

The Post-Feasibility Study Reception:

A Capital Idea for Engaging Major Donors

By Sharon Danosky



Capital campaigns – traditionally the holy grail of fundraising. And for good reasons. They allow you to raise significant sums of money in a relatively short period of time for a critical need. While campaigns have evolved over the years – (they are not always for capital projects, for instance) – they still remain a relevant and critical source of philanthropic revenue.

The question of whether a feasibility study is a valuable part of the pre-campaign planning has been debated for a number of years now. I subscribe to the school of thought that it is. And while I am not debating the value of feasibility studies in this blog – I believe one of the primary benefits of the study is the opportunity to ask your donors for their input on your initiative before you launch it and ask for their support. And as a consultant who has had numerous conversations with donors over many years – I appreciate the candid and frank responses they giving knowing that their answers will remain anonymous.

Years ago, a donor made a comment during the interview that has stuck with me for years – and actually changed the way I approach doing feasibility studies. He said to me, “You know, Sharon, I have participated in so many of these studies, and while I always enjoy it and feel they are valuable – I never hear the results of the study. And I wonder why?”

I wondered why, as well. So I started recommending that organizations hold a reception for those who participated in the study to be able to share the results. I believe it provides a valuable opportunity for several reasons:

1. It shares the results of a study in which they participated
2. The organization can answer specific questions that were raised during the study
3. It provides the opportunity to let the donor know you heard what they were saying
4. If you made changes to the Case for Support as a result of the study – you can let donors know what their changes are

5. And you can let them know of your decision to proceed (or not) with the campaign and even let them know the level of support from the Board

These receptions can be tailored to the organization and indeed, I have seen some very creative and effective ways my clients have used these forums. Many even continue the forums as cultivation events with some tweaks and modifications.

Rabi Ari Rosenberg of Temple Sholom in New Milford found that holding these receptions lets his donors see that they're not alone in supporting his organization. "Many of the opportunities I have to engage our donors are one-on-one. These receptions allow donors to see that they're in good company with other like-minded people; they're part of a larger cause."

Beekley Community Library board member Laura Sunquist had a frank conversation with a donor at the reception following their feasibility study. "There was a major concern on the part of the donor related to a hot button issue. I was able to bring this back to the board for discussion; I never would have had an opportunity for this kind of conversation otherwise."

The feasibility study is an excellent way of engaging your major donors. The reception keeps the engagement going. Both vital to a successful campaign.

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