

Contacting and Mobilizing Voters

7

- 128 Calculating the number of votes you need to win.
- 129 Identifying and targeting voters.
- 131 Making direct contact with voters.
- 135 Communicating with different kinds of audiences.
- 138 Talking to undecided voters.
- 138 Developing a get-out-the-vote plan.
- 145 Last-minute advertising.
- 146 Planning your celebration and thanking your volunteers.
- 147 Five things to know about contacting and mobilizing voters.

Advertising can only get you so far in local elections. You need to make direct contact with voters and mobilize them to turn out on Election Day. To do this, you will need to build a strong field operation and plan your strategies for contacting and mobilizing your voters. This is known as your “ground game.”

At the beginning of your campaign, figure out how many votes you will need to win. Then spend the rest of the campaign building your list of supportive voters so that you can mobilize them on Election Day (and even before, if they vote absentee). Use door-to-door canvassing, phone calls, and other forms of direct contact to identify likely voters who support you, to persuade undecided voters to support you, and to mobilize both of these populations to vote for you. Your ability to achieve each of these objectives will determine the overall success of your campaign.

Calculating the Number of Votes You Need to Win

The calculus that determines the outcome of an election is quite simple—to win, a candidate needs to receive one more vote than his or her opponent(s). The hard part is figuring out the total number of votes that you will need to win and where they will come from. When calculating this number, consider the following questions:

- How many votes did the winner of the last (contested) election receive?
- How many registered voters are there in the district or jurisdiction?
- What percentage turned out the last time this office was contested?
- Is there anything else on the ballot that is likely to drive up turnout this time, or anything missing from the ballot that will decrease turnout?

Once you have determined the number of registered voters in your district or local jurisdiction and the likely turnout (based on past, comparable elections), you can estimate the total number of voters that you will need to vote for you. If you have only one opponent and only one candidate will be elected, you will need 50% plus one vote. If you have more than one opponent competing against you but only one candidate will be elected, you will only need a plurality of the vote. In either case, to en-

sure a sufficient margin of victory, you should set your vote target higher than the total number of votes you will need to win.

If you are running in an election where multiple candidates will be chosen, calculating the total number of votes you will need to win is more difficult. In addition to the questions above, you must assess the strength of the other candidates in the race. How many candidates will likely receive little or no support? How many will be competitive for winning the most votes? Is support among a particular constituency (such as conservatives) likely to be split between two main candidates? These questions are necessary because the number of votes needed to win will depend on how well the other candidates perform.

For example, if the three candidates who receive the most votes will be elected to fill three seats, you will not need to win a plurality of votes. You will only need to come in third to win. In these elections, however, voters typically cast multiple votes, making calculations of votes needed to win even more complicated. Your best strategy is to consider the specific circumstances of your race, such as the number of candidates, the rules of the election, and the character of your jurisdiction. Then set a realistic vote target that will allow you to win your election comfortably.

Identifying and Targeting Voters

Before you can contact and mobilize your voters, you need to know who they are. Start by obtaining a voter file from the county elections official that lists registered voters in your district or in the jurisdiction where you are running and whether they voted in past elections. Ask a volunteer to transfer this information to a database that is kept separate from the database of potential donors and the volunteer list. Larger campaigns may want to hire a professional to help compile the voter database. Either way, make sure your database remains private and secure.

Third-party vendors sometimes sell voter lists with demographic information (for example, age, marital status, ethnicity) that can be entered into your database and used to target mail, get-out-the-vote, and other campaign activities. At minimum, your database should identify the party affiliation and voting history of the registered voters in your district or jurisdiction.

After you obtain a list of registered voters and set up your voter database, the next step is to identify voters who support you, support your opponent(s), or are undecided. The object is to move those in the undecided column over to the column of voters who support you through free and paid media, persuasive mail, phone calls, door-to-door canvassing, and other forms of direct contact.

■ **BRIGHT IDEA: Develop a Voter Contact Tracking System**

Every campaign needs a system to identify likely voters who support the candidate and then make sure those voters do indeed vote. Provide your door-to-door or phone canvassers with record keeping tools (e.g., note cards, call forms) so the campaign can enter the results of the canvass into the voter database.

Campaigns in relatively small districts or local jurisdictions with a large volunteer base can implement a voter identification program that involves calling all of the voters on the voting rolls to find out if they are committed to a candidate. This information is entered into the voter database. Supportive voters receive get-out-the-vote calls and materials near the end of the campaign and “convincible” voters (those who are undecided) are called again, visited by canvassers, and sent information through the mail. When making voter identification calls, your volunteers should be clear that they are calling from the campaign and attempting to talk to all

voters. Otherwise, they may be accused of “push polling,” which means disguising a persuasive phone call as an independent poll.

If your campaign does not have the resources needed to call all of the registered voters in your district or jurisdiction, you should develop a list of targeted voters based on the demographic and geographic information provided in the voter rolls. Choose the relevant characteristics that will allow you to narrow your list of potential supporters to a reasonable size. Then ask your volunteers to contact these likely voters using door-to-door canvassing or phone banking in order to determine their level of support.

Targeting Makes Best Use of Limited Resources

Most campaigns have limited resources, including candidate and volunteer time. Use these resources efficiently in ways that are most likely to advance your ultimate goal of winning the election. Some professionals recommend expending 80% of your campaign resources on unde-

cided likely voters and using the remaining 20% to mobilize your base. This general rule needs to be tempered with your own political judgment, but it is a good starting place in planning how to allocate your campaign resources.

Targeting involves focusing your resources on specific groups of voters based on their party affiliation, likelihood of voting, geographic location, or other demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, or religious affiliation. It requires that you adapt your message to the concerns of your audience. The mail you send to targeted voters, the scripts you use when you talk to these voters, and the literature you drop off in door-to-door canvassing should all be adapted to emphasize aspects of your message that will appeal to your targeted voters. If your voter database is set up correctly, you should be able to use it to help with your targeting efforts, including sending targeted direct mail, developing call lists for targeted phone banking, and compiling household lists for door-to-door canvassing.

Making Direct Contact with Voters

Many voters expect to know their local representatives and to connect with them on a personal level. To gain the voters' trust and support, you will need to talk directly to them. The more contact voters have with you, the more they will learn about you and know that you are in tune with their concerns.

Although television and radio advertisements can provide effective means for communicating your message, research has shown that speaking directly to voters is more likely than mass advertising to generate participation and support, especially in local elections. Direct contact with voters can also help you establish a reputation as a hard-working candidate who cares what voters have to say.

Most successful campaigns combine advertising and direct contact with voters to get their messages out. The most common forms of direct contact are telephone calls and door-to-door canvassing. Both require volunteers and a well-organized field operation.

Setting Up a Phone Bank

Setting up a phone bank of volunteers who call registered voters is an efficient way to reach a large number of voters in a short amount of time. Providing your volunteers with training before they begin calling is critical to the success of your phone bank. Your volunteers will be interrupting people at home, so make sure that they know how to make calls that are brief, effective, and help convince voters to support your candidacy rather than turn them off.

Your volunteers should begin the call by saying that they are not calling to sell anything and that they are volunteers for your campaign. Develop a script for your callers to ensure a consistent message, but it is important that your callers not simply read a script; they should be willing and able to respond to voters' questions and concerns. To instill confidence in your callers and ensure a smooth message delivery, make sure your callers practice on each other before they start dialing. Ask them to keep track of whom they reached (and didn't) and how the voters responded.

Phone banks can be an early-warning system to alert you to the concerns of voters. Many campaigns use phone banking to gather information as well as distribute it. Formal polling is typically done by phone, but it requires professional procedures that should not be attempted by volunteers. Phone banks can provide valuable informal feedback, however, and you should be attentive to the message from the grassroots. Keep tabs on the messages your opponent(s) deliver by phone and mail, as well. Your callers should always be prepared to respond to questions about the latest attacks launched by your opponents.

Political telemarketing is more accepted than commercial telemarketing, but many people are still annoyed by the interruptions. Remind your callers to be polite even when they are not received well. Automated calls are expensive and less effective, but they can be used to mobilize supporters in combination with other methods of direct contact.

Setting Up a Door-to-Door Canvassing Operation

Many local campaigns use door-to-door canvassing to demonstrate their grassroots support and to meet voters directly. Before setting up the canvass, take a driving tour of your district or jurisdiction and assess the feasibility of walking around it. Try to determine whether your constituents will react positively to getting a chance to meet you or your

volunteers, and whether the other candidate(s) in the race will walk door-to-door, which might create the expectation among voters that you will do the same.

If your district or jurisdiction is large or you have a small number of volunteers and are unable to canvass all of it, start with your strong areas, move into the swing areas, and finish in the strong areas. It is a good idea to focus on homes with multiple voters and analyze past voting returns to identify densely populated swing precincts.

The success of your door-to-door canvassing operation will depend on the strength of your organization. If you have a base of supporters at the precinct level, you can set up a system of regional coordinators, precinct captains, and block captains. While voters prefer direct contact with the candidate, the second best option is volunteers who are neighbors of the voters they canvass.

Try to coordinate your canvass with your other campaign efforts. For example, send mail before you walk so that voters already know something about you before you or your volunteers reach their door. Distribute a different set of materials when you meet them. For those households where no one is home, leave a door hanger with a short, hand-written note on it and follow up by phone or mail.

Volunteers are more likely to participate if you can promise them a regular schedule of precinct walking that includes a short training and a thank-you party. Each time they walk, you should provide them with a good map and a list of houses to visit. Ask about their experiences when they return.

Going Door-to-Door

Before you start walking, you will need to estimate the time it will take you to complete your rounds and build a reasonable schedule. An average door-to-door contact requires three to five minutes. Remember that many residents will not be home, and weather conditions can affect the time it takes to get around. Keep these factors in mind when developing a schedule that you can actually complete.

Be polite and smart about your visits. If a voter does not agree with you on something, it is best to acknowledge your difference of opinion and move on rather than enter into an argument that will waste valuable time. Do not get discouraged by rude people or slammed doors; they are inevitable. Do not walk at night or at times of the day when no one

is likely to be home. Dress well but not so that you look out of place in the neighborhood. As always, stretch before walking and drink plenty of water.

Use a nametag or campaign button to identify yourself. Introduce yourself and the office you are seeking, and explain your reasons for running in a brief (thirty seconds or less), clear statement. Turn your contact with voters into a conversation rather than a speech by soliciting questions and asking about their concerns. Keep track of whom you talk to, the number of registered voters in the household, the issues that they care about, and the level of their support, but do not take notes until after your

conversation. If voters express support for you, ask them if they would agree to place a sign in their yard. If a voter seems especially enthusiastic, ask him to volunteer a few hours of time on the campaign. Take advantage of street life; talk to people who are outside but do not interrupt their activities.

If volunteers are walking on your behalf, ask them to follow these guidelines. Impress upon them that they are representing you and the campaign and need to remain respectful and polite. Have them

begin their contact with a voter by introducing themselves as volunteers for your campaign and saying why they are involved. Teach them how to assess the likely support of those they visit and how to adjust their scripts based on the voters' attitudes and concerns. If your volunteers are neighbors of people they canvass, ask them to invite their neighbors to a get-to-know-the-candidate event at their home. By planning local house parties for the days immediately following the canvass, you can turn the walk into a full-scale neighborhood mobilization.

■ **BRIGHT IDEA: Convert Your Endorsements into Resources for Your Campaign**

One of the benefits of winning endorsements from local groups is the potential cadre of supporters that they can offer your campaign. Be sure to recruit and use the volunteer base of these organizations for the direct contact activities of your campaign.

Follow up

Always send follow-up letters or post cards after calling or canvassing. Lock up the commitment of voters who said they are planning to vote for you by sending them a letter or post card thanking them for their support. Send a different letter or card to undecided voters. Mention your call or visit, thank them for their time, include any information they may

■ WHAT DO VOTERS WANT? Candidates Who Make Direct Contact With Voters

As with unscripted debates, focus group participants praised the substantive and symbolic benefits of candidates who participate in town hall meetings, make personal appearances, and go door-to-door. These forms of interactive communication make it possible for voters to receive a direct response to their questions. They allow voters to size up a candidate (“look him in the eye”) and gauge the candidate’s sincerity. Victoria explains the benefits of candidates who canvass:

You could ask anything you want, and they’re there. The one that’s running for city council of my district came over a few days ago. And she was there for a little bit, and she wasn’t with anybody else, so she wasn’t there with somebody telling her what she should be saying or anything. She was just giving out her flyer and telling us what she was for, what she was going to do. And we could ask anything. She even asked, ‘Was there anything else you want to ask me?’ So that’s good.

Another focus group participant, Richard, makes a similar point:

One of the local city council guys showed up at my door the other day. And I thought that was pretty impressive. . . . I opened the door and he just said who he was, he’s running for city council. He wasn’t there to give me a huge pitch, but I could tell that if I had asked him a few questions, he would have answered them. And so I think that’s another nice way to do it. . . . It can only happen at a local level, but, you know, getting out there in person goes a long way.

Some participants interpret the effort involved in making direct contact with voters as concern for the voter and evidence that the candidate will work hard once in office. Jeff suggests the symbolic importance of candidates who go door-to-door, “I would say [candidates] would have to be enthusiastic about it to go through the footwork of it. [. . .] It tells us they’re genuine, you know.”

have requested, and explain again why you are the best person for the job. Voters who were not reached should receive a letter or card introducing you to the voter. It should mention that you attempted to contact them and ask them to consider supporting you in the upcoming election.

Communicating with Different Kinds of Audiences

As you meet with prospective voters, you will notice that not everyone shares the same concerns or views and not everyone prefers the same kind of political interaction. Before you speak to local groups or canvass

■ **BEST PRACTICE: Set aside time every week to make direct contact with voters.**

By doing so, you satisfy the voters' desire for direct contact with candidates, give them an opportunity to be heard, and hone your public speaking skills.

a neighborhood, learn about the issues affecting the community and the concerns of its members. It is important to adapt to local customs and establish trust among your listeners. One effective tactic is for you or a member of your campaign to attend one of the group's meetings before you are scheduled to speak to its members. This will help you find the right tone for your remarks.

■ **WHAT DO VOTERS WANT? Different Types of Information**

When our survey asked respondents what they want to learn most about the candidates—issues, experience, character, intelligence, party platform, campaign practices, or something else—most chose issues as their first choice (43%). However, there was notable variation among respondents concerning what they want to learn. While 57% of those with postgraduate study expressed their preference for learning about the candidate's stands on issues, only 23% of those without a high school degree chose issues as their first choice. Instead, 33% of respondents with some high school or less chose "experience" as their first choice, compared to only 8% of respondents with postgraduate study.

We also found differences with regard to respondents' interest in learning about the candidate's character. Character was a more popular choice among older respondents, among Republicans, and among conservatives. Thirty-five percent of conservatives cited character as their first choice, but only 18% of liberals did. The following exchange between focus group participants Charles and Penny, who identify as Republicans, and Jeff, a Democrat, exemplifies this liberal/conservative difference on the issue of character, underscoring the differences between voters and what they consider to be relevant information about the candidates:

CHARLES: Politicians can be role models, and I wouldn't want my children looking up to someone whose morality is different than what I'm trying to teach my children.

JEFF: I try not to think of their personal image as much. I just try to look at it as if it's a job to be filled. And on the job application, they don't ask, 'What is your sexual preference? What is your religious background?' None of that should come into it. It's how well you can do the job.

PENNY: But who you are is what you do. And this is America, and we do have a heritage to protect. And so character does play a part in how they handle their job, because they're making public decisions. And they sign the final papers.

In general, some voters will be informed about politics and interested in the specific details of your issue positions while others who are less involved in politics will be more interested in obtaining easy cues about your fitness for office and your general political orientation. As you campaign, be responsive to the different levels of interest among voters and adapt your message accordingly. If they do not seem interested, don't risk boring your audience with the details of your policy proposals; some voters will only want to be assured that you have the experience and dedication needed to be an effective officeholder. Always make time for voters to ask you questions and express their concerns. Be sensitive to differences in ethnic, religious, economic, and geographic communities in your jurisdiction and adapt your style of presentation accordingly.

■ WHAT DO VOTERS WANT? Different Forms of Campaign Communication

Not only are voters interested in different things about candidates, they prefer to be communicated with by campaigns in different ways. Although voters overwhelmingly prefer debates as the primary mode of campaign communication, our analysis revealed considerable variation among subgroups of survey respondents. Men are more likely to prefer debates than women (42% vs. 34%); so are the well educated—46% of those with postgraduate study prefer debates compared to 30% of those with some high school. Respondents with the least amount of education expressed a greater preference for call-in shows (29%, compared to only 9% of those with postgraduate study). Younger voters (18-24) are more likely to prefer speeches (20%) and call-in shows (22%) than are older respondents (11% and 16%, respectively).

When asked if television ads are helpful for making voting decisions, 42% of those with a high school degree said that ads are "somewhat" or "very helpful," compared to only 17% of those with postgraduate study. Older respondents were less likely to find ads helpful than younger respondents. Forty-eight percent of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 said ads are "somewhat" or "very helpful" compared to only 24% of respondents who are fifty-five or older. Whites are the least enthusiastic about ads—only 24% find them helpful. By contrast, African Americans, native and naturalized Latinos, and naturalized Asians all have a more positive opinion of campaign ads (49%, 46%, 50%, and 48%, respectively, found ads to be "somewhat" or "very helpful").

These findings suggest that candidates who are interested in targeting specific audiences may want to select modes of communication that correspond to their audience's preferences.

Talking to Undecided Voters

Over the course of your campaign you will be speaking to lots of groups and individual voters. It is best to develop a short speech that you can use for any occasion and then make adjustments to it as you speak to different audiences. Do not overuse clichéd political language and be careful not to use technical language or appear to be aloof. You should be conversational but serious about your candidacy.

When you talk about issues, state the problems that motivated you to act before listing your achievements. Describe what you plan to do next rather than focusing on past mistakes. Do not give detailed accounts of how you developed your policy proposals; instead, talk about issues in terms of problems and solutions that affect the voters.

If you can, make the topic personal by including elements of your biography when describing the motivations behind your proposals. If you use comedy, tell short jokes that do not seem contrived and move quickly to the serious point that your jokes raise. As you speak to large audiences, select several people to make eye contact with at different places in the room and rotate among them.

In general, your interactions should leave voters with the impression that you want to establish an ongoing relationship with them. Encourage your listeners to participate in the conversation by asking them to ask questions and by soliciting their ideas. Make sure you listen as well as speak.

As with all skills, practice makes perfect. Practice delivering your speech to trusted members of your campaign before the event and solicit their suggestions for improvements. Check your gestures, eye contact, and expressions as well as your words. Record yourself with an audio or video recorder, listen to how you sound, and observe how you look. As you make improvements, write down what you are changing so that you remember to do it every time.

Developing a Get-Out-the-Vote Plan

All the message development and voter contact activities of your campaign will not matter if your supporters fail to vote. This is why you should begin implementing your get-out-the-vote (GOTV) plan weeks

before Election Day. Your list of GOTV strategies should include voter registration and absentee ballot drives, multifaceted voter contact and mobilization operations, and Election Day hoopla and services.

Registering Voters

Supporters who are not registered cannot vote and thus cannot help you win. Those who are not registered at their current address may have difficulty voting. If you have a large constituency of potentially unregistered voters, make voter registration a priority of the campaign. At the very least, you should always have voter registration forms on hand, include a link to voter registration information on your Web site, and ask your supporters if they have registered at their current address.

You can coordinate voter registration drives with other candidates or set up a table to register voters at your events. You must keep these activities separate from your campaign activities, however, as voter registration must be nonpartisan. By setting up voter registration drives, you will benefit from identifying supportive constituencies that might not be registered, and you will be doing a service to democracy in the process.

Mobilizing Early Voters

Many voters send their ballots in early using the absentee ballot program. This means that you can get-out-the-vote before Election Day and offer an alternative to people who have difficulty making it to the polls.

Here are some ways to mobilize absentee voters:

- **Track the number of absentee ballot requests in your race to determine how much of a priority it should be. If absentee voting is high in your district or jurisdiction, set up a get-out-the-vote-by-mail phone bank several weeks before the election.**
- **Always mention the possibility of voting by mail to supporters, especially those who do not seem sure to show up on Election Day. Send those who are interested an absentee ballot application in the mail. Make a follow-up call to confirm that they received the application from you. Call again to make sure they completed the absentee ballot application and mailed it in.**
- **Include the procedures for requesting an absentee ballot on your early GOTV materials and Web site.**

■ Checklist of Elements for a GOTV Plan:

- ✓ Number of voters needed to win.
- ✓ Number of voters targeted in GOTV effort.
- ✓ GOTV strategies/mechanisms to turn out your voters.
- ✓ Number of volunteers you will need to implement your plan.
- ✓ Groups that will help turn out your voters.
- ✓ How these volunteers will be recruited.
- ✓ The money you will spend on your GOTV efforts.
- ✓ The materials and supplies you will need.

- Organize an early absentee ballot drive and distribute absentee ballot applications at your campaign events. Get contact information from supporters who requested an absentee ballot and call them before the election to confirm that they completed and mailed in their ballots.

- Keep track of regular absentee voters who are your supporters and contact them with get-out-the-vote-by-mail phone calls several weeks before the election: Call to see if they received their ballots, then call again to make sure they mailed them in.

Forming Your Election Day Strategy

Resources are not spent at an equal rate throughout a campaign. Large amounts of resources will always be needed in the campaign's final days, especially if you are planning a major GOTV effort. Keep close tabs on your budget and supplies to ensure that you have enough for the sprint to the finish. Consultants recommend that you budget backwards in time, assessing your need for spending on get-out-the-vote activities before allocating funds for other campaign expenses.

The success of your GOTV effort will depend on how effective your voter identification program has been. If you know the households and precincts that are likely to vote for you, you will be prepared to target your efforts on Election Day.

For this reason, a good GOTV effort does not begin on Election Day. Consultants recommend that you have your plan ready to go at least a month in advance. One person should be in charge of coordinating the GOTV effort from the beginning. Set goals for the number of voters you will need to mobilize and the number of volunteers you will need to recruit to do the mobilizing. Generate a list of volunteers to help with GOTV and develop an action timeline.

Print a new batch of signs and select locations where they can be planted on Election Day. Make sure your call center has multiple phone lines available on Election Day and line up a large brigade of volunteers for GOTV phone calls, leafleting, sign-waving, poll watching, and other Election Day services. If you have done coalition building, you will be able to rely on supportive organizations to help you mobilize voters on Election Day.

The goal is to get your supporters to the polls. Mechanisms for accomplishing this include:

- **Phone banks the week before the election and on Election Day, reminding people to vote and to vote for you (provide a new script for callers).**
- **Literature drops and door hangers on the morning of the election.**
- **Door-to-door visits both the weekend prior to the election and on Election Day.**
- **Direct mail pieces with a reminder to vote timed to reach voters the weekend before or on Election Day.**
- **Sign-waving at major intersections and other attention-getting stunts on Election Day.**

Tell your supporters the hours and location of their polling place in these communications and do whatever you can to make it possible for them to get out and vote. Do not worry about contacting your supporters “too often.” If they have not yet voted (by absentee ballot), you should continue to remind them about Election Day.

Election Day: Helping Voters Get to the Polls

Election Day is far from a day off in the campaign. Instead, your mobilizing activity should be at its peak. Many campaigns go door-to-door in the early hours of the morning to place one final door-hanger on the doors of their supporters.

You can add a blitz of new signs near polling locations or next to major roads that lead to them. Ask some of your volunteers to do sign waving at major intersections to bring attention to and generate excitement for your candidacy. Since yard signs will be useless after the election, use the remaining signs to set up prominent displays at highly trafficked locations that will help to energize supporters and remind them to vote.

Your campaign should also offer Election Day services that you promote throughout your GOTV effort. The most common service is providing rides to polling places. This service should be mentioned on campaign materials and offered to anyone who might need it. Distribute maps and directions to polling places at your office, during your last round of door-to-door canvassing, and at your sign-waving locations. If you have the resources, offer short-term babysitting services, but make sure that you make these services available regardless of how a person intends to vote. Advertise these services widely, but make sure you can deliver them. Do not put yourself in a position where you will not be able to handle the volume of requests.

Designate volunteers to serve as poll watchers who sit next to poll workers and keep track of the names of people who vote. (This is public information and your campaign is legally entitled to it.) Have them call in the information to campaign headquarters several times throughout the day. This allows the campaign to determine who needs to be mobilized. Develop a system for quickly reporting and analyzing the information, then move all available volunteers and staff to make final get out the vote calls to those who have not voted.

■ **ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONALS: “Getting Out the Vote,” by Phil Paule**

Congratulations! You have made it—Election Day at last. The day you thought would never come has arrived. Now what do you do?

You have run a flawless campaign. The debates went well, the campaign mail was delivered on time, and the polls show you ahead, but the truth is—none of that matters. On Election Day you have to turn a well-run campaign into votes. On election night the county clerks count votes—not well-run campaigns. Getting out the vote on Election Day is what turns great candidates into elected officials.

Elections Day is the one event in a campaign that you can count on happening. The exact date is known well in advance so there is no excuse for not being prepared.

A winning campaign needs to plan for Election Day at least six weeks in advance. An effective Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) plan should incorporate four elements:

- **Identifying OUR voters.**
- **Making sure they know it is Election Day.**
- **Getting OUR voters to the polls.**
- **Checking to see if they voted.**

We call this the 72-hour campaign. Elections Day does not start the morning of the election; it starts 72 hours in advance. GOTV starts the Saturday before the election and continues through the close of voting on Tuesday night.

Who are OUR voters?

In order to mobilize your voters on Election Day, you will need to identify them in advance. Over the course of the campaign, develop a list that includes the names and contact information for everyone that the campaign has identified as a supporter. Your list will be made up of volunteers, donors, supporters with lawn signs, and other voters who the campaign has identified (for example, union members, NRA members, voters the candidate met while walking neighborhoods, and political party membership).

Do they know it is Election Day?

You would be surprised how common it is for people who have donated to a campaign not to vote on Election Day. People are busy. Just because you and the media are focused on Election Day, does not mean a voter will be. The kids have a doctor's appointment, the car needs new brakes, dear old grand-dad is ill. . . . Other people's lives don't revolve around Election Day the way the lives of candidates or campaign managers do. Be sure to contact all of your voters (by phone, mail, door hangers, and/or in person) in the 72 hours leading up to Election Day with information about the date of the election, and polling hours and locations.

How do I get them to the polls?

Election Day on a well-run campaign is an exercise in logistics. It starts before the sun is up and stops when the polls close. Different types of voters must be contacted and urged to vote in a way that fits their profile. For example, with commuters, place a flyer on the windshield of their car or on top of the newspaper in the driveway to catch them on their way to work. The flyer should tell them that today is the day and it should include a map of where they need to go to cast their ballot.

Senior citizens may need a ride to the polls. Many elections have been won because a campaign provided a van at a senior center to take voters to the polls.

You will need to take the direct approach in the form of a phone call or a knock at the door to remind voters that today is the big day.

How do I check to see if they voted?

Every good 72-hour campaign has a “poll checking” operation at the larger precincts. Poll checking is nothing more than having a campaign team member enter the polling location and check to see who has cast a ballot up to that point in time. This information is public information and very valuable. If a poll is checked in the late afternoon, the list of people who have yet to cast a ballot that day is a goldmine of information. It allows you to narrow down the list of potential voters that you will need to contact in the final hours of the campaign.

Today’s technology has made “poll checking” a must. Voter rolls can be loaded onto PDA’s so one can easily check the polls in the late afternoon and immediately download that information to a phone bank where calls can be made to get those who have not yet voted to the polls.

Last-minute attacks on opponents.

Often candidates who are lagging behind in the polls are tempted to launch an attack against their opponent in the final hours of the campaign. However, the last-minute attack strategy does not work. In today’s voter environment people tend not to believe a late charge of malfeasance directed at another candidate. They are likely to ask, “If such information on the candidate has been around for months or even years, why is it just now, twenty-four hours before the election, being brought to our attention?” Voters typically discount last-minute attacks, and if

you launch one you risk losing more voters than you gain. Such an attack may alienate your own supporters, who will choose not to volunteer or even vote for you. Last-minute attacks are not a winning campaign strategy and should be avoided.

Planning the victory party.

The victory party should always be the last thing planned by a campaign and should only be planned by people who are not part of the “ground team” on Election Day.

Many elections have been lost due to too much time spent on planning the victory celebration. This is not to say that victory celebrations are not important, but they should not be planned by the 72-hour team.

Whom to invite to the victory party is another important consideration. The party should include donors and volunteers—both have helped make the candidate’s victory possible. Donors should be invited a week in advance; volunteers should pick up their tickets to the victory party at 8 p.m. after the polls have closed. They should only get a ticket when they have completed their GOTV duties.

Elections are about getting enough votes so that your candidate can go from being a candidate to a policymaker. A well-planned and equally well-executed GOTV plan is crucial to achieving this goal.

Phil Paule is a political consultant who specializes in the “Ground Game.”

Last-Minute Advertising

Your advertising is an effective way to convince voters to support you, but it is no substitute for your GOTV efforts. Last-minute advertising is too late to introduce new issues or implement new tactics and it can sometimes jeopardize a campaign’s momentum if it has the appearance of sleaze.

You should certainly keep up and even intensify your advertising and voter contact programs as you near the election. There is also no harm in continuing to point out differences between you and your opponent(s) on

■ WHAT DO VOTERS WANT? Truthful, Relevant, and Fair Ads

Dissatisfaction with political ads was one of the first and most frequent complaints about political campaigns that focus group participants made. Participants articulated a commonly shared perception that ads function as tools of negative campaigning, which are intended to manipulate rather than inform the voter. At best, participants believe candidates use ads to publicize mostly negative and irrelevant information about their opponents. At worst, they think candidates use them to launch personal attacks, disseminate misleading information, and avoid addressing the issues that matter most to voters.

Voters want truthful, relevant, and fair ads, not “mudslinging,” and they are likely to interpret attack ads launched by a candidate during the final hours of a campaign as an attempt to manipulate the voters.

legitimate grounds. Voters expect and are accepting of these types of comparative messages; however, they are not as open to last-minute attacks. For last-minute advertising to work, it must emphasize issues that the voters are already primed to hear. Candidates who believe they can turn an election by releasing or leaking new negative information about their opponent(s) risk angering and alienating voters and losing their support.

Because some candidates will resort to last-minute attacks, it is important to protect yourself against them. Have spokespeople on call to answer accusations and make sure you are accessible to the media. If your opponent(s) engage in shady tactics, point this out.

Rather than focusing on their negative tactics, bring the message back to your own positive themes. Tell the voters that your opponent(s) are trying to move the debate away from your key themes because they know how well they are reso-

nating with voters. If you stay clean and lead by example, the contrast will show through.

Planning Your Celebration and Thanking Your Volunteers

It would be a shame to win an election and not celebrate the victory and thank everyone who was involved. Even candidates who don't win still need to thank their volunteers for their time and effort, especially if they plan to run again. Assign responsibility for planning the victory celebration to a member of your campaign who will not be directly involved in your GOTV operation. This person should reserve a space that is large enough to accommodate your volunteers, donors, and closest supporters, order refreshments, provide a sound system, and make sure that invita-

tions go out to everyone who needs one, including members of the news media.

You should always be prepared to give a victory speech that acknowledges the contributions of your volunteers and campaign staff, is respectful of your fellow candidate(s), and then moves the conversation to governance and what you hope to accomplish in the future. No matter how much you are sure that you will win, prepare remarks congratulating your opponent(s) in case the vote does not go your way.

Conclusion: Five Things to Know about Contacting and Mobilizing Voters

1. Personal contact is key in local elections.

In local elections, the degree to which you are able to communicate your message directly to voters will play an important role in the success of your campaign. This is why having an effective field organization is so important. Personal contact enables the campaign to assess whether its messages are resonating with voters, and it gives voters a chance to be heard.

■ **BEST PRACTICE: Avoid last-minute attacks.**

They can backfire and ruin the momentum of your campaign.

2. Identify and target your audience.

Make efficient use of resources by identifying likely voters who can be convinced to support you. Target geographically by neighborhood and politically by partisan affiliation and voting pattern. You may want to cultivate relationships with particular ethnic, religious, or economic communities.

3. Combine door-to-door canvassing with phone banks.

Different people respond to different styles of mobilization. Regular phone calls can be used to identify your voters, get your message out quickly, and provide a follow-up to direct mail or canvassing. Precinct walking introduces you directly to voters, demonstrates that you are willing to work hard for their votes, and gives voters a chance to size you up.

4. Practice speaking to undecided voters.

Public speaking can be challenging, especially given the different kinds of audiences you will need to speak to in a campaign. Practice enough so that you feel comfortable and are able to get your message across while remaining responsive to the concerns of voters.

5. Develop a full-fledged GOTV operation.

To get out your vote successfully, make it a priority. Include voter registration, absentee voter mobilization, and coordinated phone, door-to-door, and mail reminders to vote. Offer Election Day services and generate excitement that will bring your voters to the polls.