Workplace Giving for Christian Ministries

“I’m a giver by nature,” Ida says. Passionate and generous, Ida has always tried to give back. She serves on the board of several nonprofits, contributes articles to church publications, and has actively volunteered in her denomination since 1987. In fact, the “Volunteer History” section of her résumé is longer than her employment history!

Over thirty years ago, Ida landed a HR job at an employer that offered a workplace giving campaign. She immediately began giving a small percentage of her entry-level salary. By the time she retired, she was giving $1,200 a year through her employer’s campaign.

Workplace giving has been a staple of the American philanthropic community for decades. From the first United Way campaign in 1888 to modern campaigns focused on electronic integration and donor choice, workplace giving allows donors to support their favorite ministries while also participating in the excitement of their workplace campaign.

Today, workplace giving programs reach more than 12 million employees and raise over $3 billion each year. Many ministries focus their fundraising on major donors. Workplace donors are generally not major donors – the average gift is around $5 per week – but over 52 weeks, the small gifts of millions of donors add up to billions of dollars annually.

Many Christian ministries receive significant funding from workplace giving campaigns. For example, in a 2013 study of 100 national and international ministries, we found that these charities raised an average of over $82,000 annually in workplace giving campaigns. Christian ministries cannot afford to overlook this important revenue stream.

"Workplace giving is a priority for our Advancement team," explains Wycliffe Bible Translators' Workplace Giving Manager. "We’ve invested time and effort in gaining access to campaign events, and have received many donations as a result. A number of donors give to Wycliffe year after year. Although times in workplace giving are constantly changing, we still count on workplace donations to fund strategic programs."

While most people associate workplace giving with the traditional United Way campaigns, many other models have become prevalent in recent years. Some employers now allow donors to designate their gift to any 501(c)3 charity. Other companies build relationships with a select group of charities and do not admit charities outside that group. Most government campaigns have set eligibility criteria and accept any charity that meets those standards.

Workplace campaigns have evolved in other ways as well. One major trend is the transition to electronic giving; a 2013 study found that 80% of campaigns have some electronic component. Also on the rise are company-sponsored volunteer programs and corporate matches of employee contributions. All of these changes are good news for the charities that receive financial and volunteer support from these campaigns.

In addition to benefiting charities, workplace giving campaigns offer many advantages to both employers and employees. Employers find that campaigns help build employee engagement and morale within their company. Employees appreciate the convenience of automatic payroll deductions and the satisfaction of being part of something beyond their everyday work. As charities also benefit from a steady revenue stream and strengthened corporate relationships, these campaigns are a win-win-win scenario from any angle.

So how can you start tapping into workplace giving campaigns? For private sector campaigns, leveraging existing relationships is key. Let major donors and board members know you are making an effort to enter
corporate campaigns. They may be willing to find out information about the process of entering their employer’s campaign, or even make a formal request to add your ministry to the campaign.

Second, apply to government workplace giving campaigns, which tend to be larger than corporate campaigns and have easier application processes. The eligibility criteria for government campaigns typically include financial, legal, and service requirements, such as conducting a financial audit or providing services within the campaign area. The vetting process assures the donor that their gift is used wisely and makes an impact. It is important to note that donations from government campaigns are not government funding; they are simply donations from individuals that work for the government and have voluntarily decided to give a financial gift through their workplace campaign.

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), open to federal, military, and USPS employees, is the world's largest workplace giving campaign. The CFC raises over $200 million annually and accounts for almost 10% of all workplace giving nationally. Participation in the CFC gets your ministry’s name and mission in front of 4.1 million employees, raising awareness of your organization. You can apply on your own, or join a federation like Christian Service Charities to get help with the application, marketing, and fiscal aspects of campaign participation.

Federation membership has other benefits as well. For example, Christian Service Charities provides access to and support for over 100 state, local, and corporate campaigns in addition to the CFC. Christian Service Charities also provides accreditation to members through training for best practices in workplace campaigns and other development areas. Christian Service Charities is also a great choice for ECFA members, as the only federation in the CFC to require a Statement of Faith.

At Christian Service Charities we are preparing to launch our applications for the 2015 CFC and other workplace giving campaigns. I encourage you to visit www.christianservicecharities.org or view our webinar on the ECFA website for more information about workplace giving campaigns and CSC membership. We are here to serve and want to help.

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