

# COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE 2003 NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

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Colorado's November 2003 elections produced disappointing results for public libraries in the state, a reflection that voters are feeling the effects of the economic downturn and are reluctant to pass tax increases. Overall only 6 of 13 ballot issues for increases in public library funding were successful. Mill levy increases to operate libraries fared better than bond issues to build new ones. If voters were asked for operating funds alone, they tended to approve. If they were asked for capital funds, they

didn't. Asking for both types of funding reduced the odds of getting operating funds. Only one community, Louisville, voted in favor of both a mill levy and a bond issue to fund a new building project. Both requests were contained in one ballot measure. Table 1 summarizes the election results by type of ballot measure. Table 2 gives details about locations and voting percentages for public library measures.

**Table 1: Summary of Colorado November 2003 Election Results for Public Libraries**

Type of ballot measure	Passed	Failed
Bond issue for new building	1	3
Increased mill levy for operations, services, and/or building projects	4	3
Other (sales tax, head tax, override Tabor limitations*)	1	2

\*All of the ballot measures contained language to override Tabor limitations

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**Table 2: Library Issues on November 2003 Ballots in Colorado with Results**

Location	Ballot Issue	Votes	
		Yes	No
Arapahoe Library District	Mill levy increase	<b>58%</b>	42%
Basalt Regional Library District	Mill levy increase	45%	<b>55%</b>
	Bond issue (new library)	43%	<b>57%</b>
City of Boulder	Extend sales tax*	<b>68%</b>	32%
Clear Creek County Library District - Georgetown	Mill levy increase	<b>52%</b>	48%
City of Englewood	Mill levy increase*	30%	<b>70%</b>
	Employee head tax*	30%	<b>70%</b>
City of Louisville	Bond issue and Mill levy increase (new library)	<b>59%</b>	41%
Mesa County Library District - Grand Junction	Bond issue (new library)	49%	<b>51%</b>
	Mill levy increase	50%	<b>50% **</b>
Pikes Peak Library District - Colorado Springs	Bond issue (new libraries, renovation)	43%	<b>57%</b>
	Override Tabor limitations	43%	<b>57%</b>
West Custer County Library District - Westcliffe	Mill levy increase	<b>63%</b>	37%

\*Library services would receive a portion of the funds being voted on in these ballot measures.

\*\*Mesa County's mill levy passed by a small majority of votes, (17,880 vs. 17847), but will not go into effect because it was linked with the bond issue that did not pass.

Directors from libraries that were successful in passing ballot issues emphasized the importance of preparing well for elections. The libraries that had favorable election results relied on the goodwill they had already established in their communities and communicated effectively with their voters about the

We were successful for a number of reasons, one being the fine reputation of our staff and services, laying the groundwork for community support. Then, we had a dedicated group of campaign volunteers who worked diligently to win voter approval of the ballot question.

--Anne Mojo, Director, Louisville Public Library

reasons more funds were needed. Arapahoe County Library District did a survey ahead of time to determine how much the voters would support. Louisville Public Library relied on active volunteers who waged a multi-front campaign to bring in votes. The hard work involved is reflected in this list provided by Anne Mojo, Director of the Louisville Public Library, of all the ways in which Louisville volunteers contributed to the election effort:

- planned activities at numerous campaign meetings;
- secured support from the Mayor and all City Council members;
- distributed brochures in grocery stores, at our booth in the downtown Louisville Street Faires, in the Labor Day Parade, and to every residence in Louisville;
- wrote letters to the editor;
- made phone calls to voters;
- set up yard signs at homes and businesses;
- met with the editorial boards of the *Boulder Daily Camera* and the *Louisville Times*, and received positive endorsements from both newspapers;
- talked about the need for a new library with friends and neighbors; and
- contributed money to the campaign (not a lot, just enough).

The reason we won is that our libraries already had a good reputation in the community. We didn't use flashy advertising. We used a "just the facts" approach by printing a flyer explaining very simply why we needed the increase. We used lots of comparison charts and bullets. When you add in banking fees, we spent less than \$80 total to win this election.

--Sue Lathrop, Director, Clear Creek County Library District

Doing our homework ahead of time – day in and day out – helped smooth the way for the campaign. (As a library district we work hard to remember that everyone who walks through the door of the library is actually our city council person!) We also did a survey ahead of time so we knew we could only ask for enough to restore losses and there was no appetite for "new and improved." Our story was straightforward and compelling: 30% increase in use, and falling revenues. It also didn't hurt that people had read about the closures in Denver, so they knew that real consequences were possible. To get the message out, we had lots of grassroots volunteer support, walked precincts, put up a website, handed out thousands and thousands of fact sheets, and raised enough money to do one mailing to targeted areas. The result was a community/library collaboration to keep a much-needed service.

--Eloise May, Director, Arapahoe Library District

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