

Fundraising Principles for Small Congregations

Peggy Powell Dean, a professional fundraiser for 25 years, pioneered the concept of community campaigns for religious institutions. Common Bond's consulting editor, Kim Lovejoy, asked Ms. Dean for tips on fundraising by small congregations of 20 to 100 people for repair and restoration projects of about \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year a common situation among grant applicants to the Sacred Sites Program.

The following principles, dubbed "Dean's 15," apply to these small campaigns as well as to large campaigns.

1. Set the capital campaign goal after you know the full scope of work to be done even if you cannot address it all now. A church in North Carolina met its campaign goal but ended up deeply in debt because the work that needed to be done exceeded the goal. If the original goal had taken the full scope of work into account, the church most likely could have met the higher goal and maintained its credibility.
2. Contact the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Partners for Sacred Places, and your denominational office for help in finding reputable architects, conservators, contractors, and fundraising consultants. Use available resources, such as *The Complete Guide to Capital Campaigns for Historic Churches and Synagogues*. The new, revised edition has much more guidance for small congregations (see Resources).
3. Have plans for both building repairs and fundraising. (See the related article on conditions surveys starting on page 13 in this issue.) Among the elements of a fundraising plan are a case for support; an analysis of all markets you hope to approach; an organizational chart; job descriptions for volunteers; a timetable; and a campaign budget.
4. Get at least three estimates for every job. This applies to everything from architectural services to building repairs to fundraising. You will learn more about possible approaches to the job and find the best person for your needs.
5. Build consensus. Hard-hat tours for the congregation, friends, and neighbors at the beginning are a good way to show building conditions and gain support for the work that needs to be done.
6. Use a "Pyramid of Gifts." Construct a chart indicating the number of gifts of each size needed to meet the goal, as explained in *The Complete Guide to Capital Campaigns*. If you are not sure how to identify potential top givers, a fundraising consultant can help.
7. Focus on Pacesetting and Leadership Gifts. You must have high-level gifts at the beginning to succeed. Even in a poor congregation, there are individuals of relative wealth.
8. Use Challenges. For example, to stimulate Pacesetter, Leadership, and Major Gifts, get a lead giver in each category to match all or some gifts (one-to-one or \$1 for every \$2) to spur people to stretch in deciding upon the size of their pledges.
9. Look at former members, descendants of founding families, neighbors, and employers. Give each person a reason for giving, such as a historical connection, or a relationship with the person who is asking for a gift.
10. Once the campaign is well underway, with a plan and leadership gifts, go public with signs, banners, and publicity. Don't hide your candle under a bush. Here's an appealing example: A church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina hung a banner "An Education Building for Our Children A Garden for Everyone" on scaffolding to spur gifts for construction and landscaping.
11. Don't be afraid to return to donors who supported the campaign early on. Never say "we'll never ask again." If the campaign hits a plateau, seek challenge gifts from early donors who have paid off their pledges.
12. Be disciplined about pledge collection. A New York church issued boxes containing one color-coded envelope per month for the capital campaign intermingled with regular stewardship envelopes. This created a habit of monthly giving, which many parishioners continued after the campaign concluded, creating a steady stream of income for maintenance and repairs.
13. Incorporate planned giving into the campaign. Train volunteers to talk with donors about (a) maintaining a regular annual stewardship pledge; (b) making a capital gift for work to be done now; and
(c) making a planned gift for the future. Popular forms of planned gifts include a bequest in a will; designating a church as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy, if the donor's children are grown and self-sufficient; or designating a church as the beneficiary of an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) a good option for young single people.
14. Have a donor recognition program. Recognize donors on plaques. Periodically publish names as an incentive to others. Publicize memorial gifts to encourage others to make them.
15. Pray for the success of your campaign. Help can come from surprising places.

Q and A with Peggy Powell Dean

Common Bond: What are the priorities if only one or two people in the congregation are doing the fundraising?

Dean: Expand involvement by asking others to take on responsibilities for a small piece of the campaign, such as research, materials, a cultivation event, hosting a training session, or participating in a solicitation. Financial support follows involvement. If only two people are working on the campaign, only two people will have an incentive to dig deeply into their pockets.

Common Bond: Let's say a congregation had a capital campaign for roof replacement two years ago, and now \$30,000 is needed for restoration of a stained glass window. Does every fundraising effort need to follow these principles to succeed, or are there shortcuts?

Dean: Sometimes it is possible to turn to one person or a small group of "leaders" to quietly fund a special item. A leadership dinner is one way to discuss the need and determine whether it can be met within the group. Invited participants must be chosen wisely sometimes people wonder why they weren't included and get miffed. Furthermore, in New York there are many foundations that should be considered, although most will ask what the congregation is doing and what other sources will be approached.

Peggy Powell Dean & Company is a full-service financial and organizational development firm established in New York in 1979. Clients have included a broad spectrum of arts, education, social service, policy, and religious institutions. The firm, now in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, takes on a limited number of new projects each year on a selected basis.