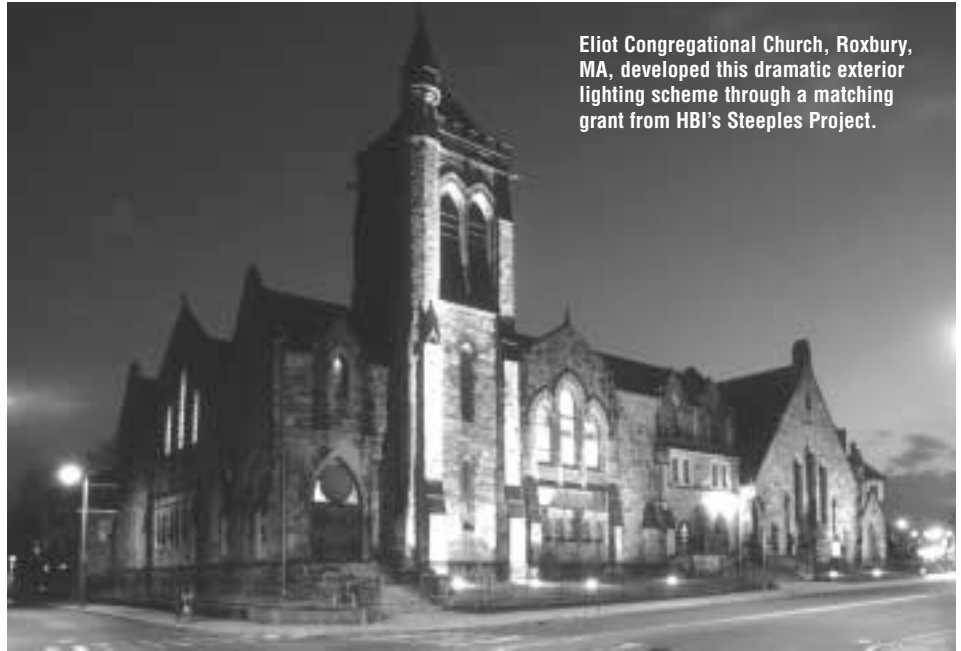


Historic Boston's Steeple Project Lights up the Skyline



Eliot Congregational Church, Roxbury, MA, developed this dramatic exterior lighting scheme through a matching grant from HBI's Steeples Project.

In the late 1980s, some of Boston's most historically and architecturally significant houses of worship were slipping into decline. A combination of aging buildings, deferred maintenance and changing demographics threatened the physical structure of these religious properties and jeopardized the social service programs housed there, many of which provided a lifeline to surrounding neighborhoods. To stem the tide of decline, Historic Boston Incorporated (HBI), a non-profit that puts people and resources together to preserve endangered historic sites in Boston, created the Steeples Project. The project provides matching grants of up to \$50,000 to Boston's historic churches and synagogues for technical assistance, major repairs and exterior lighting.

HBI's Steeples Project was part of a national movement in the mid-1980s to early 1990s, in which several local historic preservation groups began providing technical assistance, training, seed grants and capital grants to historic religious properties. What sets HBI apart from other groups in this movement is its focus on lighting steeples, towers and domes to emphasize the importance of sacred places in the urban skyline. HBI brokered an innovative community partnership with Boston's Public Works Department, Street Lighting Division, to enable sacred places to draw power for exterior lighting projects from the city lighting grid. "This is a miniscule cost to the city but it lifts a

great financial burden from the churches, temples and synagogues," says Jillian Adams, Project Manager for the Steeples Project. When the street lights come on, so do the spotlights on the steeples, towers and domes. In another example of forward thinking, HBI was the first organization outside of Philadelphia to sponsor Partners' *New Dollars/New Partners for Your Sacred Space* training for congregations.

With supervision from HBI staff and trained preservation specialists, Steeples Project grants fund comprehensive building conditions surveys; major repairs to building envelopes; and professional lighting designers to develop and install exterior lighting schemes. The project also teaches congregations about long-term planning for building maintenance and fundraising. Congregations can qualify for grants if they are: architecturally and historically significant, with steeples, towers or domes that are visual landmarks; endangered due to management, financial or demographic challenges; and provide human services that improve the quality of life in transitional Boston neighborhoods.

Since the Steeples Project started in 1993, HBI has raised over \$1.4 million from 15 charitable organizations, nearly all local to Boston. One of the greatest challenges HBI faces is making the case to funders for continued support. By building on the strengths of the project, paying close attention to feedback from

Editor's Note: Sacred Places focuses our Funding Brief this issue on a non-profit organization that makes grants to historic religious properties because its approach to raising continued support from foundations can serve as a model for other communities.

grant makers and keeping an eye on new funding possibilities, HBI has successfully funded the project for 13 years.

Making the Case for Urban Religious Properties as Community Service Anchors

In developing its case for the Steeples Project, HBI tied the buildings' repair needs to the critical role they played in the community—housing social service programs that strengthen and sustain struggling inner-city neighborhoods. HBI drew on the research and publication of its “Religious Property Casebook” (1991), which highlighted 40 endangered religious properties with historic and community significance, to demonstrate a critical need for the project. Recognizing that some funders are interested in restoring the outside of historically significant buildings while others are interested in increasing the capacity of congregations to provide social services, HBI tailors each approach accordingly.

board members and foundations.” As projects funded through the Steeples Project reach completion, HBI uses testimonials by dynamic religious leaders expressing how HBI helped them save their church, often taking potential funders on site visits to these congregations. HBI also conducts a formal evaluation of the project every two to three years and incorporates these findings into their fundraising case. Such evaluations allow HBI to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project and get quotes that can be used in future grant proposals.

Highlighting the Strengths of the Project

By paying close attention to feedback from grant makers over the years, HBI has learned which aspects of its project are most attractive to funders and highlights them in their case statement. “One of the strongest pitches we make is that every dollar we take in goes directly to the historic property,” Breitreutz

funds. For example, HBI has helped grantees successfully apply for more than \$1 million in funds from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) grants over the past 13 years.

Another element of the project that funders find attractive is the intensive technical assistance HBI staff provide to each congregation. This hands-on project oversight guarantees that the projects succeed and that the money is well managed. “We spell out the number of staff hours (200 per project) that we provide to each congregation in the budgets we submit to funders so they can see the resources we add to their contribution,” Adams explains. “We make it clear to funders that the grant award is just the first step,” she adds. “We work with these congregations for years—changing the culture of the institution to make building maintenance a priority.”



HBI Steeples Project grantee Second Church of Christ, Scientist in Roxbury, MA, gets a roof inspection.

Connecting the Dots Between People and Potential Funders

Since the early years of the project, HBI has followed what Executive Director Eric Breitreutz calls the “six degrees of separation model. In the fundraising game it's all who you know,” Breitreutz says. “We have worked hard to find the connections between our

explains. “HBI doesn't take any overhead—that positions us very strongly with funders so we put that in bold letters in all our proposals.” Another strength that HBI highlights for funders is the matching element—each congregation is required to match Steeple Project grants dollar for dollar, so funders' money is leveraged with other private and public

HBI's Keys to Success

- ❖ Tied the building repair needs to the critical public value of the social services housed in religious properties
- ❖ Connected the dots between friends of the organization and potential funders
- ❖ Used testimonials from dynamic religious leaders who benefited from the project
- ❖ Evaluated and documented the success of the project and included that in grant proposals
- ❖ Used feedback from grant makers to further refine its case
- ❖ Calculated staff hours contributed to the project through technical assistance and project oversight and included those amount as in-kind contributions in proposal budgets