



Transforming Challenges Into Opportunities

Client Story: Feasibility Study and Capital Campaign for Religious Community of Women

The Situation

A large community of women religious faced an uncertain future with an aging physical plant, increasing health concerns of its members and insufficient funding for its ministries.

The Challenge

The community wanted to renovate their chapel, upgrade the monastery and other community properties, and create a ministry fund. The community, however, had not conducted a capital campaign or any other major fundraising campaign since the monastery was built in the 1960s.

Although the community had a large number of loyal friends and supporters, the sisters had no idea what a capital campaign might raise and decided to seek professional help about how to proceed. In addition, community members were reluctant to ask for money for their own needs.

The Reid Group Solution

The Reid Group consultants met with community leadership to review the community's fund development activities as well as to begin the relationship-building process that is a vital component of any successful fundraising campaign. As a result of these initial meetings, The Reid Group suggested a preliminary goal of \$2 – 3 million for a campaign.

Importance of a feasibility study

The preliminary goal for the campaign was just an estimate. In order to assess the amount of support that existed for a capital campaign, The Reid Group recommended a feasibility study. The Reid Group executed the feasibility study, interviewing a representative sample of the community's friends and supporters.

Toward setting the goal

After the first interviews, it became apparent that the goal of \$2 – 3 million underestimated the potential support of the community's friends and potential donors. When all the interviews were completed, the feasibility study showed that a goal of \$4 – 6 million was more appropriate.

All the feasibility study interviews included this crucial question: “Without making a commitment, what level of contribution would you be willing to make over a three-five year period?” In this study, this question surfaced a major donor for the community who indicated that the community was already named as a beneficiary in his will and that he would consider a contribution at the top of the gift pyramid.

Even with this kind of positive indication, the sisters were uncertain about the amount to ask of this donor. The Reid Group consultants encouraged them to be bold—and they received a pledge of \$2 million, an amount that the donor eventually exceeded.

Keeping the faith

With the \$2 million pledge, The Reid Group recommended that the goal of the capital campaign be raised to \$8 million. As they had throughout the whole process, the sisters engaged in a collaborative decision-making process that incorporated input from the community as well as the consultants. With this feedback, The Reid Group developed a plan and a timeline for the solicitation of gifts that eventually raised a little over \$9 million.

At this point, as had been the case throughout the campaign, it was important to keep the mission and goals of the campaign in front of the community and to reinforce the belief that the goal is reachable. Like many religious communities, the sisters had not “tested the waters” of the support available among their friends and supporters in a long time, and were reluctant to “bother” them with fundraising requests.

Outcomes

The execution of the feasibility study and capital campaign did more for the community than raising more than four times the original campaign goal. It enabled the community to complete much more of its “wish list” of necessary renovations to the monastery, chapel and community properties as well as to create a ministry fund. More importantly, it solidified and intensified the support and commitment of its very loyal group of friends and donors.

Strengthening and deepening community is the by-product of a successful fundraising campaign, one that this religious community realized fourfold.