



Six Reasons to Run a Community Survey before You Put a Levy on the Ballot

A survey will help you be successful the first time. Most library leaders do not want to establish a pattern where they experience three or four defeats at the ballot box on the way to finally getting a levy passed. It casts the library in a negative light in the eye of the public and impacts the morale of the staff. Yet, for many libraries, election night is the first real measurement of how a community is thinking. A survey gives a good indication of the community's disposition toward a tax initiative and what it will take to *win the first time*.

A survey will help you design your campaign. Through a survey, you can find out who is supportive, what is important to them, and how to solidify their support. You can also discover the profile of the "undecided" (your swing voter) and how to win their support. In addition, you can discover the profile of those who are clearly in opposition so that you can avoid the trigger points that might cause them to organize. *Without this information you are guessing.*

A survey will generate information that will support your campaign. Libraries are operating in a competitive environment; many persons assume that given the internet and other information sources, libraries are no longer needed. A survey can provide you with information to "sell" the mission of the library based on increasing usage trends, overwhelming customer satisfaction scores, and what members of the community are indicating that they want. Your library has a great story to tell. A survey provides the information that makes that story *truly compelling*.

A survey will help you shape your strategic plan to fit what the community wants. In an environment of scarce resources, it is important to know where to invest those resources, in order to have the biggest impact for the persons you are trying to serve. When a library establishes its strategic direction based upon what members of the community indicate they need, library leaders are much better positioned to appeal for voter support. A survey provides you with a list of the critical success factors that will drive satisfaction and support to the highest levels possible.

A survey will help generate buy-in by demonstrating interest in the community's input. Few things are more powerful in winning over the public than exhibiting a pattern of listening to them. Adult learning theory has clearly shown that *participation breeds commitment*. A well-publicized survey with well-interpreted results communicates that you are interested in the *value of their thinking* not merely the value of their property.

Finally, a survey can guide you on the timing of a campaign. It is possible that a survey will indicate that there is not sufficient support from the community for the library to win a ballot initiative at the current time. This means that additional spade work may be necessary before the issue can be won. Better to know this now and postpone success to another day than to guarantee failure today. A survey can help you find the *right message for the right time*.