

Los Angeles Public Library Measure L Campaign

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On March 8, 2011 the voters of the City of Los Angeles approved Measure “L” by a margin of 63.3% for the continuing support of the Los Angeles Public Library. Measure L is a City Charter Amendment and therefore only needed a simple majority (50% + 1) to pass.

Over four years, Measure L changes the amount of the City’s General Fund monies guaranteed to the library from .0175% of the amount of the assessed value of all property in the City to .0300%. Measure L is not a new tax; instead it increased the library’s share of existing city funds to restore the library’s service hours and book budget, which have been cut over the last several years.

Since 1878, the City Charter has had a provision guaranteeing library funding for “direct” costs such as paying for librarians, books, computers and equipment. During the past 130 years, voters have updated the amount of library funding five times. Any change to the City Charter must be approved by voters, and the last time the library’s guaranteed funding was altered was over 10 years ago.

Two years ago, the City changed its accounting practices and began making the library also responsible for paying an increasing percent of its “indirect” costs such as for water, electricity, postage, custodial, security and benefits.

Since 2008, cuts to the library’s operating budget have resulted in a 28% cut in library staff and the elimination of two days and two evenings of service. For the first time in its 139-year history, library service had been reduced from 7 days to 5 days a week. Even during the Great Depression, the library was open more hours.

The book budget dropped from \$16 million in 2001 to \$6.8 million today. This means a book budget of only \$1.70 per person which is well below the national average of \$4.26 per person.

Over the next four years, in addition to requiring the library to pay for both “direct” and “indirect” costs, Measure L will increase the library’s share of city funds to:

1. help restore 6-day service at all 73 neighborhood libraries and eventually restore 7-day service at 9 libraries,
2. purchase books, and
3. support library programs including after-school/summer youth, student homework help, adult literacy and job search programs.

For those interested in the details of this library ballot measure campaign effort, there is a “Measure L Information Toolkit” which includes:

1. Fact Sheet (English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean)
2. Script for information presentation
3. “Elevator Speech” & Key Messages
4. Frequently Asked Questions about Measure L
5. Frequently Asked Questions about LAPL
6. Key Dates
7. Political Do’s & Don’ts

Copies of the toolkit can be obtained by emailing Peter V. Persic, the Public Relations & Marketing Director of LAPL, at ppersic@lapl.org.

For those interested in the exact ballot language for Measure L, it is as follows:

Public Library Funding, Charter Amendment, Measure L

Shall the Charter be amended to incrementally increase the amount the City is required to dedicate annually from its General Fund to the Library Department to an amount equal to .300% of the assessed value of all property in the City, and incrementally increase the Library Department’s responsibility for its direct costs until it pays for all of its direct and indirect costs, in order to provide Los Angeles neighborhood public libraries with additional funding to help restore library service hours, purchase books and support library programs, subjected to audits, using existing funds with no new taxes?