

# Taking a New Path

Dana Marcus, Executive Director, Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, CA

## *A small foundation finds itself an unlikely media services provider to grantees*

Our founder will proudly tell you of the “family business” of philanthropy that involves four generations, as well as extended family, business colleagues, and retired experts who volunteer on special projects. He will also tell you about the importance of active listening in all businesses – for-profit and non-profit alike.

The Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, established in 1999, began with the publication of a literary journal and added a grantmaking program in 2003 to support educational and literacy programs that maximize the potential of children and youth.

In 2003, in a joint effort, the family created values to guide our work, including the trademark value, “Put the right effort, in the right place, at the right time, to obtain exceptional results with maximum efficiency.”

### **But what is the *right effort*?**

We started by actively listening to our grantees and others interested in our mission. Our “foundation family” includes teachers, accountants, a doctor, lawyers, business executives, software engineers, and a photographer among others. If you can appeal to what people like to do, they are more likely to donate the limited time they have available. And, if you apply their talents and interests to what grantees need, you can really find opportunities for leveraged results.

It was never our plan to provide media tools for our grantees, but a site visit to the Diabetes Society in 2003 started the wheels in motion. When the staff apologized for showing us a hopelessly outdated video, nearly a decade old, two of our board members launched a pilot project to refer over a dozen of our grantees to a production company for no-cost, short documentaries created by student interns. From here, we were on a new path.

How could we next help our grantees use their films as effective marketing tools?

We turned to the Web and associated technology, which of course meant turning to the next generation! Kevin Fox, a board member, and Rachel Fisher, a family friend and photographer, showed us that with a small investment we could host grantee films on our website. They linked the grantees’ websites with ours, and before we knew it, the films could be viewed via the Web, worldwide.

The wheels kept turning. In January 2006, Kevin and Rachel made the films downloadable to the video iPod (see photo). The films became portable in a shirt pocket or purse – a powerful tool for non-profit fundraising, recruitment, and more. If a picture is worth a thousand words, imagine the potential for this “mobile media”!

We presented the mobile media concept to the board of Jeremiah’s Promise, a transitional education program for emancipating foster youth. Board members were enthusiastic and purchased iPods for their own use, and



The iPod – a brand of MP3 player designed and marketed by Apple Computer, capable of playing music, displaying photos, or playing videos.

the foundation donated two for the staff. Hundreds of people have viewed their film, and Jeremiah's Promise reports increased donations and referrals as a direct result. The board is even running an impromptu "contest" for most funds raised using their iPods!

### **You don't have to have all the expertise and experience before exploring and embarking on a new path.**

We continued on the path. Could a shorter format, with animated text and photos, be more effective on the iPod?

We recruited a volunteer, James Noah, a retired San Jose State University professor, to lend his communications and journalism expertise to creating mobile media "shorts." Our first media "short"? Full circle to the Diabetes Society whose outdated film started us down this path.

Lesson learned: You don't have to have all the expertise and experience before exploring and embarking on a new path. Listen for common needs among your grantees, scan the talent pool available to you, and turn to interested experts for your projects. You can turn small investments into big benefits for multiple grantees. ◆

*The Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation supports non-profit organizations in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Visit [www.fcfox.org/films](http://www.fcfox.org/films) and [www.fcfox.org/mediaproject.html](http://www.fcfox.org/mediaproject.html) for more information.*

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