Bond & Levy Toolkit

Overview

This toolkit was compiled to help administrators navigate the often-tricky landscape of bond and levy campaigns. While public entities can't directly advocate (persuade) voters to vote yes or no on an issue, they can educate voters. This means that a district can say that a bond would fund a new building or that a levy would help upgrade equipment. This toolkit is intended to help plan, develop and execute a communications program that educates and informs voters.

Election Timing

Should you go out for a general election (November) or a special (usually February or April) election? That's often the million-dollar question. General elections will always attract more people, especially if it is an even year. This means that people who vote less frequently will be more likely to vote in this election. Those voters are generally referred to as sporadic voters and they usually require more information about an issue before they vote, so you'll need to spend more time informing voters about your issue. Voters who vote in special elections are usually the opposite in that they are more engaged in the process and aware of the issues that will be on their ballot. This awareness can often come with a predetermined stance on the issue. General convention says that younger voters (45 and under) tend to fall into the sporadic universe, while older voters tend to vote more religiously. But your community may differ.

Another important factor in determining when to go out is to consider what else will be on the ballot. Even year elections will have federal and statewide races as well as a host of other ballot measures. This means that your measure will most likely find itself at the bottom of the ballot. Conversely, putting your measure up for a special election will make it front and center.

Lastly, looking at how previous measures did in your community can help you decide when to go to the ballot. Consider looking at how statewide initiatives faired in your community as well as other bond and levies, going back four or five years. All this information can be found on the Secretary of State's election results webpage.

Data Acquisition

After you determine your election date, you'll want to find a data file that includes mailing addresses for registered voters in your district. The best place to start looking, is your county elections department. The Secretary of State's office also maintains a database of registered voters. You can visit this website, email them at: elections@sos.wa.gov or call them at (360) 902-4180

Developing Your Message

Establishing a message that accurately conveys what your bond or levy would do while also ensuring this message resonates with your community can be the difference between your measure passing or failing. The best messages are those that clearly show how your community would benefit from this measure passing, while not getting bogged down with too many specifics. Specifics are best used as proof points that help reinforce your message, but they shouldn't overshadow the more compelling arguments.

Frame what this vote means

People vote for things that directly impact them. Try connecting this measure to people's daily lives. For instance, include messaging that highlights how supporting this measure will provide funding to keep a nursing home open, or how this measure will expand cardiac care for your community.

Frame why this is important and needed for the community

It's possible that you'll need to begin your messaging by explaining the what and why of this issue. Chances are some people in your community will be aware of this election, but probably not the number of people you'll need to win. To that end, it's good if your messaging explains what this measure will do, in broad terms, for the community. For example, if you're making major improvements to an outdated facility, highlight that.

Consistency and concision are key

On average, people need to hear or see the same message seven times before they start to remember it. To that end, it's important to keep things clear and concise. It's easy to think that voters will want to hear the ins and outs of your measure and exactly how every dollar will be spent, but the truth is most won't. For the few that would, consider having a FAQ document or landing page that offers details or links. But keep in mind that most people will simply want to know how this measure will affect them—so frame your message as such.

Timing

Given that campaigns are by nature short-lived, it's recommended that administrators plan to begin communicating with voters 6-8 weeks before Election Day.

Here is a sample communications timeline:

- **Fifteen weeks prior to election:** *conduct research*

- **Eight weeks before election:** *update website*

- **Seven weeks before election:** *post print collateral*

- **Six weeks before election:** *start running digital ads*

- **Three weeks before election/when ballots are mailed:** *drop mailer*

Example Messaging

If you are a rural hospital and you're building a new maternity ward or offering services that currently require a long drive, call that out.

- *Bond X would build a maternity ward at our hospital, meaning expectant families would no longer need to drive X miles to receive care*
- *Bond X would bring maternity care closer to home*
- *Our growing community would benefit from care closer to home*

For more urban hospitals, or hospitals expanding their services, this messaging could come through a capacity lens.

- *Bond X allows our hospital to increase our maternity services and nearly double the number of patients we serve*
- *More beds to serve our growing families, that's what Bond X would give our community*
- *Bond X expands our hospital's services and keeps pace with the growing needs of our community*

DO	DON'T
Highlight how money will be used	Get bogged down in the numbers
Give tangible examples	Use examples that only relate to a few people
Talk to everyone about this issue	Assume everyone knows about this issue
Focus on a few messaging points and repeat, repeat, repeat	Talk about too many things, this will just lead to confusion
Start early	Wait till the last minute

Where to Communicate

Where you communicate is just as important as what you communicate. You want to make sure you are reaching anyone who might vote in the election, not just the people who are familiar with this issue or support your hospital. There are three primary channels best suited to communicating your message—social networking sites, print materials and your website.

Social Networks

Typically, this means places like Facebook or Instagram. With these platforms, you can either post content organically on your hospital's official accounts or you can pay for advertisements that appear in people's feeds.

Keys for success when communicating via social channels:

- Keep it very, very short—for Facebook try to keep your post to three or four lines. For Instagram try not to go over five lines
- Link to your website or a site where people can learn more
- Include the measure name (as it will appear on the ballot)
- Give the date of the election
- Use positive adjectives to help show how the community would benefit
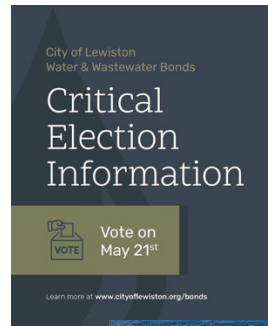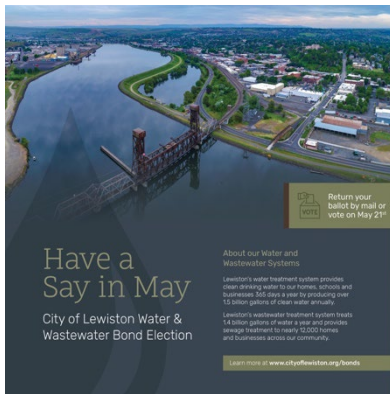
Example Facebook posts:

Mail & Print Collateral

If your budget allows, creating a mailer to inform your community can go a long way. On mailers, it's helpful to lead with a strong and short (no more than ten words) headline. Then divide your content into buckets, each with a subhead that essentially describes that bucket of content. The majority of people will skim mail pieces, so having strong headlines and subheads that provide important information will ensure people are reading what's most important. If your budget doesn't allow for mail, you can create posters that you can print off and hang up around the hospital.

Keys to print success:

- Use short and descriptive headlines and subheads
- "Bucket" your copy, don't let it all run together
- Incorporate and answer commonly asked questions
- Include the election date
- Refer to your measure as how it will appear on the ballot
- Keep the design professional and informative, refrain from making it look slick, or political

Mail Examples:

Website

Dedicating a page or building a landing page that focuses on the details of your bond or levy would be very helpful. This is the time and place to go into detail. It can also serve as the place you direct people with questions to as well as anyone who might be speaking on behalf of the bond or levy.

Keys for website success:

- Have an easy to remember URL, and keep it as short as possible
- Include links, these can serve as validators
- Get into the weeds—include whatever charts, graphs or funding models you have

Tips for Hiring Help

Not all experience is equal. You want to look for someone who has experience working in Washington state and with public entities. You also want to work with someone who works on bond and levy races, not just candidate races. The tactics used between these two types of races can vary, and it's important your help knows that.