

10-Point Checklist for Modern Campaign Communications

Whether your goal is \$5 million or \$5 billion, major fundraising campaigns are high-stakes moments for nonprofits. From planning to public launch to a successful close, communications are key in gaining attention, capturing hearts, and compelling action.

How will you use communications to excite and motivate staff, volunteers, and donors across every phase of your campaign — especially as those communications evolve in the modern era?

In Foster Avenue's 40+ years, we have helped dozens of client partners raise more than \$35 billion. Drawing on that experience, we distilled our modern campaign essentials into a 10-point checklist.

□ 1. Engage strategic communications at the planning table from the beginning.

Why: Message clarity accelerates progress.

- Identify your campaign's "big idea." You may raise funds for ordinary needs, but those funds must be in pursuit of something extraordinary.
- Before your feasibility study, invest in an effective, motivating prospectus. You have only one chance to make a great first impression with top stakeholders.
- Grounded in a clear campaign logic, organizational leaders can advance funding priorities that reflect donor values.

□ 2. Articulate rock-solid answers to your campaign’s “why now, why here, why this.”

Why: Only message resonance can make believers of your stakeholders.

- An institution’s strategic plan should — but often doesn’t — convey your organizational vision in donor-centric terms; you must do that translation!
- As your campaign goes to market, don’t skimp on this “research and development” phase that precedes your “new product launch.”
- Make convincing links between the “whys,” or risk having your campaign priorities seen as disconnected or even disingenuous.

□ 3. Articulate your funding priorities in a compelling, donor-centric manner.

Why: Donors give for their own reasons, not yours.

- Adopt an outside-in point of view in your messaging, constantly returning to what donors — not institutional planners — value.
- Remember: funding priorities that sound like “more of the same” will not distinguish your campaign from annual fundraising; skip the institutional jargon.

□ 4. Map your communications landscape, analyzing key opportunities and challenges.

Why: Campaigns are multi-year endeavors, and you must plan for the journey.

- Your campaign will not communicate in a vacuum but will be influenced by many realities in your institution’s environment, from industry and societal trends to community issues.
- Mapping your opportunities and challenges is a vital precursor to the more tactical campaign communications plan that follows.

□ 5. Assess your team's readiness to take on the rigors of campaign communications.

Why: Campaigns require specialized, strategic messaging.

- "Business-as-usual" staffing and expertise may not be enough for a campaign.
- Consider what investments you may need to make in internal talent and external partners.
- Orient staff in how the campaign may change their familiar approaches and practices; help staff embrace the effort as a skill-building growth opportunity.

□ 6. Create a plan for organization-wide collaboration on campaign communications.

Why: A successful campaign is "owned" universally, not just by fundraisers.

- To build mutual understanding and support, show how the campaign can help external relations professionals in every division achieve their own goals.
- Inspire shared ownership through a commitment to collaboration. Equip communicators from all departments with a shared understanding of the campaign vision and objectives, so all play a valuable role in cross-promoting and featuring the campaign through their existing initiatives.

□ 7. Develop a campaign message that will inform a dynamic creative platform.

Why: Your campaign's aesthetic must be distinctive, but also genuine.

- You must be able to distill your campaign message to its essentials.
- Concentrate on the institutional values and commitments that are driving your urgent response to a challenging future — because people must buy your "why" before they will buy your "what."
- Adopt a campaign theme and visual aesthetic that expresses your institutional vision and values.

□ 8. Engage program leaders to create effective unit-based funding priorities.

Why: This is the level that most donors give to.

- Constituents are often more loyal to institutional units than to the overall institution – reinforce that loyalty with effective cases for support at the unit level.
- Unit leaders vary widely in their philanthropic sensibility, which can lead to overly tactical funding priorities that lack vision.
- Educate unit leaders to set their sights on funding priorities that both compel donors and reinforce the institutional vision.

□ 9. Encourage campaign fluency among all campaign team members.

Why: Brochures don't raise funds; people do.

- Your campaign will remain just sterile words on paper until stakeholders begin to own the ideas behind the campaign.
- Train your team in messages they can morph to reflect their own passions and individual donors' interests.

□ 10. Build a digital-first (not digital-only!) communications capacity.

Why: In the modern era, personalization has replaced production as the way to engage donors.

- Flexible digital tools can support nimble, hyperpersonalized relationship-building.
- Leverage the potential of analytics to inform donor strategies and drive powerful stewardship: you're collecting the data; now put it to work.

Thank you!

We hope this list gives you a solid starting point for planning modern campaign communications – and if you could use a hand, [we'd be happy to help](#). Drop us a line at contact@fosteravenue.com.

