



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

BWF & South Dakota State University Foundation

BOLD & BLUE

South Dakota State University (SDSU) graduates are driven to achieve ambitious goals and leave their mark on SDSU, their communities, and the world—because Jackrabbits have bold dreams.

So proclaims the university website, and growing that Jackrabbit tradition of excellence is what inspires the work of the SDSU Foundation.

SDSU Foundation's first campaign, Visions for the Future (1994-1998), exceeded its initial \$50 million goal by \$2 million, and its second campaign, It Starts With State (2007-2013), exceeded its \$200 million goal, ultimately raising \$255 million.

In April 2016, SDSU welcomed its 20th president, Barry H. Dunn, who laid out ambitious plans and initiatives for the university, including increased access to higher education for Native American students and increased growth in research efforts. As Steve Erpenbach '85, Foundation president and CEO, explained, with energized leadership and a strategic plan as a road map, the time was right for the next campaign.

The Foundation publicly announced the university's third comprehensive campaign titled Bold & Blue, which aims to

About SDSU

- Founded in 1881, SDSU is a public, land-grant institution
- South Dakota's largest, most comprehensive higher-education institution
- Fall 2022 enrollment: 11,331
- 86 majors, 38 specializations, 101 minors, 37 master's degree programs, 16 Ph.D. programs, 2 professional doctorates
- Offers courses at various off-campus sites as well as undergraduate and graduate programs online through the Office of Continuing and Distance Education
- The Division of Research and Economic Development, a leader in the agriculture and life sciences space, is dedicated to solving current world problems in society and industry.

The Campaign for South Dakota State University

With a goal of raising \$500 million, Bold & Blue is the largest philanthropic fundraising initiative in both the history of the university and the state of South Dakota.



raise \$500 million, nearly twice the amount raised in its last campaign. While the previous campaign had primarily raised support for capital projects, the Bold & Blue campaign is a people-centered campaign focused on investments in four overarching categories aimed to elevate every corner of the university: people, places, traditions, and innovations.

Since early 2017, the Foundation has been building momentum toward the announcement of this most ambitious and extraordinary campaign in the history of the state of South Dakota. The campaign is about more than the dollar goal; it's about celebrating the impact that philanthropy has had on one of the Midwest's most remarkable universities. It's about cultivating that next generation of Jackrabbit philanthropists while ensuring that the generations that preceded them have their legacies entrenched and celebrated. It is about ensuring that none of the momentum that has been generated in the years leading up to this moment are lost following the campaign's successful conclusion.

Embarking on a Bold Campaign

As a first step in preparing to launch its third comprehensive campaign, the Foundation sought to conduct a campaign planning study and establish a long-term partnership with a consulting firm. They felt a fresh perspective, industry

"Our university is premier—and will remain premier—because of the generosity of tens of thousands. The bold initiative we are announcing today will continue to transform this university and continue to shape the lives of students for generations to come."

—PRESIDENT BARRY H. DUNN

(Statement made in his remarks at the public announcement of the Bold & Blue campaign on Oct. 21, 2021.)



knowledge and experience, and meaningful data would be essential in giving the board confidence in the endeavor. When seeking a consulting partner, the Foundation prioritized compatibility, campaign experience, relationship continuity, and credibility. The firm needed to be approachable and understand emerging trends and how philanthropy was changing and how to adapt to those changes. The SDSU Foundation ultimately chose BWF as its partner.

Early in the engagement, the BWF team built a strong rapport with the Foundation team and gained credibility with the Council of Trustees (volunteer leadership) by engaging with them and building buy-in. Several important initiatives were completed, including conducting a campaign planning study, retaining counsel for both the campaign and prospect development, conducting development officer training, using predictive analytics to inform decision making, and implementing sophisticated business intelligence tools.

When the campaign launched publicly, the Foundation understood there might be inherent challenges with setting such an audacious goal, including skepticism about raising half a billion dollars. The Foundation

emphasized that
the goal
was



"Our collaboration with BWF meant that we were able to implement

Microsoft Power BI to provide dashboards and data visualization tools to help monitor progress and areas for improvement related to our organizational goals. Our BWF partners' expertise allowed us to significantly accelerate the timing of the implementation of our business intelligence efforts, making sure they will be impactful during this comprehensive campaign and will sustain the momentum beyond as well."

**—ARIAN BUNDE, VICE
PRESIDENT FOR STRATEGY
AND INNOVATION**



The SDSU Foundation discovered that the continuity and consistency from having one single consulting firm throughout the full campaign planning process and as specific services were needed (i.e., campaign counsel, prospect development, business intelligence, etc.) was tremendously valuable.

There was no need for onboarding as BWF understood the SDSU Foundation and, if any transfer of knowledge was needed, the process was smooth and efficient. With almost five years working together, both BWF and the Foundation feel it has been an excellent fit, with good chemistry and good rapport.

shown to be achievable through data analytics and research, and that the campaign had the full support of President Dunn.

Building a Strategic and Sustainable Pipeline

As planning the next campaign began in earnest, the Foundation reflected on key learnings from the past and some current realities. In previous campaigns, the SDSU Foundation had primarily relied on trustee support and donor referrals to reach fundraising goals and decide who to try to engage in the campaign. Many development staff members had not yet experienced an official campaign, and many had only worked in development at SDSU. To hit that \$500 million goal, new strategies and an investment in staffing would be key.

The blueprint for the Bold & Blue campaign was built on a solid foundation of analytics and logic. As the campaign progressed, the Foundation grew increasingly confident it was targeting the right individuals as the team gained more clarity and knowledge into portfolio management. In the past, gift officers weren't always sure why certain people were assigned to them. Now, by qualifying donors and using data to inform assignment, the gift officers were confident about why people had been assigned to their portfolios.



Meanwhile, the business intelligence work provided an efficient way for the Foundation to get at its data, automate reporting, and train staff members who are now able to design and deploy sophisticated dashboards. In addition, dashboard suites were developed that focus on supporting campaign efforts by measuring and benchmarking progress to goals and answering complicated questions in nearly real time. And the Jackrabbit Philanthropy Academy was formed to provide workshops, led by BWF and SDSU Foundation and university leadership, to demystify fundraising for deans and department heads and help them understand

expectations for their involvement in the campaign and tips for their engagement. As Erpenbach observed, “We were working hard, but now we are working smarter. It’s been a great fit with BWF.”

Naturally, throughout the campaign planning and implementation phases, needs evolved. BWF’s breadth of services allowed the Foundation to continue its forward progress as it responded to particular needs—and BWF provided guidance on what needs were most pressing to address and what could be tabled for later. When the Bold & Blue campaign planning began, it wasn’t anticipated that prospect development, strategy, and management would become focal points of collaboration. Having now focused on these areas, the Foundation is poised for long-term success.

While significant improvements have been made to the pipeline, resulting in growth, the Foundation noticed other notable differences since the start of the campaign. The system has become more structured and organized. Increased levels of untapped capacity have emerged. Principal gifts grew, from approximately \$130 million in the previous campaign (2007-2013) to \$250 million and counting in the current campaign. Through the feasibility study, SDSU learned how highly the university ranked among donors’ philanthropic causes, an important finding for the Foundation team. And that team now exudes a heightened level of confidence, in part due to staff members continuing to hone their skillsets and being able to utilize their talents in a structure better designed for them to prosper.

Although the campaign planning study, which included case testing, data analysis, and forecasting, projected a campaign goal of \$425 million, the Foundation decided after the successful leadership phase to go public with a \$500 million goal. While achieving this goal would require a monumental effort, the data-informed results and expertise and support from BWF bolstered the team’s confidence that they will succeed.

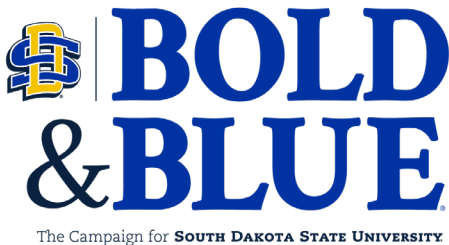


“Since our last campaign, we have new Foundation staff and have added new trustees, deans and campus leadership. BWF gave us a lot of credibility with these groups going into the feasibility study and when making decisions for staffing up and making investments. This campaign was of course about raising money for this campaign, but it was also about setting us up for long-term success with our pipeline and tapping into the next generation of donors.”

**—STEVE ERPENBACH,
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE
SDSU FOUNDATION**

Bold & Blue Campaign Highlights

- *20% increase, on average, in new donors over the course of the campaign*
- *Principal gifts grew from \$130 million in the previous campaign to \$250 million to date*
- *Annual fundraising increased by over \$25 million, on average, since the last campaign*



The Road Ahead

The SDSU Foundation has become more data driven, has clearer insights into its operations, has the ability to make strategic decisions and make them faster, and has a better way to validate its strategy, thereby saving both time and resources. Vice President for Development Keith Mahlum has touted the significance of having accurate, close to real-time data at their fingertips, which translates into expediting their ability to make informed decisions.

As noted on the campaign website, "By launching Bold & Blue, SDSU introduces a new level of fundraising and continues to raise the bar on what the yellow and blue can accomplish. The unprecedented ambition and audacious goal of the campaign establishes State as a leader in academic excellence and as a top-tier destination for building the future." To date, SDSU is on track to exceed its campaign goal.

"There's a new level of confidence on the team that comes from the data. We aren't guessing anymore. We have confidence in who we are reaching out to in the campaign. We are thinking bigger about our goals," says Erpenbach. "We believe there is nothing we can't accomplish now." ■

ABOUT BWF

BWF is an international fundraising consulting and services company headquartered in North America. As both experts in complex philanthropy and the leading innovator in the field, we bring both a global perspective and local know-how, providing deep cross-sector strategic and tactical solutions to advance our clients fundraising abilities. It's why clients turn to us as their trusted partner, expanding their knowledge and abilities through our panoramic view of philanthropy. Not only do we stimulate the industry through thought leadership, but we are an incubator of multidisciplinary "next practices," always testing new ideas and exploring innovative ways of doing things.

For nearly 40 years, nonprofits throughout the United States and across the globe have turned to BWF to empower philanthropy for their organizations. We're ready to do the same for you. **Contact us today at info@bwf.com or visit bwf.com.**