

# WID WORKS!

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT, NEW YORK | DECEMBER 2009

## HOW TO IMPRESS AND ASTONISH FUNDERS WITH YOUR WRITING

By Barbara Stewart

Don't even try. It should be an exercise in simplicity, clarity and succinctness. The content should be organized, informative and straightforward. You don't want the funder to be impressed by the jargon and fanciness of your letter or statement. You want her to so approve of your accurate, thorough and clear information that she funds your request.

First, expect writing to take some concentration and effort. People who are not comfortable writing often tend to think that it comes easy to talented people, whoever they are. The talented, it seems, can sit down at the computer and whiz right through, producing a magically graceful piece, one so persuasive that the funders will easily open their wallets. Those writers, the thinking goes, are born with the skill, just

as some people are born with double-jointed fingers or the ability to stand comfortably on one foot, like an ostrich.

I am here to say that while some people are probably innately gifted writers, even they must concentrate and put forth effort to create clear prose. And those who may not be gifted — which tends to mean they do not like to write and therefore neglect it until the last minute or beyond — are usually well able to write a simple, clear and convincing document, which is all that funders require.

Here are some suggestions, offered in more or less chronological order:

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## UPCOMING EVENT

### THE INSIDE SCOOP ON CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY

**Monday, December 7, 2009**

**12:00–2:00pm**

**The Princeton Club**

**15 West 43rd Street, NYC**



*Speaker:*

**Christine Park**

President, *New York Life Foundation*

Vice President, *New York Life*

*Insurance Company*

Register now: [widny.org](http://widny.org)

Christine Park, a leader among philanthropy executives, will present an insider's view of the latest thinking among corporate executives about how to organize charitable giving programs and choose among the multitude of worthy grant seekers. This information will be invaluable

to luncheon attendees in seeking corporate support. Ms. Park will be introduced by Ronna Brown, President, Philanthropy New York (formerly NYRAG).

Christine Park is president of the New York Life Foundation, the charitable foundation created by New York Life Insurance Company. In addition to her Foundation duties, Ms. Park is vice president of New York Life's Corporate Responsibility unit.

Through its *Nurturing the Children* initiative, the New York Life Foundation devotes the majority of its funding each year to programs that help children in the areas of mentoring, educational enhancement, childhood bereavement and safe places to learn and grow. Since its founding in 1979, the Foundation has made more than \$120 million in contributions to New York- and U.S.-based non-profit organizations.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear WiD Colleagues:

I know we are all very busy as the year's end draws near. Holiday preparations, next year's department budget and the final results of the annual appeal conspire to occupy every moment this time of year. I want to remind you that materials from WiD workshops and other

programs are available online if you happen to miss an event — just log onto the website and check the “Program Handouts” section. Another wonderful members-only benefit! Let me draw your attention particularly to the handout from our Social Media workshop in Brooklyn a few weeks ago, focusing on how you can use social media to your organization's advantage, whatever your organizational capacity. The PDF on the website has a list of websites and resources recommended by our expert panelists, annotated with short descriptions. If you have a similar list of resources that you would like to share with the membership, send it to us at [widny@widny.org](mailto:widny@widny.org).

I am already looking into 2010, and I'm excited about the “I to I” networking event on January 19th. I hope you'll join me there for what has to be the most engaging and fun networking experience the city has to offer. It's a particular favorite of mine because the feel is so different — there is ample time to really connect with colleagues and to talk with new members. Please find me and say hello.

I wish you very happy holidays and an invigorating start to the new year.

Sincerely,

Kerry Walsh  
President

## 2009–2010 PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL

Members of the WiD President's Council have 20 years or more experience in the not-for-profit sector, working in fundraising and related fields. Receive special recognition as a leader in our field and invitations to targeted initiatives for senior professionals. Please join us today at this special membership level. Visit [www.widny.org](http://www.widny.org) for details.

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## THE INSIDE SCOOP ON CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY *(continued from p. 1)*

New York Life Corporate Responsibility initiatives include the award-winning Volunteers for LIFE program, which helps New York Life employees nationwide volunteer within their communities. Prior to joining New York Life, Ms. Park most recently served as president of the Alcatel-Lucent Foundation. In addition, Ms. Park served as first vice president and manager of corporate giving for Washington Mutual Bank, and for ten years held numerous philanthropic leadership positions within the Dayton Hudson Corporation (now the Target Corporation) in Minneapolis. Prior to joining Dayton Hudson, Ms. Park was an assistant to the mayor of St. Paul, and worked as a schoolteacher and community organizer.

Ms. Park recently completed two terms on the board of directors of the national Council on Foundations as well as several years as chair of their Corporate Advisory Committee. She serves as the board chair of Philanthropy New York, formerly the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers, and is a past Chair of the Conference Board's Contributions Council, on which she continues to serve.

Ms. Park earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota. She currently resides in South Orange, NJ.

## DON'T GET PUSHED INTO SOCIAL MEDIA WITHOUT A PLAN!



On November 12th, three women with divergent experiences brought their insights to WiD's first outer-borough meeting, held at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The panelists were Christine Kite (Communications Manager, Princess Grace Foundation-USA), Sue Nyoni (Principal, Conscious Technology) and Hoong Yee Lee Krakauer (Executive Director, Queens Council on the Arts), with Yolanda Johnson (Development Manager, Princess Grace Foundation-USA) moderating.

The evening was, naturally, extremely interactive, with lively small-group discussions after the panel presentations. A summary of the key advice offered at the session:

- Understand what you want to achieve by using the social media, and develop a plan with measurable goals.

- Use the right medium to reach the right people for your particular organization.
- Social media are about interactivity — between the organization and individuals, and between your supporters/followers/donors. This is not just another way to publicize information you want to send out.
- The speakers produced a list of resources which is available below. Also mentioned during the discussion were: [www.wearemedia.org](http://www.wearemedia.org) (a good place to start), [www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com) (which allows you to categorize your Twitter inputs into manageable categories) and [www.twhirl.org](http://www.twhirl.org) (that allows you to set up permanent searches of all Twitter feeds so you can hear and possibly reply to tweets about your organization or relevant topics).

## HOW TO IMPRESS AND ASTONISH FUNDERS WITH YOUR WRITING (continued from p. 1)

First, pick up a copy of Strunk & White. You remember Strunk & White, don't you? It is the slim book of writing instructions by William Strunk, Jr., a Cornell professor of 60 or 70 years ago, enlarged upon by E. B. White, the *New Yorker* writer and probably his most renowned pupil. It is splendid. It is fun to read. It includes the overview, the sweep and the minutiae. And in writing, the minutiae matters greatly. This is something that Suzuki Roshi, an influential Zen master who lived out the latter part of his life in northern California, knew well: when he was being led through a newly constructed building, the student, his guide, said, "It's almost done. There are only a few more details." To which Roshi replied: "But is there anything else?"

### **1. First, rouse your confidence, inhale, exhale and get started.**

Few people, however skilled, leap into a writing project with the joy — for instance — of a commuter unlocking her door at the end of a hard day. Writing is work. No way around it. Thinking that it shouldn't be and wouldn't be if only you were better at it is both inaccurate and paralyzing. Comparing yourself to others who are supposedly brilliant ("Sure, but it's *easy* for her...") is a bad way to begin. And while you may not be able to write for the *New Yorker*, you can definitely write an adequate letter or longer piece for a funder. It's rather like cooking — being Jamie Oliver requires talent but everybody ought to be able to fix a reasonable dinner. You just need to...

### **2. Know your subject — even if you are only writing a letter.**

Figure out what you want to say. This may seem obvious, but people often want to skip this step, go immediately to the writing and get it all over with — as if they could leap right over the annoying moat rather than having to wade through it. The trouble is, once you begin to write, you will find that you don't know what to say if you haven't done your research. Make a point of including telling details, interesting anecdotes and useful statistics. Otherwise you will find yourself writing in unconvincing and often banal generalities. Isn't it more compelling to read: "Last year, one of every eight Latino citizens was stopped by law enforcement officers and questioned about his immigration status" than "Even Latino citizens are frequently ordered to prove their immigration status?"

### **3. Organize the structure of the piece before you begin.**

This is mandatory for a longer piece and a true lifesaver with a proposal. But when writing even a substantial letter, I find it

helpful to figure out a ground, path and fruition: the basis of what you want to say, the path, or route, and the conclusion, the result. There are other ways to structure a piece. But at all costs, avoid writing sprawl, which can be as confusing and irritating as the Houston highway system.

### **4. Use simple words.**

Write in straightforward, declarative sentences. Keep paragraphs short: do not use multi-syllabic words when shorter ones are available. Do not back into the sentence or the paragraph. Avoid "pretzel" sentences by cutting them into two. Writing, here, is like make-up. It should not call attention to itself. It should not obscure. It should unobtrusively highlight the beauty of the story, the feelings, the facts.

### **5. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.**

Nobody gets it right on the first try. Nobody. Take a few minutes to reread what you wrote. You want to correct the obvious mistakes and flaws. But also notice the flow and the structure. Is this the best way to express yourself, to describe your project, to give your thanks? Then put the piece away for a little while — a half-hour or longer. Read it again. And again. All the great writers know this. When Hemingway told an interviewer that he rewrote the ending of "A Farewell to Arms" 39 times, the interviewer asked: "Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?" Hemingway replied: "Getting the words right."

### **6. Have a good editor.**

Contrary to widespread opinion, writing is not altogether solitary work. Everybody needs an editor. You need a second pair of eyes and ears.

#### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE ...**

We invite you to take advantage of WiD-NY's robust professional network. It's an exclusive benefit of being a WiD member!

#### **Looking for professional guidance?**

Get advice from a senior career coach.

#### **Planning your next career move?**

Visit our job bank.

#### **Ready to share your expertise with other women?**

Join our volunteer career coach roster.

## RAVE REVIEWS FROM A FULL HOUSE

WiD's sold-out November luncheon featured Jane O'Connell and Megan McAllister of the Altman Foundation, Julia Bator from The Heckscher Foundation for Children, and Robin Hood Foundation's Deborah McCoy discussing how nonprofits might measure the impact of their work in "Demonstrating Impact: Perspectives of Three Foundations."

### HERE'S WHAT ATTENDEES HAD TO SAY:

"Hearing from funders is so helpful, and with little face time these days this is so important."

"This covered the landscape well."

"Members of the panel were interesting and articulate... these women appeared to have given a lot of thought to their remarks."

"The program was informative and valuable."



PHOTOS: Annalee Van Kleeck, Lyric Photo

## WID WANTS YOUR THOUGHTS

Thank you to all who have filled out our post-event surveys. Your feedback helps us tailor upcoming events to your needs, and we appreciate your candor and kudos. Please do continue to fill out this short form after you attend events; it takes just a minute and is invaluable to our planning committees.

# SAVE THE DATE

## “I TO I”: A STRUCTURED NETWORKING EXPERIENCE

**Tuesday, January 19, 2010**  
**6:00–8:00pm**  
**The Cosmopolitan Club**  
**122 East 66th Street**  
**(between Park & Lexington Avenues)**

Learn first-hand how to expand your network, land a new job, transition into a new field, pursue a passion, make your next move, and more, in this unique participatory workshop. Attendees will have an opportunity to make genuine contacts, discuss meaningful topics in small-group settings with facilitators, and share good food and drink.

## INSPIRED PHILANTHROPY: LAURIE M. TISCH SPEAKS ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF THE LAURIE M. TISCH ILLUMINATION FUND

**Monday, February 1, 2010**  
**12:00–2:00pm**  
**The Yale Club**  
**50 Vanderbilt Avenue**  
**(between 44th & 45th Streets)**

Register for these programs and more at [www.widny.org](http://www.widny.org)

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

WiD Wants You! Want to get involved with WiD? Like to be on a committee but don't know what is expected? The WiD Volunteer Development committee needs volunteers to join several working committees. Network, build your skills, get to know fellow WiD members while you work to advance our organization.

**Please sign up in the members-only area of the WiD website, under the “Sign-up for a Committee” tab.**

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