

# WHY DO SOME CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS FAIL?

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It is very important for organizations to understand their strengths and the areas that need improvement as they evaluate their capacity to achieve campaign success. Virtually every area of concern can be addressed and overcome, if the organization thinks strategically and commits the necessary resources to campaign preparation and implementation.

However, failures do occur, generally for one or more of these reasons:

- **Lack of preparation** – is effective and willing leadership available? Is the cause strong? Is the timing right? Are there identified sources of lead or major gift support? Are there identified numbers of prospects and willing volunteer solicitors? Is there a realistic and adequate budget?
- **Prematurity** – generally caused by overeager board members, volunteers or senior staff. Signs include announcing the effort “publicly” before there is sufficient buildup of support and enthusiasm; announcing before a strong base of major gifts is in place; disregarding the cardinal rule of sequential solicitation (highest or pace-setting gifts first) by making any of a whole host of wrong moves where prospect cultivation and solicitation are concerned.
- **Radical departure from the plan** – there will inevitably be some departure, but radical departure signals little or no regard for a planned approach to the campaign.
- **Failure to follow through** – assignments not carried out; major prospects not cultivated properly or, worse yet, not solicited at all; committees not organized or staffed; campaign details, like donor acknowledgement and/or recognition ignored.
- **Insufficient commitment** – indicates a lack of conviction and calls into question whether the organization should even be in a campaign. *No campaign will succeed without the undivided determination, discipline and dedication of its leadership and the willingness of board members and key constituents to make sacrificial gifts.*
- **Under or over-confidence** – nothing can kill a campaign faster than pessimism, except perhaps an exaggerated sense of achievement before it is earned.
- **Poor communications** – externally and internally. Externally, the failure to communicate the case for support effectively will result in gifts that are smaller and less in number. Internally, poor communication can cause missed opportunities, create a poor public image and result in loss of morale and enthusiasm all around.