

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

THE JOURNEY TO ESTABLISHING SACRAMENTO'S MEASURE L



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INTRODUCTION

Across California, local governments struggle with supporting after-school and weekend programming for children and youth. This is especially the case in low-income neighborhoods where parents cannot afford costly enrichment programs for their children. Sac Kids First, one of the largest grassroots coalitions in the region of Sacramento, California, has prioritized increasing local access to programming for children and youth.¹ Made up of over thirty-six organizations and two thousand coalition members, Sac Kids First has waged multiple campaigns to establish a city Youth Fund. A Youth Fund is a designated pool of money from a city's general fund that is set aside specifically for youth services and programs. Since the City of Sacramento lacked dedicated funding for young people, the Sac Kids First coalition ran multiple ballot measures to identify and set aside city funding for youth programming. A Youth Fund ballot measure was based on earlier successful measures that were passed in Oakland in 1996 and previously in 1991 in San Francisco. In Sacramento, it took the following three election cycles for a Youth Fund ballot measure to successfully pass. This ballot measure campaign resulted in an estimated \$10 million in annual funding for children and youth programs that comes from cannabis tax revenues.

This report summarizes the successful

efforts to pass Measure L, the Children and Youth Health and Safety Act, in Sacramento in 2022. It draws from interviews with leaders, secondary analysis of reports, and my observations as an intern at Youth Forward, an organization that is dedicated to ensuring that California invests the revenue it is receiving from marijuana taxes into youth prevention. These investments are focused especially on communities of color. I obtained this internship through the California Freedom Summer participatory action research project organized by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. My purpose in writing this report is to contribute to the historical record of this campaign, as well as to document and break down the strategies used with the intention that they can be replicated and used in other cities.

BACKGROUND

In 2022, young people up to age twenty-four made up approximately 32 percent of Sacramento's population. As a result, local leaders and youth saw that there was a clear need for funding to support this portion of the city's population.² While the City of Sacramento funded facilities, such as parks, that youth could benefit from, there was no consistent stream of funding to support the development of Sacramento's youth. Sacramento leaders realized that they could not continue

saying that our youth are our future without finding a way to support and prepare them to lead.

The Sac Kids First coalition learned a lot from the work of the East Bay Asian Youth Center, or EBAYC, a youth development organization with offices in Oakland and Sacramento. In 1996, EBAYC was part of a coalition that successfully ran the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, a measure that provides over \$14 million per year for children and youth.³ EBAYC's Sacramento chapter had similar goals to those of Oakland's 1996 measure and presented the idea to Youth Forward (the coordinating entity for Sac Kids First) and four other community-based organizations. Following the creation of this coalition, EBAYC used the example in Oakland as a guide to creating its Youth Fund for Sacramento youth.

Sac Kids First tried passing a ballot measure in 2016: Measure Y would have raised taxes from 4 percent to 5 percent for marijuana cultivation and manufacturing businesses.⁴ Under Measure Y, the revenue from this tax would have gone into a children's fund separate from the city's general fund. However, Measure Y failed to pass, losing by less than 1 percent.⁵ The coalition then tried again in 2020 with Measure G. Learning from Measure Y, the architects of Measure G proposed setting aside 2.5 percent from the city's general fund rather than raising taxes.⁶ Despite this significant change from Measure Y, Measure G faced a lot of opposition.

Those who did not support the measure argued that Measure G would restrict the city from spending on essential services such as emergency response, would impact the city's availability to spend on homelessness, and was simply unnecessary. An article written by Sacramento City Council members Angelique Ashby, Jeff Harris, and Larry Car stated that "... Sacramento doesn't need Measure G" and that "Measure G would leave no resources for addressing homelessness or affordable housing."⁷ The mayor of Sacramento, Darrell Steinberg, along with the Sacramento Police Officers Association, and the Sacramento Area Firefighters Union, all opposed Measure G and donated money against the measure. In total, the "No on G" campaign received \$211,000 in monetary contributions.⁸

Sac Kids First did not give up, however, and introduced Measure L in 2022. Unlike previous efforts, Measure L received high levels of support and very little opposition. A key difference was that Measure L had the support of Mayor Steinberg and Council Members Jay Schenirer and Mai Vang.



Brothers Leo Hsu and Oliver Hsu canvassing for "Yes on L", 2022.

Measure L was also endorsed by Sacramento Area Firefighters, Local 522. This time, Sac Kids First and the local fire union formed an alliance based on the creation of partnership programs. These partnership programs were eligible to receive funding from the Youth Fund, and the money could be used towards recruiting young workers to work within the firefighters union. When compared to Measure G, Measure L faced a smaller amount of paid opposition. There was an advertisement in a local newspaper as well as a paid firm to manage the

“No on Measure L” committee. In total it was reported that \$4,415 was spent on opposition, with \$3,391 going towards the newspaper advertisement and \$481 going to the firm.^{9, 10} In addition to the paid opposition, Measure L also faced vocal opposition. Council Member Harris, who had opposed Measure G, argued that the measure was “ballot box budgeting” and would lock up money that would be needed in times of economic crises.¹¹

	Where was the money coming from?	Type	Voter approval rate	Vote count
Measure Y 2016	Increase the city’s cannabis tax by 1%	Tax increase	65.86% yes 34.14% no	64,394 yes 33,378 no
Measure G 2020	2.5% of the city’s unrestricted general fund	Set-aside	45% yes 54% no	55,866 yes 67,556 no
Measure L 2022	40% equivalent of the cannabis tax revenue	Set-aside	62% yes 37% no	85,903 yes 50,955 no

*Because Measure Y was a proposed tax increase, it needed a 66.67% (two-thirds) yes vote to pass.

WHAT IS MEASURE L?

Measure L is a city-wide ballot measure that requires the city to invest the equivalent of 40 percent of the money that the city generates from its cannabis tax, which is equal to about \$10 million per year. Of the three measures Sac Kids First campaigned for, Measure L will draw the least amount of funds. These funds will be used for youth services focused on youth mental health, youth substance abuse prevention, and youth homelessness for children and youth up to age twenty-four.¹² This also includes helping youth in the foster care system transition to independence, providing job training or continuing education programs for eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds, and improving already existing programs that reduce youth crime, drug use, and gang violence. Before Measure L passed, the city's cannabis tax was funneled into the general fund. By reallocating the funds through the ballot measure, Sac Kids First was able to run a tax-free initiative by running on a set-aside measure on the ballot. A set-aside ballot allows for already existing revenue to be set aside for a specific purpose, like a Youth Fund, instead of raising taxes to create new revenue for the fund. Arguably, running on a set-aside is easier than raising taxes. A set-aside requires only a 50 percent-plus-one approval from the voters while an increase in taxes requires two-thirds of voter approval.



“Yes on L” campaign logo, 2022.

The Coalition

From volunteering to canvassing to creating social media posts, coalition building was the driving factor that spread information about and increased support for Measure L throughout Sacramento. When deciding to run a campaign for Measure L, the members of Sac Kids First recognized the importance of growing their coalition and fostering relationships with established constituents. For example, Sac Kids First sent weekly emails to coalition members, which kept them updated on volunteer opportunities such as distributing campaign lawn signs, canvassing, and setting up kick-off events. Sac Kids First also held events where they would recruit new members to join their mailing list.

In addition to the coalition's work, a steering committee was formed. The steering committee consisted of David Kakishiba and Xai Lee from EBAYC, Monica Ruelas Mares and Jim Keddy from Youth Forward, Mayor Steinberg, Council Members Schenirer and Vang, youth policy specialist Claudia Jasin, campaign consultants Catherine Lew and Jennifer Longley, and social media manager Bryan Ross Adams. Each member brought unique and invaluable experiences to the committee. Kakishiba and Lee had previously done work in Oakland specifically with the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth. EBAYC was able to garner people power and engage their youth base. Ruelas Mares and Keddy served as the link between the steering committee and the coalition while also serving as the voice of the community as representatives of Youth Forward. Elected officials were active in fundraising efforts and their political influence aided in gathering supporters and endorsements. Collectively, the steering committee was an interdisciplinary team of community organizers, politicians, and experienced grassroots consultants collaborating to make strategic decisions for the measure from its language, media strategy, fundraising, and on-the-ground efforts. While the campaign consultants often led committee conversations and made recommendations, the steering committee had a system in place to vet these recommendations, and ultimately decisions were made based on a group consensus.

In terms of the financial aspects of the measure such as what to spend money on, the decisions were made by Council Member Vang, who served as treasurer. Councilmember Vang worked with Ruelas Mares to ensure that the decisions made were aligned with the goals of the coalition. The committee included three funded positions: social media manager Adams, campaign consultants Lew and Longley, and Ruelas Mares as part-time campaign manager.

When it came to being involved in Measure L, Sac Kids First had the participation of six of the organizations within their coalition: Youth Forward, EBAYC's Sacramento chapter, Hmong Innovating Politics (HIP), Jakara Movement, Self Awareness and Recovery (SAR), and Sacramento LGBT Community Center.¹³ These organizations are experienced in grassroots efforts and they brought a policy-based focus to Measure L. Other coalition organizations are direct service-based. Indeed, some of the latter were initially hesitant to participate because of a lack of experience with policy work. In order to bridge the gap between both types of coalition organizations, Sac Kids First coordinator Monica Ruelas Mares emphasized the importance of educating both groups to integrate an organizing mindset and to think about changing systems. An organizing mindset involves looking beyond the services that these organizations provide. It involves thinking on how organizations can work and plan with

one another to create a long-term vision and strategy of what it may take to create system changes that they would like to see. Working to create these changes in turn would mutually benefit both the direct service worker and policymaker through a stable system of funding and resources.

STRATEGY AND VOTER UNIVERSE

Due to the costly and time-consuming nature of campaigns, it would not have been effective or feasible to target all voters. Because of this, Sac Kids First relied on their pre campaign polling and previous experiences to help determine their voter universe, which represents the targeted portion of the registered voter population for outreach. Lessons learned from Measures Y and G and polling information revealed that Democratic women comprised a majority of their supporter base. With this information, the campaign focused on this voter population in its outreach.¹⁴ During the polling phase, it was also revealed that Measure L lacked Republican support. One reason for this was the narrative produced by Republican voters, which held that nonprofit organizations do not manage their money well.¹⁵ Thus, the campaign's strategy did not include Republican households in the voter universe. Instead, funding and campaign efforts were dedicated to the voting base that was proven to be supportive (Democratic women and women

of color) instead of trying to change the ideology of Republican voters.

Messaging and Media

When it came to getting the word out and securing votes, Sac Kids First focused on media, canvassing, and phone banking. In order to ensure a streamlined messaging process, Sac Kids First had to create a strong narrative. Before the campaign was launched, a poll was completed to find messages that were best received by the public. The poll reported three main messages that the community cared the most about:¹⁶

- Youth mental health
- Youth substance abuse prevention
- Youth homelessness

The fact that the measure did not raise taxes also became a key messaging point. These messages were then used for the campaign's media, which included an official

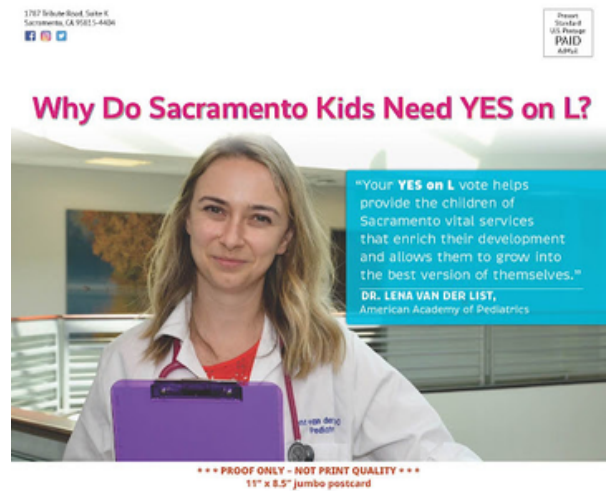


“Yes on L” Campaign Kick Off graphic published on Instagram, September 2022.

Instagram account, mailers, and social media advertisements. The Instagram account featured content that was created by youth and other coalition members as well as videos from endorsers such as the local firefighters union. When it came to mailers, there were three that were sent out over the campaign season. Two of the mailers featured a local pediatrician and teacher who were also coalition members. In addition to mailers, there was a literature piece, a flier detailing the information of Measure L, that was distributed to homes while canvassing. The fact that the measure did not raise taxes also became a key messaging point. These messages were then used for the campaign's media, which included an official Instagram account, mailers, and social media advertisements. The Instagram account featured content that was created by youth and other coalition members as well as videos from endorsers such as the local firefighters union. When it came to mailers, there were three that were sent out over the campaign season. Two of the mailers featured a local pediatrician and teacher who were also coalition members. In addition to mailers, there was a literature piece, a flier detailing the information of Measure L, that was distributed to homes while canvassing.

Canvassing

Sac Kids First canvassing events started September 10, 2022, which was approximately two months before Election Day on November 8 and one month before



“Yes on L” printed mailer (front), 2022.

the County Election Office sent vote-by-mail ballots. Canvassing was solely volunteer based and led by coalition members and organizations. Canvassing events were held every Saturday and Sunday with lunch provided for volunteers. Each weekend different organizations would take turns hosting canvassing events in their neighborhoods. This allowed community members of different neighborhoods to engage with and canvas communities that they would have otherwise not been able to. The initial canvassing focus was on high-density voting areas irrespective of prior voting results (i.e., in favor of or opposition to ballot measure with goals similar to Measure L). Starting in high-density areas was an efficient way to get new canvassers to go door-to-door and engage with large numbers of people. While the voters in these areas may not have been in support of Measure L, the high number of voters provided volunteers with a wealth of firsthand experience. To canvas these high-density precincts within two months of the elections, the campaign chose to prioritize high-density, Democrat-leaning neighborhoods, and

in turn, filtered out purely Republican households. Measures Y and G lacked Republican support and because Measure L advocated for similar goals although via different means, Sac Kids First did not prioritize outreach to Republican households due to constraints in time, limited resources, and a reliance on volunteers for canvassing.

If there was a household mixed with at least one Democratic member, Sac Kids First included that household on its list of targeted houses. Because Sacramento is geographically large, the focus of canvassing centered on maintaining the yes votes from previous elections rather than trying to persuade previous no voters to vote yes. A primary focus during GOTV weekend was engaging young voters, specifically youth experiencing their first, second, and third election cycles. Going into the November 2022 election cycle, the campaign knew that young voters and low-propensity voters would wait until Election Day to vote. Therefore, during GOTV weekend, the campaign's primary focus was engaging with young voters, especially those experiencing their first, second, or third election cycle. While it was recommended by political consultants to start earlier, Sac Kids First started canvassing later in the campaign season due to a lack of organizational capacity, which limited their ability to canvas neighborhoods more than once.

Phone Banking

Aside from canvassing, there was also phone banking. Before the actual phone banking

began, Sac Kids First started with a text sweep to generate their call list. A text sweep is when text message is sent to a large group of people to filter numbers. A text was sent to over 90,000 people to ascertain which numbers could and could not receive text messages. By doing this, the phone numbers that could not receive texts were assumed to be landlines. From this information, the call list was then generated. The call list specifically targeted Democratic women, as the initial campaign polling showed that Democratic women were especially likely to vote yes. If there was at least one Democratic woman in a household, then that household received a call informing them about Measure L and reminding them to vote in the November election. Similar to canvassing, phone banking was solely volunteer-based. Volunteers would meet either in person or via Zoom twice a week between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Each volunteer had a list of numbers to call and was provided with a call script. Phone banking began in mid-October 2022 and continued until Election Day.

Youth Engagement

When it came to the campaign, youth were involved every step of the way. Youth were at the heart of educating voters and increasing voter turnout. Every Saturday and Sunday morning during the campaign, youth of all ages gathered, ready to canvas. Youth present ranged in age from elementary school students to high school students.

Youth also participated in the various phone banking days and performed similar tasks to canvassing via phone calls. When it came to spreading the word for Measure L and keeping voters informed, youth also played a big role in doing so via social media. Youth involved with the Measure L campaign made TikTok and Instagram content promoting the benefits of Measure L and reminding voters to vote; these videos were posted and shared on their own and the campaign's social media pages. Having young people involved in the campaign proved crucial. The campaign was to secure funding for youth, so giving youth the opportunity to participate included them in the process of building something from which they would benefit. A measure for youth cannot truly be for youth if youth are not involved in the process: they must be heard and seen in the work.



“Yes on L” Election night viewing party, November 2022.

RESULTS

The collective effort of Sac Kids First and its coalition contributed to Measure L passing with a 62 percent yes and 37 percent no vote. Out of a total of 136,858 votes on the measure, 85,903 were yes votes. In order to win, Sac Kids First only needed a yes vote of only 50 percent plus one. When the first vote count dropped at 8:15 pm on November 8, the results came back as a 60 percent yes vote and stayed consistent, with a 2 percent rise after all of the ballots were counted. Out of the 801 precincts in Sacramento, only four precincts voted against Measure L.¹⁷ In one precinct Measure L lost by only one vote. In the other three precincts, the number of no votes that Measure L lost was between 44 and 67¹⁸ votes.

What Came Next?

After Measure L passed, the City of Sacramento and the community began the implementation phase. As of early 2024, a Planning and Oversight Commission had been established, with their first regular meeting having been held on February 1st, 2024. This commission will be responsible for creating a five-year investment plan and for reviewing evaluation reports and fiscal and performance audit reports. This will be done in collaboration with the Sacramento Youth Commission.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

This commission was formed for advisory purposes and all decisions regarding funding allocations will be determined by the mayor and city council. Each city council member and the mayor will appoint a member, forming a nine-person commission. Members will serve in two-year terms, and cannot be on the commission for more than three terms. Each person that the council appoints must meet the following criteria:

- Has past or present experience as a “consumer of youth services.”
- Has “demonstrated knowledge of and professional experience in youth development theory, youth program implementation, or youth program evaluation.”

Sacramento now has the funding to implement youth services but a significant question remains: Who is eligible to receive these funds? Those who are eligible to receive funding from the Youth Fund include nonprofits, the City of Sacramento, and public agencies. However, non-city public agencies are required to match the amount of funds they are requesting in order to access Youth Fund resources. In order to promote and enact accountability, any organization that receives funding from the Youth Fund is subject to audits related to financials and performance.

Through Measure L, Sac Kids First has provided Sacramento youth with the opportunity to nurture their young person’s development and well-being through programs and services to which they likely otherwise would not have had access. Measure L is working toward creating a more equitable Sacramento. Important lessons from this campaign include:

1. Recognize and work at the capacity you have. Sac Kids First knew and recognized that volunteers could not canvas the whole city of Sacramento in the time frame available, so there was a focus on high-density areas and areas of past support.
2. Strength is in numbers. The work could not have been done without coalition members, and throughout the campaign there was a strong focus on continuing to grow the coalition.
3. Persistency. It took Sacramento three tries to establish a Youth Fund, but it was the persistence and perseverance of Sac Kids First to continue the work and learn from past campaigns that ensured the successful passage of Measure L.

As a first-time voter who observed this campaign, the campaign for Measure L taught me, most of all, about the importance of voter outreach. When I first started canvassing and phone banking, I was

extremely nervous. The thought of having to knock on someone's door or call someone at random scared me, and I was nervous that people would not be receptive or they would be annoyed at me for interrupting their day. Instead, I learned that these interactions were key for the success of the campaign. The connections and conversations that were made while canvassing and phone banking made the community feel connected to the campaign. That form of connection is important for voters to have as they are filling out their ballots. As a voter, I want to feel like my vote is making a difference, that my voice is heard. By having the chance to interact with the campaign on some level, such as talking to a canvasser, I was able to start forming those ties and connections that I otherwise may not have made if I had not taken the time myself to research the measure. Sac Kids First and their volunteer base took the necessary time needed to outreach to the community to secure the votes they needed to win.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kennedy McIntyre is a third-year UCLA student majoring in international development studies with a minor in community engagement and social change. She grew up in Sacramento, California. As an intern for the California Freedom Summer participatory action research project, she

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