

THE FIRST MONDAY REPORT

Thoughts on Fund Raising for Campus Ministry

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THE ANNUAL OR SUSTAINING FUND

The annual fund is the cornerstone of all the fund raising efforts of your campus ministry. Sometimes it is referred to as the “**sustaining**” fund, because it literally sustains your budget from one year to the next. It is through this regular, ongoing appeal (more than once a year) that your “universe of donors” gets to know your mission and begins to feel connected to it. Sustaining fund appeals keep the doors open and the welcome mat out. Fund raising is not about money; it’s about relationships. And it’s through the annual/sustaining fund that vitally important relationships are established, nurtured, and sustained. Like regular correspondence with family and friends, the sustaining fund seeks to maintain close contact with your most faithful donors and invite them to continue to support your ministry.

In campus ministry the sustaining fund mailing list typically consists of a wide range of names and addresses, probably collected over many years of contact with a large variety of people. On a typical sustaining fund mailing list will be:

- ▶ Alums who were former students active in the ministry
- ▶ Faculty and staff, both current and former
- ▶ Parents of students, both current and former
- ▶ Members of local congregations who have expressed interest
- ▶ Board members, both current and former
- ▶ Former staff members
- ▶ Synodical leadership, including area pastors and AIMs
- ▶ Other Afriends@ who have supported your ministry over the years

The mailing list should be as expansive as possible and kept current by printing “address service requested” below your permit number. There is a per piece charge for returns and/or corrections, but the price of retaining a valued donor is worth the cost. In this highly transient society, as much as 10% of your database may change between mailings. So although there may be some work and expense involved, it pays to keep accurate and active as possible. You can’t afford to lose friendly donors. Also, it will help if you have software that will allow you to sort your data into categories that will permit



you to send first class mail to contributors and third class mail to all others. A rule of thumb is that once someone has given a gift to your ministry, you should not send them any mail again that is not first class.

The basic principle in the fund raising world for operating a sustaining fund is simple: “get the gift, repeat the gift, and increase the gift.” The sustaining fund seeks to open the door for new contributors, invite those who have given to do so again, and ask those who have consistently been generous to be even more so. Later, as you put in place your capital/endowment campaign, it will be from this group of consistent, supportive givers that your best large gifts will come. These friendly givers are your best cheerleaders and the sustaining fund builds on these essential relationships.

Before you can begin a sustaining fund there are several things to put into place:

1. A mailing list of potential contributors that is accurate and up-to-date.
2. Computer software to support your needs.
3. A specific budget item for this ongoing venture
4. A committee that is trained and willing to work with you.
5. Carefully written and edited interpretive material.
6. A list of positive, significant ways that people can contribute to your ministry.

Even though case statements and feasibility studies are usually done for larger capital or endowment campaigns, it may be useful for those leaders guiding the sustaining appeals to develop a “case” for the contributions you are seeking, if for no other reason than it provides a way for you and your leadership to agree on the need for the fund raising efforts.

Likewise, a “chart of gifts” is usually done for a larger campaign, but might have application for your annual fund. This chart lists how many gifts can be expected at what levels. For example, in larger campaigns, two gifts might represent 80% of the goal or more, while in an annual fund it may take many more gifts to reach 80%. Big gifts are still very important in smaller campaigns, and it means spending more time with this select group of donors. In an annual fund, this may suggest that there will need to be some personal contact above and beyond a simple mailing. The typical giving pyramid becomes flatter, recognizing that smaller gifts are what support the sustaining fund. Moreover, you will need more prospects to secure the larger gift (prospect-to-donor ratio of 5:1) than for the smaller gifts (2:1). This does not minimize the smaller gifts, but helps you realize the amount of time and effort needed to invite the larger contributions.

A Gift Range Chart for a \$60,000 annual fund, using this ideal model, is as follows:

Gift range	# of gifts	# of prospects	\$ per range
\$3,000	2	10 (5:1)	6,000
1,500	4	20 (5:1)	6,000
750	12	48 (4:1)	9,000
600	18	72 (4:1)	9,000
250	24	72 (3:1)	6,000
100	120	360 (3:1)	12,000
under 100 (\$30 av.)	400	800 (2:1)	12,000
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580 GIFTS			\$60,000 TOTAL

There is a wide range of opinion today about several issues related to sustaining fund appeals.

- ◆ Some advocate the use of “giving clubs” that challenge donors to respond at a certain level and maintain or increase the size of the gift from year to year. Others think that this creates false hierarchies and discourages some smaller gifts, while lifting up the larger ones. You decide.
- ◆ Some suggest making the appeal in terms of what a certain dollar amount will purchase for the ministry. For example: “A gift of \$100 will send one student to a retreat or purchase Bible study material for one term.” This approach, they say, will allow individuals to give to specific programs or projects that are of interest to them. Others suggest that this kind of laundry list is too crass and places too much emphasis on “what my dollar will buy.”
- ◆ When solicitation letters are written, some suggest that they be brief, crisp and bold. Others suggest that you take as much space as you need to say what is important, thinking that if people are interested in what you are doing, they will take time to read about it. In either case, keep your letters as personal as possible.
- ◆ Some are adamant that there needs to be a return card and envelope in every piece of correspondence. Others say to be selective and not to include these in thank you notes, for example. Perhaps this is another reason for stratifying your database, so that only certain categories of donors receive the repetitious return cards—those who have used them in the past.

These are all items that will need to be discussed by your local committee and the best judgments made for your ministry in your situation.

Although the sustaining fund is often called the “annual” fund, the gift planning process should include ways to be in touch with your “universe of donors” several times a year. Perhaps there could be a special newsletter sent to them twice a year, or a special event to which they are invited on a regular basis. One letter or newsletter sent once a year will not do the trick, especially if it is poorly done and impersonal. Since fund raising is essentially relational, you will need to find creative ways to keep in touch throughout the year. Pick up the phone. Send photos. Invite feedback. Involve students. Make connections as personal as possible.

Pledge cards may be used for sustaining fund appeals, particularly if you are asking for significant amounts of support. However, if pledge cards are used, keep them updated. People do not like to be reminded to remit a pledge that they may have already paid. Offer to remind them when their next pledge payment is due—it will give you another opportunity for contact.

More and more these days, donors are looking for ways to simplify their giving. Electronic transfer is one good option, such as the Simply Giving program offered by Thrivent Financial. With a minimum of administrative detail, organizations and donors enroll through Simply Giving to make monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or annual gifts through electronic transfer. For more information go to: www.thrivent.com/community/outreach/giving/simplygiving

There are a variety of ways of reaching people to ask for their support. Obviously the more personal the contact can be, the more effective the results will be. But time and distance usually drive us to a less-personal means, such as bulk mail, e-mail, or phone calls. Professionals in the field have developed the following “chain of effectiveness” list, moving from the most to the least

effective.

- A. Person to person conversation
- B. Personal phone call
- C. Personal letter
- D. Personalized letter, such as one with a handwritten P.S. at the end
- E. Impersonal phone call
- F. Impersonal letter
- G. Special fund raising event
- H. Door to door “cold” calling
- I. Media advertising

Note #1: in a highly impersonal society, it is now believed that a phone call is better than a letter, even with the current trend of phone solicitations by telemarketers. Perhaps the best approach is a combination of a letter and phone call, especially with faithful, current givers.

Note #2: while e-mail was once the preferred way to send inexpensive, instant messages, the communications field is changing rapidly. Many recipients now consider e-mail very impersonal and would prefer a voice message or a Facebook connection. Active, up-to-date Web sites are a useful way to share stories and photos. Also, it is relatively easy these days to provide a “donate online” link. The key factor is how you lead your constituents to your Web site and how you engage them in the information that you have posted.

Finally, find a way to say “thank you” quickly and personally. It is very likely that the chance of a repeat gift hinges on the way that you express appreciation for the current gift, however small. Again, the goal of the sustaining fund appeal is to “get the gift, repeat the gift and increase the gift.” Friends of your ministry will want to know that what they have done by sending a contribution is genuinely appreciated and carefully used. A prompt, personal note from you or from someone representing your ministry will go a long way to continue and sustain your relationship with each cherished contributor.