

Case for Support: Research on Fundraising Practices within Majority Christian Communities of Color

THE QUESTION:

The world is in need of moral leadership and the church has a significant and undeniable role in shaping how we respond to the most pressing challenges and issues of today. Faith communities have been the anchor of community change, social justice, and social services throughout history. Yet, the financial challenges faced in fulfilling mission and vision have led congregations, theological institutions, faith partnerships, and denominations to make drastic decisions in how they fulfill the many needs that exist, in both the community and the constituencies that are served. Effective fundraising is essential so that the church can fulfill its purpose in the world.

This research on fundraising practices within majority communities of color undergirds the Vision of the project:

VISION

Ministries will have the resources they need to transform the world.

AIMS

- To redefine philanthropy and generosity
- To connect conversation partners
- To bring witness to best practices
- To confront the taboo of money talk
- To inform faith communities to better serve their community
- To strengthen ministry outcomes in communities of color

We therefore seek to answer the question:

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

Currently, there are no fundraising statistics, very little qualitative data across denominations, and inadequate information about diverse fundraising practices in communities of color. In addition, there are a disproportionate number of white fundraising professionals compared to people of color with the same skill sets. These realities illuminate both a challenge and an opportunity relative to understanding the various communities we serve. Emerging fund-

raising trends from a diversity of communities of color must align with cultural understanding and exploration of relationships with money and Church for greater understanding.

The intersection of faith and giving is best understood when we recognize the distinct role of culture, philanthropy, fundraising, and financial management in faith traditions and communities across the country. This is critical information for congregations and denominations, such as those whom we serve, working to live into their divine purpose. The Church cannot fulfill its purpose without expanding its understanding of effective fundraising practices.

We recognize that thought-leaders are the informed opinion leaders and often times the recognized go-to people in their field of expertise. Yet, research in the field of faith and philanthropy often suffers from under-representation of fundraising professionals of color with the expertise, experience, and respect of diverse denominations. Fundraising and philanthropy often suffer from the same paradigm found in our greater community whereas diversity is mistaken for inclusion. Without a voice and seat at the research table, data is not being systematically collected from Church communities with the potential to reinvigorate our understanding of best practices. Churches and congregations need trusted sources who have the capacity to move and inspire people with innovative and proven ideas; and yet, they are often intimately connected to underexplored resources and practices with the capacity to turn ideas into reality. Together, we have the capacity to explore, document, share, and bring witness to the best practices and resources that illuminate ways that we may replicate their success and lessons learned, for generations and congregations to come.

As evidenced by the four gospels, each written by a different author and community, the early Christian movement was defined by a diversity of perspectives, cultures, and contexts. In the same way our team is reflective of many cultures, races, and identities that comprise the modern Church. So too, we see God incarnationally through the diversity of people and their stories.

Currently, the lack of reliable fundraising data for faith communities of color is both unfortunate and tragic.

There is no qualitative or quantitative data that could inform best practices in stewardship to meet that diversity on its own terms.

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.¹ 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.

In our work we hear regularly of the increasing vitality and vibrancy of communities of color. The Church in the United States is not predominantly white, and yet the ways we talk about and engage with money, and the best practices used for raising funds come from studies conducted with congregations over a generation prior. How various cultures, and generations within the diversity of these cultures, understand money in their lives and the lives of their

1 2010 United States Census Bureau

congregations, in addition to how money should be given and spent in churches, is varied. We hope to meet these challenges through this research and community-building project, providing for the Church at large necessary data and for communities in particular access to using their diverse voices.

Three-Phase Methodology

In order to study this question, we have developed a team diverse in institutional representation, personal demographics, and denomination affiliation. Each team member (see attachment) provides expertise and experience in particular areas needed for this research initiative.

The project is divided into phases: A planning period, Pre-Phase 1: Proof of Concept, Phase 1: Qualitative Analysis, Phase 2: Quantitative Study, and Phase 3: Disbursement and Ongoing Review.

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This project will gather leaders from predominantly communities of color across denominations to develop both qualitative and quantitative research. Our overall proposed outcomes include:

1. Show the Church where it is missing data that reflects the general population
2. Highlight on successful giving practices of diverse communities of color
3. Create a network of faith-based leaders to cross-pollinate information, and
4. Articulate how the Church is changing and re-imagining itself.

We will do this by:

1. Gathering leaders from across the Church for a consultation to gather qualitative information
2. Strengthening, not using the communities from which they come
3. Analyzing this information for emerging themes
4. Identifying language, cultural practices, and theological implications from the data
5. Utilizing the qualitative analysis for Phase 2; a large scale quantitative study of fundraising characteristics in faith communities
6. Continue annual consultation and foster a network of faith-based leaders of color who engage in fundraising
7. Disseminate quantitative data across institutions and develop ongoing qualitative/quantitative review

To provide a nimble yet effective structure for completing our work, we have chosen the business structure of a 501c3. 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.

PRE-PHASE 1: PROOF OF CONCEPT

- Gather small groups of leaders, both fundraisers of color and generally speaking leaders in the religious fundraising world, to present proposal and receive feedback
- Speak with 100 individuals such as those in the theological academia, fundraisers, and denominational leaders to ask pointed questions on the necessity of this research and the most needed data
- Write a “proof of concept paper” out of these conversations which can be used to solicit funds for the actual research

PHASE 1: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

- Development of relationships of trust among existing levels of contacts
- Identification of 5 city gatherings
- Identification of onsite liaisons for each of the 5 cities
- Gathering of potential participant list (250 potential participant list)
- Stakeholder Analysis (size, geographic area, platform, generational differences, immigration status, gender, voice, denomination, ordination status)
- Top 10 places within cities (50-75 participants broken up into 5 segments)
- Incentivization of participation
- 4-5 hour days
- Utilization of two PhD Researchers, with access to the protocols to the Institutional Review Board practices, for emerging themes across faith, religion, and fundraising
- Creation of a community of colleagues for future support and learning, and to gather again in Phase 3
- Qualitative Report on emerging themes across faith communities of color
- Identification of types of questions and themes to explore for Phase 2
- Initial publication of findings

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
- Qualitative Assessment of Qualitative Tool and Process in preparation for Phase 3

PHASE 3: INTEGRATION AND DISSEMINATION

- Publication of Phase 1 and Phase 2 findings
- Review and reflection of findings from Quantitative Study
- 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

In Conclusion

There is little research or common knowledge concerning the resources leaders in communities of color bring to bear on an ever changing ministry landscape. Existing mainline Church structures, habits of life, and questions we ask, are built around assumptions of the North American Church and a world of 40, 50, and 60 years ago. That church took for granted a predominantly white, often middle and upper-middle class population.

Further, the altered landscape of religious giving is well documented through research and analysis supported by Giving USA, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, and Connected to Give: Faith Communities. As we understand more about savvy donors and the impact of faith on giving, we have an opportunity to explore in greater detail, how demographic, generational, and cultural and socio-economic differences align with the tenants of giving – relationship development, establishing trust, effective vision casting and the impact of discipleship development. We must be as attentive to how people understand money, raising resources and financial support, as we are to the distinct ways that different populations understand resources, fundraising, stewardship and generosity. At our best, the Church embraces and learns from the distinct worship, and preaching traditions of various faith communities. Fundraising portends to offer the same benefits.

It will be in the funding of this proposal that ministries will have the resources they need to transform the world.