



# PREPARING FOR A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

• PASTOR'S GUIDE •

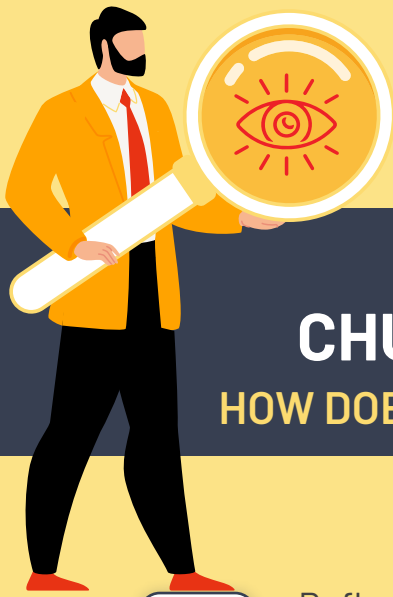


When a capital campaign misses its mark, it usually comes back to a handful of common errors or missteps that stem from not preparing adequately.

Churches often rush and launch a capital project too quickly. It's understandable as the pace is the natural outcome of our urgent need for a particular space or program. We've outgrown our children's wing. We need to replace the church van. A loyal group of members is championing a new ministry and promise to bring needed funds to the table.

**All too often, we hurry the very process that would help ensure success. In this article, we're guiding pastors through the key steps of preparing your church for a campaign:**

- **Aligning with your mission and vision**
- **Assessing your internal readiness**
- **Conducting a feasibility study**
- **Reviewing your past wins and losses**



## PASTORS, IT ALL BEGINS WITH YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION AND VISION.

### HOW DOES THIS CAMPAIGN ALIGN WITH WHO YOU ARE?

1

Reflect with your leadership - and with your entire congregation - on your "big" ideas as a church. What is your church called to accomplish in the broadest sense? This is a macro goal: the core idea of who you are as a church and from which all your ministries flow out. Some congregations are church-planting focused. Others have a big picture goal of discipleship or evangelism.

2

Pastors, be intentional about using that mission and vision as a filter in all your work. It should be front and center in your ministries and day-to-day work as well as in your strategic planning. Your capital campaign project must fit with that mission and vision. If it doesn't, getting your congregation to support the campaign project long-term will be an uphill battle...and likely set you up for failure.

3

Have honest and thoughtful conversations with your staff, board and volunteer leaders about the campaign fit within your mission and vision. It may be a natural next step in your church's ministries. But it's also possible that this project is a wonderful idea better suited to another congregation. Take the time you need to fully vet that now rather than being surprised by a lack of enthusiasm when the rubber hits the road of your fundraising goal.

**This is where your leadership as pastor becomes critical in navigating the realities of your project and the church's future direction.** Exploring this project through the lens of your mission and vision also provides a tremendous opportunity to build buy-in and support that you'll need over the life of your campaign. When done well, this process helps each member see themselves as part of the "campaign team," with a sense of ownership. You want the vast majority of your members to feel invested in the idea - rather than feeling as if the project is something only championed (and thus funded) by a small group.



## THE SECOND PHASE OF PREPARING FOR A CAMPAIGN IS AN HONEST ASSESSMENT OF YOUR CHURCH'S READINESS.

Capital campaigns can be all-consuming in the life of any organization or ministry. For our churches to see a campaign to successful fruition, we first have to honestly assess our internal capacity. This is not a feasibility study, as we'll unpack that next. This type of readiness is about the internal structure and bandwidth of your church, its programs, its leaders, its staff and its volunteers.

Capital campaigns take an intense amount of work, from the pre-planning all the way through the post-acknowledgments of a three-year campaign, for example. Often this work has to be overlaid on the already-full day-to-day ministries and operations of your congregation. With the focus on the campaign project and what it means for your church, everything from your web, communications and marketing to your budget allocations will be impacted.

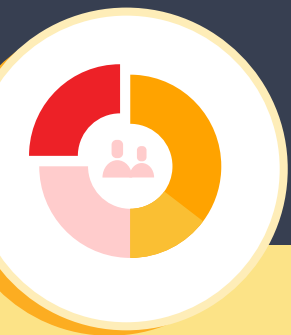
Pastors, if you are serving in a large congregation with a number of paid staff, this readiness assessment can entail a conversation about roles and bandwidth, identifying how each person's work will touch the campaign. If you are leading a small congregation with only part-time paid staff and primarily volunteer leaders, this has to be a forthright discussion about how to best leverage each person's skills and available bandwidth.

Your church's key volunteers and leaders will inevitably be drawn into the campaign and asked to carry additional workloads, meetings and time commitments. Have a thorough and honest conversation about how that will affect your current programs and ministries. This includes determining what you will commit to do - or not do - over the next two to four years. There are many activities you might not do during the campaign years of your budget that you normally would, for example. There are also hard costs to the campaign itself (marketing pieces, mailings, events, etc) to consider.

It's worth having open forums - even using some time on a Sunday morning - to explore these realities with your congregation. Doing so not only prepares everyone for the realities of the additional labors needed, it also can give your members an imagination for how to best help the church navigate the challenge of allocating staff and volunteer time.

A campaign is never one person's job - and it is certainly not your sole job as pastor. The campaign has to be embedded across the church, so while it may impact some staff and volunteers more than others, it will impact everyone.

Asking and answering those internal readiness questions with your congregation will help identify the pressures that will be on your key leaders and programs. Help your members work through those assessments while keeping an eye on the end goal of your campaign project and its impact.



## THE NEXT CRITICAL PIECE OF PREPARING FOR A CAMPAIGN IS THE FEASIBILITY STUDY.



The goal of that study is to help you understand if your church's members are on board with the project, the extent to which they're prepared to help fund it, and the timing of a campaign.

Begin first by taking a close look at your church's financial picture. What's the recent history of our members' giving? What are our financial obligations? Are we paying off debt? Are we struggling with cash flow or to make our budget? Are we growing or shrinking right now? A deep dive on these financial questions will help you frame your trajectory and inform any decisions about the viability of doing a campaign in this season.

Long before we put together any videos or design any brochures about our campaign project, we have to conduct feasibility assessments. Many organizations undertake a formal feasibility study that can take several months. It includes a look at donor data and trends along with in-depth interviews with key leaders and donors. Those conversations help us know where this campaign project is on the priority list of our givers, how they would handle a three-year pledge commitment and what their level of enthusiasm is for the project.

Pastors, those donor discussions during the feasibility phase are incredibly revealing. They can flag if donors would move their tithe commitments toward funding the campaign goal, which would hurt the church's operating budget. Those interviews also alert us to any concerns about the project or funding models that should be addressed in our campaign meetings and materials. Equally importantly, those conversations give us a chance to ask our top prospects where they see themselves in the funding pyramid (the levels of donor gift commitments we'll need to be successful).

Finally, those feasibility conversations re-inforce how important each member and giver is to our campaign and allows them feedback and buy-in. How much do they know about the project and its expected outcomes? Do they believe in it? We should come away with a clearer picture of what's needed in our campaign communications.

A thorough feasibility study can sometimes tell us we have a great project but the timing is wrong. It can help us re-assess and determine multiple phases, slow or scale the project down.

But this study can also reveal that we can do more than we'd imagined. Sometimes we discover this is the very season in the life of our church - and the right timing - for a larger goal or bigger vision than we'd originally planned.

Successful campaigns have to be scaled to the outcomes of feasibility. We know God is at work in the hearts of our members and may bless this work in ways we can't anticipate or plan for. But we will have done our part in intentional planning, being good stewards of our members, their time and resources.



## FINALLY, AS YOU PREPARE YOUR CHURCH FOR A CAMPAIGN, IT'S IMPORTANT TO ASSESS YOUR PAST SUCCESSSES AND SHORTCOMINGS.



Even if you've not done a major capital campaign recently, you've likely had some kind of project where you've tried to fund a ministry or mission trip, retire debt or perhaps raise funds for a church plant.

In my book, *Donors Are People Too*, I devote a chapter to the kind of questions donors have but might not ask you directly. One of those is about your track record of past successes. Donors want to know that you and your church can handle the heavy work and effort required by a campaign. They may have lots of capacity to give but might hold back if they aren't fully confident in your ability to execute a successful campaign (or the project itself!).


So take a close look back at your successes, but also at your failures. If you don't have a great track record of prior success, it doesn't mean you won't - it just means you need to assess and learn from what happened. Look at what course corrections you have or will need to put in place based on those learnings, and be ready and prepared to talk about those candidly with donors. Again, they may not ask, so it's important that you find ways to assure them you know what went wrong in prior projects and are prepared not to repeat the errors.

Pastors, remember that most of our members don't expect us to hit it out of the park every time. But they do and should expect transparency. A friend of mine has a mantra I've adopted that says, "If you can't fix it, feature it!" Confront past failures and shortfalls head on, demonstrate accountability and a plan to ensure future success.

While revisiting past 'misses' isn't always fun, it does often reveal systemic issues or consistent themes and barriers that need to be addressed. Trying to launch a campaign without cleaning those up and making corrections isn't fair to members and donors, so take the time to dig into those past projects and see what lessons can be learned.

**Be open and discuss those learnings with your leadership, board and your congregation in the course of planning for this campaign.**





**Approach campaign planning in a methodical and slow way.** Set aside the time to undertake that full preparation process. There are no short-cuts in donor development work, and certainly not in campaign planning. The more intentional and strategic you are in your planning, the more you ensure the best outcome for your ministry and your members.

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BE STRATEGIC AND INTENTIONAL,  
**AND GOD WILL LEAD YOU**  
AND YOUR MEMBERS EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

- *Timothy L. Smith*

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# Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

## **The know-how you need from experts you trust.**

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

## **Tools and support to strengthen churches.**

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

## **Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.**

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

## **A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.**


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

## **We believe in YOU!**

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

## Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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