

# The Use of Polling In Political Campaigns

North Side High School

Statistics Class

June 2, 2010

# Outline

- Types of polls
- Goals of communication from a campaign
- How a campaign crafts a message
- How a campaign communicates its message
- Staying on Message
- Developing a media calendar

# Types of Polls

- National polls: efforts to measure public opinion within a limited period of time using a national representative sample: trying to achieve scientifically valid measures of the K, beliefs, or attitudes of the adult population.
- Gallup, CBS News/New York Times
- General Social Survey, National Election Studies: more detailed/in-depth, good for academic research

# Types of Polls

- Campaign polls
  - Benchmark: initial poll on a candidate and issues on which campaign strategy is based and against which later polls are compared
  - Tracking: ongoing series of surveys that follow changes in public opinion over time: rolling
- Exit: election-related questions asked of voters right after they vote
  - 2000 Florida for Gore, no Bush, no it's too close to call
  - Not supposed to predict the race, but to explain the race: of course if they were really far off on the prediction, then why should we believe the explanations that come from them?

# Types of Polls

- Pseudo polls
  - On-line, Poll21, Literary Digest: limited audience and self-selected audience
  - Push polls: polls that ask for reactions to hypothetical, often false, information in order to manipulate public opinion
  - No sample, call as many as possible
  - Spread bad information
  - Hide sponsor

# Goals of Communication from a Campaign

- Increase name recognition
- Define the candidate(s)
- Deliver the message
- Stay on message

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Start with:
  - Biographies (personal and professional)
  - Motivation for seeking office
  - Ideas
- Begin refining it by talking with people (small groups)
- Poll
- Focus groups

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Biographies
  - Birthplace
  - Education
  - Family
  - Religious affiliation
  - Employment history
  - Community service
  - Elected offices held (votes cast, projects and legislation supported)
- The goal is to develop the most compelling history for the person that will convince voters this candidate is best qualified to hold the office.

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Motivation for seeking office
  - Anger
  - Need a job
  - Stepping stone to other offices
  - Gaining power and authority
  - Giving back to the community
- The goal is to identify the most accurate description of why the candidate is running for office that will resonate with the voters.

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Ideas for mayoral candidate
  1. City History Day
  2. Income tax abatement for R&D employees
  3. Income tax rebate to businesses who pay off college loans
  4. Quarterly town hall meetings: City gives updates on goals and takes public comment
  5. Add signs to traffic signals informing people who to call if the signal is not working
  6. Summer concert or movie series rotating through the parks: combine this with “Fan Friday”
  7. Develop a curriculum for residents to take at the police and fire academy for a nominal fee (high school students can attend for free (recruitment tool))

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Beginning to refine the message
  - Talk with family, friends, advisors
  - Talk with small groups
  - Find words, terms, phrases, and stories with which the candidate is comfortable and to which the audience responds. These may not be the same thing.

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Polling
  - **DOES NOT** tell you where to stand on issues
  - **DOES** tell you how to deliver your message
- Do not have to test everything
  - City History Day
  - Quarterly town hall meetings: City gives updates on goals and takes public comment
  - Add signs to traffic signals informing people who to call if the signal is not working
  - Summer concert or movie series rotating through the parks: combine this with “Fan Friday”

# How a Campaign Crafts a Message

- Do have to test some things
  - Income tax abatement for R&D employees
  - Income tax rebate to businesses who pay off college loans
  - Develop a curriculum for residents to take at the police and fire academy for a nominal fee (high school students can attend for free (recruitment tool))

# Order of the Questions in the Poll

- Filter (employment in news, marketing, political campaign, registered to vote, likelihood of voting)
- Right track / wrong track
- Most important issues facing our city
- Prefer a Republican or Democrat
- Thermometer
- Similar approach / different approach than current mayor
- Horse race

# Order of the Questions in the Poll (cont.)

- Specific issues
- Ideas
- Positive biographies of the candidates
- Horse race
- Negative biographies of the candidates
- Horse race
- Demographics

# Questions for the Poll: Ideas

Now I'm going to list some proposals involving issues facing our city. For each one, please tell me whether your reaction to the proposal is very favorable, somewhat favorable, neutral, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable.

# Questions for the Poll: Ideas

- Income tax abatement for R&D employees
  - An income tax abatement for research and development employees so companies in our city can be competitive and grow
  - An income tax abatement to promote innovation in our businesses
  - Encourage businesses in our city to be innovative by providing an income tax abatement for research and development employees

# Questions for the Poll: Ideas

- Income tax rebate to businesses that pay off college loans
  - Encourage businesses in our city to recruit college graduates by providing an income tax rebate to businesses that pay off college loans
  - Fight the brain drain problem we have by offering an income tax rebate to businesses that pay off college loans

# Questions for the Poll: Ideas

- Develop a curriculum for residents to take at the police and fire academy for a nominal fee (high school students can attend for free ((recruitment tool))
  - Make our community safer by offering residents a certificate program at our police and fire academy
  - Recruit young people into public safety jobs by offering them free courses at the police and fire academy

# Questions for the Poll: Positive Biographies

- Jane Doe has been a leader on city council for 12 years championing programs that promote a safer community.
- Jane Doe owns a business with 45 employees and has served on city council for 12 years. Her success in the private sector and on city council have proven she knows how to balance a budget without cutting the quality of services.
- Jane Doe is a lifelong resident of the community. She earned a Bachelor's degree and MBA from City U. She is a successful business owner who is committed to our community. She serves on the board of XXX, YYY, ZZZ, and has served on city council for 12 years.

# Questions for the Poll: Negative Biographies

- Jane Doe is no stranger to raising taxes as her record shows. She voted for every tax increase during her 12 years on council.
- Jane Doe represents an old approach to government and refuses to consider fresh new ideas. Her 12 years on council will keep her from moving the community forward.
- We cannot afford Jane Doe's double standards. She consistently votes to raise our taxes, but pays her employees below the average wage for our community.

# What the Poll Tells Us

- Current attitude of the electorate
- Appeal of political figures
- Baseline horse race
- Appeal of the ideas
- Effect of the positive biographies
- Effect of the negative biographies
- Who responds to which ideas and biographies

# Focus Groups

- Add qualitative data to the research
- Allow for testing subtle nuances

# How a Campaign Communicates Its Message

- Earned media
  - Press conferences
  - Candidate forums / debates
  - Radio and television appearances
  - News stories and editorial board interviews
- Paid media
  - Television and radio commercials
  - Direct mail
  - Web presence
  - Signs

# How a Campaign Communicates Its Message

- Issues regarding earned media
  - How does the media define newsworthy?
  - How does the media define fair and balanced?
  - Is the media over-taxed regarding time and space for news?
  - What is the relationship between the news staff and editorial staff?
  - Are there fundamental differences between papers, radio, and television?

# How a Campaign Communicates Its Message

- Issues regarding paid media
  - It has to match the candidate
  - It has to look good, but not too good
  - Often there should not be only one ad running (even though the message in the ads might be the same)
  - Someone has to watch and listen to be certain that the right ad is running in the right time on the right channel
  - Paid media might become earned media

# Staying on Message

- Voters have limited exposure to candidates
- Every exposure has to be maximized
- Polling and other research has provided an idea of which issues, biographies, and ideas resonate the best
- Match the message to the audience

# Staying on Message

- Staying on message does not mean that the candidate cannot talk about things that are not tested or that were not among the highest performers
- Staying on message does mean that the candidate has to be able to see the relationship between seemingly unrelated issues

# Staying on Message

- How are the crime rate or the condition of streets related to job creation?
- How are state parks and the tax structure of the state related to each other?
- How is agriculture policy related to highways or foreign policy?

# Developing a Calendar

- Work backwards from Election Day
- Include in the calendar known media opportunities (parades, regularly scheduled news stories, debates / forums / candidate appearances, etc.
- Schedule earned media opportunities
- Schedule paid media communication

# Developing a Calendar

- Known media opportunities
  - Holidays
  - Parades and festivals
  - September 11<sup>th</sup>
  - Ubiquitous stories
    - Yard signs
    - Last day to register to vote
  - Opportunistic stories
    - Political party events
    - Governor's announcement about taxes

# Developing a Calendar

- Earned media events
  - Press conferences related to your ideas
  - Press conferences related to endorsements
  - Appearances on radio shows
  - Editorial board interviews
  - Debates / forums / candidate appearances

# Developing a Calendar

- Paid media
  - Television commercials
  - Radio commercials
  - Direct mail
  - Signs
- Earned media should reinforce paid media

# Conclusion