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Ask & Receive

Raising Funds and Friends for Campus Ministry

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May, 2011

WHEN IS IT FEASIBLE TO ASK?

Have you ever embarked on a major trip and wondered if you're going to make it? Do you have the passports? Do you have the maps and the suitcases? Do you have the kids? Yipes! Not knowing if you have the possibility of reaching your goal intact can be nerve-wracking and of paramount importance. You just have to be prepared for every contingency and challenge. Why would you not want to plan and be prepared?

Similarly, if you are planning for a major fundraising campaign, there is a lot on the line that you need to consider. Is the goal realistic? Are there enough potential donors? Does the vision fit the ministry? Will people give? How many gifts at what amount will be needed? All of these questions, and more, can and will be addressed if a solid feasibility study is done.

While the leadership may be more than ready to move ahead, the feasibility study measures "external readiness." It lets you know what other community leaders think of your campaign proposal and the level of potential success is has. It makes available a large range of information, including:

- ◆ the way people know and value your ministry
- ◆ the level of confidence people have in your organization
- ◆ the concerns or questions people have about your programs
- ◆ the viability of the design of your campaign
- ◆ the likelihood that your constituency will financially support it
- ◆ the size of potential gifts from key prospects

- ◆ any recommendations to improve the campaign.

In preparation for a feasibility study, persons to be interviewed are identified and sent information in advance about the ministry and its campaign goals. Typically, a consultant is hired to conduct the interviews and provide a detailed summary at the end. These interviewees may include long time friends and supporters of the ministry, community leaders, established high-level donors, experienced campaign workers, church representatives, and modest donors who have "reach" potential.

The feasibility study may take 3-4 months to complete and may cost several thousand dollars, depending on the scope of the study and the size of the campaign. Since the consultant is the first ambassador of your campaign to the general public, you will want to be sure that you find someone who is competent, trustworthy and sensible. Get references. Write a contract. The consultant helps to prepare the board and leadership for the ultimate "Go/No-Go" decision. Be ready for some surprises, however.

Based on the results of the study, your leadership may have to adjust the campaign goal up or down, repair any image problems, add more staff or leadership, or slow down the process. Above all, LISTEN to the wisdom of the feasibility study. It will potentially save you headaches and embarrassment later. At best, you will be given the green light and success will be more assured because you took the time upfront to do your essential research. More people now know your case and will stand ready to make contributions.

STATISTICS OR STORIES



“If you truly want to persuade people, tell them a story. On this point the data is clear.” Andy Goodman

Place yourself in front of an audience where your presentation will be heard with open regard, but also with guarded response. Your purpose is to inform them about all of the wonderful things happening at your campus ministry. You want them to know more about your vision, but you also want them to support it with generous gifts.

The quandary: do you use your precious time to dazzle them with data (because attendance is better now than ever before) or do you sway them with stories about how students grow in faith and learn to serve the world?

A recent study¹ conducted at Carnegie Mellon University by Save the Children reported that the response to an appeal based on a text story was twice as effective as an appeal based on facts. Paul Slovic, one of the researchers, said, “When it comes to eliciting compassion, the identified individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer.” The study points out that people connect more to personal stories, because numbers are not relational and we tend to look away, especially if they are overwhelming.

The research went on to study the effect of combining story with statistics. There, it was reported, data helped to support the story, unless the data was overwhelmingly negative. People’s hearts were touched by the stories of children whose lives were touched by Save the Children, but were put off by the huge number of children yet unfed. They were still inclined to donate, but gave less. “The data sends a bad feeling that counteracts the warm glow from helping,” the study states.

Most of the newsletters I read from campus ministries these days opt for stories, complete with pictures and first person narratives by students involved in the program. Seldom are statistics

quoted or attendance figures given, unless a goal was set and it was over-achieved. People are drawn to stories and donors (who are people) are likely to respond more generously to an appeal portrayed through stories. It seems to me that we are clear on this approach.

However, I’m not sure that we’re clear that stories can’t carry everything. If I read a newsletter with four poignant stories, three of them written by student “staff,” I wonder about the silent voices. Were there no others? How many actually did participate in this lively Bible study or go on this dynamic spring break trip?

As a self-interested reader (and aren’t we all) I am looking for something that will motivate me to care deeper and think broader than I already do. I want engagement. I want challenge. I want to be hopeful. And, perhaps most important, I want to know that if/when I make a gift, it will help to meet human needs. Data may help me understand that. While I’m not sitting there with a sharp pencil, calculating if programs with minimal attendance may cost maximal dollars, I do want some sense that my meager donation, coupled with those of others, will move the vision forward and help the ministry to accomplish its carefully planned goals.

In the end, I’m looking for good, genuine, solid stories that are supported by accountability. I think that this is what churches and denominational leadership want as well. They desire to know that their allocations are making a difference and they want to be informed by both accountable data and credible stories, presented in as personal a way as possible.

Before you edit your next newsletter or write your next appeal letter, think about how you prefer to receive information and how you like to be challenged and engaged. Test out your approach with friends and supporters to see what they think. Don’t miss the chance to share great stories, but don’t neglect solid, supporting statistics either.

¹Reported in Contributions Magazine, January 2010, by Andy Goodman

ENDOWMENT OR ANNUAL FUND

An old friend and colleague contacted me the other day with a conundrum. He wanted to know about the wisdom of working on a significant expansion of the ministry's endowment at a time when they need every dollar they can raise from their annual/sustaining appeal. It's a good question and it comes at a time when most campus ministries are hard-put to keep up with budget shortfalls. They do not have the infrastructure or leadership to address the increasing day-to-day expenses, let alone have the energy and foresight to take on an endowment campaign.

At first blush, there is an inherent rub between the annual fund and the endowment. The former is focused on the short-term, making dollars stretch, paying staff, keeping the building intact, etc. It is labor intensive, requiring several mailings (note, not just "annual"), lots of personal contacts to invite and thank for gifts, and keep accurate records. These are smaller gifts that demand lots of attention. Endowments, on the other hand, are future-oriented. They are not just "rainy day" or "holding" funds that may be tapped at any critical moment, endowments are serious commitments to provide a future for the ministry. While the interest income may be used for specified purposes (although this inhibits the growth of the fund), the corpus of an endowment can never be touched, except by complicit agreement of all those who contributed to the endowment, and even then there may be ethical and legal issues to pursue.

Ministry leadership, typically, are more focused on immediate needs and solutions. They have goals that their constituency expects them to pursue. They may be impatient with long-term answers to short-term problems. They want to see results-NOW! Putting their shoulders to the wheel of the annual/sustaining fund seems more prudent. After all, they may be able to raise more through one appeal than the interest from an endowment will provide.

Creating a significant endowment of perhaps \$1 million takes time, energy, and a focus very different from that of the annual/sustaining fund. In many ways it is like a capital campaign. It has a high goal. It looks to high level gifts to make it successful. It is built on the foundation of generous, consistent donors. It has a timeline and specifically recruited leadership. Here is James List's list of guidelines¹:

1. Set endowment goals, with particular attention to the needed amount of the principal, investment policy, protection from ordinary budget demands, and safeguards of the donor's intent.
2. Separate the endowment campaign from other annual or capital campaigns. This will ensure that gifts from the same donors are not comingled or compromised and goals are not confused.
3. Be prepared to discuss estate planning or provide professional counsel who will work with donors around issues of tax, finances, and legalities.
4. Become acquainted with key donors, those who give to your ministry generously and often. Know what motivates them. Be prepared for several conversations, much of it focusing on the donor's interests and values. They will want to know how an endowment gift will continue the ministry; your job is to genuinely assure them that this will be the case.

Donors give for many different reasons, but an endowment donor is unique. They may want to give back, provide a family legacy, or support the worth of your cause. In any event, they want to guarantee the future.

¹James A. List, Esq., Contributions Magazine, May 27, 2011

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

Ask & Receive is a newsletter designed to supplement the Fund Raising Initiative of the Ecumenical Campus Ministries Team. It presents a series of ideas and resources on a monthly basis to address the challenges of fund raising and board development, focused on the particular context of campus ministry. Each issue deals with an aspect of fund raising, such as the annual appeal, visiting donors, trends, or tuning up the board.

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“The seriousness with which a board member is recruited and selected is directly proportional to the seriousness with which a board member fulfills his or her role.”

Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom, *The Nonprofit Board Answer Book*

RECRUITING GOOD BOARD MEMBERS

Where do they come from, these highly motivated, tireless, selfless, generous, insightful, committed board and committee members? While they may be gifts to the ministry, they seldom drop from the sky or appear at the door fully trained in every nuance of your organization. Good board members must be invited to serve, mentored, evaluated, and appreciated. It begins with recruitment.

The first step is to develop a realistic job description for board/committee members. Serious potential members will want to know what they are committing to, how much time it will take, and if all other members are equally committed. The job description can be used in conversation while the person considers. There may be generic roles and tasks, but there may also be specifics related to the current context of the ministry. It may also stipulate meeting times and dates. If you were a matchmaker, how would the skills and experiences of the potential member fit with the needs of the ministry. Recruitment tests this fit, for both the organization and the future leader.

A second part of the early conversation should be about the core values and vision of the organization. This is another point at which a match needs to be made. Persons will not serve well on a board that holds views and develops programs that run crossways with their own value systems. They may warm a chair, but they won't light up the room with ideas or support. Ask candid questions and allow for the same. It's kind of like a dating relationship—get to know each other prior to signing the agreement. It may be good practice to invite potential members to attend a meeting before to making a commitment.

Once the new member agrees to serve, there needs to be a provision for them to learn their responsibilities so that they can serve effectively and with a sense of fulfillment. Mentoring helps by pairing up new members with experienced members for a time. That way there will be at least one

friendly, familiar face at the next meeting to share comments and “dumb questions” with.

A board book places essential information into the hands of all members, creating an equitable base of resources and understanding. A good board book will contain articles and by-laws, policies, the mission statement and strategic plan, budget reports, minutes, personnel documents and reports, calendar of events, recent newsletters, and relevant historical items. It serves as an orientation handbook and becomes a toolbox for working board members.

One of the “rights” of board members noted in an earlier article (“Ask & Receive” 9/2010) is the right to participate in an evaluation of the work of the board with other members and, if necessary, to know when a person's service is not satisfactory so that they can correct it or cease to serve. Obviously such evaluation is done to learn and make changes together and not for punitive purposes. However, good potential members will often ask about the board evaluation process in advance and will expect to participate in it as an eventual member.

All potential board members need to know up front that they will be expected to willingly contribute to the organization they serve. There should be no surprises here and they may ask how the current board is supporting the ministry. Also, if they will be expected to visit prospective donors, they need to be assured that there will be training and guidance if this is new territory for them.

Finally, all board members, both seasoned veterans and new recruits, have the “right” to hear appreciation and have their service and valued from time to time. Words of affirmation from board leadership, staff, or those related to the ministry will go a long way to encouraging them and motivating them in the future. The annual meeting is a good time for recognition. Turn the tables and let students plan an appreciation event for board members for a change.

Trained, involved, informed, dedicated board members are truly blessings to be carefully sought, encouraged and valued. Recruit some for your ministry today!