

## Why a Database Plan is Important?

Creating a database plan will help your organization develop clear ideas and agreement about what kind of database you really need, can afford and are able to support. The database plan will examine your current information and data-tracking systems and identify future needs. To develop an appropriate database, you need to know how information moves throughout your organization.

The following are some of the common pitfalls in database creation and ways to avoid them:

Common Pitfalls	How to Avoid Them
Leaving out key staff, leaders and key members (who will be using the database) from the planning and design process.	Include staff, leaders and key members in the database planning effort. These folks will use the database more and you will have fewer problems if they are involved in planning it.
Focus on technology, not the organizing work.	Assess and plan from an organizing framework – how will technology aid in carryout campaign goals, meet fundraising objectives, etc.
Ignoring reports	Use your reports to identify the “outcomes” of your database. By doing this you will be able to produce reports and statistics that your funders and staff need. You will also be able to produce walk lists, media fax alerts and donor profiles.)
The database collects too much information or not enough (too broad or too narrow).	Make sure that the database collects only the essential information you need. Remember that someone will need to enter all that data into the database so you want to limit it to information that you must track and reports you must generate. Assessing and mapping needed information before entering data is essential.
Not expandable	Campaign, funders and report information need to be changed. You need to have flexibility to change and modify the database easily. A good designer will know how to do this.
Rushing the time between purchasing your system and using it in your program.	Develop a realistic database planning schedule and remember that launching your database takes time. Keep organizational goals at the forefront of assessment and planning. Once you are clear about why and how databases will be used – then purchase needed hardware.
Not testing your new database system before converting all of your data to the new database.	The database developer should test proposed layouts and presentation with test data. This is the time to make your changes to the database design, or make your decision about a different database program.
Providing limited or no training to the staff using the database.	Evaluate staff and leaders comfort level with databases and provide them with training and documentation to use it.
Losing continuity in the planning process when staff changes occur.	Include multiple staff and key members in the planning process and do not have just one “keeper of the keys” when it comes to your database. Investing time and money in training early will save your organization a great deal of resources in the long run.
Not allotting enough time to convert files from your database to the new database.	Develop a realistic database planning schedule and remember that launching your database will take some time.
Lack of commitment to ongoing resources (money and time) to the database project.	Allocate time and resources for the set-up and ongoing management of the database. Deciding to implement a database plan is a long-term commitment.