

Do It Yourself Capital Campaigns: Yes or No?

Dear Friend,

Once a community decides to undertake a capital campaign, the question arises in some quarters, “Should we hire a fundraising professional, or should we attempt to do it ourselves?” This question is a legitimate question. As someone who has worked in stewardship, development and capital campaigns (300+) my whole career, the short answer is, **“Don’t attempt to do a capital campaign by yourself!”**

- 1) In 25 years I have only seen one small, wealthy, rural church successfully raise the money it needed on its own! It was a small church of 60 households wanted to raise \$165,000 in 2005 for the building of a small, steel-sided social hall. They did not raise all the money they needed at first, but they did after a time.
- 2) **A professional fundraising consultant should be able to raise 2X to 4X the money you can raise on your own. How much is that worth to you?**
- 3) In the 1990s I knew of an organization that wanted to raise \$3 million for a new sports complex, but they wanted to save money. They did not hire a professional. Instead, they conducted a capital campaign on their own and raised \$1.5 million. A good amount for sure, but they fell far short of their goal. This community was a group of wealthy farmers. In fact, the directors of neighboring organizations knew they could have easily raised the needed \$3 million. But, to save the cost of the consultant’s fee, they lost \$1.5 million. And they built a partial complex.
- 4) **You only have one chance!** It is best to start with the needed professional immediately. There are no re-dos once a campaign begins. Even if you hire a consultant halfway through, your campaign will not be fully successful.
- 5) Years ago, after finishing a capital campaign, one campaign leader said to me, **“Either you hire a consultant, or you do it the wrong way!”** I used to think that was an overstatement; now I see that it is true.
- 6) A successful capital campaign has many moving parts and many deadlines. **Only a fundraising professional has the knowledge and experience to oversee this complicated process and keep it moving forward successfully.**
 - A) A capital campaign has a specific timeline, a momentum, and many moving parts.
 - B) **An experienced consultant knows how to identify the major donors that will make for either a successful or failed campaign.**
 - C) An experienced consultant has seen dozens or hundreds of different campaign experiences. He/she can draw on his/her expertise to apply just the right solutions.
 - D) An experienced consultant is objective.
 - E) An experienced consultant keeps all the leaders accountable and moving forward.
 - F) An experienced consultant can inspire the campaign leadership.
- 7) **At the beginning a community is worried about the fee; in the end, it will be concerned about the money they have raised!** A few dollars saved in the beginning can mean millions lost in the end. An organization can “Trip over dollars picking up dimes!”
- 8) Over the years, I have learned not to tile my floor, shingle my roof, install my cabinetry, etc. I keep focused on what I do well and hire others to do what they do well. You will be hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars ahead by hiring a professional.

Mark Filips

President

VisionWorks partners with churches, schools, libraries, hospitals, and other non-profits in feasibility studies and capital campaigns.

Contact Mark Filips and VisionWorks today at 402.999.2970 or markf@VisionWorksCo.com, and let us put our expertise to work for you!