Observations On The Role Of Nonprofits In Resolving Radon Issues

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ABSTRACT

The search for solutions to the radon problem has been underfunded since its inception. While AARST has opened lines of communication to natural confederates like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Health Physics Society and the Conference of Radiation Control Program Directors, the economy of grant-making institutions remains largely unexamined. Grant-making institutions are broadly categorized as governmental (supporting specific agency-level goals), private (endowed from an individual or family fortune to accomplish topical goals) or corporate (supported from business profits to accomplish goals in areas related to market). Grant-making institutions that are serious about surviving in the marketplace want to be found, and they go out of their way to make their presence known. To save their time, they clearly state what they will support, and they provide explicit instructions for writing winning proposals. While these institutions do not specifically earmark funds for radon, issues affiliated with the the environment, public health, improved education, and public information are readily integrated with the AARST mission. This paper reviews resources that can be exploited to identify sources of funding, and presents selected strategies for pursuing grants.

INTRODUCTION

Radon has been at the forefront of indoor air quality concerns for a long time. Studies of environmental radon date from the era of the First World War, when early soil gas measurements were used as an exploration tool for natural gas deposits. Serious studies of radon in "ordinary" buildings were launched in response to concerns over radium contamination. By the early 1980s, however, "background" measurements conducted in presumably uncontaminated structures soon refocused attention to the general building stock. Since that time, radon has been discovered (and mitigated) in a full variety of buildings in virtually every part of the world.

While it is tempting to view radon in isolation, AARST concerns constitute only one aspect of a rather complex system of technical and communications issues. Energy conservation, for example, predates indoor radon by a few years and what little progress that has been achieved in clarifying energy and environment issues has required significant rearrangements of conventional wisdom. Similarly, the hundreds of organic compounds emanating from consumer products and materials in routine use are just beginning to be properly recognized, and the

scientific community has (literally) only scratched the surface when it comes to aerobiology in buildings.

BASIC STRATEGIES

A mature economy of foundations and grants has emerged over the years to support the "good deeds" that society needs from time to time. Grant-making institutions in the nongovernment sector are broadly categorized as either private (endowed from an individual or family fortune to accomplish topical goals) or corporate (supported from business profits to accomplish goals in areas related to market). Most agencies of the Federal Government support grants programs related to agency mission. Many grants are accomplishment-oriented, striving to meet predetermined objectives (essentially demonstration projects). Other grant programs operate under wide-open solicitations where the funding source not only needs answers, they also seek questions. Consequently, there is no real need to think of "attuning" objectives and mission statements to meet apparent needs. Rather, it is entirely reasonable to stipulate what it is that **you** would want to accomplish and, from there, find a vehicle to support it. These funding vehicles are not for the faint-of-heart, however. Applicants need to plan ahead and winning proposals need to tell a good story. Pitfalls and pratfalls take the form of:

- Delays – It can take a year for funding to show up. Funding may disappear or be diverted in the wake of policy changes. Reviewers may have "just a few more questions" about your proposal.

- Affiliations – Some funding sources strictly limit their awards to nonprofit or not-for-profit entities. Successful teams can incorporate for-profit entities in most cases. Furthermore, accounting rules sometimes allow for-profit entities to forgo collecting a fee (while still covering standard overhead and administrative costs).

- Incompatible Topics – Many funding sources eschew debt reduction, capital construction, equipment purchases, ongoing service delivery programs, direct support for individuals, and blatant handouts.

- Writers' Block – The blank page can be a frightening thing.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that this was never meant to be hard -- grant-making institutions not only want to be found, they go out of their way to make their presence known. Indeed, grant-makers who avoid spending the money pay a significant price for doing nothing. This perspective completely inverts the sales resistance equation, and many grant applicants have trouble adapting because *the trick is there is no trick*. Remember this mantra:

- If they make crummy awards, they lose their backing.

- If they lose their backing, they lose their charter.

- If they don't give the money away, they lose their charter.

- If they lose their charter, they have to get *real* jobs.

Some people define the budget before considering what should be done with the money. If you spend too much time talking with lawyers and stockholders, you'll come away with a long list of things you can get away with (like using a preposition to end a sentence with). If you think in terms of basic requirements, though, you'll have an even longer list of things that should be accomplished. The principal objective here is not just to spend the money (indeed, any body can *do that*). Rather, the driving force is to accomplish something. If you are lucky enough to define the "right" kind of problem, the funding begins to act like a lubricant as opposed to a fuel because you are dealing with a problem that needs to be solved regardless of the availability of funds. The funding sources outlined in this paper all clearly state what (and who) they will support, and each organization provides very explicit instructions for writing winning proposals.

FINDING SOURCES

A number of more or less standard publications exist to begin the process of identifying sources of funding. Ask a librarian. If a particular book is not on the shelf, your local public library can get it through interlibrary loan (this ploy really works -- the author once used interlibrary loan to gain access to a copy of the famous 1910 Batemann paper that first presented the mathematical description of the buildup and decay of radon progeny). The explosive growth of all things Internet makes the reconnaissance function to identify grant sources easier than ever. A few websites worth looking through are listed below. Each website listed in this paper opens out into a larger field of affiliated sites. When cruising through these resources, note that some grant-writing institutions operate under clear and predictable demarcations of schedule and content while others operate through a more open format. Finding the match points that naturally associate your desires and needs with grant-making missions, however, requires significant homework, and remember, it's up to you to make the proposition attractive to them. Table 1 summarizes selected Internet portals. These are "list-of-lists" resources that provide pointers to subsequent detail. While not all funding sources necessarily maintain Internet sites, these portals inexorably lead to electronic and print media that cover essentially all sources that would be of interest.

The *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* is a soup-to-nuts database that promises to list out all funding vehicles of the federal government. In that regard, it is of high value. The interface and search engines, however, are a bit murky, and it's not always a simple matter to find things of value or to recognize when things of value are found. Some of this is traceable to the assignment of keyword tags in their database, and this should improve with time. Other major Internet portals like *Yahoo.com*, however, suffer greatly from uneven quality. This problem pervades all of Yahoo, however, because listed elements are self-identified. This hands-off approach is unlikely to "improve" labeling quality with time. Sites like the *Foundation Center*, on the other hand, are specifically designed to support needs related to locating funding vehicles and identifying partners and stakeholders. It should be noted that the Foundation Center also seeks to support their operating expenses by selling things and charging users for certain services. They are well-regarded for many of their publications and directories, and for training programs attuned to the "Grants Culture," but the *Philanthropy News Network* and *TRAM* provide useful inroads without charge.

Table 1. General Portals to Grants Resources.

Organization	Mission Highlights	Comments

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance http://www.cfda.gov/	Government-wide compendium of Federal programs, projects, services, and activities; searchable by department.	Requires significant attention to find things, but complete within its mission.
Foundation Center www.fdncenter.org	Nonprofit information clearinghouse. Contains useful links, a number of valuable for-fee tools	Ultimate level of utility depends on buying products and services from the Center.
Grants Net http://www.grantsnet.org	Free, one-stop resource to find funds for training in the biomedical sciences and undergraduate science education.	Search engine geared to querying funding opportunities and resources.
The Grantsmanship Center http://www.tgci.com/training	Grantsmanship training and low-cost publications to nonprofit organizations and government agencies.	Collects the "best" of funded federal grant proposals annually and makes them available on CD-ROM.
Guidestar http://www.guidestar.org/	Annually conducts hundreds of workshops on grantsmanship and proposal writing.	Searchable database of more than 700,000 U.S. nonprofit organizations.
Philanthropy News Network http://pnnonline.org	Online gathering point for nonprofits. Contains links to leading corporate and private foundations, as well as a number of tools.	Links page points to hundreds of private, corporate, and community foundations.
TRAM http://tram.east.asu.edu/	Searchable database-like structure for querying research support	Originally developed for academic users; good search utilities for agencies and foundation support plus up to date forms & regulations.
YAHOO http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_ and_Culture/Issues_and_Cau ses/Philanthropy/Organizatio ns/	List-of-lists compendium that attempts to organize all things Internet	Regularly updated, but contents are self-identified, and organization is chaotic.

The private sector embodies a long list of prospective foundations and institutions. The Links page of the _Philanthropy News Network_ gives _very_ useful pointers to hundreds of private, corporate, and community foundations. This links page gives a crisp summary of the mission for each, facilitating (but not shortening) a search.

Government agencies (Table 2) will represent significant funding sources of major support for the foreseeable future. The sources listed here are identifiable out of the _Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance_ as well as from the homepage for each agency. On the surface, the department of Education would not seem to be an obvious beginning point because grant competitions are usually geared to classroom activities. Inroads are possible, however, through program areas that need to recognize radon and other aspects of the indoor environment (e.g., Professional Development and School Improvement). Similarly. EPA, DOE and HHS are set up to let applicants know when specific funding prospects are open.

Table 2. Examples of Government Agencies.

Organization	Highlights
U.S. Dept. of Education www.ed.gov/funding.html	Grant competitions usually geared to developing classroom tools and the like;

	categories of Professional Development and School Improvement may be amenable to radon concepts.
U.S. Dept. of Energy www.er.doe.gov/production/grants	Office of Science Grants maintains solicitations that can be applied for at any time.
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services www.hhs.gov/grantsnet/	Website lists grant competitions currently open and provides links to downloadable application packages, forms, etc.
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Grants: www.epa.gov/epahome/grants.htm RFPs: www.epa.gov/oam/rtp_cmd Small Business: www.epa.gov/sbo	Program areas of Environmental Justice and Pollution Prevention may be amenable to radon concepts. Project-based requests for proposals (RFPs) occasionally relate to radon.
National Park Service National Center for Preservation Technology and Training http://www.ncptt.nps.gov	Seeks to apply new technologies in historic preservation and cultural resources conservation. Radon topics are so far unexploited for historic buildings.

The _National Center for Preservation Technology and Training_ (NCPTT) represents a special opportunity -- relatively little detailed attention has been paid to radon in historic buildings. The NCPTT mission is specifically geared to (1) developing improved preservation and restoration technologies, (2) teaching others how to use them, and (3) actually applying the techniques. They are open to fairly innovative thinking, and developing the radon context for restoration and preservation older buildings is a natural topic.

Table 3 lists a few examples of private and corporate foundations that merit attention. Opportunities here range from modest grants of a few thousand dollars to significant program-grade support. The Ben & Jerry's Foundation (yes, the ice cream people), for example, tends to write modest grants of a few thousand dollars. The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Verizon Foundation, on the other hand, work from a heftier asset base and make hundreds of grant awards each year. While none of these institutions has specifically earmarked funds for radon, recurring themes of education, public health, and public awareness give ample room to _develop_ programs around the compelling issues of radon.

Most funding resources work from severely limited budgets, so it becomes attractive to integrate concepts across institutional barriers. Most of the organizations highlighted in this paper welcome co-funding. This enhances the budgetary efficiency of all participating organizations, and helps to forge functional alliances that pay off in the long term.

Table 3. Examples of Foundations and Other Grant-making Institutions.

Organization	Mission Highlights
Ben & Jerry's Foundation www.benjerry.com	Will consider proposals that address issues affecting children and families, disenfranchised groups, and the environment.
The Heinz Endowments www.heinz.org	Support the efforts of non-profit organizations active in the areas of Arts & Culture; Children, Youth & Families; Economic Opportunity; Education; and Environment, with an emphasis on programs either in southwestern Pennsylvania or of clear benefit to the region.

W. Alton Jones Foundation, Inc. http://www.wajones.org	Eliminate Systemic Contamination in three areas affecting the health of children: Pesticides and endocrine disrupters, Air pollution, and Lead poisoning.
The George Lucas Educational Foundation http://www.glef.org	Promote and support changes to the K-12 educational system; share the latest strategies for improving schools, especially those that integrate technology with teaching and learning; connect people to information *and each* other to share ideas and resources.
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation http://www.packfound.org	Broad program areas of Science, Children, Population, Conservation, Arts, Film Preservation, Community and Special Areas that include Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy.
The Pew Charitable Trusts http://www.pewtrusts.com	Promoting economic and regulatory incentives that encourage innovative approaches to pollution prevention. Increasing public understanding of the public health impacts of environmental policies.
Verizon Foundation http://foundation.verizon.com	Wants to be known as a cyber-foundation and prefers online submittals. Priority given to activities that facilitate collaborations through network solutions and enhanced communications systems in program areas of Education, Health and Human Services, Arts & Humanities, and Communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The funding examples listed here are truly the tip of the metaphorical iceberg. Like any other field, consultants and experts stand ready to help grant-makers and grantees organize things. Rather expensive training on proposal writing and grantsmanship is available, and professional services wait in the wings. Grant-making institutions are of particular value to AARST chapters. Local grants sought in league with sympathetic organizations provides that special satisfaction that comes from developing positive grassroots, and offers unmatched opportunities to shine a positive light on AARST and its members.