

Launching a Campaign – Science or Art?
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All too often organizations jump into a campaign without having done any real legwork or research into what is a realistic goal. “Unfortunately, I frequently come across situations where campaign goals were selected simply because an organization wants to top their last total – or best the goal of a peer,” says John Taylor, Principal, Advancement Solutions Consulting Group (Durham, NC). “Or even worse, a new Executive Director or President arrives, is charged by the Board to immediately launch start a campaign, and so a number is picked out of thin air – usually because that’s how much the ED or President rose at a previous institution.”

Since, as we all know, there has “never” been an unsuccessful campaign, such unplanned targets often result in the counting of things that were never intended to be counted, such as gifts made years before the campaign, or verbal and uncertain commitments. The result may be announcing a successful conclusion, but with having little to show for it in the bank. This means projects won’t be started, building built, etc.

“This is precisely why it is a wise investment to conduct a feasibility study,” suggests John. “And it is an investment,” John continues. “But a feasibility study frequently is not a costly affair, and the investment will likely help you save face in the future.”

What is a feasibility study? The key components are:

- Independent assessment of chances for success
- Consists of 40-50 interviews of board members, major gift prospects, potential donors, business & community leaders, staff members

The interviews will:

- Surface the organizations strengths and weaknesses
- Help establish and validate campaign goals and timing
- Bring important people closer to the project
- Identify leaders and prospects for the campaign
- Inform as to community support for the campaign

“Many organizations do not think a feasibility study is needed – that they know what everyone is thinking. But don’t be so sure,” concludes John. “I have seen too many campaigns on the road to failure simply because we didn’t consider donor burn-out either from our – or other – recent campaigns, or lack of energy or support by staff or the community. An independent analysis, confidentially conducted, will yield mountains of information that will make the campaign process, and the campaign itself, successful and painless.”