

Bond Campaign Process

How to achieve bond campaign success!

Historically, public schools often rely on the passage of bond issues for new construction and to make essential updates to their learning environments. Decreasing budgets, mature buildings, and rapid changes in technology standards put unending amounts of pressure on school administration. There are limited resources in state budgets to aid public schools with needed changes, so the burden falls to the local taxpayers to support their local public schools. This challenge can be met with resistance, especially with an unpredictable economy, or in areas with little community involvement in the school system. However, that does not make the need any less real. It is imperative that all public schools receive the necessary support to foster growth in all students through their learning environments.

While the State of Michigan average passage rate for qualified school bonds has been close to 50% over the last 20 years, TowerPinkster has been successful with more than an 80% passage rate.

As experts in K-12 design, TowerPinkster has been extremely successful in working together with School Districts and their communities to listen, engage, and create solutions to obtaining voter approval for bond campaigns. While the State of Michigan average passage rate for qualified school bonds has been close to 50% over the last 20 years, we have been successful with more than an 80% passage rate. In the past 20 years, we have learned much about the steps to bond passage and how to host a meaningful, involved bond campaign. Surveying your facilities, involving your community, and raising awareness are crucial for success.

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FACILITIES ASSESSMENT

In order to understand your current facility needs, and to intelligently address community questions, it is especially important to study your current facilities. Our team of professional architects, mechanical and electrical engineers, landscape architects, and occasionally various specialty consultants, will team with your facilities maintenance staff to identify and document building deficiencies.

After the facilities have been assessed, it is important to use that information to assemble a strategically thought-out facilities plan. The overall goal should be to focus on the needs of the school district, not the wants or desires. The first option that every community member will want to see is – how much does it cost to fix what we have? Once we know that answer, we move on to the bigger question – by making small fixes and upgrades, are we being good stewards? If not, it is time to think about a renovation or replacement. Prepare to implement changes that are based on making the space more efficient, and once those needs have been taken care of, consider making larger changes like new construction or major additions and renovations.

By creating a list of priorities that are important for your students, it will be easier to present solid ideas to the community and gain buy-in. If your district does not have a clear vision, the community will be less willing to support a bond measure. Equally important, these priorities will set realistic expectations for what is to be implemented once the bond passes. Without a set plan, support may grow for a special interest project, instead of the necessary practical changes. If residents are going to see their tax bills increase, your district needs to be prepared to manage those expectations. This is one of the many reasons that engaging your community is so important in planning a bond campaign.



AWARENESS

The citizen's committee will solicit support from the community, but your school district needs to supply information. The community will rely on the straight facts to come from the school district. TowerPinkster's K-12 team has expert knowledge in helping school districts to spread information. Having an information brochure to send home with students, give to parents, and mail to the voters is the best way to ensure that the community is receiving the correct facts about the vote. Similarly, having a website or page that is dedicated to informing the community about the bond will ensure that all internet searches on the matter are clear and concise, providing the most accurate information.

The biggest trend in bond proposals is the creation of a bond video. With the wide spread rate of videos across the internet and social media platforms, bond videos are becoming more common and effective as a way to quickly inform your citizens about the need for a bond. The overall message of the bond video must be positive.

These videos are short and generally feature the superintendent, a school principal, a community member, or a member of local leadership or government. People that are recognized and respected in the community, talking about your bond, will garner more results or interest on social media sites. It is also an exciting way to feature students. Parents are more likely to share the video, especially if their child is involved in a small clip.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

TowerPinkster believes that the most important phase of your entire bond process is community engagement. You are putting the future of your district to a community vote and your citizens need to be involved in every step of the bond process. Without their support you will have little chance of success, so every aspect of your bond campaign has to work at actively engaging the community.

There are many ways to do this, however on the base level your district has to start with asking the right questions to engage your community and your staff, and then thoughtfully provide appropriate answers. Your district needs to work with your architect to determine the appropriate solutions for your community.

A community survey that asks for their opinion on the top priorities for your district can be a valuable tool. Provide five or ten priorities for your district and ask them how to rank those needs. This will create an invested foundation for the campaign.

As your district can only share information, it is good for your architect to engage a citizen-led committee. This committee, comprised of community members, school employees (working after school hours), and board members (not using school resources) will be key in educating constituents. Their job will be to emphasize the need for the bond, explain its benefits, and spend time face-to-face with parents and local leadership. The citizens committee can fundraise to create a wide range of support materials, from brochures, yard signs, and door cards, to supporting videos and websites.



Jenison Public Schools 2016 Bond Video

TOWERPINKSTER – BOND CAMPAIGN SPECIALISTS

Our approach is to take the time to understand your community and then to ensure that your community understands your district. We will involve your citizens in the concepts, costs, and incorporate their ideas into the final plan. Our team will create graphics that help explain the projects and provide the expertise necessary to illustrate the functional, operational and financial benefits of the solutions. Community is the key to a successful bond vote and TowerPinkster's K-12 team can help you achieve that success.

For more information on TowerPinkster's bond campaign capabilities, please contact one of our K-12 Directors:

Matt Slagle, AIA, LEED, CPTED, msslagle@towerpinkster.com, (616) 719-4224
Steve Hoekzema, AIA NCARB, shoekzema@towerpinkster.com, (616) 719-4248