7 Tips
To Help Your College Launch a Comprehensive Campaign

Undertaking a comprehensive campaign is an intricate and time-consuming endeavor with a lot of moving parts that need to be linked together. No matter what size your organization is or how large your monetary goal is, methodical pre-campaign preparation is essential. The following points highlight important steps organizations need to keep in mind to get campaign ready.

1. Find consensus on your campaign timing and objectives

The college foundation board, the college trustees, the college president, the upper management, and faculty leaders must be in acceptance of the campaign and the individual responsibilities that each one will have during the endeavor.

2. Learn about your institution’s fundraising potential

While you are deciding whether and how to start a fundraising campaign find an expert to provide you with a professional perspective about the benefits and need of a feasibility study. Through interviews with key community members, such study will help to find out if the time is right, community perceptions, potential leadership and donor base, and external factors that will come into play.

3. Hold on your desire to announce the campaign goal too early

A feasibility study will provide you with some guidance for the goal and once you have it such number becomes the “working goal.” However, the true test takes place in the initial phase of the campaign, when you begin receiving leadership gifts. These are the gifts that will set the tone for the campaign and give a clear indication of what the goal is.
4. Realize that campaigns require many hands

Whether the college is managing the campaign by themselves or working with a consultant, a team must be organized to handle the effort. Meetings need to be set up and rescheduled, brochures and publications need to be written, websites have to be created and online communications activated, volunteers need to be recruited and managed, committees need to be formed and provided with professional support, proposals need to be written and presented, agendas and minutes need to be delivered, events need to be planned and staged, donor research has to be done, donors need to be cultivated and asked, gifts need to be tracked and donors need to be thanked. Most commonly, organizations create the team picking people who are already in staff. In some cases, you will need to hire a major gifts officer.

5. Think big and be strategic in the selection of the campaign chair

One of the most important decisions is the selection of the campaign chair. Success will be directly related to their leadership. The chair should be able to add credibility and charisma, lead the team in the largest gift solicitations, be the public face of the campaign, and lead by example providing a gift, setting goals and accomplishing them. Discuss potential names with key stakeholders as early as possible. The feasibility study can produce names of key community leaders who have prestige, respect, capacity and the desire to make a significant difference in your institution.

6. Be aware that the campaign begins long before you start asking for money

The planning process can take four to five months or even longer. This is the period where you put all your dots in order: conducting executive awareness sessions with key stakeholders, writing and getting consensus for the case for support, creating branding and marketing materials, recruiting the campaign chair and the campaign leadership committee, recruiting staff, planning for parallel campaigns, e.g. employee giving campaign, planned giving campaign, and creating data management systems to track gifts and create progress reports. During this period you also start lining up donors and having conversations about leadership gifts.

7. Get help from professional campaign experts

If the college has never led a major gifts campaign and neither has your foundation director or your development director, your organization will be served well by getting professional guidance. Professional counsel will assist you running your campaign from start to finish. Consultants come in many different types and sizes. They vary from individuals to multinational firms. No matter what type of consultant your organization is comfortable hiring, they should provide you with expert advice and coaching. A good consultant will provide you with a road map and ensure that the campaign stays on track and reaches its full potential.