

Establishing a Major Gifts Program at Mustard Seed School: Building Partnerships for Sustainability

Thomas Postema, VanLunen Fellow 2012-2013
Head of School, Mustard Seed School, Hoboken, NJ
www.mustardseedschool.org



Consultant: Don Distelberg

History

As a school that values diversity, Mustard Seed School has always relied on partnerships and the generosity of donors to fulfill its mission to serve students of all backgrounds. At all times, at least 50% of students receive need-based financial aid. The development strategy to raise these funds has moved beyond mail appeals to include individual donor meetings, cultivation events, an annual fundraising banquet, a holiday matching gift campaign for parents, and smaller, parent fundraisers that feature children's art. Through these efforts, Mustard Seed School has moved from raising \$300,000 (2005) to raising \$770,000 (2013). Despite this increase, the school awards far more financial aid than is raised. This year over 125 students received \$1.3 million in grant aid.

What I did:

We continued with many of the development events that we had in place but explored new major donor strategies and hosted four small targeted events for potential donors. Using WealthEngine, the wealth identification service, to analyze the giving potential of our current donors, we found that many of the parents in our school community had the means to become major donors. We used our prospect list more intentionally to strategize. We trained school trustees in development strategies and used the trustees to develop a network of potential donors. In addition, trustees were asked to host a table at the annual fund-raising banquet and invite potential donors. We also did a careful analysis of the spread of our donors (the donor pyramid) in preparation for thinking about future initiatives.

What I learned:

- Parents have not been tapped for full-donation potential
- Leveraging gifts is a good way to multiply the gift and honor the donor
- Small boutique events seem to appeal to major donors and should be part of the ongoing plan
- Putting together a 5-year development plan is necessary

What difference it made:

- Raised \$90,000 in funds that might not have been raised without a major donor strategy
- Surpassed budgeted donations by \$130,000
- Showed the need to move the \$5-\$10,000 donors into the major donor category of \$15-\$25,000