How to Manage a Successful Campaign

You've assembled your communication materials and started identifying donor prospects. Now it's time to launch the campaign. In this phase, we'll move into the process of building relationships with donors and meeting their application requirements. By understanding the basic attributes associated with launching and sustaining a successful fundraising campaign, you'll have a higher probability of realizing your objectives.

This guide will answer two specific questions on how to generate support and sustain your campaign over time.

1. What Are the Primary Attributes of a Successful Fundraising Campaign?

Organizational commitment and solid timing are key elements in any successful campaign. You'll want to consider:

When to launch: The best time to start a campaign is in the spring or fall, when people are back to school/work and starting to decide who they're going to support this year.

Length of your campaign: One of the most common mistakes organizations make is that they fail to give themselves sufficient time to build relationships, submit applications, and get commitments in the door. In short, the more time you give yourself (6, 12, 18, 24 months), the more space you'll have to cultivate donors and give them the space they need to make a decision.

Securing leadership gifts: You need to secure as many funding commitments as you can before you start reaching out to the broader community. If you can show the local bank or supermarket that you have already met 30% of your goal, you'll have a much better chance of gaining their interest to secure the rest.

Casting a wide net: Good campaigns never put too much focus on a single source of funding. By fishing in all donor pools (individuals, foundations, corporations, government) simultaneously, you can spread the requests. You'll also demonstrate to potential donors that you're doing everything you can to get the entire community on board.

Active engagement: Successful campaigns have the active engagement of the entire team – from staff and volunteers to board members. These stakeholders can help you to scale up your outreach and touch more people. After all, who do you want to talk to—a paid staff member or a passionate volunteer?

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2. How Can I Sustain Interest and Engagement in My Campaign?

You need to have a solid strategy and the tools in place to engage with each prospect in a sustained and purposeful manner. You will want to:

Develop a donor pipeline: A donor pipeline is a tracking resource that contains simple, quick-hit information about each donor, like contact name, application deadlines, last contact, and key info about their giving interests. Your pipeline will enable you to monitor and coordinate outreach and relationship development on a sustained basis.

Build community awareness: Asking a donor for their money is a lot easier if they know something about you and your project prior to the first conversation. Partner with your existing supporters to develop creative methods to engage with local media and community stakeholders over the entire length of your campaign.

Launch sub-campaigns: Support your team's ongoing outreach and bring added exposure to the project by creating a series of short-term initiatives that run in parallel. This could include something as simple as a 'challenge grant' to local business. (For example, our local business partner will contribute $10,000 if we can raise another $10,000 from other companies in the area.)

Use the right tools: Try employing one of the many project management tools on the market to build your donor pipeline and organize your campaign. Their templates are easy to use and will prove invaluable in helping sustain your outreach and track your deliverables. You should also experiment with one of the many gift range calculators online to determine how much money you'll need from each level of donor.

Action Steps

1. Create a donor pipeline using an online project management tool and start populating it with all the donors and supporting information you've collected.

2. Determine the optimal method for approaching each 'Tier 1 Donor' on your list (application, letter, phone call, email, direct message) and ask them to make a leadership commitment prior to the public launch of the campaign.