

OUR HOMES

OUR VOTES

BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS



HOUSING ON THE BALLOT

How to Organize a Successful Ballot
Measure Campaign for Affordable
Homes

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**NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION**

HOUSING ON THE BALLOT



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INTRODUCTION

To achieve affordable housing solutions, advocates must show up at the ballot box and elect bipartisan housing champions. Elections also offer a critical opportunity to take the issue of affordable housing directly to the voters through **ballot measures**. Over the past few years, voters have approved significant new funding for affordable housing and enacted tenant protections through ballot measures at the state and local levels. The success of ballot measure campaigns shows that voters are ready to enact bold solutions – even in communities where elected officials are hesitant to commit new resources or strengthen tenants’ rights.

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This resource from the *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign summarizes the successes of housing-related ballot measures in recent elections and offers guidance for housing advocates seeking to mobilize around ballot measures in 2022. Ballot measure campaigns can be time-consuming and expensive undertakings, but fortunately there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Advocates can turn to the lessons learned from past campaigns as they develop their own plans.

A NOTE ON LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations must not endorse or oppose political candidates, they can legally express positions on ballot initiatives, bond measures, and other policies brought directly to the voters. Under federal tax law, ballot measure advocacy is treated as lobbying, which is permitted (with important restrictions) for 501(c)3 nonprofits. For more information, refer to the Bolder Advocacy program’s [Ballot Measures Toolkit](#).

RECENT BALLOT MEASURE CAMPAIGNS

In 2020 and 2021, states and municipalities passed dozens of ballot measures related to housing and homelessness. Many of these ballot measures created new funding sources for affordable homes – such as taxes, bonds, and fees on short-term rentals. Voters also approved measures to increase tenant protections, such as right to counsel in eviction court and rent stabilization ordinances. Some campaigns mobilized to defeat harmful ballot measures, such as increased enforcement of camping bans that punish people experiencing homelessness while they wait for access to stable, affordable housing and other needed services. Below is a summary of select housing-related ballot measures from elections held in 2020 and 2021. Please note that this summary is not comprehensive. For more information on housing-related ballot measures that are not included in this summary, reach out to ourhomes@nlihc.org.

Increasing Resources for Affordable Housing

A major focus of recent ballot measures is increasing resources to build and preserve affordable homes. Such ballot measures were successfully approved by voters in communities across the nation, from California and Colorado to New Mexico and North Carolina. Ballot measures included proposals to increase resources by redirecting existing funds, increasing taxes on real estate transfers, issuing bonds, and setting small fees on short-term rentals.

Redirecting Existing Funds

Voters in Los Angeles County, CA, for example, authorized [Measure J](#) in 2020. The measure requires at least 10% of existing locally controlled revenues to be directed to community investments and alternatives to incarceration. When fully phased in, the measure will generate nearly \$1 billion dedicated to a wide range of community-based services, youth development programs, job-creation initiatives (including construction jobs for the expansion of affordable and supportive housing), and affordable housing and rental assistance. [The Re-Imagine L.A. Coalition](#) of more than 200 community-based organizations and individuals from across Los Angeles County led the fight for Measure J and is now working actively on implementation. The measure passed with [57.12% of voters](#) in support.

Residents of San Francisco, CA, [approved](#) a ballot referral in November 2020 that authorized the city to develop or acquire up to 10,000 units of low-income rental housing. Because of a provision in the California state constitution, voters must authorize the city's development, construction, or acquisition of low-income rental housing projects or the use of public agencies' funds for nonprofits and companies to do so. Just over [73% of voters](#) supported the measure.

Voters in Philadelphia, PA, voted in November 2021 to devote 0.5% of the annual general fund budget to the city's Housing Trust Fund, which supports nonprofit developers' construction and preservation of affordable and accessible homes. Homes are targeted to those earning less than 80% of area median income (AMI), and a minimum of 10% of all homes must be made accessible to people with mobility or sensory

impairments. The mandatory appropriation, which takes effect in fiscal year 2023, was originally expected to invest [\\$25 million](#) in the Housing Trust Fund each year, although more recent estimates suggest that this investment could be as high as \$28 million annually. [More than 70% of voters](#) supported the ballot measure.

Real Estate Taxes

In 2020, San Francisco, CA, voters [approved](#) a resolution that would increase taxes on certain real estate sales and leases of 35 years or more. The ballot measure raised the real estate transfer tax to 5.5% on real estate transactions of \$10 million to \$25 million and to 6% on transactions of more than \$25 million. The measure is estimated to [raise \\$196 million annually](#). Some funds are dedicated to the Emergency Rent Resolution and Relief fund for landlords who waived rent for their tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Half of future revenue will go to the Housing Stability Fund to finance the creation of permanently affordable housing. The measure passed with [57.55% of voters](#) in support.

Bond Issuance

Raleigh, NC, voters approved a [2020 ballot referendum](#) to authorize an \$80 million bond measure with revenue dedicated to affordable housing. Raleigh estimates the [bond will fund](#) more than 3,200 new affordable homes in its first five years. Most of the revenue will go to constructing new homes through a public-private partnership and be targeted to providing affordable housing for people who earn less than 30% of AMI. Additional funds will be used to rehabilitate the existing affordable housing stock. The bond measure was approved by [71.74% of voters](#) - the highest approval rate on a bond measure in the city's history.

Similarly, voters in Baltimore, MD, passed a ballot measure in November 2020 to issue \$12 million in bonds to fund the planning, development, and execution of the city's Affordable Housing Program, which includes investments in its Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The measure passed with [86.08%](#) of voters in support.

Albuquerque, NM, voters authorized their city to issue up to \$3.33 million in bonds for the [Workforce Housing Trust Fund](#), which finances the construction and preservation of affordable

housing, as well as land banking for future development. Since the fund was established in 2007, nearly 87% of units created through the fund have been made affordable for households with incomes at or below 80% of the city's Median Family Income (MFI), and the majority are affordable for families at or below 50% of MFI. A total of [71% of voters](#) supported the measure in November 2021.

Fees on Short-Term Rentals

Numerous mountain communities across Colorado passed ballot measures in November 2021 to increase fees on short-term rentals and invest revenues in community housing. In Leadville, [69.7% of voters](#) approved a new 3% tax on hotel, motel, and short-term rental guests. Avon passed a 2% excise tax on short-term rentals that is [estimated](#) to raise at least \$1.5 million, which [will be used](#) to purchase land, construct affordable homes, and pursue other related community housing initiatives. More than [70% of voters](#) supported the measure. The town of Ouray [passed](#) a 15% excise tax on short-term rentals – the state's highest tax on vacation rentals – with [56.8% of voters](#) in favor. Telluride approved a 2% Town Lodgers' Tax on short-term rentals, which will be used to mitigate the effects of tourism on the community as determined by the town council. Development of affordable or workforce housing is one of the possible uses of the money. Telluride also [voted](#) to increase the business license fees for short-term rental units, direct the revenue into the town's Affordable Housing Fund, and cap the total number of licenses at the number that had already been issued as of November 2, 2021. In Vail, [53.7% of voters](#) supported a ballot measure to [increase Vail's sales tax](#) from 4% to 4.5%, with the additional revenue to be invested in housing initiatives.

Strengthening Tenant Protections

Some jurisdictions successfully strengthened renter protections via ballot initiatives in recent years. These measures have typically focused on rent stabilization and access to legal representation in eviction matters.

Rent Stabilization

St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN, each passed ballot initiatives in November 2021 to establish the first rent stabilization ordinances in Minnesota.

Because of a [1984 state law](#), municipalities in Minnesota cannot regulate rents on private residential property without voters' approval in a general election.

In St. Paul, voters passed the nation's [most rigorous rent stabilization ordinance](#), which will limit rent increases to 3% annually. In contrast to nearly all other rent stabilization ordinances currently in effect, this restriction applies to new construction, and landlords cannot raise rents beyond the 3% threshold even when a new tenant begins a lease. While most rent stabilization ordinances account for inflation when determining maximum rent increases, St. Paul's annual 3% cap will not be adjusted to factor in the rate of inflation. The ballot initiative, which passed with [52.9%](#) of voters' support, instructed the city council to establish a process by which landlords can apply for exemptions from the rent-increase caps.

Minneapolis's ballot measure, which passed with [53.2% of the vote](#), authorizes the city council to establish a rent-control ordinance, although it does not prescribe policy details, unlike its counterpart in St. Paul.

Legal Representation

In Boulder, CO, voters passed a 2020 ballot [initiative](#) that guarantees free legal representation to individuals and families who are served a summons to eviction court. Landlords pay an annual \$75 excise tax per licensed rental property to fund a program that provides free legal representation to tenants facing eviction. The measure, known as the [No Eviction Without Representation initiative](#), creates a tenants' committee and provides rental assistance to those vulnerable to eviction. The city of Boulder estimates that this measure [raised \\$1.9 million](#) in tax revenues in the first full fiscal year.

Addressing Homelessness

Ballot measures addressing homelessness have usually taken one of two approaches: increasing resources to better serve people experiencing homelessness, or criminalizing homelessness, a counterproductive strategy that punishes people experiencing homelessness while they wait for access to permanent housing and services.

Increased Resources

In San Francisco, CA, voters passed a [measure](#) that authorizes the city to issue up to \$487.5 million in bonds to fund parks and street improvements, as well as permanent investments in transitional supportive housing facilities, shelters, and/or facilities that serve people experiencing homelessness, people with mental health challenges, or people facing substance use issues. News reports [indicated](#) that \$207 million would be earmarked specifically for homelessness projects. The measure was placed on the ballot by San Francisco Mayor London Breed and the Board of Supervisors, and it passed with [70.63%](#) of voters' support in November 2020.

Voters in Denver, CO, approved Measure 2B, in November 2020. The ballot measure increased Denver's sales tax on non-essential items by 0.25%, effective January 1, 2021, which will generate an estimated \$40 million annually to be invested in housing and homelessness services. The tax revenues will be used to create more pathways out of homelessness through proven models such as permanent housing with supportive services, while also replenishing shelter capacity that was lost due to the pandemic and improving the health and housing outcomes of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness by providing mental and physical health, employment, and other services. The measure passed with [62.81% of voters'](#) support.

Denver voters also voted in November 2021 to authorize \$38.6 million in bonds to improve the city's emergency housing and sheltering system. [These resources](#) will enable the city to fund improvements to existing shelters, acquire up to 300 motel rooms for non-congregate sheltering, and convert a shelter that it currently leases into a city-owned, 24-hour facility. The ballot measure passed with [61.6% of voters' support](#).

Criminalization

In Denver, CO, voters rejected a ballot initiative that would have made it more difficult for people to exit homelessness. The measure aimed to increase enforcement of the city's camping ban, require written permission for camping on private property, set a maximum of four city-

sanctioned homeless encampments on public property, and invest city resources in these authorized sites.

As it appeared on the ballot, the measure would have enabled residents who submit a complaint against an unauthorized encampment to sue the city if enforcement actions were not taken within 72 hours. Two days prior to the election, however, Denver District Court Judge Darryl Shockley [ruled](#) that the 72-hour requirement would infringe upon law enforcement's ability to guarantee constitutional protections to those suspected of breaking the law and impede the city's timely responses to other illegal activities. Because of the judge's ruling, the 72-hour enforcement provision would not have taken effect even if the ballot initiative had passed.

Ultimately, voters defeated the measure, with [56% voting in opposition](#) in the November 2021 elections.

ORGANIZING A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

Behind every winning ballot measure is a well-organized campaign. Some campaigns in 2020 and 2021 were grassroots efforts, while others were led by elected officials who voted to put the measures on the ballot. Some campaigns were well-funded, while others had limited resources. Some campaigns had staunch opposition, while others built broad-based coalitions and achieved buy-in from diverse stakeholders, such as the business community.

The successes of recent campaigns offer valuable lessons for organizers who are working to pass ballot measures in 2022 and beyond. Here are some key takeaways for housing advocates as they mobilize around ballot measures:

√ Know the basics.

Ballot measures are governed by state rules and are allowed only in certain states and jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction has its own set of rules that determine the process for placing a measure on the ballot, such as the minimum number of petition signatures to qualify. Vote

thresholds for passage sometimes vary based on the type of question put forward to voters. Ballot measures may require a simple majority or a supermajority to pass, depending on the jurisdiction and the type of ballot measure. There are also specific rules that govern some of the procedures for processing ballots. Always take the time to become acquainted with the rules about ballot measures in your own jurisdiction so you can set goals and develop strategies accordingly.

The early stages of a ballot measure campaign require diligent research. The wording of the ballot question matters. Ballot measures can be written with very technical language, and their meaning is not always clear to the average person. A poorly written measure could result in voters making a choice they did not intend. Leaders of ballot measure campaigns must invest significant time and effort to determine the wording of the ballot question that they will put directly before the voters. Organizers should also research how to communicate about their ballot measure in a way that resonates with voters most effectively.

Voters want to know where their money is going. Be clear and transparent. Many recent ballot measures raised new revenue through hotel and short-term rental taxes, general obligation bonds, sales taxes, real estate transfer fees, or vacancy taxes. Persuading voters to agree to these new revenues is often easier when the proposal and the ballot explicitly state how the money will be used, with a narrow and clear message about increased resources for housing production or homeless services, for example. Revenue ballot questions that state they will generate revenues for general funds tend to receive less support.

✓ **Design the campaign based on your resources and capacity.**

As you make a campaign plan, take stock of your resources, partners, and collective strengths. Successful campaigns put all available resources to use and carefully choose how to allocate limited funding. Some campaigns hire campaign consultants who can provide expertise – but these can be expensive. Other campaigns

are staffed entirely by committed volunteers, including tenants and renters themselves.

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Even with limited resources, you can get your campaign off to a strong start by building on existing organizing efforts and developing the type of infrastructure that has proven successful in the past. Consult with experienced organizers – whether in your own community or others – to understand successful plans for voter outreach, media engagement, and other aspects of the campaign. In addition to housing advocates, you should consult with local advocates in other sectors who have organized efforts to enact ballot measures addressing their issues. Work with organizers who have a history of successful ballot measure advocacy in your state or municipality and replicate those components of their plans that worked well in your community.

✓ **Build a strong and diverse base of support.**

Mobilizing a broad coalition in support of a ballot measure will extend the campaign’s base beyond the communities in which housing advocates already have strong connections. Other coalition members will bring additional resources and areas of expertise, and they will spread the word about the campaign through their own networks. However, always be mindful that it is important to keep a clear and unified message about the ballot measure, which can become more challenging with a broad-based coalition. Take the time to develop community norms and set clear expectations about each coalition member’s role. Depending on the specific ballot measure, you may consider building coalitions with environmentalists, transportation advocates, veterans’

organizations, labor groups, faith communities, public health advocates, education advocates, or business leaders. Tenant associations and community-based organizations, especially BIPOC-led organizations with deep roots in communities of color, should be central to the coalition's leadership and decision-making.

✓ Mobilize and follow the leadership of directly impacted communities.

The strongest campaigns are those that elevate the voices of low-income renters and other people with lived experience. Community members who would directly benefit from the passage of the ballot measure should have a central role in developing and executing every aspect of the campaign's strategy.

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Generate support for the ballot measure by organizing door-to-door campaigns in the communities where low-income people live, having one-on-one conversations, and drawing connections between the challenges faced by community members and the solutions offered by the ballot measure. Always include opportunities for voter registration and information about voting logistics when canvassing people about the ballot measure. Recruit tenant leaders as trusted messengers who can educate their own networks about the campaign and mobilize their members to vote. Train resident leaders to serve as building

captains or floor captains to canvass their neighbors, spread the word about the campaign, and answer questions.

CASE STUDY: The Keep St. Paul Home Campaign

In November 2021, housing justice advocates in St. Paul, MN, led a successful campaign for a ballot initiative to enact the nation's most rigorous rent stabilization ordinance. The ballot measure required the city to implement a policy that would strictly limit rent increases to 3% annually. The measure passed with [nearly 53%](#) of voters' support.

Recent rent spikes in St. Paul have disproportionately affected households of color and widened racial disparities in housing instability. St. Paul is a renter-majority city, but people of color are disproportionately represented among renters. While only 39% of white residents rent their homes, 82% of Black residents, 64% of Native residents, 62% of Latino residents, and 58% of Asian residents are renters.

Housing Equity Now St. Paul (HENS) – a coalition led by low-wealth communities, Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color in St. Paul who are dedicated to housing justice – mobilized around this issue in 2021 with the launch of the Keep St. Paul Home campaign. The campaign chose to organize a ballot initiative effort because Minnesota state law – like that of 36 other states – preempts rent control, meaning that local governments do not have the authority to pass rent control on their own. A city in Minnesota can only enact a rent-control ordinance if it receives voters' direct approval through a ballot measure.

The ballot measure (Question 1) [read](#), "Should the City adopt the proposed Ordinance limiting rent increases? The Ordinance limits residential rent increases to no more than 3% in a 12-month period, regardless of whether there is a change of occupancy. The Ordinance also directs the City to create a process for landlords to request an exception to the 3% limit based on the right to a reasonable return on investment."

The campaign's steering committee included 35 organizations, representing neighborhood groups, tenant leaders, legal aid nonprofits,

policy advocates, faith-based organizations, youth-focused organizations, civic engagement organizations, and others. To place rent stabilization on the ballot, HENS coalition members collected more than 9,100 petition signatures. From the signature-gathering phase up to Election Day, direct, interpersonal contacts were at the heart of the campaign's strategy. Over the course of the campaign, HENS hosted 97 events across the city, filled more than 1,180 volunteer shifts, delivered more than 800 yard signs, and made nearly 248,000 voter contacts. The campaign received endorsements from 47 elected officials.

Keep St. Paul Home had a powerful opponent in the Sensible Housing Ballot Committee, which organized against the rent stabilization measure. The Sensible Housing Ballot Committee raised more than 15 times as much money as the Keep St. Paul Home campaign. The \$5 million in donations received by the committee came largely from out-of-state contributors and LLCs, while Keep St. Paul Home raised \$300,000, with more than half of donations coming from St. Paul residents.

Although the Keep St. Paul Home campaign had far fewer financial resources, its success proved that grassroots volunteer mobilization can be an even greater asset than campaign contributions. Volunteers were trusted messengers who spread the word about the campaign in their own buildings and neighborhoods. Organizers also emphasized the role of the campaign's uplifting messaging, which resonated with voters. The campaign employed a "race-class narrative" strategy, which rejects the language of division and instead mobilizes the community around an inspiring message and a clear vision of what can be achieved through collective action.

The campaign's work did not end with the passage of the ballot measure. As the St. Paul City Council crafted the details of the policy, HENS continued to mobilize its network during the implementation phase to ensure that the ordinance adhered to the original ballot measure. The impact of Keep St. Paul Home extends beyond its victory at the ballot box: the campaign deepened relationships, sparked a citywide conversation on housing and racial justice, strengthened renters' power, and laid the groundwork for future achievements in the housing justice movement.



Keep St. Paul Home produced campaign billboards to communicate the importance of the ballot initiative for a diverse cross-section of the community.

√ Develop clear messaging.

Be transparent and specific about how the funding will be used and the impact it will have on the community. Ballot measures often use technical language that can be difficult for voters to interpret. Use accessible and compelling language when mobilizing voters in support of your campaign, while also ensuring that voters know how the question will be worded on the ballot so they know what to expect when making their choice.

Your campaign may also want to connect with other campaigns that are advocating around other ballot measures that benefit low-income communities. Individual campaigns can work together to elevate a slate of ballot measures and present a clear, unified message to voters. Collaboration across campaigns can also leverage additional resources. However, be sure to differentiate each ballot measure and limit the number of ballot measures on your slate to counteract voter confusion.

√ Harness the media.

An effective communications strategy requires significant planning from the campaign's communications team. Develop a communications strategy early in the process to maximize the campaign's visibility and increase public support. Campaigns should establish ongoing relationships with journalists who cover community development, affordable housing, and homelessness. When these journalists write local stories about homelessness and housing poverty, they will know to mention the ballot measure as the natural solution to the problems they discuss in the piece. Campaigns can also gain earned media by generating new data or publishing new reports on the expected impact of their ballot measure's passage.

Social media is often an important piece of a successful campaign's strategy. Many low-income renters are active on Facebook or Twitter. Set up Facebook and Twitter accounts for your campaign, and when organizing an event, create a Facebook event page to promote the event and request RSVPs. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag and any campaign-specific hashtags that you develop.

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CASE STUDY: Philadelphia's Campaign for Permanent Housing Trust Fund Resources

In November 2021, Philadelphia secured a permanent funding source for its Housing Trust Fund when more than 70% of voters voted in favor of “Ballot Question 4.” The ballot measure requires the City of Philadelphia to set aside 0.5% of its annual budget for affordable housing programs – an estimated \$25 million each year, according to initial projections.

The rising cost of housing in Philadelphia became an important part of conversations in the city about an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, however, did not see affordable housing as a priority issue and even tried to pull resources out of the city's Housing Trust Fund.

Frustrated with the constant fight to maintain and expand the Housing Trust Fund through annual appropriations, a coalition of advocates – including the [Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations \(PACDC\)](#), the [Women's Community Revitalization Project](#), and the [Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities](#) – pursued a ballot measure to amend the city charter to require a permanent funding source. The ballot measure (Ballot Question 4) asked, “Shall the Philadelphia

Home Rule Charter be amended to provide for a mandatory annual appropriation for the Housing Trust Fund?"

Advocates leveraged deep organizing experience and existing networks to build their campaign. They educated members of the City Council about the Housing Trust Fund and secured the vocal support of Councilmember Derek Green, who introduced legislation to put the mandatory appropriation before the voters as a ballot measure. Once the legislation passed, the coalition mobilized to educate voters and convince them to turn out in support.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Philadelphians were voting by mail or voting early. To reach early voters and mail-in voters, the coalition needed to shift its campaign timeline and begin outreach well before Election Day. The coalition tapped into the energy and momentum around the Black Lives Matter movement, which sparked a broader conversation about equity and the need for social change.

The campaign for Ballot Question 4 brought together a diverse coalition of supporters. The Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities mobilized tenants, advocates, union members, faith groups, and other community organizations in support of the ballot measure. PACDC organized its members – many of whom are involved in the development and management of Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties – to engage their tenants on the ballot measure. Project HOME helped people experiencing homelessness register and turn out to vote. The campaign also engaged with ward leaders, who encouraged their community members to vote in support of the ballot measure.

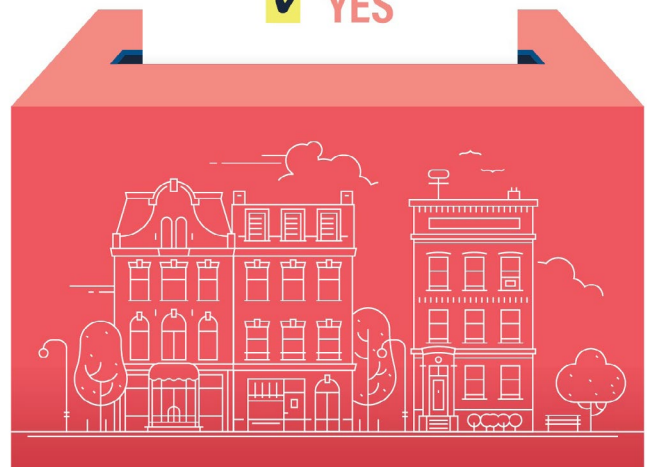
The campaign invested significantly in a public education and media strategy. The campaign put together a comprehensive voter education [toolkit for members](#) with sample email newsletter messages, social media posts, printable flyers, and answers to frequently asked questions. PACDC placed [op-eds](#) and other [opinion pieces](#) in local newspapers with widespread readerships. The campaign also produced a [video](#) featuring Ms. Peaches, a low-income homeowner who had received a grant

from the city's home repair program. She talked about the direct impact that Ballot Question 4 would have on Philadelphians like her, and the video played an important role in the public education campaign around the ballot measure.

The campaign faced opposition from Mayor Kenney, who was hesitant to limit the discretion of future mayoral administrations to allocate city funding. Although one prominent local paper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, [opposed](#) the ballot measure, the campaign for Ballot Question 4 had already disseminated its message and gained significant support by the time the *Inquirer* published its editorial. Thanks to the campaign's robust and proactive messaging, there was no information vacuum for the *Inquirer* editorial to fill, so the piece did not significantly threaten the campaign's prospects.

After the *Inquirer* editorial was published, the campaign redoubled its outreach efforts and won decisively on Election Day. The passage of Ballot Question 4 will secure unprecedented and permanent new resources for the Philadelphia Housing Trust Fund – a transformative, long-term victory achieved by bringing the issue directly to the voters.

**On Tuesday,
November 2nd,
vote YES on Ballot
Question 4 to
increase funding for
affordable homes.**



The campaign's voter education toolkit included downloadable images for email newsletters and social media.

✓ Organize accessible campaign activities.

Grassroots campaigns will generally hold trainings for their canvassers, phone-bankers, and other community volunteers. Some campaigns will also hold town halls, rallies, or other large public events to build support for their ballot measure. To maximize the value of these events, be sure that they are accessible to all communities - especially directly impacted people who are at the heart of the campaign.

If you are holding an in-person event, select a location near low-income communities. Consider using the community room of a public housing building or the meeting room at a local neighborhood center. If your event is somewhere further away, provide clear instructions on how to find the address and options for traveling via mass transit.

Many participants will need to adjust their dinner or lunch plans to attend your event; providing food will make it easier for people to fit the event into their schedules and will increase turnout. Provide childcare at your events or make them kid-friendly, as low-income individuals are less likely to have backup support for childcare, which can be an obstacle to attending evening or weekend events.

For both in-person and virtual events, be sure that your event is accessible to people with disabilities and community members whose primary language is not English. Provide translation and make it known in advance that translation will be available. To ensure that community members who are deaf or hard of hearing can participate, include sign-language interpretation and, for virtual events, closed captioning.

CASE STUDY: Denver Votes to Fund Homelessness Resolution Plans

In Denver, CO, the campaign for Ballot Measure 2B in November 2020 secured an estimated \$40 million annually to reduce homelessness and build affordable housing. The ballot measure raised the city's sales tax by 0.25 percent on non-essential items - an increase that will cost most households only \$5 per month. The

revenues will be used to build 1,800 homes with supportive services in the next decade, provide employment counseling and behavioral health care, increase shelter bed capacity and services, and fund innovative programs for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Between 2005 and 2015, a ten-year plan called "Denver's Road Home" shaped Denver's response to homelessness. Although advocates and service providers generally agreed that the plan was well-intentioned, it fell short of achieving its goals because no funding source existed for many of its initiatives. To make up for the shortcomings of Denver's Road Home, local elected officials and advocates aspired to find a long-term funding source for homelessness resolution. Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, a leader in the campaign for Measure 2B, conducted polling to determine what kind of funding source would be acceptable to voters, which ultimately resulted in the choice to pursue a sales tax increase. The mayor and City Council supported this proposal. Because Colorado's statewide "Taxpayer's Bill of Rights" prevents municipal governments from increasing taxes through legislation, the Denver City Council voted to put the sales tax increase directly before voters as a ballot measure in the November 2020 election.

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless led the campaign for Measure 2B alongside Healthier Colorado, which advocates for policies that improve the physical, mental, and social health of all Coloradans. Denver Homeless Leadership Council, a network of nonprofit and faith-based service providers, also officially supported the campaign, although the group does not typically become involved in electoral work. The strong, multisectoral nature of the campaign contributed to its success and widespread support. For example, Healthier Colorado mobilized health care providers to write a public letter and publish op-eds that emphasized the connection between housing stability and health care for people experiencing homelessness.

From their decades of organizing and providing direct services in Denver, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and other coalition partners already had a strong sense of what messaging would resonate with Denver voters. They knew

Help Reduce Homelessness

YES on Denver's 2B

Thousands of individuals and families in Denver are experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless—and the pandemic is making it worse.

We need to act now before we fall further behind. Measure 2B will make sure Denver is prepared to help newly homeless families find shelter and access safe, stable housing.



Learn more about 2B at yeson2b.org



Mike, Military Veteran and Supportive Housing Resident

Mailings from the Yes on 2B campaign featured individuals who achieved housing stability through the programs that the ballot measure would fund.

that voters liked to know the concrete impact of a ballot measure - e.g., how much money a measure would cost, and how it would benefit the community. Campaign messaging made clear that the sales tax increase would only cost an average of \$5 per household per month and painted a detailed picture of how these resources would be spent.

In a typical election year, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and its partners host in-person rallies and community roundtables where people with lived experience tell their personal stories and share the impact that a ballot measure would have on their lives. Although the Yes on 2B campaign could not host in-person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its postcards and advertisements shared the stories of people who had accessed stable housing through the programs that Measure 2B would fund. To substitute for in-person forums, the Yes on 2B campaign's website allowed local organizations to request virtual information sessions, and organizers gave virtual presentations about Measure 2B for neighborhood associations, business groups, and civic engagement organizations in Denver.

Local media outlets with a long history of reporting on homelessness in Denver understood

the shortcomings of Denver's Road Home and were prepared to frame Measure 2B as a common-sense next step to follow through on the plan's intent. Heightened attention to housing and homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic also raised the profile of the ballot measure and made the public even more eager to vote for policies to address the crisis.

The campaign faced little organized opposition, so most voter outreach was focused on turnout rather than persuasion. Instead of door-to-door canvassing, the campaign employed a text-banking tool, which was primarily used to remind voters about the ballot measure, where to look for it on the ballot, and how to submit their mail-in ballots.

Measure 2B passed with 62.81% of voters' support in November 2020. The following year, campaign partners built on the success of this coalition and achieved other ballot measure victories, including the defeat of a proposed camping ban ordinance.

The dedicated funding from the sales tax is now being invested in homelessness resolution services across the city. As the measure is implemented, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and its partners will track

and communicate the impact of these resources on individuals who are experiencing homelessness. The coalition plans to leverage the success of the ballot campaign into future organizing and to generate support for additional investments in homelessness resolution services and affordable housing.

✓ Integrate voter registration and mobilization into the campaign.

Educating the community and building support for your ballot measure are important aspects of a winning campaign, but to bring about the enactment of your proposal, it is crucial that your supporters turn out to vote. Voter registration and voter mobilization are essential components of a successful ballot measure campaign. When canvassing for your ballot measure, always provide printed voter registration materials, and keep track of new voters whom you register so you can reach out to them again as Election Day approaches. Include links to voter registration in your social media posts or on your website. One easy way to keep track of new voters – if allowed by the laws in your state – is to collect voter registration forms from new registrants and then photocopy the forms before mailing them in.

You may also ask registrants to fill out two-part voter pledge cards. Voters will keep the half of the card that reminds them of their pledge to vote, and your campaign will keep the half of the card with their contact information. A [sample fillable voter pledge card](#) can be found in the *Our Homes, Our Votes* resource library.

Keep a database of all your contacts, including newly registered voters, so you can mobilize them to turn out to vote. When you contact voters, make sure they know the *when*, *where*, and *how* of voting. Be prepared to help them find their polling place, transportation options, and voter ID requirements, as well as information about what to expect on the ballot and what to do if their right to vote is challenged. Encourage early voting and vote-by-mail, if applicable in your state, as part of a broader mobilization strategy.

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When contacting voters in the days leading up to Election Day, ask them how and when they plan to vote, and how they plan on getting to their polling place. Asking voters to express this plan can allow organizers to verify the polling location and hours with the voter and resolve transportation barriers or other obstacles to voting.

On Election Day, organize a volunteer phonebank and contact voters until they affirm that they have voted. You may also consider organizing group walks or rides to the polls, providing childcare, or planning other activities that will make it easier for voters to turn out on Election Day or in the early voting period. For more in-depth information on voter mobilization, visit <https://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org/voter-mobilization>. Be mindful of voting options in your community and how they may influence your campaign’s timeline. The expansion of vote-by-mail in 2020 – and the enduring importance of vote-by-mail and early voting in many communities – means that some campaigns will need to shift their timelines to begin much earlier in election season. Many voters will fill out their ballots in the weeks before Election Day, so it is essential to begin voter education as early as possible. Your campaign should educate voters about their options and make sure they are aware of relevant deadlines. For example, [the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless 2021 Ballot Guide](#) begins with an overview of registration deadlines, the timeline of vote-by-mail and early voting, and external links for voter registration and voter pledges.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

The achievements of recent election cycles make clear that voters are eager to enact affordable housing solutions at the ballot box. Ballot measure campaigns in 2022 are well-positioned to build on this momentum. By drawing on lessons learned from past campaigns, organizers

can launch their campaigns with confidence – even if they are new to ballot measure advocacy.

As the 2022 midterm elections approach, NLIHC will track state and local ballot measures related to affordable housing and homelessness. If you are working on a ballot measure campaign in your community, reach out to ourhomes@nlihc.org so that we can highlight your work and share *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign resources.

OUR HOMES

OUR VOTES

BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS

