

Focused Fundraising at San Jose Christian School

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San Jose Christian School spends roughly 25% of its yearly budget on rent. During its entire 51-year history, the school has not owned a campus, and the incredibly high property costs of the San Francisco Bay Area mean that tuition rates must climb steadily each year if the school is to afford its facilities and compensate its staff well. Owning a campus would alleviate the problem of ever-increasing rental rates by giving the school a fixed mortgage payment or owning the property free and clear. Securing a facility would require a large capital campaign, and the school has never conducted one before. Another area in need of fundraising—the SJCS endowment—must also grow considerably from its current amount of \$350,000 if the income of the fund is to be useful for the school.

The goal of this project was to employ focused fundraising strategies for the school's 2010-2011 Annual Drive and the other fundraising events during the school year. By using this year as a dry run for a capital campaign, administration, board members, and participating personnel could familiarize themselves with the process of a fundraising campaign, the cultivation and solicitation of major donors, and the vision casting that motivates individuals to contribute to one's cause. Although the scale of our efforts was much smaller than would be needed for a capital campaign, the strategies employed made 2010-2011 the most successful per-capita fundraising year in the school's history and the second most successful year ever in terms of gross dollars. Moreover, learning the ropes of fundraising de-mystified the process for everyone involved and made the prospect of executing a successful capital campaign in the near future much less daunting.

Background

San Jose Christian School has provided high quality Christian education from a Reformed perspective to students and families in the South Bay Area since 1959. At one time, SJCS served grades K-12, but in 1986 the school's Association members voted to close the high school, as it was financially unsustainable based on the number of students attending. Narrowing the focus of the school's efforts proved to be a good decision, and SJCS flourished over the next couple of decades. In 2005, the school reached an all-time high in enrollment with 357 students in grades JK-8. However, as the fortunes of the Silicon Valley economy go, so go the school's enrollment numbers.

The recent economic downturn saw JK-8th grade enrollment drop to 245 students, but SJCS opened a preschool on campus in 2009, which is home to 45 students, greatly easing the financial strain of the JK-8th grade situation. For the past 23 years, the school's home has been an old elementary school, leased from the public school district. The school district steadily increases rent (\$598,000 for 2011-2012), so SJCS must raise tuition even more than it would like to cover those costs and continue to improve teacher compensation. Campus ownership would erase the challenge of ever-climbing rent, and a major capital campaign would be required to make that dream a reality.

Project Focus

This project sought to educate SJCS board members, administration, and other applicable personnel about fundraising so that the procedures used in successful capital campaigns could become part of the way San Jose Christian operates as well. Specific events were held to teach board members about fundraising and their role in it, and the superintendent led the board through an in-depth discussion of fundraising on the annual board retreat.

The superintendent then worked with a consultant from the Van Lunen Center to apply specific strategies to the SJCS Annual Drive and Spring Auction to increase the success of both of those events.

Methods

LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

On October 13, 2010, Don Distelberg of the Timothy Group came out to San Jose to present some of the key elements of effective fundraising to the SJCS Board of Trustees. Topics included:

- The importance and necessity of trustee involvement in school fundraising
- How to cultivate donors for your school
- Creating a vision to present to donors
- Making "the ask" to a prospective donor
- Typical calendar of events for a capital campaign

On November 6, 2010, the SJCS Board of Trustees and administrators held their annual visioning retreat and continued the discussion of fundraising and the role it needed to play in the future of San Jose Christian School. The day's discussion also included current and future facilities needs for the school, along with possible creative partnerships with supporting churches on a future campus. Three specific readings anchored our thinking at this event, all of which came from materials used in the superintendent's Van Lunen Fellowship. They were David Hahn's "A

Winning Performance: Fundraising Basics;" Penelope Burke's "Donors Are People" and "Three Simple Steps to Raising More Money;" and Jerold Panas' "Mega Gifts: Who Gives Them, Who Gets Them."

Later in the school year, on April 7, members of the board of trustees and administration met with advancement personnel from Calvin College to talk about various aspects of developing donors and creating a culture of giving based on biblical principles. A Calvin donor also attended this meeting and shared her insights as to what motivated her to begin supporting the college. Specific topics for this meeting were:

- Creating a donor culture and understanding what motivates people to give to SJCS
- Methods of giving: cash gifts, appreciated assets, other assets, and deferred gifts
- The benefits of non-cash gifts
- How to solicit and thank donors
- Resources for further help

FUNDRAISING TECHNIQUES AND EVENTS

For this project, we set a goal of raising \$140,000 via 4 strategies for the 2010-2011 school year. Each strategy and its goal amount is explained below:

Strategy: Personal solicitation - \$70,000

The SJCS Finance Committee went over the giving history of SJCS contributors to determine who would be considered "major donors." People who contributed \$500 or more on a consistent basis were placed in this category, and we made appointments with them for personal visits. To aid in asking these donors for funds, we created a customized leadership proposal for each donor with the help of the Timothy Group's personnel. Another part of personal solicitation was the creation of a donor appreciation event to highlight the use of the gifts we had received from these higher-level contributors. We also invited people to the event if we thought they had the potential to become major donors for SJCS.

Strategy: Fundraising event - \$50,000

We hold an auction each spring that funds special projects at the school, often related to technology initiatives. This year, the major focus was the purchase of a mobile iPad lab for SJCS students. Prior to the event, we solicited one of the major donors we were cultivating for some kind of a matching gift to multiply the power of the money we would raise at the auction. The donor agreed on a matching gift of \$10,000, and we stipulated that the contribution of the match hinged on SJCS bringing in at least \$45,000 on the night of the event. Throughout the evening, we reminded the guests of the total we needed to reach and kept a running tally on the screen.

Strategy: Church gifts - \$10,000

During December, the head administrator spoke during worship services at each of the supporting churches regarding the power of the church's partnership with SJCS and the current needs of the school. The offering at each of these services went to SJCS, and each church placed a copy of our

annual campaign brochure in their bulletins. Many of the members of these churches are already in our supporter database, so they were receiving information from multiple fronts.

Strategy: Mail appeals - \$10,000

Historically, the sole method for soliciting money for the annual drive was a mail appeal. SJCS creates and distributes a brochure outlining the needs of the school and requesting help from its supporters to meet those needs. This brochure goes out to approximately 1,500 people. This year, we still sent out the mailed materials but sought to focus more on personal contact for our upper-level contributors.

Results

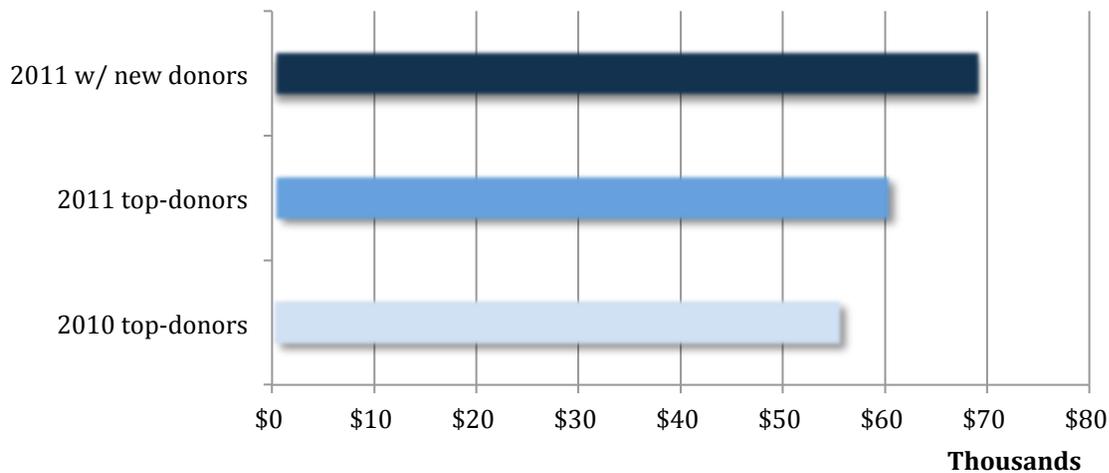
As stated in the summary paragraphs, this past year was the highest per capita giving year in school history and the second highest gross amount ever. Considering the smaller number of students and families we have today, our efforts were quite successful. Specific details follow:

Personal solicitation goal: \$70,000

Actual Receipts: \$69,613.54

17 individuals were categorized as upper-level donors, and their gifts in 2009 totaled \$55,968. By personally approaching each individual in 2010, that amount increased to \$60,782. However, as part of the personal solicitation process, we also identified new potential upper-level donors and added 7 new individuals to this category, with their gifts totaling \$8,831.54. That amount brought the 2010-11 personal solicitation receipts to \$69,613.54, an increase of \$13,455.54 from 2009-10 (24%).

Personal Solicitation Donations



Fundraising Event goal: \$50,000

Actual Receipts: \$70,172

The 9th year of the spring auction was an overwhelming success, shattering all previous records for money raised. People in attendance responded well to an exciting cause and the idea of matching funds, and even after we had reached our goal, they wanted to give more. We set a goal for

\$45,000 to earn the match of \$10,000, and we ended up bringing in \$60,172 before the match was applied. The total marked a 63% increase from the previous year.

Church Gifts goal: \$10,000

Actual Receipts: \$11,319

Special offerings taken in the supporting churches during the annual drive totaled \$11,319. Because we had not previously separated this amount from the other receipts for the annual drive, we had no comparable data from year's past.

Mail Appeal goal: \$10,000

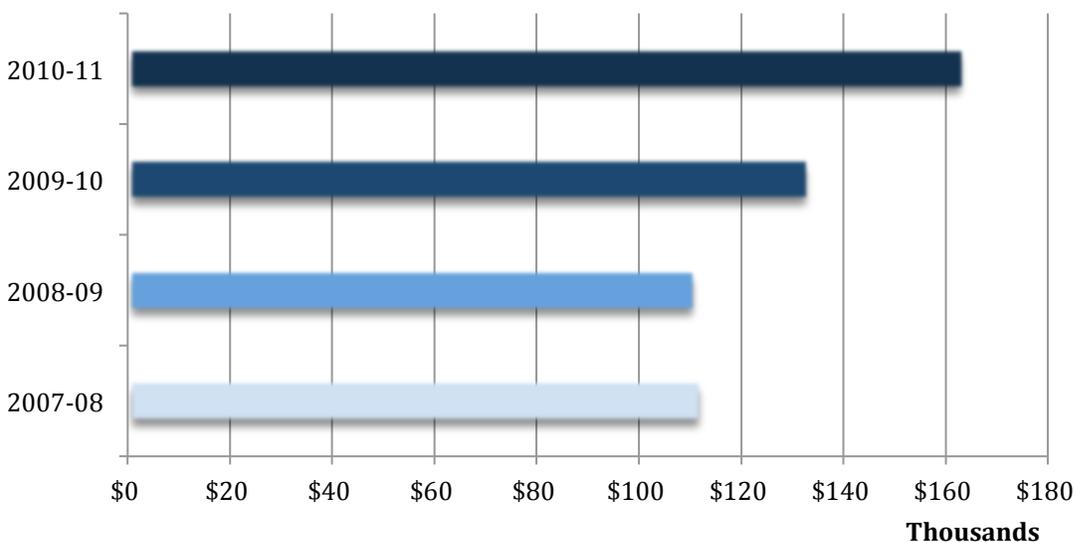
Actual Receipts: \$12,767.46

As a mailing campaign had previously been the sole means of conducting the annual drive, we expected this category to perform well. Separating out the major donors who were solicited personally left us with receipts of \$12,767.46

Total Fundraising Goals: \$140,000

Total Receipts: \$163,871.54

SJCS Fundraising History - Last 4 Years



Analysis

A more intentional approach to fundraising taught both the SJCS board of trustees and administration several key lessons:

- 1) The importance of story telling – Mission, Tuition Assistance, and Educational Quality are all worthy reasons to donate money, but seeing specific examples of donations in action really motivates people to give again and increase their giving amounts. In our various presentations and events, we used videos, pictures, testimony from families, and written notes from students to drive home the impact gifts were having on the SJCS community.

Looking for new and interesting ways to continue to tell our story will be an important part of the fundraising activities of the future.

- 2) Soliciting donations doesn't need to feel sleazy – Anxiety is an understandable first reaction to the prospect of soliciting funds for SJCS from people we know. However, in working with consultants and in our own discussion, we began to realize that asking people to help out the school is much easier if we are excited about what is going on around campus and our future plans. Keeping the conversations about giving within the realm of Christian stewardship also helps keep people from feeling like mere statistics and keeps our own eyes on something other than just the bottom line.
- 3) We have much room to grow – As we become a school more focused on our fundraising efforts, we will learn to work smarter and find new opportunities to cultivate donors. It will be important to bring new people into the circle of giving and broaden our donor base, rather than just maintain our current contributors if we are to take on major campaigns. Despite declining enrollment for the past 3 years, both our gross and per capita donations have steadily risen. We clearly have people within our school community committed to supporting SJCS, and we must work to increase our partnership with them.
- 4) Success breeds success – When we their use gifts well, people are more likely give again and give larger amounts. We saw this illustrated in our contacts with major donors, but it also applies to fundraising in general. In looking at the prospect of a capital campaign, it may be wise to conduct a smaller campaign (ex. \$1 million) and achieve our goal to build a sense of optimism amongst the school community before taking on a more major campaign.

At SJCS, the leaders must work to create a culture that understands the importance of fundraising. This important task cannot be the sole responsibility of the head administrator or even a development officer. Leadership means believing strongly in what one's institution is trying to accomplish and giving of one's time, talent, and treasure to help it achieve its goals. We are truly grateful for the expertise of the individuals who have helped educate us about effective fundraising, and we look forward to honing these skills in the years ahead.