

Crafting a Campaign Communications Plan

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So you're in a campaign. Looking at campaign realities, you know you will need to maximize resources in order to address the demands of the campaign and, while the prospect may seem daunting, there is a silver lining. Campaign planning provides a great opportunity for you to review your development communications plan and find new ways to give your supporters substantive information and to streamline your work flow.

The first step in designing this donor-centered communications plan is to conduct a communications assessment. It is essential to make a list of what you are currently sending out to donors, whether it is a stewardship report for an endowed chair, an alumni newsletter, or a thank-you letter to an annual fund donor. Once you know what is currently going out from your office, you can regulate timing and generate cross-pollination with content and ensure tighter control over messaging.

Once you have done this, you will also need to write out a list of your diverse, target audiences. Although there may be some overlap, you will invariably have different audiences with slightly different needs—corporations, annual fund donors, trustees, alumni volunteers, and major donors. These audiences may receive many of the same communications, but you will need to be aware of what special communications needs may emerge.

At this point, you will have the “how” and the “who,” and it is time to decide on the “what.” What stories do you want to tell in order to engage your donors? What do you want to say about your institutional aspirations and the impact that campaign gifts will have on these aspirations?

The good news is that you already have outstanding information about the people and programs that define your organization from stewardship reports. Finalizing your plan is a matter of taking this information and plugging it into diverse communications vehicles. In this way, stewardship information becomes multipurpose, and a report for a scholarship donor also becomes the raw material for a story about scholarships in an alumni newsletter or a Web site profile.

With the proper planning, your donor-centered communications plan will be a flexible, well-timed integration of form and content. You will have a list of your communications vehicles and your audiences, and an inventory of content. Now look at your calendar and plot out a timeline, keeping your outreach varied, and your message consistent. Congratulations on your excellent campaign communications plan!