

HOW TO OVERCOME PREMATURE CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCEMENTS

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The way in which you announce your organization's capital campaign can set the tone for the entire fundraising drive. Gail Meltzer, CFRE, founding principal, CoreStrategies for Nonprofits, Inc. (Miami, FL), says certain activities must occur in a campaign's quiet phase to put an organization in a position of strength to announce the capital campaign.

These activities include:

- Completing a pre-campaign or planning study to test the case for support and the campaign goal among a select group of the nonprofit's critical stakeholders, to determine if the campaign's purpose and financial goal are on target and if sufficient leadership will commit to the campaign.
- Preparing a gift chart that indicates how many gifts are required at what levels to reach the campaign goal.
- Identifying a sufficient number of qualified prospects to assure adequate numbers of donors at each gift level.
- Closing the campaign's top 10 to 15 gifts.
- Confirming sufficient campaign leadership/solicitors have come aboard to work to close the other gifts needed.

However, if an organization prematurely announces the capital campaign before these steps are taken, Meltzer offers tips to deal with this "not uncommon situation."

Here's how to recover when campaigns are announced prematurely:

1. Put an experienced fund development staff person or consultant in place immediately to direct and manage the steps leading up to a campaign.
2. Have this individual from that moment forward serve as the point person through whom all campaign information will flow in the future.
3. Contact all staff, board members and volunteers immediately and ask them to refrain from publicly discussing a potential campaign or goal, with an explanation of why this is necessary and what will be happening to assure future campaign success.

4. If news releases have gone out but nothing has yet appeared in the press, contact the media immediately and ask them not to release the information at this time, offering them an explanation.
5. If articles have already appeared in the media, no public follow up should be undertaken. If the media is calling for interviews, refer them to the person in charge.
6. Remove any campaign information that has been added to the website.
7. Future issues of the organization's newsletter should not contain any further campaign information until the public phase begins.
8. If campaign chairs were in place and didn't know the public announcement was a blunder or were shocked at the premature public announcement, personally visit them to explain the situation, offer future direction and seek their input and support. Assure them steps are now in place to properly move forward.
9. Re-group, get educated about how the campaign must be undertaken to assure success, be sure the proper staff and/or campaign counsel is in place, commit to doing things right this time, start over and don't look back.

"Along with undertaking the steps outlined above, the most important thing an organization can do is keep a sense of humor, plan strategically about moving forward and do the right things the second time around," says Meltzer. "If the campaign's purpose is solid and urgent, this kind of false start can most certainly be overcome."

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