

Is your agency ready for a Fundraising Campaign?

By Gary M. Bernstein

To conduct a successful capital and/or endowment campaign, you must inspire your constituents. Your project must be visionary. It must make sense and be consistent with your mission and strategic plan. It must be well thought out, well researched, well focused, and well presented.

Most important, it must motivate action as it secures people's emotional, then financial investment.

It's a challenge...and sometimes overwhelming. But it's also quite exciting to create a vision and a dream, and then rally your community to make it a reality. It truly is an opportunity of a lifetime.

It all begins with planning-an insightful, honest assessment of potential, possibilities, people and pitfalls.

The first task is to understand the underlying principle for the appeal and capture that in a simple yet thorough document. Fundraisers call this the case for support or case statement. It tells the prospective donor how your organization will use the funds and who will benefit.

Creating the case is top priority-and in many ways, similar to the group effort involved in developing your agency's strategic plan. Your agency Board members and community leaders are more likely to support a plan they helped create. Include the features and costs of the project, but focus on the benefits. Make an appeal to the heart as you stress why every gift will matter.

Emotion and passion lead to commitment. Until the donors believe in your agency's mission, the written case statement has little value. The case for support must become part of your donor's belief system. Donors and supporters will give freely of their time and talent when they understand and embrace your cause.

This is most critical for those prospects your team will identify, cultivate and solicit for leadership and major gifts: those six, seven or eight-figure expressions of support that will make or break your campaign.

Major-gift fundraising is the most cost-effective resource-development strategy. A major-gift initiative gives your agency an opportunity to sell the movers and shakers on your programs and services. The appeal will be personal; the case for support will reinforce your project's viability and value to the community.

GETTING STARTED: CAMPAIGN READINESS REVIEW

As you build your case and your plan, you also will ensure your agency's readiness to engage in such a significant undertaking.

The decision to conduct a campaign is not an easy one. Many factors contribute to success or failure. You can best identify and measure them—as well as build constituent interest and support—by conducting a pre-campaign assessment. Here is a checklist of tasks:

- . Review all issues related to Board development. Seek people with influence and affluence. Work to ensure the agency is well positioned in the philanthropic community. Your campaign leadership will most likely be your current leaders. Those who have been charitable in the past might also be quite generous in the future.
- . At every step involve as many volunteers and potential supporters as possible. If you find any key people or constituencies who you have neglected, brief them and make every effort to get them involved. Prepare written materials describing the project. Stress these benefits to the agency and community.
- . Prepare a number of project budgets. Consider capital, endowment and the annual operating needs. Capital campaigns are characterized by visionary projects and large financial goals. The funds are to be attained during a multiyear pledge period.
- . Form a resource development committee to help shape the agency's comprehensive fundraising strategy. Your committee might want to seek advice from outside counsel to formulate a professional campaign plan. Outside counsel helps reduce risk, ensures staff and campaign leadership stay on course, and maximizes your fundraising potential.
- . Plan your solicitation strategy. You will secure your leadership contributions first from those closest to your agency that is capable of making pace-setting investments. You will approach prospects with more modest means after you have secured lead gifts. Finally, there is a public phase (typically after you have secured commitments for at least half the total) when you approach the larger base of supporters.
- . Develop a core of knowledgeable people who will help your agency avoid common mistakes in preparing for a capital campaign. These key people should help remind other volunteers to focus on leadership gifts. This committee—sometimes called a campaign cabinet—will remind others to seek support from individuals as well as foundations and corporations. They also should remind the volunteers to focus on personal contact, not mail, phone, or special events.
- . Evaluate, and, if necessary, strengthen your record keeping functions and fundraising software systems. Accurate and complete records are critical for a successful campaign project.

When you have addressed these tasks and prerequisites, and answered all of the questions, you will be poised for a successful campaign. You now are equipped with the necessary and basic information that will provide a road map for victory.

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