

Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: Fundraising for individual artists or arts organizations is challenging, particularly for those who are starting out. Here to shed some light on this complex business is Paul Marengo, CEO of Promethean Fundraising. Welcome Paul, thanks so much for joining us.

PM: Thank you for having me.

VC: You have an interesting background. Tell us about your journey from the New York State assembly District to working with non-profits and opening your consulting firm, Promethean Fundraising.

PM: Sure, so after college I started working for New York State Assemblyman Jake Gunther. And there I worked with individuals who needed assistance with government agencies. And after a while I wanted to get some federal experience or Hill experience so I moved to Washington DC and I worked on the Hill for a while. I got into some political fundraising and realized that a lot of the fundraising that I was doing was going to pollsters, posters and T-shirts and not really helping a lot of people. So, I rolled off the Hill and started working for non-profits, specifically for unions and associations and then I started working for charitable non-profits. And then I found that DC has a lot of non-profits. It has the largest concentration of non-profits of any other city in the world. And the problem is that there are a lot of smaller organizations who don't have the same resources as larger institutions so that's where I found my niche. I wanted to help small grass roots organizations obtain the funding that they needed. And from there I started to work with a lot of artists and so I started teaching grant writing, fundraising and development to artists and various organizations throughout the country. The idea is that a lot of people don't have the expertise or know how to write grants or know where to find them so I wanted to take the opportunity to empower them so that they could find those funding opportunities so that their projects can be made, because that's what it really rolls down to, making sure that artists get paid and get paid to do what they love and also make sure that those projects just don't sit on the shelf, that they get made, and then fund arts organizations to help those artists get those projects done.

KK: So, you just described what Promethean does. But if I'm an artist, an individual, or a small organization, what's the steps to come to you?

PM: Just a quick background. So, my firm is called Promethean Fundraising. Prometheus was a Greek titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to man. The idea is to find resources for smaller institutions so that they can be more competitive, than the larger ones. I'm online at prometheanfundraising.org. My email and telephone number are on there, on my website. Otherwise, people can just email me if they have questions, or advice or anything in between.

VC: Great, so how do you acquire funding, or research funding or whatever, to fill the needs of your clients?

PM: So, there's a couple of different ways. For organizations, I try to create a plan for them. And the plan includes four different funder types. There are individuals, there's corporate sponsors, government funders and then there's foundations. And then we look at the mixture between the four and we figure out what's best in every specific funder type. And then specifically for like government funders we look on a local level, state or city level and then the federal level. We look for funders who we could apply and receive funding. We need to make sure that obviously our applications are competitive because government funding is very competitive. On a foundation level, there's many, many foundations all across the world, more so here than any other country. So, with foundations, again, we have to make sure that organizations are competitive. We have to make sure that budgets are sound and make sense. We have to make sure that their programming makes sense and things like that. With individuals the research gets a little bit harder as most institutions require 501-C3 status. You know, some funders give to an individual. Most government funders have some kind of individual program. And again, it's just researching using things like Foundation Center or Candid, which it's called now, and their database to look for individual grants for individuals and organizational grants. For government funders it's a simple Google search at each level of government and seeing...for Federal, there's the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for Humanities. On the city level, most states have a state level arts funder. Funding on a county level is becoming more prominent so there may be opportunities on a county level and then trickling all the way down to cities. A lot of individuals, a lot of government agencies are now seeing the value that the arts have outside of just being art, but also being an economic driver. So, there's a lot of different opportunities. It just takes a lot of time and energy. It's not something that's quick that you can apply tonight and get the funding tomorrow.

KK: You just said for an individual they have to have, you mentioned some sort of status they have to have. Explain what that is.

PM: Sure. Most foundations, probably 90% of foundations, require you to be a non-profit. A small number of foundations have individual programs. Now some foundations where they require you to be a 501-C3 will take what's called a fiscal sponsor. Your fiscal sponsor is basically your bank and bookkeeper. So, you apply to

a foundation that takes a fiscal sponsor. If you get approved and the money goes to a fiscal sponsor. And when you need money, you go to the fiscal sponsor and then they pay for whatever invoices need to be paid. Fiscal sponsors all require applications to apply. It's a very extensive application, one or two pages or up to 18 pages, because this organization is now your bookkeeper.

VC: They take a cut, right?

PM: They call it an administrative fee. (VC: Right.)

KK: Okay, I'm curious. How long, when you put applications in, what is the time span where you get yes, we've got money we're giving to you? Are we talking months, a year? What?

VC: Or does it depend on the individual you're applying to?

PM: It depends. With government funders, most government funders will give you some kind of time frame of when they would make a decision and then will sometimes give you an idea when you would actually get the funding. Foundations, there's no rhyme or reason. Foundations take, it depends because some foundations have rolling admissions so you could apply and then get an answer in a month or two. Or they put all their applications together when they have a board or trustee meeting, that's when they decide who they are going to fund. It depends on the funder when it comes to foundations, and you'll know that when you do your research and you look to see, do they have deadlines, do they say it's rolling admission. That's all in their request for proposal or on their website which is why research is so important.

VC: What is the difference between foundations and grants?

PM: When you think of grants, grant funding organizations could be anything from, they could be corporate foundations, private foundations, family foundations, public foundations, charitable foundations, they could be humanities organizations, nonprofit funders are not specifically foundations but they are grant-giving. "Grants" is one name that all that funding falls under, what you would call it, as opposed to like a donation from an individual sponsorship from a corporation.

KK: Is there an advantage to have Promethean Fundraising try to do the grants and try to get the money from whatever you think would be the place to go to look rather than somebody like myself who is not a big researcher, it seems like this would be daunting. Do you have a better chance of getting it than I would individually?

PM: It depends on the individual, it depends on whatever consultant you use, there's different factors that take place. I don't usually cross-share, if I'm helping you out, I wouldn't apply for grants that I've applied for, for another organization because that's being competitive and that's something you don't want to do. For the individual it depends on the time, it depends on other factors because usually I'm not applying to the foundation on behalf of Promethean Fundraising. I'm just doing your writing for you and it depends. I can

write for the arts, I can write for health, I can write for youth, I can't write for the environment. There are industries that I normally write for that I consider—I'm not an expert in, but I have a good working knowledge of versus other industries where I may not have any. You know, I've worked with filmmakers, artists and arts organizations for close to 30 years now so that's an industry that I do a lot of work in and have a lot of relationships with so that's what I prefer, rather than doing other industries. So, when you're looking for a consultant, you obviously want someone who's in the industry than someone who's not.

VC: Now what is GuideStar and what is the Foundation Center, talk about that a little bit, and what are they, how can we as artists use them?

PM: So GuideStar and the Foundation Center are merged into one organization called Candid. Candid has GuideStar. GuideStar is a platform much like Charity Navigator which critiques organizations based on a couple of different policies, board makeup, all sorts of different details, service, how they do different services depending on the organization. It's an organizational rating platform. Foundation Center has two different focal points. One is to provide education. You can take classes that are free, like intro to project budgeting. They have the boot camps that you could pay for as well and on the other side is their foundation directory. The foundation directory is not cheap but you can access a free copy at most libraries. You can call up your library, see if there's a copy there, you just go there and you can do your research. There're other directories, there's Grant Station and Grant Watch that are a little more affordable and if you're in with a couple of different filmmakers then it becomes a lot cheaper, you can get some of the smaller directories and do your research.

VC: Oh, that's a good idea. Is there any need for an individual artist to incorporate?

PM: It depends, that's kind of a loaded question because a lot of filmmakers do incorporate with their films so the film could be one company and then they could start on another film. And there's different advantages to do that. With an individual artist there's the option of fiscal sponsorship so they don't necessarily have to create their own company. If they want to access a foundation or government funder that only accepts nonprofits but also accepts fiscal sponsors you could go that route. Most filmmakers who incorporate, incorporate as a for-profit. They're incorporating to get certain advantages for their filmmaking. You don't have to go that route. You can just be an individual and work with a fiscal sponsor, you don't necessarily have to become a nonprofit. There's a lot of work that goes into forming and maintaining a nonprofit but as an individual if you go the route of fiscal sponsorship, it's an application process and then you're done.

VC: Now when it comes down to actually filling out those grant applications, those applications for funding, that can be somewhat daunting. What advice do you have for the individual or the emerging organization as they're filling out these things?

PM: Even before you fill out the grant application you have to make sure that the application that you're filling out is for an organization, a funder, that closely matches you and what you're doing. You have to do your proper research. You have to figure out which funders have a high probability of funding your project before you even think about putting the application together. And once you get the application, the one thing I would say is look at the attachments first because they usually take the longest so you can get those balls rolling before you start answering the actual questions. The one thing I always tell filmmakers is answer the question. It sounds bizarre to say it but there are a lot of times when a filmmaker may not know how to answer a question and start writing and writing and writing and never answer it. So, you look at the question, make sure you answer the question. If you don't have any idea, most foundations have a program manager. There's no reason why you can't call them up and say hey, I'm stuck on this question, this is how I think I'm going to answer it, should I answer it. If not, you could always look for friends, either other fundraisers or development, or individuals who work for nonprofits and say, could you edit my application? Am I answering the questions? Like, if you were reading them, what would you think? You should always have a second set of eyes on your applications once they're completely written. Just make sure that you're answering the questions, making sure that you're answering them correctly, short and straight to the point, because a lot of reviewers may not know things like different camera equipment, or the fact that you have a contingency line because you're shooting outside and you don't know if it's going to rain. Most funders will tell you to write applications as if the reviewers know nothing. I literally sat on a panel this morning with other reviewers going through applications. And a lot of the filmmaking applications that we were reviewing, timelines didn't make sense to the other reviewers, but I'm like, oh, that's pre-production, that's post-production, that's marketing and distribution. That timeline makes sense, but I'm a filmmaker so it makes sense to me but it did not make sense to the other reviewers.

KK: Is there a criteria for you to take on a client?

PM: Organizations that I work with have to be a certain age. I do not work with organizations that have just started because I can't tell a story of an organization with no history. I work with organizations that have a history or have some kind of trail that I can present to a funder. So, I couldn't work with a first-time filmmaker because there's no history. I can't present anything. I want to be able to present three years' worth of programming, or financials. With a filmmaker it's trailers, films that have been completed. They don't have to be completely established but they have to have some kind of history to present to a funder. That's the most important thing, at least for me. And they have to have their paperwork in order, whether it's staffing, or whether it's shot lists, or everything in between because you never know what I could use to paint a better picture to you to a funder. Funders don't think it's just a filmmaker by themselves and that's always a

misnomer because on most filmmaker applications they don't mention the entire crew. That's something I learned today. I surveyed probably ten different filmmaker applications and none of them mentioned craft services (VC Wow!), or lighting person, or sound person, or an editor, anything like that. (VC: No kidding!) It's important to be comprehensive about who's working for you and it's OK to pay yourself. It's OK to pay everybody on staff. It's OK to present that kind of budget. But it has to make sense, it can't have any red flags and it has to be comprehensive enough that a reviewer can understand. Or program manager, because when it comes to paneling-so paneling is when reviewers sit around and talk about applications and their scores. Most, if not all government agencies have to panel by law, and some nonprofit foundations panel, but not all foundations panel. Some foundations will rely on their program manager to score the application and then that application goes to a board or a set of trustees to determine whether they are going to get funded or not. So, it's important, at least if you are applying to a government funder you have a better chance, even though it's just as competitive as a foundation because at least your application is being reviewed by a couple of different people as opposed to a private or public foundation where only one or two people may review the application before it's sent on.

VC: Wow! I'm still on that thing that you said about the filmmakers who don't mention, oh by the way, I have a crew.

PM: Yeah, a lot of filmmakers sometimes do what we call pad the budget and that's something you should never do. You should always be completely honest about what you're spending. I mean, if I'm putting a film budget together and let's say I'm filming in Sullivan County, I have to bring food because where I'm filming there's no place to go eat so I have to put that in my budget. But I explain that it's a food desert, there's nowhere to go, still got to feed my crew, got to feed my actors so we have to bring that kind of expense to our filming. But a lot of filmmakers will just put that in their budget in another line item thinking that a reviewer's not going to notice, but it's better and more honest if you explain everything out, even if you have to put contingency lines, you know, we're filming outside, it may or may not rain. If it rains, we have to spend extra money on actors, crew and equipment. That's why we're adding another \$5,000, \$10,000 (VC: Another day) (KK: Exactly). We may not use it but we're putting it in our budget just in case.

KK: You've been involved in some interesting projects. Can you tell us what is Beyond Drinking: Redefining Community Spaces?

PM: So, for Humanities DC, I put in an application for this project. And the project was that LGBT bars and clubs were, in essence, our community spaces. We're lucky right now that we have a community center but we didn't always have one. So, where our organization met was in bars and clubs. So, I did a panel of bar owners, club owners and event promoters about how bars and clubs were our community spaces back then

because that's where our community felt the safest. And Humanities DC gave me a grant to produce that panel. And that was a personal grant that I got for myself, not for an organization. (VC: That's very creative). And I just got another grant from the DC Arts Commission to produce a project. I call it The Drag Chronicles. It's called The Drag Chronicles: From Art Form to Activism. And it's about drag queens who are now using their platform as activists.

KK: Are you preparing, do you want to film this?

PM: There's two parts that will be filmed. The panel will be filmed and then we're going to do oral histories of drag queens and kings who have been in the industry for decades.

VC: Oh wow. Sounds really interesting. Have you started working on that yet, or...

PM: We have.

VC: That's awesome. Good luck with that! You've given us a lot of really good information here, like really super-good, super terrific information that I think artists in all fields can use, I mean because we ourselves are filmmakers and video makers so that's kind of our frame of reference but I think a lot of what you have said can apply to artists in different areas.

VC: And I know you said this kind of at the beginning but why don't you tell the folks again where they can contact you, and get more information about Promethean.

PM: Sure, so my website is prometheanfundraising.org and I have a contact us section on my website, it's got my email and phone.

VC: Paul, this is so informative. Thank you so much.

PM: Of course.

KK: We really appreciate it. I'm, by the way, jotting down notes, and I'm thinking, yeah, this was great and we thank you.

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