

Overview

The idea of creating a campaign can be daunting to many. But what exactly does a campaign consist of? The definition is as disparate as the issues addressed.

Campaigns can be defined as a movement, crusade, operation, drive, fight, battle, war or promotion. It is the purpose that distinguishes it from a war (Iraq), a marketing promotion (new Coca-Cola) or political campaign (running for office). In the context of the nonprofit sector, the term "campaign" has usually been used to refer to movements (civil rights), drives (membership) or battles (spotted owl supporters vs. the logging industry).

All campaigns start with an idea or event that captures the imagination and then spurs action of the creator(s). It may focus on an individual's desire to establish a neighborhood watch program or it may be a far-reaching issue that impacts many in the present and future. It can be as simple as a group of parents coming together to have a streetlight installed at dangerous intersection or as involved as the efforts of Lois Marie Gibbs when the situation at Love Canal, New York, led this

"ordinary" woman to do extraordinary things. The latter became a symbol of what happens when citizens, provoked by injustice and emboldened by outrage, stand up for themselves and their families and in the process change the course of history.

We can understandably be intimidated by the costs -- time and money of engaging in campaigns. Well-known campaigns have been known to cost millions of dollars. The good news is that there are many other examples of campaigns that have been remarkably successful without the expense.

Starting a campaign is a challenge that takes focus, commitment and time, but is well worth the investment if done wisely. This paper outlines the building blocks to developing an effective campaign. Put simply, the secret is having the right message at the right time for the right audience delivered by the right messenger. "Easier said than done" you might say. But with the tips that follow, engaging in and supporting a campaign on your issue of concern can become a reality for you and your organization.

Introduction

Before you get started it is helpful to develop a concept paper that clearly describes the reasons behind the campaign and the steps you plan to take. This does not have to be an extensive piece, but one that forces the planners to take the time to clarify the intentions and outcomes for your effort. This document can also be used as fundraising proposal, which is always a concern for nonprofit organizations.

A. Statement of Purpose

State in clear and precise language the intent of your campaign. Most-if not all-campaigns seek to get others to participate, support or contribute in meaningful ways. Therefore, you present a compelling vision that will lead others to join your effort.

In a recent article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter, 2003) Chip Heath suggests that nonprofit leaders should keep asking the “why” question and not stop asking this question until something simple, concrete, unexpected, and emotional emerges. His advice can be a valuable tool for creating a clear and convincing statement of purpose.

B. Objectives

Clearly state the objectives of the campaign. These can include both long and short term objectives. For example, a long term objective may be to reshape the country’s fiscal and economic priorities by increasing federal financial support for domestic programs, provided by nonprofit organizations. There are various and challenging short term objectives needed to achieve this overarching objective. One example might include, engage key stakeholders in applying pressure to policymakers to increase federal support for domestic programs.

Critical to the objectives is a clear statement of your proposed solution for the identified problem. It is difficult for people to join in an effort or campaign if they are not clear about its purpose.

C. Research and Analysis

Paint a picture of the current situation that supports your identification of the need for your campaign. This is your problem statement, backed up with objective data and facts. Note the severity and breadth of the problem. Highlight the potential ramifications of not fixing the problem. This should be an objective statement of facts and not a scare tactic. Scare tactics take attention away from the issue and deflect it to the methods of your action.

D. Intuition and Opportunity

In contrast to the data and facts approach, another key component is to trust your intuition that the timing is right and conditions aligned for your campaign. Based upon your read of the situation, identify potential moments of opportunity and build alliances that were seemingly impossible in the past. There is tremendous value in scanning the landscape for simmering sentiments of discontent or interest that can help your organization galvanize a base of support. Typically this has occurred when an action has been taken or proposed that will impact a large group of individuals or organizations. Some campaigns have been successful not because of their brilliance of strategy but because they capitalized on the existing tension found in their community and proposed a solution that others were ready to hear. Success can also stem from having a creative and unique proposed solution or perspective. However, these opportunities are few and far between. It is finding the right chord to build the necessary alliances and to be ready to take advantage of opportunities that arise are most likely to contribute to a successful campaign.

E. Partnerships: Key Players and Coalitions

Building the right partnerships is vital to the success of any campaign. Identify the partners you will need and recruit them to be involved in the campaign. You may choose to develop a planning committee of influential stakeholders, including your neighbors, board, members, or constituents. Demonstrate that your issue is of concern to these stakeholders and that this effort is not driven by a single entity or individual. You can then identify credible spokespersons for your campaign that takes into consideration your target audience. Identifying additional players, such as grassroots based organizational representatives and their clients is another critical step to gaining support for your effort.

F. Methodology

Your methodology can include both a short-term and long-term plan of action. This plan should include all important steps that you will take to develop and implement your campaign. It should include not only those steps under your direct control, but also those of your significant partners. An outline of one approach is included on page six of this document (*Campaign Outline: A Model*). The plan should include methods of communication—that is, what vehicles you plan (or in many cases, can afford) to use to disseminate your message.

G. Target Audience

Before you begin your campaign, you must identify your target audience. The target is the individual or group of people that have the power to implement the solution or the individual or group of people that influence those people that have the power to implement the solution. Understanding the

concerns and motivations of these groups is essential to crafting your message and the desired action that will result from receiving your message. Substantial attention must be paid to message development (see below), but before you consider the message you must understand your target group. It is through the understanding of the motivation (wants/desires/interests) of your target group that you can more effectively craft your message. Different messages are required for the identified target audiences. The messages might require first to get the attention of those that have the power to influence, second to communicate the specific actions they can take and third influence those that have the power to implement the solution.

H. Message Development

Message development is crucial to the success of campaign objectives. Messages must be developed to inform and motivate your target audience, so clarity of objectives and your call to action are important as you develop your message. A helpful source from *Making Health Communications Programs Work: A Planner's Guide*, Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health (1992) with adaptations from Heath (SSRI, Winter, 2003) advised that messages should include the following:

Clarity – messages must clearly convey information to ensure the public understanding and to limit the chances for misunderstanding or inappropriate action. Clear messages contain as few technical, scientific or bureaucratic terms as possible, and eliminate information that the audience does not need in order to make necessary decisions. Readability tests can help determine the reading level required to

understand drafted material and help writers to be conscientious about the selection of words and phrases.

Consistency – in an ideal world, there would be specific consensus on the meaning of new findings or the implications of policy decisions. Unfortunately, consistency is sometimes elusive. Experts tend to interpret new data and policy decisions differently, making consensus among government, industry, and public-interest groups difficult. The important task at hand is to make sure your message is consistently presented and leaves little room for misinterpretation.

Main points – The main points should be stressed, repeated, and never hidden within less strategically-important information.

Tone and appeal – A message should be reassuring, alarming, challenging, or straightforward, depending upon the desired impact and the target audience. Messages should always be truthful, honest, and as complete as possible. Including stories about real people or using simple analogies often go a long way in getting your message across. The use of unexpected connections can elicit the reaction “I had not thought of it in that way”.

Credibility – The spokesperson and source of the information should be believable and trustworthy. Rely on authorities or testable ideas.

Public need – For a message to break through the “information clutter” of society, messages should be based on what the target audience perceives as most important to them- what they want to know, and not what is most important to the originator of

the message. Tapping into emotions (both negative and positive), is more likely to get attention from your target audience.

Test it out – Prior to final production, messages should be re-tested with the target audiences (and in some cases with channel gatekeepers) to assure public understanding and other desired responses.

Closing

The true test of success for a campaign is whether the stated objectives have been achieved. Too often our advocacy and campaign efforts are not perceived to be successful because the change we seek is too broadly defined. Success can take the form of changing practices, laws, or even minds, or at least laying the groundwork for future efforts. So, it is important to consider the lasting impact of your efforts as part of your measure of success.

“To win, we will need to keep building the movement, networking with one another, planning, strategizing and moving forward. Our children’s future, and those of their unborn children, is at stake.”

- (Lois Marie Gibbs, Love Canal Homeowners Association)

About NCNA

With a mission to advance the vital role and capacity of the nonprofit sector in civil society and support and give voice to state and regional associations of nonprofit organizations, the National Council of Nonprofit Associations (NCNA) serves as a credible voice and champion for the nonprofit sector. A 501(c)(3) membership-based organization, NCNA represents a network of thirty-eight state and regional associations of nonprofits serving over 22,000 charities annually.

Campaign Outline – A Model

Short Term Plan of Action

1. Planning Stage

- a. Finalize statement of need and objectives
 - i. Objective I
 - ii. Objective II
- b. Develop framework for the work plan

2. Secure a Planning Committee

- a. Identify and convene targeted groups to serve as the Planning Committee
- b. Identify roles and functions of Committee members
- c. Agreement on approach and strategy
- d. Fundraising to move forward

3. Data Gathering

- a. Identify research needs
- b. Opposition research
- c. Commission specific studies

Long Term Plan of Action

1. Implement Campaign Strategy

- a. If funding available, hire experts such as lobbyists and/or communications specialists
- b. Clarify the campaign strategy
- c. Engage campaign strategy – direct media and/or grassroots
- d. Information dissemination and vehicles for communication

2. Engage Constituencies

- a. Planning Committee members engage their constituencies in message delivery
- b. Outreach to media: local, state and national
- c. Engage and inform political candidates about the campaign issues
- d. Grassroots community

3. Monitor Progress

- a. Develop measurements of success
- b. Realign strategy, if need be
- c. Media relations
- d. Assess impact of messages and refine as needed