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**Campaign Budgeting 101**

You’re starting to develop your campaign plan and it is awesome! Before getting too far ahead, have you made sure that you have the resources to pay for all of those great ideas? Or, maybe your coalition is eligible for a sizeable grant to support the campaign but you need to submit a budget that includes 50% cash match. Or, maybe you have plenty of resources from foundations and government sources, but no unrestricted money for lobbying. Adequate campaign funding can mean the difference between winning and losing. It's important that we develop realistic budgets that are tightly aligned with campaign strategies and tactics and in order to do that, we must build from the ground up. Here’s how:

**Step #1: Identify all potential cost categories**

Looking at your campaign plan, particularly your campaign tactics, identify all of the known and possible categories of expenses for your campaign. Don’t leave anything out! If you think you might need something, include it.

* Staffing – salaries and benefits
* Rent
* Telephones
* Organizational overhead
* Computers and other technology
* Consultants/subcontractors:
  + Media/communications
  + Polling/research
  + Lobbying
  + Etc.
* Volunteer stipends
* Materials and collateral – design, printing/development
* Postage/shipping
* Direct mail/phone-banking
* Travel
* Meeting costs – space rental, food
* Events (lobby days, grassroots trainings, awards)
* Paid media

**Step #2: Itemize expenses in each category**

Now you’ll need to start itemizing costs. This can be tricky and will necessitate at least some guesstimating. For each item, you need to differentiate between your “must have” costs (these will form your bare bones budget) and your “would like to have” costs (these will form your fantasy budget). Remember that a bare bones campaign budget is lean but mean – while it doesn’t include a lot of the extra’s, it still provides adequate resources to get the job done!

Some of the questions you’ll want to consider as you move through this process include:

* What is the absolute minimum we need in order to launch a viable campaign?
* What can we live without?
* What do we need but not right away? And are there other potential funding sources that might be able to cover those expenses?
* Are there any items that could be covered through in-kind donations?

You’ll also want to be sure that you aren’t “double-dipping” in your budgeting. Let’s say, for example, that a staff person for a coalition member is going to be playing a lead role in your campaign. How much of that person’s time will actually be spent on this campaign? If it’s .5FTE then you’ll need to pro-rate salary and benefits rather than list them at a full time rate. This type of pro-rated budgetmay be required for several other cost categories such as rent, computers, telephone, and more.

**Step #3: Put it into a spreadsheet**

Campaign budget spreadsheets can be simple or complex. They can include just expenses or they can also include sources of funding and fundraising and development goals. Some funders will require that expenses be broken out into lobbying and non-lobbying expenses. At a minimum, your budget spreadsheet should include the following:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Cost** | **Detail/justification** | **Source of funding** |
| Personnel | $45,000 | Campaign Manager 1.0 FTE |  |
| Contractor | $60,000 | Lobbyist | Non-grant sources |

**Frequently Asked Questions**

*Which do I submit to my funder – my bare bones budget or my fantasy budget?* At the risk of providing a wishy-washy answer, it depends. Has this funder already indicated a budget maximum that they will contribute? If so, you won’t want to submit a budget in excess of that amount unless you note that the excess costs will be coming from another funder or donor. If you are approaching a potential donor and no budget amount has been discussed, by all means present your fantasy budget. Be prepared, though, to justify each and every one of the expenses listed.

*How do I estimate subcontractor costs?* There are a few options for estimating these types of costs. First, if you have existing relationships with subcontractors you think you might wish to hire for the campaign, ask them to provide a “back of the envelope” cost estimate, erring on the higher rather than lower side. You can talk to your campaign partners to see if they have hired these types of subcontractors previously and, if so, have a sense of costs involved.

*How do I figure out travel costs?*  Figure who will need to go where and then get online and get a sense of what airfare, train fare, or mileage will cost. If you’ll need hotels, look at some hotels in that location and identify an average price. Also factor in ground transportation, meals, and parking if relevant.

*How do I know what we’d want to spend on media?*  This is one area where you will definitely want to ask an expert. First, think about the type of media you’d want to utilize (print, radio, TV, billboard) and then ask a media or communications colleague for input.

***Remember: When it comes to building your budget, you need to include everything you will or might need. And, when in doubt, round up rather than down!***