

FUNDRAISING FOR SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In May of 2004, a group of students from the Valparaiso University chapter of Engineers Without Borders (EWB-VU) undertook a trip to the village of Nakor, Kenya with the goal of constructing a water supply and irrigation system they had designed. While working in a remote African village produced many difficulties, perhaps the greatest difficulty associated with the project was raising the \$45,000 necessary to cover the expenses of travel and materials, yet this amount was raised in less than eight months without the aid of major corporate sponsorship.

After a brief explanation of the project, a discussion of the methods used to raise the necessary funding will be provided. These techniques are not only applicable to this project, but can be applied to other local international service projects as well.

2. THE PROJECT

The community of Nakor, in Northwestern Kenya, is approximately 70 miles (a 2 ½ hour drive) southwest of Lodwar, the nearest town large enough to contain stores for purchasing materials. The village consists 2300 people spread out over approximately 20 square miles and is located in the Turkana region, an area that has been severely impacted by drought. The region routinely receives less than three inches of rain annually, and although the village is located along the Kerio River, the river typically runs for less than one month a year. The villagers' drinking water supply is primarily from relatively shallow, hand-dug, open-pit wells. Unfortunately, these wells are also used for watering the goats herded by the villagers and quickly become fouled by animal waste. Additionally, there is no long-term water collection or storage for crop irrigation.

Gene Morden, who, along with his family, has served as a missionary in this region since 1995, brought this project to the attention of EWB-USA. EWB-USA awarded the project to EWB-VU in October of 2003, a mere eight months before the first construction trip. This short time span made raising the required funds even more difficult.

Initially, the scope of the project as envisioned by EWB-VU consisted of two components intended to address the drinking water and the irrigation/food needs of the village. The proposed components were:

1) Windmill-Powered Water Pumps: Gene Morden reported that the groundwater in the area was potable and close to the surface (less than ten feet below ground surface) near the river but much deeper (between 80 and 100 feet below ground surface) near the village center, which is situated on a bluff above the river. It was decided to construct one well near the river and a second well near the center of the village to provide drinking water for the village. By constructing the windmill-powered water wells, the problem of contamination of the water by animal wastes would be virtually eliminated, as the water would be pumped straight from the aquifer.

2) Water Storage for Crop Irrigation: In addition to providing drinking water, it was decided to investigate the feasibility of an irrigation system to aid in food production. The community had selected a plot of land near the river for this purpose, however the soil, while arable, was not cultivatable due to the arid climate. The goal of the second component of the project was to establish a small (roughly one acre) test plot watered by a drip irrigation system. A water storage tank connected to the windmill-powered well would feed the system. If the test plot were successful, EWB-VU would significantly expand the irrigation system from one acre to approximately 20 acres of cropland during later visits to the village.

In addition to the design work done here in the United States, the project has thus far involved two trips to Kenya. The first trip was a site reconnaissance trip taken by the first author and Chris Breinling, a senior civil engineering student at Valparaiso University. The purpose of this trip was to perform an initial survey of the area, assess the needs of the community, and determine the availability of supplies.

The second trip occurred during the second half of May 2004, when the EWB-VU team consisting of the first author, his wife, an African History professor and twelve Valparaiso University students traveled to Nakor, Kenya to construct the project.

3. THREE SIMPLE RULES FOR FUNDRAISING

Fundraising is often a daunting task. It is easy to fall into the mode of thinking that someone or something will provide the needed funds in the end, which often leads prospective fundraisers to throw their hands in the air and wail “Why bother with all of those carwashes? Besides, do you realize how many carwashes we’d have to do to fund our project?”

The single most common question asked by novice fundraisers is “where do we begin?” When beginning a fundraising program, it is helpful to keep three basic rules of fundraising for a service-learning project in mind: (1) your project is your single largest asset, (2) more (people and money) is better and (3) carwashes and similar public events create public awareness, even if they fail to generate meaningful dollars.

When attempting to raise funds for a service-learning project, it is important to remember, and more importantly to make your donors cognizant of, the benefits which will result due to these efforts. People are much more likely to donate to your project if they are aware of the positive changes you are trying to bring about. Make the reasons why you are doing the project the focal point of your fundraising efforts and you will be far more successful. You obviously believe in the work you are raising funds for, you just need to make other people believe in it as well.

The more people you can involve in your fundraising efforts, the more opportunities you will have for success. This is true both in terms of the number of people you recruit to work on the fundraising and the number of potential donors you contact. By recruiting a large varied population of fundraisers you will maximize your potential contacts and lessen the load on everyone. Similarly, never turn down a speaking engagement about the project. Even if there is no immediate financial compensation, the odds are that the contacts you make will eventually prove beneficial.

Public awareness of your project is critical. Almost anything you can do to make potential donors aware of your efforts is worth the time you invest in it. Efforts in this direction can range from posting fliers in local store windows to articles in the local media. The community sections of local newspapers are always looking for human-interest stories and are usually grateful to have something as interesting as your project handed to them on a proverbial silver platter. Similarly, local radio stations frequently air short bits of local interest during their news segments. Don't hesitate to contact the media; the worst they can say is "no thank you".

4. TECHNIQUES FOR FUNDRAISING

There are a large number of potential funding sources available for service-learning projects both on and off campus.

4.1 Inside the Academic Institution

There are a great number of sources of funds within almost any university. While these opportunities may take a little effort to locate (although many are almost ridiculously easy to find), the competition for them is frequently much less than it is for external grant monies, and thus they are usually easier to obtain.

Possible internal sources of funds include:

- Most colleges and universities have a student senate, an organization for institutional advancement, a guild or other auxiliary organization answering the needs of students, and an alumni base, all of which frequently have money available for student projects and travel. Remember that your project will likely bring positive publicity to the university, don't be afraid to point that out. One word of warning: always make sure that the academic organization in charge of soliciting *its own* donors for institutional purposes is aware of *your* fundraising efforts; if its lifeline is threatened or compromised, the

repercussions could be unpleasant. Full disclosure, coordinating efforts, and ongoing communication are essential in this regard.

- Another opportunity for gathering funds occurs when the campus hosts a prominent sport, such as, in Valparaiso University's case, a Division I basketball team. With a collegiate team carrying any degree of national recognition, formal rules will be encountered, be it NCAA regulations or otherwise, warding off interest groups desiring to solicit donations directly from using that team's name or the name of any of the team's members. While this practice is strictly disallowed, generating funds indirectly from the team represents a possible source of income. Use half-time periods for announcements. Have volunteers standing at the doors, preferably poor and undernourished students, well-equipped with articulate and booming voices, to greet fans as they enter and depart the athletic center, to part with, at least, unused concession funds. Since businesses love publicity at sporting events, conducting a silent auction throughout the course of the game using merchandise garnered from various local merchants who want their names broadcasted can be a significant source of funds.
- On campus, it would be additionally worthwhile to check with the student union board (who often have budgets that are rarely fully tapped) for funds to subsidize a concert or other event attractive to the student population as well as to members of the larger surrounding community. With the board fronting the expenses of the band, campus food services contributing some munchies during the performance or presentation, the university giving up one of its banquet halls for the evening, and members of the Greek sorority and fraternity campus life helping make and distribute fliers promoting the event, this type of fundraising allows for other university segments to become involved in a very worthwhile mission.
- Business fraternities, professors, and leaders may be able to provide managerial and marketing skills. Use them. Talk with business professors about making this a project of a particular marketing or management class.
- Finally, look around campus to see which groups are successfully receiving monetary gifts to help other causes. With a faith-based academic institution, establishing a connection with the local chapel, churches, synagogues, and other centers for worship and promoting social causes may provide funding towards a specific aspect or element of the project, including travel, vocational studies, and humanitarian relief.

4.2 Outside the Academic Institution

There are numerous opportunities to raise funds off campus as well. These include external grants, the local community, and the personal contacts of the people involved in the projects. Some suggestions include:

- Search for relevant sources of national and international aid. Numerous grant source catalogues can be located in practically any campus or community library and on the Internet. Examine the annual budgets of the foundations and charities that have

historically given aid to international relief projects, especially those that promote university student involvement. Remember to apply according to the guidelines given for each grant submission, attaching all required and otherwise helpful collateral documents, by the deadlines provided and well in advance (at least one year) of the chapter's planned trip.

- Round up the chapter leaders, members and advisors and speak anywhere possible on the substance and details of the planned project. Contact representatives of churches, of local radio stations, of newspapers and of adult-learning committees, such as Elderhostel. Make connections with principals of middle schools and high schools (even though the monetary donations may be negligible, getting the word out about the project and having the students follow up with the progress of the chapter's efforts through your website or e-mails will prove to be invaluable to both sides – and do not discount the elementary students either!) School presentations inevitably develop a new generation of thinkers and actors. Civic organizational contacts should include the Rotary Club, the local Chamber of Commerce, engineering firms and associations, the Elk's Club, the Moose Lodge, the Fraternal Order of Police, the Loyal Order of Eagles, Veterans of Foreign Wars, medical and sorority auxiliary clubs, American Association of University Women the Masons, and countless other possibilities. The key here is to once again disseminate news of the project using PowerPoint presentations with key narrative aspects. Pass the basket at each function, not only for events scheduled before an upcoming trip, but during reports given on a completed phase of the project. There is always next year to think about.
- Tap into the legal community through the local county bar association or through a particular known contact. Perhaps several attorneys may be willing to donate the proceeds generated from preparing wills or trusts for a limited time.
- By far, the most important fundraising tool is developing new and tapping into existing personal relationships. The one-on-one approach has proven to be the best method of garnering funds. As students are usually without funds individually, ask student chapter members to compose a list of their relatives, parents' friends and if applicable, hometown businesses and places with which they have strong connections. Design a generic one-page solicitation letter, complete with details of the project, and complimented with colored pictures. While this sounds very elementary, the initial visual grab directs the reader to actually read about the monetary plea and discover the basics of the project's purpose. Ensure that the ending of the letter includes language similar to the following: *"Engineers Without Borders is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Your contribution is tax deductible to the extent no goods or services were received."* This language is very important to the prospective donor, wishing to claim the contribution to your chapter as a taxable deduction. Have the initial solicitor sign his or her own batch of letters, adding personal comment where appropriate. Write "thank you" notes to **all** donors. For repeated monetary gifting, contributors should be properly acknowledged. This practice is not just good deportment, but sustains a renewable source of revenue for the chapter to help support additional phases of the project or for different projects altogether.

- After fundraising sources are identified and monies are received, keep extremely well organized records. Good accounting practices are not just practical locally, but are mandatory under state and federal law.

5. CONCLUSION

For most engineers the hardest part of a service-learning project is the fundraising. It is also the most intimidating and least enjoyable aspect. Unfortunately, it is usually the most important. While daunting, it is certainly not as difficult as most people imagine. It is the authors' hope that the guidelines and suggestions provided in this paper have helped to remove some of the mystery and intimidation from the process.

Remember that your project is your greatest asset. If you believe strongly enough in the project to invest your own time and efforts in it, you should have no problems convincing others to help support your vision as well. Good luck and Godspeed in your efforts.