



# Chapter 3: Voter Contact & GOTV

## Contacting Voters

Once the campaign figures out where to go and what to say, the campaign needs to figure out how best to reach the voters. The campaign will have a menu of techniques for contacting voters. All of these techniques should have one or more of the following goals:

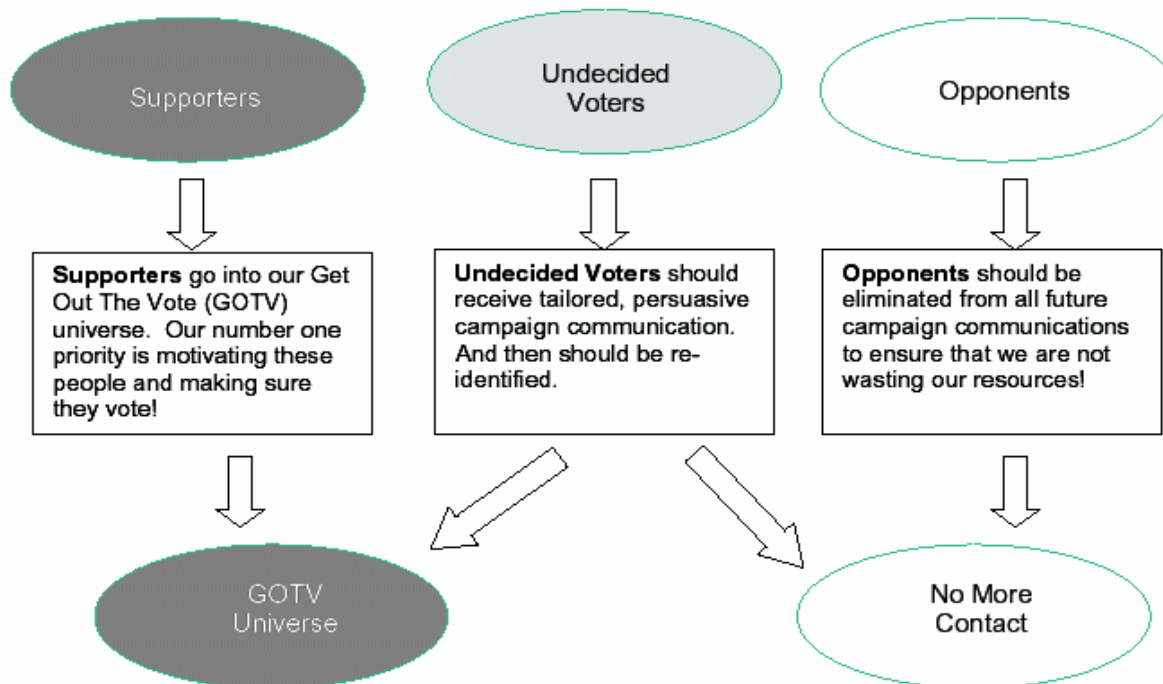
- Identifying supportive, undecided, and opposing voters
- Spreading the campaign’s message to undecided voters
- Increasing the turnout among supportive voters
- Collecting information for future voter outreach efforts

### Data Collection

Remember, the goal in any election is to make sure that 50 percent plus 1 of the Election Day voters support our campaign. A well-organized field campaign will track which voters they have communicated with and how a particular person is likely to vote. **Collecting this data is crucial to your voter contact strategy.** Many local Democratic Parties will allow you access to a voter file that combines the publicly available voter registration data with party or candidate preference information from previous campaigns. If no party voter file is available to your campaign, then it is important to create your own system of tracking voter’s preferences.

### Categories of Voters

There are essentially three groups of voters in any election: **our supporters, undecided voters, and our opposition.** Unless your local party has a well-kept voter file, you will probably not know which voters belong in which group at the beginning of the election. As you contact each voter you will begin to categorize them as supporters, opponents or undecided. Each of these categories requires a different voter contact strategy.



Think of voter contact as a process of refining and re-refining a huge list. The more times you’re able to go through your list contacting each voter, the more you are able to tailor a specific message (GOTV or persuasion) to a specific voter.

## Types of Voter Contact

The more personal and retail the contact, the greater impact the contact will have. At the same time, making retail contact with each and every person is extremely demanding on your resources.

**Voter Contact can be divided into two different categories: High impact and Low impact.**

| Tactic           | Impact | Targeted   | Two-Way? | Resource Costs |        |       |
|------------------|--------|------------|----------|----------------|--------|-------|
|                  |        |            |          | Time           | People | Money |
| Canvassing       | High   | Highly     | Yes      | High           | High   | Med   |
| Phone            | High   | Highly     | Yes      | Med            | Med    | Low   |
| Literature Drops | Low    | Sometimes  | No       | High           | High   | Med   |
| Posters          | Low    | No         | No       | Med            | Med    | Low   |
| Lawn Signs       | Low    | No         | No       | Med            | Med    | Med   |
| Billboards       | Low    | No         | No       | Low            | Low    | High  |
| Human visibility | Low    | No         | No       | Med            | High   | Low   |
| Emails           | None   | Moderately | Somewhat | Low            | Low    | Low   |

In 2000 Yale political scientists, Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, produced Get Out the Vote!, a book which quantified the effect of voter contact tactics on GOTV. As predicted, the more personal the tactic, the more likely that tactic would produce a vote. As a general rule, Green and Gerber estimated how many contacts each tactic required to turn out each additional voter (GOTV only):

*Canvassing: One additional vote for every 14 people successfully contacted.*

*Phone banks: One additional vote for every 35 people successfully contacted.*

*Literature Drops: One additional vote for every 66 people successfully contacted.*

*Direct Mail: One additional vote for every 133 people successfully contacted.*

The study indicated that these tactics had greater impact in local (or down-ballot) elections and in mid-year elections. Although these numbers generalize the significant distinctions among different kinds of voters, the research powerfully illustrates the varying degrees of efficacy for each tactic.

What voter contact strategy a campaign employs will be based on resource realities. The most effective impact will come from a combination of techniques, designed to be as personal as possible and related to one another both in message and timeline. Effective communication is layered.

*Example: Layered Communication to Persuade an Undecided voter*

1. **Television ads** raise voter awareness across a large segment of the population.
2. **Door-to-door canvass** identifies a voter who is undecided on an issue.
3. **Direct mail** provides persuasive issue material to voter.
4. **Phone bank** re-identifies - voter is now in support.
5. **Election Day direct mail** reminds supportive voter to vote.
- Election Day phone bank** reminds supportive voter to vote.
- Election Day doorknockers** reminds supportive voter to vote.

We will discuss 3 of the most widely used voter contact tactics on the following pages: Canvassing, Phone banking and direct mail.

## Canvassing: Rules of the Road

Canvassing is one of the oldest, most versatile and most effective methods of contacting voters. Though it is very time and resource intensive, canvassing is by far the most effective voter contact tactic available to your campaign.

Canvassing is also sometimes known as ‘Door-knocking’ or ‘block-walking’. It is a high impact voter contact tactic because it allows for two-way communication between the campaign and the voter. Television advertisements and yard signs can help get a campaign’s message out, but they are easily lost in the daily blur of our commercial culture. A face-to-face conversation also gets a campaign’s message out to a voter, but it also allows that voter to ask questions about the candidate and express his/her hopes, fears and frustrations about the district and issues that affect his/her daily life. This conversation makes the contact more memorable and thus more likely to influence the voter’s behavior on Election Day.

**Canvassing:** To solicit political support or to determine opinions or sentiments. To seek votes. A personal solicitation of votes or survey the public opinion.  
- Webster’s Definition

**If you are a candidate in a local election, there is no higher impact you can make on a voter than personally knocking on their door, listening to their concerns and asking for their vote.**

### Canvassing Preparation

Canvassing is a very resource heavy tactic. Before you can begin to canvass or send others out to do so you need to make sure you know where they are going and what they are going to say when they get there.

#### **Sample Canvass Packet**

- List of voters (walk list)
- Map of the area
- Scripts
- Candidate position paper
- Campaign literature
- Clipboard & pens
- Phone # for HQ
- Bottle of water

This information should be assembled together in a ‘canvass packet’ before you can begin an effective canvass. A canvass packet has information on the voters who are being targeted, maps of the area being canvassed (also known as ‘turf’), campaign literature and scripts.

Be sure that your canvassers are delivering the right message to the right voter. Are you trying to identify and persuade voters or are you trying to remind your supporters to get out and vote?

### General Canvassing Tips

1. **Safety First.** Never go inside anyone’s house and be careful of dogs! If you have to enter a fenced in area to reach the door, shake the fence first and see if any dogs are waiting for you. Bring doggie treats as a last resort and to earn brownie points with owners.

2. **Dress the Part**

Dress appropriately & wear comfortable shoes! Check the weather before you leave. Bring snacks and water.

3. **Know the Message**

Be a brief speaker and a good listener. (Remember the 5 C’s!) Have the script memorized so you don’t have to read from the sheet.

4. **It’s Not Only What You Say**

90% of communication is non-verbal. Always be smiling when a voter answers the door and look them in the eyes. Take a step back from the door after you knock to allow them to open the door and talk. Try to hand them your campaign literature if they don’t open the door at first.

## General Canvassing Tips (cont.)

### 5. Say 'I Don't Know'

Never guess the candidates position on anything! If you can't answer a question, write it down and then follow up with the voter later.

### 6. Don't Debate

Avoid getting in an argument with a voter in front of their own home. Even if you can win the argument, you'll likely lose the vote. Spend the most time with people who are open to your campaign.

### 8. You're not the Mailman

Never put campaign literature in mailboxes – only on the door. Leaving unstamped mail in a mailbox can lead to a hefty fine from the post office.

### 9. Live off the Land

You can canvass for more than just votes. If you need something, (pens, water, umbrella, bug spray, bathroom) ask for it. You'll be surprised how helpful people can be and it helps establish a connection with the voter.

## Phonebanks

Phonebanks are a critical element to any political campaign. They are one of the most inexpensive, effective, and resource efficient tactics to contact voters and deliver your message. Although not as persuasive as canvassing, phonebanks allow you to reach voters that canvassers sometimes cannot due to time or geographic constraints.

**The speed and efficiency of phonebanks makes them ideal for any type of voter contact.**

- Voter Identification
- Crowd Building for events
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Voter Persuasion
- Get Out The Vote

## **Keep Good Records**

Keeping accurate records is essential to any voter contact tactic. With the high number of contacts a campaign can make with phonebanks, it's all the more important to record the outcome of each call. Be sure to create clean and easy to understand call sheets and that your volunteers are trained how to fill them out. Info from the previous night's calls (who is voting with us, who is not, who has a disconnected number, etc) should be entered into a voter file the next morning.

## **Create a Positive Working Environment**

### **Sample Phonebank Packet**

- List of voters (call list)
- Scripts
- Candidate position paper
- Campaign literature
- Clipboard & pens

Keep your phonebanking space clean and organized. It should look busy and inviting to any current (and potential) volunteers. Have all necessary calling info ready in a Phonebank Packet for volunteers when they arrive. Be sure to have coffee, water and snacks available at all times. A good phonebank manager will push their volunteers to make more calls while making sure they are having a great time doing so. Think of creative ways to keep the energy and excitement high in any phonebank.

### **SCEDS – 5 Keys to effective phone banking**

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b><u>Smile</u></b>    | They can tell.   |
| <b><u>Connect</u></b>  | Find a way to relate to the person you are calling.  |
| <b><u>Ear Glue</u></b> | Keep the phone glued to your ear between calls. You'll save time and momentum.   |
| <b><u>Dammit</u></b>   | Don't sound like you're asking them a question unless you are. Think the word 'Dammit' at the end of each sentence to emphasize your point and sound more assertive. |
| <b><u>Stand</u></b>    | Standing while you call keeps your energy and enthusiasm high  |

## Voting in Advance – Absentee, Early, and Vote by Mail

Every state has some form of alternative voting option. These options usually allow the voter to cast a vote in advance of Election Day, either at a designated location or from the voters' home via postal mail. Many of these advance voting options are restricted to segments of the population, often by age.

Absentee voting is present in some form in all states. This voting option is often reserved for those of a certain age or disability. Most absentee laws include allowances for students or people who commute to work during polling hours. Early voting allows voters to cast their ballots at a designated location such as the county clerk's office or city hall. Many states have a vote by mail program where the county mails the ballot to the voters and the voter mails the ballot back within a certain time frame. Advance voting requires an application before receiving a ballot, and has deadlines regarding application and ballot submissions.

Incorporating advance voting into your regular voter contact program offer three advantages:

### Reasons to Vote in Advance

- 1) Convenient for the Voters – Can vote at a time before the election, in the privacy, comfort, and convenience of their own home. Or they can take the ballot, in person, to the County office. The voter will not encounter your campaign's GOTV operation.
- 2) Often incorporates an auditable paper trail (esp. voting by mail).
- 3) For the campaign these votes are "in the bank"; you will not have to spend resources on these people on Election Day. This is a good investment in resources because it will allow you to start tallying actual votes and saves you time during the period you need it most.

Choosing to incorporate an advance voting program into your plan is like any other strategic decision. Chasing mail ballots require time, people, and money. An effective program requires a basic commitment to release a number of targeted VBM direct mail pieces and follow-up phone banking to a targeted portion of a campaign's supporters. Consider your vote goal and targeting and figure out the best audience for VBM outreach and calculate the cost per vote. The program should help you reach your vote goal and be in line with your budget.

### Incorporating Vote by Mail (VBM) and Absentee Voting into Your Field Plan

You can make the most of your state's advance voting programs by incorporating them into your field plan as another voter contact tactic. States which have VBM and states which have workable absentee ballot requirements can open the door to a voter contact program that can make a big difference in close elections.

#### Four steps to a good VBM program

- 1) **Research** – Find out the feasibility of doing any type of VBM program in the state. Figure out who can VBM and what process the voter must go through. Deadlines will be important in formulating a plan. Determine if the campaign can distribute and/or submit applications (good thing) or if the voter must do it for him/herself (not as good). Figure out who votes early and why. What issues are important to them? This can be useful for targeted outreach down the road.
- 2) **Integration** – Once the campaign determines who the state allows to VBM, the next step is to determine who the campaign needs to VBM. Budget your VBM program into your targeted direct mail voter outreach. Integrate your VBM program with your voter ID work. ID'd strong supporters should be told about the VBM program, and VBM outreach follows soon afterward.
- 3) **Outreach** – The vast majority of voters still do not know they can participate by advance voting. Those who do might find the process confusing. Outreach should be done via mail, phone, and when possible, through the door canvass. Ideally, the campaign can simply deliver the VBM application to the voter.
- 4) **Follow up** – In the hassle of every day life, a voter might forget about his/her ballot, might have tossed it out, or lost it. You have little control of this, so it is essential to follow up with every targeted voter. Usually voters who have submitted their votes appear on the county's voter role after a period of time. This will help you target your follow up.

## Recommended VBM program activities

A campaign can adjust this general plan to fit with a given budget and vote goal:

| Tactic            | Message  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Mailing #1</b> | <b>Announcing that VBM is on its way.</b>  |
| <b>Mailing #2</b> | <b>VBM application with instructions. Instructions should be clear (have a volunteer read it) and the deadline for the applications should be in large bold font. Pre-print information if possible.</b> |
| <b>Phone #1</b>   | <b>Did you get the application? It's important that it is promptly filled out. How can I help?</b>   |
| <b>Mail #3</b>    | <b>Thank you for applying. Here's what your ballot will look like.</b>   |
| <b>Phone #2</b>   | <b>Follow up. Did you get the ballot? It's important that it is promptly filled out. How can I help? This call comes no later than four days after voters receive their ballots.</b>                     |
| <b>Mail #4</b>    | <b>Reminder mailing, motivational, urgent. Submit your ballot NOW. Sent to those who have not yet voted.</b>   |
| <b>Phone #3</b>   | <b>Last minute ballot chase for unsubmitted votes before deadline.</b>   |

### Helpful tips:

- Secure postal permits early. Ideally, get a business reply permit and/or have applications returned to the campaign headquarters (instead of the county office) so you can keep track of your voters. Be sure to check with the county board of elections to see if you can legally collect and submit applications on behalf of the voter.
- Leave a phone number in your mailings for questions. The voter can call the campaign office for assistance with filling out the information. Be sure to train your staff.
- Messages targeted to your VBM voters need to be sent out earlier because they vote earlier. If you know what issues tend to motivate your district's early voters, you can fit your mailings to speak to that issue.

## Get Out the Vote (GOTV)

The GOTV phase of an election consolidates all the campaign work that had come before it. In a closely contested election, a well-run GOTV plan can secure victory for the campaign. The campaign shifts gears in the final weeks to its GOTV phase. GOTV is much more than Election Day - preparation for GOTV will take weeks and the GOTV itself can take weeks.

It is often said that GOTV can impact a race by around 5% of the campaign's turnout.

Of the Democrats 31 Congressional pick-ups in 2006, 13 were within 5%. Both of the last two presidential campaigns were within 5%.

### Before GOTV Can Begin

The months of work on the campaign's field plan all lead up to the final weeks of the campaign in the GOTV phase of the campaign. Because of this, a number of benchmarks must have been hit before GOTV even starts.

Campaigns often see GOTV planning as a process that begins a near to the election. Well-run campaigns create their entire field plan with GOTV in mind from the beginning. The GOTV plan needs to be made with information gathered from months of work in the field program. The field plan needs to be built with GOTV considerations in mind. The GOTV plan incorporates information such as the locations and characteristics of supporters and likely supporters. The GOTV plan will also need to prioritize groups of supporters and the precincts they live in. Because of this, the field plan has to start with a goal to identify and/or persuade a certain number of supporters and it must track these supporters on a precinct level.

In other words, the GOTV program relies on a list of supporting voters. Building this list is the job of the field program until GOTV begins. Once GOTV begins, the campaign is focused on turning out that list.

If this list is incomplete by the time GOTV contact starts, the GOTV plan will be less effective.

### Goal Setting and Targeting Your 'GOTV Universe'

You've already calculated your 'win number' (50%+1 of est. turnout) and your 'vote goal' (52% of est. turnout). These numbers formed the basis of your field plan in the previous sections. These numbers and the work you've done in the field plan will now form the basis of your GOTV plan. If you've run a good field program to this point, goal setting can be as easy as 1-2-3.

1) Look at the precincts you have been working in. You've spent most of your time in swing precincts (Democratic performance = 35% to 65%) identifying supporters. How many of these supporters have you identified?

2) Look at your Democratic Base precincts (Democratic performance = over 65%). You spent time early in the campaign building a name for yourself among your base, but paid far more attention to the swing precincts for most of the rest of the campaign. Now it's time to go back to your base. Judging by democratic performance and likely turnout, how many votes can you expect from these precincts?

3) Add these two numbers – ID's supporters and Base voters – together. This is your 'GOTV universe.' If you live in a Democratic area, or if you've run an aggressive field program, you might find that your base voters and your ID'd supporters meet or exceed your vote goal. You will want to build a GOTV contact plan for your voters, broken down by likelihood of voting. Somewhat likely voters get more contact than very likely voters.

## **What if your GOTV universe isn't large enough?**

We'd like campaigning to involve very little guesswork. That's why it is so important to run an aggressive field plan: The more supporters we ID and persuade, the less guessing we have to do as the campaign enters its final weeks. Unfortunately, not all campaigns are able to reach their vote goal through ID's and existing base voters. For these campaigns, we will need to figure out how to increase the size of our GOTV universe in a way that produces more votes for the campaign.

### **1) Turning out potentially supportive, but infrequent voters.**

Take another look at the high Democratic performance precincts. We determine our turnout projections in these precincts based on previous performance. If the turnout in Democratic base precincts increases above its expectation, the campaign would receive more votes. Focusing on increasing turnout in high performance/ low turnout precincts is a resource intensive strategy. These precincts usually have low turnout for a number of reasons – reasons which previous campaigns did not overcome. The precinct could have high residency turnover, inaccessible households, individuals working numerous jobs, etc. If the campaign decides to target these voter/areas, the campaign should take a look at the factors which lead to low turnout in the target areas. The campaign must develop a plan for contacting these voters. That plan must begin with a goal of how many more voters the campaign can turnout (usually on a precinct by precinct basis) with increased contact activity. This number is often calculated as the 'GOTV index.'

If thought out in advance, this strategy will produce increased numbers of supportive voters. The increased comes in the form of more time, money and people used to contact these voters.

### **2) Turning out likely demographics.**

Sometimes you just have to guess. At least make it an educated guess. If you have objective information stating that a certain kind of voter is very likely to support your candidate, you might decide to add all of that kind of voter into your GOTV universe, including unidentified voters. This most likely occurs if the campaign has access to polling information indicating the inclinations of specific demographic groups. The pollster might find that two-thirds of women under the age of 50 support your candidate. In this case, your GOTV plan would be wise to add all female voters under the age of 50 to the GOTV universe. Do not add in groups of voters to your GOTV universe without reliable, objective information. "Hunches" are not the foundation of a GOTV strategy.

If done with reliable information, this strategy can be a huge help in building a GOTV universe. It relies on having a detailed voter file (including age, race, sex, income, etc) and an objective source of quantifiable demographic inclinations.

### **3) Turning out supporters in hostile territory.**

There are reasons we do not spend much time in Republican base areas. Untargeted turnout work is likely to produce more opposing votes than supportive, and targeted turnout work is more expensive on per/voter basis. If, by GOTV time, your campaign is unable to build an adequately large GOTV universe by targeting base precincts, ID'd supporters, supportive demographics, the campaign might decide that targeted GOTV work in Republican precincts will be necessary.

This strategy is risky because Republican base areas do not need any reminders that there's even an election in progress, much less that there's a Democrat running. GOTV in these areas is risky, expensive, and potentially frustrating.

## **Research and Reach Out**

Election laws differ from state to state and have changed recently. Administration of these laws may even vary from county to county. The importance of researching election law and regulation can not be understated. The campaign should understand voter registration timelines, absentee and mail-in voting regulations, early voting, poll checking rules, poll opening and closing times, peculiarities of different voting machines throughout the district, etc. Election information is usually kept by the state Secretary of State and administered by the individual counties or county organizations (Clerk, Board of Elections, etc). On Election Day, the individuals overseeing the polling station might not well-versed on election law, especially due to the recent and numerous changes in the law in the last few years. The campaign should have a legal team available to troubleshoot and anticipate potential problems. Seek out local attorneys who have experience in this area.

Chances are, in GOTV, it's all been done before. Just as during the start of the campaign, the GOTV phase of the campaign will benefit from having reached out to other campaigns, previous campaigns, and the existing Democratic Party infrastructure. Local groups and activists who have worked in the district in past cycles might be able to share their experiences with the campaign. Additionally, many campaigns will work in the context of the state's Democratic Coordinated Campaign. The state Party usually pool resources and data from Democratic campaigns running in the state in that cycle. Most of this coordination is done between the largest campaigns (statewide and Congressional campaigns), but can be useful for down ballot campaigns as well. Be sure to ask the state's Democratic Coordinated campaign what it can share with your campaign. The coordinated campaign can be a huge help for GOTV.

## **Staffing**

As the campaign transitions into its GOTV phase, your staffing structure will begin to change. The campaign will require increasing amounts of staff time and resources spent on GOTV. Most of the staff will switch over to GOTV work. In the final days of GOTV nearly all the staff has switched over with the possible exceptions of only the scheduler, the communication director, and the finance director in their original roles.

Many campaigns will bring on a dedicated GOTV director to plan and execute the GOTV phase, others will transition the existing field director. Having a fresh staffer on the ground who is not distracted by anything other than the needs of the upcoming GOTV phase can be a huge help when the campaign needs to transition into GOTV. Researching, planning, and preparing for this final phase of the campaign is a major undertaking and needs to begin well in advance of the election. The new GOTV director needs to learn about the district and the campaign's work up to that point in a short amount of time. Additionally, the new GOTV director will need to jump into an existing staff and establish new accountability and reporting procedures.

Whether the campaign has the ability to bring on a GOTV director or decided to use the existing Field Director, the campaign must have a clear system of who is accountable to whom for the final GOTV phase. As more staff members are added and existing staff is shuffled, everyone should be clear what is expected of them and from whom. As the campaign nears the final stretch, the GOTV director's responsibilities become increasingly greater, as does the number of staff that report to him or her.

### **Prioritize, Evaluate, and Revise**

As with any project where your resources are limited, smart prioritizing is the key to successfully reaching your goal. In GOTV, you prioritize voters and the precincts they live in. Much of the GOTV work the campaign will do utilize three main tactics: **door-knocking**, **calling**, and **mailing**. The key to distributing these tactics efficiently is to figure out which voters and which precincts get canvassed, called, and mailed for GOTV.

As stated earlier, your GOTV universe consists of people reliably identified or presumed to be supporters of the campaign. Among these supporters, some voters will require more contact than others. Among those same supporters some may need to be contacted by different methods and will require varying levels of resources.

### **Prioritizing by Voter Behavior**

Frequent voters require relatively little contact. This group of voters should still receive some contact before the election and should certainly be included on Election Day GOTV voter contact lists.

Infrequent voters will require much more contact. These voters should be contacted in a number of different ways – phone, canvass, mail, lit, etc – before the election. They have a record of missing some elections, so it's worth making sure they know this one is important.

### **Prioritizing by Precinct**

Every vote counts equally once it has been cast. But getting that voter to cast the ballot is not equal in terms of the resources required. Some precincts may be more difficult for a person to access on a given day. The campaign will emphasize phone and mail outreach for these voters.

Some precincts have more GOTV targets than others. Because you have limited resources, it will be important to target the precincts with the highest number of GOTV targets, especially for Election Day when the campaign must distribute canvassers. An hour spent by a canvasser in a GOTV dense precinct will produce more than an hour spent in a precinct where there are fewer targets. Large Democratic Base precincts will almost certainly have the greatest number of targets, followed by swing precincts in which the campaign has done its most aggressive voter ID and persuasion work.

| Example: Prioritizing Precincts for GOTV |       |        |            |          |
|--|-------|--------|------------|----------|
| Precinct                                 | Perf. | Voters | GOTV       | Rank     |
| Pct 5-1                                  | Base  | 315    | <b>201</b> | <b>1</b> |
| Pct 5-2                                  | Base  | 283    | <b>183</b> | <b>2</b> |
| Pct 5-3                                  | Base  | 194    | <b>177</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Pct 5-4                                  | Swing | 406    | <b>166</b> | <b>4</b> |
| Pct 5-5                                  | Base  | 135    | <b>109</b> | <b>5</b> |
| Pct 5-6                                  | Swing | 281    | <b>106</b> | <b>6</b> |

On Election Day, the campaign will distribute volunteers to precincts in the order in which they are prioritized. Priority precincts will be covered throughout the day, pulling out all the voters in the precinct team's list. If a volunteer lives in a priority precinct he or she should work in his or her home precinct, but this should be worked out beforehand for priority precincts. Avoid sending volunteers to non-target precincts until all target precincts have been filled. It's tempting to send volunteers wherever they want to work, but unless they refuse to work anywhere else, priority precincts must be covered before non-priority precincts are considered.

## GOTV Tactics

GOTV contact makes a specific ask, “Vote!” and makes this ask many times over a short period of time. Generally, the more contact a voter receives, the more likely that voter will turn out and vote. At times this may seem to temporarily frustrate the voter, but the relationship between number of contacts and turnout is solidly in favor of repeated contacts. This is especially true of infrequent voters. Ultimately, the best way for a voter to end contact from the campaign will be to get out and vote. The more personal the GOTV contact, the better the response. The more personal forms of contact, such as canvassing, are necessary but also resource intensive.

### Door Knocking - the canvass

Contact for contact, door conversations yield greater turnout than any other contact. It’s easy to throw away a piece of literature or even cut short a phone call, but a cheery and persistent volunteer is difficult to ignore or dismiss. That said, canvassing is by far the most labor and time intensive form of contact. An efficient canvass operation requires advance material preparation, adequate volunteer training, and a system of volunteer supervision.

Canvass materials preparation includes having walk lists and maps printed in advance for each team. Maps should include the precinct itself and a map or set of directions (both ways) to the target precinct. Count out any accompanying campaign GOTV literature to make sure that the campaign will have enough for every targeted precinct. Clipboards, pens, and water should be available to assist each team. Each team should have the office’s contact information in case a situation should arise. All of this is done before the canvassers arrive and ready in packets for when the canvassers hit the streets.

Training for GOTV canvassing needs to be made mandatory even for veteran canvassers. The campaign should arrange for a number of meetings around the district to serve as a canvass briefing and training.

The canvass coordinator might choose to cluster precincts together if the campaign has many precincts to cover or not very many volunteers. If so, be sure to separate base precincts (blind-pull) from swing precincts (targeted GOTV). It will unnecessarily complicate matters if a volunteer team assigned to more than one precinct needs to execute different GOTV strategies.

A key procedure for GOTV on election is a voter turnout reporting system. Work out a plan so that the campaign knows throughout the day when its targeted voters have cast their ballot. Many counties allow the campaign to copy a list of voters who have shown up. The campaign will want to check that list against its own list of targets. Those identified voters who have cast their ballot should no longer receive GOTV contact. Focus your resources for those who have not yet voted. At appointed times in the day, your precinct team will check on that list and transmit that information back to their HQ or staging area.

A quality canvass program requires supervision. By the time GOTV commences, the campaign will have recruited a number of volunteer leaders. These leaders will be responsible for recruiting, training, and launching GOTV volunteers. Many campaigns use off-site (away from HQ) staging areas where volunteers gather to receive materials and training. These sites are run by volunteers the campaign knows and trusts. The staging area(s) is effectively HQ for any volunteer during Election Day and the actual campaign HQ is deserted except for core staff and Election Day attorneys. Precinct materials should be signed out by the leader and he or she should collect the contact information of any volunteer who takes out a precinct.

### Canvass contingency materials

**Rain:** Clear plastic cover sheets, found in a school supplies section of any store, can reduce smudges on walk sheets when clipped on the top of walk sheet.

**Rain:** Inexpensive plastic ponchos, or even garbage bags, will keep canvassers dry. It isn’t high fashion, but volunteers will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

**Cold:** The campaign cannot provide warm clothing for every volunteer, but glove and boot warmers can be affordable if purchased in bulk.

**Cold:** Although more expensive, gel pens do not freeze in cold weather.

**Windy:** Clipboards are a huge help, but they lose effectiveness if there are too many items stacked in one. Having a bag, even a grocery bag, will allow canvassers a better place to stick their glossy campaign literature.

## Phoning

Phone outreach is essential to any GOTV operation. In the days before the election, phone calls are made to every supporter in the GOTV universe, with an emphasis on infrequent voters. Use these calls to remind voters of their polling location, confirm their support of the candidate, set up volunteers if they have special needs, and to recruit volunteers for Election Day. Phones provide the most coverage of any personal tactic.

Volunteer phone calls have a greater affect on an individual voter, but if the campaign can not muster up enough volunteers to cover the list, it would be prudent to hire a professional campaign services firm. Volunteer GOTV calling should be supervised and done at phone banks. This ensures that volunteers are making the calls and that data from the calls comes back to the campaign in a timely manner.

One of the major responsibilities of the GOTV director is securing enough phone lines to make calls through the GOTV universe. Union halls and businesses (law firms, travel agencies, etc) will provide multiple lines if asked. Planning for phone banks requires some calculation and some educated guess about rates (these guesses are replaced by real numbers once specific contact rates of your own).

### Calculating Your Phone Rates – Race County Example

Figuring out key rates in your phone program can help you assess your needs for Election Day.

**1) Completion Rate.** Your GOTV universe mostly consists of people the campaign has already called through the voter ID and persuasion phase, so you know the numbers are good. Assume a 75% contact rate after three rounds of calls. To figure out how many completed calls to expect, multiply the GOTV unique households by .75. For calls to uncontacted base supporters, assume a lower number (60%). In this example, we assume all the GOTV universe has been contacted at least once before (a good idea, anyway).

**EXAMPLE**  
 Race County GOTV universe = 4604  
 Assumed contact rate = 75%  
 Projected contacts = 3453

**2) Call rate.** The rate at which a campaign’s volunteers can contact voters is largely a volunteer management issue. Short scripts and on-task volunteers are able to cover the GOTV universe, ensuring that every voter is contacted. The scripts have one simple message: “Get out and vote!” A short script with a good phone bank captain might be able to reach as many as 20 contacts an hour. This will help you figure out how many hours of calling the campaign will need to do to cover its GOTV universe.

**EXAMPLE**  
 Race County projected contacts = 3453  
 Assumed call rate = 20/hour  
 Volunteer hours needed = 172.65

**3) Hours available.** Election Day, as any other day, provides a finite length of time in which calls can be placed. Election Day calls can begin at 9am and last until shortly before polls close. Now that you know how many volunteer hours you need to fill on the phones, you will need to calculate how many phones you need by dividing the available calling hours

**EXAMPLE\***  
 Volunteer hours needed = 172.65  
 Available hours (9am - 7pm) = 10  
 Phones to fill = 17.265

\*A number of factors should alter the above assumptions. First, your GOTV operation should ideally update the phone lists and remove supporters who have already voted from your contact lists. Second, contacts will not be made evenly throughout the day. The campaign will make few contacts in the morning and afternoon, and will have many contacts to make in the evenings. In this example, you might decide to keep eight phones filled for the morning and afternoon and 25 or more for the evening.

## **Direct Mail**

Although lower impact than phones or canvasses, direct mail is an indispensable part of GOTV. Unlike the canvass or phone outreach, anyone for whom you have an address is guaranteed to receive contact. Just as with the other forms of contact, you have one simple message: “Go out and vote!” Because of this your mail piece should be simple. Include information about where to vote (each address would have its precinct printed or stuck to the mail piece), why it is important to vote, and contact information for the campaign office for questions.

Even more than with other direct mail, your GOTV mail needs to be timed well. Ideally, you want this piece to arrive on the Saturday or Monday before the election. When in doubt, aim to be a day early.

## **Literature Drops (Lit Drops)**

Lit drops are more personal than direct mail, and consequently, more effective. It also takes less time to cover a neighborhood with lit drops than it does with a canvass. But just as with mail and canvassing, Lit drops are a poor tactic to use if it is not targeted. Typically, lit drops are done in Democratic Base areas where targeting is less important. A tried and true method of GOTV lit drops are door hanging literature with the polling place information for that neighborhood printed on. Though it can be effective, extra care must be taken with this tactic not to accidentally confuse voters with wrong information.

Canvassing takes more people and time, Direct mail takes more money. If you have the resources, however, it’s always worth concentrating your volunteers on real voter contact (canvassing and calling) and your money on direct mail.

## **High Visibility (Viz events)**

Numerous visibility events are traditional in the days before a campaign. These events should serve a purpose other than just GOTV. Often these events are set up to get media or rally volunteers. Visibility events should only be done in places where the candidate is already popular (don’t want to remind the opposition).

As a solely GOTV oriented event, visibility is a poor use of resources. It is not proven to increase turnout by itself. Your volunteers can engage in tactics more effective than standing on a street corner. The few seconds a driver might see a volunteer on the road have significantly less impact than the time that same driver could spend with a volunteer at the door. This is the same for staff. If staff members are spending time organizing events or lawn sign distribution, they are not spending time doing more high impact work. The key to GOTV is repeated contact and the most potent contact is personal.

The same is true of standing at the polls. Although traditional in many areas, this tactic has even less value than standing on the roadside. People who show up at the polls, have obviously already decided to vote. They have also, almost certainly, made up their minds. A good GOTV program is focused only on supportive votes. You should already have enough votes to win. GOTV is the time to get those votes out. A volunteer’s time is best spent away from the polling station, and into the neighborhoods.

If all the campaign’s target precincts are covered, and all the phone lines are full, the campaign can start distributing volunteers for visibility.

## Poll Checking (striking voters from contact lists)

Once an individual has voted, the campaign should no longer contact this person. The key is to figure out who has voted. Some states and counties allow only certified individuals access to the list, other post the list for everyone to see outside the polling area. Some states and counties only allow access to this information at certain periods of the day, while others allow open access. In any case, the GOTV director must understand how volunteers will have get access to these names to integrate it into Election Day GOTV.

Volunteers canvassing a precinct would ideally have easy access to the list by just checking in with the polling official as allowed. Getting these names to the phone banks can be more difficult. Typically, the campaign will have three checks in the day: One in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one before the evening rush.

Laws vary greatly from location to location. Campaigns which can not get these names to the phone banks will spend much of their time with people who do not need a call at all.

### Sample Election Day Schedule

Precinct teams meet at 5:00 a.m. on Election Day. Teams put up signs at key locations around the polling place. Poll watchers arrive at 5:30 a.m. and supervise the preparations to open the polls.

#### 7 am Polls Open

- Poll watchers/Vote checker begin crossing off names, and passers begin handing out sample ballots.
- Staging areas check in with HQ.
- Coffee and doughnuts for volunteers and poll workers.
- Volunteers begin to arrive at appointed staging areas and phone banks.

#### 9 am Calls Begin

- Vote checker reports names of supporters who've cast their ballots. These names are removed from voter contact lists for phones and canvasses.
- Phones calls to supporters who haven't voted start and continue throughout the day.
- Canvassers arrive in precincts and contact non-voted supporters throughout the day.

#### 1 pm Lunch

- Precinct captain provides lunch for volunteers **after** the regular lunch hour rush.

#### 2 pm Second Run

- Vote checker reports names of supporters who've cast their ballots. These names are removed from voter contact lists for phones and canvasses.
- Field/GOTV director might reallocate resources according to need.
- Door knockers make a second run through the precinct.

#### 5 pm Third Run

- Vote checker reports names of supporters who've cast their ballots. These names are removed from voter contact lists for phones and canvasses.
- Field/GOTV director might reallocate resources according to need.
- Door knockers make a second run through the precinct.

#### 8 pm Polls Close

- Poll watcher and precinct captain supervise the ballot counting.
- Volunteers clean up signs and other campaign literature around the polls.

#### 8:30 pm Victory Party