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The Attractiveness of Dessert

It is well known that affluent uncles dote on buying candy and ice cream for their little nephews and nieces. Much less often, however, are these same kindly relatives concerned about paying the grocery bills. And they often lose all interest when the charming little children start to grow up.

The sources which support science—private foundations, federal agencies, and individuals—have a tendency to behave a little like rich uncles. They rather like to give funds for showy pieces of apparatus. They prefer to support the early, pioneering, “demonstrative” stages of a scientific development; following which “someone else” is supposed to take over the less glamorous task of providing support through the pimply stages of adolescence, to say nothing of the dull stages of maturity. Concerning “overhead” the supporters tend to be embarrassed, or bored, or totally uninterested. Equipment and consumable research supplies command high respect. Research assistants, or even research assistance, is fun and fine. Travel and publication costs are often treated as rather questionable items. Heat, light, janitor service, secretarial service, etc.—these after all should be provided by “the institution itself” out of its “own funds,” as though colleges and universities kept printing presses in the basement.

When a university genuinely wants to undertake some activity, it impressively confirms their desire if they *do* themselves contribute. And private foundations have, in my judgment, a right to choose projects in which they are partners in support, rather than full supporters.

But an agency, private or governmental, that wishes to aid the support in any field should do so by removing, or at least helping to remove, the *limitations that hamper progress*. If this requires equipment or research manpower or relief from other duties—fine. If it requires a secretary, or travel, or books—fine again. If the institutions in question cannot reasonably meet the increased basic costs of housekeeping, then these should be paid. If remodeled rooms, or a new wing, or a new building is essential, then these often despised “bricks and mortar” necessities are just as sensible and worthy as is any other part of the whole project.

If everybody says that certain costs must be met by somebody else, then who is left over to be that somebody else? And if a pump is worth priming, isn't it pretty sensible to pay the person who goes on pumping?—WARREN WEAVER, *Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, New York*