

SECTION 5.1

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

In creating this toolkit we interviewed people across the country—both those who had succeeded and those who had failed in efforts to implement local early learning financing initiatives. We asked them to share their best advice with those considering launching an initiative. Here's what they said:

1 BE SPECIFIC

Winning referendums have defined and successfully communicated a specific purpose. You need to be able to answer: What is it? Why do we need it? What is the benefit to the community? How much will it cost? If it feels too broad or people do not understand it, your initiative is unlikely to rally the support needed for success.

2 USE DATA AND STORIES TO BUILD A CASE

Using data is key to making a credible and urgent case for your proposal - then back it up with examples and stories to show the reality of the situation. Use thematic stories that focus on the context and the environment.

3 ESTABLISH A SUNSET DATE

A sunset date means the policy ceases to have effect or exist after a specific date, unless further action is taken to extend it. A sunset date provides an opportunity to review performance and outcomes and gives voters an opportunity to recommit to the initiative. Voters may be uncomfortable with the idea of approving funding in perpetuity. The Children's Movement of Florida successfully employed this approach in Miami-Dade, as did First Things First in Arizona.

4 CONSIDER OPTIONS WHERE EVERYONE PAYS

Financing methods where everyone pays (property or sales tax) are more successful than those that are product based (hotel accommodation or sin tax). Modest property tax increases were approved in Miami-Dade and Seattle as were modest city sales tax increases in Aspen, Denver and San Antonio. Prior to the property tax initiative in Seattle in 2014, a 10-cent tax on all espresso products failed 2-1 in 2003.

5 KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

Consider what it will take to succeed, then determine available resources. Consider forming a coalition to plan and execute the campaign. Many successful initiatives required campaigns to educate, engage and persuade elected officials and voters to support the effort. In other words, it takes money, so plan ahead for how you will fund your effort.

6 CREATE A BROAD-BASED COALITION

Successful initiatives are community-based. Look for partners outside of the early childhood community to be a leading voice: business leaders, clergy, law enforcement and health care providers. The First 2,000 Days initiative, a campaign to recruit nontraditional early childhood supporters, provides tools to engage your community at www.first2000days.org.

7 GAIN SUPPORT FROM LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

Successful initiatives have the support of local elected officials. In San Antonio, Mayor Julian Castro was a champion for the Pre-K 4 SA initiative. Gaining support from elected officials requires understanding what they care about, whom they listen to and the current challenges they face in addressing the needs of the community. The tools provided in Section 5.2 can help you think through these issues and plan how to reach local leaders.

8 ENGAGE THE MEDIA—TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL

An initiative needs to be visible to win. For voters to show up to vote, they have to understand what is at stake, the benefit and what's in it for them. Use your nontraditional champions as spokespeople.

9 KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY

When you know your community, the initiative can be tailored and framed for your audience. In 1988, leaders in Miami-Dade Florida attempted to pass a referendum to fund services for low-income children. It failed. In 2002, the same referendum passed. The difference—services would assist all children.

10 LEARN FROM FAILURE

There is always something to learn from failing. In Denver, referendums were tried in 2000 and 2001 to increase the sales tax by .2 percent to benefit children's services and failed by 56 percent of the vote and 62 percent of the vote respectively. However, in 2006, the city approved an increase of .12 percent for prekindergarten. Even in failing, you begin to build support for future efforts. In 2003, Seattle tried to raise funds for early learning by increasing taxes for espresso products by 10 cents. That initiative lost 2-1. However, in 2014, Seattle approved a modest increase in the property tax, and in September 2015 the city launched its inaugural preschool class.