

We see many clients who have identified a need, instructed architects to develop designs to provide images of the finished project, and then gone straight to their fundraising campaign, only to find that they cannot answer difficult questions from donors and other stakeholders. This can lead ultimately to a failure of the campaign which could have been avoided through better planning.

Key questions

You must have considered and be able to answer the following questions before you commit to expensive designs:

- What is the required outcome of the project and how will the project deliver the outcome?
- Is the project the most efficient and cost-effective way to deliver the required outcomes?
- What other options are there and why were they excluded?
- What will not having this building (or refurbishment) mean in the short, medium and long term to students and to staff?
- What will it cost to run – e.g. overheads and staff costs?
- Who will use it and for how many hours per day or week – e.g. can this include members of the wider community, are there benefits beyond the school community and if so what?
- What is the use of the building in holiday times?
- What is the long term maintenance plan?
- How will the building or refurbishment help deliver the long term school development strategy?
- How does the project complement other provision locally?
- Will it be possible to get planning permission?
- If there is likely to be some government funding for the project, what national, regional and local strategic needs is the project fulfilling?
- Have the end users – e.g. students, teachers and external groups – been consulted on the building's features and lay-out?
- What are the implications of a proposed new building on the proposed site for the rest of the school estate and other users?
- How much will it cost to build and how are we going to pay for it?

Putting the case

Once you have answered all these questions you will have a Case for Support to which all your stakeholders can sign up, and with which you can convince potential donors. A good Case for Support will focus on the benefits of the project and not its features. i.e. it will concentrate not on what the building will look like but on what difference it will make to the education and well-being of the students. If you can get students to understand this and care about it enough to get involved in fundraising then this is a powerful message for their parents and your alumni.

Options analysis

But answering some of these questions might not be easy or possible to do without professional advice. It is often necessary to engage the services of a design team in your feasibility study to tell you if your list of requirements will fit on the site, or if the building

you want to convert or refurbish is suitable/ large enough to meet your needs. They ought to be able to give you an indicative capital cost based on comparable facilities elsewhere. But this work should only cost a small fraction of the fees you would incur for a full design.

Sometimes it is the case at this stage that your requirements are found either not to fit the site or to be unaffordable. You then look at a range of options which would deliver more or less of the wishlist at a range of prices and undertake a cost/benefit analysis

Achieve early buy-in from your best donor prospects

Alongside the options analysis you should consider what funding might be available to inform discussion about which of the options is affordable. Armed with information on the different options and their relative prices it is possible to test the fundraising proposal on some potential major donors. Asking potential major donors for advice at this stage is a good way of engaging their interest and improving the chance of them offering you financial support in due course.

If you ask for advice you often receive help. If you ask for help before you are ready you will often just receive advice!

Key principles for capital appeals

Capital appeal definition: a defined target in a defined time period, e.g. £4 million by June 2012 (so the building can open before the Autumn term 2013).

The time limit is crucial so donors do not get bored and loose heart.

80% of the target will come from 20% of the donors. Figure 2 shows a typical gift table for a £4 million capital appeal

Gift /grant amount £	no of gifts	no of prospects required	Total £
1,000,000	1	4	1,000,000
750,000	1	4	750,000
500,000	1	4	500,000
250,000	3	12	750,000
100,000	3	12	300,000
50,000	4	16	200,000
25,000	5	20	125,000
10,000	7	28	70,000
5,000	15	60	75,000
smaller gifts & event fundraising			230,000
	40	160	4,000,000

Figure 2

Work out at the earliest stage who these 20% are. You almost certainly already know them. Your biggest donors are most likely to be people who have already given and are particularly loyal to you. Wealth is obviously a key indicator but warmth is just as important. If you cannot identify this level of wealth and interest among current connections your target is probably too high.

Figure 2 shows that for every gift you are likely need four prospects. If your parent and alumni network is already warm and well-developed this ratio could go down. If you have never communicated in this way with these people you could need a deeper prospect pool.

It is really important to start any capital campaign with approaches to the 20%. If you don't already know them undertake wealth searches of your databases and contact mapping with your governors and warmest parents and other stakeholders. Do not go to the wider school network with a general appeal until you have at least 60% of your target in place. You will not achieve your target if all you best prospects are asked for £500.

Be aware that the costs of a capital campaign tend to be around 8-15% of the target. You may need to invest in additional staff, consultancy support, a new database and events. Your headteacher may need cover for some of their job if they are to take a leading role in the campaign.

Who should ask? And how?

Experience has shown us that the most successful asks are peer to peer and face to face. A cold mailing typically receives a 1% response rate. For a warm mailing (i.e. to people with a current connection) you could expect 5% up to 15%. Face to face and peer to peer 80% of people will say yes (although not necessarily to the size of gift you originally requested).

Therefore leadership of your campaign is critical. For school appeals an active and effective Campaign Board will make all the difference. These people will each need to make a limited number of face to face asks to other parents, alumni and governors. And they will need to make gifts themselves at a level appropriate to their circumstances: "if not you then who?"

You need to match your prospects as closely as possible to the best asker. For some it will be the headteacher or chair of governors, for others it will be another parent, or even a student. Gather as much intelligence as you can on the wealth, interests, past giving and connections of all your major donors. This is a conversation about them, not about you.

And remember, face to face will be several times more effective than writing letters. The fewer prospects you have the more important it is to maximise every opportunity.

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