



NORTH COUNTRY LIBRARY SYSTEM

22072 County Route 190 - Watertown, NY 13601-1066

Phone: (315) 782-5540 Fax: (315) 782-6883

www.nclsweb.org

Director: Stephen B. Bolton

SCHOOL BALLOT REFERENDUM TOOLKIT FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES



Table of Contents

1. What is a "School Ballot Referendum"?
2. Benefits for Libraries
3. How do we do it and when do we start?
4. Campaign advice
5. Sample necessary documents
 - a. Petition and ballot wording
 - b. Per capita cost calculator

Amy Starr Zuch
azuch@ncls.org
North Country Library System
Updated in 2010

1. What is a “School Ballot Referendum”?

Requesting funds directly from school district taxpayers by asking them to vote on a resolution placed on the annual school district ballot is the definition of a “school ballot referendum” and is becoming one of the most popular funding avenues in today’s public libraries.

See the “Benefits for libraries” section for more information. School district taxpayers pay an amount based on their assessed property value, just like they do for school taxes. Generally the annual cost is very low (under \$10) but depends on how much the library (or libraries) requests in annual funding.

When one public library within a school district wishes to “go on the school ballot” as we say, it is wise for the other libraries in the same district to do so as well. The reason for this is that all school district taxpayers will be responsible for paying the library tax even if the library in their village or town does not participate. Therefore, the more libraries that participate within a school district, the higher the probability of “yes” votes.

When one library wishes to go on the school ballot but one or more other libraries in the district do not wish to, the library that does wish to is still entitled to do so. It may make their fight a little tougher, but they do not need the permission of or participation by other public libraries in their district. But, again, taxpayers that use a library who has chosen not to participate will still have to pay taxes for the library that does request funds should the resolution pass.

FAQ’s

1. If a library wants to be on the ballot to request tax money from the school district taxpayers, how may they do it?
The library board should ask the applicable Board of Education to place a proposition on the school district ballot. The library board should prepare a valid petition to put the matter on the ballot. The Board of Education must honor the request and place the library’s funding proposition on the ballot. A budget proposition, which has been properly submitted, must be presented to the voters. (Ed. Law §259 [1])
2. Are public and association libraries autonomous legal entities?
Yes. Even though they usually have a budget and staff much smaller than the local school district, public and association libraries are corporate entities chartered by the Board of Regents and registered by the Commissioner of Education.
3. Why do public and association libraries request funding through the school district ballot?
The law provides a means for these libraries to access voters in the community in order to levy taxes and to use tax collection mechanisms. (Ed. Law §§ 256[1], 259[1], 255[1]).

Public and association libraries serve the entire community.

4. Can a public or association library request that its budget vote be held at a separate time and/or separate location from the school district's budget vote?

Yes. At the discretion of the school district, a special district election may be held at a time and place designated by the school district. (Ed. Law §2006,2007). If the vote is held in the library, it must be administered by the school district.

A school district public library may hold their vote at a time and place separate from the school district. If held separately, the vote must be held between April 1 and June 30. The library may incur costs for requesting a vote separate from the school district election. This should be discussed at the local level between the school board and the library board. (Ed. Law §259 [1]).

5. If voters approve the library budget, is the tax money collected for the public library mixed with school district funds?

No. These tax moneys must be kept separate and must be paid to the treasurer of the library board "upon the written demand of its trustees." (Ed. Law, §259[1])

6. Can the school district charge for collecting the library funds from the district taxpayers?
No.

7. Does the library funding appear as part of the school district budget funds?

No. Library funds appear as separate lines on the ballot. (Ed. Law, §259[1])

8. Is a new budget vote required each year?

No. Once the proposition has been accepted by the voters of the district, it is "considered an annual appropriation until changed by further vote." (Ed. Law, §259[1])

9. If a library vote requesting an increase in funds is defeated, does the library receive any funds?

Yes. If a library vote for an increase is defeated, the appropriation reverts to the amount last approved by the voters, since the appropriation is "... considered an annual appropriation until changed by further vote..." (Ed. Law, §259[1])

2. Benefits for libraries

- 1:** School ballot funds are voted on one time and then become an annual appropriation. Libraries do not have to go back each year to request funds.
- 2:** By taxing voters directly through an annual appropriation, libraries do not have to rely upon municipalities for funding that could reduce or cut funds entirely at any time and with little or no notice. In other words, school ballot funds are more secure.
- 3:** Libraries can go back on the school ballot after an initial successful vote and ask for additional annual funds at a later date (one, two, three, or more years later). Even if the vote for additional funds fails, the library still receives the annual appropriation from the preceding successful vote. There is no limit to the number of times a new proposition for additional funds can be placed on a school ballot, regardless of past successful or unsuccessful referendums.
- 4:** Libraries can and should feel good about receiving funds directly from school district taxpayers because those taxpayers voted “yes” and wanted the library to be funded! Be thankful and serve them well!
- 5:** School district funds can be spent in any manner that the library board deems appropriate (and according to NYS Education Law). Also, funds can be saved from one year to the next and do not need to be spent within one fiscal year to be retained by the library. The school district has no say in how or when the funds are used. So, go ahead, save up and fix your roof, build a new library, buy new computers, invest... whatever you need!

3. How do we do it and when do we start?

Follow the activity timeline on the next page, but first, speak to the trustees of all the other libraries in your school district and ask them to participate with you. If they agree, coordinate your PR efforts with them and keep in close contact with each other throughout the campaign.

ACTIVITY	TIMELINE
1. Library board passes resolution to pursue funds via the school district vote. a. Decide on amount (Around \$10,000 would be a nice start: enough to be worthwhile, but not so much that the amount becomes a stumbling block).	No later than January
2. Library board and campaign volunteers circulate petition asking that library proposition be put on the ballot. a. Need 25 signatures, but get more, in case of dispute.	January
3. Library board members and other library supporters attend school board meeting to ask that the library's proposition be placed on the ballot. a. Call/write to the school board clerk/secretary to be placed on agenda, and to check on deadlines. b. Even if the board won't voluntarily put up the library proposition, Ed. Law requires them to.	February or early March
4. The school district publishes public notice of the vote.	Late March (Ed. Law requires at least 30 days, but some school districts require more; check with S.D. to be sure)
5. Library board and campaign volunteers distribute publicity: posters, radio spots, press releases, invite reporter to library to take pictures of children's story hour, seniors using computers, ...	March-May
6. Campaigners call every voter or go door to door to tell people what the library will do for them with the money, ask for their vote a. Keep list of definite "Yes" voters	No later than 6 weeks out
7. Campaigners call yes voters the day before the election, remind them to vote.	3 rd Monday in May
8. <u>Library proposition passes!</u>	3 rd Tuesday in May
9. Library issues press release after the vote thanking supporters and inviting public to come see new services at library.	3 rd Wednesday in May
10. Library holds thank you party (with private funds) for campaign volunteers and builds goodwill for next year's campaign.	Soon after vote
11. Library expands hours, buys more new books, or improves handicapped access to building... whatever they said they'd do with the money.	Promptly
12. Library keeps up warm contacts with reporters and supporters as they invite them back repeatedly to show how wonderful improvements to the library are.	Continuing
13. The process begins again when the library seeks an increase in funding.	Next year or two

4. Campaign advice

The following table* shows how library administrators ranked the importance of various campaign tactics for their campaigns. Rankings were performed on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important:

Ranked Importance of Campaign Tactics

	Avg. Ranking
Pamphlets, fact sheets, bookmarks, etc.	7.93
Newspaper ads, feature articles	7.49
Press releases	7.08
Letters to the editor, editorials	6.42
Community group presentations	6.34
Endorsements by community leaders	6.29
Library Friends group	6.21
Mass mailings (postcards, flyers, etc.)	5.56
Volunteers telephone contact	4.69
Public forums	4.55
Private business participation	2.95
Chamber of commerce participation	2.63
AV (slide or videotape) presentations	2.60
Radio spots	2.51
Yard signs	2.45
Organized door-to-door contact	2.21
Television spots	1.39

Ask your
Consultant
for help with:

Pamphlets, fact sheets, newspaper ads, press releases, letters to the editor, community presentations and endorsements were some of the most commonly used campaign methods for library measures.

Contact your NCLS Consultant to discuss tactics and find out what type of assistance NCLS has to offer your library!

*Adapted from: <http://www.library.ca.gov/LDS/referenda/refer4.html#TACTICS>, 3/30/05

5. Sample necessary documents

Sample petition and ballot wording

NOTE: legal wording subject to change. Always check with your Consultant or DLD for any recent changes to the ballot wording.

Sample per capita cost calculator.

NOTE: call the school district to get the “total assessed property value” for the district as well as the “amount raised through taxes” and then plug them in to the sample. (Ask to speak to the tax collector if you get someone who does not know what you are asking for when you call).

To the (X) Central Board of Education:

We, the undersigned residents of the (X) Central School District would like the following included as a proposition on the (X) Central School District ballot:

Resolved, that pursuant to Education Law, Section 259, the Board of Education of the (X) Central School District is authorized to levy and collect an annual tax, year after year, separate and apart from the annual school district budget, in the amount of \$20,000, which shall be paid to the (X) Public Library for the support and maintenance of the library; with this appropriated amount to be the annual appropriation until thereafter modified by a future vote of the electors of the (X) Central School District.

Signature	Printed Name	Address	Date

*\$40,000 for the Parish Public Library and the
Williamstown Community Library through the
Altmar-Parish-Williamstown School District Referendum*

School District Information:

Total True Value Assessment: \$261,795,150

Amount Raised Through Taxes: \$5,820,968

$5,820,968/261,795,150 = 22.234816$ average rate per thousand before increase (of \$40,000)

\$5,820,968

+ 40,000 proposed funds for the library

\$5,860,968 / 261,795,195 = **22.387607** average rate per thousand after increase (of \$40,000)

22.387607 including \$40,000 increase for the library

-22.234816 without library funding

.152791 per thousand rate increase in the average assessment

Therefore...

For **every \$1,000 of assessed property value**, an additional taxation of \$40,000 would cost each taxpayer **15 cents per year**.

\$50,000 assessment: $50 \times .152791 = \$7.64$

Providing \$40,00 per year in funding for the Parish Public Library and the Williamstown Community Library would cost a person with a \$50,000 property assessment **\$7.64** per year.