

Fundraising Campaigns in Canada: What's Enduring. What's Evolving. What's Emerging.

2026 CAMPAIGN
TRENDS REPORT



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Foreword

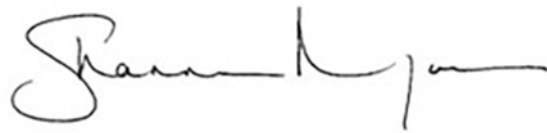
Campaign fundraising has long been one of the most powerful tools available to Canadian charities.

It enables organizations to think beyond annual cycles, articulate bold visions for impact, and invite donors, volunteers and communities to participate in moments of transformational change. Over the past decade, however, the context in which campaigns operate has shifted significantly. Economic uncertainty, evolving donor expectations, and increasing pressure on organizational capacity have all reshaped how campaigns are planned, executed, and experienced.

KCI's Campaign Survey offers a rare longitudinal view into these shifts. First conducted in 2013 and repeated in 2018, the survey has become a benchmark resource for understanding how campaign fundraising is practised across Canada. The 2026 edition builds on this foundation, drawing on insights from nearly 150 senior fundraising leaders representing organizations of different sizes, sectors, and regions.

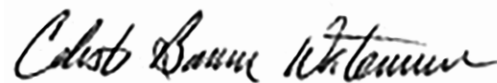
What emerges from this latest survey is not a story of disruption, but of adaptation. Many of the fundamentals of campaign fundraising remain intact: relationships still matter most, transformational gifts continue to anchor results, and volunteers and leaders play pivotal roles. At the same time, the way campaigns are structured, resourced, and paced is evolving in response to new realities.

This report is intended to support reflection and decision-making among boards, senior executives, and fundraising leaders. Whether your organization is preparing for its first campaign or adapting its approach as circumstances evolve, the insights that follow are intended to inform thoughtful, confident decisions about what comes next.



Shannon Moon

Vice President, Research + Analytics



Celeste Bannon Waterman

Partner



Introduction

The Canadian fundraising sector is operating in a period of heightened complexity. Donors are generous, but more selective. Organizations are ambitious, but often stretched. Fewer Canadians are giving overall, and fundraising success is increasingly concentrated among a smaller pool of committed donors. At the same time, those who do give are giving generously, often at higher levels and with greater intentionality. Campaigns remain central to growth strategies, yet they are unfolding in an environment defined by uncertainty, competition, and rising expectations for professionalism and accountability.

These pressures are shaped by broader forces beyond the sector itself. A significant intergenerational transfer of wealth is underway, reshaping where philanthropic capacity sits and how donors think about timing, legacy, and impact. Economic uncertainty continues to influence donor confidence and decision-making, even as demand for charitable services remains high. Together, these dynamics are changing not only how much is raised, but how campaigns are structured, resourced, and experienced.

Against this backdrop, KCI undertook this Campaign Survey to better understand how organizations are navigating today's campaign landscape. The survey explores where organizations are in the campaign cycle, what they are raising money for, how campaigns are structured and staffed, and how donor behaviour is changing. It also examines emerging practices related to recognition, giving vehicles, and volunteer engagement that were not captured in earlier iterations.

Importantly, this report does not seek to prescribe a single model for success. The diversity of respondents underscores that effective campaign strategies vary widely by sector, scale, geography, and organizational maturity. Instead, the goal is to surface patterns and tensions that fundraising leaders are grappling with, and to highlight areas where long-standing assumptions may warrant re-examination.

Throughout the report, and where data is available, we draw comparisons to findings from 2013 and 2018 to distinguish enduring truths from emerging trends. We also incorporate perspectives from KCI's senior consultants, grounded in our work with organizations across the country. Together, these insights paint a picture of a sector that is resilient, pragmatic, and increasingly intentional in how it approaches campaign fundraising.

About the Survey

The 2026 Campaign Survey was distributed in September 2025 to just over 700 executive-level fundraising professionals within KCI's network of Canadian charities, as well as select additional organizations raising more than \$4 million annually. This marks the third iteration of KCI's Campaign Survey, following earlier editions in 2013 and 2018. Taken together, these three cycles allow us to observe how campaign practices, donor behaviour, and the broader fundraising environment have evolved over more than a decade. Where relevant, comparisons to earlier surveys are woven throughout this report.

The survey included a mix of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. In several areas, respondents were asked tailored follow-up questions based on their earlier responses, allowing for deeper insight into campaign readiness, structure, decision-making, and performance. In total, we received 148 completed surveys, representing organizations of varying size, sector, and geographic reach across Canada.

Following the close of the survey, KCI's analysts conducted a detailed review of the results, identifying patterns, divergences, and emerging trends that shape the findings presented here. As with prior editions, the primary focus of the survey is philanthropic and private support for campaigns, rather than funding from public sources. The perspectives shared by respondents provide a grounded view of campaign fundraising as it is being practised today, highlighting both the opportunities and the pressures facing organizations as they pursue transformational projects and long-term institutional priorities.



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Survey Participants: Reflecting the Canadian Campaign Landscape

The survey reflects a broad cross-section of Canadian charities actively engaged in fundraising. Participating organizations span all regions of the country and represent a wide range of annual fundraising revenues, from under \$1 million to more than \$20 million.

Organizations participating in the survey operate across multiple geographic scopes. More than half primarily focus on local communities, while others work within provincial or territorial systems, national mandates, or international contexts. This mix provides a balanced lens on how campaign fundraising trends are experienced across different service footprints.

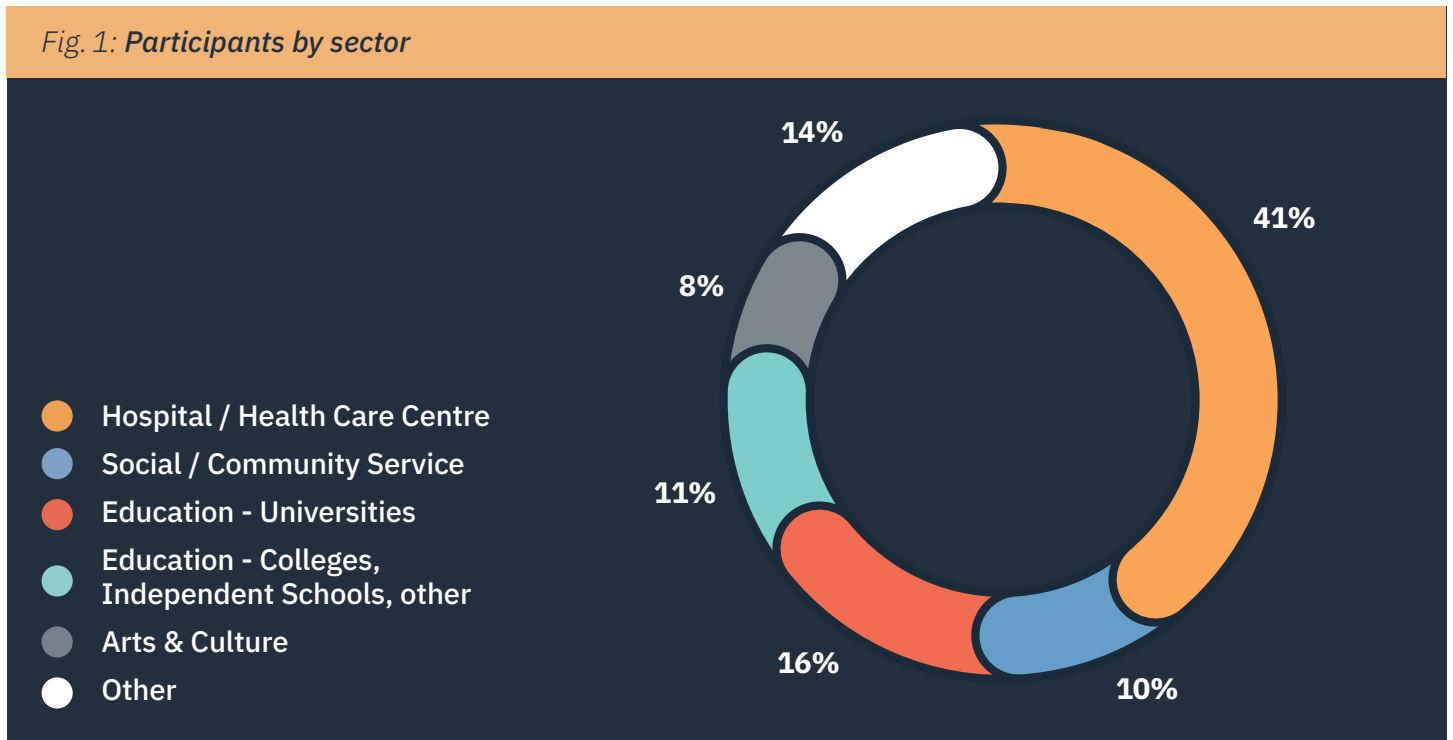


Geographically, respondents were distributed across the country, with Ontario-based organizations comprising the largest share, followed by British Columbia and representation from most other provinces. This distribution reflects both population density and the concentration of charitable activity in major centres, while still capturing perspectives from regional and community-based organizations nationwide.

Sector representation was similarly diverse. Health care foundations account for the largest proportion of respondents, alongside strong participation from education, social and community services, and arts and culture organizations. This diversity supports a comprehensive understanding of campaign fundraising across the Canadian charitable landscape.

When compared to the 2018 survey, the overall composition of respondents remains highly consistent. Geographic distribution shows similar patterns, with Ontario representing the largest share in both surveys and other provinces appearing in comparable proportions. The mix of local, provincial, national, and international organizations also remains aligned, despite slight differences in question wording. While revenue categories are not directly comparable due to changes in response options, the continued presence of small, mid-sized, and large fundraising operations provides confidence that observed differences reflect real shifts in practice rather than changes in who participated.

Fig. 1: Participants by sector



Campaign Landscape: A Permanent Feature, Not an Episodic Event

Campaign fundraising is firmly established as a central feature of the Canadian philanthropic landscape. **Nearly half of survey respondents report that they are currently in a campaign**, while more than a third are actively planning one. Only a small proportion indicated that they have never conducted a campaign, and among that group, the vast majority are considering one in the future.

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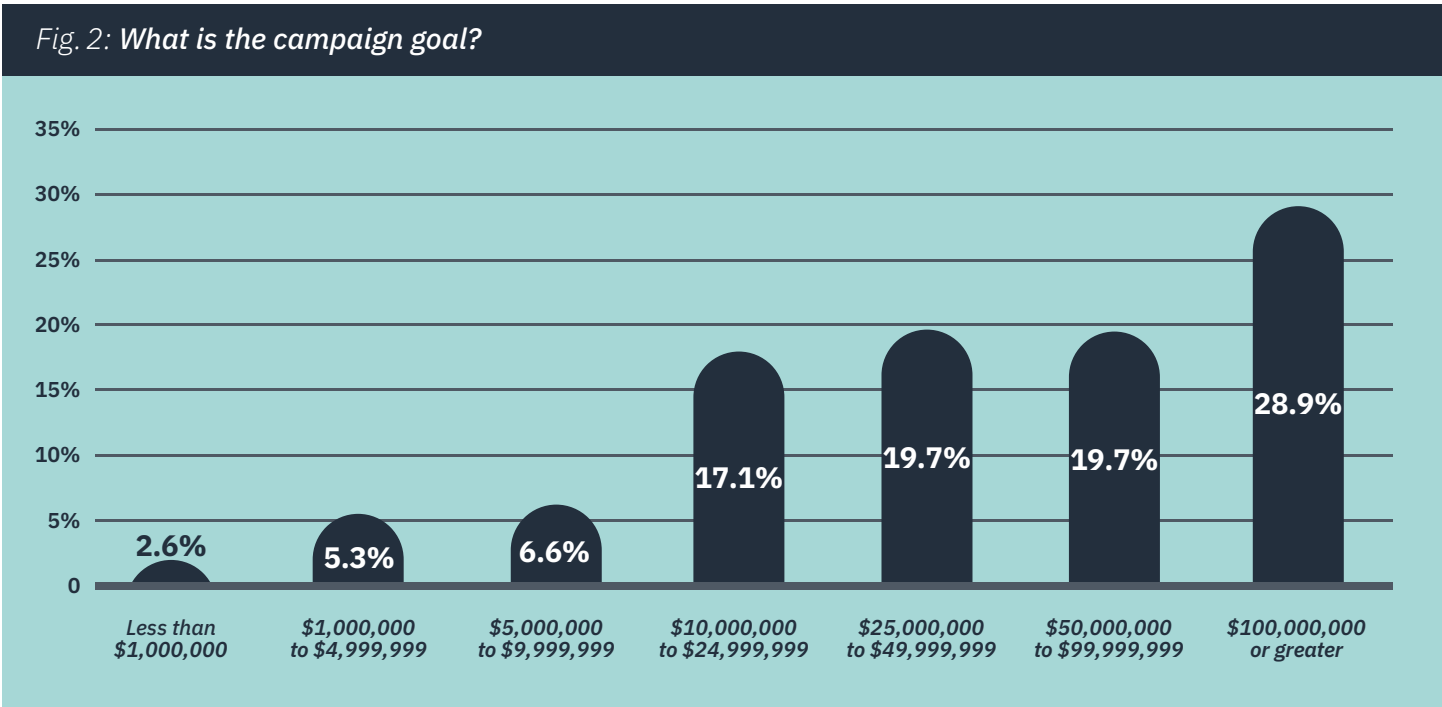
Campaigns have become the default growth mechanism. If you're not in one, you're preparing for one—and that's now true across almost every sector.

Susan Storey, Partner



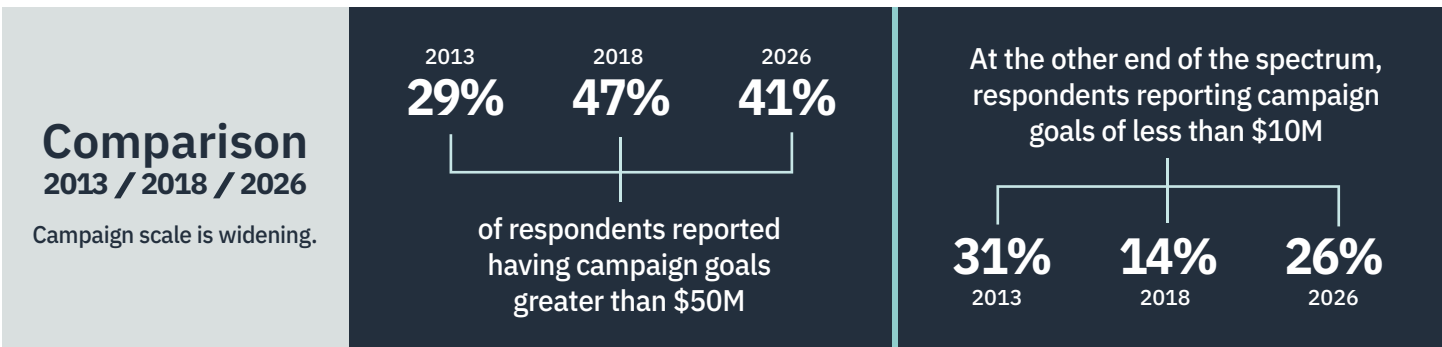


Fig. 2: What is the campaign goal?



The survey results point to a strong and sustained pipeline of campaigns across sectors and regions. Campaigns are no longer viewed solely as episodic efforts undertaken once every decade. Instead, many organizations are moving fluidly between campaign phases, transitioning from one campaign into planning for the next, or advancing targeted, priority-driven initiatives within broader fundraising strategies.

This finding reinforces a key shift first observed in 2018: campaign fundraising is no longer an exception or special project. It is a core operating model for organizations seeking to fund growth, infrastructure, and long-term impact.



Planning and Readiness: From Big-Bang Campaigns to Sustained Momentum

Campaign planning continues to evolve, particularly in how organizations think about duration, scale, and public visibility. While multi-year campaigns remain common, the findings suggest a gradual shortening of campaign timelines. More than a third of respondents reported campaigns lasting four to six years, but there is also a noticeable increase in shorter, more focused efforts, including campaigns lasting a year or less.

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We're seeing more organizations use spotlight campaigns as a way to stay nimble. They can advance a priority, engage donors quickly, create momentum, and avoid overextending internal capacity.

Mike Logue, Partner



These shorter initiatives are often described as “spotlight campaigns”. They are targeted, priority-driven efforts designed to build momentum, test donor appetite, or advance a specific institutional need without the weight of a full-scale comprehensive campaign.



Spotlight Campaigns: Focus, momentum, and flexibility

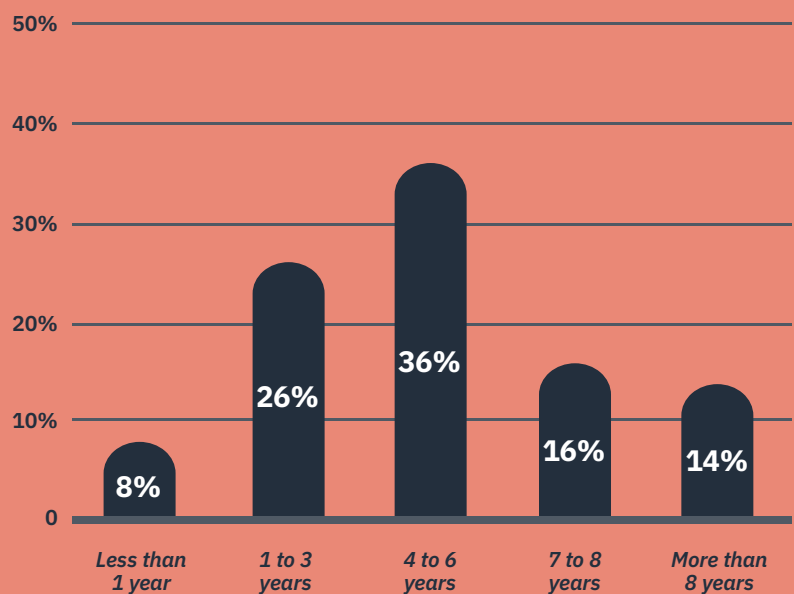
An emerging feature of the campaign landscape is the rise of what many organizations describe as “spotlight campaigns.” These are time-bound, priority-driven efforts focused on a specific project, program, or funding need, rather than a broad, multi-year comprehensive goal.

Spotlight campaigns are often used to advance discrete priorities, maintain fundraising momentum between larger campaigns, or test donor appetite before committing to a more ambitious effort. They

tend to be shorter in duration, more tightly scoped, and easier to resource within existing staff capacity.

Importantly, spotlight campaigns are not a replacement for traditional, larger capital or comprehensive campaigns. Instead, they reflect a more modular approach to campaign fundraising, allowing organizations to respond to opportunity, manage risk, and align fundraising effort more closely with organizational readiness.

Fig. 3: What is anticipated to be (or was) the total duration of the campaign, including quiet and public phases?



Public launches remain a defining feature of campaign strategy, though practices have moderated slightly over time. In 2018, 89% of organizations reported holding or planning a public launch. In 2026, that figure remains high at 80%. While there has been a modest decline, the overwhelming majority of campaigns still mark their public phase with a formal launch or announcement, underscoring the continued importance of visible inflection points in building momentum, engaging volunteers, and generating broad awareness.

Public launches remain common across all campaign sizes, with particularly strong uptake among mid-sized and larger campaigns. The only notable variation appears in the \$25 million to \$50 million range, where a smaller share report a formal launch, suggesting some experimentation with quieter or more phased approaches.

Overall, the data suggests that while the form of launches may be evolving, the concept itself remains deeply embedded in campaign practice. Rather than disappearing, public announcements appear to be adapting to campaign scale, audience strategy, and institutional context.

Fig. 4: Will you do, or have you done, a public launch to announce your campaign?

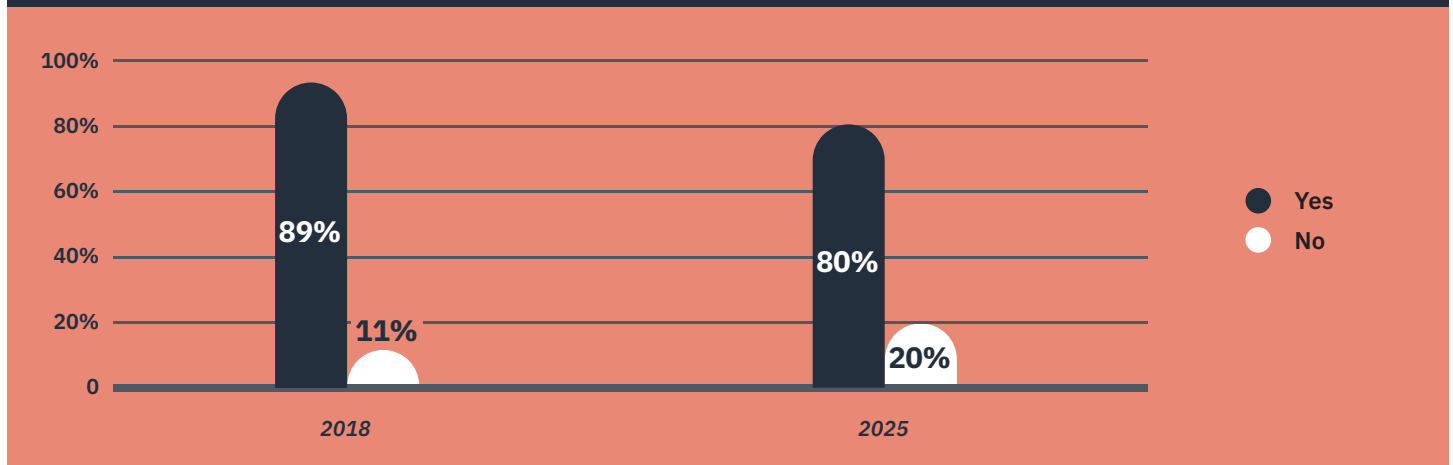
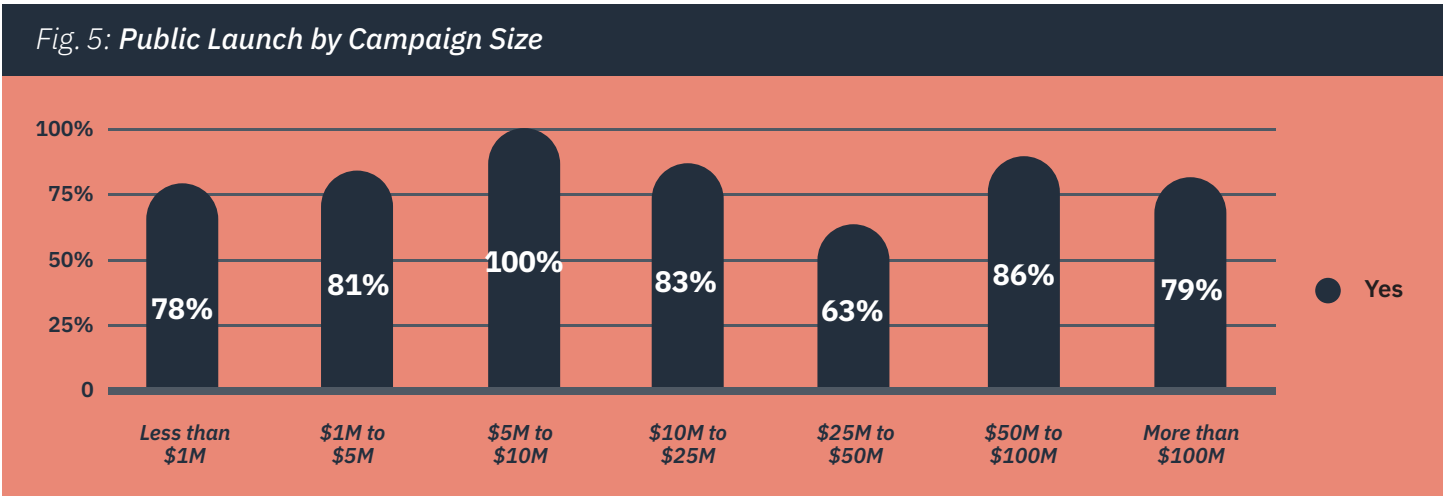
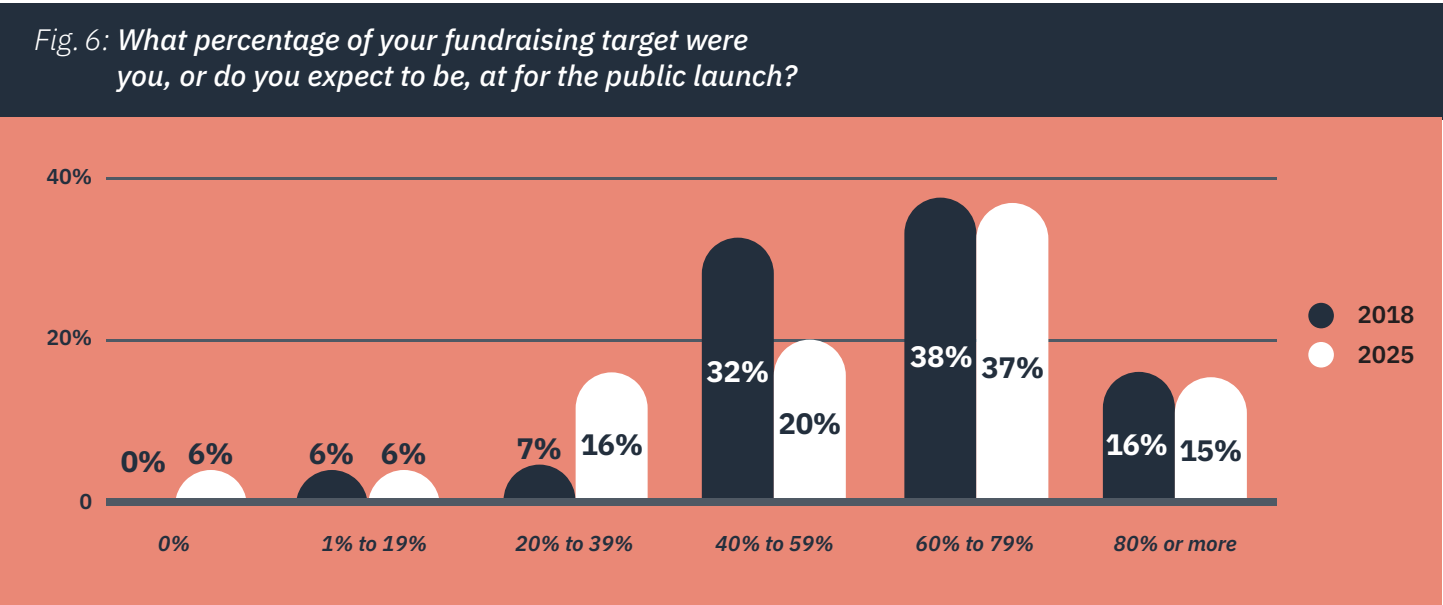


Fig. 5: Public Launch by Campaign Size



Despite these changes, one best practice remains remarkably stable: most organizations aim to be at or above 60% of goal before going public. While some respondents report earlier announcements, the median result continues to reinforce this long-standing benchmark.

Fig. 6: What percentage of your fundraising target were you, or do you expect to be, at for the public launch?



Goals, Priorities, and Donor Interest: Broadening the Case

Campaigns continue to support a mix of capital, programs, and operating support, with most respondents selecting more than one funding area. Capital remains the most common inclusion, though its dominance has softened since 2018. In contrast, operating and programmatic funding have increased significantly, signalling

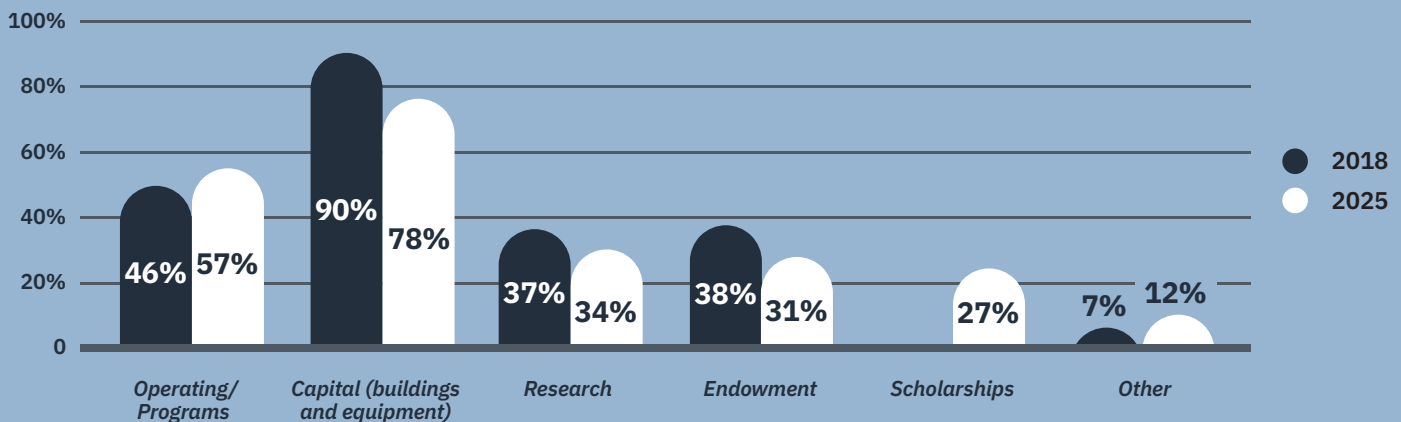
a broader campaign case that extends beyond buildings and equipment to core mission delivery.

Donor interest appears to support this evolution. Nearly eight in ten respondents report that donors are very or moderately interested in both capital and operating priorities. Notably, interest in

operating and program support has grown since the last survey, suggesting increased donor comfort with funding core operations when clearly tied to impact and outcomes.

Research and endowment priorities have declined modestly compared to the previous cycle, though this varies by sector.

*Fig. 7: Which funding areas does/did your campaign include?
(note: respondents could select more than one response)*





At the top of the gift pyramid, campaign revenue remains highly concentrated. On average, gifts of \$1 million and above account for 38% of all dollars raised, with a further 35% coming from gifts between \$25,000 and \$999,999. Respondents report that the largest gift now represents 19% of the total campaign goal, up from 16.6% in 2018, reinforcing the central role of transformational philanthropy in campaign success.

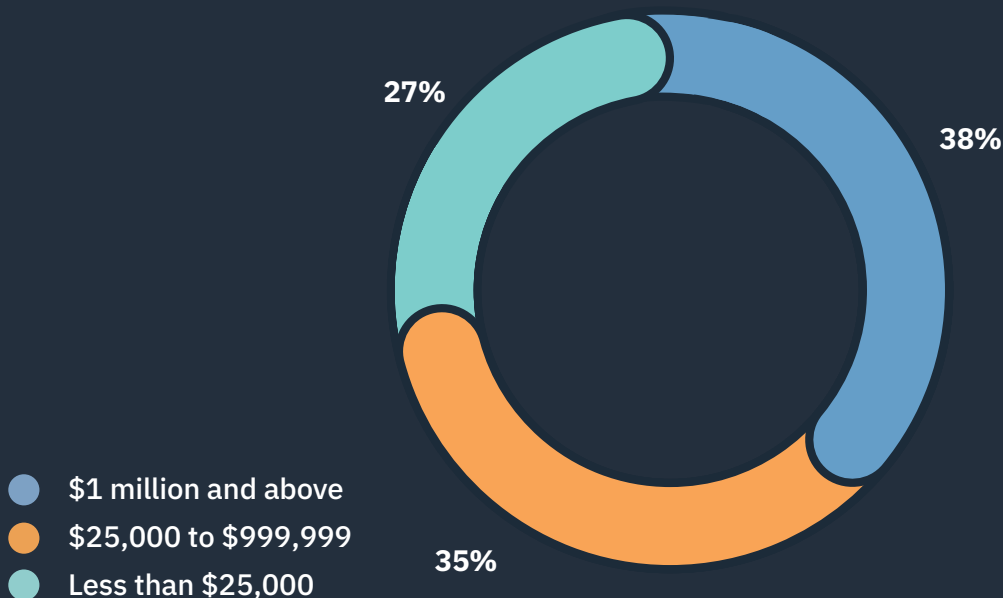


The math hasn't changed. Campaigns still rise or fall on a small number of very large gifts, even as everything else around them evolves.

Suzanne Duncan,
Vice President, Philanthropy



Fig. 8: Approximately what proportion of your campaign revenue to date has come from each of the following gift levels?



Revenue Mix and Giving Behaviour: Flexibility Over Duration

While individuals remain the largest source of campaign revenue, their share has declined since 2018, accompanied by modest increases in foundation and estate-based giving. This points to gradual diversification, even as campaigns remain heavily reliant on individual donors.

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Today’s donors want time to think, but once they are ready, they want momentum. We’re seeing shorter pledge timelines paired with a strong preference for flexibility and tangible impact.

Celeste Bannon Waterman, Partner



Pledge behaviour is also shifting. Three-to-five-year pledges remain the norm, but there is a clear trend toward shorter commitments and an increase in one-time gifts. 15% of respondents report that pledge periods are becoming shorter, while fewer see them lengthening. This is a notable shift from past reports and has profound implications for campaign strategy.

On the one hand, it brings greater confidence and potentially up-front funds for charities, but it may reduce the overall total gift if donors are planning for shorter timeframes. One bright spot though: given lengthening campaign timelines it also opens the window further for donors to be asked more than once during a campaign. As always, excellent donor stewardship and engagement is key.

Internal discussions suggest several drivers behind this trend: donor caution amid economic uncertainty, a desire for quicker impact, and the growing use of donor-advised funds and other flexible giving vehicles.

Fig. 9: What is the approximate split in revenue source in your campaign to date?

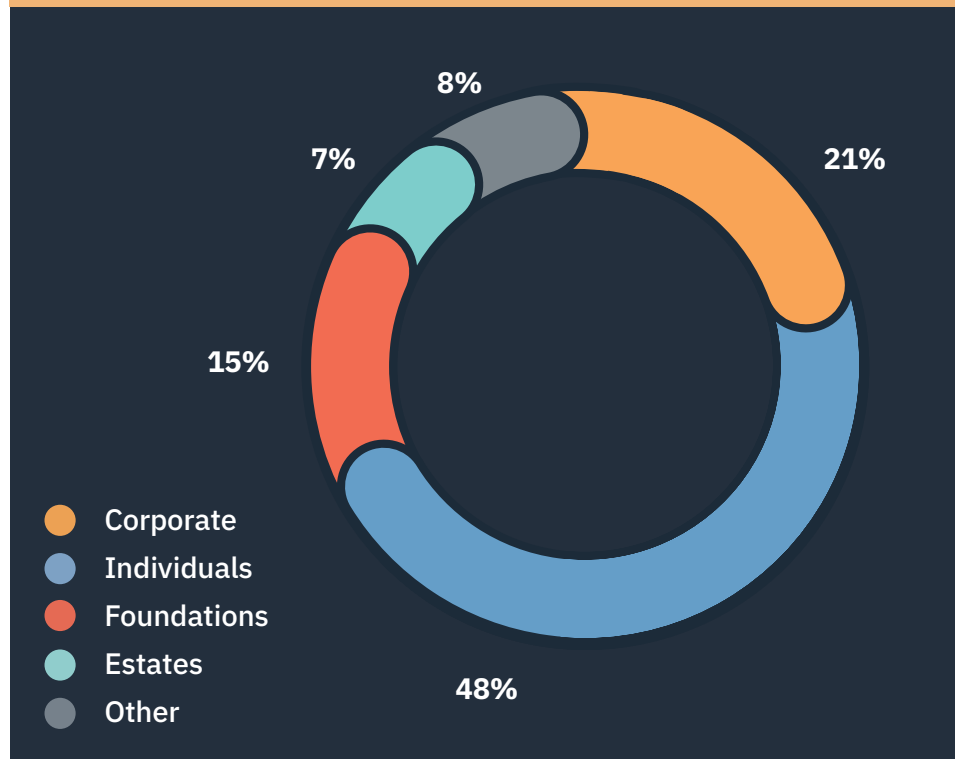
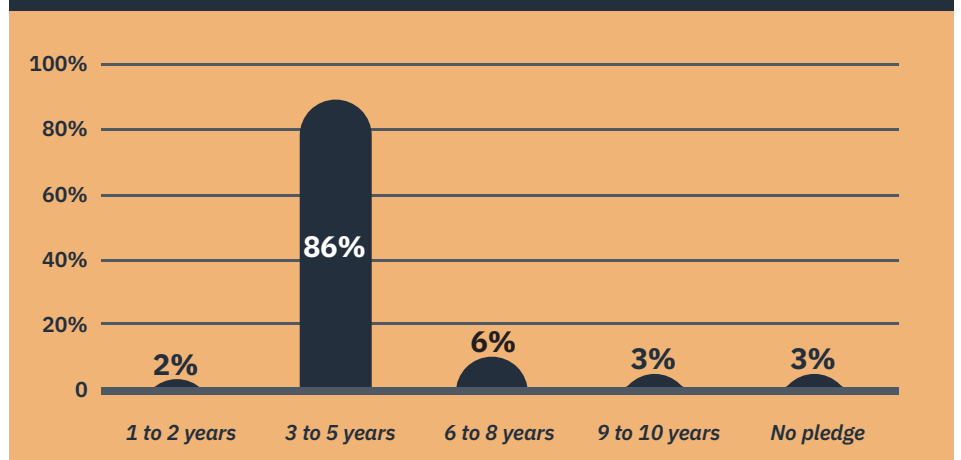


Fig. 10: What is the typical pledge period for your major & principal gift donors?



Naming, Stewardship, and Recognition:

Structure, Caution, and Choice

Practices related to naming, recognition, and stewardship have become more formalized and risk-aware over time. For a meaningful segment of donors, named recognition remains a motivator: nearly half (43%) of respondents report that it often or very often influences a donor's decision to give. This dynamic is even more pronounced in some sectors, particularly arts and culture, where 55% say naming often or very often serves as a motivator, and hospitals and health

care, where 51% report the same. At the same time, a comparable share indicate that recognition rarely plays a role, suggesting that many donors continue to prioritize mission, impact, and alignment over public acknowledgement. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of offering flexible recognition approaches that align with donor values, sector norms, and institutional context.

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We're seeing far fewer ad hoc naming decisions. Even smaller organizations are putting formal frameworks in place so they're not making one-off commitments they'll regret ten years from now.

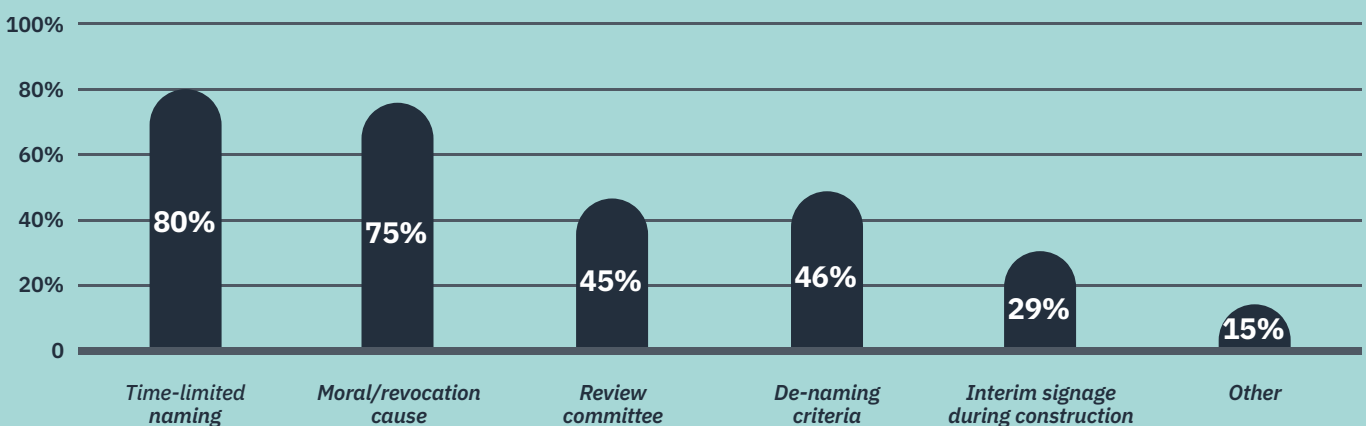
Louise Mussio, Associate Vice President, Strategies + Assessments



One notable finding in this survey is the level of structure now underpinning naming decisions, pointing to an emerging trend in how organizations are approaching recognition. A strong majority of organizations report having time-limited naming policies, moral or reputational clauses, and defined criteria for review or revocation. Heightened public scrutiny and reputational risk appear to be contributing factors, alongside practical considerations such as facility renewal cycles, redevelopment, and programmatic change, which make flexibility essential.

Importantly, this does not signal a retreat from recognition as a fundraising tool. **Rather, it reflects a sector that is increasingly balancing donor expectations with institutional longevity, brand stewardship, and risk management.** The result is a more intentional and transparent approach to naming—one that continues to support major gift fundraising while preserving adaptability over time.

Fig. 11: Tell us about your current naming practices / policy. Does it touch on the following?
(note: respondents could select more than one response)

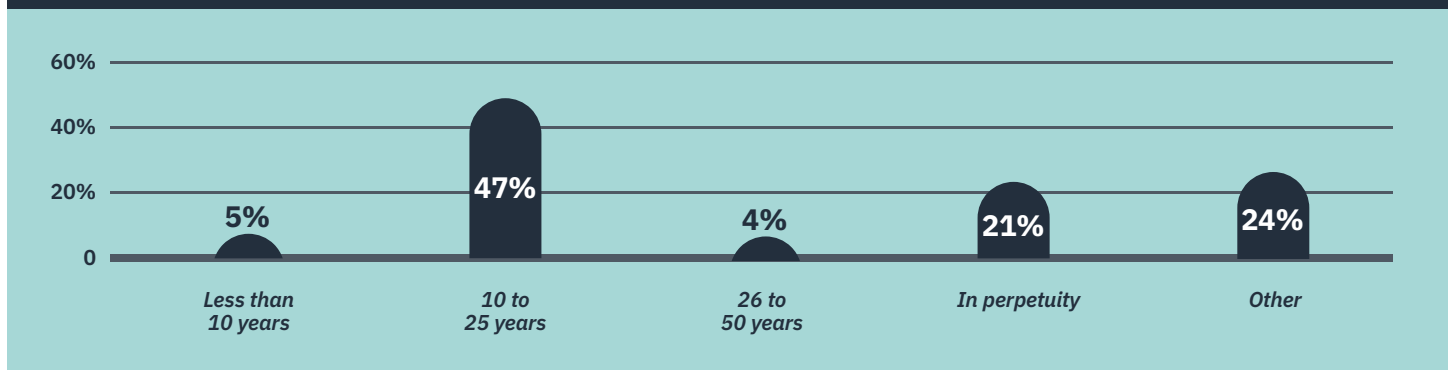


In the chart above, “Other” includes requirements such as a minimum percentage of the gift being received before recognition or signage is installed, as well as hospital approval for exterior signage.

Time-limited naming has become the prevailing standard, with most organizations offering terms of 10 to 25 years. Still, approximately one in five respondents continue to offer naming in perpetuity. Practices vary meaningfully by sector. Colleges and arts and culture organizations are most likely to report the use of time-limited naming, often paired with moral or revocation clauses. Universities, by contrast, are more likely to report formal review committees and defined de-naming criteria, reflecting a more layered governance approach.

Differences are also evident by the nature of the gift. Programmatic naming, endowed funds, and research initiatives are more likely to carry longer or perpetual recognition, while capital projects increasingly align naming duration with the useful life of the space. Roughly one in ten organizations report having revised, declined, or removed a naming opportunity in the past five years due to reputational or ethical concerns. In other cases, issues arose from misaligned expectations rather than donor conduct. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of clear policy, due diligence, and governance processes in managing major gifts.

Fig. 12: What is the typical duration for space/program naming at your organization?



In the chart above, “Other” primarily reflects the useful life of the space, with additional considerations including future renovation timelines, refresh cycles, and project iterations.

Giving Vehicles:

DAFs, Bequests, and Blended Approaches

Modern giving vehicles are now a routine part of campaign fundraising, even if adoption remains uneven. Nearly three-quarters of respondents report that at least some campaign gifts are made through donor-advised funds (DAFs), with most indicating that DAFs account for between 1 and 10% of total campaign revenue. Adoption varies by sector, with universities and arts and culture organizations reporting the highest prevalence of DAF gifts within their campaigns. While still modest in proportion, this reflects a meaningful shift since 2018, when DAFs were less consistently tracked or acknowledged.

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What's striking isn't just that DAFs are showing up, it's that they're quietly reshaping how donors think about timing, pledge length, and flexibility. Flexible DAFs in particular are enabling donors to make bigger contributions at key project points, with funds that are ready at hand.

Celeste Bannon Waterman, Partner

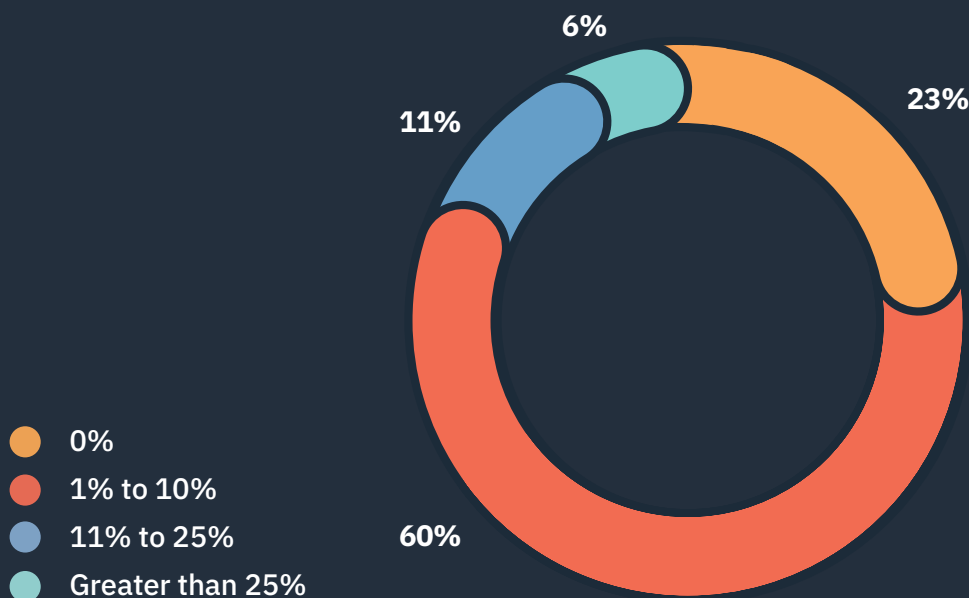
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Legacy giving remains largely adjacent to campaign counting rather than fully integrated. More than three-quarters of respondents do not include bequest expectancies in public campaign totals, although a small minority either include confirmed expectancies or set separate legacy goals within their campaigns. This suggests growing awareness of the long-term value of planned gifts, even as organizations remain cautious about public reporting.

Blended gifts, where donors are recognized for a total contribution that includes both an outright gift and a planned gift, are still relatively uncommon. However, approximately one quarter of respondents report having completed or finalized at least one blended gift, indicating early adoption that may accelerate as donor sophistication and comfort with these structures grows.

Taken together, these findings point to a gradual evolution in campaign revenue architecture. Campaigns remain anchored in outright major gifts but increasingly accommodate a broader mix of vehicles that emphasize flexibility, tax efficiency, and long-term partnership.

Fig. 13: *Approximately what proportion of gifts to your campaign have come from donors using Donor-Advised Funds to make their contributions?*



Major Gift Pathways: Relationships First, Always

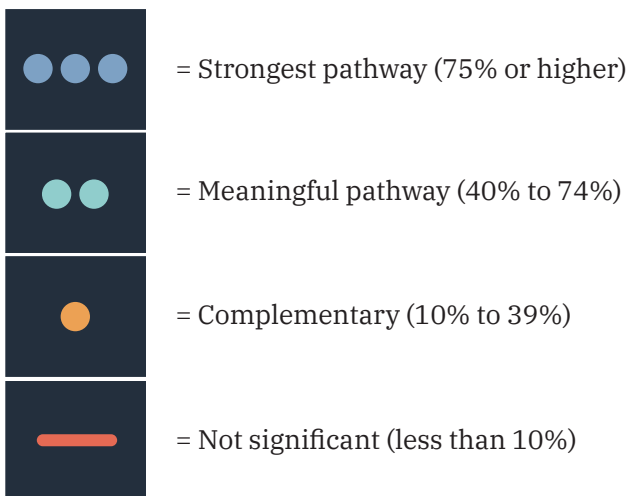
The pathways that lead to major gifts have remained remarkably consistent over time. Campaigns continue to be driven primarily by existing donor relationships, with more than nine in ten respondents identifying repeat major donors as the most important source of significant gifts. Upgrades from mid-level donors and connections facilitated by board members, campaign cabinets, or other volunteers also play a critical role.

While these relationship-based pathways dominate across the sector, their relative importance varies by organization type. Hospital foundations uniquely identify grateful patients as an important pathway into major giving, reflecting the clinical care context in which those relationships are formed, and are also more likely to report events as a complementary donor entry point. Universities skew highest on new major gifts from existing major donors, upgrades from mid-level donors, and introductions facilitated by board, cabinet, or other volunteer connections, underscoring the importance of long-term cultivation and peer influence. Social and community service organizations are most likely to credit marketing efforts as a primary pathway into major giving, reflecting the role of awareness-building and values-driven engagement. Arts and culture organizations similarly emphasize board and volunteer connections as an important source of major gifts.



Fig. 14: Pathways to Major Gifts by Sector

Pathway	Hospitals/ Health Care	Universities	Colleges	Social or Community Services	Arts & Culture
Existing Major Donors	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●
Board/ Cabinet Connections	●●	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●
Grateful Patient/ Beneficiary	●●	●	●	●	●
Mid-Level Upgrades	●●	●●●	●●	●●	●●
Marketing	●	●	●	●	●
Events	●	—	—	—	●



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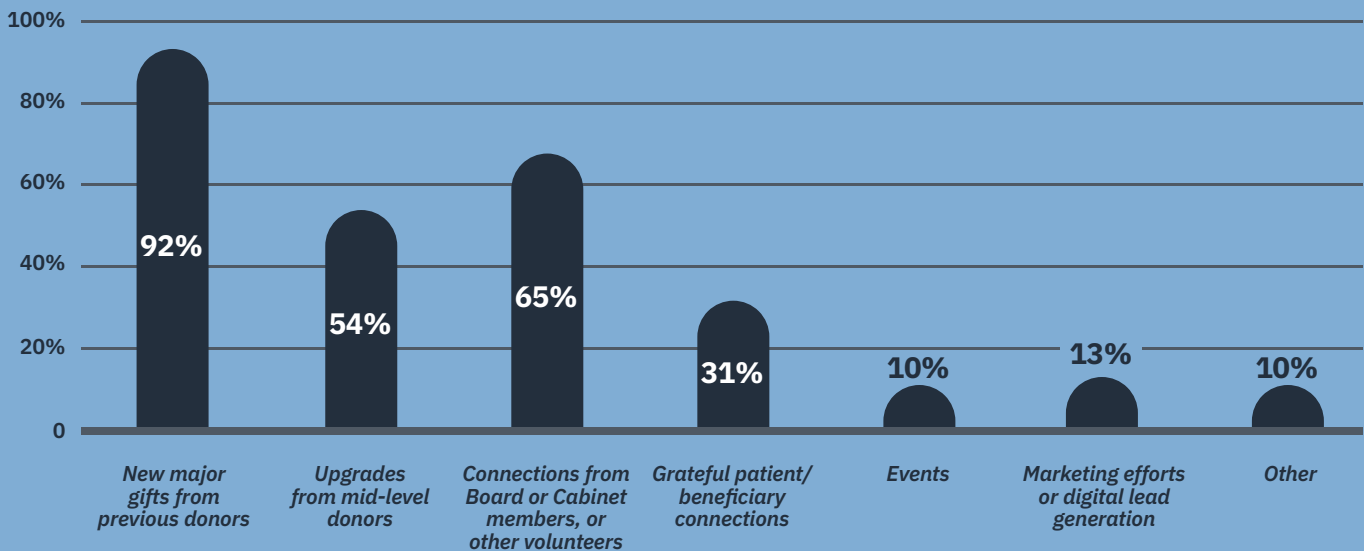
Volunteers remain essential, but their role is evolving. Long-term commitments to serve on a Campaign Cabinet for multiple years are becoming less common. Instead, many volunteers are choosing to make their own gift and help in a limited but impactful way with a few key prospects outside of a formal committee structure.

Susan Storey, Partner

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These findings reinforce the importance of sustained relationship management well before a campaign begins. Strong mid-level programs continue to serve as essential feeders into the major gift pipeline, while volunteer involvement is most impactful in opening doors, making introductions, and advancing early-stage cultivation.

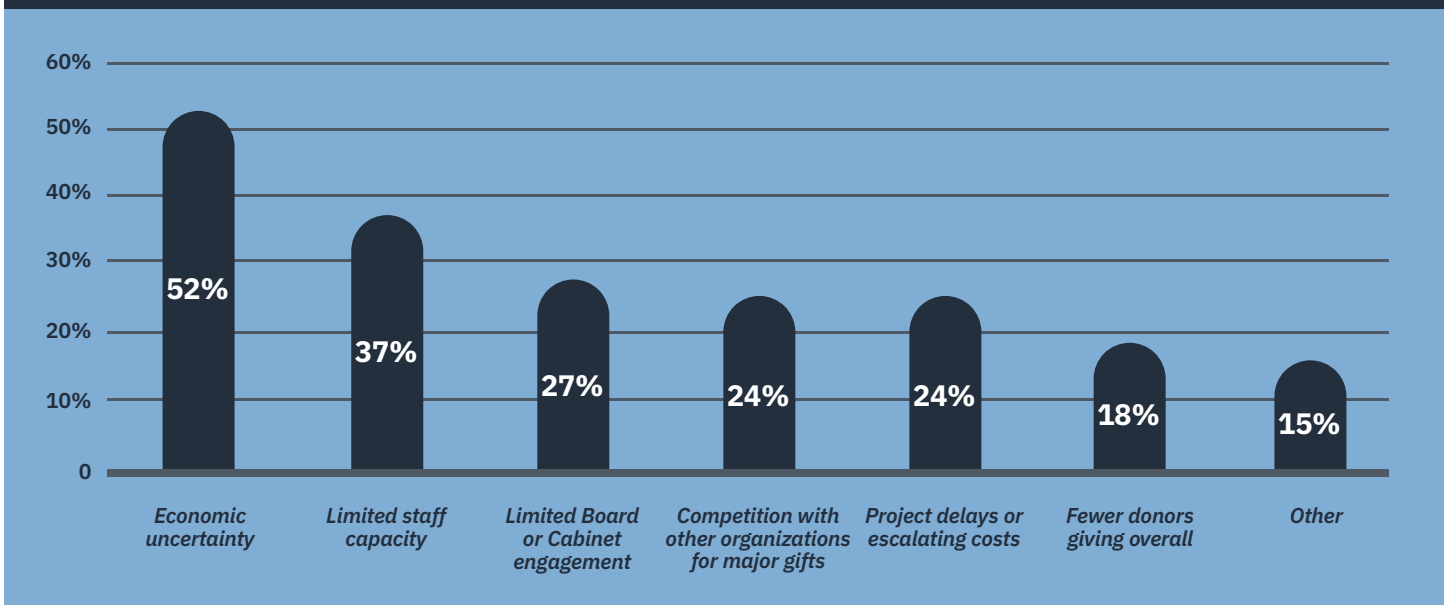
Fig. 15: Which of the following pathways have been most important in securing major gifts for your current or most recent campaign? (note: respondents could select more than one response)



Despite multiple pathways into the major gift pipeline, organizations face persistent and interconnected barriers. Economic uncertainty emerged as the dominant challenge, shaping donor behaviour, gift timing, and campaign confidence across sectors. Limited staff capacity followed closely, with many organizations reporting that they feel under-resourced relative to the scale and complexity of their fundraising ambitions.

Volunteer engagement also surfaced as a constraint, less in terms of willingness and more in the availability of experienced leadership able to open doors and advance high-level relationships. Competition for major gifts and project-related realities, including shifting timelines and evolving priorities, remain meaningful secondary pressures, reinforcing the increasingly complex environment in which campaigns are being executed.

Fig. 16: What are the top two barriers your organization is encountering in your campaign?



Staffing and Volunteers: Evolving Roles and Expectations

Volunteer engagement remains a defining feature of campaign fundraising, though its structure and expectations are evolving. While a large majority of organizations continue to involve volunteers beyond normal board responsibilities, the proportion doing so has declined since 2018. This shift is consistent across sectors and reflects broader changes in campaign design rather than sector-specific dynamics.

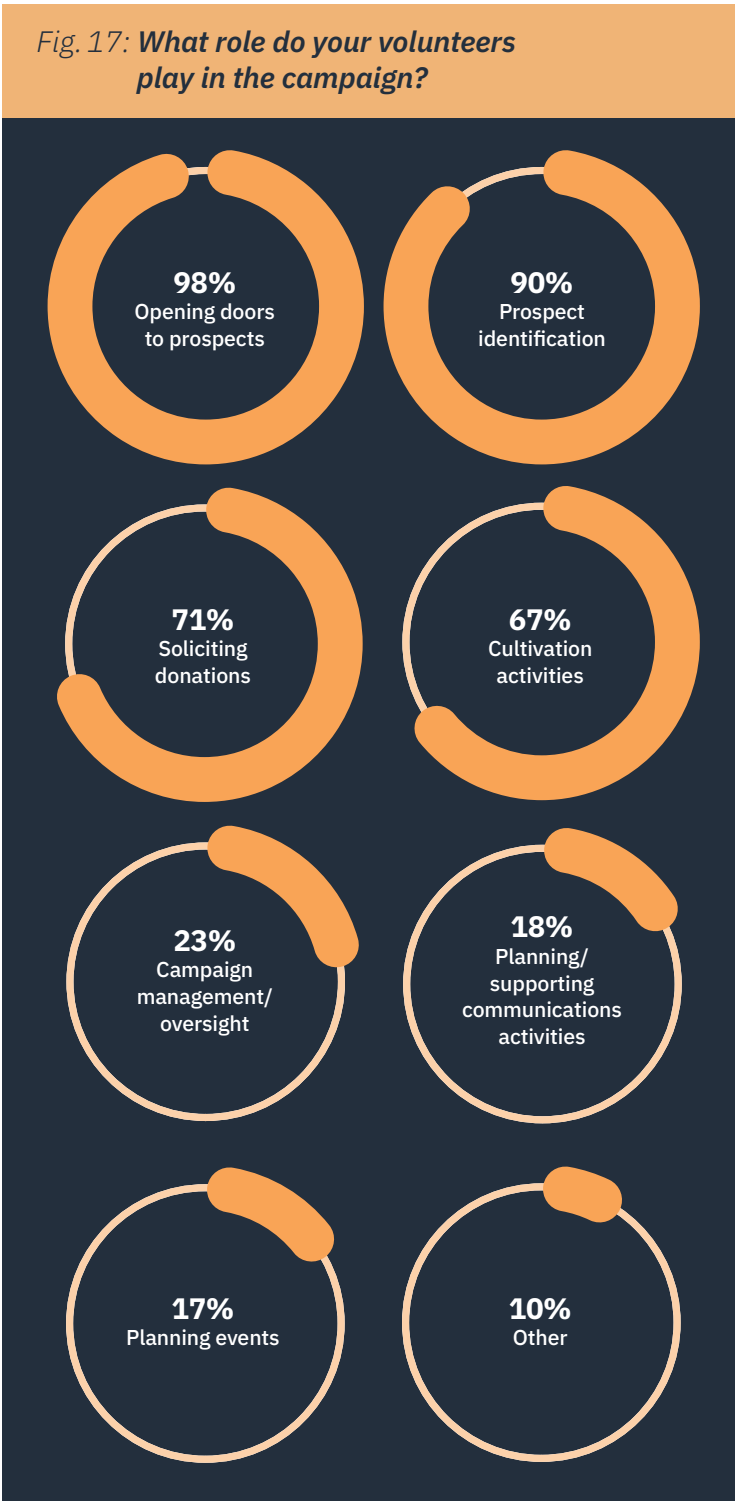
Campaign cabinets remain the dominant volunteer structure, but their composition and scale are changing. Most organizations now rely on smaller cabinets of 6 to 15 members, with fewer large or highly specialized committees. Honorary cabinets and single-purpose committees are less common, while co-chair and shared leadership models have become the norm. This reflects a move away from large, committee-heavy structures toward more focused leadership groups.

Volunteer roles are also becoming more targeted. Volunteers are most consistently engaged in prospect identification and introductions, with growing involvement in cultivation and advocacy. By contrast, fewer organizations rely on volunteers to plan events or carry significant solicitation volume.

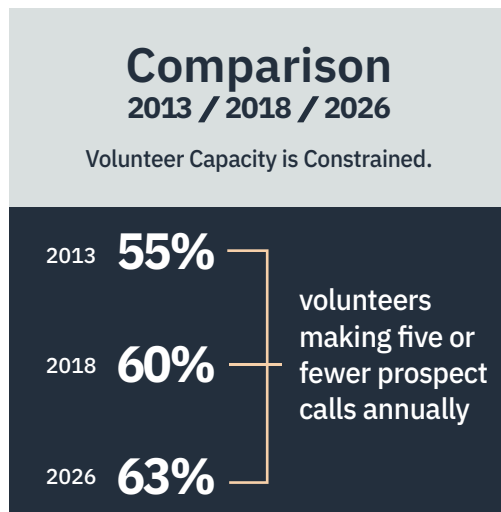
These trends point to a reframing of volunteer engagement in campaigns. Volunteers remain essential, but their greatest value lies in access, credibility, and leadership rather than activity volume. Campaigns that align volunteer roles with these strengths are better positioned to sustain momentum, particularly in environments where staff capacity is constrained and high-touch relationship management is critical.



Fig. 17: What role do your volunteers play in the campaign?



“ We talk a lot about three to five calls per volunteer, but the data tells us that even that can be ambitious. Setting realistic expectations is critical. Louise Mussio, Associate Vice President, Strategies + Assessments ”



Staffing patterns reveal growing structural pressure. Nearly one quarter of respondents report that staffing levels remained unchanged during their campaign, a higher proportion than in 2018, even as campaigns have become more complex and increasingly concentrated at the top of the gift pyramid. Limited staff capacity ranks among the most significant campaign challenges overall and is felt most acutely in the college sector, which is the only sector to identify staffing capacity as a top barrier to campaign success. This points to a widening gap between campaign ambition and organizational investment in people.

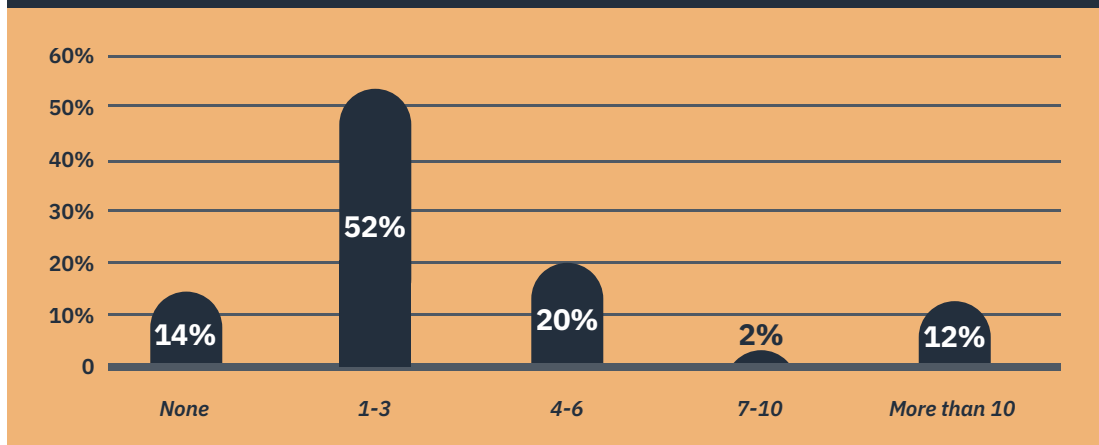
From KCI's experience, this pattern reflects the increasingly continuous nature of campaign fundraising. Rather than building discrete, time-limited campaign teams, many organizations are operating in near-constant campaign mode, with campaign activity deeply embedded in ongoing fundraising operations. As a result, existing teams are being stretched to sustain momentum over longer periods, at precisely the moment when high-touch donor management, stewardship, and volunteer coordination are most critical.

“We’re seeing campaigns layered onto already-full portfolios. That’s creating real strain, especially as expectations around integration and sophistication increase.”

Ellie Rusonik, Senior Vice-President/Practice Lead, Search + Talent



Fig. 18: How many staff are you planning to add or did you add in total to execute the campaign?



Campaign Costs: Disciplined Investment, Strong Returns

One of the most important considerations in campaign planning relates to cost. While campaigns remain a cost-effective way to generate significant philanthropic revenue, they require meaningful investment in staff, marketing, volunteer engagement, and infrastructure.

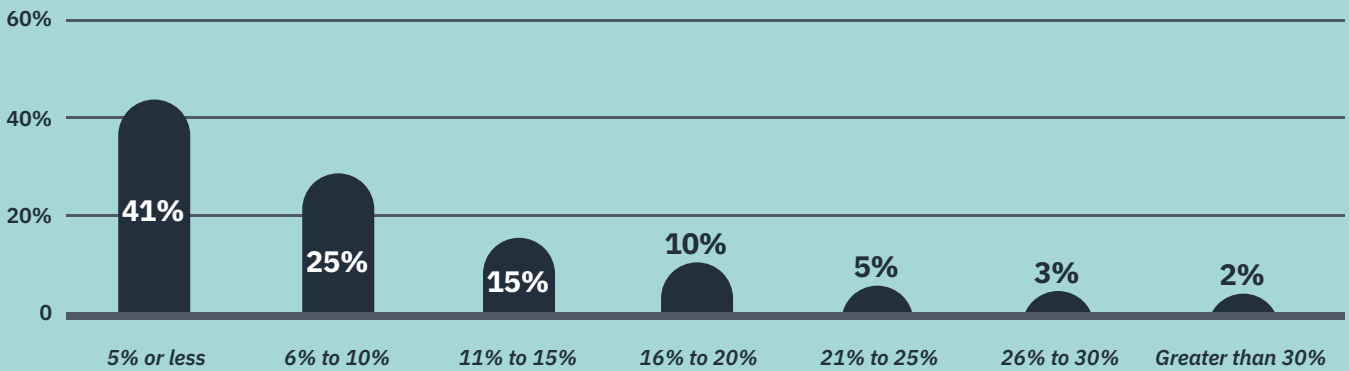
Survey results show that campaign costs are most commonly concentrated at the lower end of the spectrum. **41% of respondents report spending 5% or less of the campaign goal on expenses**, and another 25% fall within the 6 to 10% range. Two-thirds of campaigns report costs of 10% or less of the goal.

Fewer organizations report higher relative costs. 15% fall within the 11 to 15% range, and 10% report costs between 16 and 20%. Only a small minority exceed 20% of the goal, with just 10% reporting costs above that threshold.

Across campaign sizes, cost ratios remain tightly clustered at the lower end of the spectrum. In every size band, the largest share of campaigns report expenses of 5% or less, and most operate at or below 10% of goal. While there is some variability among mid-sized campaigns, there is no clear evidence that larger goals consistently drive higher proportional costs.

Overall, the data suggests that most organizations are delivering campaigns within disciplined and predictable cost parameters, regardless of scale.

*Fig. 19: What is/was the approximate cost of your campaign relative to the financial goal?
i.e. What percentage of the goal do you expect to spend on campaign expenses?*



Capital Needs:

Enduring Demand, Evolving Dynamics

Capital needs remain a central driver of campaign fundraising across the sector, though donor interest and fundraising dynamics continue to evolve. Capital is the most common campaign funding area, cited by 78% of respondents, and remains particularly attractive to major individual donors, corporations, and foundations.

Major individual donors continue to demonstrate strong interest in capital priorities, while corporate and foundation donors are also more likely to support capital needs than other funding areas. Planned giving donors show a modest increase in interest over time, reflecting the long-term and legacy-oriented nature of capital investments. By contrast, interest among mid-level and annual donors has softened, suggesting that capital appeals may require more targeted positioning and clearer articulation of impact for these audiences.

Compared to other priorities, nearly half of respondents report that fundraising for capital needs has become somewhat easier over time. This reflects the tangible and visible nature of capital projects, which donors can readily understand, see, and take pride in supporting. Naming opportunities, physical transformation, and a sense of progress continue to resonate.

At the same time, capital fundraising presents distinct challenges. Some donors view capital costs as the responsibility of government or the institution itself, particularly in healthcare and post-secondary environments. Others note that capital lacks the immediacy or emotional resonance of programs or services, especially when timelines are long or project scope is large. These tensions underscore the importance of thoughtful positioning, clear communication of need, and alignment between capital priorities and donor motivation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that capital remains an essential and viable campaign focus, but success increasingly depends on how clearly organizations connect capital needs to human outcomes. Donors respond most strongly when buildings, spaces, and equipment are positioned not as infrastructure, but as enablers of better care, improved access, stronger programs, and more dignified experiences for the people the organization serves. Disciplined messaging, integration with broader campaign priorities, and realistic expectations about which donor segments are most likely to respond are critical to ensuring capital resonates as a means to impact, not an end in itself.

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Capital resonates most when donors can clearly see what it enables—who is served, how experiences improve, and what becomes possible because the space or equipment exists.

Shannon Moon, Vice President, Research + Analytics



Key Takeaways and Implications:

What's Next for Campaigns

We are deeply grateful to the organizations that generously shared their campaign experience, results, and insights through this survey. Their collective input, combined with KCI's experience advising campaigns across Canada, informs the key takeaways and conclusions that follow.

Campaigns continue to be powerful tools, advancing not only fundraising outcomes but broader institutional ambitions. The insights below reflect both the data gathered and the practical realities we see across the sector.

1

Campaigns remain unmatched as a strategic mobilization tool.

Campaigns continue to be an unparalleled way to raise awareness, rally stakeholders, and advance bold institutional visions. The data confirms that most organizations are either in campaign or preparing for one. While significant goals can be funded outside a formal campaign, the discipline, focus, and volunteer engagement that campaigns create remain uniquely powerful.

2

Campaign success is increasingly concentrated at the top.

Campaign revenue continues to be driven by a small number of transformational gifts. On average, gifts of \$1 million and above account for 38% of dollars raised, and the single largest gift now represents 19% of the total goal, up from 16.6% in 2018. As donor pools narrow, campaign momentum and risk are increasingly tied to a handful of high-capacity supporters. This reinforces the need for disciplined major gift strategy, strong volunteer access, and early cultivation of top prospects.

3

Take the time to plan and adapt to your reality.

While many longstanding trends and rules of thumb continue to hold true, no two campaigns look exactly alike. The survey findings reinforce that strategy must be tailored to your organization's mission, capacity, competitive landscape, and community context. Investing the time up front to test assumptions, clarify priorities, and pressure-test timelines creates alignment, reduces risk, and allows you to focus on execution once the campaign is underway.

4

Design for flexibility, not rigidity.

Donor behaviour continues to evolve. Shorter pledge horizons, alternative giving vehicles, and shifting priorities require adaptable campaign structures. Flexible counting policies, recognition frameworks, and phased funding strategies position organizations to respond effectively while maintaining clarity and credibility.



5 Make space for priorities—but anchor them in a unifying vision.

Comprehensive campaigns and multi-priority cases are increasingly common. Many donors want to support the organization broadly, not just a single capital project, and expanding priorities can widen participation and strengthen results. However, breadth without coherence creates risk. Successful campaigns are distinguished by a clear, compelling narrative that connects every priority to a larger vision. Without that unifying story, a campaign can quickly feel like business as usual rather than a catalytic moment.



6 Today's donor may be tomorrow's campaign prospect.

As pledge periods shorten and campaign timelines lengthen, opportunities for re-engagement increase. Phased campaigns and milestone-driven strategies allow organizations to build on momentum and deepen relationships through multiple touchpoints over time.

7 Volunteers remain essential, but their time is finite.

With fewer donors and greater competition for attention, volunteer leadership continues to be a differentiator. Campaign cabinets and committees remain fixtures because they work. However, expectations must reflect modern realities. Clearly defined, time-bound roles that leverage influence and credibility are more effective than diffuse or open-ended commitments.

8 **Align ambition with capacity, especially staff capacity.**

Limited staffing remains one of the most persistent barriers to campaign success. Ambitious goals require investment in skilled people, infrastructure, and systems. Organizations that scale expectations without scaling support create avoidable risk.

9 **Protect the campaign before it is tested.**

Formal policies around naming, recognition, governance, and risk management are critical, particularly as campaigns grow in size and complexity. Clear frameworks provide consistency, manage expectations, and safeguard institutional reputation over longer timelines.

10 **Understand and manage campaign economics.**

Campaigns remain cost-effective vehicles for raising significant philanthropic revenue, with most operating within accepted cost ranges. That said, disciplined planning around staffing, marketing, volunteer engagement, and infrastructure investment is essential to maintain efficiency and confidence among stakeholders.

11 **Leverage everything.**

Successful campaigns multiply impact by aligning funding sources and moments of visibility. Government commitments can unlock philanthropic gifts, and philanthropic commitments can strengthen government cases. Gift announcements build credibility. Volunteers open doors. Campaigns work best when organizations think in terms of leverage at every stage.

Board Leadership: Asking the Right Questions

As campaign environments become more complex and capacity-constrained, board leadership plays a critical role in setting direction, discipline, and expectations. The following questions are designed to support informed oversight and effective governance.

Are we truly ready to sustain this campaign?

Do our staffing levels, systems, and leadership capacity align with the scale, complexity, and duration of what we are proposing—not just at launch, but over time?

Where will our largest gifts realistically come from?

Do we have a clear line of sight to the small number of transformational gifts that will determine success, and are the right relationships in place to support them?

Have we matched ambition to capacity?

Is our campaign goal grounded in realistic assumptions about staff workload, volunteer availability, and organizational focus?

Are our policies keeping pace with today's realities?

Do we have clear, board-approved frameworks for naming, recognition, counting, and risk management that reflect shorter commitments, modern giving vehicles, and evolving donor expectations?

How are volunteers being positioned for success?

Are volunteer roles clearly defined and aligned with access, credibility, and leadership—rather than volume of activity or unrealistic expectations?

Is our mid-level donor pipeline strong enough?

Are we investing sufficiently in the relationships, stewardship, and engagement needed to grow future major gift donors?

How will this campaign strengthen the organization beyond dollars raised?

Are we using the campaign to advance long-term goals such as donor trust, brand positioning, culture of philanthropy, and leadership engagement?

Campaign Readiness: Are You Positioned for Success?

Campaign Readiness Checklist

To help determine your readiness for a campaign, KCI has created the following checklist. Have a look and see how your organization would fare.



		Yes	No
1	We have an inspiring case for support, anchored in the institution’s vision, tested with and endorsed by prospective donors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	There is strong internal alignment and buy-in to the campaign funding priorities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Board and organizational leadership are supportive, understand what’s required for success, and are willing to commit their time and make meaningful personal gifts, while credibly and passionately championing the vision and case.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Fundraising staff are appropriately skilled and adequately resourced to support volunteers, manage the campaign, cultivate donors, solicit gifts, and deliver meaningful stewardship (or external support is engaged where required).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	A culture of philanthropy is actively promoted across the institution to support campaign engagement and stewardship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Appropriate internal systems, policies, and procedures are in place to manage all aspects of the campaign, including naming, recognition, and risk management.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	The institution has committed the financial and human resources required to sustain the campaign over its full duration.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	A sufficient pool of qualified prospects has been identified to reach the goal, and there is a clear understanding of where the largest gifts will come from.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	There are enough volunteers with the credibility, connections, and willingness to serve in leadership roles focused on access, advocacy, and early-stage cultivation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	The institution has experience soliciting, receiving, and stewarding major and transformational gifts, including gifts made through modern vehicles such as donor-advised funds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Donors have been well stewarded, understand the impact of their past giving, and are prepared to give again. A resourced stewardship plan exists for both new and existing major donors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Competitive, market, and environmental factors that could affect campaign success have been assessed and incorporated into campaign planning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	A detailed campaign plan has been developed, approved by the board, and includes clear milestones, benchmarks, and accountability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Leadership and staff share confidence, momentum, and commitment to sustain the campaign through to completion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	We have realistically assessed staff capacity and are confident our team can support a concentrated major-gift-driven campaign without relying on unsustainable workload assumptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	We have clearly defined campaign priorities and sequencing to ensure focus, manage workload, and avoid overextension of staff and volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Change. Complexity. Opportunity.

What's next for Canada's non-profit sector?

The Canadian charitable sector is evolving—not through a single moment of disruption, but through a steady accumulation of new expectations, new pressures, and new possibilities. Donor behaviour is shifting. Campaign models are adapting. Governance, risk, and accountability matter more than ever. At the same time, the fundamentals of successful fundraising remain firmly rooted in relationships, trust, and impact.

Navigating this moment requires more than innovation alone. It demands focus, discipline, and an honest understanding of what it takes to succeed.

At KCI, that's where we work best—helping organizations ask the right questions, make informed decisions, and move forward with confidence.

For more than 40 years, we've partnered with thousands of organizations across Canada to shape strategy, build capacity, and raise billions of dollars in support of education, health, social services, arts and culture, and faith-based missions. Our team brings deep expertise in fundraising, strategy, research and analytics, and executive search—grounded in data, informed by experience, and focused on what works.

So what's next?

That's still our favourite question.

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What's Next.