Not *'If'* . . . But *'How'*

The Firm's Unusual Approach to a Feasibility Study

For years, we conducted feasibility studies in a conventional manner, much like all of the other firms in the field. I always felt that ours were superior. I admit to a strong bias in this regard, but I know my competition very well—and I honestly believed that our studies were more penetrating, more intuitive, and more extensive and innovative in their recommendations. I was very proud of our work.

But something happened about eight years ago which changed unalterably the direction and focus of our future study work.

It happened in Texas. We were asked to undertake a study in a major city for an important organization. The group required a great deal more money than had ever been raised in the city before. Our challenge was to determine how to uncover the full potential of that organization and help that community *stand on tiptoes*.

It was that Texas program that ignited the spark. All of a sudden, it occurred to me: *our firm is not in the business of market research. We are paid to motivate people and to raise funds. That's really our business. And at that, we're great!*

We tried something new for that Texas study, something that had never been done before. The results were extraordinary. I couldn't believe that the new approach could possibly make that much difference. But it did.

Since then, we have conducted probably another 400 or 500 studies—with the same concept and principle we used for that first Texas community. And hopefully, we improve a little each time, fine-tune the process a little bit, and learn and understand with greater clarity what motivates people to give.

If you want a totally objective feasibility study—I suggest that we might not be the appropriate firm for you. We feel keenly that each interview is an extraordinary opportunity to cultivate and win new friends for the organization. If we apply our methods properly, we are convinced that we can help those we interview reach new levels of giving and leadership. It works. It really does!

We thrive on organizations and institutions that have challenging and audacious objectives. This is where we are at our best. We know that any firm of quality can determine *if* a project is feasible. We feel our charge is beyond the feasibility. Our dedication is to show an organization *how* to achieve its needs. In this regard, our overriding commitment to the client is: **Not *If'* . . . But *'How'***. And that distinction is of extraordinary importance to the client.

Not *If'* . . . But *'How'*. This is our guiding and resolute principle in conducting our assessment. That is why we have given the approach we take and the total process a different name: **Feasibility/Developmental Analysis**. It is our determination to take the organization from where it is—and move it to where it needs to be in order to fulfill its mission and meet its needs.

Not *'If'* . . . But *'How'* is our promise to the client, our Covenant. *jp*

JEROLD PANAS, LINZY & PARTNERS

THE F/DA
The Concept and Methodology

THE FEASIBILITY/DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

The first phase of our service with a client is to conduct an analysis of their potential to raise funds. This involves much more than just feasibility. The analysis should always include a design and plan of action for raising optimum funds. There should also be a strategy for recruiting the most effective leadership possible.

Our approach to the analysis is unlike that of any other firm. It revolves around a cultivation process that involves leadership in several steps of major consequence to the client. It starts with an impressive opportunity for interpretation.

It is usual in a campaign to prepare a *Case Statement* which describes in compelling and dramatic terms the unquestionable need for the fundraising program. We do not wait for the campaign for this document. We prepare a Prospectus for the feasibility study. The Statement is prepared in advance of the interviews. We find that this important change in the process makes a difference of extraordinary proportions.

Before we ask any questions of the men and women we interview, we spend fifteen to twenty minutes in reviewing the mission of the organization, its plans for the future, and the urgent and compelling need for the funds. The meeting with those we interview becomes an unusual opportunity to cultivate—a quiet, soft sell on behalf of the organization and the project.

The Case Statement is reviewed with each person and is left for future reading.

It is important to note that in the special research we have done regarding this step of the process, we have found that the interviewee does return to the Case Statement and read it. Some read it several times. And because of the unusual way we prepare it, they keep it. Our research shows that it is kept an average of fourteen months.

It is only after a thorough interpretation of the project and a review of the Case Statement that we begin asking questions about the proposed campaign and its undeniable need.

We have found that there is remarkable difference between a typical feasibility study and the approach we have developed. It truly raises the level of support and enthusiasm for the program. We have found, also, that it is fundamental in uncovering key leadership. In most situations, this is of primary importance.

THE CASE STATEMENT

We assign to the project one of our writers, who develops the concept, the theme, and the manuscript for the Case Statement.

Our writers are bright and effective. But we also try to choose the person on our staff we believe will be most sensitive and feel keenest about the mission of the organization and its philosophy of operation. We know from experience that even the most effective writer is not at his or her best if they do not feel a certain passion and sympathy for the organization.

When the manuscript is completed, it goes to a Partner of the firm for thematic review, editing, and assessment. It is then sent to the organization for approval.

If the organization has a staff person who can undertake the Statement, or if there is someone locally who can do it—we feel it is quite acceptable to have it done by the client. The problem is that typically the result is unsatisfactory in both content and time. We usually require a very quick turn-around. If it is prepared internally, we require the right of approval.

The final document is designed and printed. Almost always, there are photographs to accompany the text.

TARGET INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the individual interviews is to interpret, cultivate, and determine attitudes and perceptions about your plans. Most importantly, we test your leadership capacity and the range of giving.

Before undertaking any of the interviews, we become totally familiar with the organization, its mission, its programs, and its plans for the future. By the time we begin the interviewing, we are able to answer every possible question.

In all likelihood, after the interviews are completed and the written Report is presented to your Board, we may wish to convene the key interviewees for a presentation of *their* observations and recommendations. We have found this to be a most effective way of bringing leadership into the inner circle of the program. The wisdom of such a meeting can be determined by the organization after the presentation of the Report. We have found, however, that this is of immense value and an important step in the total cultivation process.

In each program, we try to develop a strategy to bring leadership closer and closer to the organization. We review the Case Statement with each person, the material is left, the interviewees are invited to hear the presentation of the Report. Most often, they also receive an Executive Summary of the Report. Each phase is a step in a carefully structured process and is important in establishing leadership's involvement in the program.

The purpose of the interviews is to gain important information. We never lose sight of that. But of equal importance, however, the interview can be a consequential method of interpreting the organization's needs and plans for the project—to some of the organization's most influential and affluent potential leaders. And this is what truly counts.

We conduct an interview that is subjective, but structured. It is accomplished in such a way that there is a complete sense of the respondent's providing counsel and guidance. But we make no claim to pure and scientific research. The typical institution does not need analytical market research. What is most important is interpreting the institution and its mission, cultivation, and motivating the prospective donor. This is what wins campaigns.

SCOPE OF INTERVIEWS

In preparation for the study, we send the organization a guideline and detailed instructions which define a very clear parameter of those who should be contacted. In all, there are nine pages of instructions. This may appear overly detailed, but for the results we propose, we require careful adherence to certain essential criteria.

We make certain for the interviewing that we see precisely the men and women who will be most significant in the winning of the program. Anything less will not do. An officer of the firm visits the client-site and is in regular contact on the telephone to make certain that your roster is appropriate. We may, perhaps, recommend additional men and women to be included for interviewing.

After we have visited with an organization and spent time reviewing their various giving-constituencies, we can determine quite precisely how many interviews will be necessary. Typically, the range is somewhere between fifty and one hundred twenty-five. Some very effective and valid studies have been conducted with as few as twenty-five interviews. The important criterion is not the number of interviews, but the quality of the people we see. That counts for everything.

In many cases, we also conduct focus groups—or ***RoundTables*** as we prefer to call them.

THE MAJOR FINDINGS

As a result of our interviews and our ***RoundTables***, we shall be able to determine:

i **Knowledge of the Organization** As a result of the ***F/DA***, we shall be able to evaluate the attitudes of leadership toward the organization and its mission. We shall determine the knowledge and real understanding leaders have of activities and programs. We shall be able to evaluate the responses and make appropriate recommendations to the Board regarding the strengthening of its image—including public relations, communications, and leadership-involvement programs that will be particularly effective.

ii **The Appeal for the Program** The interviews will uncover how responsive leaders are to the project and the need for the program. We shall determine how strong a *case* can be made for the plans. Should any negative factors exist, we shall indicate how these are to be corrected. Positive factors are also described and a plan designed so they may be enhanced and developed to their full advantage. We shall define the impact of the organization and indicate the kind of understanding leaders have of the program and the institution's special role.

iii **The Caliber of Leadership to Expect** The Study will indicate how responsive leaders are to the program and whether they are genuinely and sufficiently enthusiastic to work actively for the effort. We shall recommend men and women who should and will fill key leadership roles in the capital fund program.

iv **The Amount of Money Which Can Be Raised** The Study will define the pattern of giving and indicate the people who will have the greatest impact in influencing large gifts. If any danger areas exist, they will be exposed in the analysis with recommendations on how they can be corrected. We shall determine how many dollars can be raised and suggest strategies with which to reach maximum potential.

v **The Proper Timing and Strategy for a Campaign** As a result of the ***F/DA***, a master plan and schedule will be developed. Recommendations will be made regarding the precise timing for an effort with specific suggestions about developing the foundation for a drive.

AN AFTERNOTE

We feel keenly about our special approach to the analysis. We understand full well the faith and confidence the client places in us. We do not take this special trust casually.

In almost every study, an Officer of the firm shares part of the responsibility for the interviewing. We have an important reason for involving one of our senior people in the study process. Also, an Officer signs the Report—which is the organization's assurance of the integrity and validity of the Report. We stand behind our findings and recommendations.

We have men and women on our staff who do nothing but conduct studies. They collect the data, they do the interviewing, and they develop the Report and the strategy. These people are specialists in this type of study and are schooled in our special approach. They are not writers. They are not campaign directors. They are not Planned Giving specialists. They are men and women experienced in studies. They understand the interview process, they know how to listen creatively, they learn to read body language, and they know how to motivate.

Before one of our staff is assigned to the study, we interpret in detail the situation and the project. We review, also, our special concept of conducting a study. No matter how many studies one of our staff has already undertaken, we have the same review and the same explanation of guidelines. We feel that we cannot do this too often. And we furnish, also, a twenty-one page outline of what we require in a study. No matter how many studies have been done in the past, our Director receives the guidelines. Our staff tells me that we have a mania for exactitude and perfection. I plead guilty!

It may be interesting to have you read the introduction I prepared for *The Guidelines*. This document is designed for our staff and internal purposes only. I felt, however, that the opening paragraphs of the introduction, even though meant for our Study Directors, would be of general interest. I believe it conveys the significance we give to this service and our sense of commitment to the client.

> *In our firm, we call the feasibility study a **Feasibility/Developmental Analysis**. The name of the concept is unique to us and is registered. Typically, the assessment which is done by other firms answers the questions of <u>whether</u> a campaign can be done or not. We feel that 'if' is not the most significant aspect of an analysis. In our firm, it is **Not 'IF' . . . But 'HOW'**.*
>
> *It is not difficult to determine the feasibility of a project. Any firm can do that. Our responsibility to the client is to tell them <u>how</u> to reach their objectives. The distinction is critical!*
>
> *I think we do the best studies in the business. In-depth, penetrating, bright strategy, specific and relevant recommendations, innovative approaches. I know our competition, and no one works at the study process harder than we do, or does them better. In our study and analysis work, we are without parallel. It is up to you to make certain we maintain that premier position.*

Here are some guidelines which will be helpful to you. We have used and insisted on them for so long, they have become part of our standard operating procedure. Many are simply common sense. Most of the items are ones you have implemented in past studies. It is important that you review these guidelines each time you begin a study. Every step in the process is of consequence.

I know how arbitrary this must all appear. But I do not feel that there is a degree of flexibility. You are not to use your discretion. This does not make you less professional, but rather allows us to have a common understanding of what is expected and that will assist you in meeting the kind of standards and qualities which will make us all proud of the result. We have a reputation in the field for doing the best studies in the business. And I want to keep it that way! And I want our work to be the most effective and productive for the client possible.