

# What Makes Libraries Successful in the Public Vote Process?

## Key Themes from Interviews with Experienced Library Professionals

### Respondents:

Kevin Gallagher, Director, Thrall Library in Middletown, NY

Parry Teasdale, Editor, *The Independent*, Hillsdale, NY

Dayle Wexel, Director of Development, Corning Library, NY

Jerry Nichols, Director, Palmer Institute for Public Library Organization and Management, Long Island, NY

Pat Kaufman, Director, Mahopac Library, NY

Patti Haar, Director, Patterson Library, NY

### Political Know-how

- Libraries must take the political initiative.
- Success in 414 propositions is highly dependent upon the ability of the library board to understand that libraries are political entities, though not partisan.

### Community Support

- Get out in the community and be present where people will be talking about the library's proposal. (Ex - Senior groups)
- One primary reason why the Thrall Library's special district vote didn't pass was because there wasn't a groundswell of public support. The referendum kind of came from on high (from the Library & the State). There needs to be citizen support. Trustees need to get the buzz started in the community.
- Libraries need a local connection to the people. Show people how the library is going to fit into their lives, don't be a place where only academia go.
- Libraries that do public votes receive more support than even libraries in wealthier communities.

### Managing Negative Publicity

- Reply factually & truthfully.
- Emphasize the positives of additional support for libraries.
- Seek advice in each case.
- Always speak to the middle. When attacked the way that you respond dictates how the people in the middle will view you. You can earn respect; people judge you by how you treat your enemies.
- Get to know your enemies. "When you know someone, it is really hard to hate them." (Jerry told a story about an anti-tax group that strongly opposed the library. Now these groups are meeting in the library!!)



## **Diligence**

- If you look at even the most successful libraries, some have lost their votes several times before winning.
- Negative folks eventually run out of steam. If you keep pressing on, they'll tire out.

## **Some reasons why votes fail:**

- Political opposition.
- Inadequate press coverage.
- Long-standing resistance for paying fair value for library service. (Residents in un-chartered areas are used to getting full service at a bargain basement price.)
- Not enough public support.

## **What wins votes for libraries?**

- Good customer service.
- Working hard: trustees and library directors putt in a lot of work and stay focused.
- Political involvement; making political connections.
- Getting out in the community; personal contact. Telling people, especially parents of young children, why the library needs their voting support.
- Getting out the vote. Focus on voters that will support you and mobilize them.

## **Interesting Quotes:**

- "As far as institutions go, libraries are transparent, and use money more wisely than most. This can be a selling point for them. Explain to the public that every time the library wants an increase, they have to come back to them. The volunteer fire company doesn't have to do this." P. Teasdale
- "Public Library District Model = "Ticket to Success." The public library district model is the path to success; it is a structural change for libraries." J. Nichols
- "You have to believe that libraries are an important part of society and fight for that position. Libraries need to be courageous." J. Nichols
- "Libraries are a political animal, but they have to have the service to back it up." J. Nichols.

