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RANCHO SANTA FE FOUNDATION

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“Would you tell me, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where,” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

“So long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.

“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if only you walk long enough.”

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll.

The prospect of Alice wandering her way to somewhere- anywhere, really – makes a pretty good case in favor of making a game plan for whatever one does. And this applies, as well, to the three primary activities of a community foundation. Certainly, the fund-raising activity is critical to being able to stay in business at all. And the investment activity is important because we are the stewards of the community endowment. Both of these involve a great deal of planning and vision and they each play a crucial role in how the foundation manages and perpetuates itself.

But the grantmaking role of a community foundation is our lifeline to those in the community who benefit from the generosity, passion and vision of our donors and the foundation itself. And in my opinion, grantmaking is the most important thing we do.

Foundations and their non-profit partners need a roadmap for action. And the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, along with most community foundations across America, are strategizing on how to plan useful grants and how to evaluate why and how they work best. There are several reasons for this; first, foundations are much more interested in articulating their own strategies. They are working off of a business plan and are increasingly interested in “return on investment” kinds of grants ... grants that will have maximum impact and use of resources. Foundations are looking for collaborations with other non-profits also to maximize their dollars. These are community based strategies.

Secondly, in response to the national conversation about the need for accountability in the non-profit sector, it makes it more important than ever to set clear implementation and outcome benchmarks. Evaluation is the name of the game!

Thirdly, foundations are looking to provide their agencies financial and technical support -capacity building, as some call it. This involves in -depth planning and advance

evaluation of internal controls and operating policies. Foundations will put their resources where they can measure results.

Two times a year the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation accepts grant requests from our community agencies. The Spring grant cycle has begun and our Grants & Projects Committee, chaired by Ty Miller, with Emily Bagnall and Roger Rowe, will evaluate nearly 15 requests in the next two weeks. These are formal requests, ranging from \$1000 to \$10,000. The committee will evaluate the requests based on the merits of the program, the costs associated with the program and the impact that implementation will have on the target population. At the end of the process, the Board of Directors will vote on the committee's recommendations.

Last year, the Foundation put more than \$850,000 back into the community from discretionary, designated and donor advised funds. This year, we will surely exceed \$1 million in grants. With a plan in hand, and a vision in our hearts, we, unlike Alice, are getting somewhere fast!