

Research on Fundraising Practices within Christian Communities of Color

SEPTEMBER 2018

Effective fundraising is essential so that ministries will have the resources they need to fulfill their purpose in the world.

In 2015 Project Resource was created as a collaborative initiative between the College of Bishops, Development Office of the Episcopal Church, and the Episcopal Church Foundation to train diocesan teams from across the Episcopal Church on effective fundraising strategies rooted in a deep theology of giving. It was at the inaugural event in September 2015 that Project Resource faculty, Erin Weber-Johnson, was providing national data on generational characteristics and teaching how to apply this data to implement corresponding fundraising strategies.

At the end of the segment, Bishop Eugene Sutton noted that while the national data seemed to reflect those in his diocese in predominantly white parishes, it did not reflect what he knew of parishes with majority people of color. He asked if there was such data available for the creation of additional strategies. At that time Erin both consulted and trained others on fundraising for years but was not aware of the need for the data till that very moment. She promised Bishop Sutton to provide him this data.

After a year of asking every denominational body and every major religious research entity, several key learnings emerged:

1. This data does not exist in either qualitative and quantitative form.
2. There are very few number of professional fundraisers of color located across denominations.
3. Research bodies that previously tried to gather data from communities of color have done so by using large scale studies and oversampling--with consistently unverifiable results.
4. Research attempted in the past has not been initiated for the purpose of providing communities of color strategies for effective fundraising based on their data.

It became increasingly clear that if a team wasn't developed to address the gap in fundraising practices, it would not be addressed. Without this vital information, leaders, like Erin at Project Resource, will continue to teach and utilize strategies developed based on incomplete data at all levels of our institutions.

What characteristics and successful fundraising practices are found in faith communities of color?

In 2007 “Rodriguez” outpaced “Smith” for the first time as the most common surname in the country. Current census data has also shown that Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial ethnic group in the country. Based on the most recent data in the 2015 Blackbaud Diversity in Giving study, and current demographic trends, both the Church and philanthropy are changing, and our data and best practices are not keeping pace.

Yet, there are no fundraising statistics, very little qualitative data, and inadequate information about diverse fundraising practices in communities of color. This is the data we seek. In addition, there are a disproportionately high number of white fundraising professionals compared to people of color. Currently there is no existing network for religious fundraising professionals of color. While our goal is to collect information and provide it back to communities of color for the purpose of strategy making, we will also gather religious fundraising professionals of color so that they can grow as a network and support one another.

The data we seek is critical for congregations and denominations working to live into their purpose. The Church simply cannot fulfill its purpose without expanding its understanding of effective fundraising practices and how they respond to cultural realities and experiences. Best fundraising practices in the church, however, have been created by qualitative and quantitative work with, by and for white dominant North American culture, putting communities of color at an immediate disadvantage. This is deeply unfortunate for many reasons, among them being:

1. Lack of existing data to boost fundraising and stewardship cohorts of communities of color by their own leaders.
2. For culturally mixed congregations, white dominant culture’s concept and construction of money and stewardship is perpetuated without consciousness, excluding the experiences and ways of being of the full diversity of God’s creation in these congregations, thereby giving primacy to whiteness.
3. Putting religious fundraising professionals who seek to support the diversity of God’s people at a loss, preventing them from being as effective as possible and perpetuating whiteness alongside lack of effectiveness.

These challenges will be met through this research and network-building project, providing the Church at large necessary data and for communities of color in particular access to using their diverse voices.

We have heard repeatedly that the data of fundraising practices in a diversity of communities of color is absolutely necessary. Utilizing a grant from Duke’s Leadership Institute, we formalized a methodology and have tested this proposed process with conversation partners and a focus group consisting of more than

twenty senior level pastors of color. The people of color whom we have spoken with over the past year have stated that they will not be turning over their knowledge or experience to established institutions who have historically used their data against the sustenance of their communities. That said, what is needed is qualitative and quantitative data that reflects them but is gathered in another way: relationship and trust building.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

We seek endorsement and support for this project. We are five individuals working together over the past year to pursue this data: Aimée Laramore (religious fundraising consultant), Larissa Kwong-Abazia (seminary administrator and pastor), Erin Weber-Johnson (religious fundraising consultant), Derrick McQueen (pastor, academic) and Mieke Vandersall (religious consultant and church planter). We are all consultants in the Vandersall Collective (for profit) and have created a nonprofit called The Collective Foundation to be able to do this work.

To procure the most objective data possible, it is important that our project be independent of an established theological institution so that it can serve as a mirror, reflecting a critical image of philanthropy and fundraising today. Being an independent entity frees us from long-held structures, missions, approaches, and perspectives of more traditional institutions.

PRE- PHASE 1: PLANNING - IN PROCESS

During this phase (partially completed) we gather our team, along with our researcher, to establish the norms and guidelines for choosing participants, as well as the facilitation guide for the gatherings themselves. This then gets communicated to the potential participants for recruitment and the local gathering teams.

PHASE 1.5: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS - 2019

Gather six regional focus groups throughout the country for worship and discussion of cultural constructions of money and fundraising. At these gatherings we will ask questions to get to the heart of the struggles and wins of their congregations/faith communities, as well as listen to the questions that they would like answered. We will do this by together identifying cultural constructions of money and how the experiences that construct money relationships impact fundraising.

These gatherings will then be used to write a position paper with our thematic findings, and also to seek further support for a national quantitative study. Following these findings, we will share the results with the communities that have participated with us for the qualitative work.

OUR AIM DURING THIS PHASE:

- Define burning questions/refine research questions for quantitative phase;
- Information gathering;
- Facilitated focus group conversations;
- Listening and Research Partner recording and analysis of response/trends;
- Create space and facilitation to listen deeply and identify diverse fundraising themes;
- Connect conversation partners;
- Foster a network of faith based fundraising professionals of color;
- Collection, consolidation and presentation of written data;
- Published report of Phase 1 experience for funding partners;
- Recommendations out of Phase 1 for funding partners.

METHODOLOGY:

- Facilitate six regional gatherings across the United States with 10-15 participants;
- Each gathering would draw representation from people of color including Native American, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Asian clergy, fundraising professionals, and church leaders;
- Engage deeply in conversations of fundraising practices, theologies of giving, and narratives of finance at the parish level;

Utilize two Lake Institute PhD researchers, with access to Institutional Review Board Practices, to analyze data;

DELIVERABLES:

- Provide participants and denominational leadership with the results of the analysis in the form of a Summative Position Paper;
- Provide direct strategies and hands-on assistance to all participants for how to utilize this information to support their own stewardship practices;
- Write a position paper from these gatherings to illuminate the struggles and wins, as well as articulate next steps, including the quantitative analysis section (phase 2).

Amount Needed For Gatherings, Research and Writing, not including overhead: \$175,400

PHASE 2: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

- Utilizing learnings from Qualitative Report to create Quantitative Tool for interviews and congregational survey;
- Quantitative Assessment and report on findings;
- Continued fostering of network through staff and liaisons of those convened in Phase 1.5.

PHASE 3: INTEGRATION AND DISSEMINATION

- Publication of Phase 1 and Phase 2 findings;
- Review and reflection of findings from Quantitative Study;
- Best practices tour;
- Expansion of research sites;
- Refined methodology questions for facilitated groups or new approach;
- Fundraising approach(es) revisited in written document;
- Continued convening of additional participants- 5 yearly meetings to test out quantitative data;
- Fostering of network of those convened;
- Continued qualitative assessment;
- Publication of findings.

CONVERSATION PARTNERS SO FAR INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis
- Michael Brown, Payne Theological Seminary
- Chris Coble, Lily Endowment
- Craig Dykstra, Duke Leadership Institute
- Bill Enright
- Yvette Flunder, City of Refuge UCC
- Lisa Greenwood, The Methodist Foundation
- Ellie Johns Kelly, Presbyterian Foundation
- David King, Lake Institute
- Mike Kinman, All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena
- Rosemarie Mitchell, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Mary Katherine Morn, Unitarian Universalist Association
- David Odom, Duke Leadership Institute
- Christian Peele, Riverside Church
- James Reese, Presbyterian Foundation
- Channon Ross, Lily Endowment
- Christian Scharen, Auburn Seminary
- Stephanie Spellers, The Episcopal Church
- Elona Street-Stewart, Synod of Lakes and Prairies
- Gene Sutton, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
- Jessica Tate, NEXT Church
- Cameron Trimble, Center for Progressive Renewal
- Landon Whitsitt, Synod of the Mid-America
- Frank Yamada, Association of Theological Schools
- Presbyterian Church (USA) Research Services
- The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church