



Winning Resources and Support

Essential Components of a Fundraising Campaign

Terry

Geoff Howard is the Director of Craigmyle Fundraising, Marketing and Strategic Consultancy, the UK's longest-established fundraising consultants. Geoff's company boasts an impressive track record of helping organisations large and small, achieve success in capital appeals and project work. I began by asking Geoff if he could break down a fundraising campaign into its essential components.

Geoff

The first phase of the campaign has got to be preparations. Like most things in life, success is built upon sound, thorough, preparations. So one has therefore to accept that a period of probably at least four if not six months, and depending upon the size of the campaign it could be a lot longer than that, is essential, and during that time no money is going to come in. That is, preparations in terms of setting up the infrastructure, defining the constituency of support, and a doing the basic research and evaluation of potential leaders, potential major donors and preparing the detailed fundraising strategy.

You then move into recruiting your leaderships and here de facto you do some fundraising. Part of the terms of reference for your leaders will be an expectation or requirement for them to give, very early in the process. So one is then into that recruitment of leadership and that moves naturally into the major gift phase, where one covertly, is approaching individual sources of money, be they Corporates, be they Trusts and Foundations, be they private individuals and that's the biggest source of major donors, and they need to be developed on a one by one basis.

You may then be ready to launch publicly. Whether you are going to launch publicly will depend very much on the cause in question. If it is something of general interest to the population, then yes publicity is very valuable. If it isn't, then there may not actually be a great deal of merit in a public launch. But if it isn't a public launch it is, if you like, spreading the campaign more widely across the constituency of support, and that would be your third phase.

Your fourth phase would be consolidating and reviewing and follow up. It is almost certain that, if it is a capital campaign, there would be an opportunity to cultivate the relationship with people who are first-time donors to the capital campaign and sustain that relationship to feed the ongoing revenue needs of the organisation.

Terry

How would he sum up the process of moving from a campaign strategy to actually making it work on a day-to-day level?

Geoff

Success in fundraising is dependent upon really professional management of a huge host of detail and that has got to be planned well in advance and whether that is represented by a very detailed action plan, or a very detailed timetable, it has to there. Nobody should be going into a fundraising office, particularly for a capital campaign, and be asking the question 'Well, what shall we do today?' They should know what they are going to do today and that should be all mapped out in advance. Now that said, one mustn't be overly rigid because it's important to maintain an opportunistic eye on what is unfolding and therefore be flexible. But certainly detailed planning, that's set out for people to follow.

Terry

What would he say makes the key difference, between a successful fundraising strategy and one that might not work so well?

Geoff

By and large I would say it's where the plan has been tailored to the unique circumstances and character of that individual organisation rather than an off-the-peg template approach. It's really understanding what all the tools in the fundraising kit are about and how they can be applied to your circumstances. It's quite legitimate for an organisation to take the view that this particular sector or this particular technique, isn't appropriate. There's no obligation to use every possible type of fundraising in constructing that strategy. So I think bespoke tailoring is the answer, which can only be achieved if people really understand the processes that are involved.

Terry

How did this relate to the overall fundraising effort?

Geoff

Fundraising does not, can not and should not take place in a vacuum. It's got to be integrated with the whole of the organisation. I think it is rather sad sometimes that there's almost a class divide in some charitable organisations where the serious most important people are those delivering the service of the charity, whilst the fundraisers are the lesser folk, if you like, who have to do the dirty work of raising the money to enable the charity to achieve its objectives. But it's got to be integrated. There's also a danger in looking at opportunities outside the organisation because of a new funding source coming on stream and thinking 'Well what can we do to get money from that source?' If that results in a project being conceived that actually doesn't fit within the remit of an individual charity, I think that's inappropriate.

Terry

Geoff talked about how organisations can vary their fundraising approach to reach new groups.

Geoff

Very often one gets involved with an organisation which has been doing traditional fundraising, as they perceive it, for many years and that will have manifested itself mainly in fundraising events, and they're locked into that actual type of fundraising. I can remember an incidence of a cancer care project in the South Wales Valleys, in the Rhonda Valleys in fact, where it was a challenging time at that time, some six hundred thousand pounds to be raised. A feasibility study had indicated maybe two fifty thousand was achievable.

Within the first twelve months, three hundred thousand pounds had been raised, and in the view of local people, without doing any proper fundraising, because we'd actually done some structured approaches to Trusts whereas all they previously done was some blanket letters. We'd used some direct marketing techniques which they believed just could not work. The Rhonda valley at that time was one of the most deprived parts of the United Kingdom and the idea of seeking commitments of five pounds a month from people on very limited budgets was ridiculous. In actual fact, it responded very, very well indeed and raised a good chunk of the money.

So I think it's really opening people's eyes to that whole principle of defining your constituency of support, making sure that every possible source of money is considered, and then it is decided 'Yes that has potential' and then agreeing what should be done for that.

Terry

Any kind of a strategy involves risks. What steps can be taken to manage the risks in a fundraising strategy?

Geoff

I think risk assessment is probably the most valuable tool to emerge in recent years, and it is essential in managing any project, not just the risk assessment but the risk management. It's

important to share that with the whole of the client body, identify with the risk, but also review it very frequently. In some instances one would have the risk assessment process in place, and in scoring it and in reviewing it on a monthly basis, certain risks will move up if you then order them. And you can actually see what is threatening and what is receding, in terms of the circumstances surrounding the project. Those are internal factors, external factors; the risk assessment needs to be very comprehensive.

Terry

I asked him to expand on that.

Geoff

When one is embarking upon a new project there is a question of whether one is able to attract sufficiently high status leadership to assist, let's say, with the major donor work which we were talking about earlier on. Now if one fails to do that then it's going to have an impact on the potential for attracting major gifts. It may also lead to a revision in the timetable of the whole campaign. And any timetable that's drawn up has got to be on a provisional basis and is dependent on achieving certain key objectives at certain key points.

External factors, I mean adverse news about an organisation or about a person associated with an organisation, needs to be accounted for. What happens if somebody involved with an organisation is caught with their hand in the till? I can remember years ago a very high profile individual was suddenly accused of undermining the local environment by being associated with a planning application for his huge country estate and he contacted the charity in question straight away and resigned. I think people being open about things, I think some charities are exemplary, where they share bad news with their donors. Particularly where one has charities involved in delivering projects in developing countries, where the nature of the situation is that from time to time, the money is going to not hit its target. When they are open with donors, it encourages people to carry on supporting them.

Terry

Geoff talked a bit more about how to ensure that a fundraising strategy achieves results.

Geoff

I don't want to sound glib but it is absolutely key that the fundraising strategy addresses the issue of implementation. And one of the, I think, common problems is that people come up with very, very impressive fundraising strategies but they are theoretical documents and don't actually address the reality of the organisation for which the strategy is being devised. So implementation is very important. Very often people will say 'Well we're big picture people', you know, less detail. Well people often say that the devil is in the detail and it's very true.

I think one of the most important things is where there is a common ownership of fundraising throughout an organisation and that the board of Trustees are not just pushing out the responsibility of fundraising to staff or to other external sources and saying get on with it. Those that actually share the responsibility for it, and all make a positive contribution to fundraising, are those that succeed. It's quite a helpful image, that of fundraising being a jigsaw to which everybody can contribute a positive piece, even if it is only a positive attitude towards fundraising and advocacy for it. So being a jigsaw rather than being a bouncing ball that no one wants to catch.

Terry

He emphasised the importance of skills like teamwork and communication.

Geoff

Communication is absolutely essential and people must not be left to carry out their specific responsibility in a team in some sort of unconnected bubble in which they are left to sink or swim. I think they must be encouraged and if in doubt, shout. And they need that support and mentoring all the way down the line. It does return to that issue of ownership as well though, because if everybody in an organisation is aware that at the very top people are proud of the fact that they are delivering their mission but also proud of the fact that they are attracting the funds necessary to deliver that mission that would irrigate the whole

organisation and encourage people to work together. And again the risk assessment process of it is a regular activity. It will identify the problems that emerge.

Terry

Here's an example of how this kind of monitoring and evaluation works in practice.

Geoff

I think the strategy is in place, you know what you are going to be doing when, to different sectors of your constituency of support. It's important to measure the response from that, so at least on a monthly basis one is analysing donations as they come in. They are telling you 'yes we're getting nothing from the corporate sector but that's OK because we're not active with the corporate sector at the moment. We are getting a much higher response from private individuals than we anticipated.

We had intended in two months' time to refocus upon the corporates, or rather to focus upon the corporates and move away from applying resources to private individuals. But we are seeing that the response is much higher than anticipated so we must therefore change tack. We must push the corporates six months down the track and we must actually commit more of our resources to developing what is a much richer seam than we saw'. But it is only by actually analysing and reviewing regularly what's happening, that you can take that sort of informed decision.

Terry

I ended by asking if there was one piece of advice he could offer to someone devising a fundraising strategy, perhaps for the first time, what would it be?

Geoff

In recent years I think the whole of the voluntary sector has focussed too strongly upon methodology and has lost its way a little bit and ignored the case that the reason a charity exists. I think it's very important that people embarking upon fundraising really focus upon why an organisation exists, what its mission is, who are the people who are going to benefit from the activities of that charity. And then from that, will come the opportunity to apply expertise with regard to which methods of fundraising will best achieve that mission.