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## Capstone Papers

### **Title**

A Scientist's Guide to Philanthropy: Bridging the Gap between Marine Conservation Biologists & Funding

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/01w6x13f>

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### **Publication Date**

2016-04-01

**A Scientist's Guide to Philanthropy:**  
**Bridging the Gap between Marine Conservation Biologists & Funding**

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**June 9, 2016**

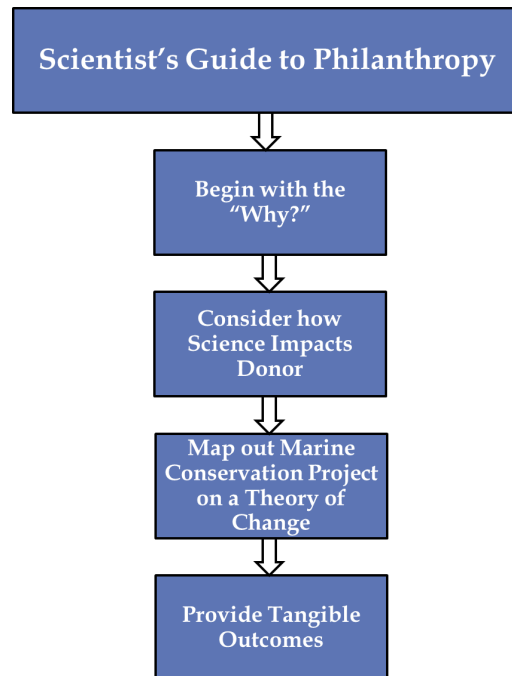
## **Abstract**

This capstone report involves the relationship between marine conservation biologists and funding. The goal is to help scientists pitch their projects in a way that compels potential philanthropists dedicated to ocean conservation to financially contribute by investigating transferable communication tools that scientists can utilize. This has been done through conducting interviews with various marine foundations and institutions' program departments. Upon conducting extensive research in marine fundraising, it becomes clear that there has been a shift in the philanthropic landscape that requires scientists and labs to think differently about cultivating relationships with donors. Ocean science research has been reliant upon now dwindling large scale financial support from federal agencies. This research highlights the importance of cultivating relationships with philanthropists and marine conservation foundations through new and different communication approaches.

## **Introduction**

Shifting to private foundations and high net worth individuals will require some key adjustments in how marine conservation projects are designed, presented and budgeted. A considerable amount of research has been done on fundraising for conservation organizations, but little research has been done on exploring the gap between marine conservation biologists and donors. The question remains, what is most important to philanthropists who give to ocean organizations? Additional studies are needed to understand how marine conservation biologists can inspire and maintain funding from private support. The research suggests four approaches in the stewardship of a donor. These include; mentioning the “why” of any scientific project,

including how the science is relevant to the donor, mapping out marine conservation projects in terms of a theory of change and providing the donor with tangible results.



## Literature Review

1. Sargeant, Adrian & Shang, Jen (2011). Growing Philanthropy in the United States. *A Report on the June 2011 Washington, D.C. Growing Philanthropy Summit*, 1-34.

Sargeant and Shang (2011) examined the need for nonprofits to reevaluate the structure of their relationships with funders. They found that it is important to treat donors less as economic gains, but instead focus on developing relationships based on an individual's personal voice and preferences in philanthropy. Another conclusion they made was to move away from directly asking for money and instead focus on the individual's personal identity as a donor. Sargeant and Shang came up with 32 recommendations to help nonprofits redefine their goals and implement action plans.

2. Durbin, Tim & Drake, Josh (2015). Money for Good. *Revealing the Voice of the Donor in Philanthropic Giving*, 1-157.

Durbin and Drake (2015) developed a research series to help reveal the incentives behind why individuals donate to certain causes. The article explores how to increase the amount of money donated to charity and changes nonprofits can implement in order to improve the quality of the giving process. Durbin and Drake reveal that giving has increased since the 2008-2009 recession, but a lack of understanding in regards to a philanthropist's incentives, choices and behavior contributes to overall low charity contributions. They found that a \$47B increase in giving is available if nonprofits reshape the giving process to make sure donor's needs are met.

3. Anft, Michael (2015). The Chronicle of Philanthropy. *When Scientific Research Can't Get Federal Funds, Private Money Steps In*, <https://philanthropy.com/article/When-Scientific-Research/151777>.

Anft examined how large donors have stepped in to help fund scientific projects that often times cannot be funded by federal support. This money has played an important role in scientific advancement that is often times stalled by a lack of federal support. Anft discusses the largest gift ever made to science by Ted Stanley. \$650 million was given to the Broad Institute to explore the links between genetics and severe mental illness. Unrestricted gifts from donors have fewer rules tied to them than federal grants and therefore organizations can use philanthropic donations to work more easily overseas and improve an organization's facilities. He found that showing donors more concrete results would result in better scientific fundraising.

## **Methodology**

### *Type of Research*

This study was conducted using qualitative research by interviewing marine conservation program departments to help paint a picture of areas where marine conservation biologists can be the most effective in presenting their research to donors. The goal was to investigate the “why” and “how” of the decision making process to determine what factors are involved in funding a marine conservation project. The objective of the interviews was to identify transferable communication tools that could be duplicated and utilized by scientists working in ocean research.

### *Sampling Method*

The sampling method was based upon foundations and institutions who are dedicated to a marine conservation mission. In total, twelve organizations were contacted. Letters of intent were sent and the sampling was based upon those program departments who responded with interview availability.

### *Respondents*

The respondents in the research included; The Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, The San Diego Foundation, The Ocean Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the same set of questions being asked to each program department. The opinion of marine conservation biologists at Scripps was also sought

out in regards to their relationship with donors and what communication methods have been the most successful in generating and maintaining philanthropic support.

### *Questionnaire*

Questions discussed included:

- 1) Currently what are the most popular ocean related causes that donors tend to invest their money in?
- 2) What kind of communication follow up would donors like to see after contributing money to a scientific project?
- 3) What determines what amount individuals donate to scientific projects?
- 4) Based on case studies, does witnessing the science taking place first hand positively influence the scientist/donor relationship?
- 5) How can donors be provided with tangible outcomes after financially contributing to an ocean related project?
- 6) How will shifting to private foundations and high net worth individuals for financial support affect how scientific projects are designed, presented and budgeted?
- 7) How do you recommend researching a target market for potential investors?
- 8) In your experience, what type of function is most successful in generating visibility and potential donations? i.e., public presentations, open house type events, youth programs, social media (follow the twitter account of a lead scientist, etc.)?
- 9) What has been your most important decision in steering the grant making or program department in your foundation?
- 10) How could scientists/ocean conservation biologists be better fundraisers?

11) How important do you feel it is that donors understand the science that is happening in the project? In large projects do you feel the presence of a “scientific liaison” would be helpful?

12) For initial contact with a potential large donor, what do you feel is the most successful for developing a relationship? (Send information followed by a call, introduction from a common acquaintance, invitation to witness some of the process, meet the lead scientist, etc.)?

## **Results**

Qualitative interviews with marine organization’s program departments concluded that utilizing the following four transferrable communication strategies are effective tools scientists can implement in hopes of gaining funding from philanthropists.

### *The “Why”*

Simon Sinek is an author, speaker and consultant who coaches people on leadership and management practices. He brought attention to a significant communication strategy to help individuals connect with their audience. This tool of starting with the “why” is critical when it comes to scientific presentations to donors.<sup>1</sup> This golden circles explores the why, how and what of a communication message. Every scientist knows what they do, they know how they do it and the methods they use, but very few scientists communicate why they do the science that they do.<sup>2</sup> The why refers to your purpose, what is your passion? Why does your research question exist? Many scientists when put in front of a donor communicate from the outside of the circle in, going from the straight forward methods of what their research entails to how they do it.<sup>3</sup> The

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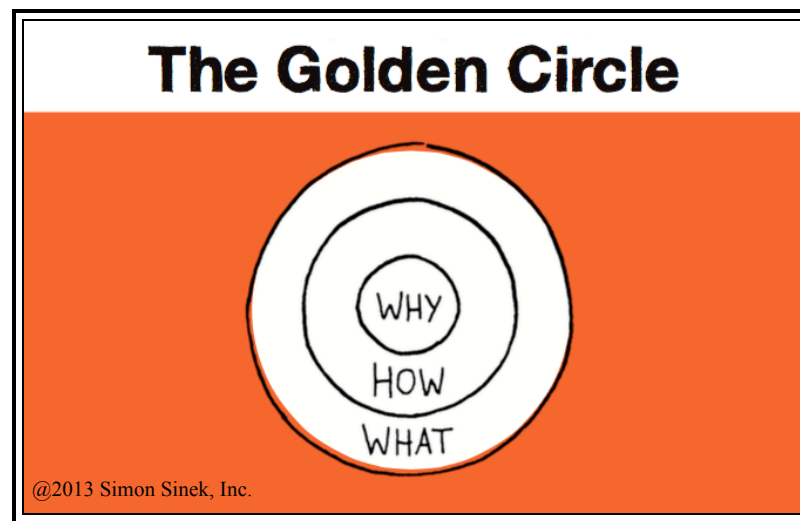
<sup>1</sup> Simon Sinek, *Start with Why* (Simon Sinek, Inc., 2013), <http://startwiththewhy.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



most effective scientific communicators will communicate from the inside out of the golden circle starting with the why. This is important when it comes to communicating with donors because people don't invest in what you do, they invest in why you do it. When we communicate from the inside out of the golden circle we target the part of the brain that controls behaviors and then people can justify it with the what and the how.<sup>4</sup> All decisions (the decision to donate to a project, for example) are rooted in emotion. Researcher Dr. Antonio Damasio said, “So at the point of decision, emotions are very important for choosing. In fact even with what we believe are logical decisions, the very point of choice is arguably always based on emotion.”<sup>5</sup>



### *Impacts*

When thinking about communicating with a donor it is crucial to think about an organization's mission, its strong reputation and consider how the donor fits into a scientific project. When pitching your marine conservation project it's important to identify the problems

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Camp, *Decisions are Emotional, not Logical: The Neuroscience behind Decision Making* (Think Big, Inc., 2016), <http://bigthink.com/experts-corner/decisions-are-emotional-not-logical-the-neuroscience-behind-decision-making>.

and issues. It is imperative for the donor to understand how the scientist is attempting to make a difference in order to solve the problem. A way of doing this is finding opportunities to involve the donors first hand and allowing them to see the science in action. There's a famous Chinese Proverb that goes, "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I may remember. But involve me, and I'll understand."<sup>6</sup>

In 2012, Edith Widder, a deep-sea biologist and founder of the Ocean Research and Conservation Association in Fort Pierce, Florida went out on a deep sea exploration with Ray Dalio, a billionaire hedge fund founder. During that trip the first ever video of a giant squid was captured in its deep sea habitat.<sup>7</sup> Dalio, said he "was surprised at how little is spent on ocean exploration, and he recognized that with his considerable resources he could actually have a major impact."<sup>8</sup> Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution went on to collaborate with Dalio and he funded coral reef studies in Micronesia and sperm whale research off the coast of New Zealand.<sup>9</sup>

In 2012, Scripps Institution of Oceanography donors financially contributed to an expedition to study microbial life in the 35,000 foot deep Tonga Trench in the South Pacific. Identifying potential experiences where donors can witness the science in action is crucial in inspiring and maintaining philanthropic support.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Chinese Proverb

<sup>7</sup> Mark Schrope, *Wealthy Backers Support Scientific Efforts to Explore Deep Seas* (The Washington Post, 2013), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/wealthy-backers-support-scientific-efforts-to-explore-deep-seas/2013/05/24/486c6430-b716-11e2-aa9e-a02b765ff0ea\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/wealthy-backers-support-scientific-efforts-to-explore-deep-seas/2013/05/24/486c6430-b716-11e2-aa9e-a02b765ff0ea_story.html).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## *Theory of Change*

Shifting more to private foundations and high net worth individuals will require some key adjustments in how scientific projects are designed, presented and budgeted. The third communication tool can be used to address this by mapping out marine conservation projects based on a theory of change. A theory of change is a project management tool typically used in business and philanthropy, but marine conservation biologists can consider this in the stewardship of the donor and involving them at each part of the project progress. To develop a theory of change begin by addressing what positive changes are trying to be achieved and what are the steps to get there. The first part is to identify the long term goals and then work to figure out all of the circumstances (outcomes) that must be implemented in order for the goal of the project to be achieved.<sup>11</sup> A theory of change can be very helpful in classifying outcomes and measuring progress. This can be effective in documenting how the donor's gift can help during each part of the project.

A theory of change is important in marine conservation projects because it helps scientists to be results oriented and for the donors it helps them to consider the process involved in working on any scientific theory.<sup>12</sup> Rare is an international conservation organization whose goal is to implement sustainable environmental practices in communities all over the world. They effectively use a theory of change to set targets, measure success and better link social change to biodiversity threat reduction.<sup>13</sup> By communicating marine conservation projects based

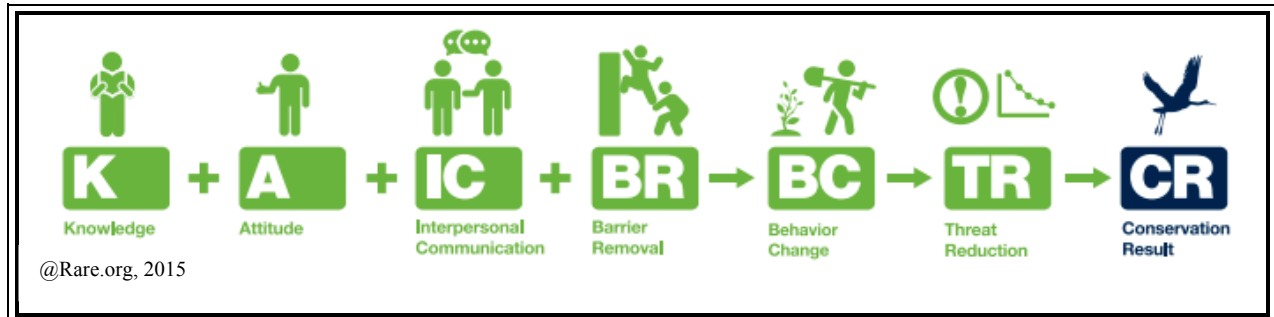
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<sup>11</sup> What is the Theory of Change? (The Center for Theory of Change, Inc., 2016), <http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Rare: Theory of Change for Community-Based Conservation (Futerra Sustainability Communications, 2015), [http://www.rare.org/sites/default/files/ToC\\_Booklet\\_Final\\_Rare.pdf](http://www.rare.org/sites/default/files/ToC_Booklet_Final_Rare.pdf).

on the theory of change, it results in a more effective evaluation by philanthropists because it becomes possible to measure progress in regards to the long term goals.



### *Tangible Outcomes*

Current trends in philanthropy are requiring scientists to provide measurable outcomes so that donors feel as though their money has made a difference. Providing tangible outcomes is the fourth communication tool that can be used when working with a philanthropist on marine conservation projects. According to a study conducted by Root Cause on the giving process and the psychology behind donor motivation, they concluded that 75 percent of respondents seek out concrete information in regards to charities achievements before making a decision about whether or not they will donate.<sup>14</sup> "These potential donors place a high importance on confirming an organization's success rate and whether or not it focuses on immediate or long-term changes. Fifty-one percent of donors seek out this information when planning to contribute to a charity for the first time."<sup>15</sup> Developing tangible outcomes will help you understand what you need to accomplish and will make it possible to measure the impact of your scientific project. Examples of these objectives over the course of a project to share with the donor could include, metrics

<sup>14</sup> Donor Direct (Donor Direct, 2016), [http://www.donordirect.com/blog/financial-management/donors-more-likely-to-give-after-seeing-tangible-results/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1465405787.4073669910430908203125](http://www.donordirect.com/blog/financial-management/donors-more-likely-to-give-after-seeing-tangible-results/?doing_wp_cron=1465405787.4073669910430908203125).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

demonstrating the number of increase, decrease, or percent of change you have achieved, providing educational programs and even presentations to staff or faculty. For example, from 2015 to 2016, coral cover within marine protected areas increased by .08 percent in the Caribbean as determined by visual transect surveys.

## **Discussion**

This study found that funders of marine conservation projects have various suggestions about communication tools to utilize when developing a relationship with a marine conservation biologist. The organization's program departments sampled in this study were in agreement about the importance of personal connections between the philanthropist and scientist. One of the limitations of this research study was the restricted number of marine conservation organizations who responded and were interviewed in the sample size. Additional research needs to be conducted in regards to the scientist's perspective and what methods have been successful in maintaining financial support from donors. Also, a qualitative study needs to be completed in regards to development departments at marine conservation organizations and their role as the liaison between the scientist and philanthropist.

## **Conclusion**

By investigating the gap between marine conservation biologists and donors this study determines that utilizing the following four transferable communication methods are effective when trying to raise money from private support for a marine conservation project; start with the "why," consider how the science impacts the donor, map out your project in terms of a theory of change and provide the donor with tangible outcomes as you progress in your research.

Developing strategies to restore and protects various marine habitats are becoming increasingly

important issues that must be addressed. Recently, there has been increased concern from foundations and wealthy individuals about environmental pressures on our world's oceans. Honing in on private support from wealthy individuals is crucial in the future of marine conservation projects. Better understanding the cultivation and maintenance of the relationship between a scientist and donor will lead to increased overall success in the field of ocean conservation.