

## Q & A

### Community Water Fluoridation Wins and the Ballot: Lessons Learned from Nov 4<sup>th</sup> Election

1. How valuable was national support to your campaign or is most of the support really needed at the local community level?

- National organizations have a wealth of resources which meant we didn't have to build everything (campaign, messages, materials, etc.) from scratch.
- Financial resources from national organizations are also very helpful.
- Campaigns are won by local efforts. It is the local folks who are talking with their neighbors and getting support. In the end the locals are the ones who can vote.
- Local is powerful, but national is necessary for resources. Both are needed.

2. What was your campaign budget and how was it funded? How important is it for a community to have financial resources?

You definitely need funding to run a campaign!

- **Kalama, WA:** We were funded through the Washington Dental Service Foundation. The budget was based on the number of voters.
- **Healdsburg, CA:** The campaign was approved to spend up to \$50,000 and we spent most of it.
- **Salina, KS:** We raised \$50,000 for the campaign within one week thanks to state and local partnerships. However, we did not spend all of it. The funding came from state health foundations, Kansas Dental Association and local dental societies.

3. What suggestions do you have for folks to find funding, particularly for smaller communities where funding resources may not be as readily available?

- Reach out to and build a relationship early on with
  - Foundations that may support this type of community effort
  - State organizations such as state dental associations and state oral health coalitions
- Reach out to Campaign for Dental Health who may be able to help identify who in your state, community, or region is already mobilized, has information, and can support folks.
- Fundraise as a part of the political campaign

\*As a funder, water fluoridation is one of the best investments you can make in the oral health of any community.

4. How early did you start your campaign?

- **Kalama:** We started 90 days prior to election. This time period covers writing the voters pamphlet statement through to Election Day.
- **Healdsburg:** Three months before it went to ballot, but we've done this before so we had the resources and were familiar with voices in opposition.

- **Salina:** Thirteen weeks from the day the local petition was certified and the question officially went on the ballot to Election Day. We began working immediately, did lots of work to build relationships and get people to sign onto the campaign, but did not release materials or start “campaigning” until October 1. The “hold back” was purposeful.

#### 5. How many voters turned out for the election?

- **Kalama:** There are 1456 registered Kalama voters and 902 people voted on the ballot measure.
- **Healdsburg:** About half of eligible voters turned out to vote. 2184 voted in favor and 1113 voted against.
- **Salina:** Total votes cast =14,273, but not everyone answered the ballot question. Yes vote = 4720 and No = 9,553 (a “No” vote kept fluoride)

#### 6. In Kalama, was a public vote involved or a city council vote?

- Kalama is a charter city. (In Washington State some cities are charter cities and do not give the citizens a right to initiatives)
- The issue first had to go through a council ballot.
- The city council chose or initially voted to send this issue to the public via a ballot measure. It was an advisory ballot, so the council did not have to abide by the vote, but council promised that they would abide by the vote.
- Just before the public vote, the council sent out a petition to the surrounding areas that were purchasing water from the city and asked them what they thought.
- Finally, the city council voted to retain fluoridated water within their water system.

#### 7. How important was social media in the campaign, and what role did it play?

- **Kalama:** We started using it late in the campaign. I recommend investing a lot more time and resources into social media. The very demographic we wanted to reach was older adults who are also the fastest growing demographic with Facebook. In the future, I will spend a lot more effort of social media. It is effective and more quantifiable than other forms of messaging.
- **Healdsburg:** We had a website but did not use social media actively. Supporters may have their own social media pages.
- **Salina:** We had a social media manager at Oral Health Kansas who had posts for every day of the campaign, plus endorsements, commercials, videos, and mailers. It is an easy, free way to connect. Can ask to repost to friends, show up at a campaign event, or have a yard sign. You can also do push advertising so you can pop up on the walls of users more often which is relatively cheap. It is great for those with limited funds. One Facebook post reached 15,000 people.

The opposition was very active on social media. The local dentists who managed the Salina campaign would very politely respond if they brought up a question and say, “Here’s the answer to that and here’s a link for more information.” Some of the opposition eventually had to be blocked from the page/posting. Some of the opposition

stole some photos that we had used on our social media page. The opposition can be very crafty, so you have to watch their pages and make sure your materials are not being used without consent.

8. Did the opposition use paid media? How much of the focus was on paid media?

- **Kalama:** The opposition focused their campaign predominantly on Facebook and yard signs, but the yard signs were late in the campaign. Our primary media focus, at the recommendation of the committee, was predominantly yard signs, the newspaper, and direct mail pieces. One of the things that didn't get mentioned in the presentation was the collaboration – we can provide, as the experts doing campaigns all over, the menu of options, but the local folks can provide ideas of what will work in their community. Finding that good synergy is important.
- **Healdsburg:** The opposition did use direct mailing. I do not recall any ads in the newspaper. They displayed ads in a smaller free newspaper, but they have been doing that for years.
- **Salina:** For paid media, they did not have as many resources as we did. They had a few business card sized ads that were run with a bunch of other ads in the newspaper. We had full page color ads. We were on TV, they were not. Here is a link to our TV ads <https://www.youtube.com/user/dougcoonrod>. They were on a few of the talk radio shows but it was not a formal debate.

9. How did Kalama measure/evaluate the effectiveness of the direct mailer? Did they survey people or have web analytics?

We sent three educational mailers: one in September and two in October. However, we did not do any quantitative polling. Anecdotally, folks noted the mailer was a way they received information about the campaign.

10. How did you deal with the misinformation campaigns by the opposition?

- **Kalama:** Facebook posts were dealt with in a direct and courteous manner citing credible, verifiable data.
- **Healdsburg:** We were aware of a small vocal group and knew that this group networked with other opposition groups in the state. We assured our local supporters that we were able to respond to all of the arguments effectively. We
  - Provided accurate information on our website.
  - Used straight forward positive messages.
  - Relied on the credibility of those who have studied fluoridation, that is, the health and scientific organizations. We relied on a trusted, credible messenger to deliver the positive message.
- **Salina:** Local campaigners came up with great talking points about the misinformation and stuck with them. It is best not to argue. It is important to keep the tone positive and cordial to bring out the best in folks.

11. Were there any unexpected tactics by the opposition?

**Kalama:** There is not always warning from the opposition. The move by the opposition to remove fluoride was a surprise. We were also surprised by the survey sent to surrounding areas for their opinion. But our committee decided to stay focused in Kalama and it paid off. It is important to engage your community leaders very early to communicate their support for fluoridation.

**Salina:** Some of the opposition also stole/destroyed yard signs. We actually expected more of a fight in the campaign, but did not get it.

12. In Healdsburg, how did you deal with the NAACP endorsement of the opposition stance?

We did not make it an issue. We stayed focused and used our positive message. We were aware of the local endorsement in the county, but did not play in this instance.

13. Has the NAACP changed their mind or viewpoint on fluoridation?

Not to our knowledge.

14. Any advice to communities who want to get started?

- Reach out for support from national allies.
- Relationships and trust established early are very important for victory.
- The dental community is the very foundational for any campaign, but work to seek out pediatricians and local business people as part of strategies.
- The dental community is supportive, but sometimes they need to be informed on the campaign and have ways to participate in ways that works for them.
- Allow local folks to take the lead. They can endorse the campaign and lend their photos to press pieces.
- Make the decision not to get entangled in arguments against fluoridation. Stay focused on positive message and the credible supporters of that information.
- When dentists speak from personal experience “this is what I see in my community in my own practice,” that message is very effective.