

Chart a Course for Capital Campaign Success

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I can just see you now. You're at work, in a meeting with colleagues, when someone, or maybe even you, mentions a capital campaign might be necessary to move your organisation forward. Those in the meeting discuss the possibility of a capital campaign, but only a little. Those in the room nod their heads and agree a capital campaign should be discussed in detail, but later. And your meeting moves on to the next item on the agenda.

Sound familiar? This might too...

It's eight months later, the capital campaign is now a constant item of discussion but there has been practically no regard for the huge fundraising effort which will be needed to make the campaign a success!

As a capital campaign consultant, most, if not all, fundraising managers I speak to, accept that advanced planning is essential to achieve success in their annual fundraising programmes. Unfortunately, many fundraising managers disregard this accepted wisdom when it comes to planning a capital campaign. Instead, they consider advanced planning starts when a feasibility study begins. That's a mistake. Advanced planning for a capital campaign should start one year before a feasibility study.

If you dedicate time to advanced planning for your capital campaign, you'll be in a more likely position to succeed. Here are my Top 5 critical areas to get started on early.

1 Develop Your Case for Support

The case for support is the main selling document used in any capital campaign and is the document from which all other marketing collateral is developed. Collate project-specific information into a single document for internal use, that includes things like:

- Your mission statement and organisation's history
- Qualitative and quantitative evidence that what you do works or is needed
- A project specific executive summary
- A project specific capital works budget
- Architectural drawings (even just concepts) which will excite your major donors

After a month, maybe six weeks, you should have a draft case for support that can be used internally when speaking about the project. Invite critical, but constructive, feedback from service managers, senior management and board members. Incorporate feedback you believe makes the case for support stronger and disregard the rest. However, with feedback you disregard, tell the person who suggested it the reason why.

2 Develop Your Narrative & Deliver it Consistently

Review your draft case for support and select elements of it to use as your campaign narrative. What I mean by narrative is your "elevator pitch." These are 10 or so bullet points that explain why your organisation needs this capital campaign. Keep these points succinct — if you had to read them aloud, it would only take you a few minutes. Then, seek feedback on your draft narrative from the

same internal group as before. Why? Because internal stakeholders (staff, management, board) are probably going to be the people using the narrative to connect with major donors. This means your colleagues must be comfortable with the narrative.

If you've completed these first two tasks, you're ready to start explaining the capital campaign externally to donors face-to-face. Start with a few loyal, longstanding donors. Provided their reaction to the capital campaign is positive, explain it to the rest of your major donors. Repeat your narrative to your major donors at every opportunity.

In the year leading up to your capital campaign, deliver your narrative consistently and do not go "off message." Going "off message" is telling donors your new building is going to cost \$10 million and four months later saying, actually, it will be closer to \$15 million. Consistency is critical because many donors remember letters they receive or what a CEO tells them during an event or your AGM. In my experience, this is especially true with top donors — high net worth individuals who are usually financially and commercially astute.

3 Cultivate Your Top Donors

By now you've probably got about six months left before your capital campaign starts. It's time to look at the state of your organisation's relationships with your top donors. I'd recommend generating a list of your Top 30 individual donors and present it to your board. Ask board members to select three or four names which they will engage over the next six months using the draft case for support and campaign narrative. Board members are not to ask for money during this time, rather it's to cultivate the relationship to a point where a gift can be sought when the capital campaign finally arrives.

Board members should have no significant reservations about getting involved with this because by now they have provided feedback on the case for support and campaign narrative — and they're comfortable with both. In addition, you've now taken them out of the task, for now anyway, of asking for money. Over the coming months, keep track of which members of your board are active and which are not. The latter should not be relied on heavily for any future capital campaign.

4 Develop a Table of Gifts

A Table of Gifts is designed to identify the number of prospects required and the likely level of gift ranges necessary to achieve the capital campaign target.

The following could be done in less than an hour. Find a Table of Gifts calculator on the Internet. Plug in your capital campaign target and export the table to Excel. Now that you've got your campaign gift ranges, run a series of queries for each gift amount against the records on your database. In minutes, you'll know if you have existing donors who have already given you a gift in one of the ranges within your Table of Gifts. This quantitative data will allow you to get a sense of where you have donors in sufficient numbers, where you have just a few and where you need more.

5 Start Lobbying Government

The commitment of the New Zealand Government to bring the country back to surplus may have a potential impact on their ability to provide your campaign a one-off capital grant. But you should still try. I spoke at the FINZ 2012 Conference in May about lobbying government and suggested fundraisers answer a few basic questions before engaging government. For example, have a strong idea of which department or agency's budget is likely to be involved and where the political or budget cycle is. If you haven't engaged government before, scan your own database for records containing "The Honourable" or "MP." If you're lucky enough to find a sitting or retired politician who is a supporter, then go ask her for advice and guidance on engaging government effectively.

Set Goals

A year passes quickly. Set several goals to be achieved in the first six months and review your progress in three. If you've achieved little or nothing, sorry, but you're probably on your way to blowing your only chance to better position your capital campaign for success.

But if you're on target, pat yourself on the back and continue to stay on course. ■



Early planning will help ensure your capital campaign enjoys smooth sailing

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