

Selecting a Capital Campaign Consultant

This worksheet is designed to assist organizations with the selection and hiring of a consultant to direct a capital campaign fundraising effort for a real estate project.

Raising funds for a one-time capital project is not the same as seeking annual operating support. It is well worth your organization's time and money to hire a consultant who specializes in nonprofit capital campaigns. As with any professional your organization hires, a key determinant of the consultant's success lies in selecting an individual who fits with your organization's mission, goals and Board. The success of the campaign is not only critical to the completion of the facility project, but it also has an impact on the financial health of the organization long after the project is finished. It is essential to be thorough in the selection process and to involve key staff and Board members who will be directly involved in working with the consultant. Be sure to follow up with references—there is no substitute for firsthand experience!

Designate a group or committee that will be responsible for selecting the capital campaign consultant

Set up a Board selection committee. This committee should be comprised of a combination of members from the resource development and facilities committees, as well as development staff members. Seek committee members with connections and who desire to own the process.

Decide on a selection process and issue a Request for Proposal

Determine the process, timeline and criteria for selection. See below for suggested selection criteria. Issue a request for proposals and ask fellow organizations for referrals.

Suggested Selection Criteria

When selecting candidates, it is critical that your organization only seeks out proposals from consultants who fit the relevant experience listed below. It is your committee's job to keep the secondary and more detailed criteria in mind as you review proposals from and interview qualified candidates.

Preliminary Qualifications and Relevant Experience

The right capital campaign consultant for the job should:

Understand the role of your organization in the community.

Have experience working with similar organizations.

Have previous successes of building a capital campaign from scratch for similar organizations.

Know the local funding community.

Be sensitive to the culture/race/gender of your organization's target population.

Analyze the Candidate's Strategy

Through proposals and interviews, your selection committee must determine candidates' qualifications and fit with your organization. Consider the following criteria for making a decision:

How does he/she approach working with clients—both Board and staff? Ask candidate to describe an example of how he or she has worked with Board members both individually and as a group to achieve program goals?

What has his/her experience been with public relations, communication and marketing and how does he/she see those efforts affecting fundraising for a capital campaign?

How would he/she integrate a capital campaign with existing corporate and foundation operating support efforts?

What role has prospect research played in these efforts?

What strategy would he/she recommend to this organization in launching a capital campaign?

What are the factors that contribute to achieving campaign goals quickly, or can objectives be met quickly at all?

How soon would he/she develop a work plan? What would that plan include? What checkpoints would be set up as the consultant worked with staff and Board on implementation?

How involved would he/she be with plan elements, such as prospect research? How much will be demanded of organization staff time?

What are the natural links and divisions between consultant and staff tasks? How would he/she involve staff in the campaign? What are some examples of the kinds of things staff will need to do?

What Board training will be included? How much time will be spent training and preparing the Board?

What specific challenges and opportunities does he/she see for your organization?

Assess the Timeline

Compare the consultant's proposed timeline to that of similar campaigns.

Ask for examples of ways the consultant can sustain momentum for a multi-year campaign.

Find out how much time the consultant will spend on your campaign through its various phases.

Understand the Fee Structure

Are costs based on a flat fee or an hourly rate?

What are the consultant's payment expectations? Is payment tied to achieving agreed-upon milestones?

Are administrative expenses covered in the fee? What percentage of these fees will be covered by organization operations?

Check References

This final step is critical. Your principal question should be aimed at discerning whether the previous client would use the same consultant again, and why or why not.

Negotiate a Contract

Select your consultant based on the criteria set forth above.

Take into consideration the goals of your campaign, the selected candidate's strategy, timeline and fee structure to negotiate a contract that will meet your goals on time and on budget.

Consider milestones for payment and incentives for reaching goals ahead of schedule.

Have the contract reviewed by a qualified attorney or Board member with previous experience.