



**THE HIGHGROUND  
VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK  
CAMPAIGN READINESS STUDY  
JANUARY 2020**



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*The Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Tribute "Fragments"*

## **Executive Summary**

Located in central Wisconsin on two campuses totaling approximately 456 acres, The Highground has served veterans and their families for more than 35 years with a mission of honoring, educating, and healing. The beautiful grounds are maintained by a crew of nearly 250 volunteers. Numbers of visitors are on the rise with 225,000 annually with 6,000 to 8,000 being veterans, some who receive personalized support services while visiting and touring.

The Highground's three-fold mission and on-going duty is "to honor and support our veterans and their families; to ease and help heal service-related injuries, both physical and mental; and to educate the public at large about the true costs of freedom."

The Board of Directors has proposed a \$7.5M expansion campaign to address multiple needs at

the site including: construction of a new multi-purpose welcome and visitor center, increased parking, mortgage pay off, consolidated administrative offices and improved handicapped accessibility to better serve veterans and visitors.

This Campaign Readiness Study report outlines the findings of Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC which secured input from 157 volunteers, donors, board members, and local and regional business owners, as well as a study of philanthropic trends. The analysis supports a goal of \$3.5 to \$4M for the first phase of an expansion for construction of the new facility and mortgage pay off to allow the organization to better serve veterans, their families, and visitors.

## **Introduction to the Campaign Readiness Study**

The Highground is a not-for-profit, predominantly volunteer organization comprised of both veterans and non-veterans, dedicated to “honor, educate, and heal.”

From its founding by Tom Miller and a small group of Vietnam veterans in 1984, the organization has grown to a memorial park that hosts more than 225,000 visitors annually and serves 6,000 to 8,000 veterans with individual referral, support, and healing services. The main campus includes a museum and visitor center, a library book resale area, 19 tributes dedicated to veterans’ groups and service eras, a meditation garden, and trails which crisscross hills and valleys featuring a breathtaking landscape. The donated campground retreat, Camp Victory, located approximately 20 miles from the main campus is comprised of 300 acres and expands the organization’s capacity to provide retreats for veterans and their families which will be fully developed in the next few years.





*Meditation Garden*

Over the past decade, the organization has begun the transition from its founding focus as a Vietnam Veteran's memorial to an expanded purpose serving veterans and their family members in need of healing. The Board of Directors and staff now desire to formalize this type of support with specific programming, healing retreats, and more, all through the space made available in the proposed new building in combination with other project elements.

The support envisioned, which would include referral services for employment and housing agencies to mental health programming, has been provided on a case-by-case basis as needs arise. As someone visits the gift store, for example, they might mention their interest in purchasing a memorial stone in the plaza. Within an hour they may be connected with a volunteer, and talking about their service time in Vietnam for the first time in years. A referral

might then be suggested to support services or a veterans' group. This kind of scenario happens thousands of times every year.

As an organization operating with a limited but dedicated staff, extensive volunteer crew, and a modest budget, the skyrocketing number of visitors per year and the level of care given to the grounds is impressive. At 225,000 visitors, the site hosts one-sixth of the number of visitors of the most popular and well-loved memorial in the country -- the Vietnam Veterans Wall in Washington D.C. With publicity, visible champions across the country, and a well-managed capital campaign The Highground stands to expand that number even more with the proposed new project detailed in this report.

The Board of Directors has recognized the need to expand for a number of years. In 2018, the organization began exploring the idea of a building expansion project with a fundraising campaign to address the limitations of best serving its visitors. The expansion will address inadequate and even unsafe parking, inefficient multi-building programming areas, a cramped visitor center, an opportunity for more expansive programming and meeting expansion opportunities for the newly acquired Camp Victory.

This study is the result of that exploration and seeks to identify the ability to fundraise \$7.5M to move the organization forward into its next generation of service.

## **Proposed Project**

In the spring of 2019 the Board of Directors engaged two landscape and architectural design firms to develop proposals for the area directly across from the current visitors' center. A building study was also conducted to understand the best use of the spaces currently available. These efforts resulted in proposed plans to reuse one building and make way for a larger, centrally located visitor and welcome center also onsite. The two designs were vetted with the Board of Directors and more than 250 volunteers and stakeholders who serve at The Highground.

Elements of the expansion campaign include:

- Addressing the organization's \$750,000 mortgage to increase financial stability and long-term sustainability
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance to ensure disabled veterans and all visitors are able to access all elements of the park and memorial sites
- A new larger visitor center to house meeting and programming space as proposed in either of the designs
- Parking expansion to allow for safer access to memorial and visitors center and to accommodate larger gatherings
- Upgrades to the newly acquired 300-acre Camp Victory, donated by Al Lamovec in 2018, including bunkhouses and a meeting center on site for retreats

## **The Purpose of the Campaign Readiness Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine if The Highground stakeholders, donors, foundations and state and regional corporations and businesses would support a \$7.5M expansion campaign.

The goals of the study included to:

1. Outline the most effective fundraising strategy for meeting the proposed goal.
2. Identify favorable conditions for the fundraising campaign.
3. Identify potential conflicts with the fundraising campaign.
4. Outline any challenges that could inhibit or slow the fundraising process.
5. Assess the level of financial support available.
6. Cultivate prospective contributors.
7. Identify and cultivate potential campaign leaders.
8. Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to voice their opinions.
9. Educate philanthropic leaders about the campaign status.

## **Procedures for the Campaign Readiness Study**

Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC was engaged by the Board of Directors to conduct the Campaign Readiness Study, analyze the data, and write a report to provide recommendations for the organization to proceed with the project. The study Summit at The Highground was a festive event which unveiled the two proposed designs, provided a coach bus tour of Camp Victory, a luncheon and a brief presentation. Following the presentation, the 30 attendees representing stakeholders, donors and volunteers attended focus groups to discuss their thoughts and potential support of the proposed project.

Following the Summit, Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC advisors facilitated telephone interviews with donors from the Neillsville area, and across the state and country to ensure key volunteers, donors, corporate owners, and veterans advocates were able to relay their opinions, questions or concerns about the proposed project.

Using the following methodologies to obtain its conclusions and subsequent recommendations, the study:

1. Reviewed the history of the organization and its fundraising/development efforts.
2. Researched national veterans' organizations and trends in veterans' issues.
3. Conducted fact-finding with staff, Board of Directors and key stakeholders.
4. Held a Summit event at The Highground and Camp Victory to assist in viewing the scope of the project as a whole.
5. Completed three focus groups with Summit attendees which resulted in 24 respondent answers. (Note: Not all respondents answered every question.)
6. Conducted 32 personal, confidential telephone interviews. (Note: Not all respondents answered every question.)
7. Reviewed results of online surveys from 102 community members. (Note: Not all respondents answered every question.)
8. Held general discussions with staff and volunteers.

The input is detailed in the findings section of this study. Participant responses have been grouped for this study into categories based on the main topics requested of respondents as well as issues or concerns respondents wished to discuss. In some cases, responses have been split into different categories to reflect the multiple topics shared with the interviewers. All key topics were addressed, some numerous times. Sample comments are shared in the following section. Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC chose those comments which closely mirrored the most consistently mentioned details per topic.

## **Campaign Readiness Study Planning Committee**

A Pre-Study Committee was formed which included Board of Directors and staff members. These individuals helped identify respondents to interview regarding the proposed expansion campaign. Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC is thankful to those committee members whose dedication assisted in completing an effective review of stakeholders' views and ideas. Their direct involvement in the study planning process and assistance in contacting key individuals to interview was vital in bringing the study process to a successful conclusion.

Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC is grateful to all those who took the time to participate in the onsite study Summit at The Highground, as well as those who completed telephone interviews, focus groups and the online survey. Their responses provided excellent input and thought-provoking questions which will need to be addressed during the pre-campaign planning if a capital campaign is initiated.

Study Summit Planning Committee Members included the following individuals. We appreciate their dedication to the study process.

C.W. King, Board President

Michelle Benson, Board Member

Scott Kissinger, Board Member

Al Lamovec, Board Member

Bill Lobeck, Board Member

Steve Maddox, Board Member

Don Quicker, Board Member

Gary Wierauch, Board Member

Jon Weiler, Executive Director  
Ike Rebout, Chief of Staff

Alicia Elgersma, Administrative Assistant

## Project Details

As an organization and memorial park, The Highground is unique in providing support services to veterans who visit the site. A campus with the size and scope of The Highground requires an extensive maintenance plan. Typically, an ad hoc group of volunteers staff the grounds 365 days a year, many of whom have also served in the military. While tending to their tasks, they also offer advice, support, and a physical presence to veterans and their families who need to know they are not alone in dealing with the emotional and physical wounds of their service.

This unique function of The Highground will be further developed by the expansion, catapulting the organization to the next level of service and growth. The new building will provide a physical space to allow expanded programming to meet needs of veterans and provide the essential and often missing element of connecting service providers with those seeking services.



*The Highground Annual Bike Tour*

The key element of the new building will be a large gathering space to host 200 to 300 individuals to address the current lack of space for large veterans' groups who come together for special programming. (On average 150 to 200 persons currently attend each of the organization's hundreds of events annually.) The new facility will be especially helpful during events when there is inclement weather, and holiday services such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day which historically have high numbers of visitors. The expanded space will also allow families to gather for services to honor servicemen and women while receiving a stone laid in the large open-air plaza. The plaza itself would also be expanded to allow more families and friends to honor their loved ones with a stone, as the current plaza is almost filled to capacity.

The proposed center will bring all staff and volunteer functions together under one roof. The Board of Directors wishes to improve efficiency for building maintenance and reduce overall heating and cooling consumption and costs. This will also streamline organizational operations including administration, event planning, fundraising/financial development, volunteer management, and grounds and maintenance to reduce operating costs. The Board believes the main welcome and visitor center will also expand services to veterans, especially when casual conversation with a volunteer causes a veteran to open up about their own service to reveal needs requiring more support. In these circumstances, which is currently the main way in which The Highground offers support to veterans, staff will be available onsite with formalized programming to provide expeditious referrals and responses.





*Legacy Stone Ceremony*

Furthermore, the project will allow the organization to better serve aging and disabled veterans by facilitating needed repairs and updates to increase its level of ADA compliance. The proposed new building would be handicapped accessible and include a nearby parking lot specifically for disabled veterans' vehicles, more paved trails for easier maneuvering between memorial sites and handicapped accessible restrooms.

The proposed welcome and visitor center would allow more space for the museum to host larger tours and school groups, which is an authentic need for the area, and an important desire of The Highground's mission to promote public awareness of veterans, their service, and their sacrifice. The new space would also shift the library and archival collection on war time books and biographies to an updated reading and viewing area. This move will allow individuals and groups to conveniently utilize these educational resources and would also provide additional private



spaces where veterans may meet with volunteers, staff or possibly even onsite therapists as this more formalized support programming progress.

Finally, the proposed campaign also seeks to address the \$750,000 mortgage currently carried by the organization, which will allow more of the operational costs to go towards program and maintenance needs, and provide retreat space and hunting trips to build camaraderie and healing opportunities amongst local veterans at Camp Victory.

Study respondents reviewed the following summary prior to providing their feedback.

## **Mini Case Summary**

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park, Neillsville, Wisconsin, is planning a major transformation of its 156-acre, 35-year-old campus to accommodate doubling its 225,000 annual visitors with a proposed \$7.5M construction project and capital campaign. The expansion is necessary to accommodate the huge increase in growth of providing services for veterans, help heal returning soldiers and families, educate U.S. citizens regarding the sacrifice and service of military service men and women, and honor our country's fallen heroes.

The Highground was incorporated in 1984 as a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation with the original name of Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project, Inc. Originally created to provide a place of healing for Vietnam veterans and their families, the organization has blossomed in size, scope, and purpose. The enduring and touching mission has evolved over the years with commemorative monuments for veterans of each era as well as programs and services for veterans.

Since its inception, supporters have helped create 19 tributes including a learning center, museum, gift shop and administrative offices. In 2019, The Highground was gifted the 300-acre camp to hold veterans' retreats and provide a safe hunting space for those with physical limitations. The camp provides the capacity to further the organization's mission and goals of

providing healing programs for veterans. The park and camp's economic impact to Clark County surpasses \$10M and an overall estimated regional economic impact of more than \$20M was determined by the Clark County Economic Development Corporation and Tourism Bureau (CCEDC) in 2018.

The Board of Directors has initiated a Campaign Readiness Study to examine a \$7.5M expansion and renovation to better accommodate veterans and honor the heroes who pilgrimage here annually to reconnect, recover, remember, and honor veterans and their families.

The study will examine capital campaign goals for:

- Construction of a museum, gift shop, and visitor center to provide services desired by veterans, visitors and increase revenue estimated to cost \$2.5M.
- Expansion of counseling space and programs.
- Reconfiguration of the overall park plan for complete ADA accessibility providing increased safety of entry and improved traffic flow estimated at \$1M.
- Mortgage pay off of \$750,000 to help strengthen financial solvency and provide long-term financial stability by retiring its approximately \$3,900 monthly loan payment.
- Trail development for continued benefits to the organization, Neillsville area and its partners at \$500,000.
- Endowment replenishment of \$1M, which was invested to purchase adjacent property to the park.
- Camp upgrades as yet unidentified in the strategic plan.

The park is bursting at the seams. The capital campaign will relieve limitations due in part to the tremendous growth. Challenges include:

- Limited ADA accessibility in and to all buildings, and eliminate traffic congestion.
- A further desire to fund needed veteran programs.

- More space needed for growing special events, and an expanded gift shop and museum to increase revenue and provide financial stability.

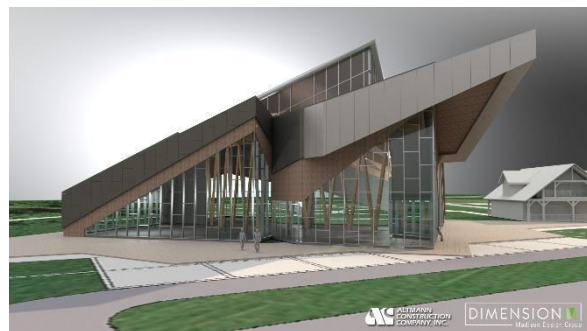
#### Conceptual plans under review

Although not complete, the Board of Directors is studying a master plan to accommodate future growth. Key components will include improved entry, safety, accessibility throughout the park, new tributes over time, and an expanded museum space. The Board's campaign committee has initially reviewed two proposed designs. The designs are comparative in price, but vastly different in terms of design elements. The group is desiring stakeholder input through the Campaign Readiness Study.

Proposal A design includes a foot print of approximately 133 feet by 80 feet.



Proposed B design includes a foot print of approximately 100 feet by 100 feet.



Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC and its team of four advisors were hired to complete a Campaign Readiness Study to determine and assess the interest in and viability for reaching the proposed private fundraising goal of \$7.5M. Private confidential telephone interviews, meetings, focus groups, and an online survey were utilized. Recommendations will be presented to the Board of Directors regarding the potential success of the proposed private fundraising goal and strategy needed for a successful campaign.

## **Campaign Readiness Study Summit Respondents**

### **Personal Interviews**

Bob Barth	Sally Johnson
Michelle Benson	Gary Karczewski
Connie Braun	C.W. King
Diane Buechner	Scott Kissinger
Dan Curran	Al Lamovec
Tom and Renee Danhof	Bill Lobeck
Sue Davis	Steve Maddox
Peter and Linda Draeger	Michelle Marine
Gary Foster	Kirk and Nancy Rodman
Jim Fox	Don Quicker
Greg Foye	Eldora Schuster
Leonard Frye	John Ward
Jeff Gall	Gary Weirauch
Wayne Gross	Dallas Wuethrich
Mike Huebsch	
Rick Ichler	
Bruce Jacobs	

### **Focus Groups**

Bob Barth	Danie Scheunemann
Michele Benson	Brad Venaas
Billy Buss	Mark Williams
Julie Diesing	Leah Wilson
Ron Ehrlich	Gary Wilz
Greg Foye	Robert Wruck
Leonard Frye	Darlene Zschernitz
Amanda Hensiak	
Jim Houser	
Joyce Jarvis	
Bryce Kelley	
David Kemp	
Skip Klabon	
Jodie Lemont	
Tom Napierala	
Mike Olson	
Sheri Rohland	

## **Public Survey**

Mike Abitz  
Doris Allen  
William Backes  
Audrey M. Berger  
Frank Biesel  
Heidi Bower  
Connie Braun  
Joel Brockman  
Mary Brown  
Troy A. Buddenhagen  
Carol Carroll  
Rhonda Chojnacki  
Dan Curran  
Hiram Cutting  
David Dvorachek  
Steve Dykes  
Joann Ellis  
Fred Ellis  
Natalie K. Erpenbach  
Thomas J. Fogarty  
Gary Foster  
Joy L. Foye  
Leonard Frye  
Rick Gardner  
Donald Gehl  
Walter Graf  
Paige Gregar  
Greg R. Grunert  
William Haack  
Thomas Heiser  
Jim Hennen  
Julie Herrick  
Dean Hillestad  
Patrick and Fran Holloway  
Wayne Irwin  
Robert G. Jackan  
Ken and Wanda Jennings

C.W. King  
Gerry Kitzhaber  
Paul Kokosz  
Tom Kostopoulos  
Jerome Krempasky  
Marvin J. Kummer  
Dale Lang  
Deb Larson  
Barbara A. Lucht  
Larry Luzinski  
Steve Maddox  
Heidi Mansavage  
Michelle Marine  
Michael Martino  
Tammy Marty  
Mary Mashin  
Tammy Minnic  
Patrick Moran  
Tom Napierala  
Nathan Brown  
Vern Nelson  
Allen Nohl  
Kaye Olson  
Jonathan Otterbacher  
Kenneth Patterson  
Kevin Richard Anundson  
Richard Rubel  
Roger Sampson  
Randall Schaefer  
Michael Schaefer  
David Schultz  
Linda Schultz  
Wayne Short  
Ted Sorensen  
Jeanne Stiemke  
Bob Theibault  
Susan M. Thering

Adel Thiede  
Dan Vande Wettering  
Diane Vermillion  
Mike Voorhees  
Linda L. Waterman  
Walter Wesenberg  
Carl H. Wieman  
Andrea L Williams  
Gary Wilz  
Allen Zabel  
John Zutz

*Please note, some respondents wished to remain anonymous.*



*Korean Tribute*

## **History**

The Highground's three-fold mission and ongoing duty is "to honor and support our veterans and their families; to ease and help heal service-related injuries, both physical and mental; and to educate the public at large about the true costs of freedom."

As mentioned previously, The Highground Veterans Memorial Park was founded by Vietnam veterans from Wisconsin in 1984. It is one of the nation's premiere, privately-funded Veterans Parks, that is manned on a continuous basis and receives more than 225,000 visitors per year.

Tom Miller is the veteran who spearheaded The Highground's founding, along with a few other local veterans, in honor of his friend who died in his arms in Vietnam. This loss became the force behind The Highground and its need to offer a healing place for local veterans.

The original focus on honoring Vietnam veterans quickly grew to encompass, recognize and embrace veterans from all branches of service, involved in all 20th and 21st century conflicts, through times of war and times of peace.

## **Tributes, Programs, and Staff**

The Highground offers tributes to Vietnam Veterans, Women Veterans, Native American Veterans, Vietnam Veteran's Tribute, WWI Veterans, WWII Veterans, Korean Veterans, Gold Star Tribute, Fountain of Tears, A Dove Effigy Mound, A United In-Service Tribute, A Meditation Garden, a developmental forest with four miles of hiking trails, a Museum, and a Learning Center.



“The Highground was once just a field with a beautiful view, but it has grown into a wonderful park encompassing that view, adding to the spirit of The Highground,” said founder Tom Miller.

In the next year, the organization strives to more fully develop and formalize its support programming for veterans and their families which will include onsite or referrals for PTSD, suicide prevention, mental health and healing counseling, and employment and housing referrals.

A more formal approach would allow the organization to expand its capacity to serve veterans and reach more veterans through its message of healing and hope.



*The National Native American Vietnam Veterans Memorial*

The Highground uniquely relies entirely on its small, efficient, and dedicated salaried staff whose daily efforts are augmented by a sizeable, capable and supportive group of volunteers including its Board of Directors. However, some concerns exist as to the organization’s ability to maintain the multi-facility campuses as efficiently with a sole volunteer effort. This is another lesser reason the board is reviewing the expansion plans with an eventual goal of increasing efficiency.

After 35 years of successful growth and service, the organization now finds itself outpacing both the operating capacity of its physical facilities and its available funding. The expansion must occur to continue serving the veterans community in a timely and meaningful way, seek new, sustaining



sources of funds and expand its physical space to meet the ever-growing number of visitors seeking comfort, solace and to honor those loved ones who fell in service to this country.



*Gold Star Tribute*

The desire to honor veterans is a core American value reflected across the country. Here in the Midwest, more than 363,000 veterans live in Wisconsin representing 8.6 percent of the population compared with the 6.6 percent nationally (2017 VA data).<sup>1</sup> Support for veterans is a value which runs strong. The Highground serves as a healing place of peace that is felt by visitors and veterans alike. Through programs, education and archival resources the organization is so much more than a beautiful memorial grounds.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/State\\_Summaries\\_Wisconsin.pdf](https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/State_Summaries_Wisconsin.pdf)

## **Benefits of the Project and Importance of the Organization Findings**

It is clear respondents believed The Highground is important, most significantly from the standpoint of its touching and endearing support and memorializing of the sacrifice and service of our veterans. It is also beneficial from the standpoint as an economic driver for the Neillsville region.

One of many comments regarding this finding is as follows:

*“I am in favor of their project for sure. I think everybody does a good job. They have outgrown the space though. Restrooms, parking, display space inside, offices, and all over. The building was great back then. They have growing pains now, which is good to have. They need this project.”*

One hundred percent of respondents affirmed the importance of The Highground as a regional resource for veterans, a tribute to their service, and a place to honor, remember, and educate the public.

Most respondents felt the project elements were all equally important and all an intrinsic part of the three-fold mission of the organization. The numbers reflect their ultimate choice of the top priority.

The utility of the project, indeed the heartfelt desire for the project, was also affirmed in the study. Respondents varied from regional corporate business people and local farmers to individuals and veterans from around the state and nation who have experienced the loss of a veteran or who were veterans themselves. All believed that the project had merit to honor veterans, create more space for programming, and to grow the organization’s capacity and reach.

The following options were provided for respondents to rank the importance of The Highground’s purpose. The respondents (private and focus group respondents only) chose the top reasons listed below:

1. Honoring veterans through the memorials (26 responses)
2. Programming designed to support veterans and their families (13 responses)
3. Educating citizens about the sacrifice of our military (11 responses)
4. Opportunities for veterans to come together with other veterans (1 response)
5. Building relationships with agencies such as the VA and Vets Center to transition veterans home from their deployment (0 responses)

Respondents (public, focus group, and private interviewees) were then provided five options to rank regarding their perceived top benefit of the project:

- The ability to create a centralized location for veterans' activities in the community (21 responses from focus groups and personal interviews and 36 from online survey responses)
- The ability to house a multi-use space to include indoor activities due to inclement weather (18 responses from focus groups and personal interviews and 26 from online survey responses)
- The ability to house more advanced museum exhibits that require specific safety and exposure conditions (7 responses from focus groups and personal interviews and 18 from online survey responses)
- The ability to house all departments and staff under one roof reducing utility and technology costs (7 responses from focus groups and personal interviews and 0 from online survey responses)
- The ability to join with tourism partners to help diversify funding needs (0 responses from focus groups and personal interviews and 6 from online survey responses)

There is a strong feeling of respect for The Highground and its mission of honoring veterans, offering programming of support, and educating those who visit. The proposed project, specifically the expanded building and meeting spaces, will allow for this to be addressed. More will be noted on this in the final conclusion.

Sample comments about the value of The Highground and the proposed project include:

*The Highground is a very nice place, but some have trouble navigating the grounds very well. Camp Victory is incredible and the opportunities for disabled veterans is amazing.*

*Absolutely beautiful. I've been to Washington D.C. many times, and The Highground is on the same footing as D.C.*

*To me, it's an exceptional place of healing and memorializing.*

*Awesome place, but I can see why they need to expand. I was more active a few years ago, but I love going there. They do need help in some areas. I think they should go for the project.*

*It might be hard to raise it all, but I think they need it. It's as important to non-vets as to vets.*

*It's a great place for veterans, but I think it's an under-utilized, unknown gem. If you go to populated areas of the state, they don't know it exists.*

*We are very lucky to have The Highground in central Wisconsin. It is a draw to our area and helps tourism in major ways.*

*I am in favor of the project for sure. I think everybody does a good job. They have outgrown the space though – there is the need for restrooms, parking, display space inside, and offices. The building was great at one time. They have growing pains now, which is good to have. They need this project.*

*Absolutely fantastic for something developed through volunteers and the few people who started it all. Amazing what has been accomplished. So far it has met the purpose of the goal of why it was established.*

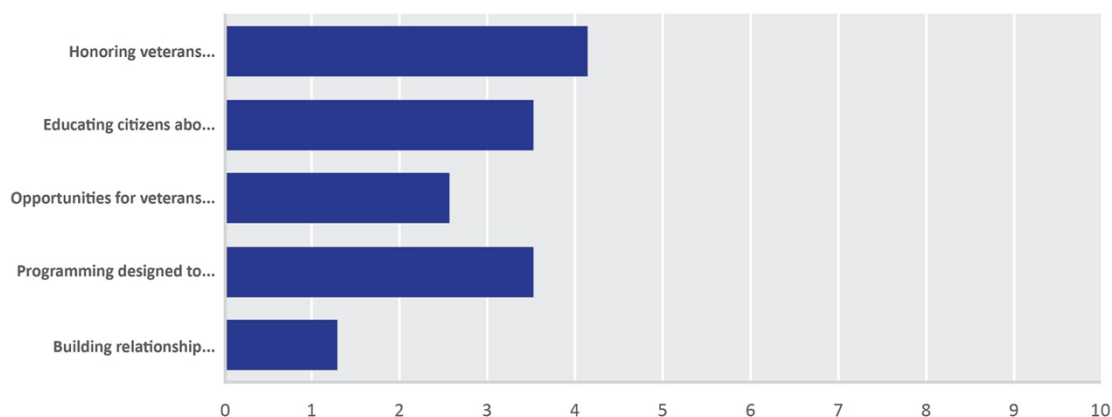
*The facility really needs more room for a museum to educate and raise awareness, and something to have healing space as well as more programming space to support vets with PTSD, that will bring in more funds down the road.*

Respondents were asked if the mission of The Highground is important, has merit and value as an organization seeking private philanthropic support. The observations of the private confidential interviews and focus groups follows.

## Private Confidential Interviews: Consultant Led

**If you felt the organization is important, please rank in order of most important (one being most important).**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 1



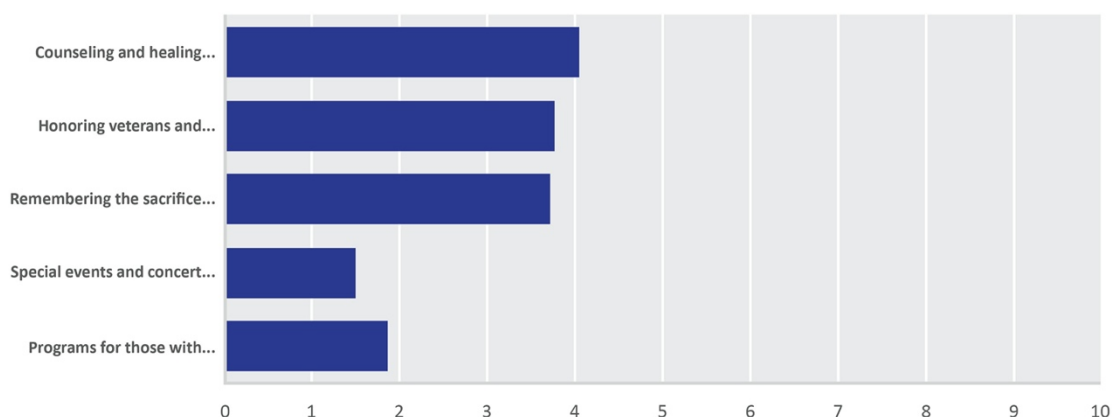
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Honoring veterans through the memorials	54.00% 13	24.00% 6	12.00% 3	12.00% 3	0.00% 0	25	4.16
Educating citizens about the sacrifice of our military	17.86% 5	35.71% 10	28.57% 8	17.86% 5	0.00% 0	28	3.54
Opportunities for veterans to come together with other veterans	3.85% 1	15.38% 4	30.77% 8	46.15% 12	3.85% 1	26	2.69
Programming designed to support veterans and their families	32.14% 9	21.43% 6	21.43% 6	21.43% 6	3.57% 1	28	3.57
Building relationships with agencies such as the VA and Vets Center to transitions for veterans	0.00% 0	4.00% 1	4.00% 1	0.00% 0	92.00% 23	25	1.20

The qualities of The Highground that respondents noted -- the combination of beautiful memorials and grounds in addition to more formalized programming designed to support veterans, educate visitors, and foster healing -- is unique to the organization on a national scale, which will help to propel this project to success.

## Public Survey

**If you felt the organization is important, please rank in what ways (1=highest; 5=lowest).**

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Counseling and healing programs and services for veterans	54.17% 13	4.17% 1	33.33% 8	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	24	4.04
Honoring veterans and their families	20.83% 5	45.83% 11	25.00% 6	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	24	3.79
Remembering the sacrifice of U.S. Military men and women	25.00% 6	33.33% 8	33.33% 8	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	24	3.75
Special events like concerts, hunts and national holiday events	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	4.17% 1	29.17% 7	62.50% 15	24	1.50
Programs for those with disabilities at the Camp Victory	0.00% 0	12.50% 3	4.17% 1	45.83% 11	37.50% 9	24	1.92

## Benefits of the Project and Importance of the Organization Conclusion

The Highground is clearly a special and treasured place for thousands of veterans and their families, many of whom visit regularly, and has impacted thousands upon thousands over the years. It was compared in conversation to the same feeling brought about similar to when visiting well-known veterans' memorials in Washington D.C. - a place of healing, a spiritual place, and a place where veterans and their families can receive the care and resources that they need.

All respondents found that The Highground was of importance in its key role of honoring veterans. When questioned about ranking the list of benefits, noted on the previous pages, many of those personally interviewed believed it was very difficult to choose just one as a top benefit and that indeed, all options were truly integral to the organization's role for veterans.

## Questions Regarding the Expansion Campaign Findings

Respondents in the 29 personal interviews as well as online survey respondents were given the opportunity to state any questions they might have about the project. Many respondents did not have any questions. Of those who did have questions, they were expressed fairly equally in three categories:

- 1) The fundraising amount proposed of \$7.5M
- 2) Organizational capacity
- 3) Design, timing, and programming needs

Those who questioned the financial development capacity of the organization wondered about its ability to raise \$7.5M. Still others questioned if the organization should focus more specifically on increasing its public relations to have a wider draw to the entire state and the Northern Midwest region. A number of individuals were questioned whether a phased approach would be more appropriate as the organization cultivates current and new donors.

Sample questions which arose during interviews in particular include:

*It's not really a question, but, if they have the money they should spend it, because it's such a worthwhile cause. Ample inside space is so very needed.*

*Are we going to be able to afford this to get enough contributions to cover our expenses?*

*What are the increased operating costs annually?*

*In what ways will the money be aimed at attending to the needs of healing for veterans?*

*I don't know where they're putting the buildings. How far is it going to be from Camp Victory?*

*How many more personnel is the organization going to be able to accommodate?*

*Are we going to have enough volunteers and donors regionally to sustain the expanded organization?*

*Is the funding coming from local (Neillsville area) residents and businesses or is it more widespread throughout Wisconsin?*

*Why would you want to spend so much money on new programs that duplicate existing programs?*

*Are we growing too big geographically to man this operation?*

*Do we have the right designs?*

*Are we able to fundraise \$7.5M?*

*Do you really need a big event center that you might have trouble operating?*

*What kind of advocacy or support are we going to provide for people when they come hurting?*

*Do we have the right people in place to make this happen right now? It may have been best 10 years ago in my estimation.*

*I do not really have any questions; but, shouldn't we start slow? It will take some time. We need to work on the mortgage. We need to work on the road and the parking and accessibility. We need this expansion for counseling space and programs. We need to hold off on the big building to stabilize more.*

## **Question Conclusions**

A large number of questions were identified in the research. This is not uncommon at this early stage of a campaign and is not a major concern to the consulting firm. Clearly the questions that the organization needs answered must be addressed before and during the early pre-campaign stage which will set a solid foundation for the campaign to move forward. The Board of Directors, campaign leaders and committee members will utilize this list of questions and comments as a guide for framing the capital campaign case for support and answering important questions for key stakeholders and community leaders during the pre-campaign stage.



## Concerns Regarding the Project Findings

Concerns stated by respondents echoed many of the questions identified in the previous section. Specifically, respondents (private interviewees and online survey respondents) voiced concerns around the following five categories:

- 1) Fundraising the stated project amount of \$7.5M
- 2) Organizational capacity
- 3) Project design
- 4) The need for more public relations
- 5) Competition for funds

The issue of organizational capacity was noted given the recent personnel changes with the Executive Director's resignation and some general concerns about if the right staff are in place to support the campaign management and leadership (volunteer) process to a successful completion. Some concerns also referred to the need to integrate younger veterans and supporters into board leadership and in the volunteer base to enable the organization to have new ideas as well as accessibility of donors from various ages and service experiences.

Other respondents were worried about the need for a larger building, the desire to make sure the proposed design would fill needs of veterans, and that the project would not detract from the organization's capacity to meet those needs.

It is clear there is a need to more effectively market the organization to the public locally, regionally and nationally. With a greater reach, The Highground would be better positioned to reach the full goal amount.

A variety of sample concerns identified included:

*My concern is that we go overboard, possibly don't make the funding goals, and are saddled with more debt. Finding the right people and corporations will make it easy.*

*They haven't been the best at raising money most recently. They need us to help reach out to larger donors. People seem to give when they have more information - we need to share more to address this need to draw more funds.*

*I do have concerns with the Executive Director resigning -- to address the campaign at the same time will be challenging. The goal amount is too high, but I do understand why it was set there.*

*We need to involve planners, volunteers, workers, and contributors from across the state, not just local and Clark County residents who comprise most of the volunteer efforts. We also need to encourage a broader age spectrum of planners, workers, etc., not just the middle-aged and seniors.*

*Yes, to me the two tentative designs reflect different parts of one project. Any major building/development project needs to consider all aspects of The Highground, ( i.e.) General access, to the grounds, access to the tributes, consolidation of the buildings, parking, handicap access, etc.*

*I feel there will be an increased need for volunteer support and volunteers are becoming harder and harder to secure; not only for The Highground but for all organizations run primarily by volunteers.*

*The money aspect is the biggest issue for me to keep the organization sustained. I don't want to get too big to keep the money coming in.*

*That with the expansion The Highground stays true to the original mission and does not become an amusement park of sorts.*

*My main concern is the conglomerate of fundraising. They need to figure out how to raise money, and also they have to figure out traffic flow. Access off highway 10 is another main concern.*

*All board members need to be involved.*

*Funding fatigue with the local hospital campaign and another local project.*

*May be hard to find local funders at the top levels. May need to reach outside of the area and work with veterans' organizations to uncover others outside of area, and spread the word.*

*We need to make sure a central/welcoming area is part of the project to get people acclimated. Many people don't even see the museum, because they don't make it that far in to the grounds themselves.*

*Given the last couple of weeks of personnel issues, the execution is in jeopardy. Not a full story, but not a good start to a campaign.*

*I am a little concerned right now because of the local hospital campaign. Construction is taking place right now for an infusion and a wellness center, and I do not know if The Highground can raise this proposed goal.*

*I am concerned about the finances. The project needs a slower pace. Getting donors is an issue. A lot are older. The Highground needs to address mortgage and parking and ADA and program space. We need to get our name out there to build to that point.*

*The funding amount is a concern to me. There is a lot of interest but times are tough. Finding the big benefactors is going to be a challenge.*

*We need some new young service people to come forward to help. The age of those who are putting forth the efforts is increasing, and we need younger people involved not only in Clark County but Eau Claire and other larger cities.*

*People are looking for serenity and a way to heal. We need to help these vets, but I'm not sure if we need a big event center. I suggest having more programs and people to serve the real needs of vets who have returned home to handle the trauma, etc.*

*No real major concerns now. It's a new endeavor. We just have to see how it goes forward. I have hopes that major donors will come onboard. One problem is that people don't know about it. It needs to be presented and publicized, what and why The Highground exists.*

The concerns or issues expressed by key stakeholders during the interviews, focus groups and public online survey data are all valid points.

Opinions regarding the lack of organizational capacity to effectively handle a capital campaign was the number one concern of respondents, followed by doubts of raising the entire amount proposed of \$7.5M. Two things can be surmised from this:

1) The original funding amount, while large, was not met with major skepticism, but rather the concern was to develop and strengthen the organization so the effort can be undertaken in phases and

2) With board development, strong campaign leadership, and a new Executive Director these concerns will be addressed and the campaign will succeed, perhaps not at the initial financial goal, but one which will still be able to bring needed expansion benefits.

A phased approach was suggested by several respondents, an idea that would allow the organization to utilize the first phase of the campaign to achieve its building goals for the new welcome and visitor center, and thereby strengthen its own organizational capacity both structurally and financially, to achieve other desired elements of the above stated project goals.

The completion of the larger building and addressing the organization's debt were the top two choices of the project goals in terms of priority in order to allow solid growth and stability.

The respondents' concerns toward the campaign can be addressed through a carefully planned campaign, case statement and an FAQ document clearly addressing these issues head on well before any formal solicitation of donors would take place.

It is clear the benefits of The Highground's proposal expansion resonate with the local and regional stakeholders. Moving forward with a campaign is supported despite some questions and general concerns and some growing pains from organizational challenges faced in late 2019. Nationally, support for veterans' issues is on the rise. Americans continue to see veterans' services as an important priority The Pew Research Center reports<sup>2</sup> that:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/10/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>

*In a recent survey a majority of people (75 percent) said that if they were making the federal budget, they would increase spending for veterans' benefits and services – the highest share of all 14 program areas included in the survey, as well as the highest level of support for increased spending on veterans' services since Pew Research Center first asked the question in 2001.*

Effectively marketing the capital campaign will allow the organization to tap into this support. Also, the organization's leadership would be well served to adapt and adjust with the changing face of American veterans. According to the Pew Research Center:

*Gulf War-era veterans now account for the largest share of all U.S. veterans, surpassing Vietnam-era veterans in 2016, according to Veterans Affairs' 2016 population model estimates. As of last year, there were 6.8 million American veterans who served during the Vietnam era and 7.1 million who served in the Gulf War era, which spans from August 1990 through the present.*

Identifying and cultivating key leaders of the next generation of veterans may help create new inroads into additional sources of contributions and key relationships with donors.

The Board of Directors is supportive of and committed to the expansion campaign. However, Crescendo has concerns regarding the lack of timely follow through from The Highground as advisors worked to secure needed details during the study. Without knowing what actually caused the problems or why the study was not seen as a priority, this resulted in two missed deadlines, and a reorganization of the study process. The successful completion of the study was only due to several of the Board members who took on the responsibility to personally complete the necessary planning and follow through. Regardless of why support for the study was lacking, should this occur during the capital campaign, it would greatly limit the potential to reach the goal.

Although there are some concerns regarding the proposed campaign, as such the findings still conclude the proposed project has merit, is feasible, accepted by organizational stakeholders, the region in general and indeed welcomed as a way to continue this cherished mission for generations to come.

## **Fundraising Climate for Campaign Findings**

From the beginning, The Highground avoided any government funding, wanting instead to be a tribute to veterans funded entirely by the local community, veterans, and the wider public.

While that has bonded the organization to local veterans, visitors and groups with a truly astounding level of volunteer support, it has also somewhat restricted the organization's fundraising growth. It is evident a formal financial development effort is required to raise the funds needed to serve veteran's needs and to carry the organization to the next level of regional and national significance it deserves.

In the past two years the fundraising capacity at The Highground declined from previous years (see table below) although over the last approximately two years staff has reorganized its large and growing fundraising database. From this consulting firm's estimation, the declining gifts may have been in part due to the change in leadership from its former long-term Executive Director who had exhibited strong fundraising capability.

In 2017, the organization had fallen below its past fundraising successes; however, 2018 found the organization rebounding. While still resonating with local donors, strategic fundraising for larger corporate or foundation donors had not been pursued until late 2019. We are confident that the touching nature of The Highground, its strong Board of Directors, and an expanding effort to instill a formal financial development/fundraising effort will continue moving the organization on a solid course of growth.

Private annual giving revenue from 2014 to 2018:

2014	\$342,988
2015	\$408,697
2016	\$419,708

2017 \$368,515  
2018 \$406,856

The proposed fundraising campaign, accepted on some level as feasible by the majority of respondents, would shore up the organization's fundraising ability and success not just in local dollars but by pursuing state, regional, and national dollars from individuals, corporations, and foundations. A successful campaign would help to get the organization's name recognition into a larger funding pool on the path to long term growth and sustainability.

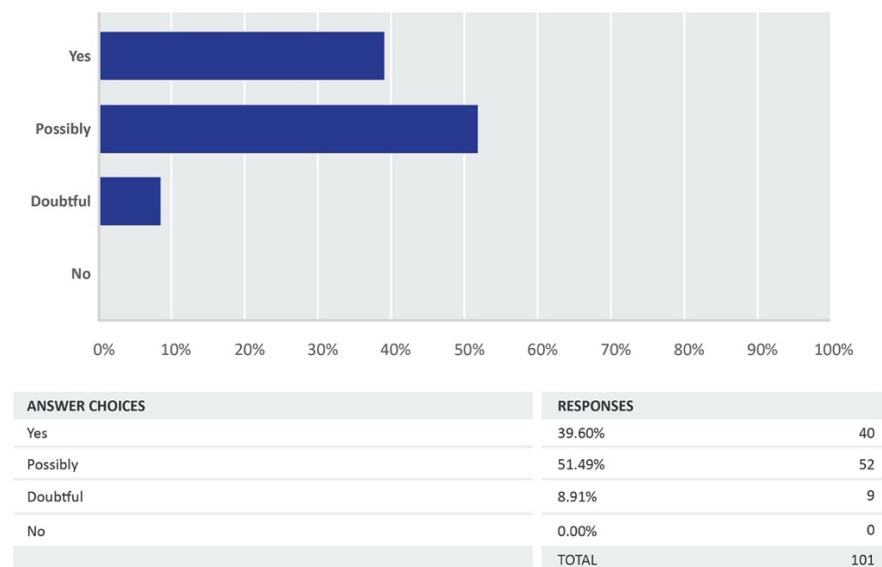
Findings are strong about the acceptance and support for the campaign.

Buy-in with all staff and volunteers is critical to the success of any capital campaign. While change and new ideas are often challenging to embrace in life and non-profit organizations, acceptance of the expansion vision and clearly communicating the campaign's key benefits at all organizational levels would be very important to encourage a positive outcome.

#### Public Survey:

**Please answer if you believe the \$7.5M proposed fundraising campaign will be accepted and supported by area leaders, the general public and The Highground donors and stakeholders?**

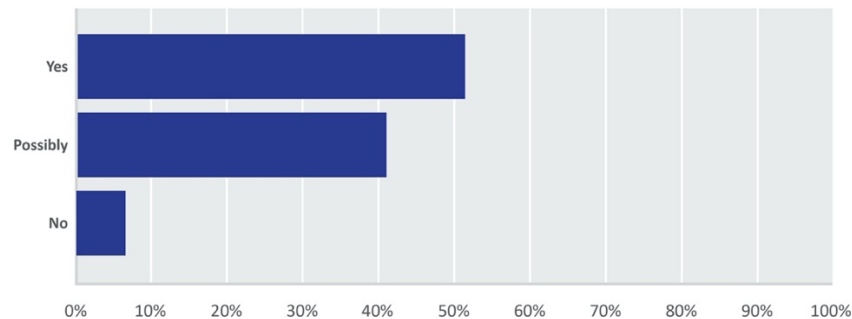
Answered: 101 Skipped: 1



## Private Confidential Interviews: Consultant Led

### Do you believe the proposed \$7.5M fundraising campaign will be accepted and supported by area leaders?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	51.72%15
Possibly	41.38%12
No	6.90%2
	TOTAL29

The years of 2018 and 2019 have experienced a strong environment and climate for fundraising. In 2018, giving was up in all sectors of philanthropic activities across the U.S., according to Giving U.S.A.'s annual report. The top sector for giving in the U.S. is comprised of individuals, a full 70 percent of all philanthropic activity typically comes from this group. This is a positive piece of information to note for campaigns such as that proposed by The Highground Board of Directors.

An effective campaign strategy to achieve the project goals, even in phases, would focus on this sector of giving and would include a pre-campaign, and capital campaign, as well as a foundation grants strategy. Campaign activities would utilize volunteer support from key individuals across the community and reach out into the wider veterans' advocacy groups across Wisconsin, which would allow the organization to network, publicize its efforts, and increase its overall donor base for years to come.



## Potential for Lead Gifts and Indication to Give

This chart indicates the need for giving levels required to successfully reach a goal of \$7.5M in any capital campaign and was determined to be unavailable at this time.

The Highground Expansion Draft Campaign Gift Pyramid						
\$7,500,000						
Range of Gifts		Number	\$ at this	Total	Total	Percent
From	To	Required	Level	Donors	Dollars	of Goal
1,000,000	1,500,000	1	1,250,000	1	1,250,000	17%
750,000	1,000,000	2	1,750,000	3	3,000,000	33%
250,000	449,999	4	1,499,998	7	3,999,998	53%
100,000	249,999	4	699,998	11	4,699,996	63%
50,000	99,999	12	899,994	23	5,599,990	75%
25,000	49,999	27	1,012,487	50	6,612,477	88%
15,000	24,999	28	559,986	78	7,172,463	96%
5,000	14,999	35	349,983	113	7,522,445	100%
	<5,000	many		many	>7,500,000	

A lead gift is generally defined as the top gift required in a campaign that comprises 15 to 18 percent of the total goal. They are vital to securing the goal amount. The finding for a lead gift in the \$1 to \$1.5M range required to meet the proposed \$7.5M goal was not identified during the study. However, one potential prospect indicated a desire to consider a possible gift at \$100,000, and another indicated a possible pledge at the \$50,000 to \$99,000 level.

Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC expects for these ranges to triple at a minimum once donors understand that pledges may be remitted over three to five years, excitement builds with the capital campaign rationale development, and organizational stakeholders begin sharing the story effectively with other donors, friends and the public who are interested in veterans' issues.

The majority of respondents stated that they would give at some level toward the campaign. Several gifts were noted at the \$25,000 amount. Many others noted at \$10,000 and lower.

The chart below identifies the total potential contribution range as noted by survey respondents.

<b>Online Survey</b> - Pledge Amount Considerations (of 104 respondents)	Number of Gifts	Approximate Pledge Ranges
\$100,000 and above	0	\$0
\$50,000 to \$99,999	0	\$0
\$25,000 to \$49,999	0	\$0
\$10,000 to \$24,999	1	\$10,000 to \$24,999
\$5,000 to \$9,999	3	\$15,000 to \$29,997
\$1,000 to \$4,999	7	\$7,000 to \$34,993
\$1,000 and under	48	\$0 to \$48,000
In kind gift options		
<b>Total Range Online Survey</b>	59	\$32,000 to \$137,989

<b>Focus Group</b> - Pledge Amount Considerations (of 24 respondents)	Number of Gifts	Approximate Pledge Ranges
\$100,000 and above	0	\$0
\$50,000 to \$99,999	0	\$0
\$25,000 to \$49,999	1	\$25,000 to \$49,999
\$10,000 to \$24,999	1	\$10,000 to \$24,999
\$5,000 to \$9,999	4	\$20,000 to \$39,996
\$1,000 to \$4,999	7	\$7,000 to \$34,993
\$1,000 and under	9	\$0 to \$9,000

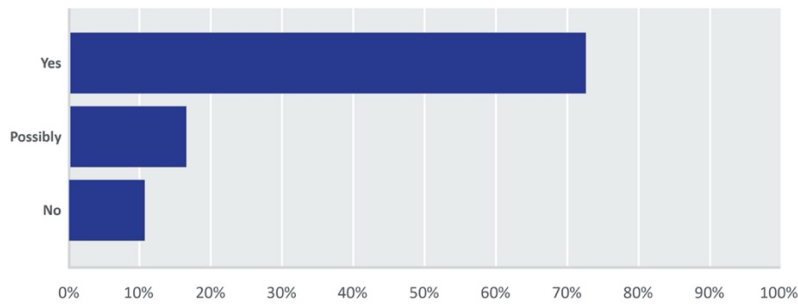
In kind gift options		
Total Range <b>Focus Group</b>	22	\$62,000 to \$158,987

<b>Personal Interview</b> - Pledge Amount Considerations (of 32 respondents)	Number of Gifts	Approximate Pledge Ranges
\$100,000 and above	1	\$100,000
\$50,000 to \$99,999	1	\$50,000 to \$99,999
\$25,000 to \$49,999	1	\$25,000 to \$49,999
\$10,000 to \$24,999	2	\$20,000 to \$49,998
\$5,000 to \$9,999	7	\$35,000 to \$69,993
\$1,000 to \$4,999	7	\$7,000 to \$34,993
\$1,000 and under	8	\$0 to \$8,000
In kind gift options		
Total Range <b>Personal Interviews</b>	27	\$237,000 to \$412,982
Total Overall Range of Possible Pledges	108	\$331,000 to \$709,958

## Private Confidential Interviews: Consultant Led

**This is at a very initial stage of a potential capital campaign, but, do you believe you (or your company) would consider making a personal, corporate or foundation gift to the campaign?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 1

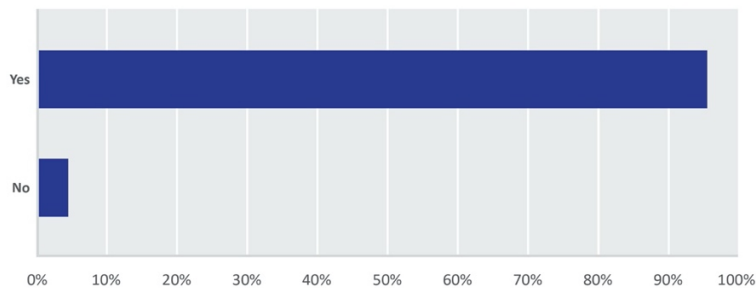


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	72.41%	21
Possibly	17.24%	5
No	10.34%	3
	TOTAL	29

## Focus Group Survey:

**Would you consider a gift to the campaign if you were asked?**

Answered: 23 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	95.65%	22
No	4.35%	1
	TOTAL	23

Ninety-six percent of focus group respondents and 73 percent of personal interviewees said they would give to the expansion campaign. Only three interview respondents and one focus group member said they would not consider a gift to a campaign. Sixty-five respondents noted they would consider pledges of \$1,000 or less, which may result in substantially larger pledges once the case for support is fully articulated during the solicitation process.

With a history of more than 20,000 donors over the years, the organization has a had strong base of support financially. However, it is also evident there is excellent potential with possible regional partners as well as individual prospects who could be engaged to help achieve the campaign goal and support organizational goals for years to come. Planning and managing a successful capital campaign would address the current challenges and limitations of the grounds and buildings and enable the organization to flourish and grow to its full potential.

## **Potential for Lead Gift and Indication to Give Conclusions**

Historically, all successful capital campaigns require 12 to 16 major gift pledges to provide 60 to 70 percent of the total campaign goal. Moreover, the lead gift and top two gift levels are vital to a campaign's overall success.

At the publishing of this study, approximately 90 percent of personal interview and focus group respondents said they would give a pledge to the proposed campaign. This shows a strong and positive sentiment regarding the proposed campaign. However, Crescendo has determined the capacity to reach the proposed \$7.5M goal is unlikely at this time, since the lead gift of \$1M to \$1.5M was not uncovered during the study.

One respondent indicated a possible pledge of \$100,000 and one identified a possible pledge of between \$50,000 and \$99,000 range. Two individuals said they would consider a pledge in the \$25,000 to \$49,999 range. Four individuals or businesses suggested they would consider gifts from \$10,000 to \$24,999. Fourteen respondents suggested gifts in the \$5,000 to \$9,999 amount.

Twenty-one individuals said they would consider a pledge of \$1,000 to \$4,999 and 65 survey respondents noted they would consider a pledge of \$1,000 or under.

The giving ranges identified during the study totaled from \$331,000 to \$709,958. In campaigns managed by Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC, the firm typically experiences three to five times larger gifts than what is initially indicated from study respondents when the campaign's case for support is effectively communicated and widely promoted during the cultivation and solicitation process.

Of particular importance is the relatively small segment of stakeholders who agreed to respond to either a study interview request, focus group or the online survey. Crescendo believes this is not due to lack of interest in The Highground or the proposed expansion campaign but rather concerns related to the perceived high campaign goal of \$7.5M.

The lack of a formal development effort that has successfully cultivated, expanded and connected well with its donors will be vital to move forward with a successful capital campaign. The absence of knowledge regarding the organization's top donors and potential donors, and scarcity of cultivation of those relationships, caused a lack of effectiveness in qualifying the development and philanthropic potential. Fundraising development and cultivation cannot only be a focus for those who only walk through the doors of The Highground, but must be realized by an effective strategy. This will include completing the hard work of reaching out and communicating with donors who are too far away to connect with on a face-to-face basis.

A relatively small segment of The Highground's stakeholders agreed to participate from personal requests via physical mail, dozens of telephone calls, and thousands of emails to prospective respondents. During the actual capital campaign, a wide-reaching cultivation and solicitation process would be completed to reach its vast numbers of past donors as well as engage new donors.

A significantly smaller goal of \$3.5M to \$4M may be met. It is widely believed a goal which is considered attainable would gain traction once the case for support is fully articulated, developed and cultivated personally with potential donors.

## **Campaign Volunteer Leadership Findings**

Volunteers are the lifeblood of a capital campaign. Respondents were asked about individuals they felt should be involved in this campaign to achieve success. Respondents shared many names of key individuals who they felt would need to be involved in the campaign in order to successfully reach the projected goal. They were also asked if they would consider volunteering or identify other high-level individuals who would be helpful to the proposed campaign. Thirty-one percent of personal confidential interview respondents indicated they would consider volunteering.

Some of these individuals are already involved at The Highground, serve on the Board of Directors, are key volunteers or are new to the organization and their involvement and would bring fresh energy to the organization's efforts.



*Wisconsin Persian Gulf Tribute*

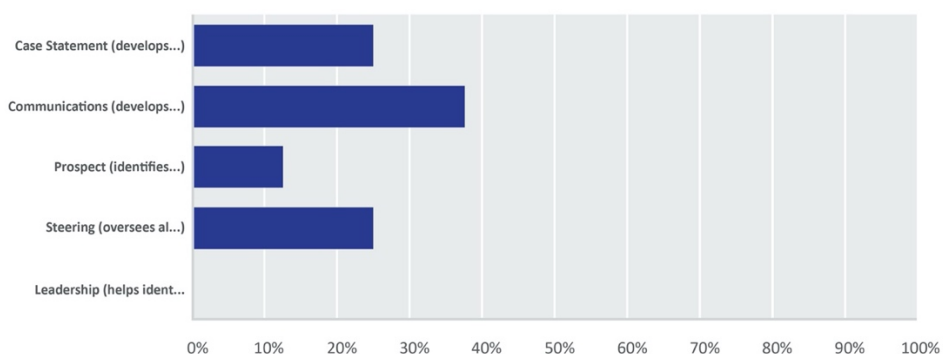
Respondents spoke of the need to reach outside of the key volunteers and board members who have faithfully served to extend the reach of the campaign into corporations, business owners, and into a younger generation of philanthropists. Some respondents suggested the involvement of more Persian Gulf veterans, younger individuals who would be able to contribute to the furtherance of the project and the organization.

Twenty-six persons were identified as potential campaign Co-chairs. Several of the same individuals were identified numerous times. A Leadership Development process is implemented during the campaign to determine the best individuals who will lead the campaign to a successful conclusion.

### Focus Group Survey:

#### Would you consider leading or working on one of the potential campaign committees? If so, please select a committee.

Answered: 8 Skipped: 16



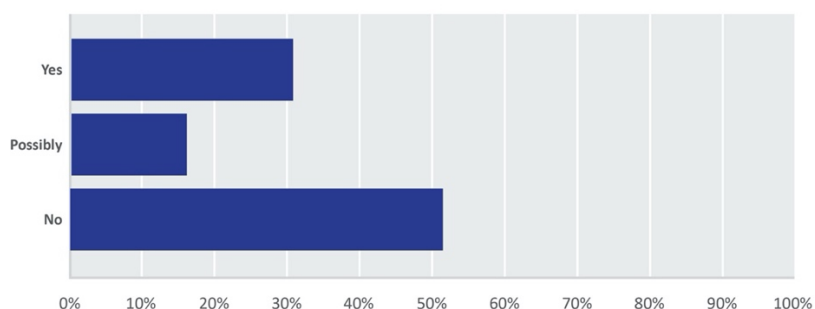
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Case Statement (develops comprehensive rationale for campaign)	25.00%	2
Communications (develops marketing and branding materials for campaign)	37.50%	3
Prospect (identifies and categorizes groups of potential contributors)	12.50%	1
Steering (oversees all committees)	25.00%	2
Leadership (helps identify and recruit campaign volunteers)	0.00%	0
TOTAL		8



## Private Confidential Interviews: Consultant Led

### Would you consider leading or working on one of the committees?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	31.03% 9
Possibly	17.24% 5
No	51.72% 15
	TOTAL 29

## Campaign Volunteer Leadership Conclusions

Successful capital campaigns require two essential ingredients – a worthwhile mission and strong leaders who are enthusiastic, willing to participate and willing to give financial support. A campaign’s success depends upon leadership from high profile people who are easily recognizable in philanthropic circles throughout the region or state and who are committed to the organization.

A strong pool of volunteer leaders exists who are passionate about and dedicated to The Highground. They are willing to provide support for the campaign and enlist other highly regarded and astute philanthropic leaders from their contacts. Recruitment of high-profile General Co-chairs and high-level leaders is crucial to the success of the proposed campaign. At the writing of this study, leadership and volunteers also exist to work on the suggested pre-campaign committees.

## Final Analysis

### Favorable Factors

A number of factors exist which would positively affect the eventual outcome of a fundraising campaign.

1. The Highground expansion is necessary due to the tremendous growth and interest in the organization with 225,000 individuals visiting annually.
2. Economic conditions and a strong stock market are deemed positive to initiate a capital campaign.
3. The Highground stakeholders believe in the benefits of the project which will continue to honor, educate, remember, and help heal veterans and their families.
4. The organization is unparalleled in its scope as the largest manned veterans memorial park in the nation and its unique characteristics set it apart from other veterans' memorial parks.
5. The Highground experience impacts people immediately and powerfully. As an effective marketing and development plan is formulated, it will help to stimulate more individuals, foundations and corporations to develop an interest in and passion for furthering its mission.
6. The Highground is an economic asset to the Neillsville area, Clark County, and the State of Wisconsin.

## Challenging Factors

1. No lead gift for a \$7.5M campaign was discovered during the confidential personal interview, focus group or online public survey process.
2. Supporters of The Highground have numbered 20,000 over the years. However, these donor relationships were not maintained or cultivated effectively. Additionally, various levels of donors and supporters are not known.
3. The Highground has not initiated a capital campaign, although it has raised considerable funds throughout its history.
4. The previous long-term Executive Director who formerly led fundraising efforts had strong and significant fundraising successes over many years. This fundraising capacity had reduced since his retirement but may be effectively cultivated once again.
5. The Board of Directors is committed but previously had a lesser role in fundraising and governance. A board which is committed to assisting with the campaign is vital, as fund development is the most important role of any and all non-profit boards.
6. The current architectural designs are not fully embraced, although concepts of each are accepted. More work should be completed during the campaign with the board including visitor engagement and stakeholder feedback on a design to best accommodate visitors, plan for future growth and assist staff in their roles to more effectively serve the mission and respond to evolving visitor needs.
7. Many benefactors and potential benefactors are spread throughout the state and nation, which is logistically challenging.
8. As mentioned in favorable factors, having people experience the healing experience of The Highground in person is a critical component of understanding the mission. However, given its rural location, encouraging people to visit the site is also a challenge. An awareness and educational campaign must be part of a fundraising campaign to stimulate more visits and inspire more philanthropic gifts to allow people to experience the impact of the site without visiting - perhaps through personal stories, visitors, volunteers, and champions, videos, and social media.

9. The organization requires an effective Executive Director who has experience in non-profit management, leadership, and fundraising to assist in navigating its growth and development. A search is underway at the time of the writing of this report.
10. Potential funding fatigue for local donors with the hospital campaign.
11. Staff may lack the Board of Director's vision for the future causing lack of effectiveness or willingness to accommodate change efficiently.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the study findings, conclusions, and favorable and challenging factors, Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC offers the following recommendations:

1. We advise the Board of Directors to adopt this report, accept its findings, and support its conclusions as a basis to implement a **\$3.5 to 4M capital campaign (see the proposed gift chart on page 55)**.
2. Pay off the mortgage of approximately \$750,000 and raise funds to construct the welcome and visitor center with a large meeting space, programming rooms, and administrative offices. The other elements should wait until another phase -- five years or more in the future but dependent on fundraising success.
3. During the pre-campaign, vet the operating budget for the organization following expansion using the expertise of volunteer leaders to encourage confidence for donors regarding future financial solvency.
4. Reach out to younger veterans to integrate into the organization's Board of Directors, volunteer base, and cultivate interest as financial supporters.
5. Develop a strong and compelling case statement that answers the key questions the philanthropic community identified during the study.
6. Work to continue establishing relationships with major corporate leaders locally, regionally and nationally who support veteran's issues.

7. Incorporate an effective branding and communications plan during the campaign to gain state and national awareness and attract more visitors from outside of the Central Wisconsin area.
8. Pre-Campaign planning should begin immediately to build off of the exposure identified during the study.

## **Addendum**

### **The Case Statement**

To raise capital funds, a comprehensive and compelling case statement must be prepared citing the components and rationale for the project as well as inspiring those able to consider a major contribution. The case statement must point to the opportunities presented, what needs for change exist in the organization, and what will be the result upon completion of the project.

A strong capital campaign case statement must contain the following information:

- A summary
- A brief statement of the organization's mission
- A convincing description of the purposes to which the capital funds will be sought and the benefits received for the organization and stakeholders upon completion of a successful campaign
- Plan about ways one may give pledges, gifts of securities, or gifts of real property, stocks, etc.
- Financial information on how the organization will be operated after the expansion
- Recognition opportunities, such as buildings, rooms or exhibits to be named for donors
- List of key people involved in the campaign

The case statement serves as a vehicle to convince people that their support in the project and the organization as a whole is worthwhile and needed.

## Personal, Confidential Interview Survey Questions

1. Contact information
2. Would you please tell me a bit about yourself and your involvement in the community in which you reside?
3. Do you feel The Highground's mission is important and has been an important for awareness of veteran's issues and honoring of veterans?
4. If you felt the organization is important, please rank in order of most important (one being most important).
  - a. Honoring veterans through the memorials
  - b. Educating citizens about the sacrifice of our military
  - c. Opportunities for veterans to come together with other veterans
  - d. Programming designed to support veterans and their families
  - e. Building relationships with agencies such as the VA and Vets Center to transitions for veterans
5. Based on the brief summary of the project, what do you believe to be the top three benefits of the expansion?
  - a. The ability to create a centralized location for veterans' activities in the community.
  - b. The ability to house more advanced museum exhibits that require specific safety and exposure conditions.
  - c. The ability to house a multi-use space to include indoor activities due to inclement weather.
  - d. The ability to house all departments and staff under one roof reducing utility and technology costs.
  - e. The ability to partner with tourism partners to help diversify funding needs.
6. Please share with us your current, overall impression of The Highground.
7. What questions do you have about the project?
8. What concerns do you have regarding the project or potential campaign?
9. Do you believe the proposed \$7.5M fundraising campaign will be accepted and supported by area leaders?
10. Please provide additional comments based on your answer. If you are answering no, please share why you feel this way.
11. Please share your feedback on the proposed project (refer to mini case for details). Which of the two options for the design to you prefer?
12. What could or does set The Highground apart from other Veteran's Memorial organizations? (The Highground is the largest veterans memorial in the country at 156 acres plus the 300-acre camp. It offers PTSD seminars, etc.)
13. Who are the most influential area leaders who could serve as a campaign chair or Co-chair?
14. Who are some other possible volunteers that come to mind who would be helpful due to their interest in Veteran's issues and opportunities, etc.? (Please refer to these job descriptions for what would be involved.)
15. Would you consider leading or working on one of the committees?

16. Which committee would you consider leading or working?
17. Years of experience in capital campaigns teach us that most successful campaigns have similar patterns of giving. Here is a table that represents the giving patterns for a typical successful campaign (\$7.5M gift table). What individuals, foundations, companies or organizations do you feel would be able to make a pledge of around 15 to 18 percent of the campaign goal (This is often referred to as a lead gift)?
18. If applicable, would you be interested in your gift being utilized as a challenge grant?
19. What other people, corporations or groups would you expect may be some of the larger contributors?
20. This is at a very initial stage of a potential capital campaign, but, do you believe you (or your company) would consider making a personal, corporate or foundation gift to the campaign?
  - a. Naming right \$500,000 and above
  - b. \$100,000 and more
  - c. \$50,000 to \$99,999
  - d. \$25,000 to \$49,999
  - e. \$10,000 to \$24,999
  - f. \$5,000 to \$9,999
  - g. \$1,000 to \$4,999
  - h. \$1,000 and under
21. If your answer is no, please provide additional comments to understand why.
22. If the proposed goal of \$7.5M cannot be secured, what are the three most pressing element which you believe should be completed through the fundraising campaign? Please choose the top three.

- a. Mortgage payoff of \$750,000
  - b. Reconfigure overall park plan for ADA accessibility and traffic flow
  - c. Camp Victory upgrades to increase revenue stream
  - d. Construction of museum, gift shop and visitor center
  - e. Trail development
23. This Study will determine if the region is willing to support a campaign. This is not an actual solicitation, and you are not obligated to give a gift in a range you indicate, but if you would consider a tax-deductible charitable gift over three to five years, which one of the following ranges would you be interested in at this time?
24. Do you have additional input you would like to share?

### Focus Group Survey Questions

1. Please share your current, overall impression of The Highground.
2. Do you feel The Highground's mission to serve and honor veterans and educate the public on the sacrifice of veterans is important?
3. If you felt the organization is important, please rank in what ways (1=highest; 5=lowest).
  - a. Counseling and healing programs and services for veterans
  - b. Honoring veterans and their families
  - c. Remembering the sacrifice of U.S. Military men and women
  - d. Special events like concerts, hunts and national holiday events
  - e. Programs for those with disabilities at the Camp Victory.
4. Based on the brief summary of the project, what do you believe to be the top three benefits of the expansion?
  - a. The ability to create a centralized location for veterans' activities in the community.
  - b. The ability to house more advanced museum exhibits that require specific safety and exposure conditions.
  - c. The ability to house a multi-use space to include indoor activities due to inclement weather.
  - d. The ability to house all staff under one roof reducing staffing costs.
  - e. The ability to house all divisions under one roof reducing technology costs.
  - f. The ability to partner with tourism partners to help diversify funding needs.
5. Which of the two options for the design do you prefer? Please review/visit this link for more information: <https://www.thehighground.us/campaign/>
6. Campaigns require strong leadership to be successful. From the campaign committee job description shared at the focus group, which individuals come to mind who might consider serving on a committee for the campaign? Please list three names of top potential leaders.
7. Who are some other possible volunteers you know who may be interested in assisting on a short- term committee? Please list three names.
8. Are there one to three individuals, foundations or corporations you think we should be asking for their feedback on this project due to their interest in veterans?
9. Would you consider leading or working on one of the potential campaign committees? If so, please select a committee. If no, please explain why.
10. Would you consider a gift to the campaign if you were asked?



11. This is not an actual solicitation and you are not obligated to give a gift in a range you indicate, but if you would consider a tax-deductible charitable gift over a three to five-year period, which one of the following ranges would you be interested in at this time?
  - a. \$100,000 and more
  - b. \$50,000 to \$99,999
  - c. \$25,000 to \$49,999
  - d. \$10,000 to \$24,999
  - e. \$5,000 to \$9,999
  - f. \$1,000 to \$4,999
  - g. \$1,000 and under
12. Do you have any additional input you would like to share?

### Online Public Survey Questions

1. Do you feel The Highground's mission to serve and honor veterans and educate the public on the sacrifice of veterans is important?
2. If you felt the organization is important, please list in what ways. (1=most important; 5=least important)
  - a. Counseling and healing programs and services for veterans
  - b. Honoring veterans and their families
  - c. Remembering the sacrifice of U.S. Military men and women
  - d. Special events like concerts, hunts and national holiday events
  - e. Programs for those with disabilities at Camp Victory
3. Based on the brief summary of the project, what do you believe to be the top three benefits of the expansion?
  - a. The ability to create a centralized location for veterans' activities in the community
  - b. The ability to house more advanced museum exhibits that require specific safety and exposure conditions.
  - c. The ability to house a multi-use space to include indoor activities due to inclement weather.
  - d. The ability to house all staff under one roof reducing staffing, utility, and technology costs.
  - e. The ability to partner with tourism partners to help diversify funding needs.
4. Do you have any questions about the potential campaign?
5. Do you have any concerns about the potential campaign? If you answered no or doubtful, please share why.
6. Please answer if you believe the \$7.5M proposed fundraising campaign will be accepted and supported by area leaders, the general public and The Highground donors and stakeholders?
7. Which of the two options for the design do you prefer? Please visit this link for more information: <https://www.thehighground.us/campaign/>
8. Why do you prefer the option you chose?
  - a. Best use of space
  - b. Seems cost effective for money
  - c. Consistent with the general feel of The Highground
9. What are the most pressing challenges or limitations to The Highground from your perspective?
10. When did you last visit The Highground?
  - a. This year

- b. Last year
  - c. Within last 5 years
  - d. Within last 10 years
  - e. More than 10 years
11. Please identify your level of interest in the following proposed elements? (1=highest; 7=lowest)
    - a. Increased space for counseling services and programs for returning veterans
    - b. Paying off the \$700,000 mortgage to provide more money for programs and services
    - c. Well planned park layout for ease of navigation and accessibility
    - d. Expanded room with flexible space for programs indoors
    - e. Improved meeting areas for the community and The Highground programs
    - f. Camp Victory improvements
    - g. \$1M Endowment
  12. Campaigns have many different committees that work together to prepare the campaign for solicitation. Who are some other possible volunteers who you recall have been involved in other successful fundraising campaigns that could have an interest in this campaign?
  13. Can you identify individuals who you might expect to see in leadership positions in a campaign due to their support and interest of veterans?
  14. Campaigns have the following committees which prepare the campaign for solicitation. Would you consider working on one of the committees in person or remotely? If you are interested, please select which committee. If you are not interested in serving, might you share why?
  15. Would you consider accepting a four to nine-month leadership position in the campaign committee you previously noted?
  16. If not interested in a committee or leadership role, would you volunteer your efforts in some way on behalf of a campaign?
  17. This is at a very initial stage of a potential capital campaign, but, do you believe you (or your company) would consider making a personal gift to the campaign?
  18. Would you be interested in making a major gift as a challenge gift to help leverage giving for this campaign?
  19. The Campaign Readiness Study helps determine if donors are willing to support the campaign. This is not an actual solicitation and you are not obligated to give a gift in a range you indicate, but if you answered yes to considering a tax-deductible charitable gift, which one of the following ranges would you be interested in at this time which could be paid over three to five years?
    - a. Naming right \$500,000 and above
    - b. \$100,000 and more
    - c. \$50,000 to \$99,999
    - d. \$25,000 to \$49,999
    - e. \$10,000 to \$24,999
    - f. \$5,000 to \$9,999
    - g. \$1,000 to \$4,999
    - h. \$1,000 and under
  20. Do you have any other input you would like to share?

Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC has identified a proposed achievable goal of \$3.5M at this time with effective and careful cultivation of key individual, corporate, organizational and foundation donors.

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**The Highground Expansion Draft Campaign Gift Pyramid**

**Proposed Goal Amount at Low Range**

**\$3,500,000**

Range of Gifts		Number	\$ at this	Total	Total	Percent
From	To	Required	Level	Donors	Dollars	of Goal
500,000	600,000	1	550,000	1	550,000	16%
300,000	400,000	1	350,000	2	900,000	26%
100,000	150,000	6	750,000	8	1,650,000	47%
50,000	75,000	12	750,000	20	2,400,000	69%
25,000	40,000	16	520,000	36	2,920,000	83%
15,000	20,000	22	385,000	58	3,305,000	94%
5,000	10,000	28	210,000	86	3,515,000	100%
1,000	1,500	75	93,750	161	3,608,750	103%
	<1,000	many	>-108,750	many	>3,500,000	

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## **Pre-Campaign Job Descriptions**

### **Steering Committee**

This committee directs all activities of the campaign. The committee is composed of 16 to 20 state and national leaders who will be instrumental in providing input on the foundation for a successful capital campaign. The committee helps assure the success of the campaign by overseeing and giving direction to the work of the Case Statement and Communications Committees and provide input for the prospect development portion of the campaign. Once monthly meetings are held over approximately 12 to 18 months. Steering Committee members will eventually solicit three to five potential donors with another team member.

### **Leadership Development Committee**

The Leadership Development Committee is composed of 8 to 10 individuals who have a commitment to the organization and who are interested in the expansion benefits to honor veterans. These individuals will be knowledgeable about the business, philanthropic and social relationships which exist within the state and nation in regard to how to best support veterans. The committee ensures the success of the campaign by identifying and recruiting the topmost echelon of campaign volunteer leadership for the campaign Co-chairs. This group meets three to four times.

### **Case Statement Committee**

The Case Statement Committee requires the assistance of individuals who are knowledgeable about the scope and mission of the campaign. This group ensures the success of the campaign by providing input for consultants to develop a strong and compelling campaign rationale and FAQ, as well as answer key questions regarding the campaign and fundraising plan. This committee tests the case statement. This group of approximately 10 to 12 people will meet approximately three to four times to help finalize the case statement and validate the case rationale with key donors; meetings will last one hour.

### **Communications Committee**

The Communications Committee enlists 8 to 12 persons who are knowledgeable about branding, communications, marketing and media. They enhance the effectiveness of the campaign by helping provide input for the promotional elements, assisting in raising awareness of the project, providing information to the area about the project and help provide input on coordinating a Launch event. This committee will meet once per month for 8 to 10 months to provide input on materials; meetings will last one hour.

### Prospect Development Committee

The Prospect Committee enlists 6 to 10 persons who are knowledgeable about The Highground and those connected to veteran's organizations who provide financial support. The group helps make suggestions on potential area donors who may be interested in supporting the campaign and will help match potential solicitors to donors where able. This committee meets for approximately four to five meetings over the course of the campaign; meetings will last one hour.

*Our sincerest thanks for the commitment of many donors and stakeholders from The Highground who provided information to complete a comprehensive report. We are grateful!*