

Setting a Budget

There's an age-old adage, "If you want it done right, do it yourself." Unfortunately, this adage doesn't apply to communications campaigns—unless you're an exceptionally talented individual who can conduct market research, develop creative, chat up reporters, and buy cost-effective media placements all at the same time. Good communications campaigns require professional help and that, in turn, costs money. If you have a small budget, you'll need to keep your campaign small. We recognize that shortcuts come in handy—such as testing the ad with your hostile brother-in-law instead of organizing a half-dozen focus groups. But if you don't even have the money for some quick-and-dirty testing, you should probably skip the campaign. Drastically under-funded campaigns simply end up having no impact. In this case, the money would be better spent elsewhere.

A campaign budget should include funds for message development and testing, creative development and testing, the media buy, some sort of campaign evaluation, and any incidental agency and contractor fees (e.g., a PR consultant). That said, we do have a few tips to help you stretch your budget.

Six Ways to Stretch Your Budget

1. **Free market research.** Beg and borrow market research from other organizations. Talk to their marketing and research staff. Whatever market research you can get from someone else is market research you don't have to pay for yourself. It might not be perfect, but it's a start.
2. **Free creative.** Beg and borrow messaging and creative from other organizations. If something worked in a state or on an issue that's similar to yours, see if you can adapt it.
3. **Quick and dirty.** Be brave and use quick-and-dirty testing if you have to. Even if you have to stand at the exit of your local grocery store and beg strangers to take a quick look at your print ad, it's better than nothing.
4. **Focus.** Target that target audience. Narrow down your campaign by focusing on a smaller set of people and impact that group as best you can. If you show potential donors that your small campaign made an impact, you can more easily convince them that a large campaign will make a large-scale impact. Don't try to do too much on too little; you'll end up not doing it effectively.
5. **Low-cost media.** Look for lower-cost media vehicles (e.g., blanket the town in billboards and forgo television).
6. **Earned media.** Look for ways to get earned media. Any good media coverage you don't have to pay for helps bolster your campaign. Is there a way to make the campaign itself newsworthy and still get your message across?



Drastically under-funded campaigns simply end up having no impact. In this case, the money would be better spent elsewhere.

This page intentionally left blank.