School Fundraising for Parents

The Donor Cultivation Cycle
Participants were reminded that fundraising is just talking to people you know, and giving them an opportunity to support something worthwhile. People bring different strengths to the fundraising process – some people are comfortable selling products while; others are good at creating events, and some are comfortable making a direct ask. Remember that people give to people because they are asked!

Donor Identification
- Identify your own “sphere of influence.” These are the people that you already know who may or may not know that you are passionate about public school.
- Take advantage of opportunities to meet and get to know new people at work events, parties, school events, neighborhood association, or community meetings, etc.
- Consider whose interests are served by the success of your school: parents and grandparents, neighbors, realtors, and other local business people. One school is reaching out to its alumni, and asking them to identify former classmates to schedule one-on-one conversations about the exciting opportunities at their school.

Cultivating Relationships
- A request for money should not be the first or even second communication that a prospective donor receives. Engage prospective donors and connect them to your school before you ask anyone for financial support.
- The most effective fundraisers are good listeners! Listen to potential supporters to determine what their interests are. Parents have an interest in programs that directly benefit their children, but neighbors without children may be interested in campus beautification, or traffic and safety projects. Retired people might be interested in volunteer opportunities. Local business people may have an interest in connecting with families who are potential customers.
- Stay in touch and share news about what's happening at your school, including success stories and opportunities to get involved. Think about the people you are cultivating, and what their interests are. Alumni or local business people might participate in a career day event, some people might welcome opportunities to volunteer on campus while others might attend an evening program or event.
- Create opportunities for members of the community to visit your school. Perhaps the Police Department or Neighborhood Association would hold one of its public meetings on your campus.
- Think about different methods of communication, including your neighborhood association bulletins, e-newsletters, email, notes, social media, Nextdoor App, your website and your marquee.
- Maintain good will and be a good neighbor. Remind parents to observe safe drop-off procedures and not to block neighbors’ driveways. One private school cultivates their neighbors by leaving a poinsettia and a thoughtful note on neighbors’ doorsteps at the winter break.
Asking For Support

Once you have identified who cares about your school and why, think about how much they might be able to give and how much to ask for.

- Remember that you are not asking people for a handout. You are asking them to make an investment and giving them an opportunity to support something that they care about.
- Some of the best fundraisers are storytellers, and the best stories incorporate information as well as a personal anecdote that connects the prospect with a real person and situation.
- There is a universal case to be made for public education, but you will be more successful if you are clear and specific about what you are asking them to support, and what the outcome will be.

During the workshop, participants paired off to practice asking for support for a specific project. In the following example, note how Jim first presents the idea to Katarina to see what she thinks, and follows up by asking about her own interest in gardening. He also gives her an option of giving time, names a specific amount, but gives her the opportunity to give at a level where she is comfortable:

Jim: We are thinking about starting a community garden on the corner of our school campus, and I know your house is right across the street.
Kat: Your school could use a face-lift.
Jim: The kids want to start a garden, and we're looking for volunteer help or a small donation. Do you garden?
Kat: A little bit.
Jim: Would you have some time to volunteer?
Kat: No.
Jim: Could you support our project with a monetary donation?
Kat: Well... how much?
Jim: We're asking for up to $150. Could you give $150?
Kat: I could do $100.

Another participant talked about his sales experience: "I emphasize the benefits and hold off naming the price. Timing is important; if they seem hesitant, I tell them I can call them back in a few months – before they have a chance to say no. The people who eventually buy appreciate my being persistent and polite." Then, stay in touch in between calls. Give prospective donors opportunities to get to know you and your school or project, so that when the time is right, "the ask" is really an opportunity for them to give to a project they care about.

Stewardship

Your relationship with a donor does not end when they give you money. In addition to acknowledging their gift directly, continue to cultivate the relationship by letting them know how their money was put to use and provide updates on the project. Continue to keep them informed about your school and to give them opportunities to be involved to the extent they are interested.
Annual Funds
The Pasadena Educational Foundation (PEF) raises funds for the district, supports teachers, provides enrichment programs throughout PUSD, and supports schools with their Annual Funds. Annual funds are a way for school communities to raise money for programming and personnel with few restrictions.

PEF will help schools structure and implement a fundraising plan. They also receive deposits, log donor information, ensure funds are dispersed according to school agreements, provide statements to schools, and complete IRS tax reporting and donor letters. A 5% fee on the fund balance is charged for these services.

Annual Funds and PTA
- PTA funds are more restricted in how they can be used and must be spent on projects that benefit the whole school.
- PTA may elect to "organize or support educational programs" – including those that involve "hiring staff by gifting monies to school districts" – subject to PTA guidelines and insurance limitations." A PTA can act in the capacity of employer, though PTA's guidelines discourage this approach, in part because it entails the PTA unit meeting all relevant IRS requirements.
- PTA budgets should include some carry-over amount appropriate for costs expected to be incurred at the beginning of the school year, however all projects and programs must be voted on and approved by the current year's membership before any expenditure may be made.
- The PTA budget can include a gift to the school's Annual Fund, provided it will be used for something that benefits the entire school.
- PTA funds and Annual Funds must be kept separate.

Working Together
PTA and Annual Funds should remember that they are not in competition since all funds raised will benefit the students. Parents representing all parent groups should work together and with school administration to achieve the school's goals.