

Ready or Not? Your First Capital Campaign

Are you planning for future facilities needs and considering a campaign to fund expansion, renovation, or construction of a new building?

While the context in which we are raising money has become more challenging and complex, the basic rules of successful capital campaigns remain the same. So how can you be sure your goal of a capital campaign is realistic?

Will the same donors who invest in your core mission be eager to fund your facilities needs? How will people respond to your project? The answer is ...

It depends on your leadership

Capital requests are scrutinized much more thoroughly than project requests. One of the key differences is that your leadership and your leadership's ability to carry out the plan will be more rigorously tested.

You'll be evaluated twice: once on the merits of the project and again on the strength of the organization to lead the campaign. Here are some frequent questions that funders and donors will likely ask:

- Why is this effort critical now?
- What makes your leadership outstanding?
- How does your strategic direction inform this effort?
- How have you prepared for this effort?
- What will happen in the community if this facility is not built?
- What potential challenges do you anticipate and how will you overcome them?
- What scenario planning has your leadership done in the event fundraising for the building fails to meet the goal you have set?

It depends on planning

A feasibility study will determine how much you can reasonably expect to raise so that your project's scope fits within the reality of your fundraising ability and your community's ability and willingness to support the project. Think you can't afford a campaign feasibility study? In today's economy, organizations cannot afford to proceed without one. When done properly, the feasibility study will test the case for support, reveal sources of likely revenue and inform changes to assure success in the public campaign. Simply put, a good feasibility study will give you the information you need to succeed.

It depends on your fundraising skill & capacity

Capital fundraising is all about timing. The right actions, carried out at the right time, can help you to avoid costly errors. Once you break ground, you will be committed to building the

facility whether or not your fundraising is successful and once the building is complete, the fundraising opportunities become increasingly limited. If your organization is not skilled in capital fundraising, consider retaining professional council.

Even a small investment upfront can pay for itself in avoiding costly mistakes. Successful fundraising campaigns share common qualities

- The need for the facility is well researched and clearly stated
- The fundraising goal is realistic for the organization, project and community
- Sources of revenue are diverse - there is no over reliance on foundation support
- Long-term financing scenarios are well thought out and contingencies are built in
- A thorough feasibility study informs scope of the project and fundraising strategy
- The board champions the cause and inspires others to give – leading by example
- Adequate time and money are allocated to fundraising activities

Capital campaigns by their very nature are transformative. You will be asking your community to take a leap of faith with you and envision what could be. Allow plenty of time to prepare your leadership and complete the extensive planning necessary. Then, go forward and build the future you envision for your organization, your constituents and your community.