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BOND ISSUE STRATEGY

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

5100 Darrow Road
Hudson, OH 44236



Case Study

CLIENT

Tallmadge City Schools

CHALLENGE

Passing bond issue(s) to replace aging facilities

SOLUTION

Implement a transparent messaging strategy that communicates the importance of the bond issue's passage to Tallmadge voters and to the school district's future

RESULTS

Passed both proposed bond issues for Tallmadge City Schools on the first try on Nov. 8, 2016

How The Impact Group Can Inform Your District's Bond Issue Strategy



The Impact Group has a long history of working with school districts. Throughout this history, we have helped districts find the means to present bond issues and other matters of local government in order to secure indispensable funding and resources, guide communications and plan for the future.

Nearly every school district will confront the need to communicate the details of a bond issue to voters, especially because bond issues are notoriously difficult to pass. Oftentimes, voters are unaware of the issue's benefits and how the district will utilize the money from the tax increase. At the beginning of the public outreach effort, many questions arise:

- How can your school district use transparent messaging to make the issue clear?
- Who do you need to reach?
- What are the obstacles to delivering the information to voters?
- What materials will you use to effectively communicate?

These are the questions school districts must answer in the months leading up to the vote. If you are not proactive about the communication strategies surrounding the issue from the start, you will risk having a population who does not have enough data to make an informed vote.

One of our clients, Tallmadge City Schools, wanted to inform the community of two bond issues on the Nov. 8, 2016 ballot. In partnering with the district, we devised several components for Tallmadge City Schools that helped the community make an informed decision and vote. Both bond issues passed on the first try.



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Who do you need to reach?

What are the obstacles to delivering the information to voters?

What materials will you use to effectively communicate?

The Situation

In this particular case, The Impact Group assisted Tallmadge City Schools with communicating the details of two separate bond issues on the Nov. 8, 2016 ballot:

- The 3.86 mill bond issue to consolidate the primary, elementary and middle schools into two buildings on the current middle school campus, a K-5 building and a 6-8 building.
- The 0.9 mill bond issue to pay for the relocation of high school athletic facilities, including the stadium, football team room, baseball field and softball complex.

Since a bond issue's messaging is crucial to its passing on election day, Tallmadge City Schools saw a need for guidance. Prior to our partnership, The Impact Group conducted a community-wide phone poll in Tallmadge in order to gauge what voters would support. With this preliminary knowledge, we were able to design an informative messaging strategy that resonated and clarified the issue for voters.

If you are hoping to pass a bond issue, your voters will shy away if they do not have a straightforward message to unite behind. A bond issue is meant to provide a financial avenue for school districts to meet a specific, immediate need. The issue must be fully explained in concise, clear language and reach a wide audience. With a targeted message in place, individuals can get behind the issue, promote the information through a variety of mediums and encourage other voters to see its value. (PULL QUOTE)

In creating a successful strategy, transparent consistency is key. We were able to assist Tallmadge City Schools by developing messaging tactics that could be used at every stage of the process.

The Process

The first component in communicating information for a bond issue is to make sure that all parties involved are aware of their separate but symbiotic roles. Oftentimes, a district's superintendent and the school board are instrumental driving forces behind the issue. In our partnership with Tallmadge City Schools, we made sure that all of the key stakeholders involved were organized and united behind the issue. We met with various individuals who were involved in discussing various aspects of the bonds, including timing and finances. We also provided guidance as issues arose.

Secondly, we developed a 3-30-3 messaging tactic for the district to implement. This means creating messages of various lengths (three-second message, 30-second message and a 3-minute message) to appeal to voters across different platforms. As previously mentioned, transparent consistency is key, particularly when there are a variety of audiences that must be reached. The best way to ensure your district continually delivers a message pertaining to the same end-goal is to have a cohesive communication strategy. Our 3-30-3 messaging strategy can be used to quickly engage and capture the attention of targeted audiences in an effort to help voters see the real need for the bond.

The final component to The Impact Group's strategy is to create all of the materials for communication. Materials like yard signs, postcard mailers, billboards, newspaper inserts and advertisements, flyers, posters, banners and stickers are fundamental tools for increasing community awareness. Without these materials, the benefits and need for a bond issue cannot be understood. In addition, we encouraged individuals to use every medium possible to promote the bond issues on a daily basis, such as face-to-face communication and social media. Once all of these materials were distributed, Tallmadge City Schools recognized the value of spreading the message across a variety of channels and from all angles.

Conclusion

When looking to pass a school bond issue, districts must be prepared to handle the issue strategies with clear communication and an informed approach. By developing 3-30-3 messaging and supplying practical communication materials, school districts can convey their needs to voters before the election takes place.

It is important to design a messaging strategy that is clear, consistent and constant. With proper organization, efforts to distribute the information should remain holistic and directly explain to voters what the investment will do for the students in the district.

If you would like assistance putting together your communication strategy for a bond issue, or you would like to learn more about our process, contact The Impact Group today. When election time rolls around, you will be more prepared than ever for the successful passing of your school ballot issue.