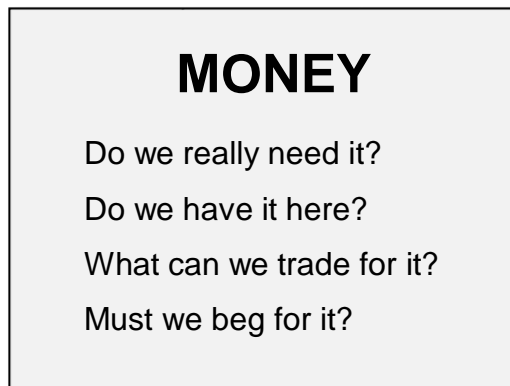


Money and the Civic Impulse

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When you enter the storefront office of a neighborhood organization in Montreal, the first thing you see is a large sign:



The Chairperson of this neighborhood organization explained that the sign is an attempt to remedy their “grant dependency.” This dependency had once led the group to believe that if they wanted to get anything done, they first needed a grant. The hidden assumption became that without outside money, their citizens organization was impotent.

As a result of this dependency, the leadership developed the four criteria on the sign. It became the group’s guide to a new understanding of the resources necessary to get things done.

The first question asks whether the group’s goal could be achieved without money. Is there a combination of local civic resources that, if connected and mobilized, could achieve the goal?

The second question asks whether the residents and local merchants might have the money that is needed? One measure of the authenticity of a local neighborhood organization is whether local citizens and their enterprises will financially support the neighborhood group’s activities.

The third question asks whether there is something the neighborhood could create or produce that would be valued enough that outside money might invest in it. It recognizes that when the neighborhood people are “first investors,” the outside money is secondary while the second investor/funder has increased security that their money will be productive.

The fourth question is intentionally stark: Must we be a beggar? The blunt phraseology is designed to push back against a “grants mentality.” It makes clear that the last resort of a group of citizens is to act like a client. The word client comes from the Latin *cliens*, a person who is a follower, a retainer or dependent.

The Montreal group recognizes that there can be many ways to immobilize citizen engagement and one of the most powerful can be outside money, even that purported to be available for citizen engagement.