



NEWS

81 Franklin Street
Fifth Floor
New York, NY 10013
T 212.400.0531
F 646.519.4749

www.gograssroots.org

MEDIA CONTACT

Alex Carabelli, 212.400.0531
press@gograssroots.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2007

The Daphne Foundation leads investment in world's first non-profit election consulting firm

Grassroots Initiative looks to revolutionize candidate recruitment in the United States

New York, NY – Grassroots Initiative, a non-partisan, non-profit organization based in New York, announced today that the Daphne Foundation will become the lead investor in its Election Assistance Unit. **The undertaking marks the dawn of the world's first non-profit election consulting firm, which seeks to drastically reduce the barriers and financial costs of running for elected office.**

Grassroots Initiative was founded to ensure that public service is accessible regardless of race, creed or economic status. **Nationwide, less than 5% of all local elected officials and less than 1% of state elected officials are persons of color.** Gaps in minority representation mirror huge wealth disparities between elected officials and the American public at large.

“There is no shortage of dynamic, capable leadership in America’s low-income and diverse urban neighborhoods, yet rarely are these individuals the same people that seek elected office,” says **Jeff S. Merritt**, Grassroots Initiative’s founder. “Our schools do not teach how to run for elected office and role models are few and far between. It’s hard to argue we live in a vibrant democracy when the vast majority of elections in places like New York have just one candidate on the ballot.”

To combat these problems, Grassroots Initiative is launching targeted public awareness campaigns to recruit candidates and provide free technical assistance to help first-time candidates get their name on the ballot. **All of the organization’s election services – from legal guides to campaign signs – are publicly-subsidized thereby ensuring that even small-budget candidates can afford the most advanced campaign tools.** In 2008-2009, Grassroots Initiative will focus primarily on recruiting and assisting candidates for City Council, State Assembly and State Senate in New York. In addition, select services, including low-cost campaign materials, will be offered to candidates nationwide.

By lowering the costs and risks associated with running for elected office, Grassroots Initiative hopes to encourage traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups to enter public affairs for the first time. In 2006, the organization attracted national attention for its work to elect the first Sikhs in New York, a group that has been a target of persistent discrimination and hate crimes in post-9/11 America.

“The Daphne Foundation is thrilled to be able to support this important initiative,” said **Abigail Disney**, President and co-founder of the Daphne Foundation. “There is no better place to look for answers to our toughest political problems than to the men and women who work hard every day to make this country tick. We will never see substantive and systemic change in America until it fulfills its democratic promise, and Grassroots Initiative is one big, creative step in the right direction.” The Daphne Foundation looks forward to seeing other funders join in this historic effort.

###

About Grassroots Initiative

Grassroots Initiative is the world's first non-profit election consulting firm. Since 2005, the organization has served as the "go-to" point for individuals interested in running for elected office in New York City. Grassroots Initiative's programs and services work to ensure that the door to public service is open to the best and brightest community leaders and that, once elected, these officials have the tools they need to successfully serve their constituents. To learn more, visit www.gograssroots.org

About the Daphne Foundation

The Daphne Foundation funds programs that confront the causes and consequences of poverty in the five boroughs of New York City. We have a particular interest in grassroots and emerging organizations engaging their members in the creation and implementation of long-term solutions to intractable social problems. We believe a foundation should fund in a manner that reinforces and facilitates the work of the programs it funds and that the most inventive and humane solutions to social problems often come from the people most affected by those problems. To learn more, visit www.daphnefoundation.org