

Lessons Learned in the Campaign Trenches

A 10-Part Series Leading Up to Election Day

Lesson #4:

Voters look for quick cues on how to vote.

What is one of the most visited pages on a campaign website advocating for a referendum? It's the list of endorsements, which often includes both individuals and organizations.

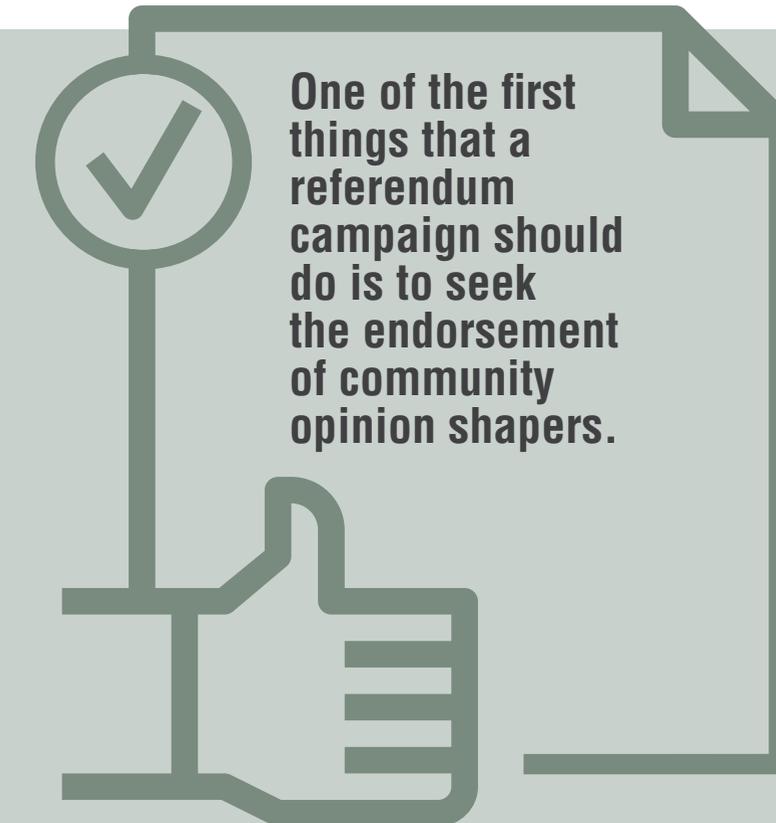
Voters are often overwhelmed with the number of decisions that must be made when it comes to both candidates and referenda, especially during general elections. When it's time to decide, many voters will go to campaign websites to determine who endorses local candidates and referenda. In fact, there is often a big spike in the number of visitors to campaign websites the first week that absentee/mail-in ballots arrive as well as a few days before Election Day.



One of the first things that a campaign should do is to assemble a list of all community opinion shapers. This might include elected officials; representatives from small and big businesses; civic, faith-based and education leaders; key senior citizens; HOA board members; and others. The campaign should then reach out to these community leaders to seek their endorsements.



This 10-part series brings together some of the most important campaign lessons that members of the Beyond Your Base team have learned throughout the past 28 years. We also provide a behind-the-scenes look at strategies employed by citizen-led campaign committees that were highly successful.



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St. Vrain Valley School District, CO

Voters in the St. Vrain Valley School District have supported four ballot measures since 2008, addressing both operating and capital facility needs. To date, these voter-approved referenda have provided more than \$800 million in funding for the District.

One of the most important action steps that the citizen-led campaign committees advocating for SVVSD's referenda have taken is to develop a comprehensive list of community opinion shapers and to then allocate the necessary resources to contact them and ask for their support. A special emphasis was also placed on

engaging with local newspapers and providing them with the information their editorial boards need to evaluate the District's funding proposals.

Some of the most persuasive campaign mailers and print ads used by campaign committees advocating for SVVSD's referenda have been those that included a long list of individuals, organizations and editorial boards in support of their funding proposals.

SVVSD's Innovation Center was part of a \$260-million referendum approved by voters in 2016. The bond measure also funded three new schools and other critical capital improvements districtwide.

In the Spotlight



Voters also turn to local newspapers to determine if editorial boards have taken a position on a referendum. The chair or co-chairs of the campaign, as well as other key committee members, should seek a meeting with editorial boards to discuss the specifics of their funding proposal well before Election Day.

The endorser list should be a broad cross-section of the electorate, with a special emphasis on fiscally conservative voters. Voters like to know that the endorsers have aggressively vetted the funding proposal before making the decision to support it. At the same time, the committee should not forget to capture endorsements from those who should be strongly in support of the referendum. Imagine if the list of endorsers for a school bond proposal did not include the superintendent.

Lastly, when an endorser list is not in alphabetical order the reader will spend more time with the piece. That's a good thing, especially given how quickly some voters will read and toss campaign materials.

Beyond Your Base (BYB) is a public affairs and pre-referendum consulting group of Wight & Company that develops and implements comprehensive public engagement programs that incorporate voter analytics, public opinion research and strategic communications.

BYB's focus is on engaging taxpayers and other stakeholders to deliver capital improvement projects that are truly community-driven.

Paul A. Hanley
Paul A. Hanley
Managing Director
Beyond Your Base

Wight
WightCo.com

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WIGHT & COMPANY
BeyondYourBase.com