



Referendum Community Engagement and Marketing Proposal



Proposal prepared for:

Brad Sellner

Superintendent

Michelle Heuer

Chairperson, Board of Education

Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools
8700 County Road 6 SW – P.O. Box 708 – Howard Lake, MN 55349

May 3, 2023

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Dear Superintendent Sellner and Board Chairperson Heuer:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this proposal for Referendum Community Engagement and Marketing Services on behalf of Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools.

This letter outlines key messages the school board should consider that we believe will increase the likelihood that your next referendum will be approved by voters.

Experience and expertise. DehlerPR has run 37 referendum campaigns, most of which have been successful. We have a formula that is tailored to your unique community. Our team includes the former superintendent of Watertown-Mayer who can mentor your new superintendent.

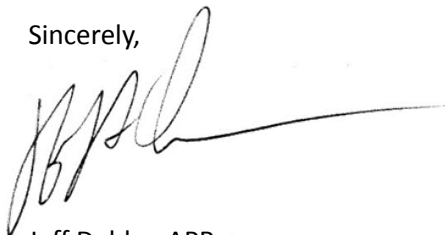
Efficient use of time. Your new superintendent will need to meet community members and begin to develop relationships at the same time as conveying referendum information. Every minute that DehlerPR creates messages and content about the referendum is a minute that the superintendent can spend in the community, instead of at a desk creating content himself/herself.

Investment with huge ROI. Your entire investment in a referendum, running a special election, paying for communications, dedicating staff time to community engagement, is significant. But it is a fraction of one percent of the return on that investment. In addition, as a member of Resource Training & Solutions, HLLW is eligible for a 10 percent discount on services when contracting for services through RT&S.

We have helped districts pass a referendum after losing multiple elections in previous years. We have helped school districts pass referenda in the face of vocal opposition. If you are ready to try a new strategy, we are eager to work with you.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal. We look forward to speaking with you further.

Sincerely,

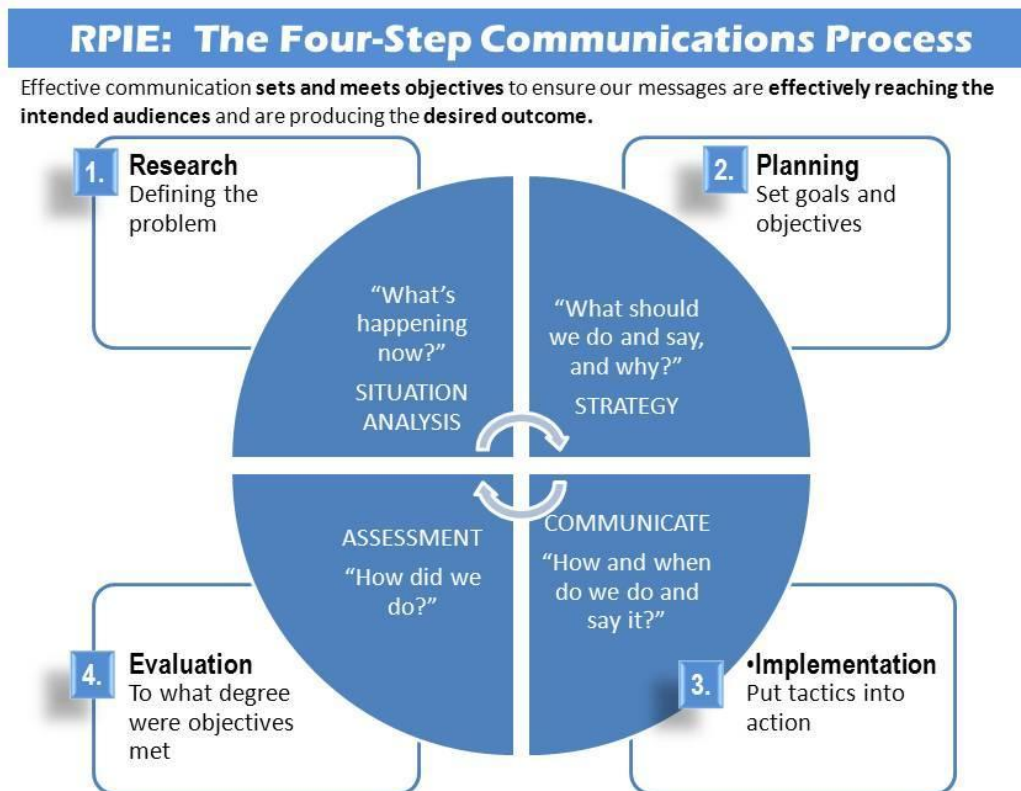


Jeff Dehler, APR

Our Approach

Jeff Dehler Public Relations, LLC exists to improve communities through exceptional public relations, marketing, and strategic counsel. We are an independent consulting firm that matches experienced professionals with clients based on the client's industry and needs. As a "virtual agency" (home offices), we bring clients more value by providing years of experience and high-quality expertise combined with low overhead. Services include strategic counsel, communications planning, public affairs, crisis communications, and traditional and social media relations.

DehlerPR adheres to the world-wide, industry-standard, four-step communications process of Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation, a process championed by the Public Relations Society of America and the National School Public Relations Association.



We overlay this process with our corporate values: We listen intently to client needs, dig deep to understand the situation, and work closely with clients to address their unique needs, and the unique needs of the client stakeholders. Always unique; never a cookie cutter approach.

Meeting the Needs of Your Community – Situation Analysis

Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Schools (ISD 2687) is a Minnesota school district located about an hour west of the Twin Cities. The school district serves approximately 1,300 students pre-kindergarten through 12th grade at a high school/middle school (located between Howard Lake and Winsted), and elementary schools in Waverly and Winsted.

The district serves the communities of Howard Lake, Waverly, and Winsted in a mostly rural area, but with a growing residential population. Enrollment has slowly but steadily grown as has assessed value, resulting in some taxpayer savings. All three communities are largely white with small pockets of Hispanic and other groups. Residents are politically conservative, having voted for the Republican presidential candidate in each of the past six elections.

The school board has three long-time members and four members who are new within the last two years. The superintendent has been in place for more than a dozen years but is retiring June 30.

The district has historically been financially sound, with two small operating levies in place, but one levy expired in 2021 and another expires this year. HLWW has the lowest operating levy revenue of any neighboring district. Budget adjustments have mostly been related to attrition and not filling vacant positions. The district is threatened by a “fiscal cliff” within two years if significant budget cuts are not made, or if an operating levy is not approved.

The district has sought voter approval of a referendum fairly often over the last 20 years.

- 2022 - two operating levy questions, neither approved
- 2020 - two questions, operating levy, capital projects levy, neither approved
- 2019 - two questions, operating levy, capital projects levy, neither approved
- 2013 - two questions, voters narrowly approved a \$2.3 million bond for improvements to the middle school while turning down a \$6.6 million bond for improvements to the two elementaries
- 2009 - three questions, \$500 per pupil operating levy renewed, inflation factor approved, revoke and replace a \$50 per pupil operating levy with a \$150 levy failed
- 2003 - building bond for a new k-12 school building failed

The school board is considering running an operating levy in fall 2023.

Referendum Community Engagement and Marketing

Goal

The goal of this effort will be to seek community input on solutions to the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winstead School District's financial challenges and clearly communicate to voters within the district the impact of a "Yes" vote or "No" vote on an operating levy referendum.

General Marketing and Communications Strategy

The school district has an obligation to its residents to inform them of decisions that impact the community. Factual information distributed to all residents through direct mail, traditional and social media, video and website is important to voters so they can make an informed decision at the polls. Voters should know 1) what challenges the district faces, 2) about the consequences of their Yes or No vote, and 3) that the information provided by the school district is unbiased, factual information. If they are hearing information in the community that doesn't sound quite right, the school district should be recognized as the go-to source of factual information.

Proposed Scope of Services

We propose a robust referendum informational campaign with a variety of tactics to communicate factual information about the district's situation and the proposed referendum questions. The consultant will review relevant existing research on the school district including results from the 2022 School Perceptions survey and from recent elections. Based on the research, we will draft and implement a strategic communications plan that meets the district's referendum information campaign goal.

Research and Community Engagement

- 1-day in-person or virtual Kick-Off Meeting with superintendent, communications director, business manager, elections clerk, and key school board members.
- Community Meeting with kick-off attendees and community members, including: parents, employees, business leaders, farm community leaders, and cultural leaders to take community climate reading.
- Backgrounding - review of existing data to help understand the district's situation and the opinions of community members.
- Phone interviews with community opinion leaders to determine district reputation, messaging and objections to a referendum proposal.
- Facilitation of two community meetings to provide updated information about your financial situation including impact of this year's state legislation, seek input on possible solutions, and identify school champions. Deliverables to include agendas, slide presentations, facilitation questions, and a report.

Planning

- Setting communications goals and objectives
- Identifying key messages
- A written communications plan — a brief outline of strategies and tactics for the campaign
- A weekly comprehensive task list of tactics for the district and consultants to complete

Implementation

Communications will include:

- Implementation of a communications plan for the referendum campaign
- Campaign Graphic and Tagline
- Standalone referendum website with visuals: charts, graphs, or content for your website
- Electronic communication (email, social media)
- Direct mail (Fast Facts, assistance with notice of special election, brochure)
- Vocal/written support from businesses, local area VIPs, and/or business groups
- Support for superintendent and staff at events and meetings
- Media relations (multiple news releases, opinion pieces)
- Strategic counsel — bi-weekly one-hour phone calls. Consultant will provide agendas, lead meetings, provide notes and action items.

Evaluation

Evaluation will include:

- Gather anecdotal information from superintendent, school board members and others who are visiting with community members
- Mid-campaign online survey of parents and staff

Additional Suggested Tactics

Video production, still photography.

School District Expectations

School district staff will play a critical role in providing information related to current communications practices. The consultant will rely on a commitment from the district to support an open flow of information about the school district, about evolving issues, about community feedback, and to assist in media monitoring. Consultant will coordinate directly with the superintendent and other district staff who are responsible for the website, social media channels, email marketing, photography or other communications tasks. School district elected officials and staff, especially the superintendent, will play a critical role in providing information related to the referendum information campaign to community stakeholders through meetings with community members, media relations, etc.

Partnerships

The consultant will work with internal staff and other district consultants to identify possible opportunities for cost efficiency, such as strategic messaging, graphic design, printing and distribution costs, etc.

Coordination with Citizen Groups

The consultant is aware of Minnesota Statute 211A which prohibits the use of public funds for the purpose of promoting the passage of a ballot question. We provide pro bono strategic communications and political advocacy counsel to citizens groups.

Citizens Committee Strategy, Counsel and Marketing

Howard Lake-Waverly-Winstead will not pay for any advocacy referendum communication. The Citizens (Vote Yes) Committee that is supporting the referendum would receive pro bono advice from DehlerPR to ensure members of the committee have the district information needed to complete their work. The goal of the Yes Committee is to identify yes voters and get them to the polls. They rely on the school district for information about the referendum, but raise funds independently of the district for campaign and marketing expenses. The Committee is made up of local advocates for the school referendum. These community members shoulder major responsibility for the success of the referendum, but they more than likely are inexperienced in running a political campaign. DehlerPR would provide strategy and tactical assistance – the constant care, feeding and encouragement of the committee to keep volunteers motivated.

Proposed Timeline

June: Kick-off meeting, research, draft communications plan and timeline, recruit volunteers

July: Community engagement meetings, school board decision

August: Campaign rollout: Key messages, brand, website, fact sheet mailing

September: Yes voter identification, Get out the early vote activities, meetings with parents and community groups

October: Meetings with parents and community groups, Yes voter identification, Get out the vote activities, district brochure mailing

November: Election

Budget & Rates

DehlerPR discounts hourly rates by 10 percent for schools and nonprofits. HLWW is also eligible for a 10 percent RT&S discount. Rates are:

\$121.50 for high level-strategy/planning and counsel, content creation, coordination, and support
\$55 for research, backgrounding, social media content, light graphic design

Any services requested by the client outside of the scope will be billed at the same rates. Work outside of the scope of services will be agreed upon by client and consultant in advance. Standard markup rate of 15% for subcontracted services, such as graphic design, will be applied. The customer will be invoiced monthly for actual work completed.

Project cost estimate:

Referendum Community Engagement and Marketing: \$32,000 - \$38,000

The range of costs is wide due to the number of options available, and the ability of the school district to provide assistance in some areas. Community engagement meetings are extremely important. The level of participation from your consultants will impact the budget.

Expenses

Direct costs, such as printing, postage, assistance from a direct mail service, annual marketing email subscription fees, video production expenses, etc. are not included in this proposal. These costs can be provided under separate estimates.

Meet Our Team



Jeff Dehler, APR, is the “Chief Relationship Builder” with DehlerPR. DehlerPR has written communications plans, completed branding processes, assisted with communications, and helped schools pass more than two dozen referendum questions. Jeff has led communications efforts for a 12,000 student school district, a metro-area county, and Minnesota’s first commuter rail line. He is Accredited in Public Relations through NSPRA and is active in school PR associations in Indiana and Minnesota. He presents regularly at school board, superintendent, and business manager associations. Jeff lives with his spouse, Rev. Debbie Dehler, in Louisville, KY.



Ron Wilke is a 40-year veteran of public schools and now provides senior strategic counseling to DehlerPR clients. He recently retired as Superintendent of Schools in the Watertown-Mayer School District. Ron began his career as Director of Bands for two school districts in southeastern Minnesota. He served as the La Crescent-Hokah Elementary School Principal prior to serving six years as District Superintendent. Ron earned a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater, a Master’s Degree from Winona State University and has completed graduate work at the University of Wisconsin. Ron lives in La Crescent, MN with his spouse Karen.



Jayne Helgevold is an account manager for DehlerPR. She brings experience in communications, crisis management, and project management. Jayne has years of experience with a Fortune 500 financial services company, weathering a number of market meltdowns, and with small nonprofits. Jayne has broad-based experience in fields as diverse as personal finance, healthcare, eldercare, and faith-based organizations, finding the story and humanity behind the chaos and the mundane. Jayne has volunteered countless hours on behalf of animal advocacy groups. Jayne lives with her spouse, Bob, and her mom in Macon, GA.



Lindsey Chamberland is an electronic communication specialist for DehlerPR. She plays an important role in many aspects of client work by assisting with research, backgrounding, social media, e-newsletters, customer reporting and more. Lindsey's first job was in the greenhouse at the Minnesota State Fair where she worked for five years and was an administrative communications intern in the Competition department. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota - Duluth in communication with a minor in music. She has training and experience as a composer and band director. Lindsey lives in Roseville, MN.

What Our School Clients are Saying

"DehlerPR was a true asset in our referendum process. Jeff helped with website information, communications, and the design of a perfect logo for our scenario. St. James had 6 failed attempts at a building bond (without a consultant). With the help of Jeff and team, we got it passed on the 7th attempt! We are very appreciative of the work that they did."

Becky Cselovszki | Superintendent | ST. JAMES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"I have now worked with DehlerPR on two successful referendum campaigns. Their services were essential to our success. The pandemic made it more challenging to engage our community. Parents had different concerns. Our staff simply did not have the bandwidth to complete the scope of work necessary to educate our public. Jeff and team helped us pivot to find new ways to engage, and to shape messages to meet the needs of the community."

Bill Adams | Superintendent | NEW LONDON-SPICER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"In the last three years, we have successfully passed both an operating levy and a building bond referendum with help from DehlerPR. Their services were key to our success. While the pandemic made it more challenging, they helped us find new ways to engage with our community, and to communicate our needs in meaningful messaging that resonated with our parents and residents."

Timothy R. Schochenmaier | Superintendent | CENTRAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"Our referendum was dependent on strong (Herculean!) efforts from the district, from our Yes committee and from our communications consultants. It truly was an "All In" effort by everyone! Our consultants set the strategy, the tone, and the pace for our information campaign. We needed their expertise to create the plan, and their time to create all the communications materials needed to get our message out."

Dave Bernhardson | Superintendent | Inver Grove Heights Schools

We Have Proudly Served These Educators

Belgrade-Brooten-El Rosa (MN), Benton (IN), Breckenridge (MN), Carlton (MN), Central (Norwood Young America, MN), Chatfield (MN), Chisholm (MN), Cleveland (MN), Crosby-Ironton (MN), Eastern Carver County (MN), Eden Prairie (MN), Forest Lake (MN), Gibbon Fairfax Winthrop (MN), Franklin Township (IN), Hawley (MN), Inver Grove Heights (MN), Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton (MN), La Crescent (MN), Little Falls (MN), Melrose (MN), Monroe County (IN), New Ulm (MN), Ogilvie (MN), Pelican Rapids (MN), Pierz (MN), Red Rock Central (MN), Robbinsdale (MN), St. Cloud (MN), St. Croix Central (WI), St. James (MN), St. Louis Park (MN), Viroqua (WI), Waconia (MN), Watertown-Mayer (MN), Waterville-Elysian- Morristown (MN), Worthington (MN), Zionsville (IN)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this proposal!

*This document is a proposal only and not a legally binding contract.
The services and costs outlined are provided in good faith and are dependent on
information available at the time of the drafting of the document.
Our proposal is valid for six months.*