

## ***What Next? After the Library Measure Passes (or Doesn't) Pass***

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### **Background**

In November 1994 The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors placed a benefit assessment measure on the ballot and received a resounding 69% of the vote securing stable funding for the next ten years. This was followed by the formation of a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) with one city council member from each of the nine cities served and two members of the Board of Supervisors representing the unincorporated areas of the County.

In 2000, the JPA approved a revised Agreement to allow for the formation of a Mello-Roos Community Facilities District to replace the current County Service Area. The JPA then placed a special tax measure on the March 2004 ballot to replace the expiring benefit assessment; the new \$42 special tax was \$8.34 higher than the \$33.66 per single-family home/condo that was collected since 1994. A two-thirds vote is required to pass a library operating measure in California and the Library received only 61% of the vote; Measure B failed.

### **Strategy**

The JPA had conducted two polling surveys, one in June 2003 and the other in December 2003 to provide direction to the JPA. Opposition to Measure B came from two primary directions, anti-tax proponents including a local attorney who threatened a lawsuit and a small but vocal anti-Internet group in South County. So, why did Measure B fail? Voter fatigue, lack of urgency since there were 15 months left before the existing tax expired and consistent attacks by one local attorney who caught the media's attention. A citizen campaign was very active, but not successful in raising sufficient campaign funds.

What now! There was no choice but to listen to the dissenters, revisit the strategy and return to the voters. Under the CFD, it was required that the JPA wait a minimum of one year before returning to the voters. That left very little time between March and June 2005 to pass a measure without disrupting service.

The economy was in a downward spiral and the Library was already experiencing a loss of revenue from other federal, state and local sources. A hiring freeze left the Library with nearly 40 fewer employees resulting in the closing of Mondays at all locations effective October 2004, reduced bookmobile service and a cut to the book budget.

The JPA conducted another polling survey and decided to return to the voters in a special all mailed election in May 2006. This was a new option and had not been done before in Santa Clara County. The JPA placed two measures on the May 2006 Special Election Ballot, Measure A would replace the benefit assessment with the same amount only in a new special tax with a term of 10 years. This would preserve the level (although already reduced) of funding and was the new priority. Measure B would increase the special tax by \$12 per year per single-family home/condo. This would allow the Library to reopen on Mondays and restore the book budget. Measure A passed with 72% vote; Measure B failed with 64% vote.

### **Impact on Service is Positive**

The Santa Clara County Library has filled the many vacancies held open during the hiring freeze and restored some of the book budget. However, all but one library remains closed on Mondays; the City of Milpitas funds Monday and Tuesday morning operations at the Milpitas Library. Sometime in the near future, the JPA may want to consider returning to the voters for a tax increase, perhaps in 2010 and for a shorter term of five years.

## **What have we learned?**

- Unless the public sees the cuts in service, they will not see the crisis
- The message must be truthful and consistent
- All library stakeholders must get involved

## **Final Analysis**

### **Ongoing Communications**

Through the library's public information outreach and citizen-driven campaign, Santa Clara County voters are more aware than ever of library needs. The library must continue to cultivate this base of support (the 72% of voters who supported Measure A in 2005) and avoid starting the education process over when community support is needed again in the future.

### **Scan for Future Opportunities**

Although the Santa Clara County Library has secured 10 years of stable revenue, library leaders should continue to scan for opportunities to raise additional revenue for the libraries. Such opportunities may include placing a modest increase of Cost of Living Adjustment on a future General Election ballot.

### **Keep Volunteers Engaged**

Hundreds of library supporters participated in the campaign for Measures A & B. Library leaders should find ways to encourage their ongoing involvement and maintain relationships with these dedicated volunteers. By continuing to engage those who worked on Measures A & B, library leaders will be able to quickly mobilize an effective force for future efforts.

### **Continue to Raise Funds**

By leaving the campaign account open and continuing to raise funds, future campaigns will have an easier time securing the resources necessary to run a successful campaign. Friends groups should be encouraged to donate annually to help offset contribution limits during a specific campaign period.

### **Learn From the Campaign for Measures A & B**

While the campaign for Measure A & B is still fresh in your mind, revisit the campaign's strengths and weaknesses. There are many lessons that can be carried over to future efforts. What worked? What could have been improved? Recording lessons learned now will help maximize the effectiveness of future efforts.

## **References**

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