

An Organization That Aids Grant Seekers Tries to Modernize

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Bradford K. Smith went to graduate school just a few blocks from where he works today, in the Foundation Center's unassuming headquarters building near Manhattan's Union Square. But in the intervening 26 years, he has worked for the Inter-American Foundation on projects in Latin America and for the Ford Foundation in Brazil, and led the Oak Foundation, a grant maker in Switzerland started by a partner in the Duty Free Shopping empire.

Mr. Smith is now drawing on those experiences as president of the Foundation Center, a nonprofit research group that has long been a leading source of information for fund raisers and others on grant makers and their giving...

Money Challenges

As Mr. Smith seeks to help the Foundation Center speed up the delivery of its data, he also wants to find new ways to display and use it. For example, the center now offers a mapping tool, Philanthropy In/Sight, which enables people to find the foundation grants that have supported the cause they care about in a specific location.

He has also been working more with other organizations, like the Council on Foundations, and federal agencies such as the Department of Education, to produce reports and Web sites that will be of immediate use to grant seekers.

Mr. Smith says he wants to continue to find ways to use the center's data to power other group's research on issues of current interest, even on controversial topics. The furor over the release this spring of a report by the watchdog group National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, which provided guidelines for how much grant makers ought to give to poor people based on Foundation Center data, shows the kind of debate such efforts might provoke.

"I'm not at all afraid of controversy," says Mr. Smith, adding that when he applied for the job he told trustees the Foundation Center should "mix it up" more. "The worst that will happen is people will come away with the impression that philanthropy is responsive and relevant."

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