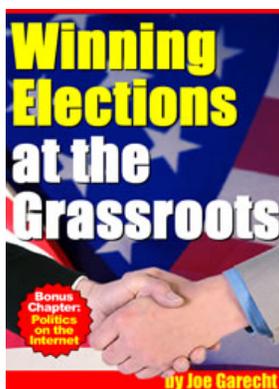


# Winning Elections at the Grassroots

by Joe Garecht



**© 2010 by Joe Garecht.  
All rights reserved.**

This e-book is protected by US and International copyright laws. This book may not be reprinted, in part or in whole, without the express written permission of the author. You may print this e-book out for your own personal use.

## Table of Contents

About the Author.....	4
Introduction.....	5
1. Stay on Target.....	7
2. How to Organize a Precinct.....	12
3. Knocking Your Way to Victory.....	18
4. The Candidate Tour Plan.....	26
5. The Guide to Successful Candidate Coffees.....	32
6. The Absentee Voter Drive Handbook.....	37
7. Targeted Voter Registration that Works.....	41
8. Building Local Coalitions.....	43
9. Everything You Need to Know About Running a Campaign School.....	47
10. Every Campaign’s Guide to Getting Out the Vote.....	54
11. The Voter Contact Direct Mail Guide.....	59
12. The Political Internet Strategy Guide.....	64
13. Grassroots Politics – Just the FAQ’s.....	69
14. The Case of Candidate X.....	72
15. Additional Resources.....	75

## About the Author

Joe Garecht is the founder of Local Victory, located on the web at [www.LocalVictory.com](http://www.LocalVictory.com)

Local Victory is the Internet's premier site for free articles and information on winning elections. If local candidates, campaign staff, volunteers or activists need to know something, they turn to LocalVictory.com

Joe spent over a decade in the trenches as a sought-after political consultant for campaigns and political organizations nationwide. He has consulted on two national political party conventions, as well as federal, state, and local campaigns throughout the United States. He is also a respected speaker and mentor, and has presented at dozens of campaign strategy seminars, including the National *Campaigns and Elections Magazine* Training Seminar in Washington, DC.

Joe started Local Victory for one reason—to help local candidates access the tools the “big boys” have been using for years – Local Victory offers candidates and activists worldwide the chance to benefit from professional political strategy advice through the articles and books available on LocalVictory.com, no matter how small the campaign or how empty the campaign coffers.

For more information, tips, and resources, visit Local Victory on the web at [www.LocalVictory.com](http://www.LocalVictory.com)

## Introduction

I can't repeat it enough: working the grassroots is absolutely essential to winning a political election – any political election.

Political candidates like to worry about the “big stuff” in a campaign – the message, the money, and the TV ads. Consultants, campaign managers, staff supporters like to talk about poll numbers and media buys, websites and major donors. All of this is important, but too often, the big-wigs forget about the real work of the campaign – like the organizing, the hand-shaking, and the get out the vote effort.

Let me tell you a story. I closely followed the 2002 Democratic gubernatorial primary in Pennsylvania. I grew up in Philadelphia and the Democratic primary race for Governor was far too interesting to pass up. In this election, there were two candidates running, each one was the polar opposite of the other.

The first candidate was former Philadelphia mayor Ed Rendell. Rendell is an old fashioned politician – he likes to slap backs, shake hands, and kiss babies. He ran a professional campaign, with a full media buy, well produced TV ads, endorsements, and volunteers. What Ed really enjoys, though, is “true politicking” – getting out there with the voters and getting their support.

The second candidate was Pennsylvania Auditor General Bob Casey, son of former governor Robert Casey. Casey ran a similarly professional campaign. The difference though, was that the Casey camp tried to run a “rose garden campaign.” Team Casey kept their candidate separated from the people, above the fray. They thought that the candidate's positive name identification, organizational support and television buys would carry the day. They were wrong. Despite earlier projections to the contrary, Rendell won the primary by a hundred thousand votes.

Now I'm not saying the Casey team was wrong to believe that segregating the candidate could work. The rose garden strategy is a valid one, and sometimes works, depending on the circumstances. What they didn't count on, though, was the relentlessness of Ed Rendell. During the campaign, Rendell was a grassroots machine, and his team built a strong organization on that foundation. A strong, relentless grassroots effort that is professional and energized will beat an equally strong media or “distance” campaign any day.

Let me tell you another story – this time, about a Republican primary. The candidates are Bob Franks, former Congressman from New Jersey, and Bret Schundler, mayor of Jersey City.

Franks, who jumped into the race late, at the behest of party leaders, ran an organizational campaign – he relied on the local party leaders, township chairman, county committees, and precinct captains of the regular Republican organization to carry his message and motivate the voters.

Schundler took the opposite tack – he had very little organizational support, instead relying on “Bret’s Army,” a motivated organization that grew exponentially over the course of the campaign. His organization was based on the most local level – with individual members from individual townships out working the streets, organized to the hilt all the way up to Schundler’s statewide committee.

Both campaigns relied on a sort of grassroots politics – Franks counted on working the organizational grassroots for a victory, while Schundler worked the popular grassroots. In the end, Schundler won. Why? Because the more local, more out there and in the field a political organization is, the more likely it is to win.

The moral of these stories is: a great grassroots campaign trumps any other type of campaign any day, and the more local the grassroots effort gets, the more likely it is to win.

You may be asking yourself – what exactly is grassroots politics? Grassroots politics are those campaign tactics that involve actually reaching out to the voters one-to-one. This one-to-one contact need not be between the candidate and the voters (though it should be as often as possible) but can also be between the campaign volunteers, staff, committee, etc. and the voter. Thus, working the grassroots involves building an organization to help you reach the voters, and actually getting out there, getting dirty, and getting votes.

This book contains complete, how-to guides to the various aspects of grassroots campaigning. Use them wisely – they may just be the key to winning your next election.

## 1. Stay on Target

The first key concept that any successful campaign needs to understand is targeting. Targeting is the process of choosing which people your campaign intends to communicate with.

I can hear you saying, “What do you mean **which** people we’re going to try to communicate – we’re going to try and communicate with *everyone!*” I also know that that’s not true. You don’t want to spend money to communicate with people who live outside your district, do you? How about people who aren’t registered to vote, or who can’t vote you in the primary because they are from the other party?

Campaigns are expensive. It costs money to send out direct mail, put gas in the car to go door to door, print up yard signs, or do any of the important things your campaign needs to do to win your election. You simply can’t waste money – you have to target who you are going to communicate with.

The examples above are the easy ones – of course you only want to target those voters who can actually vote for you – ones who live in the district, are eligible and registered to vote, and, in the case of a primary, are the same party as your candidate. The real decisions come when you decide which of the voters who can vote for you are your targeted **priorities**. That’s right – you need to decide which of the voters it would be a waste of your time and money to communicate with, and which you should lavish more of your attention on.

The next section will show you how to make these decisions. Be careful! It looks complicated, and it is... but not as complicated as it seems. Skim through this next section, then come back and work through it when you have finished this book and have the actual numbers for your campaign in hand.

### A Short Course on Prior Electoral Targeting

Campaigns use “prior electoral targeting” to find their targeted voters. This type of targeting is so named because it relies on past election statistics to determine which voters are most likely to vote for your candidate in future elections. The campaign will need several types of info to conduct prior electoral targeting, most of which can be obtained from the local board of elections or county clerks in the district where the campaign is located:

- Voter registration numbers – how many people are/were registered to vote (by party, if available) for your election and for previous elections?
- Election returns – returns by precinct from primaries and general elections for races at your level (other city council races in your district, if you are running for city council, etc.)

The goal of reviewing these statistics for targeting purposes is to identify each precinct as a “Republican Core Precinct”, a “Democratic Core Precinct,” or a “Switch Precinct.” (A precinct smallest possible political division, generally meaning all of the people who vote at the same polling place. Local races may only be dealing with twenty to thirty precincts, while larger races may have thousands to contend with).

Republican Core Precincts are those precincts where there are a large number of loyal Republicans who always vote for the Republican Candidate because he or she is a Republican. Democratic Core Precincts are those precincts where there a large number of loyal Democrats who always vote for the Democratic Candidate because he or she is a Democrat. Switch Precincts are those precincts where there are large numbers of ticket splitters, who vote for both Republicans and Democrats in the same election. In states where there is no registration by party, you must use ticket-splitting figures to label your precincts as Core Republican, Core Democrat, or Switch (more on this later).

To determine which of the three types each precinct in your district is:

**1. Choose a Baseline Race** – First, you should identify a baseline race, one that will show you how many people will vote Republican regardless of the candidate. To do this, pick a race that covers your entire district (is of the same size or larger) where the Republican received only “die hard” party voters – that is, pick a race where the Republican did not do well, and only true blue Republican voters “stuck with” the candidate.

Your best bet is to choose a race for a large area (statewide, citywide, etc.) that is larger than your district, and one in which the race generated little interest. Use your knowledge of local elections to make sure that there were no special circumstances in the race that accounted for the low turnout or low Republican vote.

List the total number of votes the Republican received in each precinct in your district in the base race. Also list the total votes received by the Democratic candidate. A form is included at the end of this chapter to assist you with this task.

**2. Choose a High Race** – A high race shows the highest vote total a Republican can hope to receive. Choose a race where the Republican candidate had widespread appeal, receiving not only Republican votes, but ticket-splitter, and Democratic crossover votes as well. List the vote totals received by both the Republican and Democratic candidate in this high race.

**3. Determine Ticket-Splitters** – Your next task is to determine how many ticket splitters there are in each precinct. For each precinct, perform the following calculations: To determine the number of ticket splitters:

**Republican High Vote – Republican Base Vote = # of Ticket Splitters**

To determine the percentage of ticket splitters:

**# of Ticket Splitter (from above) / Total # of voters in the precinct from this election = Percentage of Ticket Splitters**

To determine the projected number of ticket splitters in the upcoming (future) election:

**Multiply current registration in the precinct X Percentage of Ticket Splitters = Projected number of Ticket Splitters**

**4. Rank Each Precinct by Percentage of Ticket-Splitters** – Rank the precincts by the total percentage of ticket-splitters there are in the precinct – rank from high to low, that is, rank from highest percentage of ticket-splitters being #1, down to the lowest percentage of ticket-splitters.

**5. Determine the Percentage Republican Vote** – Determine what percentage of the voters in each precinct voted Republican in both the high race and the baseline race using the following formula:

**Total # of Votes for the Republican / Total # of Votes cast = Percentage Republican vote**

**6. Label Each Precinct as Republican Core, Democratic Core, or Ticket-Splitter** – This is where using your best judgment comes in. Generally, Republican Core Precincts are those precincts where the Republican received a high percentage of the vote in both the high and baseline races, and where there is a low percentage of ticket-splitters.

Democratic Core Precincts are those precincts where the Republican received a low percentage of the vote in both the high and baseline races, and where there is a low percentage of ticket-splitters.

Ticket-Splitter Precincts are those precincts where there are a high percentage of ticket-splitters, and where the Republican received a high percentage of the vote in the high race and a low percentage of the vote in the baseline race.

Again, there is a chart at the end of this section to help you do your prior electoral targeting. Targeting seems complicated, but it is fairly straightforward. Just make sure to carefully do the calculations for each precinct using the correct data. When you are done, you will have a list of precincts, in order of their likelihood to vote for your candidate.

Depending on your campaign strategy, you will target the Republican precincts in your district and a certain number of ticket-splitting precincts. You may even be targeting a few Democratic precincts. Simply put, your campaign must target enough precincts including Republican and possible Republican voters to garner 50% + 1 of the votes on Election Day.

The key is to not waste resources – target those precincts you need to win. If you don't have lots of money and need to target lost of Democratic leaning districts, you may not be able to spend time and money in Republican-leaning ones – those that you know will go for your candidate in the election.

### **Estimate Turnout**

The next step is to estimate the turnout for this election. To do that, determine the total number of people who were registered to vote in your baseline race and the total number of people who actually voted in your baseline race. Divide the number of people who voted by the number of people who were registered, and you will get the percentage of voter turnout in your baseline race.

To estimate turnout for this election, simply multiply the turnout percentage for your baseline race times the total number of registered voters for this election. The answer is your estimated turnout for this election.

### **How many votes will you need to win?**

To determine how many votes you will need to win, simply multiply the estimated turnout by 51% (this gives you a better margin for error than multiplying by 50% and adding 1). The answer is the number of votes you will need to win this election.

### **How many votes do you need in each precinct?**

The next step is to take the total number of votes you will need to win and determine how many of those votes need to come from each precinct. To do this, take a look at the data you compiled on each precinct. For each precinct, divide the total number of votes your like candidate received in the baseline race in that precinct by the total number of votes your like candidate received in the baseline race in the entire district. This tells you what percentage of your like candidate's votes he or she received in the precinct. Then, multiply this percentage by your total vote goal (the number of votes you need to win) to determine how many votes you need to get in each precinct in order to win.

### **Total Votes for Like Candidate in Precinct / Total Voted for Like Candidate in District X Total District Vote Goal = Precinct Vote Goal.**

This final number tells you exactly how many votes you need to target in each precinct in order to win. Combined with your analysis of Republican Core / Democratic Core / Ticket-Splitter districts, this number will allow you to accurately target your resources to use them most effectively.

Work the math, make your targeting decisions, and then craft your campaign strategy accordingly.

### Targeting Worksheet

Precinct #	GOP High # of Votes	DEM High # of Votes	Ticket-Splitter # of Votes	Ticket-Splitter %	Ticket-Splitter Rank
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Precinct #	GOP High Race %	GOP Base Race %	Category (RC / DC/ TS)*
1 (con't)			
2 (con't)			
3 (con't)			
4 (con't)			
5 (con't)			
6 (con't)			
7 (con't)			
8 (con't)			
9 (con't)			
10 (con't)			

\*RC = Republican Core  
 DC = Democratic Core

TC = Ticket-Splitter

## 2. How to Organize a Precinct

Organization is vital to the success of any political campaign. Every campaign – from township school board to presidential elections – relies on organization to maximize the campaign’s efforts to identify, motivate, and activate supporters.

In this guide, we’re going to describe the process of organizing a precinct – your goal should be to have each and every precinct in your district organized as early as possible. Don’t worry – it’s not as daunting a task as it first sounds, but it will require lots of legwork by the campaign.

### Why Organize? - The Basic Principles

Many campaigns don’t realize the value of organizing a district – they think they can “fly by the seat of their pants,” throw up some yard signs and then wait for the fundraising operation to allow them to buy television or radio time. Winning an election isn’t that simple – it requires grassroots organization at the most basic electoral level, the precinct.

From an overall perspective, the task of any political campaign is threefold. First, it must **identify** those voters who are likely to vote for the candidate or are likely to be able to be persuaded to vote for the candidate. Second, it must **motivate** those voters to vote for the candidate by communicating the campaign message to the voters. Finally, the campaign must **activate** its supporters to ensure that they go to the poll on Election Day (get out the vote activity). Organizing each precinct in your district will aid your campaign in accomplishing these three goals by allowing you to:

- **Build a Network** – Organizing allows you to utilize the network of each member of your organization to expand your own campaign network. As more people join the campaign, they bring their own networks into your organization, each of which can be solicited to continue building the network.
- **Delegate Responsibilities** – Organizing allows you to assign specific campaign tasks to a large number of volunteer workers in each of your precincts, thus reducing the amount of work and funds that must be expended by the campaign staff.
- **Targeting** – Organizing allows you to continue the process of targeting by building large networks/organizations in those areas where you need additional votes.

### The Viral Principle

As you will see, organizing a precinct works on a viral principle – like a virus, your organization should multiply rapidly, starting with one or two core members and quickly building and expanding. Each new person that joins your organization should be able to get several others to join, allowing your campaign organization to grow exponentially.

Similarly, your organization is a lot like Amway (or any multi-level marketing organization). As you build your group, you will do so by having members recruit other members, creating a hierarchy within the campaign and each individual precinct.

Everything your group does should be viral – have your members solicit their friends and associates for donations, sell tickets to fundraisers and gather volunteers for literature drops. Put your organization to work for your campaign in every aspect of the race.

### **Your Team**

The first step in building your precinct organizations is recruiting a team – the campaign should be responsible for recruiting the top-level people, who in turn should recruit people to work and volunteer under them (with the campaign always remaining involved in the process, of course). Depending on the size of your district and the number of precincts in it, you may decide to subdivide the district into several regions, each one having a regional director or regional captain, with the precinct captains beneath them in the organization.

### **The Grassroots Director**

The top of every organization, for every campaign, should be the grassroots director. If your campaign is large enough, the grassroots director may be a paid member of your staff. Smaller campaigns may recruit an able and trusted volunteer to fill this post. (For almost all campaigns, the grassroots director will be the only paid member of your grassroots organization. Large campaigns with regional directors may include them in the paid staff as well, if so desired).

The grassroots director oversees the grassroots organization and is responsible for making sure the organization grows and runs smoothly

### **The Precinct Captain**

The precinct captain is the head of the precinct operation. He or she works under the direction of the grassroots director to coordinate the precinct group. The precinct captain is generally responsible for recruiting members of the organization and building a team to help the captain identify, motivate, and activate supporters within the precinct.

### **Block / Area Captains**

The precinct can be broken down into even smaller areas, with the precinct captain recruiting members to head up activities in each of these areas. These areas can be as small as one street block, or as large as half the district, depending on the campaign's needs and the captain's abilities. As a general rule of thumb, though, the more members you have in your organization, the better.

## **Job Chairmen**

The precinct captain may also appoint “job chairmen” whose responsibility it is to head up various activities within the precinct. For example, the precinct captain may appoint a Yard Sign Chairman who coordinates signs in the precinct, a Candidate Coffee Chairman who is responsible for arranging one candidate coffee in the precinct per month, and a Walk Chairman who organizes weekly door-to-door campaigning opportunities for volunteers.

## **Train Your Team**

For your team to be effective, it is vital that you train them in campaign tactics and offer them the tools they need to be successful advocates for your campaign. One great way to do that is to hold a campaign school for your organization where you can teach them how to go door to door, how to recruit new members, talk about what areas you are targeting, etc.

You should also prepare a precinct packet to hand out to each member of the organization that includes everything they will need to do their jobs, including maps of the precinct, voter lists, absentee ballot and voter registration applications, buttons and stickers, etc.

In order to keep your team motivated, stay in constant contact with them. Set up a newsletter that gets delivered on a regular basis through e-mail or regular mail, hold pizza parties where your organization can socialize, and check in with your captains on a regular basis.

## **Put Your Organization to Work**

Once your organization is in place and ready to help you win your election, you can have your team work on any number of tasks. The key is to use the organization to help further your campaign strategy as laid out in your campaign plan. The organization you build is a ready resource for your campaign – use it wisely. Your precinct team should be involved in all of the campaign’s activities that take place in their precinct:

- **Canvassing** – Your organization can and should be utilized for door-to-door efforts, whether with the candidate or on their own. The organization should hold the same high targeting standards while going door to door as the rest of your campaign.
- **Yard Signs** – Your precinct organizations are perfect for implementing your yard sign program.
- **Fundraising** – Fundraising events can be staged by your group on a regular basis, as can personal fundraising solicitations – have your organization contact their entire network to solicit campaign funds.

- **Election Day Activities** – Your organization is the backbone of your get out the vote campaign. Members can work the polls, knock on doors, make phone calls, drive voters to the polls, etc.
- **Other Grassroots Activities** – Absentee ballot and voter registration campaigns can be run by your precinct groups.

### **Keep ‘Em Motivated!**

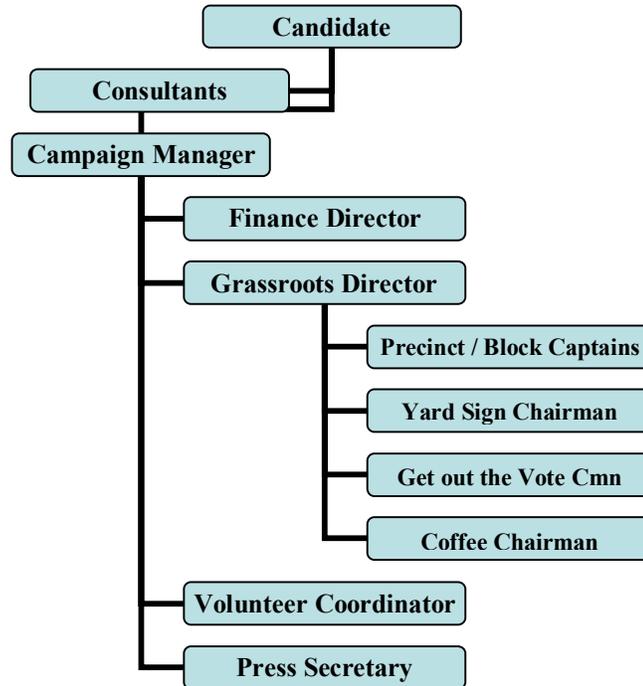
It is important for your campaign to keep your organization motivated. Because your organization is composed almost entirely of volunteers, you need to give the group incentives and praise for the work that they do. Reward precinct organizations that meet goals for a certain number of doors knocked on, a certain number of successful candidate coffees, or a great rally. Say thank you to your volunteers on a regular basis. Hand out an award to the volunteer who worked the most hours at campaign HQ. Keep your organization motivated and “pumped.”

### **Keep Building**

The surest sign that your campaign is on the right track is when your organization continues to grow at a quick and steady pace. Keep your organization growing in every respect. Have members sign-up new members. Offer incentives for joining, such as a membership cards or special newsletters. Invite your group to solicit their friends for special parties introducing them to the organization. Keep your group moving forward, and your momentum will build rapidly.

### Sample Organizational Chart

*This chart is only a sample- your race may differ depending on the size of your campaign, the number of paid positions, number of full time volunteers, etc.*



**Be a Part of Our Team!**

**YES!** I would like to help Jim Smith get elected to Congress.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to help by:

\_\_\_\_\_ Putting up a yard sign  
\_\_\_\_\_ Working at headquarters  
\_\_\_\_\_ Calling my neighbors

\_\_\_\_\_ Addressing envelopes  
\_\_\_\_\_ Going door – to – door  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample Volunteer Sign-Up Form**

**Our Goal**

Over the next eight weeks, the Jim Smith for Congress campaign needs to register 5000 new Republican voters from our district. Thank you for signing-up to help us with this effort.

Your goal is to sign-up **50 new Republicans** over the next two months. It's hard work, but together we can do it. We'll be holding an informal training session on **Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm at the Hellertown VFW Post** at 567 Center Valley Road. Please plan to attend.

***Thank you for your support!***

**Sample Volunteer Mailer**

### 3. Knocking Your Way to Victory

Door to door campaigning is an essential part of every political campaign. Local campaigns realize the value of door to door efforts, and because they have limited funds incorporate this type of activity into their campaign plan. Larger campaigns sometimes fail to realize the power of door to door campaigning, and often include it only as an afterthought or as a way to generate media publicity for a day or two. This is a mistake. No campaign, no matter how large, should fail to utilize door to door campaigning. Even presidential campaigns often have a grassroots person who makes sure that local organizations are going door to door for the campaign.

Door to door campaigning is so effective because it accomplishes four main campaign goals, all with minimal cost:

- **Name ID** – Door to door campaigning builds name recognition for the candidate in a way that literature drops and paid ads cannot. Personal contact with a voter, even if it is by a volunteer, builds a connection with the candidate that results in positive name identification.
- **Credibility** – A door to door program builds credibility in two ways. First, on the personal level, it builds credibility in the mind of the voter who is contacted because it shows that the campaign is a living, breathing organization, and that people (the volunteers) really are supporting the candidate. Second, on a larger scale, the program builds credibility by giving the impression that there is a large base of support for the candidate that is involved in a well-organized and formidable effort.
- **Turnout** – Your door to door campaign is more effective than any other method for encouraging people to go to the polls. While you will want to use telephones for the bulk of your turn out effort because of the time involved, going door to door in selected precincts can help turn out larger numbers of voters because of the personal connection it creates.
- **Support** – Finally, door to door campaigning can be a useful means of building a volunteer organization by locating interested people, as well as locating donors and precinct captains, etc.

#### Strategy

As with every other facet of a campaign, your door to door strategy is limited by the resources you have available to your campaign. The main resources you will need to conduct an effective door to door canvas are *people and time*. While some expense is involved because you'll want to have handouts and literature available to your canvassers, the only real limits to the number of doors you can knock on are the amount of people and time you have available to you.

If you have the ability to knock on every door in your district without sacrificing other aspects of your strategy, then by all means do it. Most campaigns don't have this luxury, however, and must limit the number of precincts they canvas. Decide which precincts you will target for door to door campaigning by using your campaign plan. Which precincts is your campaign targeting? Will going door to door in these precincts be possible? Will such an effort help your campaign strategy?

Another consideration you need to make is which houses you will knock at? Don't go to the homes of people who can't vote for you – this is just a waste of time. This means you should never knock at the door of a person who isn't registered to vote. If you're facing a contested Republican primary, knock only at the homes of registered Republicans. The real decision, of course, comes in the general election. You'll need to take a look at your resources and campaign plan to decide which voters to target. Will you knock only on Republican doors? Only in Republican precincts? Swing precincts? Democratic doors? All of these decisions must be made in light of your campaign strategy and targeting decisions.

### **Voter Lists**

In order to run a successful door to door canvas, you need a solid voter list. This list should be a "street list," organized by street in each precinct, and usually lists the voter's name, address, party registration (if your state allows voters to register by party) and sometime phone number. These lists can generally be purchased for a small administrative fee from your local county, township or state clerk or board of elections. Your local party organization may also have lists available. Wherever you get it, make sure the list is current.

These lists may be available only in paper form, or may also be available on computer disk. If possible, opt for the disk – it will make the task of organizing your list easier if it's on your computer. If the only list available is a paper list, you may have to enlist the aid of volunteers to manually enter the lists into your hard drive.

As you carry out your door to door activities, you will undoubtedly learn more about the voters you meet: who they support, what issues are important to them, and what their children's names are, etc. Be sure that the computer system you are using will allow you to add this additional information as you learn it. The more you know about each voter, the more you can tailor your message and communications to each individual.

### **Your Canvassing Team**

The backbone of your door to door effort is your canvassing team. One person should be in charge of organizing the canvas. This person could be a paid staff member (like the grassroots director) or a great volunteer. The canvas coordinator is responsible for organizing the effort, including making sure goals are met, organizing materials, and keeping track of targeted areas.

When building your team, you will need to decide who will perform the canvas. Voters are most likely to respond positively to the candidate, so you will want to make sure he or she is part of the canvassing effort. Of course, unless your district is extremely small, the candidate won't be able to cover the entire area. The next best person is a local resident of each area you are targeting – voters respond well to personal endorsements from people they know, like friends and neighbors.

Door to door campaign is time consuming, so you will need to make sure you recruit all the volunteers you need for this effort. Choose people who live in the district they are canvassing, when possible. If this isn't an option, at least have your volunteers become familiar with the area. When the candidate walks, he or she will need to have a volunteer with them to take care of handouts and papers. The candidate should never walk alone. If you have enough volunteers, it's a good idea to send out all your canvassing teams in groups of two.

Don't forget – not every canvas team member is a walker. You'll also need people to do the data entry work, drive the canvassers from location to location, supervise, etc.

### **Training**

Set up a door-to-door school for your canvassing team and teach them the do's and don'ts of going door to door. Give them practice in speaking with voters, handling problems, and talking about the candidate. They should be familiar with the campaign and the issues, as well as your door-to-door strategy. Each canvasser should be given a “walk packet” that includes all the materials they will need, including:

- Maps
- A list of the voters they should contact
- Literature, bumper stickers, pins, etc.
- Volunteer sign-up cards
- Absentee ballot applications (check local laws first)
- Voter registration applications (check local laws first)
- Polling place information
- Anything else they will need to be effective canvassers

The training session is also a great time to motivate the canvassers by a speech from the candidate, small gifts, etc.

### **Getting Ready to Walk**

Before you canvas a precinct send each voter you plan to visit a piece of literature letting them know you will be in the neighborhood. You could either mail them a postcard or have volunteers deliver literature to each house you plan to visit. This starts the process of introducing the candidate to the voters, building name I.D. and letting them know that you will be at their door in a few days. The card should be simple, something like:

“Hi Neighbor. Next week, I'll be in your area, and I hope to

meet you to speak with you about the upcoming election.”

The postcard should clearly indicate the candidate’s name and the office he or she is running for. You may also want to include a photo of the candidate so that the voters will be able to recognize him or her when they knock on the voter’s door.

If volunteers will be performing the canvas in a particular area, without the candidate, you should still send these “pre-walk” cards to everyone they will visit. Simply change the message to say something like:

“Hi Neighbor. In the next few days, someone from my campaign will be visiting your area. I’ve asked my team to meet with you to speak about your concerns for the upcoming election. I look forward to hearing what is important to you. If you’d like to speak with me before then, please call my office at 215-555-1212.”

### **Walk!**

On the actual day or days of the canvas, you should have all the volunteers meet at a central location or locations to begin the walk. Your team should be closely supervised by your walk coordinators, and should receive a steady supply of campaign literature, food, and motivation. Make sure your organizers keep things moving – volunteers who have completed walking one precinct should quickly be transported to the next. If possible, at least one person on every walk team should have a cell phone handy to keep in contact with campaign headquarters.

Your best bet is to take a van-full of volunteers to a neighborhood, with specific instructions and goals. Leave a supervisor with each large group to coordinate activities “on the ground.” Then have the van go back for another load of canvassers destined for another neighborhood. This way, you can have your team work several neighborhoods at once.

### **Other Considerations**

The best time to conduct a canvas is when people are at home – weekends and weekday afternoons. If possible, canvas before dark, as people are more likely to answer their doors when it is light outside. Be sure that your canvassers only go to the doors you have selected – they shouldn’t waste their time knocking at homes without registered voters or which you haven’t targeted.

### **Talking to the voters**

Make sure your volunteers or candidate knows the goals for the canvas. Usually, it will be to persuade the voter to support the candidate and to find out which way he or she is leaning. Sometimes, your canvassers will also be told to try and get people to place yard signs, recruit volunteers, or some other goal.

No matter why they're there, canvassers should try to keep the conversation short, no longer than 1 minute. Your volunteers must keep moving – spending longer than a minute at the door will leave much less time for knocking on other doors – and there's always another door to knock on. Also, never argue with the voter. It will only hurt your campaign. Simply say hello, tell them your name, your candidate's name, and the office he or she is running for. Give a brief snippet of information, ask for their support, and move on. For example:

**If the candidate is knocking:**

Hi, my name is Eamonn DeValera, and I'm running for city council, because I want my neighbors to feel safe living in our city. Can I count on your support on Election Day?

**If volunteers are knocking:**

Hi, my name is Chris Wogan – I'm a neighbor of yours, and wanted to tell you about Eamonn DeValera, who is running for city council. He is running because he believes in making the streets in our city safer. Can Eamonn DeValera count on your support on Election Day?

Be neighborly. Say hi to children, if they are present, and never, ever enter a person's house.

**Have a Handout**

Every voter your campaign visits should receive a handout. Never leave a voter empty handed. At the very least, you should give each person you visit a “palm card,” (small double-sided card with a brief message, slogan, and picture), or other small piece of campaign literature. Better-financed campaigns may also want to hand out more substantial literature, bumper stickers, buttons, etc.

One of the reasons that I suggest sending out your canvassers in groups of two is that the second canvasser (who is not speaking to the voter – only one of the canvassers should speak to the voter) can handle the various literature that you are giving away.

**Gather Some Information**

The other major job for the second canvasser is gathering information. This person should have a copy of the street list out with ample room to make notes. The second canvasser should jot down important information while the first canvasser is speaking with the voter. Some important information to listen for includes:

- Who the voter supports
- What issues are most important to the voter
- The names of other family members
- Any requests – such as stickers, a yard sign, an absentee ballot, etc.

Again, it is important that only one canvasser speaks with the voter. The second canvasser's job is simply to listen, take notes, carry literature, etc. The second canvasser can also allow the candidate (if he is the one campaigning) to make a clean exit from talkative voters by saying, "Excuse me, but we really need to visit the next house." Then the candidate can be the good guy, apologize for having to go, and move on.

### **But No One Was Home!**

If no one is home at one of the houses you knock at, you can still make a positive impression on the voter by leaving a small "Sorry I Missed You" card. This card can either be a door hanger that you leave on the knob, or a post-it note type paper that sticks to the door. The card should say that you stopped by, you'd like the voter's support, and you hope to see them soon. For example:

"Hi neighbor. I stopped by to speak with you today regarding the upcoming election. I'm running because I know my neighbors deserve safer streets. I hope I can count on your support in this election. I look forward to meeting you soon."

This note can be modified if a volunteer is doing the walking:

His neighbor. I stopped by to speak with you today about Eamonn DeValera's campaign for city council. I hope Eamonn can count on your support in this election. If you'd like to speak with our campaign, please call us at 215-555-1212.

No matter which note you use, it can be handwritten or pre-printed. If it is pre-printed, the staff should add a short handwritten note before the walk, something like, "Hope to see you soon --- Eamonn" or for a volunteer, simply, "Hope to see you soon."

### **After the Walk**

The work isn't done once the walking is complete. After each canvas, the campaign should make sure that all of the information that was gathered is entered into the campaign's database. This information can be used in future walks, get-out-the-vote efforts and mailings.

Every person who was home when the canvasser knocked should receive a thank-you note, either by mail or by delivery. The best way to do this is to send out a handwritten post card to each person thanking them for their time, and again encouraging them to support the candidate. This way the single door-to-door campaign has produced at least three contacts per voter -- One note saying "I'm coming," one visit from the candidate (or staff) and one note saying "Thanks for having me." The door-to-door experience is also sure to gain a few extra yard signs, and maybe even some volunteers.

### **Follow-up!**

The campaign should also follow-up with the voters who were particularly interested in the campaign. If anyone requested a yard sign or other campaign material, it should be delivered by a campaign volunteer within a few days of the walk. People who wanted to volunteer or contribute should be contacted immediately. The campaign can also send a special note or issue paper to any voter who indicated that they were particularly concerned about one issue or another.

Campaigns, especially local campaigns, ignore door to door campaigning at their peril. Like all aspects of the campaign, a door to door effort that lacks planning and targeting will not succeed. Carefully target the voters you will contact with your canvas, plan your effort according to the guidelines laid out above, and motivate your team to perform.

<b>Door to Door Record</b>		
<b>Yard Signs</b> should be sent to:		
NAME	ADDRESS	
<b>Requests</b> (literature, buttons / stickers):		
NAME	ADDRESS	
<b>Send an issue letter to:</b>		
NAME	ADDRESSS	ISSUE
<b>Contributions</b> – send forms for donations to:		
NAME	ADDRESSS	

**Sample door to door canvasser record**

## 4. The Candidate Tour Plan

Organizing a candidate tour of the district can be an effective way to generate publicity, reach a large number of voters, and motivate your supporters in a quick and affordable fashion. Tours can take any number of forms, but all center on the basic idea of getting the candidate moving through the district from event to event in a short period of time (over one day or several) in order to generate publicity and support.

Many of us remember Hillary Clinton's famous (or infamous) "listening tour" through New York when she was starting her Senate campaign. This is not the type of tour we're talking about here. While "listening tours" can be effective in certain circumstances, only certain campaigns can benefit from them. Every campaign, however, can benefit from active, grassroots tours of the district. These tours combine all of the elements of grassroots organizing and street-level tactics to actively pursue support in the community. This guide will walk you through the steps of creating a successful grassroots candidate tour.

### Choose a Goal

Your candidate tour can have several different goals – you should evaluate your campaign strategy in advance of the tour to determine which goals you will pursue in planning your tour. Some common tour goals include:

- **Publicity** – Candidate tours are a great way to generate press coverage for your campaign. Not only are tours exciting and newsworthy, but they also give you a chance to speak with the press from all the different parts of your district in a short amount of time, in person, while delivering a news story relevant to each particular area of the district.
- **Meeting Leaders** – Another common goal for tours is meeting local leaders in each area of your district. Tours provide an opportunity to connect (or re-connect) with local political, business, church and community leaders through meetings, meals, and co-sponsored events.
- **Spreading Your Message** – Probably the number one goal for candidate tours, as for all types of grassroots campaigning, is getting the word out about your candidate and campaign. The district tour gives you the opportunity to spread your message in person.
- **Get Out the Vote** – If you are planning a tour close to Election Day, one of your main goals is probably getting out the vote. Speeches and events at the end of the campaign can motivate supporters to rally to the polls, and tours provide a great way to link these speeches and rallies into a coherent plan that covers the entire district.

- **Fundraising** – Often overlooked as a tour goal, fundraising opportunities can easily be woven into your tour plan. For example, you can schedule “face time” with local business leaders before events where the candidate can solicit contributions, or hold VIP fundraising receptions before your public rallies.

### **Choose a Theme**

The most successful candidate tours revolve around a central theme. While it is possible to simply conduct a general tour, thematic tours generate the most publicity and support. The only exception to this rule is the get out the vote tour, which succeeds better if it is not based around any other theme than getting out the vote.

The theme you choose for your tour can be based on an issue or a demographic. For example, if job creation is a big part of your message, your candidate can do a business tour to meet with business leaders, factory workers, etc. Or, if you are targeting senior citizens, your candidate can do a senior tour visiting nursing homes, senior citizens clubs, etc.

Once you choose a theme, be sure to write some talking points (a “stump speech”) that you can deliver at each stop (slightly modified for each location). Your stump speech should hammer home your message as it relates to the tour, concentrate on a few issues related to the message, and most of all, be positive. Candidate tours are not the place for talking about how bad the economy is. Instead, talk about how great the economy could be – when you’re meeting with people in person, they want to feel positive vibes (think Ronald Reagan, not Jimmy Carter).

### **Planning is Key**

Like all major grassroots efforts, candidate tours rely on solid planning. Because your candidate will be attending various events throughout your district, your itinerary will need to be timed correctly, your staff and volunteers will need to be ready, and your materials prepared. Be sure to write out a tour plan early, and check back on it often to be sure that your district tour is a success.

### **Set Up Events**

The majority of a candidate tour consists of “events.” The tour is basically a string of events that takes place over the duration of the tour, be it one day or one week. The events should all coincide with the theme of the tour and be set-up to achieve the tour’s goals as laid out by the campaign. There are several types of events that can be incorporated into the tour, including:

- **Speeches** – The tour staple, speeches can take any number of forms, including speeches to groups, schools, clubs, etc. This category also includes press conferences.

- **Rallies** – Organized rallies can provide a great way to generate momentum and support and motivate your organization.
- **On Location Tours** – Touring a factory, business, school or other site can be a great way to highlight your message and issues.
- **Roundtables** – Public discussions (roundtables) between the candidate and some local leaders, supporters, or undecided voters.
- **Q&A's** – An event held by the campaign with the purpose of allowing members of the audience to question the candidate.
- **Whistle-stop Tours** – An old favorite. Load a train, bus, or old-fashioned trolley with supporters and make the rounds of the district, making many pre-arranged stops where the candidate can make quick stump speeches while the staff hands out balloons, brochures, etc.

The best way to generate lots of publicity and keep your supporters enthused is to incorporate several different types of events during your tour – do a rally in one town, an on-location tour in the next, etc.

## **Tour Logistics – Making the Tour Happen**

Much of the planning that goes into making the candidate tour a success is the behind the scenes work of planning the tour logistics – here are some key considerations for your planning team:

**Transportation** – The candidate and your tour team will need reliable transportation for the tour. Since the events will be scheduled far in advance, you have to arrive on schedule and depart on schedule to make it to the next event. This means having cars and vans ready, plane and train tickets in hand, and maps of the district already prepared.

**Scheduling** – Having multiple events scheduled requires string scheduling skills – your candidate and team needs to know where to go and when. These schedules should be realistic – always provide an extra buffer just in case a contingency arises.

**Local Organizers**- It is imperative that your campaign finds local organizers on the ground at each event location that will be responsible for set-up and clean up as well as other event preparations.

**Volunteers** – In addition to the local organizers, your campaign will need a volunteer team to help with the preparation and execution of the tour.

**Ticketing / Admission Procedure** – Who will be able to come to your events? For most events, such as rallies and speeches, the more people the merrier. Some events, though,

will require ticketing procedures, such as fundraisers. Other events, like tours of business, will need to have controlled access to keep them from getting unruly.

**Other Speakers** – Will you be using surrogate speakers or other types of speakers for your events? Will someone else be appearing with the candidate to make remarks? You need to plan for these other speakers in advance.

## **Get the Word Out About Your Tour**

To achieve maximum exposure for your tour (and thus assure gobs of supporters for your rallies and events) as well as generate lots of publicity, be sure to get the word out about your tour.

The first step in getting the word out is to utilize your network of supporters and fundraisers to publicize the tour and any local tour events that are taking place in their area. Prepare talking points and brochures for all of your volunteers and staff so that they can broadcast news about your tour to their family, friends, and associates.

You should also use the press to generate publicity for your district tour. Contact political reporters and “pitch” them stories with a local angle. Issue press releases and be sure reporters know what the theme and schedule for your tour is. A good press release should be positive in nature and make reporters want to attend an event.

If you have extra funds or volunteers, you can utilize direct mail and literature drops to spread the word about the tour – send brochures and palm cards to voters in the areas you are visiting, as well as those who support your candidate on the issue (or demographic) the tour is themed on.

Finally, consider sending volunteers door to door in the areas you are visiting – this is a great way to raise the local consciousness about your visit as well as ensure that additional voters (beyond your network) will attend your events.

## **Tour!**

Once you have planned, prepared, and publicized your tour, you’re ready to make it happen. Remember:

- **Keep Your Energy Up** – Candidate tours are high-octane events. Often, it’s hard for the candidate and staff to keep that energy up after the first couple of events or days – you must keep your staff (and yourself) motivated, or else the voters will think that you consider the tour boring, and they will too.
- **Listen** – Though you’ll be doing most of the talking during the tour, remember to keep your ears open. When you’re repeatedly asked the same question, it’s usually because it’s something the voters care about – listen to what they’re

saying. The candidate tour is one of the few times you get to interact with so many voters at one time.

- **Say Thank You** – As with all campaign activities, remember to say thank you to the volunteers and local organizers who are helping to make your candidate tour a success.

With a lot of hard work, the proper planning, and an organized effort to spread the word you can be sure that your tour of the district will generate support, sell your message, and be a rousing success.

## \$5 For a Better Allentown!

Thanks for coming to the Mark Smith for City Council rally! Your support goes a long way to ensuring our success this November.

Please consider using this return envelope to contribute \$5 to the Smith for Council campaign. Your \$5 contribution will allow us to send 50 additional postcards to voters to let them know how Mark Smith will make Allentown a better place to live.

**YES! I want to help make a better Allentown!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sample Contribution Envelope for Tour Events** – can be passed around, printed on a pre-paid reply envelope, at tour rallies and speeches. Use this envelope to help garner additional funds and add new donors to your database.

## 5. The Guide to Successful Candidate Coffees

Candidate coffees (sometimes called meet-and-greets, in-home receptions or house-calls) are an integral fundraising and organization building tool for local campaigns. Local candidates can garner additional funds and support through the use of these versatile events.

### What is a Candidate Coffee?

For the purposes of this guide, a candidate coffee is any event that takes place in a supporter's home and involves the candidate and a small number of voters who gather to meet the candidate. These events are often referred to as "coffees" because generally the host serves light refreshments including coffee and pastries, or other appropriate fare. While the setting and program vary by candidate and event, the basic flow of a candidate coffee remains the same: a supporter hosts a small event in his or her home and invites friends and neighbors to attend. The host serves light refreshments, after which the candidate makes some short remarks, and then goes around the room greeting the attendees. Either the host collects donations from all attendees before the event, or the candidate, host, or other campaign official solicits donations during the event.

### Why Are Candidate Coffees Important?

Candidate coffees are important functions for local campaigns because they are inexpensive ways to get the campaign message out to a group of supporters, fundraise and build the campaign organization. Candidate coffees can be run entirely by volunteers and can often take place at times when no other campaign events would occur, such as mid-morning coffees with housewives or weekday evening events.

### Goals

Candidate coffees serve a variety of important goals. Among them are:

- **Fundraising** – Candidate coffees are great fundraising venues. These events can involve either high or low dollar donors, depending on the event host. The host can either require a donation in exchange for a ticket to the event, or the candidate or host can ask for donations at the event. Depending on the event, both strategies may be used at the same coffee.
- **Communication** – Coffees also provide an excellent venue for getting the campaign's message out to the voters. While most coffees are small affairs (10-20 attendees) they provide a great opportunity for the candidate to speak to an attentive audience on a nearly one-to-one basis.
- **Organization** – Finally, candidate coffees are tremendous opportunities for building the campaign's grassroots organization. The event attendees can be

recruited to hold their own coffees or join your volunteer team, and the event host can also be asked to hold other events or help organize the neighborhood.

## **Targeting**

Just as with every other activity your campaign engages in, you should target your coffees into the areas and coalitions most important to the campaign. Try to hold coffees that encompass key demographics in the district, as well as holding these events in different areas of the district that are most important for the campaign to build support in.

## **Recruit a Local Host**

The first and most important task in holding a candidate coffee is recruiting a local host to help organize the event. Find a supporter in the area where you plan to hold the event who will agree to hold the event in his or her home. The host should be willing to donate the space for the event, as well as the refreshments and time it will take to plan the event. The host can recruit others to help with the organization and set-up, friends to donate the refreshments, etc.

The person you recruit to host the event must be willing and able to put in the time it will take to plan and organize the event. The campaign should have a packet of information and materials available to help the host get started. While the campaign should have a volunteer available to answer the host's questions and help troubleshoot for the host, candidate coffees are host-driven events and should not require much time from the campaign.

The local host also drives the effort to recruit attendees for the event. The person you enlist to host your event should have a wide-enough range of contacts, friends and neighbors to be able to convince 10-20 of them to attend the event. These contacts should be people the host suspects would be willing to contribute to the campaign, and thus should not be "just anyone." The campaign can and should invite any supporters it knows of in the area around the event to attend, but for the most part it is the host's responsibility to get people to attend. Make sure that enough people attend the event to make it worth the candidate's time to be there.

## **Host Committees**

The campaign may decide that it would be beneficial to have the host recruit a host committee to help with the event. For candidate coffees, the campaign can employ one of two different types of host committees:

- **Finance Host Committee** – The campaign can have the host recruit a finance host committee whose sole responsibility is fundraising for the event. The campaign should set a contribution level that is required to join the host committee – then the host can go out and ask key contacts to join the host committee for the event by contribution the required amount. This amount

should be a good deal higher than the admission price for the event, if one is to be charged, but can be smaller than the amount you would require for a donor to join the host committee of a larger dinner event or reception.

- **Organizational Host Committee** – If the campaign so desires, it can set up an organization host committee instead of a finance host committee. The job of an organization host committee is to help set up the event. For example, the host committee may have three members, including the host, who has the event in his or her home, another person responsible for invitations, and a third responsible for refreshments. Be careful not to make this type of host committee too big, or else there won't be any room left at the event for paying donors.

Because candidate coffees are such small events, it is generally advisable to have only one type of host committee for each event.

### **Event Types**

There are many different types of events that the campaign can host which fall into the candidate coffee category. In fact, the type of event you hold is limited only by your own imagination. Here are examples of some standard events that many campaign hold:

- **The Candidate Coffee** – The classic affair from which these events draw their name. This event usually includes a small reception with coffee and pastries served by the host.
- **The Breakfast Reception** – These events feature a breakfast served by the host and usually target senior citizens and stay at home moms.
- **Pizza and Beer** – In more working class neighborhoods, many candidates substitute pizza and beer for the coffee and pastries.
- **Barbeque** – Another favorite that works in some areas is to hold a small barbeque featuring the candidate.

As mentioned above, the type of event you hold is limited only by your imagination, so be creative!

### **Invitations**

One of the host's jobs is inviting contacts to attend the event. The campaign should provide basic information to the host to help him or her carry out this task.

The most effective way for the host to invite contacts is to simply call the people in his or her rolodex and personally invite them. Some hosts prefer to mail out invitations – this is fine, but more expensive for the host, who should be shouldering the cost for the event, including invitations. Whether the campaign and host choose phoned or mailed invitations, the invitations should be sent well enough in advance to allow people to attend. The host should also be sure to call all attendees a few days before the event to

confirm that they are coming, remind them of the time and place, and make sure they get directions to the event if they need it.

### **The Event Program**

The event itself should be a short and simple affair. While every event is different, the basic flow remains the same. The candidate should arrive after the attendees have arrived and had time to enjoy the refreshments. The candidate should make a short speech (about 5 minutes) and then work his or her way around the room meeting the guests individually. Alternately, the candidate could work the room before the speech, if so desired.

If the campaign and host have decided not to charge an admission price for the event, then there must be a fundraising pitch sometime during the event. The best way to do this is to have the host approach each person individually asking for a donation. Other ways to make the pitch include having the host or a campaign staffer make an announcement after the candidate has left, or having the candidate ask for funds from each individual as he or she makes their way around the room. One other method that has enjoyed some success is having prepaid envelopes prepared and passed out asking each person to contribute a small amount to the campaign.

### **Mind Your Manners**

As with all volunteer driven events, be sure to send thank-you's to each person who helped organize the event, as well as to each person who attended (have the host send these out). You should personally thank the host as well as send him or her a note. Also, be sure to follow-up with anyone who pledged a donation at the event but did not send it to the campaign.

### **Don't Stop at One!**

Candidate coffees are events that can be held all over your district. As your campaign gets going, you should plan to hold many of these events – they are volunteer driven and take very little time and effort for the candidate to attend. Set a goal of having an event like this once per week, twice per week, or even three in a row every Saturday. Candidate coffees provide a great mechanism for fundraising, getting your message out and organizing the district, all with little effort from the campaign.

## *Shelborne Street Supports* **Fran Heavner for Congress**

*Thank you for joining us today to support Fran for Congress.*

Host Committee

Louise Pontarelli, Host  
Frances Vincent, Asst. Host

Kyle Fenstermaker  
Frances McKee  
Robert Neimann  
Bridget Martin  
Maryanne Dunlevy  
Mace Dunleavy  
Lenny Angelino  
Brian Robinson  
Carol Beck

### **Today's Program**

Welcome – Louise Pontarelli  
  
Introduction of Fran Heavner –  
Frances Vincent  
  
Remarks by Fran Heavner  
  
Questions and Answers with  
Fran Heavner  
  
Lunch

**YES! I want to help Fran get elected.**

**Please sign me up to:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Make phone calls                      \_\_\_\_\_ Go door to door  
\_\_\_\_\_ Work at headquarters                \_\_\_\_\_ Please a sign in my yard  
\_\_\_\_\_ Stuff envelopes from home          \_\_\_\_\_ Work on Election Day

\_\_\_\_\_ **I'd like to contribute \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help the campaign.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Sample program handout for a coffee hosted by a supporter** – includes a reply device to recruit volunteers.

## **6. The Absentee Voter Drive Handbook**

Most campaigns overlook absentee voters. They think these voters are hard to find, hard to reach, irrelevant, a small percentage of the voting population, and erratic in their voting behavior. While most campaigns may be right about some of these qualities, and others may be argued either way, they are definitely wrong about one: absentee voters are not irrelevant.

Anyone who closely watched the returns come in from the 2000 Presidential Election knows that every vote counts, even at the national level. This is even more true at the local level – how many of us have seen rural school board elections where only 300 or 400 people come out to vote and the winners prevail by only a handful of votes? In every election, every single vote helps.

### **Why Absentee Voters Are Important**

As we have seen, every vote your campaign can get helps move you closer to victory. Absentee voters provide crucial extra votes for your campaign. In local elections, the number of voters who chose to vote absentee may be in the dozens. In statewide elections, this number may jump to the thousands or tens of thousands. To paraphrase the 1840's miner, "There's gold in them there hills!" Absentee votes are votes you need to go after to win your election.

There's another reason why absentee voters are so important for your campaign – because everyone else neglects them. Chances are, your campaign will be the only one that is aggressively pursuing absentee voters in your election. Sure, other campaigns may try to garner absentee votes by mailing out absentee ballot applications when they are requested or throwing a few around nursing homes, but your campaign will be the only one that is actually courting these voters: targeting them, communicating with them, and reminding them to vote.

### **Check the Law!**

It is very important that your campaign check local election laws regarding absentee ballot procedure. The rules are different in different states and municipalities. Check with an election lawyer or your state elections bureau to find out what rules apply to your campaign.

### **Who Votes Absentee?**

The rules vary by state, but generally any voter who will be out of town on Election Day, or unable to vote due to age, infirmity, or disability is eligible to vote by absentee ballot.

## **How Does Absentee Voting Work?**

Again, the rules vary by state, so check the law before beginning. Generally, a voter must fill out an absentee ballot application listing the reason they will not be able to vote at their assigned polling place on Election Day. This application is then turned in to the county clerk or state elections board. The county clerk or state official follows up by mailing the voter a ballot, which the voter marks and returns to elections officials in a double-envelope (to insure a secret ballot). This ballot generally must arrive by Election Day. In most localities, these ballots are opened at the polling place where the person would have voted, immediately after the close of the polls, and the vote is counted in the polling place total.

## **Your Goal**

The goal of your absentee voter drive is simple – make sure that any voter who supports you, but is unable to go to the polls on Election Day, applies for an absentee ballot and votes for you on Election Day.

## **Targeting Absentees**

As with every campaign activity, it is extremely important that your absentee voter drive is targeted – simply mailing absentee voter ballots to every voter in the district would not only be expensive, but unwise – half of the people you sign up would likely be planning to vote against you, and you'd only be making it easier for them. You must make sure that you target your drive only to voters who support you or who are more likely to support you than your opponent (such as when you target all registered Republicans, or all registered Republicans in your home county).

There are two basic ways to run an absentee voter drive. The first way is the passive method – you simply carry absentee ballot applications with you when you go door-to-door, and have them at events and campaign headquarters. If a supporter asks you how to vote absentee, you tell them and hand them an application.

The second method is the active method – where your campaign goes out and lets supporters know who can vote absentee, and encourage them to apply for a ballot if they qualify. Many campaigns that have a little extra cash make absentee voters a key component of their campaign by actually mailing absentee ballots out to their entire target audience (be it all Republicans, all seniors, etc.) and encouraging them to vote absentee if they can.

What works best? Use them both. If you are going to get a considerable number of votes from absentee voters, go out there and recruit them. Get your supporters to vote absentee if they qualify. You should also be prepared to send out absentee voter applications to those supporters who ask for them.

## **Building an Absentee List**

While registering supporters to vote absentee is good, making sure you keep in contact with them is even better. Your campaign should keep a list of supporters who have applied to vote absentee so that you can contact them on a regular basis. The only way you can stay in touch with them is if you know who they are -- build an absentee voter list with names and contact information.

It is easy to build a list of people who request absentee ballot applications from you – it is much harder to keep track of who actually applies to vote absentee, or to keep track of those who fill out applications you mass-mail to your supporters. The best way to keep such a list is to have people mail their absentee ballot applications back to your campaign, where their names are recorded, and then the campaign turns the whole lot of applications into the appropriate elections officer.

The legality of this method varies by state. In some states it is completely legal, provided that you actually turn the applications in and do not tamper with them in any way. In some states, this method is completely illegal. In these states, it is often extremely hard to make a list of those who applied for absentee ballots. Many states fall somewhere in between.

The bottom line is, if your state allows you to have voters mail the completed applications back to the campaign before they are turned in, use this method, but adhere to the law scrupulously.

## **Keep in Touch**

The best part about registering supporters to vote absentee is that your opponents won't know that they are voting this way, and thus, your campaign will be the only one communicating with them concerning their absentee status. You simply must utilize your list of voters who have applied to vote absentee to put your message in front of them in a special way.

## **Communicating**

While you should still present absentee voters with your campaign's regular message, you should also go the extra step by presenting a special message to these voters. This lets them know that you are in touch with what is going on with them and with their communities. Send them special mailings reminding them how to vote absentee. Mail them a special newsletter or letter thanking them for taking the time to vote, even though they can't make it to the polls.

## **Get Out the Absentee Vote**

Another important message to send absentee voters is a message to get out there and vote. Obviously, because your absentee voters won't be going to the polls like the other voters

on Election Day, you won't be sending them your standard get out the vote messages. Instead, you'll modify your message to fit their special circumstances.

After compiling your absentee list and staying in touch with them, your absentee supporters will feel in touch with your campaign. As Election Day approaches, send them a special mailing reminding them that they applied to vote absentee, and letting them know when the deadline is for sending their votes back through the mail.

You may also phone your absentee voters the week before the election to make sure they remember to vote for you. Many of your absentees will not be in the district to receive your call, but some, such as seniors and the disabled, will be. Let them know that you need their support when they mark their absentee ballot, and encourage them to send their ballot back in.

### **Poll Watching**

Absentee balloting has historically had a higher amount of fraud than other election activities. While working on your own absentee voter drive, your campaign should be prepared to deal with any irregularities in your opponent's absentee ballot campaign. As mentioned above, in many states, absentee ballots are opened at the polling place once polls close. Your campaign should make sure that your poll watchers keep a close eye on this process to ensure fairness and integrity. Make sure that the absentee ballots come from registered voters who actually live in the district, and that the absentee ballot of any voter who voted at the polls on Election Day is not double counted (in many states, people who vote absentee but then find that they are bale to come to the polls on Election Day are allowed to do so, with the absentee ballots they mailed in simply being discarded).

### **Volunteer Driven, Easy to Accomplish**

Absentee balloting campaigns are relatively easy to accomplish, so it is surprising that so many campaigns fail to put the time and effort into succeeding with them. The entire absentee ballot drive can easily be run by your campaign's volunteers, who can solicit voters, make the calls and compile the list. All it takes to succeed with absentee voters is taking the time to recruit them, and then following up with them to let them know you need their support.

## **7. Targeted Voter Registration that Works**

### **How to effectively use voter registration in your campaign**

For most campaigns, registering new voters is a luxury they can not afford. Voter registration drives are usually best left to nonpartisan civic groups and community organizations. The majority of campaigns can best use their limited resources elsewhere, and only attempt to register new voters when directly asked, such as when a supporter asks the campaign to help register his or her spouse.

There is one type of local campaign, however, that can benefit greatly from a voter registration drive: the campaign that is flush with volunteers. While a voter registration drive will not mean certain victory even for the campaign with thousands of extra volunteers, it can be an effective way to make volunteers feel important and bring in new supporters at the same time.

Because the new voters that the campaign registers will most likely not appear on the voter registration rolls ("street lists") that its opponents have, the campaign will be the only one contacting the new voters with its direct mail and other media. Thus, the voters will only be receiving one side of the story - your side. In order to be successful, though, such an effort must be done properly.

### **Legal Issues**

Before beginning a voter registration drive, the campaign must research local voter registration laws. Each state (and often, each county) has its own rules on how much aid a campaign worker may provide to a new registrant, whether the form can be delivered by the campaign or must be mailed by the applicant, etc. Therefore, each campaign must find out exactly what rules apply before beginning a registration effort. If the law is not followed, the campaign may face disqualified votes, bad press, fines and recounts.

### **Registration Strategy**

Voter registration can be risky - there is no way for the campaign to know what candidate the voter will ultimately support. Each new voter that the campaign brings in could, in theory, become an extra vote for the campaign's opponent. In order to increase the chances that the new voters will be inclined to vote for your candidate, only conduct registration drives in areas where your candidate has a high level of support. For example, if your demographics and polling tell you that the candidate is very popular (or could be very popular) with the citizens in Precinct E, then this precinct would be a good place to conduct a voter registration drive. The campaign must not conduct voter registration efforts in areas where the opposition enjoys high levels of support.

### **Registration Technique**

Registration campaigns should be carried out by a door-to-door effort. Volunteers should

refrain from setting up registration tables at malls, county fairs, or other high traffic areas, because the campaign would not be able to target such voters. The people who the campaign registers at such events may not live in the district, or worse, may live in the district but in areas where your opponent is extremely popular. The only way to effectively target new voters to register is by sending volunteers door-to-door in the proper precincts.

The campaign must ensure that it has a way to contact those who it registers. Again, check your local law to ensure compliance. Generally, the volunteers will have to mark down on the street lists who has agreed to register to vote, along with their addresses. Without knowing who the new voters are, voter registration campaigns will not be a benefit to the campaign.

### **1 - 2 - 3 Contact!**

After the registration campaign is completed, the task for the campaign is to ensure that the new voters are repeatedly contacted by the campaign. Again, because these voters will not appear on the street lists, yours will be the only campaign that is targeting them. The goal for the campaign is to contact these new voters a minimum of three times. If the volunteers who conducted the registration efforts are still available, one good use of their time would be to go door-to-door to each of the new voters to deliver the campaign's message in person. The new voters should also be included in subsequent direct mail and literature drops.

### **Conclusion**

While voter registration campaigns will not be an effective use of resources for every campaign, campaigns that are flush with volunteers will find that a properly targeted voter registration campaign can not only keep volunteers busy, but also provide new supporters on the march towards election day. To be successful, local campaigns must comply with local law, target registration efforts to precincts where the candidate enjoys high support, and ensure that each new voter is contacted regularly by the campaign.

## **8. Building Local Coalitions**

Modern campaigns, whether national or local in nature, focus on building coalitions of people who are targeted by the campaign's message. These coalitions do part of the work of the campaign, by drawing in new members and spreading the campaign's message to interested parties. Which coalitions each campaign should build is a question of strategy, and will be discussed in another section of this site. This article assumes that various groups have already been targeted, and will focus on the nuts and bolts of building those coalitions.

### **Dual Option**

The purpose of coalitions are to build grassroots organizations supporting the campaign and candidate. In utilizing coalitions, the campaign has two options: use pre-existing coalitions to build the grassroots organization, or build coalitions from the ground up. Each has advantages and disadvantages. These options can be used individually, or in conjunction, to effectively build support for the local campaign.

### **Pre-Existing Coalitions: Groups, Organizations and Clubs**

Pre-existing coalitions exist in every community and neighborhood. Church groups, community organizations, parent teacher associations and civic groups are examples of already formed entities with active members who share common concerns.

The distinct advantage to using pre-existing coalitions is that they are already packaged -- a group of like minded individuals exists with structure and organization, and often includes "doers" rather than just "sayers." Of course, there are also disadvantages. The group has set leadership and direction, and may be reluctant to feel as if it is being assumed by a campaign or somehow upended. The key is to make the groups "partners" with the campaign, instead of trying to make them part of the campaign.

Groups that the campaign wants to partner with should be approached before an individual announces his candidacy, or shortly thereafter. By meeting with the group leadership and asking for support before the campaign starts in earnest, the campaign makes groups feel part of the decision process, begins the relationship with positive communication, and improves chances that the group will be more favorably disposed to the idea of partnering with the campaign.

When approaching the organization, a candidate should meet with the leaders of each group, and eventually with the entire leadership hierarchy. It is important for the candidate to be frank about his stand on issues pertaining to the individual organization. Nothing kills a coalition faster than dishonesty in initial meetings. The campaign should ask for the outright support of the group, if this is possible, although some groups may not (or may be legally unable to) support political candidates outright. The leadership of such groups should still be approached, in order for positive inclinations toward the candidate to be created.

## **Campaign Goals**

There are several goals for the campaign when partnering with existing groups and organizations: First and foremost, the campaign wants to gain votes, and the group is a prime source of voters. Second, the campaign should seek to garner volunteers from the group. Third, press coverage may develop out of endorsements by key groups. Finally, financial support from the group, or its members, can be raised for the candidate through the partnership.

In return for these things, the campaign should promise to keep the group updated on its activities through continued contact, including future meetings between the group's leadership (or entire membership) and the candidate. The organization will want to feel as if it is "in the loop," and the campaign must make sure that this happens.

## **From the Ground Up: Building Coalitions Where None Exists**

For the ambitious campaign, building new coalitions can be the source of great grassroots support. The advantages of building new coalitions are that the campaign can independently direct the growth and substance of the coalition, and can ensure the coalition's support. The disadvantage of building a coalition from the ground up is the time it takes to do so. This may be overcome by using volunteers with extensive community contacts and available time to head up the coalition building process.

As of the time of this writing, even national organizations, such as the Republican National Committee, recognize the value of building new coalitions and are launching major initiatives to do just that. For the local campaign, coalitions can be built around key issues, such as education (parent groups), crime (civic/community organizations), or any other key local issue. Coalitions can also be formed regionally (by neighborhood or town) or by trade/profession. The range of possible coalitions that local campaigns can build is almost endless

## **Starting Out: Identifying Groups and Members**

The campaign that wishes to build its own coalitions should first map out what types of coalitions would be most beneficial, based on the campaign strategy. Is crime a major issue the campaign plans to raise? Then a "Concerned Citizens for Jones" coalition can be built. Does the candidate plan to address education? Then the campaign may wish to start a "School Parents for Smith" or "Teachers for Harrison" coalition.

After deciding on what coalitions to build, the campaign needs to determine how to get members to join. The campaign need not worry about getting thousands (or even hundreds) of members to join the coalition. Often campaigns find that one dedicated member is better than ten are not committed to the campaign or the candidate, and simply sign on to get the campaign to "stop bothering them."

Campaigns should be careful to include coalition building in all of their activities. When a candidate goes door-to-door, and meets a teacher who supports him, that teacher should be asked to join "Teachers for Harrison." When the candidate speaks at a community organization's candidate's night and is asked about crime, he should recruit new members of "Concerned Citizens for Jones." As the campaign rolls on, the coalitions will continue to fill up and form a valuable grassroots asset for the candidate that can be used not only during this campaign, but in future campaigns as well.

### **Value: What Campaign-Built Coalitions Can Do For You**

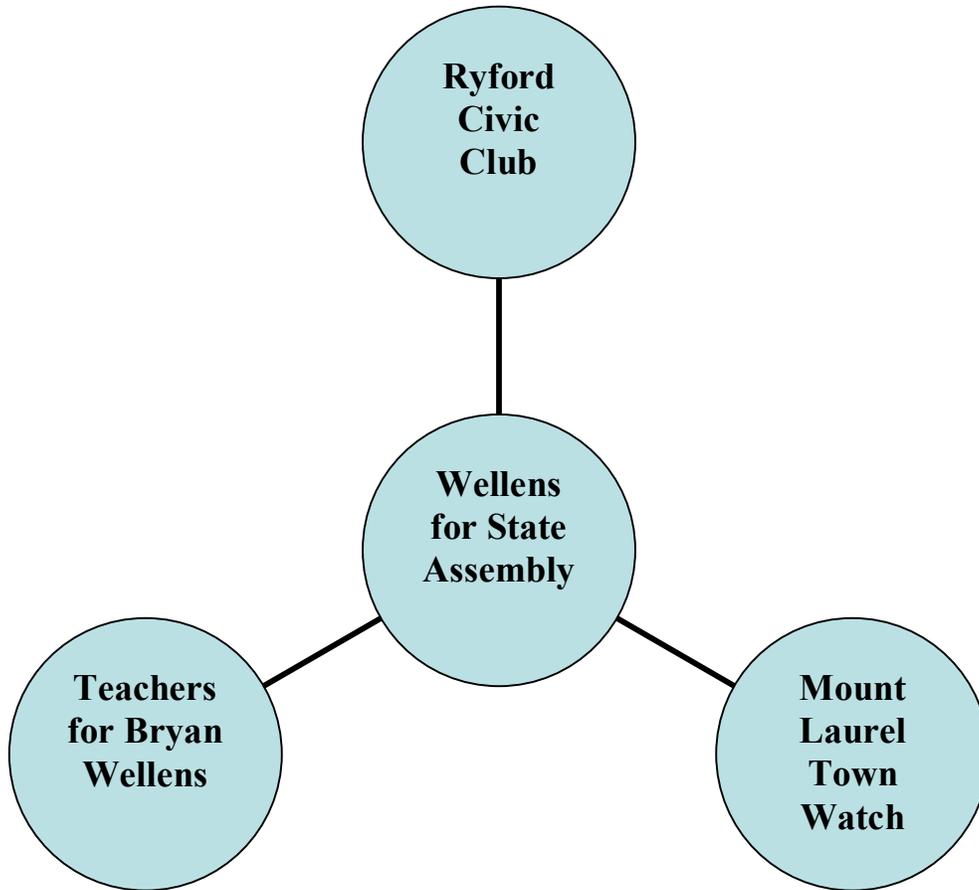
Once the campaign starts to grow its coalitions' membership, it needs to include those members and groups in its campaign strategy. The candidate may want to think about sending out a regular newsletter to the group, if it is large enough, and representatives of the organization should be briefed on the campaign's activities. The group can also be sent targeted literature and fundraising appeals.

The campaign should also seek to have the coalition members spread the word about the campaign and its message. Coalitions are a good source of volunteers, and members can often be asked to have candidate coffees in their homes, introduce the candidate to neighbors, and participate in efforts to get out the vote on election day.

### **Thank You!**

After the completion of the campaign, win or lose, a candidate must be sure to send thank-you's to every member of the coalitions the campaign built. After attaching their names to the campaign and working hard for a candidate's success, these members will feel as if the candidate's win is their win, and his loss is their loss. If the campaign wins, the group should be maintained as a source of grassroots support, and a ready made coalition for the reelection campaign. If the campaign loses, the candidate should maintain contact with the group, which will more than likely be ready to sign up for the next campaign.

Coalition building is an important part of any local campaign's strategy, and can be an effective tool for quickly building grassroots candidate support.



**Sample coalitions diagram** – shows the campaign employing two pre-built coalitions (the town watch and the civic club) and one self-built coalition, the Teachers for Bryan Wellens.

## **9. Everything You Need to Know About Running a Campaign School**

A little knowledge goes a long way in a political campaign. Often campaigns face a shortage or real, professional campaign experience and know-how. Volunteers, staff, candidates and campaign managers are often unschooled in the methods of professional political campaigns. How can a campaign – any campaign – rectify this shortcoming? With its very own campaign school.

### **The Importance of Training**

Volunteers, staff, and supporters are often enthusiastic, but misguided. The campaign manager him or herself may be a trusted friend and supporter who knows nothing about how to run a campaign. Ditto for the candidate. Most campaigns, no matter how large, face a real shortage of the knowledge needed to run a successful campaign.

The truth, though, is that in order to win, campaigns must be run in a professional manner, drawing on the experiences of past campaigns, learning from their mistakes and duplicating their successes. Uninformed campaigns wonder why they need to target, aren't sure how to organize the campaign, can't figure out how to ask donors for contributions.

Well-trained and professional campaigns, on the other hand, can spend less time wondering and more time working – doing the tasks that need to get done because the people who make up the campaign know how to do them.

Every campaign, from a race for the school board to a run for the White House, can benefit from holding one or more campaign schools to train their staff and organization and professionalize their effort.

### **What is a campaign school?**

A campaign school is an organized training session, or sessions, designed to educate your team on professional campaign tactics. Campaign schools present detailed information on how to run campaigns designed to win.

There are several different varieties of campaign schools. Many party organizations, advocacy groups, PACs, even some for-profit companies offer campaign schools lasting from 2 hours up to two weeks to train targeted groups of candidates and operatives. Campaigns can and should run their own campaign schools, however, so that they can target the information presented to fill the most pressing needs of the campaign and strengthen the weak spots for that particular race.

Schools put on by a campaign can last anywhere from two hours to a whole weekend, depending on your individual campaign needs and the level of political expertise of your group.

## **The Goal**

The goal of the campaign school is to help your staff and volunteers do their jobs better. Campaign schools should present two types of information. The first is “theory” – the strategy and reasoning behind the tactics you will use. While many campaigns don’t let their volunteers in on this theory, you should give your team a basic understanding of how and why certain strategies work and others don’t. You won’t want to tell your entire organization your particular campaign strategy, for fear it will leak to your opponent’s camp, but you can teach them some basic theory that will help them do their jobs better.

The second, and most important type of information you should present at your campaign school is “how-to” information – practical guides to the tactics your team will use. For example, if you will be mounting a strong get out the vote effort, your campaign school should include information on how to motivate voters, what to say to them to get them to go to the polls, how to be poll watchers, etc. This type of information should be the bulk of your campaign school and should be presented in a way that the volunteers and staff will be able to leave the campaign school knowing what they are supposed to do and how they should do it.

## **Who Should Come?**

One key decision the campaign needs to make is who will be invited (or required) to come to the school. Many campaigns invite their entire campaign organization – volunteers, staff, precinct leaders, etc., to come. Others only invite key volunteers. Your campaign should make this decision based on your own circumstances and the level of knowledge your team needs.

One great way to answer this question is by splitting up the campaign school. For example, let’s say you are having a campaign school over a weekend. You invite your campaign staff to come to the entire school, but your volunteers are broken into groups based on what jobs they will be handling. On Saturday, you hold a campaign school for your fundraising team, which covers campaign basics with an emphasis on fundraising. On Sunday, you hold a campaign school for your grassroots folks, which teaches basic campaigning with an accent on working the grassroots. Sunday night you hold a final session for your get out the vote team, who were also invited to your grassroots school.

You can also divvy up the school based on geography – for instance, holding four individual campaign schools in the four corners of your district.

## **Partner Up!**

If your campaign is small or you think you could benefit from some additional help or resources, don’t be afraid to partner with other local (and non-competing) campaigns or the local party organization. One township committee candidate I know held a campaign school for his volunteers in conjunction with the local Republican party and the area’s state assembly candidate. Not only did all of these campaigns get a great campaign

school, but the township committee candidate got the benefit of additional expertise from the party and a new network of political support.

### **Who Should Teach?**

The next major consideration is who should teach your campaign school. There are several different options:

If your campaign has a political professional, a knowledgeable consultant, or a seasoned veteran working for it, this person could teach the campaign school. If this person is on your staff, you may be able to have him or her teach the school for free as part of their staff duties.

If your campaign lacks a person qualified to teach the school, you can check with your local Republican party or other campaign to see if they can suggest someone who is skilled enough to teach your school for you.

The third option is to find a consultant or other political professional who would be willing to teach your campaign school for a reasonable fee.

### **Format**

There are any number of formats your campaign school can take. The first format consideration is time – how long will your campaign school be? Unless you are dealing with paid staff or true political professionals, you won't want your campaign school to be too long – people will just lose interest. A length for your campaign school is 2-3 hours. This gives you plenty of time to present information, but isn't so long that your attendees will get bored.

If you need to present lots of info and decide to hold a longer school, be sure to offer lots of breaks. You should also have question and answer periods and case-studies to break up the time and keep interest.

Whoever you get to teach your campaign school should use an informal style with many different formats. Remember – most of the people at your school will probably be volunteers. If they get bored or frustrated, chances are they'll think that working on the campaign will be boring and frustrating as well, and they may just never come back.

### **Handouts**

It is also a good idea to have packets and handouts available for your school attendees. Give them detailed notes on what you covered along with lists of strategies and tips they can use out in the field once the campaign school is finished. The campaign school is also a great time to hand out campaign packets to all of your volunteers – these packets can include anything the volunteers will need to do their jobs, such as maps, street lists, signs, bumper stickers, etc. During the actual school, your presenter can go through the

packet and explain what each item is for and how the volunteers should use them, what they are required to do, and what their goals are.

### **Viral Campaign Schools – Teaching the Teachers**

If your organization is large, you have tons of volunteers, or you are planning a campaign school for a large party organization or advocacy group, you may want to hold a “Viral Campaign School.” In other words, you may want to hold a campaign school for your top folks, who then can go out and spread the knowledge (like a virus) to the rest of your organization by holding their own campaign schools.

For example, you could have your twenty precinct captains attend your campaign school. These precinct captains could then go back to their own districts and teach the knowledge they have gained to their own downline precinct organization. In this way, you can in fact have 21 campaign schools covering your entire district, while only holding on back at campaign HQ.

### **Never Stop**

No matter how you plan and run your campaign school or schools, never stop learning new techniques, and never stop training your team. The more knowledgeable your campaign staff and volunteers are, the closer you’ll be to victory on Election Day.

**Sample Campaign School Topics –**  
*Use this list to brainstorm topics for your campaign school.*  
*Remember, one campaign school can cover several topics.*

**1. Campaign Planning / The Campaign Plan**

- Research
  - The District Analysis
    - Demographic Profile
    - Vote History
  - Candidate Profiles
    - Our Candidate
    - Opposition Research
  - The Political Environment
- Polling (Survey Research)
  - Sample
  - Question Design
  - Procedure
  - Analysis
- Targeting
- Strategy
  - Theme
  - Message
  - Classic Strategy
- Timeline
- Budget
- Writing the Plan

**2. Campaign Organization**

- The Campaign Organization
- Field Operation
- Coalitions
- Volunteers
- Headquarters
- Scheduling Operation

**3. Communications**

- Developing Your Message
- Goals of Campaign Communications
  - Name ID
  - Developing Image
  - Defining Issues
  - Differentiating candidates
  - Playing Defense
  - Building Momentum

- Political Speaking
  - Speeches
  - Debates
- Earned Media
  - The Press Operation
  - Media Relations
  - Technical Press Operation
    - Press Releases
    - Broadcasting
    - Media Kit
    - Photography
  - Generating Publicity
- Paid Media
  - Display Advertising
  - Direct Mail
  - Newspaper Ads
  - Radio Advertising
  - TV Advertising
  - Other Literature
- Communications Tactics Strategy
- Internet Strategy

#### **4. Finance**

- The Fundraising Plan
- General Guidelines
- Fundraising Research
- Personal Solicitation
- Major Donor Programs
- PAC Fundraising
- Events
- Direct Mail
- Telemarketing
- Campaign Finance Law

#### **5. Grassroots / Voter Contact Strategy**

- Targeted Voter Contact
- General Guidelines
- Purposes
  - Voter ID
  - Name ID
  - Activation / GOTV
  - Persuasion / Advocacy
- Telephone Banks
- Door – to – Door
- The Voter Blitz

- Candidate Tours
- Absentee Voter Drives
- Voter Registration Drives
- Candidate Coffees
- Coalitions
- Campaign Schools

## **10. Every Campaign's Guide to Getting Out the Vote**

There is nothing sadder in all of politics than to see a well-organized and well-run campaign fail because it let get out the vote activities fall through the cracks. Worse still are those campaigns that think that they have so much support from the public they don't need to work hard on Election Day to get out the vote. Nothing could be further from the truth. Every single candidate and campaign manager should have this sentence printed on a plaque hanging on his or her wall: An organized get out the vote operation is integral to the success of EVERY campaign.

### **What is Get Out the Vote?**

Get out the vote operations (sometimes called GOTV) are those activities that the campaign performs to turn voters out on Election Day – those tactics and strategies the campaign will use to get supporters to get up, go out, and vote on Election Day.

Get out the vote campaigns need to be targeted – that is, you need to make sure you are getting your supporters, and only your supporters, to go to the polls. GOTV operations are a waste if you are trying to move ALL voters to the polls, including your opponents'.

Simply put, every campaign, whether it is for the city council or for president, can and should implement a get out the vote effort.

### **GOTV Goals**

The goal of your get out the vote campaign is to identify who your supporters are, and get as many of them as possible to actually go vote. The GOTV team is not responsible for persuading people to support your candidate – that is the job of the rest of your campaign structure. The get out the vote campaign need only identify who has ALREADY been persuaded to support your candidate, and then motivate those supporters to go vote.

Your GOTV effort should set a goal of ensuring that at least 10% of the voters you need to win the election actually go vote. For example, if your campaign has looked at past election figures and realized that it needed 5000 votes to win the election, your GOTV goal would be to make sure that 500 known supporters make it to the polls on Election Day.

### **When to Get Started**

You should begin planning your get out the vote strategy well in advance of Election Day. Thirty days before the big day, you should have your get out the vote team in place and have your materials and systems prepared. You'll need to appoint one person as "GOTV Chairman." This person should over see your get out the vote activities in conjunction with the campaign manager. The majority of your GOTV team can be volunteers, including members of your precinct, ward, and regional organizations and block captains.

## **The Two Phases**

Get out the vote campaigns consist of two phases. The first is the identification phase. During this phase, your campaign should seek out and identify supporters. This list will be used in the second phase, the motivation phase (sometimes called “The Voter Blitz.”) During the motivation phase, which occurs in the few days leading up to the election, your team will try to motivate the supports you identified to go to the polls and vote for your candidate.

### **Identification, Please**

The identification phase basically lasts the entire campaign, with the exception of the last few days before the election. During the entire campaign, as part of every activity you conduct, your campaign must be keeping a list of supporters – along with relevant information such as phone numbers and addresses.

Your list should start with your own volunteers and staff – the people who are working to make sure your campaign succeeds. Add to that list anyone who contributes to the campaign, people who attend your events, people you meet going door to door who say they are for you. In short, add everyone who says that they support you.

You can also add more people to your list of supporters by using classic voter identification methods. By using voter ID (such as calling voters to ask who they plan to support), you make adding names to your list an objective in and of itself.

Your goal is to build a list that contains a number of supporters equal to at least 10% of the total votes you will need to win the election.

### **Contact and Re-contact**

Several days to one week before the election, you are ready to start motivating your list of supporters to go to the polls. Your ultimate goal is to make sure that every single person on that list actually goes to the polls on Election Day. Of course, you probably won’t get 100% to go, but you definitely come close.

The week before the election, you should contact each supporter to remind them when the election is, where their polling place is, and again ask for their support. You should contact each supporter at least once. If possible, contact each supporter several times. You can use several different methods to contact your supporters. They are listed here in order of descending effectiveness:

- Door-to-door visits
- Phone calls
- Direct mail
- Literature drop / door hangers

## **Election Day!**

Your Election Day activities require organization, organization, and more organization. Again, your goal is to make sure every supporter on your list goes to the polls. In order to do this, you have to have someone at each and every polling place in your district (called “poll watchers.”)

Check your local laws. There are various regulations regarding what your poll watchers can and can’t do. Generally, they are allowed to sit close to the election judges at the polling place to quietly observe the voters as they come in. Usually, they are not allowed to conduct any electioneering, or wear any campaign buttons or hats. In some states, poll watchers are required to get “poll watcher certificates” from the board of elections before going to the polls – check with the board of elections in your state or county.

Because your poll watchers won’t be able to electioneer, they won’t be able to get your message out one last time to the voters arriving at the polls. Many voters decide who they will vote for in lower profile races when they walk into the polls. Your campaign needs to have someone at the door handing out literature and asking people to vote for your candidate. This means that you’ll need to have at least two people at every polling place (one poll watcher, and one person outside communicating with the voters).

You’ll also need to have a staff back at headquarters who can make phone calls and keep a master list of who has voted and who has not.

## **Ok, We’re Ready**

Once your team is in place (and they should be in place before the polls open, with each position staffed until polls close), you’re ready to put your GOTV operation into Election Day mode. Here’s how it works:

Every time someone comes into vote, they say their name for the election judges, who determine if they are registered and eligible to vote. In many cases, the election judges will repeat their name loudly for the benefit of the poll watchers. Each poll watcher should have a list of supporters that your campaign has identified and who are registered to vote at that polling place. Every time a voter comes in, the poll watcher should look for the person’s name to see if they are on the list, and if they are, cross them off.

Periodically, someone from the campaign should go around with a master list and copy down the names of those who have voted by crossing them off. This master list should then be taken back to headquarters. The cycle should continue all day, with poll watchers crossing off names and campaign staff marking them off periodically on master lists.

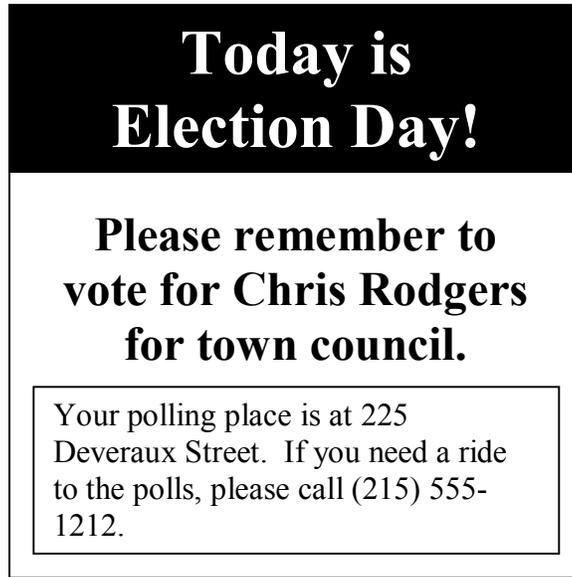
(As a sidebar, you should also send around someone to give lunch and coffee breaks to your poll workers).

In the early afternoon, the campaign should begin calling supporters who haven't voted to remind them that it is Election Day. If possible, the campaign should offer these voters rides to the polls if they need them. If the campaign is flush with volunteers, it can also send volunteers out knocking on supporters' doors in targeted districts to remind them to vote. If the person isn't home, they should leave a note on the door reminding the voter to go vote. The cycle should continue into the night, with the campaign making phone calls and knocking on doors right up until the last minute trying to get supporters to go vote.

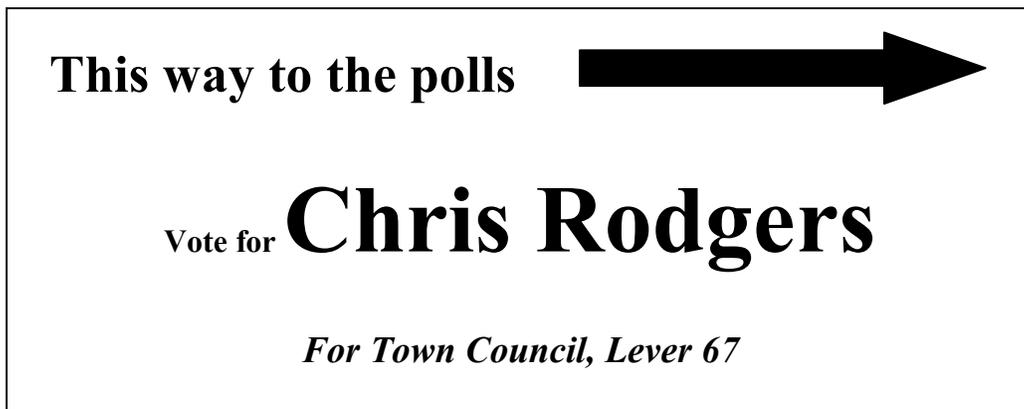
Of course, the whole time this is going on, the campaign has a worker outside of every poll handing out literature, asking for votes, and getting the candidate's name in front of the voters.

### **The Grand Finale**

No doubt about it – the GOTV operation is the grand finale of the campaign. It requires thoughtful planning, lots of leg work, and strong grassroots organization. The time and effort get out the vote operations take are worth it, though. A strong GOTV effort can put your campaign over the top, getting supporters to the polls that would never have gone if left to their own volition. Take the time and create strong GOTV drive for your campaign.



Sample "post-it note" type sticker to leave on a supporter's door during get out the vote activities



Unique polling place sign idea for Election Day.

## 11. The Voter Contact Direct Mail Guide

Direct mail isn't a classic "grassroots" technique, per se, but it is extremely important to campaigns that will be relying on grassroots strategy for a majority of their campaign plan. Of all the ways you can reach the voters in a local election, direct mail is one of the most important. Reaching the voters through the mail is so important for a local campaign because, compared to the other options available (such as TV, billboards, radio, yard signs, etc.) it is both cheap and efficient.

After looking into prices for direct mailing, you may be surprised to hear me say it is "cheap." Yes, direct mail costs money. However, unlike other forms of advertising, with direct mail you know that you are only paying to reach those voters you actually intend to reach. With television advertising, billboards, etc., you pay a small fortune to not only reach people who aren't registered to vote, but also those who live outside your district. With direct mail, you can choose exactly which voters you want to target with your message, even devising several messages to communicate to several different groups of voters.

### What is "Voter Contact" Direct Mail

In this article, we're talking about voter contact direct mail, which differs greatly from fundraising direct mail:

- **Voter Contact Direct Mail** – The purpose of voter contact direct mail is to introduce your candidate to the voters, communicate your message to them and get them to the polls on Election Day. Simply put, voter contact direct mail includes all the literature you send to the voters through the mail except for those that ask for donations or try to sell tickets to fundraising events.
- **Fundraising Direct Mail** – As its name implies, fundraising direct mail is all of the literature you send through the mail that asks for donations or encourages people to buy tickets to events.

The strategy, design, and function of voter contact direct mail is different from that of fundraising direct mail because they have two separate goals. In this article, we'll only be looking at voter contact mail.

### Stay on Target

The best feature of direct mail is that it can be completely targeted—that is, you can choose, down to the individual voter, who will receive your mail piece. Before sending out any direct mail piece, you should look at your campaign plan to determine what voters you will target with your direct mail campaign. You should know why you're sending out the mail piece, which voters will receive it, and what your message to those voters will be before mailing, and make sure that your answers to these questions serve a specific goal of your campaign plan.

Of course, your voter contact mail pieces should only go to registered voters who live in your district (the goal of your mail is to get these voters to vote for you). You may choose to send your mail only to Republicans, or only to people who usually vote in elections. Depending on your strategy and message, you may also choose to target your mail by age, gender, specific issues, etc. Use your campaign strategy to determine your direct mail strategy.

## **Lists**

The number one way to get the names and addresses you will need to send out your mail is to get a list of all registered voters in your district. Usually, this list may be purchased for a small fee from your local board of elections, county clerk, or state government. If you're lucky, this list may include the recent voting history of each voter, his or her age, etc.

If you need more information and you are running for a seat in a very large district, you may be able to purchase targeted lists from list brokers. For example, you could purchase a list of gun owners or conservative women who reside in your district. Always be sure to cross check this list against the list of registered voters and mail only to people who are registered to vote. If you are running for a local office or in a small district, you probably won't be able to purchase a list from a list broker that contains enough names of people who live in your district to do your campaign any good.

Don't forget to add information to your voter lists as your campaign gets it – whether you learn more through voter surveys, door to door campaigning or volunteer signups, add this information to your database. At some point, you may want to send a direct mail piece only to those who have expressed support for your candidate or who have an interest in transportation issues.

## **Purposes**

There are several different purposes which voter contact direct mail can serve. During an average local election, your campaign may choose to use several different types of mail to serve several of the purposes listed below, depending on your strategy.

- **Introductory Piece** – The introductory piece introduces the candidate and his positions to the electorate. This piece generally has a short bio of the candidate, listing his qualifications and accomplishments. It can have some brief candidate positions on it, as well as a picture of the candidate, his or her family, and some information on how to vote on Election Day.
- **Issue Piece** – The issue piece communicates the candidate's stand on a specific issue to the voters. The goal of this type of mailing is to persuade, not to educate. This means that, while you should support your stand, you need not include reams of statistics and evidence. Simply say what the problem is, and what your

candidate plans to do about it. This type of mailing can be especially effective when it is targeted to voters that you know already care (or are likely to care) about this particular issue.

- **Attack Piece** – These mailings inform voters about the “negative” aspects of your opponent’s record. You must be careful whom you mail these pieces to - generally, you’ll target them to go only to Democrats, and other people who don’t already support your candidate. You should also be careful not to produce ads that appear “dirty” or harsh, and that all of your facts are straight – no matter how many times your opponent voted against giving milk to starving puppies, you’ll look worse if you say he voted against it one more time than he actually did.
- **Attack Response Piece** – What do you do when your opponent attacks you? You put out an attack response piece. These pieces clearly lay out what the truth is, why it has been distorted, and why you are such a great candidate. You also may want to “hit back” by pointing out an inconsistency or negative aspect of your opponent’s record. Your campaign should prepare response pieces in advance for the various issues it knows may come up during the campaign.
- **Endorsement Piece** – These mailings add to your campaign’s credibility by touting endorsements from political, civic, and business leaders and/or celebrities. Make sure that the person endorsing you has the credibility and stature to do so.
- **Comparison Piece** – The comparison mailing clearly establishes a contrast between you and your opponent. In a comparison piece you “attack” your opponent by placing your view or record side by side with his or hers. This type of mailing has the advantage of allowing you to “hit” your opponent without seeming to do so. One type of voter that is especially susceptible to this type of mailing is the undecided voter.
- **Get Out the Vote (GOTV) Pieces** – These mailings, usually postcards, are sent to supporters to encourage and remind them to go to the polls to vote for your candidate on Election Day.

### **Voter Contact Strategy**

What types of mail your campaign should send out is a matter of strategy – what you do and when you do it entirely depends on your goals and targeting decisions. Every campaign that is doing voter contact direct mail should send out at least two pieces of mail – the bio piece and one other mailing. Many small campaigns find that they are able to afford three mailings. Look at your budget and strategy to determine what you can afford. At the very least, send out a bio piece and choose either an attack piece or a comparison piece as your second mailing.

### **Mail Design**

You've got your mail strategy planned. You know what you want to send out and when – now it's time to do the fun stuff: designing your mail piece. The first task is to determine the size, shape, and type of the actual piece of mail you are sending out. You have many options, including:

- The self-mailer – This is a mail piece that does not require an envelope, but instead is folded over (once or several times) with the stamp or postage mark placed on the outside of the piece. The majority of voter contact mail pieces are self-mailers.
- The postcard – A standard or slightly larger sized postcard with writing on both sides. Great for GOTV mailings or quick issue pieces
- The oversized postcard – A larger, two-sided postcard (usually 9" x 3 3/4"). Great for the introductory piece.
- The letter – A mailing that looks like a personal letter from the candidate, the candidate's spouse, or an endorser. Good format for endorsements, personal letters from the candidate's spouse.
- Random formats – Of course, there are always random formats that campaigns send out, such as the campaign that mailed out wooden postcards to logging industry workers. Local campaigns should generally stay away from such "cute" mailings.

### **Be Creative!**

After deciding what type of mailer to send out, you can begin to design your piece. Don't forget to leave space for postage, a return address, and the address the piece is being mailed to. Here are some basic guidelines:

**Grab the voters attention** – Remember, your mail piece is competing not only with every other campaign mailing that is send out, but with catalogs, bills, business advertisements, CDs from AOL, and all the other junk that clutters up a mailbox. To avoid being dumped in the trash with the latest supermarket circular, your mailing needs to stand out.

Use big headlines and catchy graphics, with big sub-headlines interspersed throughout the piece, drawing the reader through the mailer. Let the voters drill down for more info (the text of your piece) if they want to, but they should notice the headline and be able to follow your gist just by reading your sub-headlines.

**Visuals Rule** – Your text is important (especially for the press who read your piece), but the most important parts for the voters are the visuals. Use powerful graphics and pictures, including a color scheme that stands out but is easy on the eye. Leave lots of "white space" (the space around your text and visuals that is left blank) – it makes the piece easy to read. Your "white space" need not be white – for example, you may be using a light blue background.

**To Stand Out, Don't be Standard** – Shy away from using the “good old fashioned” political colors and logos. If you do, your mail will simply blend in with all the other political mail that the voter receives. Your mail must GET NOTICED! That being said, keep it simple. Too many graphics, too many colors, and your reader will get tired or think it looks “amateurish.”

**Know What People Read** – After the headline, the most read part of the letter is the “P.S.” – if you’re sending out a letter-type mailing, always put your number-one message in the P.S. People also read the captions on photos – always put informative captions on the photos you use. If a paragraph is particularly important, make it extremely short (2-3 lines) or use a “pullout” capital letter to start the paragraph – either one will make it more likely to be read by people who are just “skimming” your piece. Remember – before reading, almost everyone just “skims” to see if it is worth their time.

Voter contact direct mail is one of the most important, if not the most important, methods for the local campaign to effectively and affordably reach a mass market audience with its message. Be sure you plan out your effort, and use the principles outlined above to make your mailing appealing to your targeted voters.

## 12. The Political Internet Strategy Guide

Some time ago, I wrote an article that called the Internet “the most misunderstood medium in politics.” True then, equally true now. For candidates and campaigns, the Internet cannot be ignored. Millions of Americans are online, with thousands more coming online everyday. Most campaigns, however, do not understand how to use the Internet – they either lack the knowledge to succeed online or fall victim to the snake oil salesmen who tell them they need to spend thousands of dollars putting up a website, promising millions of dollars of donations in return. Use this Guide to cut through the rhetoric, look at your campaign’s real web needs, and develop a strategy that fits your budget and goals.

### The Wrong Reasons to Use the Internet

The best place to start is to look at the common myths regarding politics on the Internet – these are the wrong, but yet most often cited reasons to use the Internet in a political campaign:

- I’ll get lots of donations from all over the county – No, unfortunately you won’t. Unless your name is John McCain, you have a pre-existing donor base or national name recognition; you won’t be able to raise large numbers of donations through the Internet. You’ll be better off doing it the “old-fashioned way,” making calls and holding events.
- Everyone will be talking about my great flash graphics – The reality is, your site won’t be getting millions of hits, and most of the people who do find your site will be there for a reason – and it’s not to see the coolest candidate site on the web.
- With a website, I won’t even have to campaign, my site will do the campaigning for me – This is the most damaging myth of all. Candidates who simply put up websites and then sit back and expect to win, or who do only minimal campaigning and rely on their website to do the rest, will be shocked come Election Day. There is no substitute for old fashioned campaigning, not even the Internet.

### The Right Reasons to Use the Internet

Don’t be discouraged. There are still great uses for the Internet in a political campaign – even in small districts and local races. Here are some of the “right” reasons to put your campaign online.

- To get information out quickly and cheaply – The Internet is a great way to get press releases, issue papers, articles, and even campaign posters out to the public in a short amount of time. Of course, no one will know the information is there unless you tell them about your website (we’ll discuss promotion later), but the

web is still a great way to make campaign materials available to your organization and the voters at large.

- To provide extra information for those who want it – Your campaign website is a great place to post your issue papers, reports, responses to your opponents’ attacks, etc. In your mail pieces, you can talk about an issue, and then direct those who want more information to your website. Similarly, you can let reporters know that additional research items for a story are available on your website.
- To supplement your other campaign activities – While the web won’t take the place of campaigning, it is a great way to supplement your other campaign activities. Almost every area of your campaign can feature a web component. For example, you could offer a “special” web section in conjunction with your major donor program that has “members only” information and is accessible only by that donor group.
- To stay connected with supporters – Phone calls and mailings take time and money. By using an e-mail list to stay in touch with your supporters, you can quickly respond to attacks, mobilize them for an event, remind them to go to the polls, and keep your campaign in their minds, all for a fraction of the cost of direct mail or phone banks.

### **Website Goals**

Now that you know what the Internet can and can’t do for your campaign, it is important that you set up some goals for your website. These goals should be:

1. Collecting E-mail Addresses – This is the most important (and most often overlooked) goal of your website. You need to get visitors to give you their e-mail address along with permission to contact them through it. Why? Because your website is a passive medium – it just sits there, waiting for some one to come along. E-mail is an active medium – with e-mail, you can go out and contact a voter whenever you want, enticing them to come to your website or perform some other task. Always collect e-mail addresses.
2. Activism Resources – Another great goal is to provide your activists with the tools they need to do their work – you can create posters on-line that they can print out and use, post talking points, even include tips on how to become better campaigners.
3. Information, Information, Information – Your third and final goal is to make as much information available about your campaign and candidate as you can to as many people as possible.

## **Your Home on the Web**

The first component of your Internet strategy is your website. Your website will be your home on the Internet. The first decision you face when contemplating your site is whether to do it yourself or outsource to a web-designer. Unless you are running for congress or above, you probably don't need to hire a full-blown web-design firm to handle your entire site. Larger campaigns can hire a designer to create the template and the basic site set-up, then do the rest (adding content, maintenance) on their own. Small, local campaigns can hire a nearby college student to do the same thing for a much smaller sum.

Whether you decide to do it yourself or to outsource your web design, remember – you're in control. If you outsource, make sure that the designer creates the site the way you want it made – use this guide to help you make your Internet strategy decisions before going to see the web-designer

## **Website Design**

You must design your site to make sure that visitors stay around the site for as long as possible. For this reason, you need to make your site both easy to use and full of value for your reader.

### **Don't get Flashy**

Your campaign website is not the right place to show off the latest web technology, animations, or cool games. Don't make your site flashy by using moving components, outlandish colors or graphics, or music. Graphics and animations take time to load. People who visit your site are probably using slow browsers, and will not wait around while your pages load. Similarly, the people who visit your site are not there for the latest web-techniques, they are there for information about your candidate. Give it to them in a simple, quick loading format.

Remember that consistency counts, even on the web. Design your website using the same color scheme as your campaign's other media: direct mail, signs, bumper stickers, etc. If your mail and signs are blue and white, your website should be as well.

Keeping your site simple and consistent helps make your website user-friendly, so more readers will stick around to see what you have to offer.

### **Load It With Information**

Most candidate websites waste people's time. People go to your site for one of two reasons: (1) They want to know more about your candidate, or (2) they are interested in politics and campaigns. Give both types of readers the information they want, including information on the candidate and the local political scene. Fill your site to the brim. Post everything your campaign releases on your website, including:

- Press releases
- Speeches
- Policy papers.
- Candidate's public schedule
- Posters and brochures for volunteers
- News about the local political scene.
- Web "exclusives" that readers won't find anywhere else

### **Get E-Mail Addresses: Here's How**

Earlier I mentioned that the number one goal for your campaign website is getting your visitors' e-mail addresses. The best way to do that is to set up a form on every page of your site that allows people to enter their e-mail address to be added to your list.

Of course, readers rarely will give you their e-mail address for no reason. Instead, ask your visitors to sign-up for your newsletter or campaign updates, and set a schedule for sending out your newsletter to the group by e-mail. You can also offer a free premium in return for the e-mail address, such as asking people to sign-up to receive an autographed picture of your candidate or a bumper sticker.

Before they hand their e-mail address over to you, your readers will want to know it is safe. Clearly post your privacy policy on your site and tell your visitors that you will never rent, sell, or give their e-mail addresses to anyone else outside of your campaign.

### **Once You Have Them...**

Once you have built a list of your supporters' e-mail addresses, what should you do with them? First, make sure that if you promised to send a newsletter, you do so. In fact, it is a good idea to use the e-mail addresses you received often (without going overboard) – keeping in touch with your supporters lets you remain in their minds and helps get your campaign message out.

You should also use your e-mail list to recruit volunteers, get supporters to attend rallies, and perform other campaign related activities. If you have a large district, you may decide to have several lists of supporters broken down by geography, issues, or some other factor.

### **Website Promotion**

What good is a campaign website if nobody reads it? The only way people will know about your site is if you tell them about it. Here's how:

- Pick a good domain name – It's hard to verbally tell someone your site name if it's extremely long or hard to spell. Try to pick a domain name that is short and to the point, like [www.JohnSmith2002.com](http://www.JohnSmith2002.com) or [www.HoltForCongress.com](http://www.HoltForCongress.com). If your candidate's name is hard to spell, you can always use other words in the title,

such as [www.RealLeadership.com](http://www.RealLeadership.com) or [www.JoeForSenate.com](http://www.JoeForSenate.com). Test your domain name by calling up several friends and telling them your domain over the phone, at regular conversation speed. If they can understand what you are saying in one try (and spell it right) then you've got a winner.

- Put it on everything – The best way to get your website name out in the public is to put your domain name on everything your campaign puts out – put it in your direct mail pieces, on your letterhead and business cards, on the podium during press conference, in your newspaper ads – everywhere.
- Press Coverage – Try and work your campaign website address into press conferences and stories about your campaign. If you've got a unique idea, you may be able to get the press to write an article specifically about your site, but that is unlikely. An easier option would be to try and mention your site during televised coverage or have a reporter mention it during a story.
- Search Engines – For a local campaign, registering your site with the major search engines (Yahoo, Google, AltaVista, Excite, etc.) probably won't help much, but it won't hurt either – it's free and takes only a few seconds, and you just may get a couple of extra visitors (some search engines charge a fee to be listed – unless you're running for President, don't pay to have your campaign site listed – it's just not worth it).

Your campaign website can be a valuable tool for winning your election. Remember to set your goals in advance and design a good, information filled site. Collect e-mail addresses and then use them to reach your supporters. Promote your site and draw visitors in. If your site truly is informative and easy to use, they'll stick around to see what you have to offer.

### **13. Grassroots Politics – Just the FAQ’s.**

Local Victory receives over 300 e-mails per month asking questions on winning local elections. The majority of these questions deal with grassroots politics – organizing a district, conducting canvasses, etc. For your benefit, we’ve compiled here a list of the most frequently asked questions about grassroots politics, then formulated complete and before unpublished answers.

#### **1. How early should I start campaigning?**

This is one of the most common questions for first-time candidates and campaign managers. The short answer is: it’s never too early to start. There are always activities you can carry-out to help your campaign or future campaign. Even if the election is four years away, you can be out meeting people, talking with leaders and activists, building an organization and writing your campaign plan.

Of course, you don’t want to announce your candidacy or run advertisements too far in advance of the campaign. While the best time to start these activities varies by place, election and strategy, they generally should never take place before the last election before yours is complete (November of the year before the your election) and in all but the biggest and/or best funded races should not take place before January of the year of your election.

When deciding when to start running advertisements, remember to wait until people are paying attention to the campaign or ready to start paying attention – if you run ads and no one cares, you are wasting your campaign’s precious fundraising dollars.

#### **2. How do I start organizing my district?**

Organizing your district is one of the most important components to starting your campaign. The key to organizing your district is to build a network of supporters to whom you can delegate the important tasks that a successful grassroots campaign requires.

I once heard a grassroots organization compared to Amway – you recruit top level people, who recruit additional members, who in turn go out and recruit even more members, until the organization webs throughout the district.

The first step to organizing your district is to bring a volunteer or paid staff member on board who will head up your grassroots efforts. You should then recruit a campaign steering committee, composed of prominent citizens and business people, etc., who will be at the top of your grassroots organization and will help lend credibility to your campaign.

Your grassroots staff members should then go out and try to recruit grassroots chairmen in each of the regions of your district (these regions can be determined by your campaign

– for statewide races, you may look for a chairman in each county, for local races it may be one chairman per precinct. These chairmen are then responsible for recruiting an organization under them until the campaign has the whole district covered, including having people in each and every precinct.

### **3. Is it worth my time to register new voters?**

It depends. If your campaign has lots of volunteers, registering new voters can be a great way to use them and build support for the campaign. The key to successfully using voter registration in your campaign is to target and follow-up.

First, target your voter registration efforts closely so that you sign-up likely supporters. There's no point in going into a highly Democratic precinct and registering new voters when you're running as a Republican. Instead, go into those areas where you know that people are likely to support your candidate and register new voters there.

Second, follow up with these newly registered voters. It is likely that once your campaign helps them register to vote, it will be the only campaign that knows they are voters. Other campaigns will pass them by thinking that they shouldn't waste their time on people who can't vote for them. Be sure that your campaign continually contacts these voters, delivering your message to them (the only message they will be receiving) on a regular basis, and then encouraging them to go vote on Election Day.

### **4. Shouldn't I just stand outside grocery stores and factory gates shaking hands and seeking people to vote for me?**

If there's one concept that is overlooked by most campaigns, it is targeting. Campaigns operate with limited resources – limited amounts of time, money and manpower. These resources must be used wisely if the campaign is to be successful. The way to make sure that these resources are used the best way they can be is to target – pick which voters you need to concentrate on delivering your message to and use your resources to do it.

Standing outside stores and factories shaking hands is a risky proposition – not only do you not know if the people you meet there are registered to vote or if they even live in the district, but if they are mostly supporters of your opponent, campaigning there may wake sleeping dogs and propel your opponent's campaign to action in that area.

Simply put, don't conduct these activities unless they are targeted and targeted well. Only campaign at malls, factories and stores when you know that most of the people there are from the district and open to voting for your candidate. Most times, you won't be able to be sure of this, and thus shouldn't campaign in these places unless you have so many volunteers that it is either let them campaign at the mall or send them home because you have no work left for them.

## **5. What times are best to go door to door?**

Your best bet is to campaign when people are home. Know your district – in some places it is considered taboo to campaign on Sundays, or at other times, yet in other districts campaigning during these times is the norm. Also try to canvas before sundown – people are much more likely to answer their doors before dark.

The best times to canvas door to door are on Saturday and Sunday between 9am and 7pm, and weekdays between 6pm and 9pm. Avoid canvassing on Friday evenings.

## **6. Where should I place my yard signs?**

Like everything else in your campaign, yard sign placement depends on targeting. While it would be nice to be able to afford an infinite amount of signs and place them everywhere in your district, most candidates have a limited amount of money with which to purchase yard signs.

Choose which areas of the district you need to get your name out it. Where do you need to raise your name ID? Look at your campaign plan and your targeting to determine what areas you should concentrate on placing your yard signs in – get the most bang for your buck by placing them where you need to get your name out the most.

## **7. How do I get an endorsement?**

Ask! While there is some strategy and lots of hard work involved in getting an endorsement, most candidates don't get endorsements because they forget to actually ask for them. Few endorsements will come your way without your campaign asking for them.

If you are seeking the endorsement of a political or business leader, schedule a face to face meeting (or at least a phone call) between the candidate and him or her. Be prepared to discuss how the campaign's message and the candidate's views mesh with the leader's own pet issues and projects.

If you are seeking a newspaper endorsement, have you press secretary or other volunteer call the paper to ask about their endorsement procedure – some papers require the candidate to meet with the editorial board or an endorsement screening panel, while others simply go with the publisher's preference. Have a staff member check before you make the call.

## 14. The Case of Candidate X

When I was young, I always enjoyed reading those “Choose Your Own Adventure” stories – you know the ones – where every few pages the reader would have to make a choice, and the outcome of the story would depend on which choices the reader made. I passed by a bookstore the other day and saw one of those books in the window. I realized that it was time to put the skills and knowledge that we’ve passed on in this manual to good use. It’s time for a political version of “Choose Your Own Adventure.”

Knowledge is good, and how-to guides are useful, but it is in applying this knowledge that elections are won and lost. In this Issue, we’re going to present several fictional case studies of candidates and campaigns, and let you decide which of several options are best. We’ll then discuss the merits of each option. While there may be several different ways of solving each problem, we’ll select one answer as the “correct answer.” This is the answer that is most likely to successfully solve the campaign situation.

### 1. The Case of Max Powers

Max Powers is running as a Republican for the state legislature from a district located in a big, industrial belt city. The campaign is in a winnable district, though registration favors the Democrats. He has a solid message and team in place, and because he is seen as a credible candidate, the campaign has been able to raise a sizable, but moderate war chest. The campaign needs a way to communicate with large numbers of voters at one time. You would advise the campaign to:

- A. Buy as much television time as the campaign can reasonably afford.**
- B. Run radio advertisements.**
- C. Send out numerous direct mail pieces.**
- D. Put up dozens of billboards.**

The “correct answer” is C – Send out direct mail. Let’s take a look at all of the possible answers.

First, answer A, running TV ads. In a big city, TV ads are going to be expensive...very expensive. Plus, most big cities are covered by more than one state legislative district. This means that the campaign would be paying a huge sum of money to be on TV reaching millions of viewers, but much of that money would be wasted reaching viewers who aren’t in the right legislative district. No matter how much money the campaign has, running TV ads is a bad choice for this race. It’s not targeted, so much of the money is wasted, and it is very, very expensive.

Next, answer B, running radio ads. On its face, this isn’t a bad choice. Radio is usually much, much cheaper than TV, even in the biggest cities. The same targeting problem exists, however. The campaign will be spending tons of money reaching people who aren’t in the district, who may not even be able to vote in their **own** districts. If the

campaign has lots (and I mean lots) of money, and a strong organization already in place, it may want to think about radio, but I would generally advise against it in this race.

Next, answer D, billboards. Unfortunately, the same problem exists with billboards – especially in a big city. Millions of people will see the billboards that don't live in the district or aren't registered to vote – and the campaign will be paying a princely sum to reach these people using billboards. Billboards may be desirable if the candidate is seeking to generate publicity or some quick momentum in this race, but I would generally advise against these as well.

I should add that TV, radio and billboards are all good options in some races. In this scenario, they would be a particularly good choice if the office is citywide or statewide, or is a Congressional or other office that overlaps all, or almost all, of the city.

Finally, the correct answer, C – direct mail. Direct mail is an excellent and cost efficient way to reach targeted voters in this race. The campaign should send out mail pieces to registered Republicans and targeted Democrats who are registered to vote in this election, and in this district. The campaign can send out several mail pieces to each voter for the same amount that it would cost to run a significant amount of TV or radio ads, and the mail is more effective because the message of each piece can be targeted to the particular group of voters the campaign is trying to communicate with.

## **B. The Case of Selma Bouvier**

Selma Bouvier is organizing a campaign for city council in a small town. She's a first time candidate who has never been involved in politics before, but has been involved in local school issues and wants to take that expertise into the city council. She's gathered a small group of volunteers to help run the campaign and now needs to start her fundraising operation. After writing out a complete fundraising plan, the first fundraising course of action she should take is:

- A. Solicit donations from friends, neighbors and contacts.**
- B. Ask the local party for some "seed money" to start her campaign.**
- C. Contact political action committees (PACs).**
- D. Hold a fundraising event.**

The correct answer is A – seeking donations from friends, neighbors and contacts. Let's find out why by looking at all of the possible answers:

First, answer B, asking the party for seed money for the campaign. If there's one myth that almost all first time (and some veteran) politicians have about fundraising, it's that the party committees will see what a great candidate they are and jump in with lots of money for the campaign.

It's just not true. Never, ever rely on money from the party for your campaign. If you do get money from the local party, that's great – icing on the cake. But don't expect it.

Party committees rarely give money to first time candidates, candidates with primary opponents, or candidates who are clear winners or clear losers. In short, party committees are very fickle about who they contribute to, so while you should certainly approach them for funds at some point early in the campaign, don't count on their financial support.

Next, answer C – contacting PACs. Again, don't count on PAC money for your campaign. While you should definitely solicit contributions from political action committees, they are just as fickle as party committees, and the same problems apply – so contact them, but don't count on them.

How about answer D, fundraising events? Fundraising events are excellent tools for candidates of all shapes and sizes. I often tell candidates that they should start holding fundraising events early in the campaign, even holding a fundraising component of their campaign announcement speech or rally. Events, however, take time, effort, and yes... money, to get going. They shouldn't be your first source of fundraising dollars.

Instead, start with answer A – soliciting friends, family, neighbors and contacts for contributions. These are the people that know you best, and are most likely to contribute to your campaign. Your first fundraising task should be to sit down and make a list of all your contacts, business associates, high school and college classmates, family, friends, your accountant and lawyer and other business people you frequent, members of the same clubs and groups, etc. – everyone who you can ask to contribute to your campaign.

This is the list you should call to solicit donations. This is the first task of your fundraising plan – raising money through personal solicitation. The money you raise in this manner, which can be anywhere from 10 – 50% or more of the total amount you need to raise for your campaign, will be the seed money for your campaign, the money you will use to fund the early stages of your campaign.

## **15. Additional Resources**

Staying on top of new campaign trends and strategies is a must for any candidate, elected official, consultant, campaign manager, or activist. Simply put, you must keep an eye on new political developments, and continually hone your skills to stay in “fighting form.”

If you haven't already visited Local Victory's website ([www.LocalVictory.com](http://www.LocalVictory.com)) – do so today! Local Victory is a complete, free guide to winning political campaigns. It contains dozens of articles on running and winning elections. Visit today, bookmark the site, and return often! Also, be sure to sign-up for the Local Victory Newsletter, a weekly e-mail newsletter which contains great articles on all aspects of political strategy and campaigning.