Conducting a Poll

*Gauging public opinion for the benefit of children and youth*

**Why conduct a poll?**
A well-done poll has the power to break through our perceptions of public opinion by providing data to either validate or disprove those perceptions. Local officials tend to hear the opinions of the same politically active citizens—the people who regularly come to public hearings and town halls. Polling samples a much broader range of citizens and therefore offers a more accurate picture of public attitudes.

**What would a poll to assess the feasibility of a campaign for local dedicated funding look like?**
- **Timeframe:** From development to implementation, the process should take about one month.
- **Sample size:** This varies by size of the geographical area, but a sample of 400 survey respondents is typically sufficient for representative results.
- **Cost:** For most communities, a poll will cost between 30 and 40 thousand dollars.

**How to use a poll**
1. **Strategize for a campaign.** Determine the most effective way to use resources like money, time, and even the attention of voters.
2. **Inform a “yes or no” decision.** Decide whether or not to pursue a campaign.
3. **Design a measure.** Inform your campaign’s choice of funding mechanism, tax rate, accountability structure, and funding distribution strategy.
4. **Validate the viability of a measure to an external audience.** Show that you have put in the time and resources to research the viability of a measure.

**How NOT to use a poll**
1. **As a tool for making predictions.** Polling is not a crystal ball, but rather a planning document.
2. **As more than a snapshot in time.** A poll captures public opinion as it is when the poll is conducted. It doesn’t provide a longitudinal view or predict how opinion might change over time.
3. **As a catch-all assessment tool.** A good poll captures public opinion on both the broader political climate **and** the specific questions crucial to creating a successful campaign. Smart pollsters will help you avoid scope-creep by keeping questions specific enough to be useful.

**Who makes up the sample?**
- In order to get the most accurate, representative sample, pollsters use statistical modeling to gather a random sample of likely voters large enough to lower the margin of error to 5%.
- “Likely voters” are determined by voter records, which include age, gender, party, physical address, and the last election in which they voted.

**Polling best practices**
- Surveys are typically performed over the phone by an experienced pollster.
- All potential respondents undergo a series of screening questions to determine their eligibility and availability for the survey.
- Each survey should take no more than 20 minutes.
- Some polls strategically use oversampling, or “the practice of selecting respondents so that some groups make up a larger share of the survey sample than they do in the population.”
  Oversampling offers the opportunity to better understand the opinions of certain groups and test different types of messaging.

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1 Pew Research. Andrew Mercer. October 25, 2016. "Oversampling is used to study small groups, not bias poll results.”