

Fundraising in This Shifting Economy

by Vicki Blazejowski

To many parents of children, the summer months mean vacations, trips to the beach, and weeks of recuperating from the hectic days of school. But for those involved in their school's parent-teacher organization (PTO, PTA, PTG, PA, or PAC), July and August are also a great time to make a plan for the upcoming school year!

The economy has been in a state of flux for the the past year. But families realize that the economy goes in cycles so they are spending less, saving more, and waiting it out. Any organization that relies on donations from these families needs to adjust as well.

Kevin P. Martin & Associates, one of Massachusetts leading CPA firms, recently hosted a philanthropy summit. KPM invited a panel of top nonprofits and guest speakers to openly discuss the shifting in the economy and the steps non-profit organizations (NPO) are taking in response. As a group, these NPO's all agreed on these few key points...

Now is the time for Innovation. Foster new ideas and try other things. This includes decreasing costs while increasing outcomes. PTO's should consider new fundraising concepts that keep costs low while allowing the profitable outcome to soar. The *PTO Ideas' Educational Challenge* is a perfect example of adapting the old fundraising concepts behind a walk-a-thon or telethon and making them new. By applying these basics to an educational spelling test, it's a concept that appeals to the school families and is concious of their current spending (and savings) habits.

Innovation also gives wonderful media/press coverage; not only for your organization, but also for your sponsors. Sponsors will want to be involved in a successful, unique event because the result will mean positive coverage in the community news.

Speaking of Sponsors, you must **stay connected to these donors and foster these relationships**. Don't just ask for money and walk away. In addition to sending a "Thank You" note, plan to publicize their involvement in a successful fundraiser in the local newspaper, invite them to a year-end celebration, and keep them updated on other

positive events happening within the school throughout the year.

Now is the time to be Proactive. Make a list of things you'd like to accomplish in the upcoming year (and even three years) and actually work toward completing them! Plan ahead by preparing a PTO Events Calendar. Writing down all of your fundraising programs, family fun events, and enrichment plans in an organized calendar format will help you see more clearly how these events will be carried out throughout the school year. Write down your goals and carry them out!

Diversify your revenue streams. Don't rely on a single type of fundraiser. Just as you would never invest all of your money into a single stock, you must look to different types of fundraisers to make a complete portfolio.

But to do this effectively, you must **know your market and what they are capable of.** You need to know the capacity of your donors so that when you do ask for a donation, you are asking for a donation within their means.

And finally, **collaborate with other organizations.** Plan a city-wide Walk-a-thon, Yard Sale, or Earth Day event. Invite other schools as well as your sponsors to join in the activities. Because individually you can scale a mountain, collectively we can move it!