

Q & A with Joan Flanagan



Common Bond caught up with Joan Flanagan following the workshop and asked her to reiterate the fundamentals of successful fundraising.

What are the advantages and challenges to raising money for religious congregations?

First, I think it is most important to remember our advantages outweigh our disadvantages. Second, it is time to name, discuss, and overcome the challenges of our congregations and denominations so we can use our many gifts more effectively to help our neighbors.

The advantages of raising money for religious congregations:

1. **Spiritual solidarity:** The power of spiritual commitment enables us to achieve goals we could never reach alone. The bomb that destroyed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City also did very serious damage to St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral. The congregation received an outpouring of love, prayers, workers, and contributions from around the world. As one donor wrote, "We must rebuild the Cathedral as a sign to the world that evil will not have the last word."
2. **Human resources:** Religious institutions have very deep and broad networks. They have been the cradles of leadership for positive social change from Harriet Tubman to Lech Walesa.
3. **Tangible assets:** Congregations are often the oldest, strongest institutions with the most net worth, especially in low-income communities
4. **Emotional strength:** Faith-based institutions teach us to pray for both the grace to set high goals to help our neighbors and the courage to achieve them. Then they hold us accountable to do the work.
5. **Political power:** Congregations represent voters with values
6. **Resourcefulness:** Religious institutions have a very well-deserved reputation for doing a lot with a little. They run great programs with very low overheads.
7. **Media visibility:** The time is right. The opinion makers from the White House to the Mayor's office have recognized that faith-based institutions get more results, especially in low-income communities, than any other form of organizing, advocacy, or social service agency.

Special fundraising challenges for religious congregations:

1. There are many other demands on the time, money, and energy of our leaders and volunteers.
2. Public policies at the local, state, and national level are increasingly hostile to poor people. This produces a growing demand for religious congregations to be doing the work that our governments should be doing.
3. Systemic racism in the major denominations at every level makes it more difficult to develop the kind of diverse leadership that will be able to raise large amounts of money.
4. There are no fights like religious property fights. When we disagree, we waste our energy and drive away good people with a ferocity unparalleled in other kinds of nonprofits.

What are key fundraising do's?

1. Give your own gift first.

2. Ask for money.
3. Send prompt and personal thank you notes.
4. Ask other people to ask for money.
5. Stay focused on your mission and faithful to your values.
6. Have fun.

What are key fundraising don't's?

1. Don't sell yourself short. Believe in the value of your organization and project.
2. Don't trivialize fundraising. Put it first on the agenda of your leaders and first on the workplan of your staff.
3. Never work alone. Get a mentor in your own denomination, join the National Society of Fundraising Professionals (www.nsfre.org), and ask for advice from the experts at the Sacred Sites program.

Is there a best time of year to conduct a campaign?

There is no bad time to ask for money. The best time is when your leaders are enthusiastic. The best time for mail is November-December. The best time for parties is spring and fall. The best time for person to person requests is when the donor wants to talk.

Should there be a time limit on the campaign?

The best campaign has a beginning, a middle, and most importantly, an end. Your pre-planning may take six to twelve months to run a one to two month annual campaign. Kick off with a flourish, then have frequent, fun, short meetings to turn in money, give praise, and strategize on tough problems. End on time, have a celebration, and announce the co-chairs for next year's campaign.

Any final words of insight?

Give a gift yourself. Ask for money. Send thank you notes.