

What's So Special About the Special Projects Committee?

By Douglas Franks

Chair, SFAGO Special Projects Committee

In case SFAGO's Special Projects Committee (SPC) is a bit of a mystery to you, I'd like to take this opportunity to shed some light on what it is and what it does. As current chair of the SPC, I've gotten a firsthand look at how its valuable work on behalf of the chapter benefits our profession.

Founded in 1988 and operating under a formal charter, the Special Projects Fund resulted from the financial success of the 1984 National AGO Convention in San Francisco. The interest income generated from this investment fund is awarded in the form of grants to applicants from across the country whose proposals are evaluated and approved by the Special Projects Committee. Well over \$50,000 [\$70,000 by 2014] in grants have been paid out since the fund's inception. With pride we can claim that our chapter has had a positive impact on organizations—AGO included—and individuals who have sought to further the interests of our profession by way of the "special" projects they initiate. They've achieved their goals thanks in part to financial assistance from our chapter.

The SPC has fielded scores of grant proposals over the past 24 years, the amounts requested ranging from \$500 to \$3000. The committee meets three times a year to evaluate proposals submitted during one of three funding cycles each calendar year—and to take care of other committee business as well. Some proposals we approve, if they meet SPC guidelines and strike committee members as a project that would likely benefit or appeal to an appreciable margin of people. Other proposals we have to turn down. Because funds available for cash grants are limited and becoming more so as the economy continues to sag, we must be extremely selective and increasingly restrained in size of outlay. It is never easy to say no when someone passionately engaged in an organ-related project turns to us for a slice of their funding but is a necessary part of our work.

Many imaginative and innovative wheels are turning in our profession. Without fanfare, organ scholars and artists all across the nation are busy researching, publishing, translating, interviewing, performing premieres, recording historic instruments, convening workshops or other relevant gatherings, training young organists, composing new repertoire—the list goes on. The fire of creativity and academic inquiry is burning brightly. Oftentimes that fire requires only the fuel of monetary support to stay stoked.

SFAGO's good financial fortune, coupled with its long tradition of wide-ranging artistic vision, carries a special responsibility: To keep those fires going. What a heady privilege it is to serve on the SPC and carry out that mission as so many dedicated chapter members have done in years past. And how rewarding and fascinating it is to see what some of the projects are that we have helped fund. In next month's newsletter, we'll crack open the Special Projects Committee archives and take a peek.

(April 2012 SFAGO Newsletter)