

by Ed Gillespie

Having successfully coached citizen bond committees to 33 wins over the past 16 years (\$1.1 billion), I'm often asked, "What's the key to winning?" My answer never varies: "You just have to make sure that more YES than no voters show up on Election Day."

In order for that to happen, you, and the committee members backing you up, have to make a commitment. It usually requires three to four months of strategic planning and information-sharing activities; none of which is more important than continuously identifying YES voters and making sure they show up on Election Day.



## Your WIN Number

Prior to your committee's first meeting, acquire and analyze the list of registered voters (RV) residing within the jurisdictions your bond issue covers. You can purchase this list at a reasonable price, in an easy-to-use Excel format, from your local county clerk.

Once you know your RV number, you have to make an educated guess regarding the turnout on Election Day. Your county clerk is a great person to ask about this.

For example, if you end up with a list of 28,000 RVs and you anticipate a 30% turnout (8,400) on Election Day, your base number is 4,201 YES voters. Add 200 to take into account individuals who tell you they're going to vote yes, rather than argue with you. This makes your target WIN number 4,401.

**“ If your YES number is not consistently increasing toward your WIN number, it's time to make a course correction because you're just going through the motions. ”**

The process of identifying YES voters starts at the first committee meeting. In fact, rarely do I leave an organizational meeting without identifying the names of at least 100 likely YES voters made up of friends and family members of initial attendees. The best way to accomplish this is to pass around the RV list and have committee members identify voters they deem most likely to vote YES, and individuals they're willing to personally communicate with to ensure they do.

Every future meeting should start with the question, "What's our YES number?" If your YES number is not consistently increasing toward your WIN number, it's time to make a course correction because you're just going through the motions.

Reaching your WIN number by Election Day is the difference between *hoping* you might win and actually knowing that you have to be prepared for your Victory Celebration.

## Investment Not Cost

Refer to the tax ramifications of your bond issue as an investment, not as a cost. The word investment signals a return on investment (benefits of voting YES), rather than just another unwelcomed cost of living increase.

While there are always exceptions, the less a person has to invest the more likely one is to support an issue. Today, many bond issues are being structured so that the current tax rate remains the same. Being able to promote no change in the tax rate is a positive. That's precisely how you have to word it because you can't state that it's not a tax increase. Because it is. Upon passage, additional debt will be incurred. The only reason the tax rate will remain the same is because the payoff length is being extended.

## Communicate with YES / AV Voters



You have to effectively communicate with your identified YES voters, including sending them a Reminder-to-Vote postcard the week before Election Day.

In addition, go the extra measure to acquire the names of absentee voters (AV). You can get AV names from each of your local voting precincts. Because every precinct sends their AV ballots out on a date of their own choosing, when you're picking up the lists, it's critical to ask each official about their estimated target date to mail out their AV ballots. You have to communicate with AVs before their ballots land in their mailboxes. While it takes time to compile a master AV list, communicating with this market segment, a great

deal of whom are senior citizens, is a must because they're the only voters you can be 95% sure are going to vote, and usually in big numbers. And, they're going to do so weeks before Election Day...in some instances a month earlier.

## Communicate the Benefits

Before you begin deciding appropriate avenues of communication, spend some quality time determining your message(s), focusing on the benefits of voting YES (Returns on Investment). Once you know what you want to communicate, keep in mind that the attention span of voters is relatively short these days. Regardless of your approach(es), create succinct informational content.

After designing an informational piece, ask yourself, "How much of this would I read if I pulled this out of my mailbox today?" If you don't like your answer, then you know you have to simplify your message further, without sacrificing the key points you want to make.

*“ After designing a promotional piece, ask yourself, “How much of this would I read if I pulled this out of my mailbox today?” ”*

Every Yes initiative should have a go-to website. Consider it a virtual resource where you can share all of the information you want, including all details anyone might ask you to provide. It is essential to create links that enable visitors to easily navigate your site. Don't get bogged down in the fear of designing or the cost associated with creating your Vote YES website. There are plenty of easy, inexpensive "do-it-yourself" website template/hosting companies these days (my preferred vendor is WIX.com.) Without question, your website must feature a Question and Answer section as well as an Ask a Question link.

Hosting community forums and giving presentations to service clubs and civic organizations are essential as today's public, more than ever, demands exceptional transparency. Like all of your promotional materials, make your presentation brief, cover all of the key benefits of passage and leave plenty of time for questions.

Finally, don't overlook the exponential power of social media and, in particular, Facebook. I've been involved in recent bond campaigns that won, in large measure, due to Facebook's impressive reach.

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## Qualified Leaders in the Right Seats

Elections are won and lost based on the quality of leadership guiding all aspects of a ballot committee's actions. That's why your top leadership and subcommittee chairs must be comprised of individuals who have demonstrated their ability to not only be good communicators, but also to inspire others.

Prior to the first organizational meeting, election initiative organizers must recruit the best leaders. Individuals who know what their respective responsibilities will be and are willing to give their best for the limited time your ballot committee will be in existence. Critical leadership categories include: Overall Chair (Co-Chairs), Treasurer, Fundraising, Communications and Voter ID.

## Focus on YES Voters



There will always no voters, so don't take it personal when you encounter them...even if they live next door. To cite an often quoted adage, "It is what it is." Any seasoned election consultant will tell you to be polite to identified no voters, but don't waste a great deal of time trying to convert them. Your time will be better invested recruiting additional YES voters.

## Have a Question(s)?

There are all kinds of resources to gain additional insights into what it takes to WIN on Election Day. I prepared this brief narrative to share a few of the most critical WIN factors I relentlessly "evangelize" when working with citizens' committees; not as a comprehensive guide to managing a campaign.

If you have any questions about winning an election you're currently engaged in, or one you may be pursuing in the future, please feel free to contact me at [egillespie@grangerconstruction.com](mailto:egillespie@grangerconstruction.com) or 517.887.4171.



### **Ed Gillespie, Director of Customer and Public Relations, Bond Campaign Specialist**

Ed has been in marketing and advertising since 1970. During that time, he's applied his experience in broadcast and print journalism, public relations, marketing and advertising to assist a wide array of clients to achieve their respective goals. He joined Granger Construction in 1999 to lead Granger's Communications Department which serves as an "In-House" public relations/advertising/marketing division dedicated solely to addressing the communication needs of Granger Construction, our clients and the customers/constituents they represent.

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