

# Worksheet: Get the Real Scoop



## ■ Beware the Funder Bubble

No matter what funder you want to be—a sustainer, campaign or launcher—it is important to recognize the perils of being in what I call a *funder bubble*. If you don't take steps to be open-minded and really listen, then you risk making poor decisions and potentially cause more harm than good.

You don't want to entice a nonprofit with funding but, in the end, precipitate their failure because they were not equipped to accomplish the goal that you had in mind. You don't want to create discord between and among nonprofit organizations because you fail to follow principles of open-mindedness.

Unfortunately, I have plenty of examples: a funder comes in and unwittingly destroys a coalition or campaign, or the morale, at a nonprofit because the donor was not truly listening or holding confidences. I have also seen the opposite: a funder is profoundly helpful and really elevated my work at a nonprofit because of the partnership I forged with that donor. I developed this lesson plan in order to support you being *the good kind of donor* and not make mistakes by becoming enveloped in a *funder bubble*.

I have *nine points* to help you stay out of the funder bubble and *four tenets* to live by. Feedback is crucial to help us course correct. People push back, have differences of opinion, and we experience the consequences of bad decisions. As a funder, your beneficiaries can be reluctant to challenge you. You don't always know about your missteps. *Nonprofits don't always feel like they can tell you.*



“There is a power imbalance. It is up to you to check yourself at the door and maintain a healthy perspective.”

## ■ Nine Signs You Are in a Funder Bubble

- **New idea:** You think that you have a new idea no one has ever thought of before.
- **Just get along:** You forget that in every effort there is disagreement over strategy and it is OK that there is a spectrum of thinking about an issue.
- **Ask others to be perfect:** You get hung up on grammar or spelling in a proposal or in their public materials rather than what the group is actually doing to get the job done.
- **Don't listen:** You go into a room and are the first person to speak and don't listen first.
- **Broad sweeping conclusions:** You read a couple of articles or talk with only one or two nonprofits working on an issue and then decide you are the expert and make broad sweeping conclusions about what needs to happen.
- **Unreliable:** You are unreliable, are late to meetings, or change meeting times often at the last minute. When you have a meeting you go over time and end up taking the conversation way off course.
- **Cheap:** You nitpick the funding details. For example, you don't support the group to have dinner together or meet up to get to know one another better.
- **You think you are the smartest person in the room:** You start to feel you are keener and more capable than everyone else involved.
- **You want everyone to do what you think is important:** You start to get frustrated that others are not just doing exactly what you deem is most important.



“As a funder, you can only get a clear picture of what’s going on if the nonprofit can tell you when things are not going well”

## ■ Four Tenets to Live By to Burst the Funder Bubble

- **Put yourself in situations where people don’t think of you as a funder.**  
For example, volunteer for an organization and don’t tell people you are also a donor so that you can work with everyone equally.
- **Try hard not to be the main speaker in a room. Listen first.**  
Ask the group what they need first before offering your opinion about what they need.
- **Acknowledge your own imperfections.**  
Constantly be aware of—and voice your own—imperfections. Put yourself in positions where you can make mistakes. Take risks. Don’t just sit back and criticize others’ mistakes.
- **Build trust and hold confidences.**  
A major path to building trust is to hold confidences. As a funder, you can only get a clear picture of what’s going on if the nonprofit leader can tell you when things are not going well (as well as all the good stuff they are doing.) They need to know that when they open up, it will be held closely by you, and *that you will support them in both good and bad times.*

## ■ The Power Imbalance

Do you think to yourself, *I have never done any of these things?*

I assure you, I have seen funders do each one of these nine things, and seen it often! I myself have made these mistakes and am constantly checking myself to see if I am getting in a funder bubble.

As a funder, often you won’t get necessary, constructive, negative *feedback from people because the nonprofits will still want your money.* There is a power imbalance. It is up to you to check yourself at the door and maintain a healthy perspective.



## Homework

1. Out of the **nine signs** that you could be in a funder bubble, which of those nine do you think you may be most susceptible to?

2. What are some ideas you have to live the **four tenets** to try and stay out of the funder bubble?

3. What other creative ideas do you have to try and stay out of the **funder bubble**?

*If you would like my direct feedback, please fill out the online assessment provided in this lesson.*