

## WHEN, HOW, AND WHY TO USE PUBLIC OPINION POLLING

As you develop your appropriations advocacy campaign, consider whether polling on your issue will help move policymakers to support your funding request. Polling the public for their opinions on issues is an effective way to show how much people care about an issue and what they're willing to do about it. Polling data can help make the case for why your program needs additional funding; specifically that your issue has broad support from constituents in your state. If your organization is a 501(c)(4) that does political work, a poll showing voters are more likely to support a candidate who supports funding for child care and/or other prenatal-to-three issues could really move the needle on your vote count.

**If you're a 501(c)(3), you can conduct polls! Just be sure to keep the following in mind:**

- Avoid linking issues with candidates. If your survey covers both, consult with legal counsel to ensure federal tax and election laws compliance.
- Don't explicitly or implicitly favor, endorse, or oppose a candidate.
- Critique policies, not sitting legislators or officials, and avoid personal attacks.
- You can discuss the implications of proposed legislation or ballot initiatives, but don't urge participants to contact legislators or vote in a particular way.

## FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN HIRING A POLLSTER

If you don't have the capacity or expertise to do polling internally, consider contracting with an individual pollster or polling firm.

- **Who are you polling?** It is important that the pollster you work with has experience polling the communities you want to hear from. For example, if you want to demonstrate support for increased access to child care among the Asian-American community in your state, your pollster needs to be confident they can over-sample in that community to produce meaningful results.
- **How do the pollster's relationships and reputation impact you?** Each pollster has a distinct reputation based on who they tend to work for. Some pollsters are known to be left-leaning, which gives them significant credibility within the progressive movement but may minimize their credibility among conservatives. Some pollsters hold close relationships with lawmakers for whom they regularly work, so choosing a pollster you know the Budget chair trusts could increase the credibility of the results in their eyes. Assess your goals and do your research before hiring a pollster to ensure that their reputation and relationships are a value-add for your campaign (i.e., their reputation and relationships often should be strongest among the lawmakers you're seeking to persuade).

- **Does the pollster regularly work in your issue space?** Familiarity with your issue space can impact a pollster’s reputation (i.e., people know them as an expert in this space), and it can benefit you when it comes to developing the survey questions. An expert in your issue area has the ability to capture the nuances of your issue and deliver hyper-focused questions that can build a clear and specific case for your campaign.
- **What support, beyond polling, are you looking for?** Some pollsters are open to offering support in disseminating the survey results to your target audiences, whether that audience is lawmakers, coalition partners, or media. Do you need a pollster to walk through the polling results with lawmakers, either with you present or individually? If so, choose a pollster whose relationships will open doors to those lawmakers. Do you need a pollster to present messaging guidance to your coalition partners based on their results? Consider someone who is a clear, compelling presenter. If you’re seeking support sharing the survey results with journalists, perhaps via a press conference or webinar, choose someone who has name recognition among the journalists you want to reach.



**TIP:** To determine a pollster’s reputation among lawmakers and journalists, search for their name and/or firm in Google News. You’ll be able to pick up on which outlets and journalists share that pollster’s surveys in their coverage and you’ll quickly get a sense for the general reputation of that pollster (i.e., if they’re regularly polling for conservative candidates or appearing in conservative outlets, that’s an indication that they may be right-leaning). Additionally, don’t hesitate to ask your peers and partners for insight into a pollster’s reputation, and be honest with pollsters about what you’re looking for from them.