



Best Practice in Campaign Planning and Operations ***Abridged version - for time***

Date: June 2017

Prepared By: Monica M. Keith

Category: Advancement Management

Comments To: bestpractices@advserv.org

Description of Practice:

A campaign is an organized, targeted fundraising endeavor over a specified time frame. Time, then becomes the determining factor in both planning and execution of the campaign effort. There are different types of campaigns, and despite the size and scope of an organization's campaign there are also multiple phases of a campaign. This practice seeks to provide an abridged version of best practices (ie. best case scenario) for campaign planning and operations – specifically when there is a condensed timeframe. For the unabridged version of this practice, see *Best Practice in Campaign Planning and Operations*.

An effective campaign planning strategy requires top down leadership and collaboration across an organization. When time is limiting factor, campaign planning and operations become integrated and often will run parallel. Yet advancement operations staff are uniquely positioned to drive both campaign planning and operations efficiently and effectively throughout the campaign lifecycle.

Advancement operations units have the knowledge of advancement business processes, can identify areas of opportunities and ultimately build and enhance sustainable functions within a limited timeline. This abridged best practice will cover key aspects of campaign planning and advancement operations and opportunities to collaborate, lead and positively impact various stages of a campaign with time as a driving factor.

Prospective Users of Practice:

- Leadership of advancement units
- Advancement staff
- Organizational stakeholders

Issue Addressed:

Campaigns are defined in multiple ways, depending on your organization's resources and goals. With time as a limited commodity, campaign planning and operations are much more focused and integrated. This best practice will explore how limited time can positively impact:

- Campaign planning elements
- The campaign lifecycle
- Campaign operations and opportunities
- Evaluating impact and progress

Desired Outcome:

The success of a campaign is ultimately measured by meeting or exceeding your organization's financial and other qualitative goals. This best practice will explore key steps involved in building a strong foundation to attain success in campaign planning and operations under less than ideal timeframes.

In addition, advancement staff will be able to refer to the campaign checklist for condensed time during various stages of campaign planning and implementation. Case studies and resources from other institutions will also be provided for your current or next campaign.

Process:

The need for a capital campaign is typically the result of an organizational strategic plan that outlines the goals and direction of the organization for the next several years. However, a campaign can result from new leadership or immediate organizational needs and priorities. In these cases, 'time is of the essence' and campaign planning may be curtailed and become a more focused effort akin to 'building the plane while flying it'.

Depending on the size and scope of the campaign, campaign planning with limited time puts the focus on balancing needs and return on investment.

Campaign planning elements:

1. **Defining a campaign** – the size and scope of the campaign will set the stage for campaign planning and operational needs. Below are examples of the types of campaign definitions:

- Mini-campaign - single purpose/goal (i.e. scholarship campaign)
- Targeted campaign - shorter time span/limited goals (i.e. capital buildings/programs)
- Comprehensive campaign - all fundraising purposes, typically over 7 years (i.e. inclusive of all giving)

Regardless of the size of the campaign, planning and operations support can be combined to support necessary fundraising efforts and needs efficiently with limited time. Advancement operations staff are able to leverage their expertise in data management to set project needs based on the scope of the campaign.

2. **Planning for a campaign** – the following outlines the key steps in preparation for a campaign under - where time is limited time.

- Internal resource assessment – when planning for a campaign it is important to assess the current landscape of your advancement unit, aka a strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, with specific focus on areas including:
 - Staffing
 - Technology
 - Processes/Training/Skill development
 - Capacity - to lead/manage the campaign internally vs. hire an external campaign consultant?

An internal resource assessment is the first key opportunity for advancement operations staff to directly participate and impact campaign planning. Additional information can be found in the *Best Practice for Campaign Internal Readiness Assessments*.

- Financial initiatives/priorities – for comprehensive campaigns, there are often several campaign priorities and goals. With regards to campaign priorities, considerations with limited resources should include:
 - Defining campaign goals
 - Evaluating the gift pyramid to reach campaign goals
 - Tracking campaign progress in your database
 - Developing reports needed for either specific initiatives or overall

Key opportunities for advancement operations in this area involves ensuring that there are up-to-date policies and processes in place for

proposal management, gift counting, recording and reports. See also *Best Practice on Gift Counting* and *Best Practice in Campaign Reporting*.

- **Budget** – a comprehensive campaign typically creates additional expenses to an existing fundraising budget including, but not limited to –
 - Campaign counsel and/or staff;
 - Campaign travel;
 - Campaign events;
 - Campaign communications; and
 - Volunteer management.

Building a campaign budget is a necessary investment of time. It is vital to consider how much investment is needed for enhanced campaign efforts, and how the campaign will be funded. With limited time, advancement staff can collect information from peers and professional associations to validate estimates and ensure your organization has the resources to meet its goals. See *Best Practice on Building a Campaign Budget* and *Best Practice on Advancement/Campaign Funding Sources*.

- **Feasibility** – time may drive the the question of a feasibility study. These can be conducted either in-house or using a campaign consultant, and while typically conducted at the beginning of a campaign, may be explored at a later date during the campaign. Feasibility studies can provide the following:
 - Assessment of board strength and support of campaign;
 - Assessment of overall prospect readiness;
 - Testing of campaign priorities and messaging;
 - Identify potential volunteers;
 - Collect internal stakeholder feedback; and
 - Provide an engagement contact point in the early stages of the campaign

Feasibilities studies are an investment in time. They require pulling various data elements from your database of record, screening potential prospects for qualitative and quantitative ratings, and inform development or enhancement of a prospect tracking and management process. If time is limited, advancement operations staff may be able to mine their database initially, and consider a feasibility study during the campaign as needed. Additionally, if your operations unit includes prospect research staff, another vital component of feasibility is ensuring you have enough prospects from your gift pyramid appropriately coded, assigned to gift officers and tagged for various

campaign priorities. See *Best Practices for Campaign Feasibility Studies and Best Practice for Prospect Development Leading up to a Campaign*.

- Branding and messaging – a capital campaign typically has its own branding and messaging to highlight the campaign priorities and case statements, generate stories and build awareness of the campaign and ways to engage various constituencies throughout the campaign timeline. Branding and messaging can include additional communication needs and expenses such as:
 - Staffing or partnering with a branding vendor;
 - Case statement(s);
 - Campaign video(s);
 - Campaign website or micro-site;
 - Campaign event(s); and
 - Campaign stewardship.

Campaign branding and messaging, in an abbreviated timeframe can sometimes replace an existing communication strategy or run parallel to current communications. Either way, it is important to consider how you will enhance your existing communications strategy with the addition of campaign-related communications.

If an organization decides to partner with a vendor, advancement operations staff should leverage their network and reach out to peers for vendor recommendations and feedback, manage the request for proposals [to vendors] and propose the campaign communications budget.

Regardless of who is executing campaign communication efforts - there are many considerations with regards to needs, resources, audiences and communication mediums – and advancement operations is in the position to have the data to provide efficient support of this aspect of planning and operations.

- Campaign volunteer leadership – many organizations create a special campaign committee or volunteer leadership group to serve as the face of the campaign and to bring focused resources, expertise and efforts to the campaign. These volunteer leaders are identified because they can serve in varying capacities including:
 - Leadership support of the campaign;
 - Open doors to potential donors;
 - Host campaign events;
 - Provide expertise in specific aspects of the campaign (i.e. funding, marketing, etc.)

Campaign volunteers and leaders are 'insiders' and require special attention throughout the campaign timeline. They typically are the lead donors, key board members, and/or bring visibility to the campaign. Ways that advancement operations can assist with this endeavor under challenging timeframes is to focus communication to this group in a more targeted way about the campaign, progress against goals, milestone achievements, and in stewarding their many contributions.

If your operations shop includes donor relations staff, it will be increasingly important to consider how to keep the volunteer leadership engaged throughout the campaign, as they typically are the first to support the campaign. See also the *Best Practice on Managing Campaign Volunteers and Boards*.

AASP Recommendation:

This best practice should be used as a resource for organizations planning or executing a campaign with less than traditional timelines. This seeks to provide suggestions on how to approach campaign planning, and leverage the time and expertise in advancement operations during the campaign lifecycle. The recommendation below provides a conceptual framework and then outlines key opportunities for advancement operations to contribute and add value to campaign success.

Campaign Operations – embodies the body of work of advancement operations within the context of a campaign. There are typically two stages of a campaign for organizations lacking adequate time - the campaign planning process – the quiet (aka nucleus) phase, and the public phase. In some cases, the line can be blurred between when planning ends and implementation begins. Regardless, these stages provide opportunities for advancement operations to anticipate, evaluate and propose ways to add value to campaign operations with limited resources.

- Planning phase – also known as the silent or nucleus phase, is where all of the campaign planning typically takes place. Ideally, this phase is 1-3 years prior to the public launch of the campaign. Less than ideal can be defined as less than two years prior to the public launch of the campaign. This stage is also where the early champions (i.e. board members or volunteer leadership) are solicited to make lead gifts to inspire early support and progress. According to a 2013 study by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), more than one third of capital campaigns raised at least 41% of their goal in the "quiet" phase of a campaign.

- Key Areas of opportunity during this phase include:
 - Internal readiness assessment
 - Prospect rating, prospect management, gift pyramids
 - This could take the place of a feasibility study initially, if there is limited time
 - Development of policies and procedures:
 - Gift counting,
 - Planning gifts,
 - Campaign naming opportunities
 - Campaign budget

- Leadership phase – also referred to as the public phase, typically announced when 50-70% of the campaign goal has been attained. This phase leverages early leadership gifts and support to secure other significant major gifts in support of the campaign, overall public awareness and encourage broad participation and support.
 - Areas of opportunity during this phase include:
 - Campaign reporting and tracking;
 - Campaign prospecting;
 - Campaign event roll-out plans; and
 - Coordinate campaign stewardship and recognition;
 - Collaborate with campaign branding/communication efforts;
 - Identify best mid-level donors for the campaign;
 - Tracking campaign milestone progress

- Post-Campaign – after the completion of any campaign, analysis is vital to assess overall effectiveness of fundraising efforts and preparation for the next campaign. Some key metrics to measure campaign success include:
 - Areas of opportunity include evaluating:
 - Campaign budget and actual expenses;
 - Donor pyramid;
 - Overall gifts to all campaign priorities;
 - Donors yield/Proposal yield;
 - New prospects, donors and giving vehicles;
 - Campaign participation across various constituencies;
 - Event attendance and impact of gifts;
 - Impact of campaign on overall stewardship;

Resources:

- An Outline of a Campaign, John Taylor and Ann House
 - Campaign checklist for small shops or limited resources
- University of Miami Campaign Presentation
- *CASE Reporting Standards and Management Guidelines for Educational Fundraising*, 4th edition.
- [Four Steps to a Successful Campaign](#) (Sally Boucher, formerly of Wealth Engine – requesting permission)
- Campaign timeline infographic from Capital Campaign Masters

DRAFT