

RUNNING HEAD: CLACKAMAS COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT

Clackamas County Library District: The yes vote mixed method study proposal

Sarah Lander

Emporia State University

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Dr. Jacqueline Waggoner

Abstract

The County of Clackamas passed a ballot measure to fund their library system through a property tax of 39 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The passing of this ballot insured the funding of the library system beyond the inevitable decrease in county funding through the general fund. Understanding why the measure passed is important for the county if the future necessitates increases in the tax rate and for other library systems to use Clackamas County as a model for their library funding ballots. The literature suggests that there are many impacts as to what influences a voter to vote affirmative for a ballot. Specifically the influences are campaign marketing, recovery for ballot failure, the political and social environment and voter psychology.

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## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

### Introduction and Background

In November 2008, the county of Clackamas passed a ballot measure to fund their library network by forming a library district. To the surprise of many of the library staff members and local leaders the measure passed by 60% margin (Oder, 2008). Their surprise was rooted in the nations troubling economic situation. Library districts are also known as library tax districts because they are funded through property or sales taxes (O'Conner, 2004). This district is funded through a county tax of 36 cents per \$1,000 assessed home value within the County of Clackamas. The November 2008, ballot measure victory marks the first time library funding has been renewed since the early 90's; in March 1997 a county library funding levy failed to achieve the double-majority requirement to pass, even though a majority of county voters voted for the levy (Oder). Without funding from a levy and Federal Timber money cuts, the system has been subject to the unstable funding of the County general fund and individual city contributions. These same federal timber moneys cuts lead to the closing two library systems (Oder). Why did public vote yes this time?

The efforts to pass this ballot measure were carried out by three clear campaign fronts, the County of Clackamas, Keep Our Libraries Open campaign and individuals within the community. There was no designated campaign in opposition of the ballot, although there were a few individuals who wrote opposition pieces for the opinion columns in the local newspaper. The passing of this ballot measure insures stable funding in to the future for the entire Clackamas County Library System and keeps two libraries from closing in the 2009 fiscal year. Through this district each library in the system will receive \$1 million over a five span, rather than face reductions to zero dollars by 2014 (Roberts, 2008).

### Purpose

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study is to better understand why voters voted for the Clackamas County Library District by converging both quantitative and qualitative data. In this study, voter statistics will be used to measure voter turnout, demographics and total number of affirmative votes for the district. At the same time, the affirmative votes for the district will be explored using a qualitative review of campaign materials and interviews with library staff at each of the Clackamas County libraries. In addition to interviews users of the library of voting age at each of the libraries will be surveyed about their vote for the ballot with both quantitative and qualitative questions.

### Significance

For the Northwest region of Oregon the passing of this district marks a shift in the population's value of its libraries and their funding. For the creation of similar library districts, studying the passing of this ballot measure to fund a library district is important. Knowledge of the campaign strengths and focus based on why voters choose to vote for this library district formation will allow other library systems to campaign or gauge if their public and government body is ready for such a voting opportunity.

### Summary

As a profession it is important to study the possible funding sources for our institutions. This study allows for reflection and theorizing of how to accomplish our funding goals through library districts. The passing of Clackamas County's Library District markets the beginning of stable county funding for the entire library system. Understanding the affirmative vote will prove useful if the tax ever needs to be raised in the future and as each library implements their increased funding they will be able to publicize this study along with their improved services in both a

narrative and numerical manner to further illustrate how much the public values the services the library provides.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Introduction

This literature review explores the factors that impact voter yes votes in relation to library funding ballot measures generally and districts specifically. Marketing, prior ballot failure, political and social environments and psychology developed as themes for the review to set the foundation for answering this proposals research questions. Only 8.5 percent of all library systems are funding through library tax districts in the United States and few of these serve populations larger than 100,000 (O'Conner). The Clackamas County Library District serves a population over 370,000 (Brown, 2009). Statistically in the United States public libraries of similar size receive only 12 percent of their budget from their state governments, the majority about 81 percent from their local governments and the remaining from other sources such as support organizations and the federal government (U.S., 2007). In addition to serving its own population, the County of Clackamas serves it's neighboring two counties, Multnomah and Washington, with a combined population of over one million, through a reciprocal agreement allowing citizens of each of the counties to have library cards without a fee to the user. With such a large service population Clackamas County's establishment of a library district has the ability to be an example of how to fund large library systems. Literature states that voting is emotional and personal; therefore campaigns must to acknowledge the human element to win the vote.

### Marketing

Campaigning is essentially marketing, the ballot measure is the product, the tax and what would be lost or gained is the price and the act of getting the word out is the promotion. When the product is for "the greater good," like a ballot measure creating library-funding district, is

marketing an insult to the cause? APR marketing communications consultant Shari L. Schmidt says no:

Price. Product. Promotion. No matter what you are selling, these three items create the foundation of your marketing program. Libraries are no different. When planning a referendum campaign, libraries must start by critically reviewing the product being offered.

Make sure your review targets different segments of your populations.

Remember that people care about how they benefit; they don't really care about how their neighbors benefit. What will happen if the referendum fails? This is perhaps the most important question. If the referendum fails, there must be public changes. When Green Hills Public Library District's campaign initially failed, fees and fines increased, programs were eliminated, seating was reduced, and service hours were cut. These very public changes reinforced the message that additional funds were needed to maintain library services... Your main concern is getting the "yes" votes to cast ballots. (2005, pp.12 - 13)

Schmidt asserts that doing as much as possible is necessary. Keep it simple by using tools such as lawn signs. Public displays passively state to voters that there is a great deal of support for your ballot measure. While Armstrong emphasizes fostering a sense of community ownership of the library and not hiding the realities the library is facing. "We also gave up trying to make the library look good. It was overcrowded and we made sure that it was obvious" (2005, p.15). She purposes that libraries at the beginning of their campaigns should hire professionals to analyze the demographics of your community and create Internet tools to illustrate the new tax and value of services. Armstrong and Schmidt both suggest maintaining a regular presence in

the local newspapers as feature stories, letters to the editor and opinion columns throughout the campaign and ramping up frequency within the final few weeks before balloting takes place.

#### Ballot Failure Recovery

After a ballot failure use the strengths of the previous campaign, including reuse of campaign materials that were not used up and retain the volunteers from the last campaign for the new one. It is necessary to bounce back from the failure in a public, organized and personal reformed campaign. Particularly valuable when leading a new campaign from the ashes of a failed campaign is addressing both the positive and negative feelings in campaigns, suggests Westen (2007). He states that it is “less political than neurological,” because positive and negative emotions are “psychologically distinct, mediated by different neural circuits,” (2007, 250). Leaving out the one of the emotions asks the voter to only use half their brain, therefore a successfully campaign would activate the whole brain and address positive and negative emotions. Following a failed ballot measure, revisit the population by conducting a survey to ascertain their support for library funding (Bacon, 2005). As the survey is conducted have the local newspaper publicize it and announce the results. Favorable results will show your local governing body that a library specific funding ballot measure is what the public wants. If the council members believe there is public support for the ballot measure they will likely endorse the campaign giving a consistent message about the library’s needs. “The important thing is to make your issue part of the public discourse,” (p. 66). Person-to-person contact is invaluable in local balloting measures, the impact is real to a select population meet them and show them how real the cause is.

### Political and Social Environment

In addition to understanding the campaign techniques used, it is important to understand the general political and social climate before and during a campaign. Is it a presidential election year? Are there large marketing campaigns to get people to polls casting votes? Are there controversial, highly politicized ballot measures that would compete with your local ballot measure? Or is there too little happening during the balloting time? What is the economic climate? The year in which this ballot measure was voted on was a time of political turbulence, in the form of a historic economic low and a heated presidential election year. Across the board the public wanted change and relief. Libraries across the nation were experiencing their highest use rates in history with reused and expected reductions in fund do to the hard economic times.

In 2003, Arceneaux wrote how economic adversity greatly impacts voter turnout and how they will vote. His research concluded that, “economic adversity can lead to either mobilization or withdrawal depending on current conditions” (2003, p. 71). So, what mobilizes voter turnout about economics? When an economic situation coincides with political party policy outcomes that are negative the public tends to vote against the controlling party because they blame them for the current economic problems. Or in positive economic times the vote is generally in support of the controlling political party’s policies. Yet Rosenstone asserts that, people are motivated to vote in adverse economic situation to right the social environment that created their hardship (1982). Political climate of November 2008, likely resembled a combination of these two theories. People were facing hardships not felt widespread since the depression. Voter turnout at the national level was 56.8% (McDonald, 2008).

### Psychology

People are made up of competing political ideals that inform their political decisions. These ideals are based on an individual's values and attitudes. The psychology of voting is this competition between value and attitudes. Valerie Braithwaite, a researcher for The Australian Nation University, conducted a study about the balance of values and attitudes that move a person to vote in a predictable manner. She defined this competition as follows:

Values transcend specific objects and situations, belonging to the world of ideals where compromises and trade-offs do not have to be made.

In contrast to the world of ideals is the world of action. Attitudes represent predispositions to respond to particular objects in particular situations. They involve summing up a set of beliefs relevant to the situation and the object. Multiple values can be implicated in this process, coming into conflict in a way, which is unnecessary in the world of ideals. Conflict between two values arises when both are seen to be relevant to a specific issue, and situational constraints force individuals to make comparisons, finally choosing one over the other (trade-off). Political evaluations of election issues are likely to be greatly influenced by such constraints, whereas political ideals transcend them (1998, p. 224).

Later in her study, she explains that the study suggests that the way in which political institutions expect individuals to express their values is in tenuous with social values many have. People are complex; their values and attitudes compete with rigid political systems, such the Western model of conservative verses liberal and democrat verses republican. When the public "goes" to vote they balance their values, "ideals" with their current attitude toward the social and political environment. A person may "be" a Conservative, but vote liberally, because they feel the

conservative political agenda competes with their value of social services since they recently lost their job.

In another study conducted by Claremont Graduate University Ryan Quist and William Crano concluded that people vote based on similarity, with increased predictability when the political issues held high personal relevance for people. “[I]t stands to reason that the more important these issues, the more likely it is that perceived agreement will result in a positive behavior...” (2003, p. 159). Based on these findings one may be able to predict how people will vote and establish value in creating campaigns that develop a perception of agreement (similarity with the public). An earlier study on voting, found that this relationship between attitude and similarity was strongest when ballot issues are of high personal relevance (Crano, 1997). In 1980 Sears, Lau, Tyler and Allen also confirmed the link between voting and personal-interest as having the most effect on policy issues.

#### Summary

The literature review reveals that voter choice for this ballot was impacted by marketing, the recovery of a past ballot failure, the political and social environment and voting psychology. Marketing a ballot the same as products are marketed is no different. Emphasizing the price, product and promotion of the ballot is the key to effective campaigning. Reusing the materials and knowledge base of a previous ballot campaign is wise. Beginning and incorporating these allows for a strength not realized in a prior failed campaign. The environment of a voter is living in impacts their ability and choice at ballot time, especial attention should be paid to “historical events.” Finally, the human element is crucial for passing a library funding ballot measure. People align their vote with the personal relevance of the ballot measure to their intimate life.

Understanding the personal relevance of ballot measure can insure the passing of the ballot measure if so marketed.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Introduction

How a person arrives at making their voting choices is complex. Individuals balance both internal and external before arriving at their voting decisions. A ballot campaign if marketed to acknowledge the emotional nature of the political and social issues facing people will likely be successful. Did the Clackamas County ballot measure campaign acknowledge the human element in their campaign? This study will attempt to answer this question, by testing the hypotheses with research questions based on the trends found in the literature review, marketing, ballot failure recovery, political and social environment, and psychology using a mixed methods approach. This chapter presents the study's hypotheses, research questions, the limitations and delimitations of the study. Additionally this chapter will describe the rationale and triangulation of the mixed method, the role of the researcher, study participants, review board, instruments, design and procedures.

### Statement of Hypotheses

Based on my personal knowledge of the campaign and literature review of the topic I predict that library users did vote for the ballot measure. I also predict that pro-ballot measure campaign materials / marketing had a high level of impact of the voters' decision to vote yes. Additionally, I predict that they voted for the ballot measure because of personal values and attitudes rather than alignment with political ideals.

### Research Questions

The research questions for this study are varied because the issue of voter choice is complex. The mixed method approach in research involves both the qualitative and quantitative methods; therefore my questions are designed to generate numbers for statistical analysis and

attempt to answer the cause of the yes vote of the library district ballot measure. For the purposes of this study the research questions are:

- Are library users also voters?
- Are current library users, also those who voted for the ballot?
- Did you young voters who are also library users vote for the ballot?
- Is there a correlation between gender and the yes vote?
- Is there a correlation between the yes vote and conservative or liberal political ideals?
- What were the factors that motivated voters to vote for the ballot measure?
- Of the factors that influenced voters, were political or personal value/attitudes a great influence?

#### Limitations and Delimitations

When considering the data of this study for conclusions, it is important that the limitations are accounted for. The one weakness of this study is the systematic sampling for the survey and this study does not capture the reasons for no votes and voters who are not library users. The moneys are not currently available to conduct a mailed survey that would be large enough to a valid sample size, but after this study it is possible that the County or grant could fund a follow study to overcome this weakness. Additionally the historically events during the ballot measure campaign and vote may prevent this study from being able to be widely generalized externally.

The delimitations address variables that are out a researcher's control. . The memory of the influences for the vote will fade with if not recorded. Campaign materials will be thrown away and lost. URLs will no longer be supported. Soon the campaign will be history, which without study will minimally be preserved for study in the future. This study is attempting to

identify why people vote for this one ballot measure through an attainable finance level and short timetable of six months. After this study is completed it possible that another study could be conducted to compare its conclusions to another library funding ballot to widen the external validity of the theories that will be developed in this study.

#### Rationale - Triangulation

For this study I am using a mixed methods approach. A mixed methods approach is the best for this study, because ballot measure statistics do not reveal why people voted yes. By combining the statistics from the balloting, additional statistics from surveys, narratives of the personal experiences of library staff and literature review of the topic, the “why” question may be answered. This combining of research methods is triangulation. Triangulation “attempt[s] to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings within a single study” (Creswell, 2003, p.217). The quantitative evidence will give strength to the qualitative evidence conversely. Combining these qualitative and quantitative methods makes it possible to develop a theory as to why people to vote for library ballot measures.

#### Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study I am also a possible participant. I live in Clackamas County, use one of their libraries regularly and I voted for the ballot. I am a Graduate student of Emporia State University in the Masters of Library Science program and employed by the City of Milwaukie in the Community Services Department. I have a bias in this study; I believe in the mission of public libraries and voted in support for the forming of this library district. My bias is tempered by the study taking place after the ballot has passed. Therefore I will not be in a position to persuade voters to vote yes. I will make every effort to be objective in the collection and evaluation of data in this study, even though my bias may shape how I view these data. I am

glad the ballot passed, but I am genuinely curious as to why it passed and will conduct this study with the perspective that there are many possible reasons why the ballot measure passed and will report all my findings.

#### Participants

The participants of this study are users of each of the 13 libraries in the new library district. Only users of the libraries who are 18 years old or older will be allowed to participate in the survey. The total number of surveys per library will be based on a sampling size relative to the number of library card holders at each library who are of voting age, 18 years or older. The surveys will be given to willing participants until the sampling size has been met. The survey station will set-up during at least three different time periods at each library. Participants will not have to give their name and surveys will be submitted into an attended locked box to be reviewed off site. Participants will not be allowed to answer a survey more than once, even if they attend multiple libraries in the system.

The second sets of participants for this study are library staff members. Each library staff member will be interviewed with the same set of questions. To participate in the interview the participants will sign a permission form. One staff member from each department of the library will be interviewed at every library. The library staff will choose these interviewees internally by their own method.

#### Review Board

To conduct this study it will be necessary to get the approval of the Clackamas County Library District Board and the approval each library to set-up a surveying station inside each

library. The board will have to approve the study and review the survey and interview questions before they are administered as well.

#### Instruments

There will be two instruments used in this study; two sets of questions for surveying library users and interviewing library staff. The questions for both instruments were designed by me to answer the research questions outlined in this proposal. The surveys will not require any private information of the participants including their name, so a permission form will not be required for participation. For the interviews participants will be asked to fill out permission forms, so I can revisit the participants if a question about their answers arise.

The statistical data gathered through both the surveys and interviews will be evaluated with either a T-test or ANOVA. Additionally, the data collected in the surveys and interviews will be correlated with the general ballot statistics gathered through the county elections office. After the statistical data is synthesized it will be correlated qualitatively with the narrative data collect from the instruments. The narrative data will also be explored separately to discover any difference between the statistical data and the narrative data.

#### Design and Procedures

Upon approval of this proposal, the surveys and interviews will be scheduled. This schedule will dictate the beginning and end date of the study. The interviews and surveys will take one week per library, for a total of 13 weeks. After the surveys and interviews are complete the data will be interpreted and reviewed over the next 2 weeks. During this two week period of time any questions that arise based on the interviews will be explored with the interview participants. The statistical data will also be tested and interpreted during these two weeks. All testing will be held to a significance of  $p < 0.05$ , the standard for Sociological studies. Following

interpretation and review, a report will be made and presented to the Library District Board.

After this presentation the board will have four days to submit comments and questions. All comments and questions will be addressed the following week at a follow-up presentation. The study process will be finalized there after within one month, then submitted for publication by the Oregon Library Association. The entire study process will take roughly six months.

#### Summary

In this chapter the proposed study's details are outlined fully. The research questions attempt to explore why voters voted for the Clackamas County Library District while accounting for the historical and sample limitations. By using a mixed methods research approach the limitations of the study will have less of an impact and the qualitative narrative will strengthen the statistical data. My role as the research has an identified bias in that I voted for the ballot measure, live and work in Clackamas County and I am attaining my Masters in Library Science. To lessen the influence of my bias the study or its findings, the study taking place after the ballot measure has already passed. The instruments to be used, a survey and set of interview questions, will be reviewed and approved by the Library District Board, further lessening the possible impact of my bias. The study will take place over about a six-month period of time, from Library District Board approval to conduct the study to final presentation of the study's findings and submission for publication.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

1. What library do you work at?
2. What is your position at the library?
3. How many hours per day you have contact with library users?
4. How often did you interact with library users about the ballot measure?
5. When the public asked about the ballot measures what did they ask about?
6. How did you answer questions about the ballot measure?
7. Did you volunteer outside of work to help the Keep Our Libraries Open campaign efforts?
8. If you volunteered for the Keep Our Libraries Open campaign, what did you do?
9. Do you live in Clackamas County? If yes: Did you vote for the ballot? What motivated your yes vote?
10. What do you believe to be the most effective part of the library campaign? Why?

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APPENDIX B: Survey

1. Did you vote during the November, 2008 election season?  
 YES       NO       NOT A REGISTERED VOTER
2. Did you vote for the ballot measure funding the Clackamas County Library District?  
 YES       NO
3. If you voted for the ballot what influenced your vote? (Check all that apply)  
 ECONOMY       CAMPAIGN MATERIALS       YARD  
SIGNS  
 TAXES     CHILDREN       LIBRARY USE / EXPERIENCE(S)  
 ENDORSEMENT BY POLITICIAN(S)     OTHER (explain):

4. Do you consider yourself....  CONSERVATIVE or     LIBERAL

5. Did your political party influence your vote on this ballot?  YES       NO

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6. What is your political party?  
 DEMOCRAT     REPUBLICAN     SOCIALIST       GREEN  
  
 NONE     OTHER (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

7. Were you more likely to vote for the ballot because it was a Presidential election year?  
 YES       NO

8. Rate the following according to the influence each had on your vote for this ballot.  
(1 equals the highest influence and 5 equals the lowest influence)  
\_\_\_\_ CAMPAIGN MATERIALS (flyers, yard signs, etc...)  
\_\_\_\_ ECONOMY

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\_\_\_ FRIENDS & FAMILY

\_\_\_ LIBRARY MISSION

\_\_\_ TAXES

APPENDIX C: Participant Permission Form

My name is Sarah Lander and I am a student from the Library Science Department at Emporia State University. You are invited to be in a research study about what caused people to vote for the Clackamas County Library District in the November, 2008 election. We are asking that you take part because you are staff member in one of the libraries the study focuses on. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

**The study:** The purpose of this study is to find out why people voted for the Clackamas County Library District ballot measure.

**Risks and benefits:** The risks in this study are that questions about library users and staff are somewhat sensitive. There are no benefits to you or your child if he or she takes part in the study.

**Compensation:** You will receive no compensation or gift for completing this interview.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept confidential, to the extent permitted by law. The interview will ask for your name. Surveys will be kept securely for three (3) years after this study ends in a locked cabinet and office.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. Your decision whether or not to take part will not affect your current or future relationship with the Clackamas County Library District or with Emporia State University. If you decide to take part, you are free to not do the interview, skip any questions, or stop at any time. You are free to withdraw at any time without

affecting your relationship with the Clackamas County Library District or Emporia State University.

The researcher for this study is Sarah Lander. You may reach her at 555-555-5555, or [slander@emporia.edu](mailto:slander@emporia.edu). Please feel free to ask any questions you have now, or at any point in the future. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Clackamas County Library Board at 555-555-5555. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Please enter your child's name and sign below if you give consent for your child to participate in this study.

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_