



# I HAVE A DREAM— THE IMPORTANCE OF VISION

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This article uses two famous “dream” speeches to illustrate the power of sharing a precise and simple vision with your donors. Your vision should tell the story of your organization’s priorities and ultimately take your donors on a journey that recognizes each gift as their participation in helping bring to fruition the organization’s vision and multi-year goals.



## VISION AND THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

As fundraisers, we are most familiar—and often most comfortable—defining vision related to a campaign. A campaign forces us to draw donors into our organization’s vision. We are compelled to articulate a clear case for support that is inspirational, identifies needs and threats and provides simply stated tangible outcomes to achieve in a defined time frame. That’s vision. We do it for campaigns; unfortunately we’re not typically doing it elsewhere. In that way, campaigns have become a vision crutch.

## WE ARE LOSING SIGHT OF OUR VISION

Oftentimes organizations have disconnected goals and lack a sense of direction. Sometimes there’s a real chasm between mission, core purpose and day-to-day activities. Often that’s because there is **a lot going on**. We have strategic initiatives, plans, activities and individual goals that we’re all trying to achieve—whether it’s meeting a revenue number on the same budget as last year or needing to maintain a certain ROI in the midst of budget reductions. Bottom line, the metrics, measures and responsibilities of our job day-to-day bog us down and create a chasm between our mission, our core values, why we exist and who we serve. We are focused on goals and initiatives but lose sight of the larger vision.

## WHAT IS VISION?

### What is Vision?

***I have a dream...***

- ✓ that one day, down in **Alabama**, with its vicious racists... right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls **will be able to join hands** with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.
- ✓ that one day on the red hills of **Georgia**, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners **will be able to sit down together** at the table of brotherhood.
- ✓ that **my four little children will one day live** in a nation where they **will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.**

Fundamentally, vision inspires. The great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was obviously an incredible visionary, perhaps the greatest of the 20th century. His famous “I Have a Dream” speech inspired an entire nation and multiple generations towards a very powerful movement. His vision was raw and bold, and he believed in it deeply. His speech provides examples of things that are essential to communicating vision.

- **Real Places:** He talks about Alabama and Georgia—real places where real people live.

- **Concrete Outcomes:** He shares real outcomes—when he sees specific things begin to happen, it will be an indicator of his vision being fulfilled.
- **Timeline:** He puts his vision in the context of time. He wants these things to happen in his children’s lifetime.



### JFK's "Man on the Moon" Speech



- ✓ First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, **before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth.**
- ✓ Secondly, an **additional 23 million dollars**, together with 7 million dollars already available, **will accelerate development of the Rover nuclear rocket.**
- ✓ Third, an **additional 50 million dollars** will make the most of our present leadership, by **accelerating the use of space satellites for world-wide communications.**
- ✓ Fourth, an **additional 75 million dollars**—of which 53 million dollars is for the Weather Bureau—will help give us at the earliest possible time **a satellite system for world-wide weather observation.**

Another great luminary from the 1960's, President John F. Kennedy, provides an even better example of establishing vision over a period of time. His famous and powerful "Man on the Moon" speech to Congress set the vision for the Space Age. It is one of the best examples of a vision statement out there.

- **Clear Timeline**—"before this decade is out"

- **Simple Goal**—"land a man on the Moon and return him safely"
- **Stated Priorities**—concrete numbers and an explanation of how funds would be allocated

The last thing JFK did was make it clear that achieving the vision wouldn't be easy, it was a bold vision. It was a course which would last for many years and carry very heavy costs.

- **Acknowledged Difficulty**—he prepared people for a real challenge that would require sacrifice and total commitment

He clarified that we cannot do this halfway; otherwise we're better off having never tried. That's compelling. It challenges people. It helps them understand that they need to be involved in the long term and not follow half-measures.

### JFK's "Man on the Moon" Speech



**Let it be clear** ... that I am asking the Congress and the country to accept a firm commitment to a new course of action — **a course which will last for many years and carry heavy costs:** 531 million dollars in fiscal '62 — an estimated seven to nine billion dollars additional over the next five years.

**If we are to go only half way, or reduce our sights in the face of difficulty, in my judgment it would be better not to go at all.**

## THE SEVEN ASPECTS YOUR VISION NEEDS

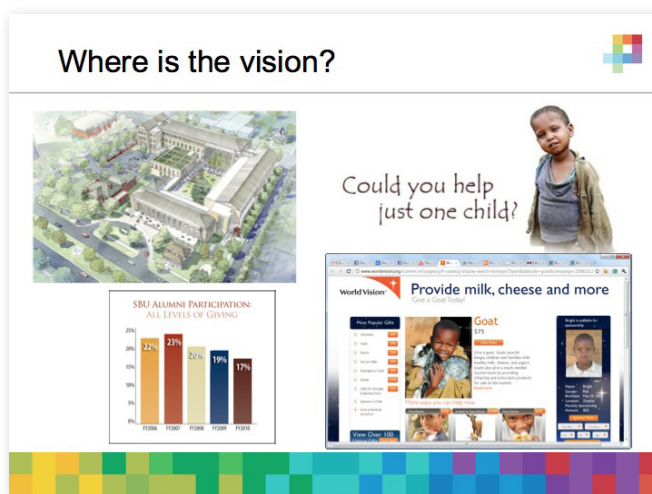
- 1. Establishes the need and the threat.** The first thing JFK talked about is why it is important to put a man on the Moon and the threat of Soviet dominance in this arena. A vision needs to establish need and threat first.
- 2. Inspirational and transformational.** It causes people to want to stand up, applaud and say, "I want to be a part of that."



3. **Simply stated, tangible outcomes.** Anyone should be able to understand it in the moment.
4. **Defined time horizons.** There needs to be accountability regarding when we will arrive at the destination.
5. **Clearly articulated requirements.** JFK's speech gave strict dollar amounts.
6. **Bold, requires sacrifice.** When people are asked to sacrifice for something bold they believe in, it's incredibly powerful, and it renders a deep level of commitment to the organization.
7. **Does not settle for half-measures.** If you and the donor believe in the vision, neither of you should settle for second best.

## RECOGNIZING VISION-ABSENT FUNDRAISING

If you look around, you'll notice a lot of vision-absent fundraising. It's not always bad fundraising, but it's generally transactional rather than visionary.



There are four types of vision-absent fundraising. Child/animal sponsorships are a wonderful fundraising tactic, but from a fundraising perspective, sponsorships are transactional. The donor doesn't see beyond the individual gift. The vision is absent.

**Buildings** are an excellent way to raise money. Putting a blueprint or artist's rendering in front of a donor is pretty powerful. People get excited, but it's not visionary fundraising. Without a discussion of how it will impact people's

lives, buildings are very organization-centric. What if JFK had only shown a blueprint of Cape Canaveral and said, "We're going to build a great rocket pad." What would be the point? The rocket pad exists to take people to the Moon. We need to remember the outcomes in our vision.

**Gift catalogs** are a wonderful device that a lot of organizations use to allow people to buy alternative gifts to help someone out. But again, a gift catalog does not speak to the overall vision of the organization but rather the one-time gift.

And finally, **participation appeals**, which are all too common in higher education.



It's almost never an effective approach because most donors don't care that much about participation, and participation appeals are so organization-centric—lacking any conversation about how lives are impacted—that they aren't going to connect with the donor.

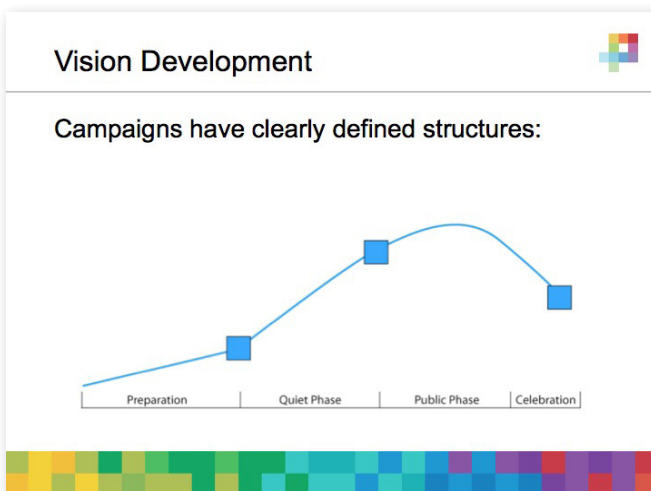
## TRANSACTIONAL FUNDRAISING

If used exclusively, transactional fundraising can add to donor churn because it's acquisition-oriented rather than retention-oriented. While you might use a transactional tactic upfront to encourage the first gift, it's important to infuse vision as early as possible to help produce a long-term relationship. We must invite the donor to go on a journey with us. Doing so will align the donor's passions with your organization and inspire them to want to be part of something bigger.

## REASONS DONORS MAKE A SECOND GIFT

In May/June 2011, the Association of Fundraising Professionals conducted a study on why donors make a second gift. The top answer—76 percent of respondents said **the organization explained a specific mission**. It's about putting the vision into context for donors and telling them why we do what we do and where we are going. It gives the donor a chance to say, "Okay great, I want to be a part of that." And that makes a huge difference going forward.

## THE CAMPAIGN ARC



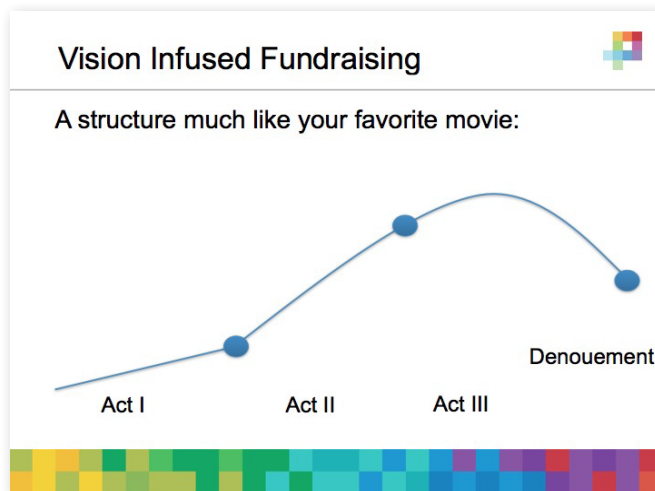
If we look at donor engagement with a capital campaign, it resembles an arc. Campaigns begin with a Preparation Phase—planning studies, feasibility studies, talking to potential leadership and potential donors, forming a cabinet, etc. Then there's the Quiet Phase where you're trying to raise a large bulk of the money from your largest donors, then you draw everybody in for the Public Phase and finally, at the end is the Celebration.

A campaign invites different types of people in during the different elements of the campaign. Obviously lead donors come in early and give those big gifts; then they become advocates in helping promote your campaign. At the very end you have smaller donors coming in, and they're helping to round out the campaign for the big celebration.





## THE STORY-TELLING ARC



The campaign arc closely resembles the story arc of most films, three-act plays and even 20-minute TV sitcoms. Beginning with Act One, characters are introduced. In Act Two, the obstacle arises. The final conflict shows up in Act Three, and the Denouement draws everything together to resolution.

Using the JFK example, in Act One he made his speech and asked for financing. “We’re going to put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade and bring him back safely.” In Act Two, they were building the rockets, testing the vehicles, trying to get a man into space—all clear reasons for needing support. Moving into act Three, they’re orbiting the moon and everyone witnessed that milestone. Obviously the payoff shows up at the end, in the conclusion, as the outcome is multiple Moon landings. As it relates to fundraising, when we invite donors on these types of journeys, we’re setting ourselves up to encourage further engagement with them philanthropically, over time, in multiple areas as the story unfolds.



## VISION-INFUSED FUNDRAISING

This arc gives us a model for how to share our organization’s vision with donors. When your overarching vision (story) infuses everything you do—campaign or not—it allows donors to participate throughout the entire process and participate more than once. At every level along that journey, we want to invite donors into the narrative. When they see how the journey impacts lives, it becomes something they want to be a part of for the long-term. And every time we hit a milestone we have another reason to come back, make another ask and involve them again in the story.



## VISION-INFUSED FUNDRAISING

Like JFK's speech, true vision includes milestones of different priorities so the donor understands their role doesn't end at just one gift. This doesn't apply only to major donors; it also applies to the person who thinks, "I've done my part," after giving \$50 to buy a goat for a family in Africa. In either case, we end up going back and asking again: "Well, the need's still there, can you give another goat/another \$50?" Alternatively, when you lay out the vision from the outset with clarity about what will be involved, that there are phases and milestones to accomplish and that they will need to be involved again—that's a compelling vision. Because we all want to be part of something bigger.

## WHAT VISION IS NOT

As you consider what the story/vision/journey is for your organization, there are a few key things to keep in mind:

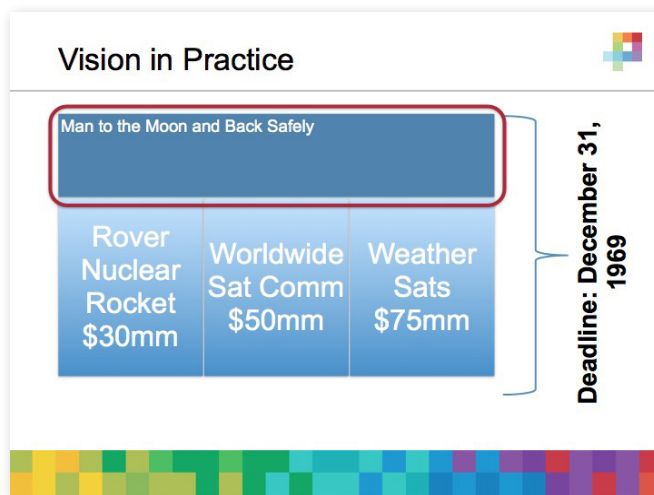
**Vision is not about being number one.** Wanting to be "the best" is not a very compelling vision. A vision should be about a destination that you're trying to reach that has some sort of impact on people's lives.

**Vision is not about rankings.** Rankings can hold us hostage especially for higher education and healthcare institutions. Being tier one, tier two, tier three, top fifty or top twenty is helpful for marketing or recruiting. But a ranking is not a vision for a donor; it says nothing about how a life has changed or how someone is impacted. My colleague Gary Cole always says, "Donors don't want to help organizations, they want to help the people that organizations want to help." If you're too focused on yourself, or your rankings, you're going to fundamentally miss what will connect a donor to your organization.

**Vision is not a dollar goal.** Fundraising goals and other metrics may be interesting to fundraisers, but a dollar goal is not going to inspire a donor. Especially as you move down the donor pyramid and try to engage all levels of your donor base, the more you emphasize a dollar goal, the more insignificant donors start to feel at the mid-level and at the lower levels. Their gift is just a drop in the bucket of your tremendous goal. Instead of fundraising goals, focus on the real impact of the organization and connect your donor to helping you achieve something that is fundamentally inspiring.

## VISION IN PRACTICE

Using the example President Kennedy provided, a Man on the Moon and back safely is the over-arching vision with several other priorities that came under it. That was the inspirational part folks could really get behind. His additional priorities weren't all directly related to putting a man on the Moon. When you're setting a vision, your related



concepts can feed into the vision, but they don't have to be directly related to it.



A lot of campaigns, and even visions, do a great job of pinning down the top three to four priorities but miss the opportunity to define a simple, inspirational concept to communicate the vision. Instead, they use generalities, “We want our college to be the best,” “We want our hospital to be best,” or “We want our organization to help alleviate poverty.” These are all wonderful goals. But in the headline, we

must also have one succinct and simple sentence that someone can respond, “Yes, I want to be part of that.”

## VISION IS NOT BRANDING

Oftentimes, we do a good job with branding and logos/visual identities, but branding is not the same as vision. Branding a vision is not the same as a simple-to-understand statement like, “Send a Man to the Moon and back safely.” Vision raises our eyes higher beyond just simple priorities and gives us something to believe in.

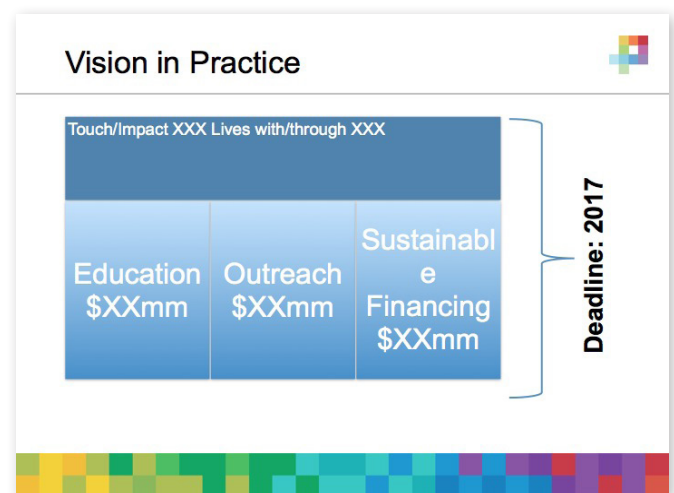
## VISION IS NOT MISSION

Mission is what you do. That doesn't change over time for most organizations. It will likely be the same 50 years from now. But vision will shift regularly. Vision statements should be revised every five to ten years—a timeframe that is measurable and tangible. And even within that five to ten year timeframe, your vision should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it still fits the direction of your organization.

## CREATING YOUR OWN VISION

Modeling after JFK's vision and priorities, an organization's vision might look something like this.

Specify how it would define touch or impact a certain number of lives, with or through some particular channel, medium or programmatic method. Then, underneath specify priorities with a firm deadline.







## HOW DOES THIS HELP TACTICALLY?

Here are just a few benefits of connecting different types of donors with your compelling vision:

**Major/Mid-Level Donors.** Setting a progressive vision using the story arc allows each ask to act as a milestone as the vision is accomplished. It allows you to go back and say, “Thanks, we got to Step 1 because of you. Now, we need to go to Step 2 together.” If your organization does a lot of campaigns, it also transcends the campaign and allows you to go back to make asks outside the campaign currently in place.

**Annual Donors.** A clear vision makes planning direct mail and online messaging easy. You’ve already defined the language of your priorities and vision, which provides a blueprint for direct-response activities. As donors move on the journey with you, it also provides compelling reasons for people to upgrade their giving from \$100 to \$500 and from \$500 to \$1,500 based upon the progress you’re making towards this vision. It provides context, and they’ll feel like they’re on a journey. It’s just not another transactional ask.

**New donors.** Having a strong vision provides easy, compelling context for a welcome series as you steward and cultivate them towards a second gift. It’s a natural segue to the second ask—a way to say, “Join us on this journey towards this vision.”

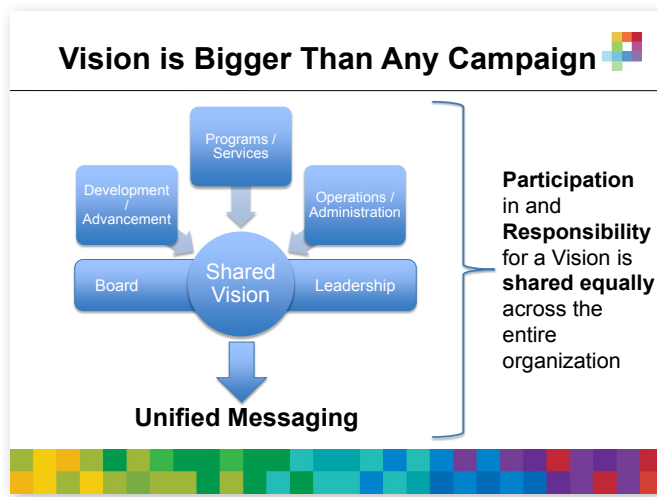
**Planned Givers.** With planned giving donors, it’s all about their legacy—their philanthropic vision of what they want to commit to and how they want to be remembered. A strong vision allows you to align their priorities with the organization’s priorities. It also provides a broader context. As you’re moving towards your vision, illustrate how their loved ones left behind can engage to see this vision come to fruition.

**Prospects.** Use your vision to engage people’s imagination. Invite them somewhere compelling, and give them an incentive to be a part of something bigger.

## VISION IS BIGGER THAN ANY CAMPAIGN

Unlike a campaign, which may have just a few leaders engaged, bringing in others only as necessary, a vision is shared across the entire organization all the time. When the leadership and board embrace and champion everyone’s participation in the vision, it becomes the foundation of everything you do. Everyone is responsible for it in equal measure; because a vision is about where the organization is going. From development and advancement, programs and services, operations and administration—everyone has a part to play and is focused on meeting that same vision.

That’s when you start to see unified messaging. There ceases to be conflict over when messaging goes out, who owns it, who is sending to the email list, who’s supposed to be on the Facebook page or who’s tweeting. It begins to be unified because the messaging is



all about the vision. There might be some different sub-messages, but if everyone is all about the vision, then the goals are aligned.

Donors will start to hear about that vision, even when it's not a fundraising ask, and they'll relate back to it and know exactly what's being talked about. They'll almost be stewarded throughout that process, because you're on a unified path as an organization towards it. Having a bold vision helps us to begin to eliminate

the risk and fear of donors receiving mixed messages.

## A CHALLENGE

Take a look at your organization's strategic plan, case for support, mission statement or even your current vision statement—review them all. Then ask yourself, "What could we achieve by the end of the decade? How could we impact lives through our mission, through our community, in our nation or in the world?"

## WHAT IS YOUR MAN IN THE MOON CONCEPT?

Then, write your own I Have a Dream/Man on the Moon speech, just one or two pages, defining that compelling concept, idea or one sentence that would make people say, "I want to get on board!" Start by thinking about what makes YOU passionate about your organization. Why are you fundraising for it? Then write out some of those principles and priorities. Focus on concrete statements of impact that you will have over time. You might not have access to exact numbers. That's okay; begin to think it through anyway. That one sentence, the elevator pitch of your vision, should be so simple and so compelling that anyone can grasp it right away.

## THEN SHARE IT

Once you have a draft, circulate it internally. See if it gets people thinking. Share it with leadership, or if you're in leadership, share it with the board. Share it in a manner that begins a conversation about putting this structure in place for your organization. Because when you do, it can revolutionize your fundraising and energize your donor base. If you'd like feedback on your draft, I would love to read it. Please share it with me: [matt.mccabe@pursuant.com](mailto:matt.mccabe@pursuant.com). We need more great examples of strong, clearly defined visions.



Dreaming connects us to the things that are important to us. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. President Kennedy had a dream. Both dreams were bigger than any one man could accomplish, and yet they weren't too big for an entire nation to take hold of. What is your dream for your organization? What inspires you to come to work every day? What are the stories that take hold of your heart and make you glad you are on this journey? That's exactly what your donors need to hear in your vision. Using the clearly articulated examples from these two speeches, find your way to a succinct vision that will take your donors on a journey and compel them to want to partner with you for a lifetime.

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