

Not-for-Profit Industry

Capital Campaign Fundraising Series #3: 4 Ways to Engage Busy Campaign Volunteers

In this article, the third in our series (read [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)) about the new trends in capital campaign fundraising, we explore new ways to engage volunteers.

VOLUNTEERS FUEL YOUR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Executive directors and development directors often claim to be too busy to spend huge amounts of time wrangling volunteers. They wonder if it is worth all of the time and trouble. The answer is YES. Involved volunteers in your campaign are worth their weight in gold.

People who are involved in campaigns give to campaigns. In many campaigns, 80 percent or even 90 percent of the people who give lead major gifts, and they play an active role in planning and implementing the campaign.

Engaging donors is one of the best ways to get them to give and give generously.

PEOPLE IN THE “LEISURE CLASS” HAVE LESS LEISURE THAN EVER BEFORE

Though the need to engage donors remains as important as ever, their willingness to help in the standard ways has declined. Everyone is, or at least feels, too busy!

An eye-opening [article in the Economist](#) explains what we in the capital campaign and fundraising world are experiencing—that well-off people who might have more leisure time are and feel even busier than they used to. “Everyone everywhere seems to be busy.” And people in the well-educated, wealthy “leisure class” feel busiest of all!



Here is the challenge—the more you engage donors in your campaign, the more successful you will be. But the very people you want to engage—those with wealth and status and power—are the people who feel busiest.

FOUR WAYS TO ENGAGE BUSY DONORS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

New technologies provide ways around this dilemma. If you use them well, you will be able to involve more donors, more effectively, in your campaign than ever before. Here are four strategies we recommend.

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4 Ways to Engage Busy Campaign Volunteers

1. Virtual Face-to-Face

In the last five years, the use of virtual technologies has become easy. While still not perfect, you can easily meet with donors online through video conferencing. Not only can you talk face-to-face with people, but you can easily pull a few people together without expensive equipment or investment.

Many busy volunteers are willing to participate in a video conference when they would not be able or willing to travel to an in-person meeting. The difference is easy to understand. A virtual meeting can easily fit into a busy day in a way that in-person meetings can't. Not only do people not have to travel to get to the meeting, but the virtual nature of the meeting eliminates a great deal of the relaxed chit chat that gobbles time during in-person meetings.

Tips for Virtual Meetings: Group meetings handled virtually require clear structure. When the meetings also involve people who are in the room, on the phone, and on webcams, the facilitator must be sure to call on everyone throughout the meeting. Without strong facilitation, people will not participate actively.

2. Short Assignments

While involving volunteers continues to be important, even targeted short-term assignments work. A volunteer does not have to serve on your board or campaign steering committee to feel engaged. You can ask him or her to come to one or two meetings to help with specific assignments instead. It is also important keep such volunteers connected throughout the campaign with updates and individualized emails throughout the campaign.

Many campaigns use a short-term campaign planning committee to engage philanthropic leaders in the campaign. Often that committee meets no more than three times to review the campaign plan. And if people have the option of participating virtually, you are likely to be able to involve some of the most important people in your community.

Cole, Newton & Duran's Not-for-Profit Practice

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Cole, Newton & Duran's team of professionals are involved in every stage of our client's engagement to ensure they are receiving high quality, responsive service.

Clients enjoy working with experts who help achieve their objectives. Clients receive industry knowledge and solutions they need to not only reach, but to exceed their strategic goals.

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3. Serial Involvement

If you do a good job of planning, running, and following up on volunteer meetings, participants are likely to agree to serve again on a task later in the campaign. For example, a volunteer who agrees to attend three campaign planning meetings may be willing to help you review lead donor lists or host a house party for the campaign.

If you asked many of those volunteers to serve on the campaign steering committee that meets monthly for the entire campaign, they would likely say no. But if you invite them to help in one way after another, they are likely to say yes—particularly if you make their involvement efficient, effective and even fun.

4. Immediate, Action-Oriented Communication

While it may seem obvious, you should use email effectively when you communicate with your campaign volunteers. Here are five suggestions for using email in a way that will make your volunteers happy to stay involved.

- **Be Succinct:** Keep your email communication short! People do not read past the top two or three lines. Communicate the important stuff there and leave out the rest!
- **Use New Subject Lines for Each Topic:** Resist the temptation to keep an email thread going and going. For better or worse, most people count on email subject lines to find things. So be sure you start new emails for new topics and that the subject lines simply capture the topic.
- **Do Not Blind Copy People:** In most cases, when you are tempted to blind copy someone on an email communication, DON'T. It is likely to create political problems that will undermine your ability to engage volunteers.
- **Send the Notes in the Body of an Email:** Write brief follow-up notes in the body of the email so they are easy to scan. Use simple headings to highlight key topics. Even if you want to write full notes and attach them, do your volunteers the favor of pulling out the high points in the email so they do not have to download the notes if they do not want to.
- **Polish Your Writing Skills:** Use active verbs and short sentences when you write emails. Get rid of words like maximize, operationalize, management, institutional, multi-disciplinary, Train yourself to write clear, simple, active language. When you do, your volunteers are more likely to read what you write.

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MAKE MAXIMUM USE OF THE TOOLS AVAILABLE TO ENGAGE VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Getting good at new technologies never feels easy. But the investment of time and energy to become comfortable and effective with them is important for your campaign.

In our next and final part of this series on what is new in capital campaign fundraising, we will outline the tools and technologies we find most useful.

The preceding is an article co-authored by Amy Eisenstein and Andrea Kihlstedt. Amy Eisenstein, ACFRE, and Andrea Kihlstedt have developed the ground-breaking Capital Campaign Toolkit, an on-line step-by-step guide to capital campaign fundraising. Visit www.CapitalCampaignToolkit.com.

Contact Us

If you would like to discuss how Cole, Newton & Duran's not-for-profit team can help your organization with your accounting, tax, or consulting needs, please feel free to give me a call.

Pat Koepke, CPA
Not-for-Profit Practice Leader
734.427.2030
pkoepke@cndcpa.com

CND Cole, Newton
& Duran
Certified Public Accountants

Cole, Newton & Duran CPAs
33762 Schoolcraft Road
Livonia, MI 48150
P: 734.427.2030
F: 734.427.3004
W: www.cndcpa.com