Planning for a Campaign – Made Easy
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Launching an 8-year mega-dollar campaign is a piece of cake – as long as you start planning for it 3-4 years in advance! Nowadays the saying that nonprofit organizations are either in a campaign or planning for one could not be more accurate. In fact, the time to begin planning for the next campaign is while you are still in the current one. It pays to have the existing campaign fresh in your mind when you start thinking about the next one as you can more readily identify those areas the next campaign needs to focus on. The reality is that it's very rare that any campaign will exceed financial objectives in each of the featured areas. Therefore, those weaker components provide the first glimpse into where the next campaign might focus.

I suggest no less than a 3-year hiatus before actually launching the silent phase of the next campaign. You, and your donors, need at least that long to "recover". "Donor fatigue" is increasingly cited as a rationale to delay starting the next campaign. We must remember, also, that your donors are not exclusively YOUR donors. Odds are that they contribute to a minimum of 3 other organizations and therefore do not need to be so quickly harassed by you! However, it is even more important to recognize the monumental effort your own staff had to expend during the previous campaign. Those 3 or 4 years are critical to let those resources recharge their batteries. But, most importantly, you also need those years to properly plan for that next campaign.

Effective planning begins with identification of the additional resources needed to launch that next campaign. You can guestimate your dollar goal by averaging dollars raised over the last 3 years, multiplying that by the expected number of years for the next campaign, and then adding 20%. With this in mind, you should have an understanding of the number of additional staff you'll need to hit that target. And it's not all about fundraising staff. More dollars coming in the door mean more receipts, more pledge reminders, more acknowledgement letters, more endowment stewardship reports, etc. It is also during this "down time" that you should assess your technology and other infrastructure needs. Once you launch that campaign it will be too late to fix anything that's broken.

Somewhere around the 24-18 month pre-launch period you will need to make the call as to whether outside campaign counsel will be retained. That's the minimum amount of time they will need to fully assess your readiness and help ascertain the right goals and objectives. With or without the assistance of counsel you will want to conduct internal assessments of your staff to gauge their readiness and willingness to go into another campaign, simultaneously inquiring as to suggested components of the campaign. No less than 18-12 months before anticipated launch you will then want to conduct a feasibility study – sitting down face-to-face with some of your "best and brightest" prospects, as well as electronically surveying all of your current donors.

These interviews/surveys are critical in determining the extent of donor fatigue, as well as receiving their thoughts on financial objectives and institutional/campaign leadership.

The results of your feasibility studies will enable you to craft a case statement (or statements) that should resonate with your constituents both internally and externally. The draft of those statements should be finalized and vetted no less than 3 months before launch. This gives you enough time to develop marketing material and brochures/fliers you will need to help secure that first 50% during the silent phase.

Now, wasn’t that easy? Actually, it really is that simple – as long as you give yourself those 3-4 years to prepare!