



# Grassroots Candidate Guide

## Targeting Voters in Your District

Elections are won with effective campaigns that engage voters directly, personally and frequently. While you may want to contact every single voter, this is a waste of campaign resources. Simply put, not everyone is going to vote, let alone vote for you. *Targeting* voters means contacting the voters who matter the most to your campaign. All the resources you may need can be purchased from Grassroots Initiative. We provide all our materials at an absolutely minimal cost, only enough to cover the costs of purchasing the relevant information and creating the materials. Please visit [www.gograssroots.org/eau/resourcerequest.php](http://www.gograssroots.org/eau/resourcerequest.php) for a full list of our services.

### Confused? Have Questions?

Grassroots Initiative is available to help. Please feel free to contact our office at (212) 400-0531 or via email at [elections@gograssroots.org](mailto:elections@gograssroots.org) if you get confused or run into problems. You can also visit our website at [www.gograssroots.org](http://www.gograssroots.org) for additional resources and useful information.

### Step 1: Determine the number of votes you need to win

Figuring out the number of votes that you need to win your election can eliminate wasted campaign energy used to pursue unnecessary votes. This is accomplished by examining previous election results. Research past elections in your district that are similar to your own. Take into account if the election took place in an *off year* (one where there is no election for President, Governor, or Mayor), the number of candidates on the ballot for each party, if it was a primary or general election, and if a hot-button issue was on the ballot as a ballot initiative. Elections have lower turnouts in off years, and more people vote in elections involving highly competitive campaigns or controversial issues. Find past elections that are as similar as possible to yours.

Using voter turnout data from these elections (and a little algebra), you can determine how many voters will be expected to come out and vote in your election. Look at the percentage of registered voters who voted (*turnout percentage*) for each party, in each district. Multiply these percentages by the current number of registered voters of each party in the district. For example, if the Republican voter turnout in the 65<sup>th</sup> Election District was 70% and there are 610 registered Republicans in that district, you can estimate that Republican voter turnout in ED 65 will be 427 voters. The sum of your estimates of voter turnout for each party, in each district will tell you your total expected voter turnout. This estimate can be adjusted according to the specifics of your election.

In the case of two candidates, you need 51% of the votes to win. Thus, if you expect 30,000 voters to turnout on Election Day, you need 15,300 votes to win your election.

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## Step 2: Determine your base and swing voters

Find a past election in which the candidate from your party performed extremely poorly and lost the election. Look at the percentage of votes your candidate won. This is your percentage of base voters. For example, if your candidate won 30% of the votes when he or she ran a weak campaign, 30% of voters still voted for your candidate even when he or she performed poorly. These voters are your base voters because they will vote for your party even when it does not do well. You can count on 30% of the vote.

Next, find an election in which the *opposing party* performed extremely poorly and *your party* did well. Look at the percentage of voters the losing candidate won. This is the percentage of base voters of your opponent and the percentage of votes your opponent can count on.

These numbers can be used to determine the number of swing or persuadable voters. For example, if the percentage of base voters of your opponent is 33%, the total percentage of base voters is 63%. This means that 37% of the voters ( $100\% - 63\% = 37\%$ ) are *swing voters*. Potentially, you can persuade these voters to vote for you.

If you need at least 51% of the votes to win, and your base vote is 30%, you need to persuade 21% more of the electorate ( $51\% - 30\% = 21\%$ ) to vote for you. It is pointless to try and persuade the base voters of your opponent, so the 21% needs to come from the swing voters. Therefore, you need to persuade 21% of the 37% of voters who are swing voters (56% of all swing voters) to vote for you. If you expect 30,000 voters to turn out on Election Day, you can count on 30%, or 9000 voters, to vote for you. You need to convince 21% more, or 6300 voters, to vote for you.

## Step 3: Identify your target voters

Targeting helps you find voters. You need to identify where the additional 6,300 voters will come from. Logically, these votes can come from the 11,100 voters (37% of all voters) who are swing voters. Targeting voters allows you to identify voters that are the most important to your campaign and that you can convince to vote for you.

One way to target voters is with *demography* or the characteristics of populations. Certain groups of people tend to vote for particular parties and types of candidates. For example, younger people tend to vote more liberally. People also tend to vote for candidates that are members of similar groups as themselves such as veterans or single mothers. Identify trends and voting patterns using voter data and determine which groups are likely to vote for you.

Voters can also be targeted using geographical information. Using voter information to identify areas of high, low, and medium voter turnout, as well as areas that tend to vote in your favor. Avoid areas that have higher voter turn out and do not support your party; you don't want to encourage these people to go to the polls because they will vote against you. Target areas that tend to vote with your party and have medium and low turnout. Areas that support your party and have high voter turnout do not need as much attention from your campaign, but should not be entirely neglected.

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Use voting history to identify those who vote sporadically (infrequently) and those who vote habitually. Sporadic voters need to be reminded to vote more often than habitual voters. Voting history can also be used to identify voters that are likely to vote in your favor based on how they voted in the past.

#### **Step 4: Build and organize your base**

You can build your base by targeting voters. Whether it is by persuading swing voters to vote for you, ensuring that sporadic voters go to the polls, or registering new voters, you can build your base by identifying supporters using targeted information. Here, it is very important to start a database of your target voters, supporters and volunteers.

Your base starts with your family, friends and coworkers. Your base also comes from members of your community, organizations and constituency groups that support your issues, and your party's prime voters. Identify and contact these voters early in your campaign using meetings, house parties, door-knockings, and phone calls. Your goal is to turn your base voters into volunteers for your campaign. Ask every base voter to volunteer. Invite strong supporters to take an active leadership role.

Identify your base by implementing a voter identification program. Although you might know generally who your target voters are and where they live, you need to be able to specifically and individually identify them. Using lists of registered voters in your district, directly ask in a phone call or door-knocking visit if the voter supports you. Note in your database if the voter is a strong supporter, an undecided voter, or a strong opponent. You can also ask voters which issues are most important to them.

#### **Step 5: Persuade swing voters**

You can use the information obtained in your voter identification program to target swing voters with a *voter persuasion program*. It is likely that the undecided voter is simply not interested in politics, but it is your job to get their attention.

The best way to engage voters is one-on-one contact; so door-knocking is one of the best ways to convince a voter to vote for you. By canvassing door-to-door, the candidate or volunteer has a personal conversation with the voter and can personalize the campaign message in a way that resonates with each individual voter. Phoning is also an effective way to persuade and engage voters in personal conversations. Organize a phone-bank using your volunteers. Targeted mailings are a more passive means of reaching voters, but tend to be the easiest way for direct voter contact and allow the voter to consider your campaign on his or her own time. Emails are also a consideration; however building a list of target voter emails addresses can be quite difficult.

It is important when contacting voters to use pre-written persuasion scripts. Have several scripts prepared based on the issues identified as important to swing voters in your voter identification program. Whether it is a door-knock, phone call or mailed literature, target the outreach to address the

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issue that the voter specifically identified in their previous voter identification contact. If the voter named health care as their number one concern, it will not be helpful to mail them information about your environmental policy ideas. Often you can persuade a swing voter to vote for you by convincing them that you are the best candidate to address the issues that they care about.

Be sure to record the results of your voter persuasion program in your database. Each swing voter should be contacted several times, until they say that they support the candidate. This may require up to 6-9 contacts over the entire campaigning period. However, do not overwhelm your voter; alternate the type and timing of your contact. It is important to schedule your voter persuasion program well.

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