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## CAMPAIGN PLANNING & BUDGETING



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# CAMPAIGN PLANNING AND BUDGETING

## Introduction – Why Plan?

Now that you have completed your research, you are ready to write a campaign plan. Much like a strategic plan for the organization itself, the campaign plan is an outline of who is responsible for what by when. It provides an overview of the assumptions underlying your action steps, describes the campaign message (or which messages the research team will be testing as Election Day approaches), outlines your overarching goals, and details agreed-upon strategies and tactics for achieving the goals. When well-crafted, the campaign plan provides mechanisms for measuring progress and includes contingency plans as events may require changes during the course of the campaign.

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The written plan is typically the responsibility of the campaign manager, but should involve the entire campaign committee. A good way to start is with a planning meeting where all key players are present. When board members, interested organization staff, key volunteers, and even some donors help create the blueprint for victory, they are more likely to volunteer for key roles and to stay on track during the campaign itself. Everyone needs to be comfortable with their role as described in the plan. Just as important, having an agreed-to plan helps the campaign manager make the best of use of his or her time, especially at the end of the campaign.

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The campaign plan should reflect your research and key goals – how you will reach 50% plus one of the expected vote

on Election Day. Campaign resources are then allocated accordingly. If you have determined, for instance, that half of your vote total must come from supportive voters who may not vote in an off-year election, then half of your campaign resources - people, time, and money – must be devoted to turnout efforts for supporters who are otherwise unlikely to vote.

As the committee conducts its research, completes targeting, and develops its strategies for success, key decisions are being made that should be included in the written plan. If you have decided that your campaign manager is also your official spokesperson, write that down. If you have decided that the campaign committee won't take contributions from certain donors, write it down. If you decide to focus on direct mail and forgo purchasing newspaper ads, write it down.

## Elements of a Campaign Plan

Below is an outline of the basic fundamentals of a complete campaign plan, though your campaign team may decide to add or delete items as befits your particular circumstances.

- The Electoral Landscape – overview of research and assumptions
  - Basic case statement – why taxing authority put levy/bond issue on ballot
  - Assessment of electorate
    - Geographic boundaries
    - Demographics
    - Voting history

- Factors contributing to perception of organization
  - Among opinion leaders
  - Among voters
  - Internal SWOT analysis
  - Community or statewide trends/external realities
- Ongoing Research Needs (Message testing)
  - What will we need to know as Election Day approaches?
    - Whether our message is effective
    - Whether our opponents' message is effective
    - What else is influencing voters as the campaigns goes forward?
  - How will we find out? (Polling? Focus groups?)
- Goals and Strategies
  - Magic number/Targeting
    - What is 50% plus 1 of expected voter turnout?
  - Likely supporters
    - Are there natural voter groups who support us?
    - How will we identify them?
    - What will we do to make sure they vote on Election Day?
  - Likely voters
    - How many do we need to persuade?
- Tactics and Action Steps
  - Message
    - Key reasons to vote yes
    - Overarching theme / Slogan
    - What are our opponents likely to say and what is our response?
  - Opinion Leaders
    - Media
    - Speakers bureau
    - Campaign events/activities
  - Voter contact
    - Direct communications (mail and phone)
    - Purchased advertising (newspaper/radio/TV ads)
  - Visibility (Yard signs/Billboards)
  - Election Day Activities
- Administration/Organization
  - Campaign team/Roles and responsibilities
  - Lines of authority/Decision-making processes
  - Budget – Total and Cash Flow
  - Fundraising Plan
- Operational Schedule

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## ***Distribution of the Plan***

To function at its best, the campaign plan needs to be understood and embraced by everyone with a key role or roles on the campaign team. Generally speaking, however, this isn't the kind of document you ever want to see quoted in the local newspaper. Finding the balance between wide-enough distribution and the need for confidentiality can be a challenge. In general, the campaign manager should endeavor to keep paper copies of the document to a minimum, should exercise caution when forwarding the document electronically, and should remind everyone who has a copy to take care that it doesn't fall into the hands of someone who might harbor ill-will toward the organization or one of its principals.

The campaign manager might review a draft of the campaign plan with key members of the team at a meeting set aside for this purpose. Once s/he has received verbal approval from this group, the plan could go into a notebook on the campaign manager's desk to be consulted or revised as necessary. Parts of the document, such as the timeline or the budget, might be distributed to others as needed to keep everyone on track, but it is probably not necessary for others to maintain active copies of the entire document. A summary version might be prepared for sharing with potential donors and others who need to see that you are well-organized and have the ability to win.

## **Evaluation and Adjustment of the Plan throughout the Campaign**

**Clear and measurable goals and timelines provide the highest level of accountability for team members.**

A well-written campaign plan is unambiguous, realistic, and flexible. It contains outcome measurements, means of ensuring accountability, and contingency plans. It is meant to keep everyone involved pulling in the same direction from beginning to end, no matter what happens externally. A plan might call for \$7,500 in direct mail, \$1,000 in literature for door-to-door distribution, and \$3,000 in yard signs and billboards. But what if the finance team only raises \$8,000? What will be dropped? A great plan spells that out in advance, easing pressure on the campaign team who would otherwise be required to make those difficult decisions within 30 days of Election Day when time spent communicating with voters is most productive.

Clear and measurable goals and timelines provide the highest level of accountability for team members. Say your plan calls for the identification of 4000 likely voters who support the levy. A team of volunteers operating a phone-calling system may need to identify 400 new voters every week for the last 10 weeks of the campaign. If after the second week of calling, only 250 voters have been so identified, the campaign manager must make adjustments to the plan by adding more volunteers or shifting resources to a paid phone system. Only by having a clear and unambiguous set of goals can the campaign leadership stay on top of such contingencies.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Successful campaigns require a focused effort by many different people taking on a variety of responsibilities. A good campaign plan thoroughly describes the key campaign roles and identifies the person or team of people who fill each one. In some cases it may be easiest for one person to fill more than one role. Other times, giving an eager volunteer a title and a discreet set of responsibilities is a simple way to involve them in your effort. Here are some of the typical roles:

- **Campaign Manager:** The campaign manager is responsible for the implementation of the campaign plan, and makes all day-to-day campaign decisions in consultation with the campaign chair, committee, and consultants. She manages all campaign expenditures and organizes communications among and between members of the team. She monitors implementation of the campaign plan and motivates the rest of the campaign team to stay on task and be enthusiastic.

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- Campaign Chair: Usually someone who is well-known in the community, or who is a member of the organization board, the chair runs the committee meetings. The chair is available to make public presentations to civic groups and organizations and is often designated the “campaign spokesperson,” giving media interviews and providing a face for the campaign. Most communications are signed by the chair or are issued in his name. The chair plays a key role in fundraising.
- Campaign Treasurer: One of the first people recruited for the campaign, the treasurer is legally responsible for keeping track of all incoming and outgoing cash, and completes all required campaign finance reporting in a timely way. The treasurer will be sending thank you notes to donors. Because the treasurer’s name appears in the disclaimer published on all campaign literature, it is helpful to have a well-known, and well-liked, person in that role. It is possible to have a deputy treasurer who completes and signs the campaign finance filing forms.
- Campaign spokesperson: Sometimes the chair, and sometimes the campaign manager, the campaign spokesperson is the one person designated to respond to media inquiries. Everyone associated with the campaign knows to refer all questions concerning the ballot issue to this person.
- Database Manager: Recruited for her knowledge of at least one computer database system and willingness to spend many tedious hours sorting data and generating lists, the database manager will be the person who obtains the voter file from the board of elections or secretary of state. She will keep track of supporter and opponent information, updating phone numbers and addresses as volunteers make contact with voters. She will provide all needed lists for walking, phoning, and mailings.
- Fundraising Chair: Not shy about asking potential donors for their financial support, the chair of the fundraising committee works to ensure sufficient resources exist to fund the budget. Often a board member, the chair implements all fundraising elements outlined in the campaign plan including appeal letters, phoning potential donors, donor meetings, and events.
- Volunteer Coordinator: Often the busiest person on a campaign team, the volunteer coordinator works to recruit and prepare sufficient volunteers to perform tasks associated with the campaign plan. Working according to the campaign calendar, the volunteer coordinator ensures adequate staffing at events, phone banks, literature distribution, yard sign set up and tear down, and Election Day activities.
- Scheduler: It is often helpful to have one person designated to ensure the campaign is visible at all community activities (fairs, festivals, parades) by scanning the civic calendars, newspapers, and other publications for events where levy volunteers can attend. The scheduler will contact the event organizers to secure all relevant permissions and instructions, then work with the campaign manager and volunteer coordinator to make sure each event is covered.
- Event chairs: If the plan calls for campaign-related events such as Town Hall meetings, or fundraisers, it can be helpful to designate specific volunteers to chair those committees. Working with the campaign manager, fundraising chair, and volunteer coordinator, the event chairs work to ensure the success of special campaign events.
- Campaign Committee: Comprised of the people described above, the campaign committee coordinates campaign activities, meeting as needed throughout the year (weekly in the final month.) This group oversees the implementation of the campaign plan and ensures sufficient resources (financial and human) are available for all tasks. While campaign planning and oversight is an important function, committee members should understand that their help is very much needed during implementation as well.

- Campaign Consultants: Depending upon the size of the district and the availability of resources, the campaign committee may choose to employ one or more consultants to fill unique roles requiring technical expertise or other resources. Examples include: polling, media, direct mail, phones, and fundraising.

Again, while smaller organizations may be challenged to find people to fill the various roles, it does help to have a clear idea during the planning phase of what the various tasks and functions are, and to write down all agreements about responsibilities people accept.

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## ***Timelines/Operational Schedule***

Adequately-planned campaigns have three basic phases:

Phase 1: Preparation. The campaign committee forms and chooses its leaders, the treasurer is designated, research is conducted, the campaign plan written, and fundraising begins. Any final tasks associated with getting the issue on the ballot are completed. While some elements of Phase 1 are ongoing until deep into the campaign, the basic campaign structure should be completed and key roles filled by about the 120<sup>th</sup> day before Election Day.

Phase 2: Organizing and Influencing Opinion Leaders.

For the three months between the end of the preparation phase and the initiation of voter contact programs, the campaign team is working among community leaders to make sure they understand the levy request and the key arguments in favor of voting for it. They are collecting endorsements from both individuals and groups. The campaign works to have a presence at community events, speaks to all civic organizations, writes and places articles in the newsletter of any group who will allow it. Individual meetings are held with elected officials, school leaders, business and industry leaders, editorial boards, and others as the campaign works to establish momentum for the final push. It is important to finalize fundraising during this time, so that planners know how much they can spend on voter contact without putting the campaign into debt.

**When putting together the timeline, put all key events and campaign plan elements onto the calendar and then set your deadlines working backward from each.**

Phase 3: Voter Contact. The majority of voters begin to pay attention to candidates and issues within 30 days of Election Day. This is when absentee and early voting begins, and yard signs start sprouting up in most locales. By now, the campaign team should be functioning very well, and the key decisions finalized. The bulk of volunteer-intensive activities take place now, as well as the bulk of the spending. It is easier to generate press coverage at this point, so many campaigns endeavor to generate attention by holding a kickoff event or rally of supporters at about the 30-day mark.

When putting together the timeline, put all key events and campaign plan elements onto the calendar and then set your deadlines working backward from each. For instance, in order to make sure you have yard signs available for distribution 30 days before the election, you will have to place the order with the printer (and have resources to pay the bill) by a certain date two to three weeks prior, finalize the design by a date before that, send drafts out to interested members of your committee by an earlier date and so on. Write these deadlines on your calendar.

## Budgeting

If the campaign plan provides a narrative description of the priorities of your campaign and reflects the key decisions you have made as you prepare for the intense and expensive final weeks, the campaign budget is the equivalent expression in numbers. Your budget is your blueprint for effective and efficient allocation of the scarcest resource, money, and is your roadmap for keeping your campaign team on the same page. Carefully-crafted budgets are not only a means of measuring campaign progress, but can also provide a framework for making those late-in-the-campaign decisions.

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The budget document itself is generally a spreadsheet showing estimated costs of the various parts of the campaign plan, projected across time, with space for actual income and expenditures to be inserted as the campaign moves along. It is just as important to anticipate the timing of costs (i.e. when each bill will be due) as it is to anticipate the costs themselves. Updated regularly, the budget document is used by the campaign manager to monitor cash flow and make campaign decisions, but should also be shared at each committee meeting. Because it is a visual illustration of the campaign's priorities, it is an important tool for keeping committee members up to date on the campaign's progress.

**A good rule of thumb is to set aside 70% of your budget for direct mail or ads, whatever your research has determined to be the best method of communicating with voters in your area.**

In budgeting, careful consideration must be given to projecting how much money the fundraising team can realistically generate. But the budget is also a fundraising tool because it serves notice to the fundraising team about the actual costs of a victorious campaign, especially if they are receiving regular budget updates in campaign committee meetings. In addition, some version of the budget may be provided to potential donors as a means of demonstrating the campaign's level of organization, likelihood of success, and how their contribution can help.

Realism must also govern cost estimates: lowballing projections in order to make campaign colleagues more comfortable doesn't serve anyone well in the end. While the budgets of other campaigns in your district don't necessarily reflect exactly what you will need to raise and spend, go ahead and pull those filings from your Board of Elections and have a look at their contributions and expenditures. Also, as you work to put figures into your budget spreadsheet, save your calculations. You may need to reconstruct your assumptions later.

Remember that your budget must reflect your priorities, which is voter contact, voter contact, voter contact. A good rule of thumb is to set aside 70% of your budget for direct mail or ads, whatever your research has determined to be the best method of communicating with voters in your area. That means that in a \$10,000 budget, only \$3,000 can be spent on supplies, equipment, research, or visibility items like yard signs or bumper stickers. Since voter contact takes place in the last 30 days, some larger campaigns actually set aside 70% of their income as they go along in a special voter contact account to be spent in the last month.

## Conclusion

Once carefully outlined and agreed to, the campaign plan serves to make day-to-day management decisions much easier, especially in that last hectic month. Not only can the campaign manager use it to determine what tasks need to be accomplished today or this week, but s/he can also use it to keep others on track as well. Importantly, as distractions occur throughout the course of a campaign – such as when a negative letter to the editor appears in the local paper – the campaign manager can use the plan to assure supporters that the campaign is moving forward productively, and, indeed, it will be. Equally importantly, the campaign manager can use a detailed plan to keep the committee from becoming bogged down on items that are not included in the plan or budget. Remember, if it is not written down, it is not a plan. Happy writing!