

Simulated Complexity: A New Classroom Simulation to Teach about Campaign Finance Laws

Activity Instructions and Materials

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Activity Instructions

1. Assign students into one of multiple groups (ideally four to five students per group).
2. Tell students this is a class activity in which their task is to determine how to convince their neighbors how to vote on a ballot measure that will appear on the ballot six days hence: *“Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and the interstate?”*
3. Give each group a scenario to guide their actions. Some groups are supposed to convince their neighbors to vote for and others to vote against (sample scenarios provided below).
4. The activity lasts two hours. A typical schedule for the activity takes the form:

1:40-2:15: Planning in groups
 2:15-2:30: Day 1
 2:30-2:45: Day 2
 2:45-3:00: Day 3
 3:00-3:15: Day 4
 3:15-3:30: Day 5
 3:30-3:45: Day 6, Election Day
 3:45-4:15: Groups share, debrief

The first half hour is dedicated to groups planning their campaign efforts. The remaining time is divided into six 15-minute blocks, each block representing one day, during which students implement their plans. Doing so means creating campaign materials to align with the plans created during the first 30 minutes.

5. For example, a group may plan to spend day one distributing yard signs and day two distributing and wearing t-shirts with a particular message. When the first block (day 1) begins, the students have 15 minutes to create a sample yard sign with materials purchased from the “store.” And when the second block (day 2) begins, they have 15 minutes to create a sample shirt with materials purchased from the “store,” and so forth. At the end of each day, each group must display created materials on the wall.
6. The aforementioned materials are purchased from a “store” using the money that each person in each group is given (\$600 per person; toy money is widely available through online retailers). They are also provided a price list (available below). The “reality” of the simulation is heightened by using actual materials, such as t-shirts and fabric markers. The store is typically run by trained graduate students. As groups make purchases from the store—which can begin during the planning period—the total money spent is tracked by storekeepers to determine when groups exceed the \$200 threshold (typically in day 1).
7. When the \$200 threshold is exceeded, the activity stops at the end of the present day, and groups are introduced to the campaign finance requirements with which they are now

required to comply. This is accomplished by giving each group a state’s actual multi-hundred-page campaign finance manual, plus all relevant forms (available on state websites). As in the real world, we provide them with very little instruction on what to do next. We simply inform them of the new requirement and why it is being imposed upon them.

8. Provide the “assistance” of someone who acts as a representative of the “secretary of state.” This person is in the room from the beginning of the simulation but is not introduced until groups must begin complying with campaign finance laws. Much like a state elections division, this person is available to answer questions as students complete the necessary campaign finance documents. This person also tracks mistakes made by groups as they submit the required forms (or don’t) and tallies fines. When we implement this activity, we fill this role with a local attorney who is an expert in campaign finance law.
9. After the simulation resumes, groups now have two responsibilities—(a) designing materials for what are now officially campaigns and (b) complying with state campaign finance laws. To increase the realism of the activity even further, each “day” in the simulation introduces new complexities that require greater attention to campaign finance laws (examples of almost all of the materials are included below):

Day 2

- Each group receives an unsolicited donation of \$1,000 in the form of a check (blank checks can be downloaded from the internet and completed as if payment is being made to the committees listed in the scenarios below).
- All groups receive an in-kind billboard. This is implemented by giving each group a piece of poster board and telling them they are receiving an in-kind billboard.

Day 3

- Disclosure deadline 1. The relevant previously provided disclosure forms must be given to the secretary of state by each group. Disclosure deadlines should be written on the board at the front of the room.
- Each group receives an offer to cover the costs of a public rally. The rally preparation can span two days and be presented on day 5. Groups are given \$5,000 if they agree to do the rally. The funder wants money spent only on the rally; any excess funds must be returned to the funder. Exchanging the rally notice (included below) for money and returning unused funds occurs through the store.
- Each group receives a donation of \$250 cash from a supporter’s bake sale. Groups are each handed \$250 in cash and told it comes from a supporter’s bake sale.

Day 4

- Each group receives an anonymous \$50 cash donation. Groups are each handed \$50 and told it comes from an anonymous donor.
- Groups are informed that someone in support of their position is waving signs at a busy intersection. Handout below; this is included as a diversion that forces

students to review campaign finance laws to determine if any action is required; none is.

Day 5

- Possible rally day.
- Each group receives a \$10 cash donation from an LLC.

Day 6, Election Day

- Disclosure deadline 2.

Many, but not all, of these require that groups complete obligatory forms or review the laws to determine what to do. They need to discern, for example, if an anonymous donation can be kept.

10. After day 6, the groups summarize their campaign messages, strategies, and materials. This is followed by a debrief during which the instructor solicits perspectives from students (questions below) about (a) the activity and (b) the political phenomenon the activity is designed to simulate. The simulation ends by asking the representative from the secretary of state's office to review errors made by the groups and announce how much in fines each group would pay.
11. As a final note, to keep students engaged, we announce at the beginning that the students' work will be judged based on quality, innovation, persuasiveness, and effective use of funds. The winning group receives gift cards to a local restaurant.

Materials

Scenarios and Instructions Provided to Students

The students are provided handouts that include scenarios for each group and instructions. Each of the scenarios is included below. Depending on the enrollment in the class, only a few scenarios may be necessary, or all of them may be required. Possible scenarios for use include: east homeowners, west homeowners, business owners, community environmentalists, construction company owners, soccer parents (under the team name Fusion), ranchers/farmers, and taxi drivers.

East Homeowner Group

Scenario

It is November 3, 2016, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a homeowner east of the city who works downtown and strongly supports the construction of a four-lane east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. Traffic congestion has grown overwhelming with all the new growth to the east, and your once-upon-a-time 30-minute commute is now at least an hour, on a good day.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for a four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary property for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now six days before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next six days vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote no on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow homeowners in your area who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote no. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a middle-income homeowner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

West Homeowners Group

Scenario

It is November 3, 2016, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a homeowner in the city whose property lies within the projected east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. To create the four-lane corridor, you will be required to leave the home you worked hard to purchase, something you do not want to do under any circumstances.

Your resistance (and that of the neighbors in your group) has led the city, county, and state to begin eminent domain proceedings. In response, someone from within a coalition of environmentalists and "smart growth" advocates has placed the aforementioned ballot issue on November's ballot, the passage of which will significantly stall the project, if not kill it. You strongly support the ballot issue as a way to stay in your home.

It is now a week before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next week vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote yes on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow homeowners in your area who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote yes. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a middle-income homeowner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Business Owner Group

Scenario

It is November 3, 2016, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a business owner in the city. The state, city, and county plan to build a four-lane east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. Traffic congestion has grown overwhelming with all the new growth to the east, and commute times are quite long. However, your business sits on one of the roads most frequently used by commuters, and you have seen a significant increase in business with the increase in traffic.

The road on which your business sits will be used for the new transportation corridor. To make room for the new four lanes, the project will use eminent domain to take your business and tear down your building for the road base. The project will pay you for your business and help you relocate, but the proposed new location will not generate anywhere close to the type of customer traffic you enjoy now. Therefore, you strongly oppose the construction of the four-lane east-west transportation corridor.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for a four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary property for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now six days before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next six days vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote yes on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow business owners in your area who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote yes. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a small business homeowner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Community Environmentalists Group

Scenario

It is November 3, 2016, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are part of a community group that volunteers time to build trails, maintain open space, pick up garbage, monitor wildlife habitats, and other activities designed to sustain and improve the natural environment. Your group becomes aware of the city, county, and state's plans for the construction of a four-lane east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. Traffic congestion has grown overwhelming with all the new growth to the east.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for the four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, recognized environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary property for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now a week before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Although your group does not ordinarily involve itself in political campaigns, you agree with the recognized environmental groups that the project will have negative environmental implications. Therefore, you decide to spend the next week vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote yes on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow community group members. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to convince others to vote yes.

However, you are a middle-income wage-earner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Construction Company Owners Group

Scenario

It is October 31, 2013, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a construction company owner in the city who strongly supports the creation of a four-lane east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. While you are ambivalent about the problem of east-west congestion, a new road could give you the opportunity to bid on the project and keep your crew working in a sluggish economy.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for a four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary property for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now six days before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next six days vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote no on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow construction company owners in your area who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote no. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a middle-income business owner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Soccer Parents Group

Scenario

It is November 3, 2016, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are the parent of a daughter who plays for the Fusion Soccer Club. The Club owns a soccer complex east of the city.

The city, county, and state have created a plan to build a large east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. Traffic congestion has grown overwhelming with all the new growth to the east.

To build the corridor, the city, county, and state need to acquire property from current owners. One of the properties necessary for the corridor development is the Club's soccer complex. The city, county, and state will pay the Club \$2.5 million for the complex, which the Club can use to build a new and much nicer complex elsewhere.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for a four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, recognized environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary properties for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now a week before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. The Club has decided to accept the \$2.5 million and has begun looking at other places to build a new complex. Therefore, you need to spend the next week vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote no on this ballot issue, or else the deal will fall through and no new soccer complex will be built.

Members of your classroom group are fellow Fusion Club parents who feel the same way you do. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to convince others to vote no.

However, you are a middle-income wage-earner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Ranchers and Farmers Group

Scenario

It is October 31, 2013, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a farmer or rancher in the county whose property lies within the projected east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. To create the four-lane corridor, you will be forced to sell at a price not of your choosing a significant amount of your acreage, something you do not want to do under any circumstances.

Your resistance (and that of the other farmers/ranchers in your group) has led the city, county, and state to begin eminent domain proceedings. In response, someone from within a coalition of environmentalists and "smart growth" advocates has placed the aforementioned ballot issue on November's ballot, the passage of which will significantly stall the project, if not kill it. You strongly support the ballot issue as a way to retain your property.

It is now a week before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next week vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote yes on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are fellow farmers/ranchers in your area who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote yes. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a middle-income property owner without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

Taxi Drivers Group

Scenario

It is October 31, 2013, six days before Election Day.

This year's ballot will ask voters to approve the following ballot issue:

Proposition 2: Shall the city be prohibited from using eminent domain to assemble property to build an east-west transportation corridor linking new development east of the city to downtown and Interstate 25?

You are a taxi cab driver in the city who strongly supports the creation of a four-lane east-west transportation corridor. Currently, no such corridor exists, and east-west transportation occurs on two-lane roads and residential streets. There is considerable growth to the east and you do an increasing amount of business there. However, the roads and streets you must use are heavily trafficked, making for longer drive times and longer wait times, thereby hurting your business.

The city, county, and state approved the plans for a four-lane corridor, but there is resistance among homeowners in the project area, environmental groups, and "smart growth" advocates. That resistance has resulted in a ballot issue to prohibit the use of eminent domain to acquire the necessary property for the project, a move that will significantly stall the project, if not kill it.

It is now six days before the election, and polling indicates opinions on the ballot issue are too close to predict. Therefore, you need to spend the next six days vigorously trying to convince your fellow citizens to vote no on this ballot issue.

Members of your classroom group are taxi cab drivers who feel the same way you do, and you have decided to come together to tell others to vote no. You must decide amongst yourselves how best to do so.

However, you are a cab driver without large amounts of disposable income. So you will need to convince your fellow citizens with the resources you have. Those resources will amount to \$600 per person. You may use that money however you wish, either individually or collectively.

At the end of the activity, the judges will determine whose efforts proved most convincing and who had money at the end.

For All Groups

Instructions

The next two hours will be used to create and implement a plan to convince your fellow citizens how to vote on the ballot issue. The first half hour will be dedicated to planning during which your team will decide the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your efforts.

During the rest of the time period you will have six 15-minute blocks, each block representing one day, to implement your plan. During the planning session, you should determine what you will do on each day, and then you will implement those activities on the respective day.

For example, suppose during your planning session you decide to spend day one distributing yard signs and day two distributing and wearing t-shirts with a particular message. When the first block (day 1) begins, you will have 15 minutes to create those sample yard signs with materials you purchase from the “store.” When the second block (day 2) begins, you will have 15 minutes to create a sample shirt with materials you purchase from the “store.”

1:40-2:15: Planning in groups

2:15-2:30: Day 1

2:30-2:45: Day 2

2:45-3:00: Day 3

3:00-3:15: Day 4

3:15-3:30: Day 5

3:30-3:45: Day 6, Election Day

At the end of each day each group will post their daily activities. This will include displaying any visual material (i.e., yard signs, shirts, websites, etc.) or electronic media material (i.e., radio or TV advertisements). The creation of some things may require more than one day. In that case, the creation of some activities may span two days but no more than that. In addition, at the end of each day, each group must post at least one completed activity. So, for example, day 1 may be spent creating a website and yard signs. At the end of the day, the yard signs will be posted. The website will then need to be posted at the end of day 2.

Because this is interactive, each group may respond to the other in their daily activities or products. For example, if group A launches an attack ad on someone within group B or on group B’s position, group B may consider creating a response on the following day.

Store Materials and Price List

Each group is provided a copy of the following.

Purchasing Materials

Materials must be purchased from the “store” using the money that each person in each group is given. Available resources and prices include:

Material	Price
Yard sign	\$1.00 each; 50 sign minimum
Highway sign	\$30.00 each
Signs for sign waving	\$2.00 each; 5 sign minimum
Design instruments (markers, pens, etc.)	\$5.00 per set
Shirts	\$5.00 each; 50 shirt minimum
Web server space	\$40.00
Buttons	\$1.00 each; 200 minimum
Direct mailing	Mailing list \$100; 500 pieces: \$500 printing, \$500 postage
Fliers/door hangers	10 for \$1.00
Hats	\$5.00 each; 30 hat minimum
Email list	\$100 each for 250 names
Bumper stickers	\$1.00 each; 100 sticker minimum
City bus advertising	\$300 per sign
Newspaper ad	\$400 per ad
Radio ad	\$250 recording; \$500 per broadcast
TV ad	\$500 recoding; \$1000 per broadcast
Robo call	\$250 for 500 calls
Billboard	\$1500 each
Airplane banner ad	\$1200

Additionally, if you plan an event that requires materials that would not be part of an end-of-the-day posting (such as refreshments, decorations, etc.), the “store keeper” will assign a price and require payment.

Political Rally Announcement

Each group is handed an announcement of someone offering to pay for a political rally. Each announcement is customized with different contributor information at the bottom. This information is necessary for completing disclosure forms. Only one example is included below.

Political Rally!

An ally in your cause has seen your efforts and wants to support your campaign. She will pay for the costs of a political rally up to \$5,000.

If you choose to hold the rally, it will occur on Day 6. That gives you two days to buy and create the necessary materials, generate slogans and messages, decide on a location, make arrangements for rent, food, and other essentials, line up speakers, and so forth.

If you agree to the rally, you will be given \$5,000 immediately. The funder has made it explicitly clear that her money may only be spent on the rally. Any money you have left over must be returned to her. Returned money should be taken back to the store.

Contributor:

Polly Wilson
254 Lake
Colorado Springs, CO 80906
Employer: Self

Sign Waving Notice

Sign waving notices are customized for each group. All of those notices are below.

Notice—East Homeowners

Someone in your neighborhood is making and distributing t-shirts in support of your position. You do not know this person and have not yet seen his t-shirts. However, he has printed many of them and is passing them out to people in your neighborhood and to others in town.

Notice—West Homeowners

Some people in your neighborhood are making large signs in support of your position and waving them on busy street corners during morning and afternoon rush hours. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few street corners around town and are generating a lot of attention.

Notice—Community Group

Another community group is making and distributing t-shirts in support of your position. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their t-shirts. However, they have printed many of them and are passing them out to others in town.

Notice—Fusion Parents

Parents from another soccer club are making large signs in support of your position and waving them on busy street corners during morning and afternoon rush hours. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few street corners around town and are generating a lot of attention.

Notice—Business Owner

Some people in the neighborhood around your business are making large signs in support of your position and waving them on busy street corners during morning and afternoon rush hours. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few street corners around town and are generating a lot of attention.

Notice—Construction Company Owners

Some people on the east side of the city are making large signs in support of your position and waving them on busy street corners during morning and afternoon rush hours. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few street corners and are generating a lot of attention.

Notice—Ranchers and Farmers

Some people in your area are making large signs in support of your position and posting them along the side of the road. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few roads and are generating a lot of attention.

Notice—Taxi Drivers

Some people in the proposed transportation corridor are making large signs in support of your position and waving them on busy street corners during morning and afternoon rush hours. You do not know these people and have not yet seen their signs. However, they are on quite a few street corners and are generating a lot of attention.

LLC Donation

Each group receives a customized notice of receiving a \$10 contribution from an LLC. Only one example is reproduced below.

November 4, 2016

Dear East Homeowners:

You guys are doing great work! I really want your side to win the election, so here's \$10 to help your cause. We will be voting for you tomorrow!

Sincerely,

Ken's Radiator Service, LLC
1215 E. Meridian
Peyton, CO 80831

Debrief Questions

1. In many of your classes in political science you've learned a lot about political theory, but this simulation required you to run the nuts and bolts of a campaign. What kind of relationship did you find between the theory of politics and the demands of a campaign?
2. There has been a lot of talk about the amount of money involved in elections. What role did money play in your campaigns?
3. What was the most difficult part of your campaign? [Assuming they say the forms et. al.:] Why was that the most difficult?
4. What kinds of effects did the campaign finance requirements have on your campaign?
5. This was obviously just a class activity; what kind of effects might campaign finance structures like these have in real life?
6. You had the first 30 minutes to plan your campaign. In what ways, if at all, did the introduction of the campaign finance requirements change your campaign plan?