

How Will You Change the World? *Strategic Vision Matters*

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When development professionals contact us to discuss preparing for a significant campaign, we ask, “What will the campaign be raising money for? How will the community be changed as a result?” These questions often still need to be answered.

With improved economic indicators and a rebound in confidence in the giving climate, many organizations are getting ready to ask for the major and lead gifts needed to advance their missions and get beyond “operations as usual.” So far this year, we have been asked to submit proposals for several campaign planning studies where the organization’s strategic vision still needs to be developed.

Clearly, a major campaign can be an effective way to raise significant gifts. It’s no surprise that development officers are charged with getting the organization “campaign ready” and are asked to start writing the case for support.

Sound familiar?

You may not be the person in your organization who directs strategic initiatives, but you can still provide incredible value by asking the right questions. In fact, you may be the best person at this!

Start with “why” instead of “what” or “how”—your strategic vision conveys the significant benefit that will result from your supporters’ philanthropic investment. It conveys how the world will be changed. It’s your promise to your donors and those whose lives you directly impact.

Unlike your mission (which will be advanced but likely never completely fulfilled), your strategic vision is achievable. It can be conveyed in one phase or a white paper, but it’s best to boil it down into a single sentence promise.

As a result of the campaign, we will permanently remove 5,000 families from homelessness.

As a result of the campaign, children for generations to come will have the opportunity to complete a college education.

As a result of the campaign, an entire ecosystem will forever be saved from commercial development.



Your supporters may already identify you as one of their top philanthropic priorities, and likely have the capacity to give more than what they are giving currently. But without a compelling strategic vision, why would they make a capacity-level gift to your organization?

While strategic vision is not created in the development department, you may be the one driving the process to ensure it's crystalized. It's more than reworking your annual case for support and using words that sound even more compelling. It's more than a list of unmet community needs or convincing arguments why your organization is the best to address the needs. *A strategic vision is inspirational in its power to convey a better world.*

If you are planning to undertake a significant campaign or ramp up your annual giving, be visionary and convey the "why." Your promise statement is essential, and it should be embedded within your overall strategic vision and make up your case for support:

- Why now? What societal problems are you addressing?
- Why is *your organization* is the best to do this important work? What is it that "Only we..." can do?
- What are the specific unmet needs you plan to meet?
- What is your proposed solution(s), including why you are confident it will be successful and how you plan to implement it?
- What is your promise (how the world will be changed as a result)?
- Why does giving matter?

What can you as the development officer do to influence the creation of this vision?

- Advocate within your organization to ensure strategic planning and direction setting are important priorities
- Ask the generative questions: "If we are truly to meet our mission, what should we be doing differently?"
- Ask "why?"
- Provide advice to help steer leaders within your organization to consider your promise and not only to address internal needs

The most impactful strategic visions and promise statements are simple and elegant, but can be messy and challenging to develop. Give us a call if we can partner with you on this journey.