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www.pcsao.org
Ohio’s 88 county public children services agencies (PCSAs) strive to keep children safe, growing up in stable families, within supportive communities. Such an important mission requires excellent public organizations, an excellent legal system, a strong well prepared workforce, critical community service partners, resource families, and of course good policies and adequate resources.

In Ohio - a state supervised county administered child welfare system - our communities take particular pride and responsibility for our children. For several years, the statewide average for the local contribution has been at or over 50% of the cost of child protective services in the state of Ohio, compared with a federal investment of 42% and the state investment hovering at only 8%.

Today, only 45 counties have a children services or combined health and human services levy. Many other counties dedicate significant local general revenues for child welfare, as budgeted by their county commissioners. Regardless, the county government is mandated to protect its children, and pay for the costs of necessary and court ordered services. County PCSA performance is regularly reviewed by federal and state government, as well as by the local press. Of course local levies offer the electorate the chance to invest in child protection.

Because of the heavy reliance in Ohio on local investment, PCSAO offers support to communities that seek new, replacement or renewal children services levies. This PCSAO Levy Guide, updated in 2010 by the PCSAO Public Information Committee, is a helpful document to assist as communities consider all the elements needed to run a successful levy campaign. I want to thank the hard working members of the PCSAO PIO Committee, which consists of experts throughout the state who have coordinated local levy campaigns. They have shared their successful strategies and lessons learned. It is also important to recognize former PCSAO Assistant Director Max Bucey and current Assistant Director Rhonda Reagh, PhD. Both were long term executives at children services agencies with successful levies, and with their experience and knowledge, PCSAO offers local support and assistance to our members, as requested.

Good luck as you create value for your community’s investment for safe children, stable families and supportive communities.

Sincerely,

Crystal Ward Allen
Executive Director, PCSAO

Additional levy info:
- www.pcsao.org or PCSAO staff
- Casey Family Programs Ohio Levy Campaign Brief (2/2010)
- County Commissioner Survey on Tax Levy (1/2007)
- PCSAO Levy Survey (updated 8/2005), and Levy Campaign Guide (1/2005)
Section I: Levy Basics

What is a levy?
A “levy” is the collection of a tax. When a human services organization is supported (fully or partly) by a levy, they are being supported by county taxpayers in the form of property tax. The organization’s levy, along with schools and other county agencies, are added on to the taxpayers’ property tax bill.

What is the difference between a new levy, a renewal levy, and a replacement levy?
A new levy is asking taxpayers for a new source of revenue. A renewal levy considers the same property values that existed when the levy originally passed. A replacement levy will consider the current value of property. Agencies can also have a renewal with increase or a replacement with increase.

What is “millage” and how is it calculated?
Millage rate is the rate at which property taxes are levied on property. A mill is 1/1000 of a dollar. Property taxes are computed by multiplying the taxable value of the property by the number of mills levied. An oversimplified equation would be: If Agency A has a 1 mill replacement levy on the ballot, a taxpayer owning a $100,000 house would be paying about $35 a year or $2.91 per month (or about the cost of a cup of coffee per month because people seem to like that analogy).

It is important to note the difference between the terms “appraised” value and “assessed” value. Appraised value is the estimated market value of a property and assessed valuation is the value at which the property is taxed which is 35 % of the property’s appraised value. For example, if a home is appraised at $100,000, the assessed valuation will be $35,000 (or $70,000 on a $200,000 home).

How do I decide what type of levy to place on the ballot?
Ask yourself why your agency needs this levy. A response of, “we just need more money,” is insufficient. Put the need in terms of positive outcomes for children, families and the community.

Analyze and determine the agency’s budget expenditures and receipts for the next five years. We know this seems an impossible task because there are so many variables, but do your best. Plot these out on a spreadsheet and show the surplus or deficit each of the five years.

Look back five years at various trends that drive your agency’s need for more funding. Sometimes, what is aggravating us most at a certain time, is not what is actually causing our financial problems. Identify the number of children who came into care because their families were dependent on substances; acute or chronic mental illness; health needs of children and parents; homelessness; unsafe housing; unruly and delinquent youth; the ages of children coming into care; how long each age stays in foster care, etc.

Examine the children in your custody on any given day. What types of placements are they in; what was their adjudication and what is the reason they are in placement; how long have they been in placement; what do the placements cost for each child; what do you need to have to return each child safely to his/her birth home; what do you need for each child to have another safe, permanent home if they cannot return to their birth home; etc.?

Define what services will be lost to children and families if this levy does not pass. How will these cuts increase the vulnerability of children; contracts with community providers; schools; etc.? Again, do this positively.

Meet with your county auditor to determine what millage is necessary to meet your agency’s needs.
How does a levy get on the ballot?
Discuss the levy with the Board (if applicable) and the County Commissioners. Use the information you have compiled to convince the Board and the County Commissioners that you need this levy. Presentations should be made in a strategic manner. We are asking the county commissioners to place a tax issue before the voters of the county. Commissioners have been branded as “tax and spend” officials for doing this at times when they had to run for re-election. Give them clear and convincing data which they can use to counter such attacks should this occur to them.

Who can authorize the placing of a levy on a ballot?
Your County Commissioners. Make certain that the County Commissioners’ resolution accurately reflects what you agreed to in terms of millage amount; whether it is a new, renewal, or replacement levy; the duration the levy will be in effect; the date the levy will begin to generate funds for your use; the date the election will be held, etc. This may sound ridiculous; but there have been instances in which each of these variables has been inaccurately recorded in a resolution. Human error and misunderstanding can lead to long-term problems for you. Take the time to check.

What do I put in my levy presentation to County Commissioners?
A very good place to start is by giving an accurate picture of your agency. What are your mandates and how do you carry them out? Who are your clients and how do you serve them? What are your challenges and what are your opportunities? What are your long and short term plans for serving your public? What is your current financial picture and what does your forecast look like for the life of the levy you are requesting. Show all of the scenarios for renewal, replacement, or new if you are asking for that. Always build value for your work. It is very important that your Commissioners can defend your work when they are asked why they approved whatever action they took. It is also very compelling to include a case example (without violating confidentiality).

When should I put the levy on the ballot?
There are several options regarding when your levy should be on the ballot. Some counties have their levy during the May primary election while other counties have it during the November general election. This decision will vary from county to county depending on the individual county dynamics, political atmosphere, and other issues on the ballot during the election. There are advantages and disadvantages to both choices and each county has to consider voter turnout, commissioner support, public perception, and possible failure of the levy during the decision making process. It may also be wise to consider putting your issue on the ballot a year in advance of expiration in order to have time to return to the voter for reconsideration before the expiration of your existing levy.

How are levy ballot numbers determined?
The state sets the guidelines for the rotation of ballot numbers. This changes every election. Consult your Board of Elections for more details.
Section II: Political Action Committees

What is a political action committee? A levy advisory committee?
A Political Action Committee, or PAC, is the name commonly given to a private group, regardless of size, organized to elect political candidates or to advance the outcome of a political issue or legislation. A levy advisory committee is composed of local business leaders, parents, and community members to review the community’s response and to recommend the contents of the levy measure to the Board, who in turn makes recommendations to the County Commissioners. The board uses these recommendations to set the levy amounts.

Who should be on our PAC/Advisory Committee?
Stakeholders, former Board members, interested community members, anyone who has a passion for your agency and will work hard to get the word out. Identify the people or group(s) who have both the authority and resources to implement the desired action or decision. Develop a stakeholder’s map of individuals or groups that can and will contribute to the passage of your levy. Think in terms of civic leaders, churches, corporate leaders, the media, elected officials, union leaders, foster and adoptive parents, etc. Think in terms of names not organizations. Write down the names on a sheet of paper. Determine whether you can pick up the phone and call each of these people. Finally, identify exactly what you want from the individual. Maybe they are perfect for your PAC or advisory committee. Maybe they would be willing to write a letter to the editor in support of your agency. Or perhaps you could speak at their organization.
Section III: Funding

Can I use the agency’s funds to help with the levy campaign?
No. Public funds cannot be used to run a child welfare levy. This may differ for some of your sister agencies.

Where do I get the funds for a levy campaign?
Donations can be accepted from private citizens, businesses, levy fundraisers, Board Members, or your PAC. If you have an auxiliary entity established to assist with activities for the agency, they may also use their funds to assist depending on their mission statements and legal structures.

How much does it cost to put a levy on the ballot?
With countywide ballots, during the odd years the total cost is charged and during the even years the cost is for the ballots and the advertising.

What types of fundraisers can support my PAC?
There are a variety of fundraisers that can support your PAC. Reverse raffles, golfing outings, bike races, runner’s races, auctions and many other events can support your levy campaign. Deciding on an event that will be well received in your community and recruiting key stakeholders such as business leaders, agency staff, community agency representatives, politicians and foster parents to participate in these events can assist in a successful fundraiser. Forming a fundraising committee can be beneficial for planning and organizing the event. The fundraising committee may struggle at first with all of the details required, but after several years, event planning becomes easier when the event remains the same year after year. Another key to successful fundraising is to build a base of supporters who attend this event to keep the event successful each year. This will allow supporters to recognize your event and plan to attend each year. It might be beneficial to have the event during the same month each year, perhaps during Child Abuse Prevention Month, Foster Care Month, or Adoption Month. This will allow you to support your agency’s mission and the levy campaign simultaneously.

What are some fundraisers employees can do?
Ideas include Chili-Cook-offs, spaghetti dinners, golf outings/scrambles, Casual Friday jeans coupons, community garage sales, etc. Just make sure events are not on agency time if employees are hosting or participating in the events.

CHIPPING IN FOR OUR KIDS
GOLF SCRAMBLE
Spring Valley Golf Course, 5851 Breezehill Rd. S.W., East Sparta
Saturday, August 21, 2010
$60.00
18 Holes with Cart 🍾 Buffet Lunch 🍾 Many Prizes 🍾 8:15 a.m. Shotgun Start
2 beverage tickets included, additional beverages for sale
All proceeds from this event benefit Stark County Citizens for Children Services, a political action committee, Rosanna Fierro, Treasurer, 2012 Diamond Street N.E., Canton, Ohio 44721.
Hit a hole-in-one on 9-hole and win a new car from Waikem Auto Group.
Section IV: Developing a Strategy

Should I hire a consultant to provide a marketing plan?
The decision to hire a consultant must be made after careful consideration from the Political Action Committee. A consultant may cost a significant amount of money and may or may not be feasible depending on the funding available. A consultant can provide very important data and planning for your levy campaign. They can provide your agency with a campaign strategy, voter analysis, aggregate data analysis, household data, and theme development. They will review the campaign budget to offer the media, print and grassroots plan for a successful levy. They can also coordinate and provide the production of press releases, broadcasts, cable and radio commercials.

I don’t have a PIO! Who can help me run this campaign?
If you do not have a PIO, enlist the help of local colleges. Many communications, marketing and public relations course instructors would beg for the opportunity to create a hands-on class project. Don’t stop there. You should also enlist the help of someone well-known in the community to head your public relations effort. Even if you do have a PIO, you should consider these resources. PIOs are generally unable to function as campaign heads during business hours. Volunteers can operate throughout the day.

When can we start campaigning?
You can begin campaigning once a treasurer for the political action committee (PAC) has been designated. If you have a treasurer in place, you can campaign three years in advance of the election! That being said, your agency can campaign separate from the PAC. Traditional and social media and newsletters can all be used during agency operating hours to promote the good things you are doing in the community. Your agency should be doing this frequently.

How do I assess the outcomes of prior levies?
To assess the results from previous levies:
Meet with the County Board of Elections and secure precinct-by-precinct results of MR/DD, Mental Health, and other human services levies for the past five years (or the most recent of each).
Ask the Board of Elections to provide you an estimate of how many people will vote in the election in which your issue will run.

Where do you focus your efforts (i.e. precincts)?
Using the information gathered in previous section, begin to identify where you might target the brunt of your campaign efforts. Divide the precincts into thirds: those that almost always support levies; those where the vote is usually very close on levy issues; and those that traditionally vote down levy issues. You only have so much time. Develop campaign plans to target the precincts where issues are almost always passed and those where the vote is generally close. Think about who can be recruited in those areas to help you; how will you get your message out, etc.

Vote for ISSUE 21
Children Services Levy

Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

Paid for by the Citizens Committee for Children Services
Amanda Comunale, Treasurer
2300 Sourek Trail, Akron, Ohio 44313

2010 PCSAO Levy Guide
Should I use traditional and/or social media?

Consider your audience. Radio, newspaper, and television ads are still effective ways to communicate your message. Billboards in targeted precincts are also useful. These traditional forms of media are also the most expensive. In 2009, Stark County had a budget of approximately $25,000. Over $20,000 was spent on traditional media. The committee received many compliments on its 30 sec. radio spots which highlighted a few horrific cases and featured a local 7-year-old “saying I can’t prevent child abuse, you can.” Most of the traditional media ads were launched during the last few days before the election.

Today, no one running an effective levy campaign can overlook social media. It’s free and easily executed. Stark was able to build its levy Facebook friends number to 650 within a few weeks. The constant messaging generated more than 1,500 hits to the web site. Start with a user-friendly and attractive web site. Once built, Facebook and Twitter can be used often to attract visitors and strengthen the supporting base. The person or people in charge of updating should be doing so two-three times per week. As the election approaches, social media sites should be updated daily. E-mail and text message blasts should also be used frequently to keep your volunteers and staff engaged in the campaign process. Ask your volunteers to forward these messages to their friends and family. The biggest advantage to using social media - you aren’t going to have to pound the pavement to find someone to volunteer. Who doesn’t love Facebook?

Still not sold on social media? According to www.checkfacebook.com, As of June 24, 2010, there are over 125 million Facebook users in the United States. Almost 70 percent are women. Over 26 percent are over the age of 45! And get this-over 90 percent are voting age.

What should the campaign message be: Negative vs. Positive?

Use a message that resonates with your voters. Both of these examples use a positive message, “I can’t stop child abuse, you can.” Stark County borrowed the message from Lorain County. The visuals here are extremely different. There’s not a right or wrong answer here. You need to decide which would work the best for you.

When creating a message, stay away from verbiage such as “Keep Kids Safe”. Using this type of message puts you at risk, especially if something horrific happens to a local child during the election.
Section V: Running a campaign

Can employees work on levy materials during the work day?
You can talk about and explain the agency, its programs and the fact that the levy is on the ballot and what that means to the agency, but cannot do “campaign materials”, asking for votes, or fundraising on agency time, in agency facilities or with agency equipment. If it is part of your job to do speaking, promote the agency, etc., you can include the levy facts in what you do.

What marketing materials have been the most successful?
That would be hard to say. The TV ads that featured young adults, who had been helped by Franklin County Children Services, were called the “best ever” and the agency had an excellent TV buy for the dollars available. The ballot language was good. The mailing sent the same day to each voter who requested a ballot was effective. The phone banks and yard signs were targeted strategically to get our voters to the polls. The email blasts were sent to between 17,000 and 20,000 people. The media support from the minority and alternative community papers was strong. The ongoing agency community outreach and earned media was valuable.

Can our logo go on levy materials or does it have to be the PAC logo?
Your PAC should have it’s own logo. It can have a similar look and feel to your agency logo (for brand recognition) but should be a separate logo.

Can we have a levy website linked from our agency website?
Yes. You can link to it, but it needs to have its own domain. It shouldn’t be part of the agency website.

What are the cheapest ways to get the word out if you have almost no budget for a levy campaign?
Email blasts, social media, speaking engagements and other outreach activities are the cheapest ways. Direct mailings to absentee voters are not too costly, and door to door lit drops are not too much, either. Paid advertising is the most costly, of course.

How do I use volunteers to get my message to the community?
Volunteers are vital to the grassroots component of your campaign. It may be beneficial to create a volunteer committee with one person as the volunteer coordinator. This person will need to recruit people from within your agency as well as others who support your levy to volunteer their time to walk in parades, forward information on Facebook, put a sign in the yard, participate in leaflet drops, pass information out at sporting events, or stand at the polls on election day. If your agency has a motto, slogan, or icon that has been incorporated into your campaign, make sure that it is used in the material passed out by your volunteers. When you develop a theme, it should be carried throughout all activities. For example, your parade float, your booth at the local festival or fair and the sign at the polls should all look the same. A consistent message is very helpful when it is seen over and over by the public. The coordinator can send out emails, or create online sign up sheets to ensure that there are enough volunteers to cover these events.

How do absentee ballots and early voting effect my marketing campaign?
The State of Ohio currently allows absentee voting and early voting without stating a specific reason, and many voters are now voting absentee just to make it easier on their schedule. This can definitely impact your campaign in a variety of ways. You can contact your County Board of Elections to gather information about the percentage of absentee voters in each district. This can help you decide when to mail your campaign material in that community. The percentage of absentee voters in your community can also impact when you air any radio or commercial advertisements.
Where should we conduct speaking engagements about the levy?
Speaking to your community about the importance of your agency can greatly impact the success of your levy campaign. There are many groups of people that you should contact regarding your issue, so creating a list of organizations will provide you with an excellent starting point. You can create a blanket letter requesting to speak at local meetings, and send the letter to various community stakeholders such as Chambers of Commerce, City Councils, Churches, Schools, League of Women Voters, YMCA, Community Colleges, American Legion, Eagles, Elks Clubs, Rotary Clubs, VFWs, and many other community agencies. It may be important to identify one or two members of the PAC to address the community through public speaking (possibly your agency’s public information officer will be willing to volunteer), and create a sample presentation so that all necessary information is included.

What statistics should be provided to the community to support the levy?
It is important to provide the community with specific information about the services provided by your agency in order to receive community support for your levy. A levy fact sheet can be created detailing the specific services provided by the agency. The information can include the number of reports received, investigations made, the basic needs of children in care, kinship programs, foster and adoption programs, contracts with community agencies, parenting programs and quality of services provided. Some counties use the information from their annual report to outline expenditures and the need for their levy, other counties just describe services provided.

How do I contact the media about my levy?
Your local news station and newspapers can provide both positive and negative media coverage of your campaign. It may be beneficial to list the strengths and weaknesses of the levy and come up with specific responses to any anticipated negative reactions in your community. Perhaps there is a specific journalist or news anchor who supports your cause and is willing to support the levy. A media advisory can be written and forwarded to local newspapers. Sometimes, the newspaper will invite the PAC to their editorial board meeting to discuss the levy facts in order to make a decision whether they support the levy or not. An outline describing whether it is a replacement or renewal, the levy millage, annual budget, expenditures covered by the levy, specific services, prevention programs and effectiveness of services will guide you through the meeting.

How do I obtain support from public officials?
There are some public officials who openly support children services and will be a great asset to your levy campaign. There other officials that may need to be contacted in order to receive their support. If there are members of your PAC who personally know a public official, they can call them directly and ask for their support. You can also ask them if they are willing to help with the campaign by allowing their name in an endorsement or using their picture as an official supporting the campaign. You can also send out endorsement request letters asking for their support.
Section VI: Handling the Outcome

What should happen during Election night?
It is nice to have an election night activity to watch the results come in! The PAC members who have worked so hard to spread the word will greatly appreciate a place to watch nervously for the polls after all their hard work. You can have the local news on and Internet access of poll activity though the Board of Elections and it can be available on a projector screen for minute by minute information. Perhaps you can provide appetizers for the supporters who stop by!

What happens if the vote is very close?
It is difficult to communicate results when you do not know the outcomes, however, you can share the facts. Right now, we won by 3 votes and a recount is possible. You may be asked for results before they are official. You can only share what you know unofficially for the record. This is especially important if this is a close vote. You can also share your optimism for a positive outcome.

What happens if the levy fails?
This is a difficult situation for everyone involved in the campaign. Your levy chair (if you have one) and/or your agency director has to acknowledge the loss and make some general statement of next steps. This can be done at the election night gathering if the loss is clear, but should also occur the next day to the staff and perhaps the media. Most campaigns have a contingency plan or “what if” scenario. Because so much depends on what gets approved for the ballot, fund raising, etc. it will be hard to make a specific statement right on the heels of a loss. However, volunteers and the community of supporters can be acknowledged for their efforts, a general statement of the agency’s concerns moving forward and a timeline for decisions on the next try at passing a levy can be included.

Post levy advertisement (thank you)
A thank you needs to be broadcasted the very next day if the outcome is clear. This can go on websites, social networking sites, newspaper ads, or if you ran a billboard campaign, place “thank you” on your latest billboard (this is pretty cheap to do).
**Reflect, debrief**

- Clean up your materials immediately after the campaign or put thank you stickers on your signs and remove one week after the election.
- Maintain your visibility in the media. Show children and families who were assisted by the levy. Keep your agency in front of the community on an ongoing basis (“every year should be a levy year”).
- Thank the voters with one last newspaper ad. Celebrate the victory and recognize all who contributed. Have a Levy Committee recognition party or get together where you recognize the Levy Chair(s) and other key volunteers with a small token of appreciation. Volunteers who are recognized will come back again to help the agency.
- Within 30 days, conduct a post-election analysis to determine where you did well and where you did not. Use this information to begin planning for your next levy.
- Follow up with the Campaign Treasurer to be certain that all post election forms are filed with the local Board of Elections. Also check to see what is done with any leftover funds.

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