

# YMCA DEVELOPMENTS

## Sitting Down with Cygnus

**Penelope Burke, President**  
**Scott Koblyk, Director of Client Services**  
Cygnus Applied Research, Inc.



**C**ygnum Applied Research, Inc. is a research-based fundraising consulting firm serving the not-for-profit sector. Cygnus is recognized as the innovator of one of the most important modern day fundraising philosophies, *Donor-Centered Fundraising*.

The firm recently finished a major research project with NAYDO on converting members to donors. Cygnus President, as well as author and speaker, Penelope Burke, and Director of Client Services, Scott Koblyk, took a few moments to talk to *Developments* about this project.



**Cygnus has done work on behalf of NAYDO in the past. How does this recent project build on that research?**

This is our fourth contract with NAYDO and our relationship dates back to 2005. Initially, Cygnus was brought in because North American Urban Group/Metro 30 Chief Development Officers had an interest in developing major gifts through existing donors. At the time, I had written my first book on donor-centered fundraising and YMCA professionals from across North America had seen me speak on the subject at various conferences. The idea was starting to catch on, and members of NAUG/Metro 30 CDOs felt that it was an important concept to explore. We started by looking at active YMCA donors and exploring the potential of how much more they were capable of giving. Through the hard work

of about a dozen YMCA sites, we found that measurable improvements in the gift values of existing donors could be achieved with the introduction of some simple, concrete, strategies. All of this data eventually led to the basis of what is now known as *The Green Book*. (Note: *The Green Book* is a companion to the famous *YMCA Red Book* but it focuses on major gifts rather than annual giving. *The Green Book* has been covered extensively in the last few issues of *Developments*).

**When did Cygnus start the current research project on Member-to-Donor fundraising and what were the parameters?**

The process started in 2007, and by late that year, we had finished choosing the test sites through an application process. The sites were:

- Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (see page 4 for details)
- Decatur, Georgia (see page 5 for details)
- Ann Arbor, Michigan (see page 6 for details)

The actual pilot phase was about a year and a half—from early 2008 until September 2009. The application process was thorough, as we needed to ensure that the three final pilot sites had the capacity to deliver on the program. By this we mean that they had the full support of their CEO; an adequate number of staff to devote to the project; and both the data management capabilities and financial resources to dedicate to the work. It's important to note, though, that what we learned at the end of this exercise can be applied to any YMCA.

**As the experts in the concept of Donor-Centered Fundraising, did you have any pre-conceived notions about what the outcomes of the study would be before you started?**

When Cygnus conducts investigation and control testing we may be able to make educated guesses about some outcomes, but we don't assume anything when we design a project. That said, probably about 90% of what we uncover

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### Summer 2010

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North American YMCA  
Development Organization  
[naydo.org](http://naydo.org)



**NAYDO**  
NORTH AMERICAN YMCA  
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

# Message from the Chair

**Bryan Webber**

*VP, Financial Development*

YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford

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I believe that with the exciting brand reviews underway at Y-USA and YMCA Canada, the future is very promising for continued growth in YMCA philanthropy. With the assistance of some of the world's best marketing and brand development experts, our national movements are making great progress on this important work. YMCAs in the US and Canada will soon be able to shift from thinking of themselves as a "charity with a lot of good programs and services," to a "cause that has a significant impact on strengthening community, and the development of children, youth and families." We will have a stronger story to tell, and a wonderful opportunity to work more closely with our peers in programming, to deliver on the promise that we make to our donors.

The NAYDO Council has also been busy working on a new strategic plan, the key elements of which are summarized on the next page.

Your NAYDO Council looks forward to serving and supporting you and your YMCA in what may be a whole new era in YMCA Philanthropy. Stay tuned for information on upcoming webinars and other learning opportunities throughout the year, and begin to make plans to join us at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual NAYDO Conference in Anaheim, California, April 27-30, 2011. We are committed to building on the success of the 2010 NAYDO Conference, and to "Advancing the Dream" in Anaheim, for YMCAs across the continent. Go to [naydo.org](http://naydo.org) for all the details.

Enjoy the fruits of your labour this summer. Our best to each of you throughout 2010.

**Bryan Webber**, *Chair*  
North American YMCA  
Development Organization



Bryan Webber, pictured on a Friday afternoon after a long week, enjoying a snack and a bit of indoor skate boarding with children in the Virtual YMCA program—a unique community outreach program of the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford, modeled after a similar program developed by the YMCA of Greater New York, that "turns a school in to a YMCA" at the end of each day. Thanks to YMCA donors, this is a fully subsidized program that provides children with the additional help and attention they need to develop their academic and socialization skills in order to improve their capacity to learn and reach their full potential.



SAVE THE DATE

## NAYDO 2011

30<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on  
YMCA Philanthropy

April 27–30, 2011  
Marriott Anaheim  
Anaheim, California

**Registration Opens July 15**

Register online at [naydo.org](http://naydo.org) or call the office at 504.464.7845. Fees include all meals and new for this year: save \$20 on the staff fee if you pay in full by the NAYDO Members Only deadline of October 29, 2010.

**Hotel Reservations Open Now**

Marriott Anaheim  
700 West Convention Way  
Anaheim, California 92802  
800.266.9432 (for reservations)  
Mention NAYDO for special room rates.



# Strategic Plan 2010–2012

For the last twenty-nine years, NAYDO has helped build capacity for philanthropy in YMCAs across the continent. To build on this solid foundation and deepen the organization's impact, the NAYDO Council recently embarked on a strategic planning process to address a number of priorities for the period between 2010-2012.

As part of the process, the NAYDO Council reviewed key environmental data and analyzed information gathered from surveys and interviews with close to 200 individuals representing a broad range of constituencies, including the following:

- NAYDO Council
- NAYDO volunteer members
- YMCA CEOs
- YMCA Chief Development Officers
- Staff from YMCA of the USA and YMCA Canada
- Non-member YMCAs
- International YMCA leaders

Based on the combined insights of these constituents and an analysis of the data, the NAYDO Council has formulated a plan with five strategic priorities along with a set of corresponding goals. Through the implementation of this strategic plan, NAYDO seeks to make a greater contribution to the advancement of philanthropy at YMCA associations—and for the children, youth and families they engage—throughout North America.

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Through the implementation of this strategic plan, NAYDO seeks to make a greater contribution to the advancement of philanthropy at YMCA associations...throughout North America.

## Education

NAYDO will support the personal development of YMCA professionals through the annual conference, year-round learning programs, targeted member resources and professional-development partnerships with certified fundraising organizations.

### Goals:

- Continue to enhance the NAYDO conference experience.
- Advance alternative methods of philanthropic education for YMCAs beyond the annual conference.
- Create new resources for members and strengthen existing resources.
- Offer additional professional development opportunities.

## Research and Development

Knowledge gained from NAYDO sponsored research initiatives will help YMCAs have a direct impact on their front line fundraising activities. NAYDO is uniquely positioned to serve as a resource to YMCA leaders and associations in this area by identifying demographic trends, unlocking potential sources of philanthropic support and sharing best practices.

### Goals:

- Improve utilization of current and future research within North American YMCAs.
- Evaluate and share best practices in philanthropy.

## Communications

Success in building philanthropic capacity in YMCAs is dependent on good communications to our members.

### Goals:

- Develop and implement a new comprehensive communications plan.
- Enhanced delivery of value-added information to members (*Developments*).
- Review and advance NAYDO Communications Awards program to encourage best practices and recognition of excellence.

## Membership Development

NAYDO will grow its membership through effective engagement with current members, and initiatives to recruit new YMCA Association members.

### Goals:

- Increase NAYDO membership and retention.
- Advance NAYDO member recognition for achievements in philanthropy.

## Strengthening its relationship with the YMCA Philanthropy Alliance

NAYDO is committed to strengthening its relationship with the YMCA Philanthropy Alliance by aligning resources, supporting the growth of annual-support campaigns and promoting the importance of philanthropy throughout the movement.

### Goals:

- Align resources and initiatives with YMCA Philanthropy Alliance partners to maximize the advancement of philanthropy at YMCAs in North America.
- Support the growth of YMCA annual support campaigns.
- Serve as an enthusiastic advocate for the growth of philanthropy with the YMCA of the USA and YMCA Canada.
- Collaborate with YMCA of the USA and YMCA Canada in branding the YMCA as a cause worthy of philanthropic support.



Cygnus Applied Research  
Member-to-Donor Project Test Site:

## Hamilton Downtown YMCA



**Kate Walton**  
*Manager, Communications*  
YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/  
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The Hamilton Downtown Family YMCA sits directly in the core of Hamilton in the province of Ontario. It is the eighth largest city in Canada with a population of 714,000 and is Ontario's most economically diverse city, with industry that includes advanced manufacturing, health care and life sciences, film and television production, agriculture and education. Known as a blue-collar city, nearly 25% of Hamiltonians are foreign-born and 20% live at or below the poverty line, 24% of which are children.

In the heart of this community is the YMCA. Although the branch has a membership base of 4,500, it serves as a hub for thousands more in the form of outreach programs for children and families who can't get to the YMCA. 50% of members are financially assisted. As one of five Membership Centres in the Association, the Downtown YMCA has an operating budget of \$3million (approximately 9% of the Association budget) and has the largest contingency of members with over 50 years of continuous membership than any other YMCA in Canada.

Despite the strong presence in the community, recent years have shown a steady decline in donor retention (50% in 2005 to 28.2% in 2008). On average approximately 70% of all active donors are newly acquired, an extremely high rate of donor turnover annually. As acquisition volumes have increased, average gift size has dropped.

Cygnus Applied Research recommended the YMCA Member to Donor Conversion Strategy in Hamilton focus on building the overall giving program to encourage multi-year donor retention by incorporating three primary goals:

- Seek to acquire or reacquire approximately 300 member-donors annually

- Focus strategies on retaining existing member-donors and retain at least 50% of new acquisitions into the second year
- Maintain an average gifts size of \$75 for new acquisitions and ensure that the contributions from multi-year supporters rises over time

Phase One, the Communication Plan, focused on building and delivering several recommendations that would educate members about the charitable nature of the YMCA and cultivate new donors. Eleven out of the 14 recommendations were implemented with varying degrees of success.

The basis for all communications was two-fold: a focused Case for Support and two pie charts that illustrated to members where their membership fees are spent and how their donations are used. The Case served as the messaging and focused our fundraising on three priority areas. The charts reinforced and complemented the Case with an underlying message that no portion of the membership fees are reinvested at the YMCA to financially assist other members. The charts were hung throughout the YMCA and were incorporated into the other communications recommendations as a stop on new member tours, member renewal letters, speaking points for staff at the membership desk, volunteer training, open letters to members, and member solicitation calls.

Two major challenges became apparent in Phase One. Many of the recommendations required the participation of front line staff, which was a time consuming task, given the staggered integration of the recommendations and a lack of established staff training format. Secondly, the YMCA membership database and the fundraising database were separate entities and did not interface with each other. Several recommendations involved knowing details about members and donors which was not shared between the two databases, therefore creating a lot of manual purging of lists and dual entry in database systems, a challenge that grew in Phase Two.

Phase Two, moved the YMCA from cultivation to solicitation, focusing on various vehicles of giving, which included improvements to on-line

giving, direct mail, front desk asks, and a phone campaign. This process began by identifying all members who had renewed their membership at least once and that had never given a gift to the YMCA. Again a manual comparison was completed. In the end, 2,061 members fit the criteria. They were then subdivided as test groups for the various forms of solicitation. Prior to execution a full volunteer training was held, which focused on the Case priorities and brought in an external expert to lead the group in an activity and discussion on effective face-to-face solicitation.

As the YMCA progressed through each phase some learnings became apparent:

- The importance of consolidating databases is essential to efficient execution, prospecting, data collection and future reporting.
- A strong Case for Support makes a volunteer's job easier and a prospect more likely to give.
- Quality volunteer training and on-going support is essential to preparing and inspiring volunteers, regardless of how experienced they are.
- We must use a variety of communication vehicles to educate members and donors.
- Solicitation methodology is less important than simply ensuring a member is asked.

In the end, the project's solicitation strategies had a clear impact on average gift values – specifically-targeted prospects made gifts that were 88% larger on average. However these targeted prospects accounted for less than half of the total number of new member-donor acquisitions. 57% of new giving members had no known solicitation strategy applied to them. The Campaign saw an 8% increase in dollars raised over the previous year raising \$110,000. The Campaign saw a 112% increase in donors from the previous year, 30% of which were identified as new donors.

The Hamilton YMCA will plan to roll out a number of the recommendations across the entire Association in future campaigns to increase member-donors. Although the YMCA recognizes the importance of donor acquisition through members, donor growth and retention will continue to be a top priority.



Cygnus Applied Research  
Member-to-Donor Project Test Site:

## Decatur-DeKalb Family YMCA



**Stacey Stevens**  
*Director of Development*  
Metro Atlanta YMCA  
Decatur-DeKalb Family YMCA  
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The Decatur-DeKalb Family YMCA is one of 26 branches of the Metro Atlanta YMCA. Located in the City of Decatur, the second oldest municipality in the Metro Atlanta area, the YMCA was built in 1960 and maintains a membership base of approximately 8,800. With its tenure brings generations of families who have “grown-up” at this Y.

While each strategy implemented brought a measure of success, two stood out:

- 1) communicating the need for charitable support to members and,
- 2) effectively training volunteers to ask members for donations.

### Communicating the Need

We knew the only way to provide prospects and donors with the knowledge of what gifts help us achieve was to develop a case for support limited to one to two priority programs tied to measurable outcomes. The limited case for support provided the detail from which all communications were developed.

For us, two important strategies, our “Impact” letters and the “Storyboard” exhibit evolved from our limited case for support. Both played a key role in educating members about the role of philanthropy in the YMCA and served as a tool for helping volunteers when making the “hallway close” during the active solicitation period. We discovered several key learnings from these two communication strategies. One was by identifying stories that illustrated the case (vs. building the case around the stories we found). Two, was the act of pairing the stories with powerful photography. Combining the two gave them overwhelming impact.

### Enhanced Volunteer Training

We learned that well trained and motivated volunteers are by far the most powerful tool to the YMCA to secure member-donors. Training moved away from simple role playing and campaign management logistics to informing campaigners about the limited case for support priorities and solicitation using a Case Study methodology. Campaign handouts were pieces that:

- 1) briefly described the case priorities, and
- 2) had a one-page description of how to make a fundraising call.

We learned that with this training, new volunteers working with cold lists of member-prospects can be as efficient as experienced volunteers in closing new member donor gifts.

### Results

The Decatur-DeKalb YMCA exceeded its goal to convert 125 new member donors by 50 – 175 new member donors were acquired. In addition, the new member donor average gift value increased by 44% and total dollars raised from new member donors increased by 70%. New member donors as a percentage of total donations increased by 50%. These results are a clear indication that, as a whole, the member donor communication and acquisition strategies employed had significant impact.



Two key communication strategies were discovered: identifying stories that illustrate the case (vs. building the case around the stories found); and pairing the stories with powerful photography. Combining the two gave them overwhelming impact.

Cygnus Applied Research  
Member-to-Donor Project Test Site:

## Ann Arbor YMCA



**Cathi Duchon**  
*President*  
Ann Arbor YMCA  
cduchon@annarborymca.org

The Ann Arbor YMCA's participation in the Cygnus Member – Donor project occurred at a time when the Association was planning to initiate a new effort to engage more members as donors. Because the opening of a new facility increased the number of YMCA members by three fold, and the member market penetration into the city of Ann Arbor was well over 15%, it was clear that YMCA members were an obvious source of philanthropic support.

With the Cygnus project, the Ann Arbor YMCA had the opportunity to initiate new strategies that were focused on the member as donor. While not all strategies worked at all three test sites, the learning came with the things that worked, as well as those that did not work.

It is important to understand that the recruitment of members as new donors is not a short-term effort. As part of the project the test YMCAs devoted five months to the Communication phase of the work. Before any member was asked for a gift to the YMCA Strong Kids campaign, a series of education activities took place.

We learned that YMCA members would contribute to YMCA programs if they were aware of the benefits to the youth and the community.

The learnings, for the purpose of this article, will be divided into two segments: Communication and Conversion.

### Communication

Communication takes place during the months before and after the actual campaign – before and after the “ask.” The top five things learned in this phase of the project:

- Differentiate for members between member dues and contributions. It is critical that members know and understand that their membership dues are not a contribution. Graphic depiction using pie charts to present “Membership Fees at Work” with “Donations at Work” was one technique. In addition, all staff and

volunteers must be equipped with the answer to the question “why should I give to the YMCA if I already pay membership dues?”

- Members must understand the YMCA as philanthropy. This can best be done through continuous communication, which links the YMCA to a cause – identifying community needs and expressing how the YMCA is meeting those needs.
- Stories about the cause of the YMCA must be communicated in different mediums and continuously – newsletters, posters around the facility - with photos, quotes, and impact statements. Members became better educated about all YMCA programs, and specifically the programs supported by the Strong Kids campaign.
- Members (and all donors) need follow up communication about how the YMCA used the money that was contributed. A very successful technique, which is now a common practice for the Ann Arbor YMCA, is to send a “pure thank you letter” every fall to every donor. This letter contains a story or quote, which allows the donor to know, first hand, the value of their gift.
- Develop a consistent financial assistance message and be certain that this message appears on all member materials, including the web site. Language should indicate that “through the generous contributions of our donors, the YMCA provides financial assistance.” It is important to link the availability of financial assistance with philanthropy.

### Conversion

Conversion strategies were the methods used to actually ask the member for a contribution to the YMCA.

The goal in the Ann Arbor YMCA project was to increase the number of member donors by 300. The Conversion phase of this project focused on the volunteer solicitor. The top five things learned in the Conversion phase of the project:

- It was determined that in order to increase the number of member donors, the number of member solicitors needed to increase. During the project year the number of member solicitors was 90% of the total.

- New solicitors (campaigners) were trained with different techniques and were carefully tracked throughout the campaign. Results for new campaigners were extremely positive in terms of success rates using a variety of methods to solicit donors, which resulted in an increased average gift amount from new donors. Volunteer lack of experience need not limit recruiting: well-trained new volunteers can be as effective as returning volunteers.
- An excellent tool was to give (new) campaigners a phrase and specific amount to ask first-time donors, for example: “I’d like you to consider making a \$100 gift to the Strong Kids Campaign.”
- Solicitors were encouraged to ask members whom they knew. Solicitors were not successful with “cold calling” YMCA members.
- YMCA members were not yet ready to respond in big numbers to direct mail and wide-distribution e-mail solicitations. Ann Arbor YMCA volunteers used impromptu face-to-face asks, phone calls and personalized emails most often.

### Summary of Key Findings:

An effective communication plan, even in the absence of specific solicitations, will have a positive impact on giving.

Trained volunteers are the most powerful fundraising tool for acquiring new member-donors, particularly at a higher gift level.

Well-trained new volunteers working with lists of member-prospects whom they know can be as effective as experienced volunteers in closing new member-donor gifts.

YMCA members can be one of the best sources for increasing annual contributions. As this project demonstrates, well-trained and motivated volunteers are an invaluable tool for communicating the philanthropic mission among YMCA members and helping create a sustainable donor base. In addition, increased numbers of donors as part of the membership base provide a higher number of committed YMCA members.

# NAYDO 2010

## Conference Review

# NAYDO 2010



ONE WORLD  
ONE YMCA



All photos by Jason Miczek

NAYDO 2010 Conference Review:

# Communications Awards

## Criteria for Entries

- Each entry must have been used in the previous 18 months (June 2008 – November 2009).
- The entry must possess a distinctive caliber of excellence in its own right.
- The piece must support a financial development effort and have demonstrated, measurable success.
- The communication must inspire a gift from the target audience.
- The piece’s design should be clean, easy to read/hear, attractive, easy to follow and make good use of color.
- The entry’s imagery should evoke emotion and portray the YMCA’s mission and goals.
- The piece’s cost must be perceived as reasonable relative to the development goal and the resources of the YMCA - both in terms of total and per piece cost.
- Audiovisual pieces must be well scripted with a focus on the case.
- Audiovisual pieces must capture the audience’s attention in the first few minutes, and the piece should be 10 minutes or less.
- All entries must follow national YMCA graphic standards applicable to the country. These standards are available at [www.naydo.org](http://www.naydo.org).

## Categories

### Print

- Annual Report
- Annual Support Campaign
- Capital Campaign
- General Case Interpretation
- Donor Cultivation
- Integrated Comprehensive Campaign

### Audio/Visual

- Website
- Annual Support Campaign
- General Case Interpretation
- Integrated Comprehensive Campaign

## 2010 Judges

**Kathryn Dobbs**, Contest Chair

*Director of Development, Frost Valley YMCA*

**Judy Hayner**

*Vice President, Marketing and Communications, YMCA of Silicon Valley*

**Kevin Shermach**

*Sr. Executive Director, Communication & Positioning, YMCA of Greater New York*

**Jennifer Rignani**

*Vice President, Development and Communications, YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh*

**Jamie Slater**

*Manager, Association Communications, YMCA of Greater Toronto*

**Todd Gray**

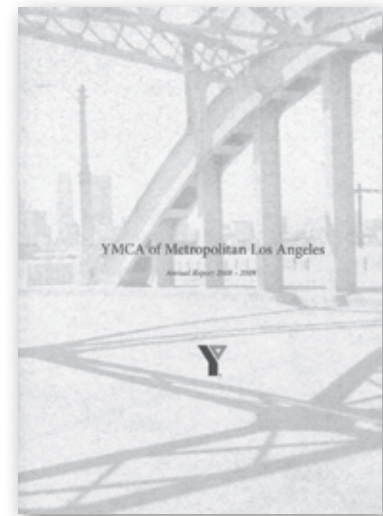
*Vice President of Marketing and Communications, YMCA of Greater Richmond*

**Rachel McDonald**

*Communication and Public Relations Director, Freedom Valley YMCA*

## Special thanks to the following for their assistance with the 2010 NAYDO Communications Awards Luncheon:

- Awards Program - Aimee DeHaven (YMCA of Central Kentucky)
- Awards Displays - Todd Gray & Larissa Tyler (YMCA of Greater Richmond)
- Audio/Visual Presentation - Kevin Shermach (YMCA of Greater New York)
- Graphic Standards Review/Confirmation - Sara Ryan & Wendy Currie (YMCA of the USA), and Janet Emmett (YMCA Canada)



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**GREATER THAN \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles**  
Jennifer Mau, [jennifermau@ymcala.org](mailto:jennifermau@ymcala.org)



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**\$25 - \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford**  
Kate Walton, [katherine.walton@ymca.ca](mailto:katherine.walton@ymca.ca)



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**\$10 - \$25 MILLION BUDGET**

**Akron Area YMCA**  
Doreen Vanchoff, doreen@caler.com



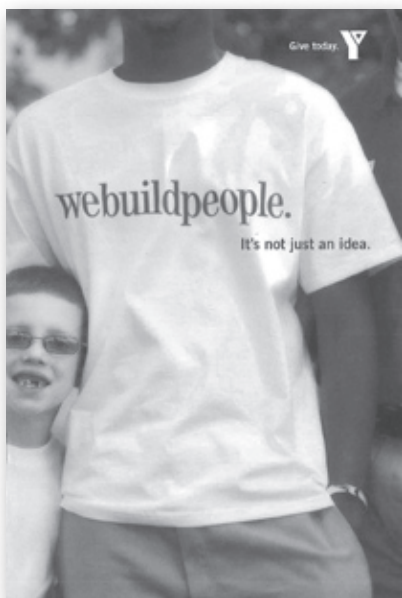
**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**  
**\$25 - \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Greater Richmond**  
Larissa Tyler, tylerl@ymcarichmond.org



**DONOR CULTIVATION**  
**\$25 - \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Greater Richmond**  
Larissa Tyler, tylerl@ymcarichmond.org



**ANNUAL SUPPORT CAMPAIGN**  
**GREATER THAN \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of the Triangle Area**  
Brad Davis, brad.davis@ymcatriangle.org



**ENDOWMENT & PLANNED GIVING**  
**\$10 - \$25 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Central Kentucky**  
Brenda Blakovich  
bblakovich@ymcaofcentralky.org

**Audio/Visual Awards**

**GENERAL CASE INTERPRETATION**  
**GREATER THAN \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles**  
Jennifer Mau  
jenniferm@ymcala.org

**GENERAL CASE INTERPRETATION**  
**\$2 - \$10 MILLION BUDGET**

**Capital District YMCA**  
Jackie McDonough  
jmcDonough@cdymca.org



**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**  
**\$25 - \$50 MILLION BUDGET**

**YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh**  
Jennifer Rignani, jrignani@ymcapgh.org

NAYDO 2010 Conference Review:

# Eagle Awards Excellence in Fundraising



The Eagle Awards showcase and acknowledge vibrant and thriving YMCA organizations who have demonstrated a sustained and exceptional commitment to building a culture of philanthropy within the communities they serve.

The Excellence in Fundraising Eagle Award is presented annually to both YMCA professionals and to associations that have demonstrated outstanding achievements in YMCA Financial Development.

**The 2010 Eagle Award Recipients:**

- Wapakoneta Family YMCA in West Central Ohio
- YMCA of the Inland Northwest in Spokane, Washington
- YMCA of Middle Tennessee in Nashville, Tennessee



Representing the Wapakoneta Family YMCA are on the left, Ruth Knous, President and CEO and third from the left, Van Wright, volunteer and former Board member. Presenting the award are Bryan Webber, Chair, NAYDO Council, YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford and Gail Glasser, Past Chair NAYDO Council, YMCA of Central Kentucky. The Wapakoneta Family YMCA was chartered in 1997 with a gift of 10.5 acres of land and they raised \$2.3 million on a \$1.8 million capital goal to build the facility in 1999. This YMCA continues to thrive with an ever-growing annual campaign, three additional capital campaigns, an innovative approach to endowment partnership and strong staff and volunteer leadership.



Accepting the award for the YMCA of the Inland Northwest, on the left, Julie Banks, Financial Development Director and Rig Riggins, President and CEO. This YMCA was recognized for its 274% increase in annual support over the past eight years and its unique joint capital campaign with the YWCA which has reached the 90% mark on its \$40.5 million goal.



The YMCA of Middle Tennessee began a comprehensive campaign for annual, capital, and endowment in 2004 with a goal of \$75 million and exceeded it by reaching \$77,209,742. Pledges to the annual campaign grew from \$3.9 million to \$5.6 million in five years and the collection rate soared from 89% to 94% in the same period. Accepting the award on behalf of the Association: left, Jeff Parsley, Chief Development Officer; center, Leilani Boulware, Board Chair; and right, Journey Johnson, President and CEO.

## Sitting Down with Cygnus

continued from the cover

during the course of a research project is reasonably predictable. However, it's the remaining 10% that really offers the surprises and thus where most of the learning comes from. That 10% is actionable; it's where our client will eventually end up making the changes that move the organization forward.

### What is the value of research?

We actually hear this question often from fundraisers who feel that they know their constituents fairly well. Staff members at your YMCA may have a gut feeling about why your donors are behaving the way they are or what obstacles exist within your organization to donor acquisition. Why shouldn't you just move ahead with sweeping changes? Intuition is a great thing, but until you test it, how will you know? Research gives us evidence and that is its primary value. We all know that change within an organization or among a group of people can be very difficult, not to mention costly. Why would you proceed with the change process until you have the evidence to back up your assumptions? Evidence gives staff the power to move ahead.

### From the valuable research that you conducted with our three YMCAs, were there any real surprises or big "aha" moments?

Of course...that's what makes this such exciting research! We are a little reluctant to just highlight one or two of the things that the pilot sites discovered because each one can be significant to a different YMCA depending on their challenges. For example, if your YMCA relies primarily on direct mail solicitations to current donors at this point, it may be incredible for you to find out that by adding one simple sentence to your letter copy, you can greatly increase your results. However, a few of the results will be startling to YMCAs across the board, in part, because they dismiss some long-held fundraising myths.

Successful fundraising does not need to be done face-to-face. We are not saying that personal solicitation has no place in your fundraising toolkit—far from it! But the research by our three YMCA pilot sites clearly bears out the need for volunteers and staff to be flexible with the options that they choose to reach donors. Sometimes it is best done at a personal, pre-arranged appointment, but other times it is more successful through an impromptu conversation in the hallway; by letter; or by email. As staff and volunteers, we need to use common sense and think about what works best for each individual prospect and not apply a "one size fits all approach". Cygnus found out from YMCA donors that the majority of the time that they were called on by current YMCA volunteers, they were never actually asked for a gift. The conversations were generally filled with pleasant "chit chat" and donors were asked to

"give what they could to the YMCA", but amounts were rarely mentioned. Happily, donors said that if they were asked by volunteers for a specific amount, they would gladly consider making that gift even if it represented an increase in their current giving level. This tells us that the YMCA needs to train volunteers differently and to give them more support from the moment they are engaged in a campaign through the entire process.

### How can I apply this Member-to-Donor research to my YMCA?

We wanted to make sure that the data gleaned through this project would be applicable to all YMCAs. In order to do that, it was critical to get Associations of all membership and budgetary sizes and from all different geographic areas. We ended up with one mid-size suburban Association in Canada; one small, single unit YMCA in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and a branch (Decatur) of one of the largest metropolitan Associations in North America, Atlanta. Regardless of the differences, each pilot site experienced

“Regardless of the differences, each pilot site experienced growth in gift size when they employed the tools that were suggested by Cygnus.”

growth in gift size when they employed the tools that were suggested by Cygnus. The strength of this research is in how you translate the strategies into your YMCA. For example, almost every YMCA conducts volunteer training and there is currently some dedication of resources—time and money. By applying what we have learned during

this process, you will still conduct training, but it will just be done differently in terms of its messaging and materials.





**NAYDO**

NORTH AMERICAN YMCA  
DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

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Kenner, Louisiana 70065  
USA



We build strong kids,  
strong families,  
strong communities.



Plus de vie à la vie  
des jeunes, des familles  
et de la communauté.

YMCA

## NAYDO North American YMCA Development Organization

### NAYDO Mission

To inspire and strengthen the philanthropic culture of the YMCA.

### Statement of Purpose

To lead, support, and advance the development of YMCA professionals, volunteers and YMCA associations in the philanthropic work of their YMCA through training, education, advocacy, research and knowledge sharing.

### Download this issue of *Developments*

If you would like an electronic version of this or past issues of *Developments* to share with volunteers and colleagues, please visit the NAYDO web site at [www.naydo.org](http://www.naydo.org).



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