

The Top 10 Mistakes in Fundraising Campaigns

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(Sept. 28, 2010) Is your fundraising campaign fizzling? Whether you are stalled or just moving slower than you would like, there are some common mistakes that you can diagnose now before your campaign sputters to a stop.

The following is taken from the AFP/Wiley Fund Development Series book called [Jump-Starting the Stalled Fundraising Campaign](#), written by Julie Ingraham Walker.

The Top 10 Campaign Mistakes

- 1. Not asking for a large enough leadership gift at the top of the gift table.** Many campaign planners now presume that top level gifts will be smaller than leadership gifts received by the organization in the past. Do not downsize your top gift expectations until they are tried and proven to be too high. With many prospects, we do not know yet which assets have been affected in what manner, so making assumptions could be a mistake. Use enhanced recognition options, gift matches and challenges, or planned giving tools to raise the level of your top gift. It is much easier to raise one large gift in this economy than many small ones! Do not be afraid of asking for more at the top.
- 2. Not identifying and cultivating enough prospects to meet your needs.** Yes, your campaign will need to identify new prospects. First, make sure that you are treating your current donors well. Then invest in some prospect research techniques, including new ones like electronic prospect screening. Do not dismiss older, more personal methods of screening, like holding screening and rating sessions with supporters. Carry a prospect list with you to all meetings and ask donors to review it—you can never tell when someone close to you will have a connection to a distant prospect.
- 3. Weak leadership from board and/or campaign leaders.** Now is the time for board and campaign leaders to stand up and be counted. Your leaders need to take charge by addressing key financial issues, cutting back if necessary, and taking part in the reassessment of your campaign. This also means ensuring they give to their level of capability and continuing to ask them to open the door to others who can give. Make your board members part of the solution—inform them, involve them, and give them important tasks to do.
- 4. Asking too soon.** Some organizations have a short-term approach to cultivation and campaign giving. They roll through prospect lists like a steamroller, extracting the gifts that are easily available and balking at donors with more complex demands. Take time to cultivate. There is a better chance of getting a higher gift level if the prospect truly understands your needs. Do not rush large gifts. It may be more important to wait and get a big gift next year than to close a small one right now.
- 5. Not asking at all.** We have all seen campaigns that never get to the point. A prospect is cultivated, cultivated, and cultivated without an ask ever being made. This is not respectful to the needs of the organization, to the volunteers, or even to the donor. Decide when enough is enough, and cut to the chase. Making an ask can be tough, but spending all that time and money on a prospect with nothing to show for it is just not proactive.
- 6. Not closing the solicitation once it has been made.** Work with your volunteers, staff, and executive director/CEO on their skills, especially in asking for and closing a gift. Too many solicitors lose their focus during the last segment of a solicitation call and fail to get a gift closed. There are real techniques to learn here, so plan a workshop or do role playing to bring everyone up to speed. You have invested so much in getting a prospect to the point of an ask, do not let your staff or volunteers fail when it comes time to close the gift.
- 7. Taking donors for granted once a gift is closed.** Treating current donors well means more than writing a thank-you letter. Keep your donors informed and involved, and they will keep giving back. It costs much less to return to a prior donor for a gift than it does to find, cultivate and solicit a new prospect. Implement a strong stewardship program and it will pay you back many times over.
- 8. Going back to the same old donors over and over.** If you are only soliciting prior donors, your organization will die on the vine. New constituents are the lifeblood of any organization. If you cannot figure out how to reach new groups, consider developing a partnership with another organization in your community that has the kind of audience you would like to reach. Offer to trade lists, to combine asks, or to develop programs together to cement your partnership. Be creative about outreach to younger donors; try social-networking or viral campaigns to broaden your base.
- 9. Not energizing your constituents at all levels on your behalf.** If your campaign needs are truly urgent, your constituents at all levels need to share that sense of urgency. Create energy for your campaign by harnessing new electronic communication methods like interactive websites and social networking, develop public events to showcase your services, and create a new PR plan to build support for your cause. Find ways to get people talking about your organization and create a buzz.
- 10. Not developing a strong enough case to show why you need the money.** It can be surprising how weak some campaigns are when it comes to making their case. "Because we need it," is not a case. "We are doing good work," is not a case. Make sure that your case answers questions like these: Why should I give? What are the needs I can give to? How urgent are these needs? What will happen if I do not give now? What impact will my gift have? Spend more time sharpening your case to stand out in the crowd and you will improve your fundraising exponentially.

Want more practical tips and lessons on jump-starting your fundraising campaign? Find [Jump-Starting The Stalled Fundraising Campaign](#) and many other helpful resources in the [AFP Bookstore](#).

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