

## **Just Keep Swimming:**

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**What Finding Nemo and  
Grantwriting Do (or Don't!)  
Have in Common**

March 24, 2023 10:45 – 12:15



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# Proactive Grant Writing:

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DON'T BE LIKE DORY

Why Are We Talking  
About This Topic?

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# **A Tale of Two Nonprofits...**



# The reactive grantwriter...

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Is frantic.

Is burnt-out.

Makes content up at the last minute

Chases funding that's not a good fit.

Overpromises to get the win.

Isolates funders.

Is less successful.





# The proactive grantwriter...

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Has more peace.

Collaborates more.

Provides accurate content.

Calibrates promises.

Holds relationships with funders.

Is more successful.

# Learning Outcomes Today

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Understand the difference between a proactive and reactive grantwriter



Learn strategies to become more proactive within your organization (s)



Feel equipped to take small action-oriented steps forward



# Is Dory proactive or reactive?

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## PROACTIVE

Does not always “just keep swimming;’ pauses to think about strategy.

**YOU**

## REACTIVE

Just keeps swimming in spite of reservations or red flags.



**This is  
applicable  
whether...**

You have 5 or 40  
hours per week to  
spend on  
grantwriting.

You are the only  
person in your  
organization or  
you work with a  
large staff.

You are  
responsible for  
raising \$20K or  
\$2,000,000 per  
year.

# Reactive Traps We All Fall Into



## 1. Chasing money

- Well, I could deliver that service...
- But it is so much money!

## 2. Applying to Bad-Fit-Funders.

- Maybe I'll just submit anyway and see what happens...
- Let's try again even though they declined our last five requests.

## 3. Ignoring Relationships

- I've never heard of, read about, talked to, or researched this funder, but I think I can write this before I close my computer for the day.

## 4. Ignoring Limits

- I can work more hours and make it happen!

## Reactive Trap #1

# Chasing Money.

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“Well, I could deliver that service...”

“But it is so much money!”

# Perspective Check.

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## BRIGHT SHINY OBJECT SYNDROME

- Grants for things you *could* do take energy away from the things you *need* to do.
- These drain your resources.

All that money will **NOT** be helpful to you if:

You don't even get the grant award.

You get it and can't use it.

You get it and it adds a ton of work and new expenses to your plate on projects that aren't a priority.

# Volunteer

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SHARE AN EXAMPLE OF A TIME THAT YOU SAW AN ORGANIZATION PURSUE A GRANT FOR A BRIGHT SHINY OBJECT. HOW DID IT GO? WHY?

# Strategy #1 Know Your Budget

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Know the dollar amount you are trying to raise.



Know what the organization plans to spend that money on (and what is NOT on that list?)



Know the wish list.

# Strategy #1 Know Your Budget

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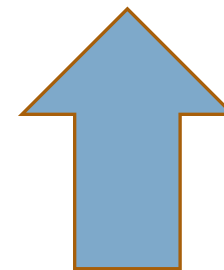
Operating Budget	
\$100,000	
Support adoption of 50 cats and dogs in 2023	
1 staff member Rent & utilities No supply purchases	



# Strategy #1 Know Your Budget

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Operating Budget	Wishlist
\$100,000	\$1,000
Support adoption of 50 cats and dogs in 2023	New feeding bowls and collars to replace aging ones
1 staff member Rent & utilities No supply purchases	Purchase bowls and collars



Consider the  
Opportunity Cost!

# Strategy #2 Make a Proactive Grants Plan

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Make a list of every funder you want to apply to this year.

Add up the total requests.

Make sure you have 3x as much as you are trying to raise.

Operating Budget	Wishlist
\$100,000	\$1,000
Support adoption of 50 cats and dogs in 2023	New feeding bowls and collars to replace aging ones
1 staff member Rent & utilities No supply purchases	Purchase bowls and collars

**\$300K in prospects**

***Another \$15K in prospects***

# Strategy #3 Request funds for things you're already doing.

*What should we request?*





Things you are already doing

Goals at start of year:

- raise \$115K
- serve 50 families

	2020 Budget
<b>Revenue</b>	
Grants	\$45,000
Govt Contracts	\$20,000
Individual Donors	\$15,000
Events	\$30,000
Other	\$5,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$115,000</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Staff	\$65,000
Contractors	\$12,500
Rent and Utilities	\$12,000
Fundraising	\$5,000
Supplies	\$6,000
Technology	\$1,500
Insurance	\$1,500
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$113,500</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>

I often hear:

“Your \$5K gift will help us serve an additional 5 families this year (up from 50 to 55).”

But you could say:

“Your grant will help us raise the \$45K we need this year to reach 50 families.”

- Talk about their gift as part of a bigger whole.
- Don't promise new things just for them.

## Reactive Trap #2

# Applying to Bad-Fit-Funders

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“Maybe I’ll just submit anyway and see what happens...”

“Let’s try again even though they declined our last five requests.”

# Perspective Check.

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- Submitting a failing grant is NOT always better than submitting nothing at all.
- “Well at least I tried” is not a measure of success.
- Repeated applications to a funder who has denied you without a conversation is not helpful.

**Assess Alignment  
Honestly**

# Choice #1

FUNDER	\$\$	PURPOSE	NOTES
Best Starts for Kids	\$250,000 over three years	Program Pilot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Program on your wish list, but not in strategic plan or budget</li><li>- Need to collaborate with staff to write</li></ul>
Medina Foundation	\$15,000	General Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- New funder</li><li>- In contact with program officer who strongly encouraged org to apply</li></ul>



# Choice #2

FUNDER	\$\$	PURPOSE	NOTES
Charlotte Martin Foundation	\$10,000	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- New funder</li><li>- Do not call</li><li>- No opportunity for feedback</li></ul>
Fordham Street Foundation	\$20,000	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Funds WA and NY</li><li>- Denied past two years, but got feedback</li></ul>

# Choice #3

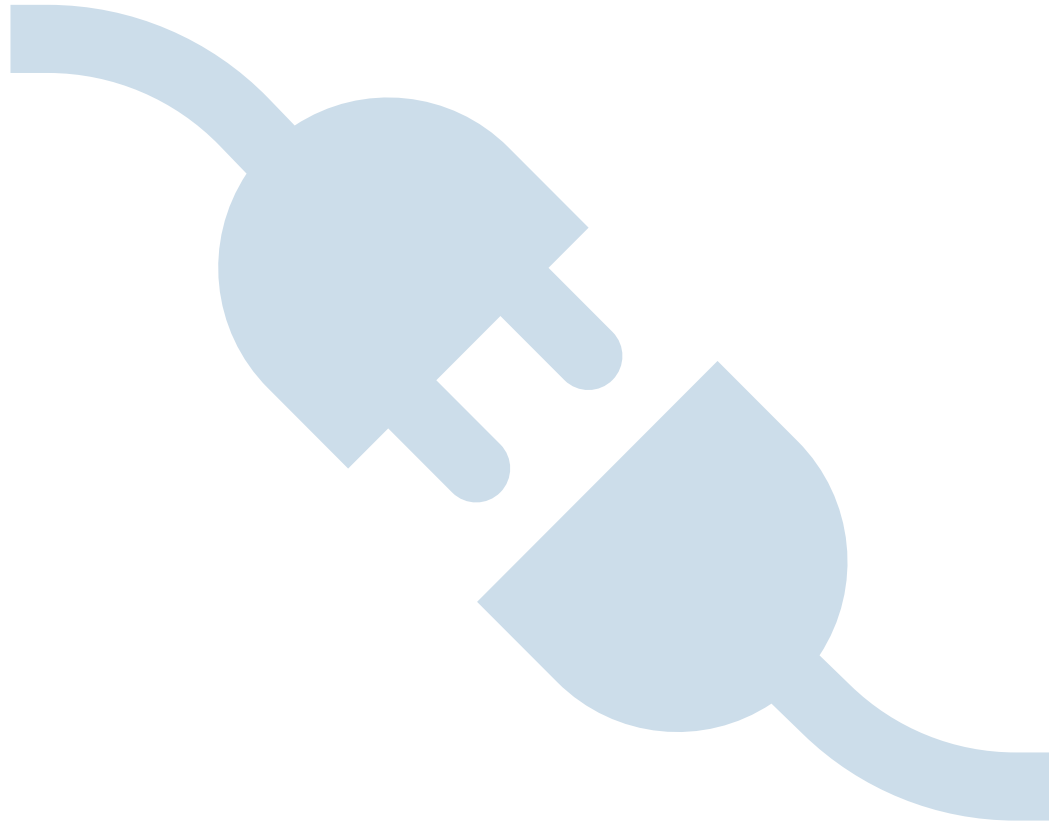
FUNDER	\$\$	PURPOSE	NOTES
Norcliffe Foundation	\$10,000	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Repeat funder</li><li>- Larger pool of money</li><li>- Local to your region</li></ul>
Brand New ABC Foundation	\$75,000	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- New funder</li><li>- Smaller pool of money</li><li>- National</li></ul>

## Reactive Trap #3

# Ignoring Relationships

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“I’ve never heard of, read about, talked to, or researched this funder, but I think I can write this before I close my computer for the day.”



# Symptoms of Disconnection

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- Relationship history with funders is unclear
- Lack of clarity on who owns relationships with funders
- Task list focuses only on solicitations
- Staff relationships are underutilized
- Grants are less successful

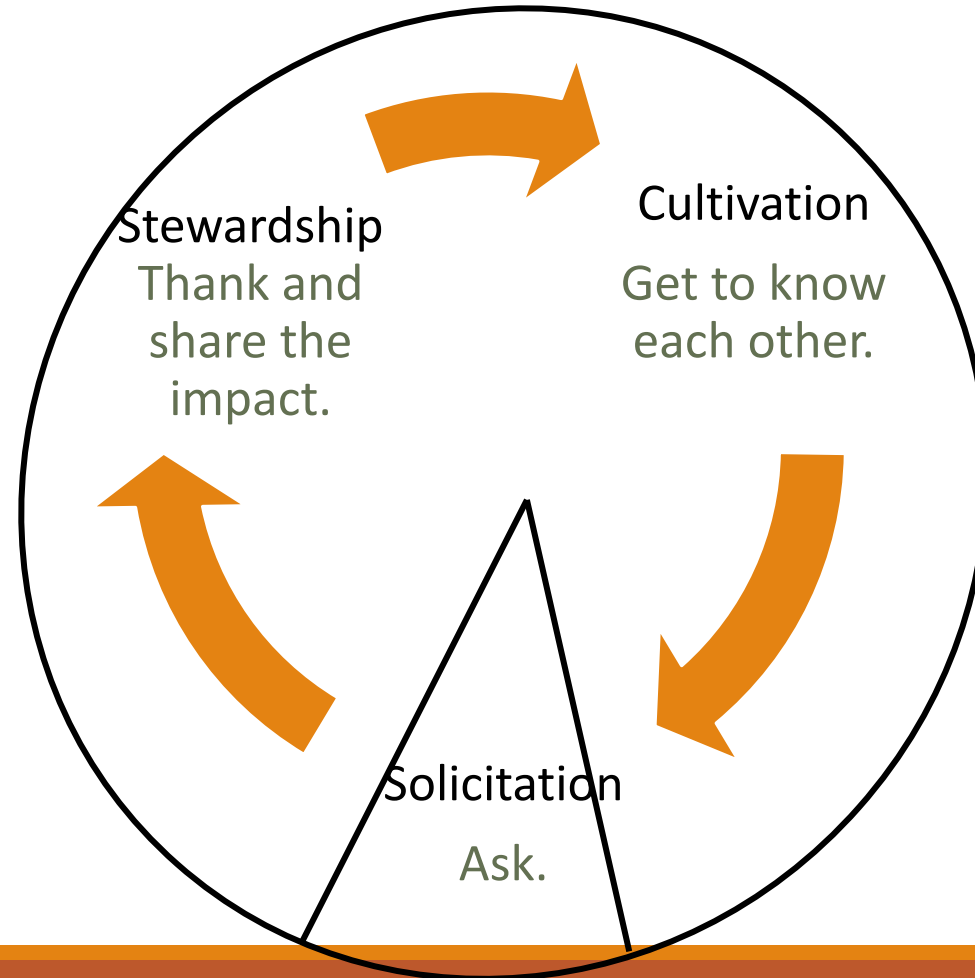
# Perspective Check.

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ALL FUNDRAISING –  
EVEN GRANT WRITING –  
IS ABOUT  
RELATIONSHIPS.

# Strategy #1: Use the Fundraising Cycle

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# With 2-3 others nearby

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DISCUSS: WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO ADOPTING A RELATIONSHIP-BASED APPROACH TO GRANTSEEKING AT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

# Strategy #2: Go back in time.

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- Relationship-based
- Tell a clear story
- Rely on many hands
- Inspire community





## Reactive Trap #4

# Ignoring Limits

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“I’ll just work extra hours and make it happen...”

# Strategies to Make the Shift

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1) VIEW YOUR TIME  
AS FINITE (IT IS!)



2) MEASURE GRANTS  
AGAINST EACH  
OTHER, NOT AGAINST  
NOTHING.



3) MEASURE SUCCESS  
NOT VOLUME.

# 1) View Your Time As Finite

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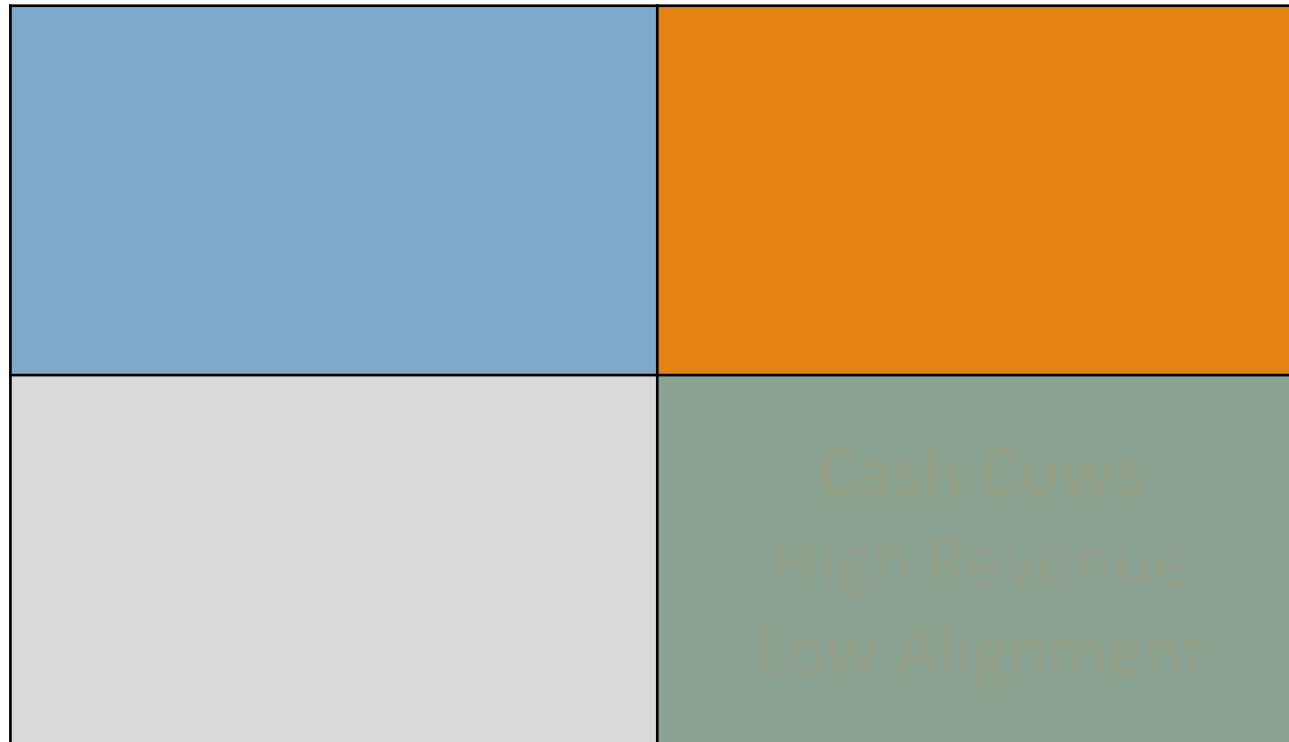
*You get to decide what you can and cannot accomplish in a day, week, month, or year.*

Setting boundaries...

- Prevents burnout
- Sets a good example
- Forces you to prioritize
- Leads to higher success rates.

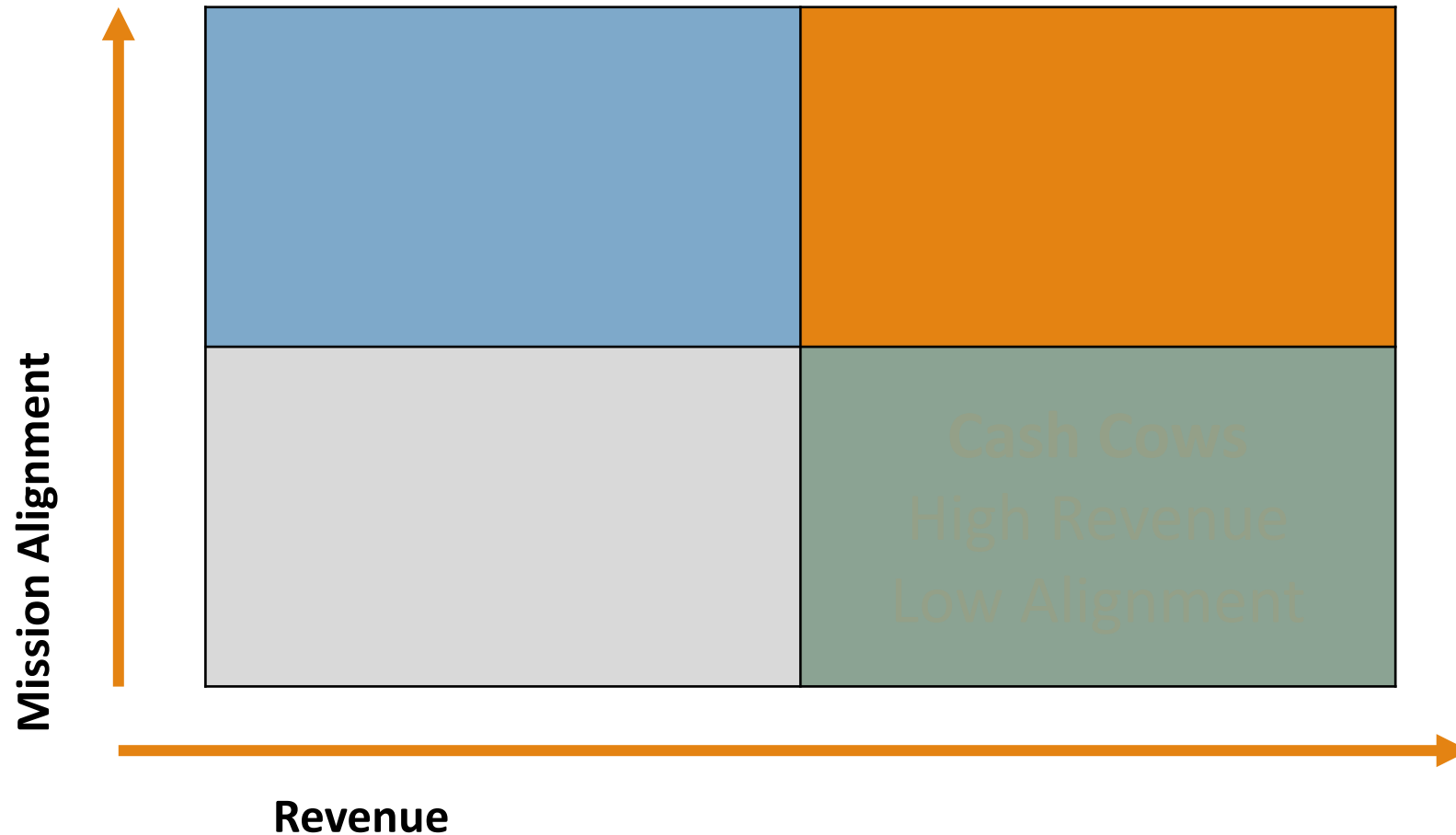
## 2) Measure Grants Against Each Other

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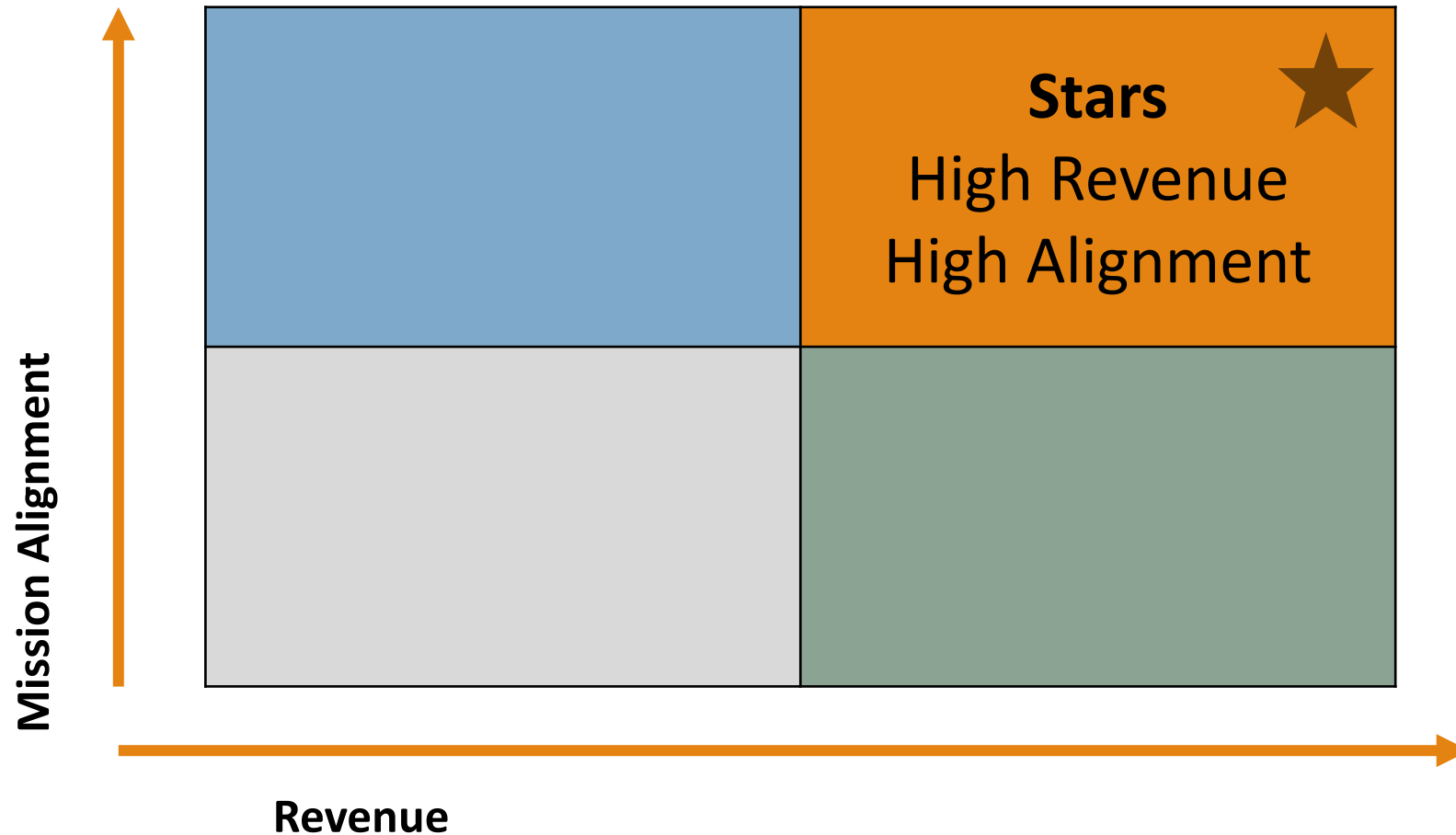
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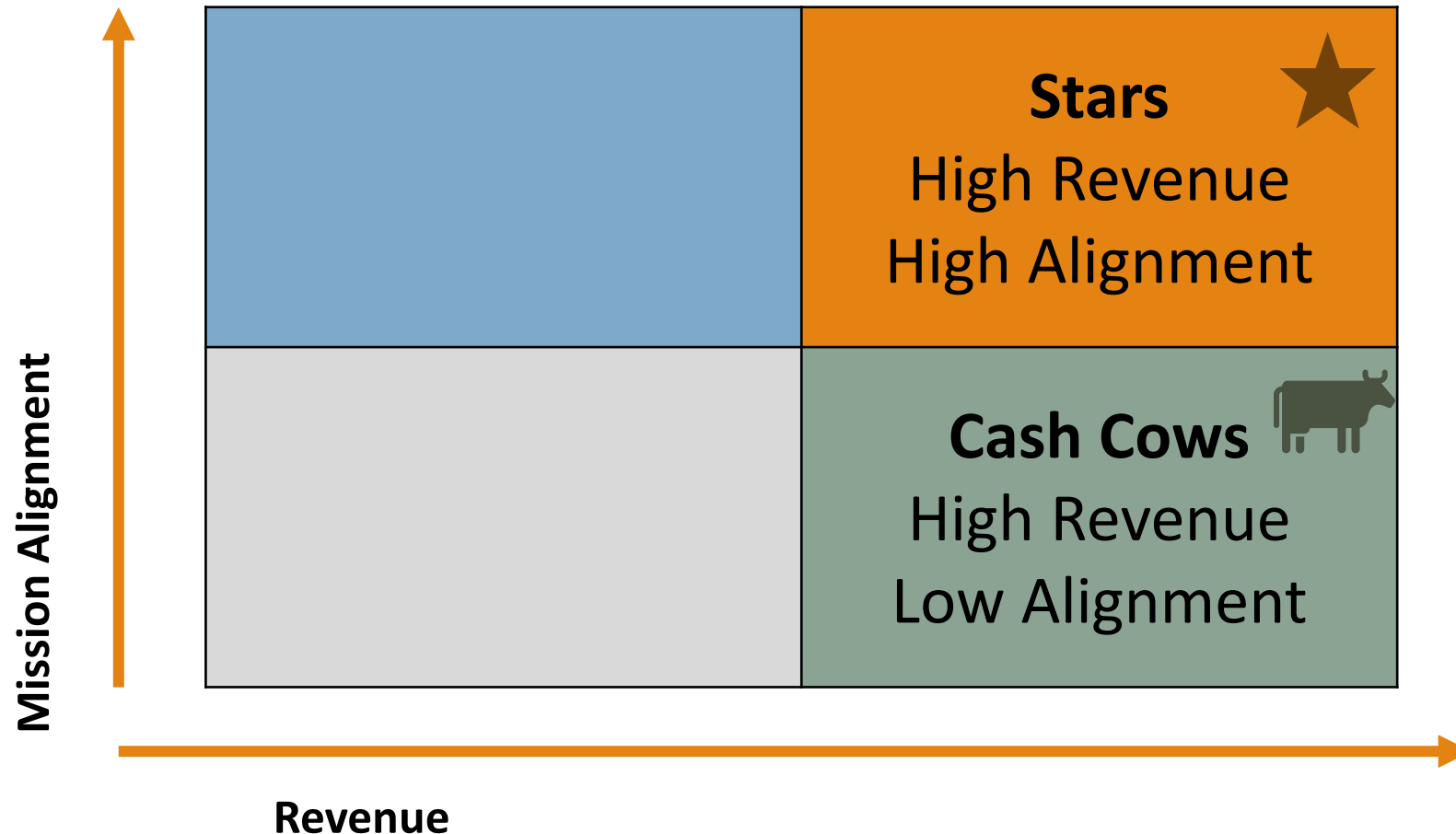
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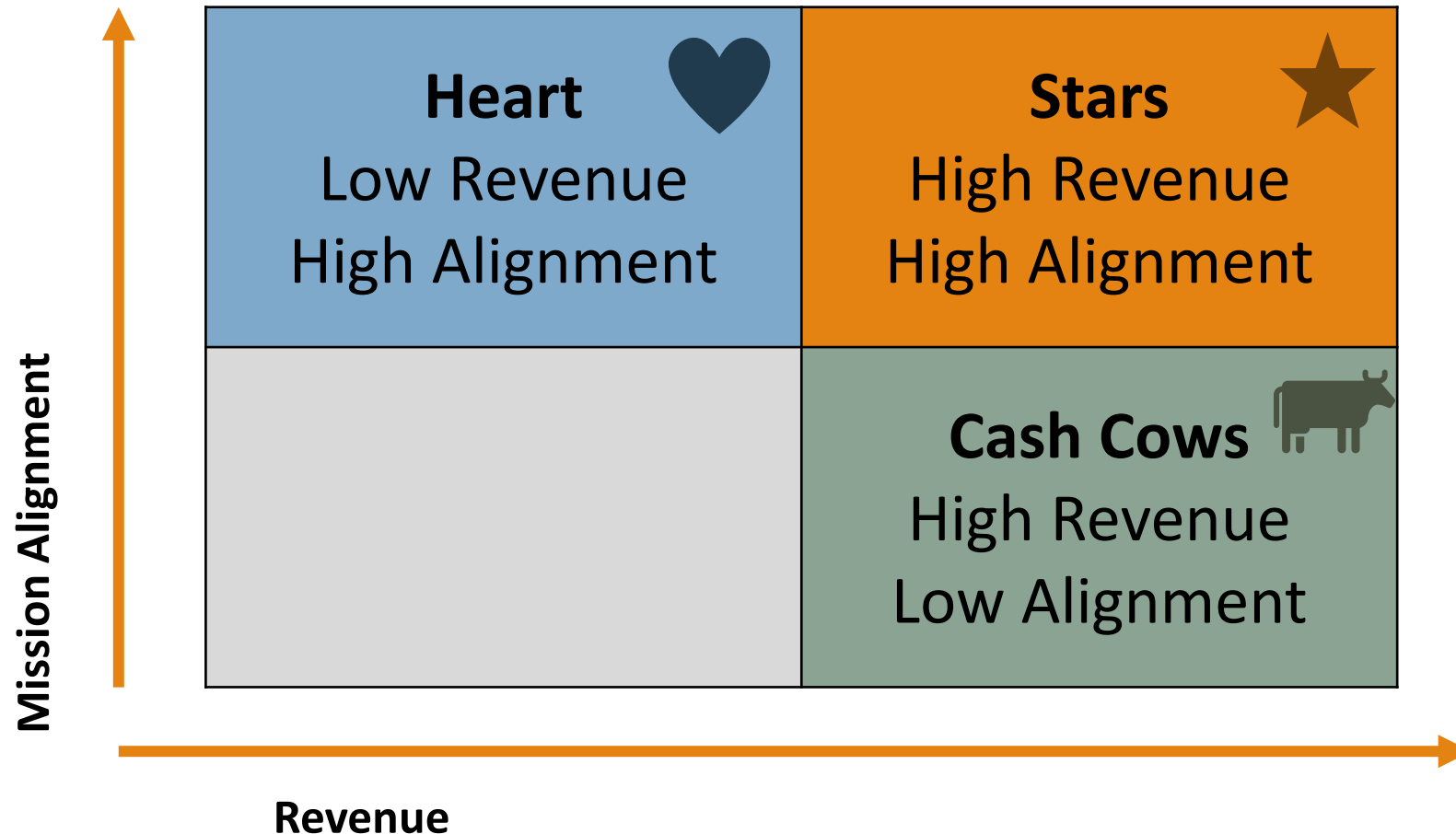
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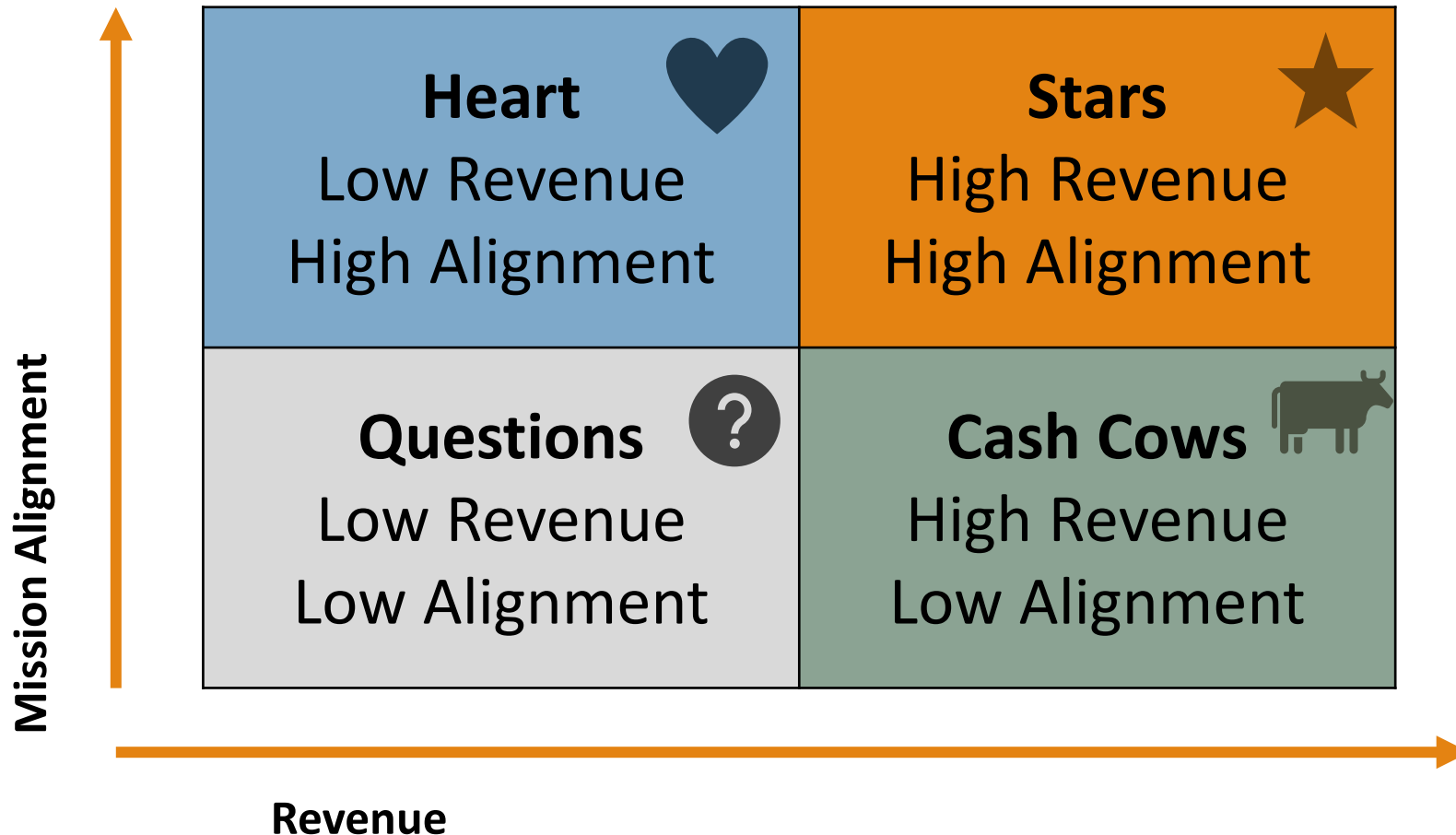
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## 2) Measure Grants Against Each Other

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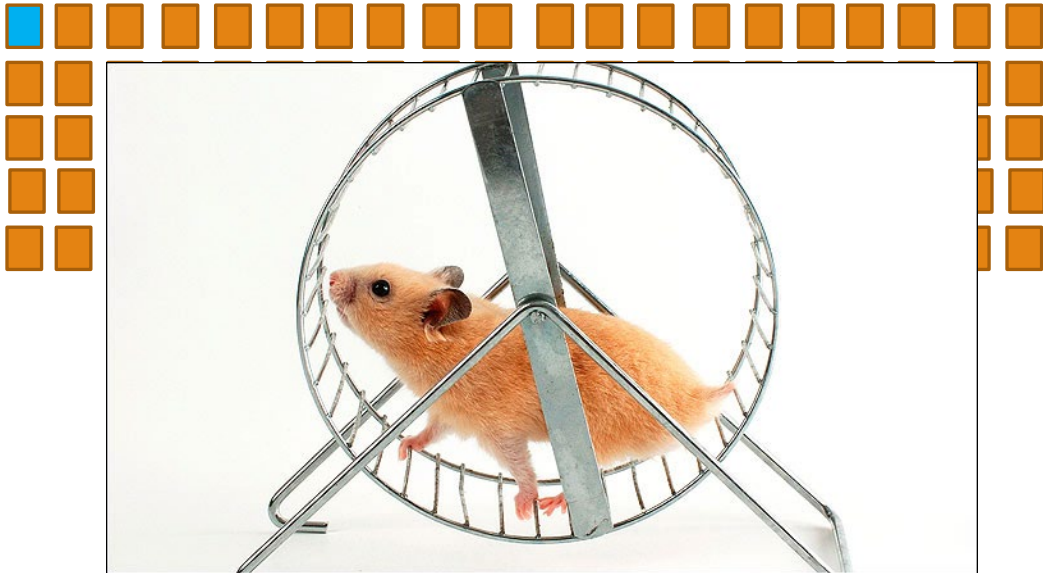


# 3) Measure Success, Not Volume

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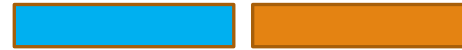
IS IT BETTER TO.....

- Spend 100 hours, submitting 100 grants, and only get 1.



OR TO...

- Spend 10 hours submitting 2 grants and only get 1?



*“Work smarter, not harder”*

### 3) Measure Success, Not Volume

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- ~~# proposals submitted~~
- Success rate (%)
- Progress to target (%)
- Funder retention rate (%)
- Lapsed funders re-engaged (#)

# What are some steps you can take to be more proactive this year?

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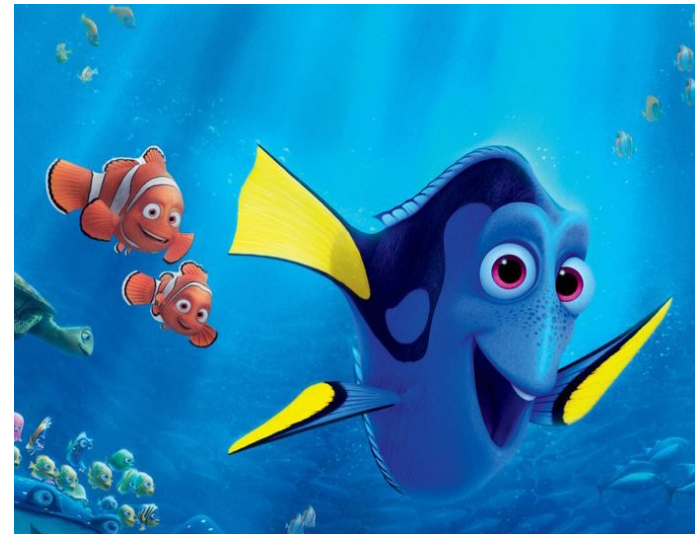
## PROACTIVE

Does not always “just keep swimming.”

**YOU**

## REACTIVE

Just keeps swimming in spite of reservations or red flags.



# RECAP

*Reactive*

Traps &

Proactive

Strategies

## 1. Chasing money

- Know Your Budget
- Make a Proactive Grants Plan
- Request Funds for Things You're Already Doing

## 2. Applying to Bad-Fit-Funders.

- Assess Alignment Honestly

## 3. Ignoring Relationships

- Use the Fundraising Cycle
- Go Back in Time

## 4. Ignoring Limits

- View Your Time as Finite (it is!)
- Measure Grants Against Each Other, not Nothing
- Measure Success, Not Volume

*When SHOULD  
we “Just Keep  
Swimming?”*

Just Keep	Being resilient.
Just Keep	Bouncing back from denials.
Just Keep	Persistently building relationships.
Just Keep	Being creative about how you can meet your goals.

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# Questions?

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