



**WINKLER GROUP**

Fueling Your Vision



**FINDING THE FUNCTION  
IN DYSFUNCTIONAL:  
STRATEGIES TO PREPARE  
YOUR BOARD FOR THE  
NEXT CAMPAIGN**

## FINDING THE FUNCTION IN DYSFUNCTIONAL: STRATEGIES TO PREPARE YOUR BOARD FOR THE NEXT CAMPAIGN

by Nikki Rach, Vice President, Client Services

**A dysfunctional board takes many shapes. The governance-only board that stays far away from donor cultivation and stewardship. The high-profile board comprised of status-seeking members who do little to advance the mission. The in-the-weeds board that wants control of day-to-day operations. The reluctant board that is hesitant to think big.**

Any of these boards—if left unattended—can derail a campaign before it begins or be the biggest barrier to campaign success.

The most successful campaigns have one thing in common: they are led by boards that support and promote the campaign as partners...while staying in their lane.

If you are considering a campaign in the next two years and your board isn't fully on board, fear not. Not all high-functioning boards are born that way. With coaching and intentionality, most boards can become well-oiled governing bodies that lend support and influence to successfully execute a campaign. This guide will show you how.

The Winkler Group has led every type of academic, healthcare, and nonprofit board through campaigns. This resource is full of best practices and practitioner's tips we've developed leading campaigns over the last two decades.

### It will also help you identify:



**When to start discussing a campaign with your board**



**Common board member fears and hesitations, and how to overcome them**



**Proper role of board members before, during, and after a campaign**



**What donors expect from a board before they will make a stretch campaign investment**



**How to keep the board from being a roadblock to a successful campaign**

## THE BOARD'S ROLE LEADING UP TO A CAMPAIGN

While the day-to-day work of most campaigns is generally fulfilled by the staff and a campaign steering committee, a board's role in a campaign cannot be understated. And this role begins long before the first ask is made.

A fully functioning board has the following responsibilities before campaign asks begin:

- ✓ Help identify the campaign's priorities—the facilities, programs, endowments that will be presented to prospective donors.
- ✓ Objectively analyze the results of the campaign feasibility study.
- ✓ Embrace donor and stakeholder input that arises from the study.
- ✓ Listen to the recommendations of campaign counsel.
- ✓ Vote to move forward with a campaign if the study indicates support for it.
- ✓ Find alternative funding sources if donors will not cover the full cost of a project.
- ✓ Consider sustainability of a project once it is complete (increased utilities, expanded staff, etc.).

When it comes to decisions about whether to embark on a campaign, what priorities to seek funding for, the campaign's goal amount, and overseeing the initiative, staff leadership and the board should be in lockstep.

Leadership should take an active role in preparing and cultivating the board for a campaign—much in the same way donors are prepared. This cultivation should start well before a campaign is launched, preferably begin during the strategic planning process. More about timing will follow in this resource.



## ASSESSING YOUR BOARD'S READINESS FOR A CAMPAIGN

The board readiness checklist listed on this page will give you an indication on where your board stands. Boards that are the most prepared to take on a successful campaign will answer yes to most of these questions. But if not, the strategies outlined in this white paper are designed to help you address the gaps and overcome shortfalls.

Do not be overly concerned if your board members or trustees lack wide spheres of influence or are not an active fundraising board. These are not uncommon scenarios in boards preparing for a campaign.

We often find that donors and key stakeholders do not know board members or trustees, and this is acceptable as long as there is confidence in the administration. That said, a campaign is an ideal opportunity for the profile of board members to be raised as they serve as ambassadors for the campaign.

Most of today's campaigns are led by a steering committee, not a board. These volunteers generally have more social capital and are more comfortable with the fundraising process.

## WHEN TO ENGAGE... THE SOONER THE BETTER

**If you wait until the campaign feasibility study to prepare your board for a campaign, it's too late. The ideal time to plant the seed of a campaign is during the creation of the strategic plan, when board members or trustees vote to approve its priorities and begin to determine how it will be implemented.**

Strategic plans are big, bold visions. By incorporating your board members and key stakeholders into the process of strategic planning, you build buy-in for the priorities birthed by the plan. The new facilities, the new programs, or the larger endowment become their ideas.

As you include your board in the strategic planning process, have frank conversations with them about the need to raise funds to accomplish those goals. Undertake scenario planning exercises and identify ballpark figures associated with each new initiative. This does not mean hiring an architect to do detailed drawings—a simple concept rendering with a rough estimate is all that is needed before a campaign launch.

By involving your board in the decision-making process, they will be much more prepared to undertake a campaign study. And they will understand their role in the process.



## FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

**Most board members have never been through a campaign before. And those who have may be scarred from the experience if the campaign was not well executed.**

The vote to launch a campaign is the most monumental decision of most board members' tenure. For this reason, it is essential that staff make sure they understand what they're undertaking. They also must realize that they aren't just voting yes and then watching what happens. Instead, they will have an active role to play and should make a substantial commitment to the effort.

It's also important to understand that board members come with different levels of experience. Some will be seasoned campaign professionals; others may be terrified. Even if board members have no campaign experience, they can still be successful.

## TWO STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME FEAR AND HESITATION

**There are two ways to allay a board's fears when preparing for a campaign.**

The first is education and the second is a robust campaign feasibility study. As campaign strategists, we find it helpful to meet with boards well before a campaign is launched as part of the education process. In these initial meetings, we walk board members through the entire process and answer their questions. Staff continue this process of cultivation and education through careful communication that continues throughout the entire campaign.

A robust campaign feasibility study will erase most board members' fears and hesitations. The study—which should include a solid representation of prospective donors' attitudes and deliver sound recommendations based on data—is the ultimate hedge against campaign failure.



## STOP BOARD PARALYSIS WHEN IT'S TIME TO LAUNCH A CAMPAIGN

**When we conduct a campaign feasibility study, we encourage priorities and a bigger goal than they are likely to realize in a have a full menu of priorities to weigh in on.**

This approach means that most of the time, the campaign study report less targeted priorities than were originally proposed. While this is paralyzed by the results. They feel a campaign will be a failure because dreams.

Instead, the opposite is true. Donors appreciate being given options—it They recognize that a study is part of a discernment process that leads

To help clients from being blindsided by the results of a campaign weekly findings reports that detail donor interviews. We encourage with the board, or at least the executive committee, so there are no feasibility study results are delivered. And if the results are positive, a wise board will move directly into the campaign planning phase following the study. Swift action lets donors know they were heard and maintains the excitement generated during donor interviews.

We've also seen boards that ignore our goal recommendation and set a goal that is considerably higher. This action sets the organization up for failure—and undermines their reputation as a board.

In both these scenarios, the actions of boards can damage donor relationships for years to come. A board that values its supporters is a board that is prepared to accept the results of a study and act immediately on donors' input—even if it doesn't fully match initial expectations.

## THE BOARD'S ROLE DURING A CAMPAIGN

**Because a board approved a campaign, board members and trustees have a responsibility to participate. They should be ready to help the campaign steering committee by hosting a cultivation event or participating in campaign solicitations. When board members sit on the sidelines, donors take notice and the steering committee can be deflated.**

That said, board members should not be expected to contribute the lion's share of a campaign goal. That's the responsibility of the steering committee. But our number one rule is that all board members and trustees must make a meaningful financial gift to the campaign. Board members approved the campaign—they must support it. Anyone not willing to give should resign their seat.

One of the board's most critical roles during a campaign is active oversight. Therefore, it is their job to understand all aspects of the campaign because they bear the fiduciary responsibility of the campaign's outcomes. Therefore, board members should be ready to listen and act on the advice of campaign counsel. They should also be ready to support the CEO, president, or executive director throughout the campaign's active phases.

### PRACTITIONER'S TIP:

**We've seen boards vote against moving forward with a viable campaign because the full amount tested during a study was not found to be a feasible goal amount. In this case, the board's actions communicate to donors that their intended gifts aren't good enough.**

## COMMON PITFALLS WHEN PREPARING BOARDS FOR A CAMPAIGN

Here are some of the most common mistakes organizations make when preparing their board for a campaign and how to overcome them.

**Mistake #1: The board hasn't done their homework or hasn't been involved in the process of creating campaign priorities.** It's imperative that staff seek the board's buy-in when creating the vision and the priorities to achieve it. Without this step, the board will be disengaged throughout the campaign. Remember to incorporate the board in strategic planning and the creation of campaign priorities.

**Mistake #2: Staff surprises the board with the campaign feasibility study results.** Instead, the board should be kept apprised of all study actions, including who is being interviewed and common themes arising from those interviews. Data from the study should be shared; how much data will vary by context—some boards are overwhelmed by too much information, while others are empowered by it. If board members do not know who is being interviewed, they could be caught off-guard when seeing friends and colleagues who have been invited to participate. And if they are surprised by the study results when it is time to vote to move the campaign forward, they are less likely to approve the initiative.

**Mistake #3: Not cultivating board members or trustees during the entire process.** It is an error to assume that because board members come to monthly meetings and have an insider's look at the organization, they are fully engaged. Too many times we fail to cultivate our board members the way we cultivate our donors. If board members feel neglected, they are less likely to give at leadership investment levels and they won't be willing to host cultivation events or open doors to other potential campaign investors.

**Mistake #4: Board members failing to launch a campaign immediately after favorable study results or ignoring a study's recommendations.** Both of these actions risk alienating donors. Feelings of alienation are difficult to overcome and could have long-lasting implications for the organization.

**Mistake #5: Board members being guided by personal agendas.** In academic settings, particularly independent schools, boards are often comprised largely of parents with personal agendas. These scenarios underscore the need for a strategic plan that is voted on by the entire board. With an approved plan, personal agendas are mitigated. We also recommend that institutions limit the number of current parents on a board. Otherwise, an administration's comprehensive vision could be derailed in favor of pet projects.



## **BOARD PARTNERSHIP IS THE SECRET TO A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN**

**Because a successful campaign transforms an organization, the stakes are high. It's important to spend time to adequately prepare board members and trustees for their role in the campaign.**

Setting expectations, overcoming hesitations, and keeping boards engaged and informed are the best ways to create a partnership with your trustees and board members before launching a campaign. Working together, visions become reality.



**WINKLER GROUP**

Fueling Your Vision

**Our clients reach—and exceed—their capital campaign goals. Nationally recognized for our honest and strategic counsel, we stand with our clients at every step. We build lifelong donor relationships and sustainable funding that continue after the campaign ends.**

**A national firm headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina, with offices across the U.S., the Winkler Group proudly serves organizations with great causes.**

**Book a complimentary consultation with one of our campaign experts today.**

