



# How to Manage A Successful Bond Campaign for Building or Expanding Facilities

Trust starts with truth and ends with truth. -Santosh Kalwar

Running a bond campaign for a school district must start and end with the truth. Voters need the accurate, truthful information presented in a way they can understand and enable them to make an informed decision. Voters and the school district may not always agree, but it is the school district's responsibility to gather, analyze, and share information with the voters. Then the school district must ask the voters to give their children, grandchildren, and neighbor's children an educational facility that will prepare them to meet the challenges that await them as adults.

## ➔ How does a successful bond campaign become a reality?

Where does the school district begin to gather, analyze, and share information in a way that voters will listen to and believe? Our proven solution is to begin early, recruit an architect with proven bond passage experience, and to put the community to work before misinformation gets circulated.

## ➔ Put the community to work

The idea is to form a citizen committee independent of the school administration. An ideal group would include independent citizens and school board members along with the district's most respected teachers. The committee must be mindful not to include individuals that could be perceived as having personal

financial gain in a successful bond issue. The citizen committee must determine what their goals are and work closely with the architect's design team. For example, if the goal is to pass a bond to build a new school, the first task is to determine why an existing school no longer meets the community's needs and why a new school is needed.

## ➔ Gather information

Subcommittees should be formed to get the maximum number of community members involved to examine a variety of issues. Committees will be district specific, but may include: transportation, evaluation of the existing school or site and its deficiencies, technology, maintenance, energy costs, safety and security issues, population growth, special needs, ADA concerns, administrative issues that impact square footage, and athletic facilities.

## ➔ Analyze information

Subcommittees will present findings to the full citizens committee under the guidance of the architect. As each subcommittee presents, the architect will organize the information into a programming document that will clearly define the deficiencies of the existing facilities and begin to outline needed improvements, additions, or replacements to update the facility for comparison to building a new facility. The architect will

identify possible solutions; generate cost estimates, and then present the information to the citizens committee using drawings and other appropriate materials that best illustrate the need.

## ➔ Evaluation

The citizens committee will weigh pros and cons of remodeling/upgrading or building a new facility. Timeframe may be determining factor. Three months may be adequate to upgrade and replace windows, doors, HVAC, improve technology, re-roof or to construct a small addition, but if the need is to demolish classrooms and add new classrooms, a new gymnasium and an administrative wing, which will require a year or more to construct with students present, that is an entirely different story. The next step is for the architect to prepare site and floor plans that meet the needs of replacing the existing facility and adding the spaces identified by the committee for comparison. Comparisons are necessary to reassure the community that the citizens committee has done their due diligence and explored possible solutions.

## ➔ Summarize and Compare

At this point the citizens committee understands the costs and challenges of remodeling the existing facility versus those of building a new facility. The citizens committee and the architects are

Hutchison Smith Architects assisted American Falls High School (RIGHT) in passing two bonds, totaling \$16.5 million. Filer Intermediate School (MIDDLE) passed a \$16.4 million bond. (FAR RIGHT) Citizens Committee Meeting.



now ready to prepare the presentation materials to illustrate the choices to the community.

### ➔ Presentation

The citizens committee will now have the following documents:

1. A written document prepared by the citizens committee and confirmed by the architect's design team indicating the deficiencies of the existing facility.
2. Site plan and floor plan drawing of the existing building.
3. Site plan and floor plan of the proposed remodel to the existing building.
4. Cost estimate for the remodel.
5. Construction schedule.
6. List of challenges for the remodel project.
7. Site plan and floor plan of the proposed new building.
8. Cost estimate for the proposed new building.
9. Construction schedule for the new building.
10. A recommendation from the citizens committee as to their first choice for solving the deficiencies at the existing facility.

### ➔ Get the Word Out

Armed with well researched and documented information, it now is time to get the word out to the community. Let's explore the best venues and opportunities to spread the word.

**Town hall meetings** Unfortunately few people turn out for advertised town meetings but nonetheless, one or two must be held. Schedule them alongside other community events or sporting events that will help bring people out. By all means, always provide food and refreshments.

**Service Organizations** Visit Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, and other organized clubs in the community. Make a presentation that exhibits all documents in a power point format along with drawings on easels. Be prepared to present and ask for opinions. Do not argue. Always respond positively, truthfully, and accurately. Representative members of the citizens committee, along with the architect, should be in attendance. Write down comments and, in an effort to avoid

disruptive outbursts, openly film the presentation. Keep it short and to the point and always finish with a sincere thank you for their time. Ask if you can return when the committee compiles input from all organized presentations.

**Senior Centers** This is not focused on nursing facilities, rather senior community centers. Seniors turn out to vote and are on fixed incomes. Therefore it is imperative to reach out to them for support. Bring students to the meeting, have them perform or otherwise interact with the attendees. Present the information, ask for their input and encourage them to share their educational background and school experiences.

**Community Presence** Set up a booth at the local fair, market or grocery store along with the drawings and a few members of the citizens committee.

Creativity is important during this phase in order to connect with the specific needs of your community. As an architect, I have participated in a wide variety of activities. A favorite is when several members of the citizens committee host a get together in their home where information is exchanged. Another option is to hit the neighborhoods and start knocking on doors armed with printed brochures.

At the end of this phase there will be a good grasp of the feelings of the community as a whole. The committee will meet and reevaluate the presentations. It is absolutely imperative that consensus is reached and the committee members are unanimous in the final recommendation which they must present to the school board who then must evaluate the information and also be unanimous in their decision.

If the decision is to take the matter to the voters to offer a bond that will raise taxes we must have 100% buy in by all board members and citizens committee members.

### ➔ Get Out to Vote

There are a couple directions to go here. The committee may choose to downplay and send a note home to the parents of students encouraging them to vote, but can't indicate how to vote. The thought being to keep it low key to avoid generating opposition. Unfortunately, the

days of hoping to avoid opposition are gone!

In order to run a successful bond campaign it must be very active and energetic. This process is a marathon, not a sprint. Get out the vote must be the job of the citizens committee with the same enthusiasm they had in the beginning. Concentrate on the 'yes' votes. Offer rides, utilize absentee ballots and identify graduates ages 18 and older away at college or in the military. Have a group calling the 'yes' voters the day of the election and encourage them to bring their 'yes' voting spouse and neighbors. Undoubtedly there will always be 'no' voters. In most cases, these voters would agree that the facility improvements are necessary but will not approve a tax increase. Identify a 'yes' voter that is a large land owner and ask them to visit 'no' voters to illustrate that it will cost the large land owner more but he understands the importance of a well-educated community and a good school system that helps to maintain and increase property values and attract new residents.

It has been our experience that a "one size fits all" or a duplication of an educational facility used in another community just does not work. Each community is unique and each school should address and emphasize what makes the community unique. This attitude is the same with running a bond campaign. The general format is similar but its success lies in finding what is unique about each district and using that to create pride and ownership in the campaign. This momentum is necessary to cultivate citizen involvement and for them to drop a 'yes' vote into the ballot box.

**About the Author** Don Hutchison is President of Hutchison Smith Architects located in Boise, Idaho. Don has nearly 40 years of experience in educational planning and design. HSA has assisted in nine successful school bond campaigns and has designed, bid, and built hundreds of successful educational projects. Don and the HSA staff have managed millions of dollars of school construction, directed community meetings for many years, and truly have a passion for education.