



# Accelerate Austin

Referendum 2022



# Background: Referendum 2020

- In 2020, APS called for a referendum due to a nearly \$3 million deficit.
- In large part, the deficit was due to a low per-pupil levy value:
  - \$42.70 per student
  - Asked for increase of \$505 per pupil
- The referendum **failed** 5957 to 6137, a difference of 180 votes or just under 1.5%.



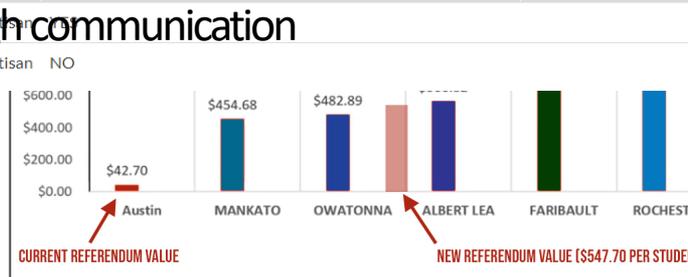
- During postmortem, we identified several issues for future referendums:

- Timing (started too late)
- Lack of community interaction / input
- Not enough communication

## OPERATING REFERENDUM VALUES PER STUDENT



Party	Candidate	Totals	Pct	Graph
		\$1,650.00	\$1,748.96	



# Referendum 2022

- Due to one-time COVID monies, we were able to maintain staffing/programming through the end of FY22 despite failing to pass the referendum.
- Community Survey with BakerTilly - was critical 
- In early 2022, we began working with Rapp Strategies to develop a plan of action in order to pass a new referendum.
- The process began with a survey of the community to see how much they would be willing to support.
- Once that support level was determined, we settled on a new ask of \$470 per pupil.
- With the assistance of Rapp Strategies, we began planning for the November referendum in May of 2022.
- Our hard work paid off as the referendum passed in November 4,512 to 3,831, a margin of 681 or just over 8%.



# Keys to Success:

## 1) Early-Stage Planning

- We began working on the referendum campaign in early 2022.
- We need to turn hard data into actionable strategies and objectives is a process called *Insights and Implications*\*
- This allowed us to plan out our communication strategies including core-messaging, social media pushes, a referendum specific website, and in-person meetings.
- One major issue identified in 2020 was the fact that we hadn't accounted for absentee voting. That meant our big push to share information with the community didn't happen until after many voters had already turned in their ballots.
- By starting the process early, we were able to begin sharing information via multiple channels before the end of the 21-22 school year.
- This also allowed time for the Vote Yes committee to organize and begin supporting the mission of the district.

\*(Lito & Deets, 2015)

# Keys to Success:

## 2) Community Focus

- We made sure to include the community in the referendum process:
  - The referendum value asked for was the result of a community survey.
  - We worked hard to interact with the community via social media and the website, which included an evolving FAQ section for interested voters to learn more.
  - We made a concentrated effort to meet with community groups to present the referendum information developed in the spring and answer any questions.



# Keys to Success:

## 3) Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

- Starting early and working with the community allowed us to communicate more effectively with our voters.
- We utilized a wide variety of channels to communicate:
  - A robust social media presence
  - A referendum specific website
  - Local news and print media
  - Flyers and other material shared at conferences
  - ...and much more.
- We started the process by choosing a brand (Accelerate Austin) and developing a logo.
- We then ensured that all our communications tied back to that brand both visually and via the vocabulary being used.
- We also developed and utilized a messaging calendar so we could effectively plan when to submit letters to the editor, post content to social media, and keep track of the audiences Dr. Page was engaging with.

# Looking to the Future

- We learned a lot with the 2022 referendum:
  - We need to start working early enough to allow for ample planning and reaction time.
  - We need to work with the community to determine the level of support and to answer questions and modify messaging as needed
  - We need to communicate those messages as widely as possible on a consistent schedule.



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