

CONDUCTING A FEASIBILITY STUDY

A feasibility study is *active capital campaigning*, and is an integral part of the cultivation and involvement process of major donors and prospects. While it does not include the writing of a campaign plan, enlistment of campaign leadership, or solicitation of gifts, *a feasibility study is a vital component of campaign success because it helps to establish campaign strategy and plans.*

A feasibility study provides the opportunity to ask, in a sophisticated, un-pressured fashion, what donors are willing *to do* to aid an organization in realizing its plans and dreams. Such a study is done by a consultant, who as an “outsider” can elicit candid, forthright commentary from prospective donors—and who can give an objective and accurate analysis of interview results.

While a feasibility study can test the ability of the organization to reach a specific dollar goal, it can also do much more—it can be an excellent means of *hearing and involving* prospective donors who will be vital to ensuring the success of the organization’s proposed campaign. Information and insights gathered from the study drive the organization to build overall campaign strategy *and* individual prospect tactics on donors' and prospects' perceptions of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and the programs or projects that seem worthy of support. Done right, a feasibility study is a low-key, dignified means of involving prospective donors *from the very beginning* in the excitement and success of the campaign.

JGA's feasibility study process involves high-level, confidential discussions with key individuals who have been or who could reasonably be expected to be knowledgeable about the organization and supportive of it in a campaign. Those interviewed as part of the feasibility study will include selected individuals from an organization’s various constituencies and from its surrounding community. Groups represented may include: advisory and emeritus board members, key volunteers, current donors, prospective donors, community leaders, recipients of services, and representatives of corporations and foundations.

Throughout the feasibility study process, JGA works closely with the staff and board to make sure that interviews advance the relationship between the organization and its friends and donors. JGA does not conduct “checklist” interviews. Instead, JGA asks for information to be provided about each interviewee's relationship to the organization. From this, JGA creates an individually tailored interview protocol that seeks to build the interviewee's sense of closeness to the organization during the interview process. Because JGA has learned about each interviewee prior to the interview and brings this context to the conversation, the interviewee typically is willing to share much more regarding how he or she feels toward the organization. This leads to a more in-depth feasibility study that is able to report on the subjective as well as objective factors that influence giving to a campaign.

The feasibility study process usually takes 90 to 120 days. An outline of this time frame is as follows:

1. Finalization of campaign components and goal amount for testing
2. Writing and editing of case statement
3. Recruitment of an advisory committee
4. Creation of preliminary list of interviewees
5. First Meeting of the Advisory Committee
 - a. Review and approve case statement
 - b. Discuss and approve interviewee list
6. Letter of invitation and draft case statement sent to interviewees
7. Schedule interviews
8. Interviews conducted
9. Drafting of findings from interviews
10. Second meeting of the Advisory Committee
 - a. Review study progress to date
 - b. Review draft findings
11. Drafting of final report
 - a. Findings
 - b. Recommendations
 - c. Action Plan
12. Third meeting of the Advisory Committee
 - a. Review and approve final report
 - b. Prepare for presentation of report to the board
13. Delivery of final report & presentation to board

The feasibility study is a key component of the success of an organization's proposed campaign because it will cultivate and educate potential top supporters about the organization's plans and involve them *from the outset* in what the organization wishes to achieve. By giving supporters an early opportunity to listen, become involved, and voice *their* interests and *their* hopes, the organization can more effectively and more successfully address the vital personal and tactical aspects of donor relationship building and cultivation.