

Considering a Capital Campaign

When I was in college my best friend and I set out on a cross-country road trip to see the Grand Canyon in his 1984 Toyota Supra. It was an exciting trip where we drove 5,400 miles in less than two weeks and visited about half the states in our country. It was the nineties, so we did all of this navigating with a map instead of a GPS – but imagine what would have happened if we left Florida without a map and just followed the sun as our guide. While I do think we would have eventually made it, we would have traveled many more miles and taken much longer. Unfortunately, many people in development launch campaigns without proper planning and do the equivalent of driving across the country without a map (or a GPS).

As you likely know, Capital Campaigns don't have to be just for real estate or buildings-- they can also be used for expanding your organization. Campaigns can also be for adding or expanding programs and other strategic initiatives that will help you do more of what you are trying to do. This desire for growth needs to come out of a strategic plan that you have developed for your organization. If your capital campaign is the new idea that you, as one of the senior leaders of your organization, has come up with, then you are not ready to launch a campaign, but rather a strategic plan. So the first step in planning for a campaign is to develop a strategic plan with the key leaders of your organization – both staff and volunteers.

Once you have a strategic plan, and assuming your strategic plan demonstrates the need for additional funds to fulfill the plan, you need to hire an independent objective outside firm to conduct a feasibility study with your major donors to determine four very important things that must be evaluated prior to launching the campaign:

- i. What is the reputation of your organization? What do people think about you and your organization? What do people think your organization does?
- ii. What do your major donors think about the proposed campaign? Tell your donors the specific details of your proposed campaign: for example – if you want to raise \$2 million for a new building on the east side of town to reach all of the homeless on the east side – ask them what they think of this idea.
- iii. What is your organization's ability to recruit volunteers to help lead the campaign? Ask donors if they are interested in volunteering for this campaign committee and then you'll know.
- iv. How much money can you actually raise? What are your donor's thoughts on this and what might they give to the campaign.

After the interviews are conducted, a report is compiled and presented to your board- you will now have a map to follow. You will know what the obstacles are and how your organizational leadership needs to be altered and updated to properly carry out the campaign. If you found out in your feasibility study that you can only raise \$1.6M instead of \$2M, you can likely still do what you want to do. You should base your campaign on your feasibility study and launch your campaign for the realistic \$1.6M and get there in 18 months and celebrate that you've raised it! What a great feeling! Donors, staff and you are all so thrilled! This is a major achievement! Think of all the momentum this builds rather than what would have happened if you have launched a \$2M campaign that stalled out at \$1.6M.

The other most important thing to have in place prior to driving across the country is a good car. What I didn't tell you about my journey across the country is it actually started in my 1981 Nissan 200SX. My best friend and I got about 100 miles outside of town and the car started overheating so we turned around and got his car. With a good car, even with a map, we would have taken a really long time getting to the Grand Canyon with a car that kept breaking down. Our "campaign car" is our leadership team – both staff and volunteers. These are the folks that deliver the message of the campaign. There are two main "campaign cars" needed to deliver the message:

1. A fulltime campaign manager who wakes up thinking about nothing but the campaign and spends all his or her time working only on the campaign.

2. An “Executive Campaign Committee” made of donors who give large gifts to the campaign and invite their peers to do the same thing.

Campaigns launched with the wrong leadership can stall out and break down and fail.

So again-- the three major things you need for a successful Capital Campaign are:

1. A Feasibility Study, based on the results of a strategic plan.
2. A full time campaign manager.
3. A volunteer team that with staff will make up your “Executive Campaign Committee.”

If you have these three things your campaign will be successful and you will enjoy the journey.

Thanks for *Taking Donors Seriously*®!

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