

## **Strategy Guide: Churches and Schools**

Much of what I wrote in *The Little Book of Gold* only partly applies to churches and schools. The reason is: you're not small.

Sure, your budget might be small and you might not have a development director on staff. But you have a lot of things going for you that change the game and dramatically increase your potential.

### **Built-in Volunteers and Donors**

For starters, you have an enormous pool of volunteers to draw from compared to another small non-profit. Your constituents are your volunteers. Schools can tap this well by asking for a certain amount of annual volunteer hours from parents. With coordination on your side, there is no end to the different jobs parent volunteers can do.

Also, fundraising activities like auctions make a lot more sense for a school. Ask every parent to donate an item to the auction. Invite the parents at X dollars per ticket. And then they bid on the very items they purchased. Not only that, but if it's run by parent volunteers (with some staff supervision of course) an auction goes from being too time intensive to highly profitable.

### **The Case is Strong**

Schools and churches don't have as much trouble with their case for giving. To a church (and, of course mosque or synagogue), it's intimately tied in with why people are showing up in the first place. To a school, it's incredibly personal—you're talking about not just "all kids" at the school but also specifically their kid.

(As a side note, this can hurt long-term capital projects for schools, if the parent isn't sure that their kids will be able to enjoy the fruits of their gift. This can make asking for gifts from prospective parents—if you can identify them—and families with kids spaced out over a few years a potential option for raising funds.)

### **You Have Regular Contact**

Schools have regular contact with parents. Churches have even more regular contact with members. Sure, you don't want to have a 10 minute request for money at every Sunday service. But you can take a few opportunities throughout the year to lay out the case for giving in a direct and personal way to a captive audience.

### **Tithing**

Churches specifically have a tradition of a tithe, a certain percentage of income. No, not everyone will give at that percentage. But large donors can give substantial sums. A small church with a \$500,000 budget might have a donor or two giving \$50,000 a year. That would be almost

unheard of for any other small non-profit that wasn't a church. But it's the kind of ask that can be made at a church because of the tithing tradition.

## **Alumni**

Schools have an advantage here: every year they send more prospective donors out into the world. This is why colleges do so well at fundraising—because their alumni feel connected to the school.

That said, the likelihood of a gift from an alum decreases with how they were when they went to school. You can probably get alumni to give to their high school—especially if you are in a community where which high school you went was important. You have much less likelihood of getting an alumni to give to a middle school or grade school, though there are certainly exceptions to this rule.

One way to encourage giving is to arrange for a gift from the students as they get ready to graduate. For high schools, a senior class might raise money to get the school a new tree or a new bench. Or perhaps any student who gives more than \$20 gets a blanket with the school logo on it. This gets them used to the idea that now they should give back to their school and will make them more likely to give later.

Alumni can really help a school's fundraising, but it requires you to stay in regular communication with them. Don't ask too often and work on ways to connect them to each other.

But they are only a piece of the fundraising budget. Most likely for any school that is not a college, your biggest donors will be current parents. It's the parents who believe in the school, not the kids. Alumni can supplement that, but probably won't match it.

## **In Short**

In short, churches and schools have dramatically higher capacity for fundraising than a non-profit with a similar sized budget. Aim high, and take advantage of your built-in strengths.