about progress, that you invite to your A.G.M., or you may even try to make an honorary member. The same goes for councillors in a ward system. Most councils running a ward (i.e. an electoral district) system run two to three members for each ward. The rest of the Council tends to let them have wide discretion for pet projects within their ward as long as it is within the council's overall framework. It is surprising the number of Ward Councillors that adopt community groups like museums and tend to help push the business on. Let your elected member know the current "state of the play".

You should also let the Town Clerk know, or the officer he may have referred you to know about the current state of the play. Never try to play the officer off against the Councillor for the ward because your project will only be the loser. The combined forces of the people at the operational level and at the elected level provide a very strong tide and it is very handy to swim along with it.

Summary

I have described the "environment" and how your group must be interactive with rapid changes taking place externally to your group. Success increasingly depends on "advantageous exchange" with groups in the external environment. Of these, the local government council is probably the most important in the infrastructure of the operational systems of your province, state or region. Dealing with the Council or any other government agency is not without its frustrations. It demands patience, a capacity for disappointment and much hard work. From my own knowledge of Museum operations, there is an enormous range of skills available in each operation. If you can harness up these skills and start working on the agencies that make community funds available, with luck, patience and perseverance, you should be able to tap into funds to enhance the undoubted historical and operational qualities of your respective museums.