

Introduction

Strategy (or, for our Republican friends, “strategery”) is everything. There might be campaigns that just luck into victory without having a meaningful plan to get there, but those are few and far between. Political strategy fits fairly well into golfer Ben Hogan’s description of his sport: “It’s a game of luck. And the more I work, the luckier I get.”

There’s no cookie-cutter approach to developing a campaign strategy. You can’t think about a state legislative campaign the same as a race for President. What works for a well-known incumbent won’t for a first-time challenger. But, the goal for every campaign is the same – to win.

The development of a winning campaign strategy must start with an understanding of the candidate, the opposition and the voters. In fact, too often the voters are forgotten in this equation. But the essence of each campaign is convincing voters they can trust you to advocate for their interests. Why should voters give you their votes? Answering this question is where each campaign should begin.

Some basic campaign strategy has changed over the past few decades. The increased use of mass media in campaigns has supplanted campaigns that were dominated by traditional party organizations. In recent years, the Internet has transformed every aspect of campaigning – from research to volunteer organizing to fundraising to communications. And with new federal, state and local campaign finance laws, the rules of the game are impacting significantly numerous strategic decisions made by campaigns.

One thing that hasn't changed is the need to have a rationale for running for public office. This question must be answered early because it is the cornerstone on which your campaign should base its message. Without a concrete answer to the question "Why are you running?" your candidate will be unable to sell an identity or platform to the voters.

There are four stages to crafting a winning campaign strategy: preparation, planning, organization and execution. This manual will address all four.

CHAPTER ONE

Step One: Prepare

The first step in budgeting and planning a campaign is to develop a substantial, accurate base of information. This information helps the campaign understand, before it begins planning, the political “lay of the land.” The preparation of the campaign plan is usually the responsibility of the campaign manager. The first step in setting up a campaign operation is doing the necessary research and preparation to design your message, ascertain your target audience, write your plan, create a budget, and set about organizing your campaign. You need to complete the research to design a strategy to win the election before you begin to write a plan or campaign. In the preparation stage of the program, the areas that need to be researched should be looked at as questions that must be answered before you can start writing the plan.

Research Questions to be Answered

- **What is the System?**

Different systems require different strategies. Is this a single member district? Do you run at-large? Do you have to win or get a threshold percentage at a convention or caucus to get into the primary? If you don't get a fixed percentage of the vote in the primary, is there a runoff? Do you need to get 50 percent of the vote to win the general? What is the ballot access requirement? Does the campaign need to circulate petitions? Is there a filing fee? Is there a residency requirement? Has the candidate lived in the district, county, or state long enough?

- **What Laws Govern Our Campaign?**

Are there special laws affecting the race? Campaign finance filing deadlines? Watchers certificates? Reporting requirements? Contribution limits? What is the law regarding your access to the media? When are the polls open? What are the laws regarding electioneering? What about on Election Day? Are there local ordinances against sound trucks? Posters? Lawn signs? Federal law is uniform for federal candidates, but state and local laws vary tremendously from state to state. State and local laws will govern the answers to many of these questions for local, state, and federal candidates.

- **Why are We Running?**

What are the reasons your candidate decided to run? Can the candidate articulate these reasons? Who encouraged the candidate to run? What groups are they in? Is the family supportive?

- **Who is Our Candidate?**

Candidate's strengths and weaknesses. What is your candidate's political experience and relationship to the community? His or her non-political experience and education? The personal financial situation? How supportive will the candidate's family be? What is the candidate's personality like? How does the candidate present herself or himself to individual voters? To small groups, larger groups, print reporters, and on television? How good a speaker is she or he? What are the situations in which she or he is most comfortable?

- **What's Going on in the Area?**

What are the local and national issues that are important and which issues are most important to target voters? How do the media view the campaign? How will the media cover the campaign? Which press people already know and like your candidate? Who are the other candidates on the ballot, and how does their presence on the ballot impact your race?

- **Who are the Voters?**

How many votes do you need to win? Who are the swing voters? What are their incomes, ages, education, ethnicity, occupations and religious beliefs? These data are generally not in one place. Look first at voter registration information, then check census data and information gathered by other government agencies and list vendors. Locate as much information as you can readily use. Ask county, state, or national party organizations how to gather data on normal turnout, party registration, average Democratic vote, swing voters and ticket splitters. Which are relevant to your campaign?

- **What Do People Do in the Area?**

Find out what organizations voters belong to, what they do for recreation, where they work and shop, what radio and television programs they listen to or watch. Determine if certain demographic groups, such as senior citizens or apartment dwellers, tend to live in one part of the district more than another.

- **How Much Time Do We Have?**

How many calendar days are there before Election Day, and how many are holidays or other special days when campaigning will be limited? How many days is the candidate available before the election? How much time will the core groups of volunteers spend on the campaign and how much overtime can be reasonably expected from staff people?

- **What is the Political Landscape?**

Who are the political players? What is the situation with the state party? Who are the other party leaders? Civic leaders? What organizations are important in the area in which you will be running? Business leaders? Who are the unelected leaders critical to your victory? Who are the other elected officials?

- **Where are you Running?**

What are the physical boundaries of the area where you will run? Do you have a map(s)? Who lives there? What do they do for a living? Recreation? What other demographics can you find out about the people who live in the area? What is the transportation system for the area? What are the issues that people care about? What are people talking about? (Local newspapers and organizations like the Chamber of Commerce are often good sources of information. The state and local government often will publish demographic information, especially when new census data becomes available.) Can this information help you define our target audience?

- **How Do People Get Information?**

What are the media outlets? Where are they located? Who runs them? Who are the reporters? When do they have news programs? When are their deadlines? What public affairs programming do they have? What about newspapers? What about weekly newspapers? Are there cable systems? Can you buy commercials on them? If you don't know these answers to these questions, check with your library for broadcast yearbooks or state or city press associations.

- **What Resources Do You Bring to the Table?**

What resources does the candidate have to assist the campaign effort? What financial resources? How involved will the family be in the campaign? How much time can the candidate bring to the fundraising effort? To what organizations does the candidate belong? What can they do to help? What organizations or PACs are likely to donate to the campaign? What are the cheapest ways to raise the most money from proven and potential contributors? Is there early money? When will the contributions be collected and how this will affect cash flow estimates? Where is your cash flow? When will the money come in?

- **Who is the Candidate?**

What is the candidate's background? Now is the time to discuss potential skeletons. What were his or her previous jobs? Any voting record? Previous public statements? Court and other public records? Why is the candidate running? Additional research is covered elsewhere in this book.

- **Who are the Opponents?**
The same questions you asked yourself should be asked about your opponents through research.
- **What Does the Candidate Like and Dislike?**
Try to tailor some activities to what the candidate likes and dislikes. If the candidate hates going to hospitals—don't go unless absolutely necessary. (This compassion does not apply to fundraising phone calls).
- **What Other Resources are There?**
Who ran here before? Do they have volunteers?
Who are potential staff? Is there a voter file? Who else represents the district, city, or state who might help?
What is the reliability of the local party organization?
- **What Additional Research is Available?**
Does the state party or party committee have targeting? Was there any previous polling done in the area? What is the schedule for the targeting and polling for the campaign? It is impossible to write a plan without first having a strategy. It is stupid to develop a strategy without targeting and polling.

You have defined your candidate and the opposition, identified important issues, described the political environment in which the campaign will operate, and identified and quantified the number of voters you must reach. Now, you are prepared to tackle the next step: planning and budgeting your campaign.

CHAPTER TWO

Step Two: Plan

Campaigns should plan to win—not just come close. Every strategy you implement on the campaign – virtually everything you do – should be with this single goal in mind. Every campaign should start with a written plan. Without one, the campaign will have too much going on with too little direction.

A campaign's ability to plan and budget realistically depends on an accurate assessment of resources: people, money and time. The interaction of these three resources determines the who, what, when, where and if of a campaign. For example, a campaign might not have enough money to pay for phonebanks that will identify supporters, but have adequate time and an abundance of volunteers to complete the task for a low cost. Or a campaign might not have enough time to complete a volunteer phone program, but have enough money to pay for a phone vendor to make the calls. By estimating resources now, the campaign can plan for completing all the tasks necessary to achieve the strategy.

Elements of a Campaign

While there is no official format that a plan must follow, it generally makes sense to include the following considerations:

The Environment

In preparation for writing your campaign plan, you need to get a grasp of the political environment. Who are the power-brokers, whose support do you need to help you win, what can these political players produce, what organizations could play a role in the election and what is the process for getting their

support, etc.? Having this information will maximize what you are able to accomplish because these individuals or organizations can help you win. Conversely, if a particular political player is not going to support you, you need to know what kind of impact that will have on the race and plan accordingly.

Make a list of every person and organization that could affect your race and assess what they bring to the campaign, if anything. Look at the list, determine who you need and devise a strategy for getting their support.



Strategic Assumptions

The first and most crucial thing you need to know in a campaign is how many votes it will take for you to win. Remember: you are not trying to come close or almost win. You want to make sure your paid and earned media, candidate and surrogate scheduling, direct mail, phone calls, and field efforts are going to generate—at the very least—50 percent of the vote plus one more vote, and you should plan to win with a more comfortable margin of 52 percent. All of your campaign efforts should be based on this strategic assumption of the votes needed to win and where those votes are coming from geographically within the district or state and demographically (gender, age, race, etc.).

Therefore, the plan should include the campaign's vote goal, or number of votes you need to win. This number is calculated based on:

- Expected turnout - the average of the entire turnout from the last three like elections
- Multiply by .50
- Add 1
- Equals number of votes needed to win election in a two-candidate race.

The comfortable margin is calculated as:

- Expected turnout - the average of the entire turnout from the last three like elections
- Multiply by .52
- Equals number of votes to plan for in a two candidate race.

Sometimes you'll hear campaign professionals ask, "So, how do you get to Fifty Plus One?" They're asking what the plan is to get just enough votes to win. Since winning by one vote counts just as much as winning by one million votes, you should choose the most efficient path and plan to win with Fifty Plus One. To be on the safe side, plan to win 52%.



Now you need to identify where those votes will come from to reach 52% so that you can plan for your campaign activities to take place in those areas. This is best done at the precinct level. Precinct level data is available at the city/town or county election official office. Again, you want to find the precincts in which Democrats have done well in the last three elections. However, your candidate may be from an area that traditionally is not where Democrats have run a strong race, or maybe there has been an increase in the number of new Democratic voters based on an emerging population. These factors should be taken into consideration when determining precincts that need to be targeted for your campaign efforts.

As we look at achieving 52% of the vote, traditionally voters can be broken down into the following demographic categories:

1. **Democratic Core Constituent Voters.** These are the people who will always vote for you as long as you get them to the polls. The goal with these voters is to maximize turnout wherever possible. Anyone taking part in field organizing activities—whether directly through your campaign, through an allied effort, or through the party—should keep this in mind when reaching out to core constituent voters.
2. **Persuadable Voters.** Often referred to as “ticket-splitters,” these are people who have not made up their mind to vote for a particular candidate. The goal is to move persuadable voters into the Democratic column. Usually persuasion is best left to the individual campaigns, but county parties can help create an environment which is more favorable to Democrats. What you say and the issues on which you run should take the views of persuadable voters into careful consideration.
3. **Republican Core Constituent Voters.** Figure out who they are and where they live and never go there! They aren’t going to vote for you and it’s a waste of time and resources to try to reach them.

This math – combined with the results of polling data and demographic analysis – will give you the information you need to target your resources and maximize the value of every dollar spent. The goal should be never to expend resources reaching out to people who likely won’t participate in the election at all, those who won’t vote for your candidate no matter what, or those who need no persuasion at all to show up at the polling place and vote for your candidate.

The following chart illustrates these concepts:

Courtesy of Ken Strasma

		Partisanship		
		Always Vote Democratic	Swing Voters	Always Vote Republican
Turnout	Always Vote	C	D Persuasion	B
	Sometimes Vote	E GOTV	F Persuasion #2	B
	Never Vote	A	A	A/B

Don't target for persuasion or GOTV:

- A. People who will never vote
- B. People who always vote Republican
- C. People who always vote and always vote Democratic

Do target:

- D. Swing voters who always vote —for persuasion
- E. Democrats who only sometimes vote — for GOTV
- F. Swing voters who only sometimes vote — 2nd persuasion

Research

Because an effective strategy is based in knowledge, the first steps in designing a campaign involve research. Many people hear “campaign research” and think sleaze: dirt digging, rumor-mongering, innuendos, smear campaigns, and the search for silver bullets. But in campaigns that aren't run by Karl Rove, that isn't really the case.

There are three kinds of research that will inform your strategic planning: polling, opposition research and self-research. The smartest campaigns begin by thoroughly examining the public records and other available information about both their own candidate and the opposition, all of which will help you at every stage of your efforts.



Self-research is a step that is too frequently ignored, and almost universally regretted by those who do. It begins with an in-depth and personal conversation with your candidate and the candidate's family. This is one of the toughest discussions you will have. But you can bet that your opposition is finding out everything about your candidate, so it's important that you know everything, too.

Having the candidate's lawyer or trusted friend conduct the research is not adequate. They won't know how to look at this information from a political point of view, and were not trained to do this sort of research. It's much safer and more thorough to invest in hiring a research firm.

Conducting this research properly and thoroughly will ensure that you can address the strengths and weaknesses of your candidate, and anticipate attacks. Knowing ahead what attacks are likely to come gives you a chance to address lingering issues, prepare your responses, inoculate yourself early, and avoid the common mistake of exaggerating or misrepresenting past achievements or biographical facts.

While you're compiling this information, make sure you're noting significant accomplishments as well. A candidate's achievements can add texture and credibility to the message of a campaign. And if the candidate has few significant achievements, it's best to realize this early and develop a message about "real life experience."

While you are conducting this self-research, you should be undertaking similar research on your opponent, searching all publicly-available and verifiable information to gain the fullest possible picture of who you are up against.

Opposition research shouldn't stop with an initial assessment, however. Tracking your opponent's statements, events, advertisements and other activities is a valuable campaign activity and often pays valuable dividends. This scrutiny will help you find inconsistencies in your opponent's positions, or identify statements they have made that are disadvantageous to their campaign – both things that could help you in your efforts. Often, this tracking is conducted by a state party organization or outside the campaign.

Whether to conduct research in-house or to hire a professional firm is a key decision. If resources are available and there is a great deal of complex information involved, outside help is likely worthwhile. A common approach is to hire consultants for the initial research, and then use staff to manage the research and tracking if needed.

Polling and Focus Groups

Polling is one of the most consistently useful tools campaigns use to grasp the concerns and values of the voting public and shape the campaign's messages and themes. Some describe the basic information gained from polling as "Five Ws":

- Who are the voters most and least likely to vote for you and who can be persuaded?
- What issues concern voters and what positions on issues will move them towards or against a particular candidate?
- When are they most likely to make a choice?
- Where do they live and get their information?
- Why do they like, dislike or remain undecided about certain candidates?

Campaigns conduct two basic types of polls. The benchmark poll is conducted as part of your planning process. The survey is typically 20-30 minutes in length, and is used to flush out opinions and issues, explore potential messages, and examine which groups of voters are most likely to support or oppose your candidate. The benchmark poll produces data that you will return to again and again over the course of the campaign.

Later in the campaign, pollsters conduct tracking polls. These are much shorter surveys, only two or three questions, and are conducted on a daily or weekly basis. Tracking polls aren't used to gather basic information, but to monitor whether support is growing or shrinking, which tactics are working, and which groups of voters are responding or need more attention.

Another type of voter research is focus groups, often referred to as qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) research. Focus groups are sessions in which 10-12 people from targeted voter groups are guided through a discussion of various campaign-related topics. It's important to keep focus group research in perspective – they are small groups of people who may not be representative of a larger sample. But they complement poll information well, providing deeper insight as to the voter's mindset. They are often used effectively to gauge how voters respond to individual advertisements, mail pieces, or other campaign materials.

Polling data – particularly from a benchmark poll – is central to the process of message development. Pollsters will provide, along with a summary report, "crosstabs" which give detailed information about how various messages or issues worked with particular subsets of the electorate. Based on this informa-

tion, they will make recommendations as to what messages work best to influence the voters you need, define your candidate, and provide the most favorable contrast with opponents.

Throughout the campaign, in addition to your own research, you'll have access to other poll results, with varying degrees of usefulness. Interest groups will often provide data that supports using their issue, or reaching out to their supporters, in a way that furthers their agenda. This type of data can be useful if it is current, conducted by a credible pollster in a valid way, and taken with a grain of salt to counter the generally obvious spin with which it's presented. It can be very useful at times to get this kind of in-depth information on specific issues, or simply to supplement your own research without having to pay for additional polls.

Public polling reported in the newspaper or on television can provide useful head-to-head guidance about the state of the campaign overall, much in the way that your own tracking polls can. But these polls are not very useful for development of campaign-specific messages or issues. They will, of course, be of great interest to donors and others in the political community, and managing expectations around them is an important way to either gain momentum or minimize the loss of it at crucial moments.

Message

A campaign's message – who the candidate is and why voters should vote for him or her – is the heart of everything it does. The candidate's message often provides a contrast with the opponent. A good message can be defined by the "Four Cs:" Clear, Concise, Contrasting, and Convincing.

The message should be integrated into all aspects of the campaign. Everything written or said by the candidate, staff or surrogates should be on the same message: interviews, mail, commercials, door-to-door, phone scripts, etc. There's an old saying in campaigns that when you think you are repeating yourself over and over again, you are finally communicating the message. For voters to be moved by your message, it takes time and repeated communications. So every time you are off-message, you are wasting valuable time and resources, which in the end could cost you votes. Remember, your message is the reason voters should choose your candidate, and you should be making your case in every way possible.

A common way to begin the message development process is for a candidate's closest advisors, at the outset of the campaign, to conduct a frank discussion/interview with the candidate so that he or she can discuss core values, inspi-

rations, experiences, and why he or she is running for office. Almost always, during this discussion, candidates reveal a compelling story that will be useful down the road.

This process can then be supplemented by research and polling. Research is a critical component in developing a message. Knowing what can be said about your candidate is extremely important. Any public record can be used against you, so know what is coming— do research on yourself. Has your candidate taken any votes in the past that will contradict your message; are there deeds at the county recorder’s office you need to be thinking about; has your candidate’s driver’s license expired?

The Tully Message Box is another tool for helping identify your message. Paul Tully, the brilliant political director of the Democratic Party, helped orchestrate Bill Clinton’s election in 1992. He defined a revolutionary targeting plan before tragically passing away a few weeks before Election Day. One of his lasting contributions to Democratic campaigns is this simple mechanism for developing your campaign’s message:

What you say about yourself	What your opponent says about him or herself
What you say about your opponent	What your opponent says about you

Often, the message is defined more sharply in a slogan for use in campaign communications. “A fighter for working families,” and “a trusted leader from the community” are two sample campaign slogans that distill a campaign

message into a tagline. Developing a slogan forces the campaign to define its rationale for the voters. The slogan should sum up the image the campaign is trying to project and should be no longer than seven words in length.

Many people confuse issues with message, but the message must be more a statement of values than a simple position on an issue. Specific positions can then be used to illustrate the message. For example, tax cuts are not a message – but talking about targeting tax cuts to help the middle class instead of the wealthy helps illustrate how a candidate is on the side of average families.

Political professionals are highly focused on “message discipline,” repeating the message tirelessly in every possible circumstance. There is a good reason for this: people have a lot going on in their lives, and you should not expect that the most important thing in your life (your campaign) is the most important thing in their lives.



The average voter spends maybe five minutes a week thinking about politics. Therefore, you want whatever they hear during that five minutes to be what you think they will find most compelling – your message.

Voters become increasingly more open to listening to your message as the election draws near. Therefore, you should not change your message in the last month of the campaign – you may be tired of saying the same old thing, but many are hearing it for the first time.

Everyone in the campaign needs to be saying the same message as the candidate. The spouse, the staff, the kitchen cabinet, and anyone else associated with the campaign needs to be on message. Give people talking points and make sure they are saying the same thing.

Keeping the message active and fresh is a constant struggle in the campaign as events unfold in real life and in the campaign environment. Therefore, it is important to hold regular meetings with your staff and advisors to make sure that as the campaign develops everyone is using the agreed-upon message.



The message should drive the schedule. Everyone should work around the message needs of the campaign and also understand that the candidate is the best person to deliver the message.

Election Laws and Campaign Finance Rules

Figure out what the election laws and campaign finance rules are and how they will affect your candidate and your campaign.

Election laws and campaign finance rules at the local, state and federal level are changing every day and they have had a significant impact on how campaigns are run. For example, in Illinois, there is no limit to what one person, organization or company can contribute to a state-level campaign but in many other states, there are restrictions on who can give what. On the federal level, there are limitations on what you can do with your state party. And each state has its own laws in regards to when financial reports must be filed and what information is required on the report. You should know what laws and rules exist and how each will affect your campaign. These are just a few examples. Some campaigns will have a person who specializes in these areas manage this process but the campaign manager ultimately is responsible so know what laws and rules exist and set up the needed systems to ensure that you stay legal.

Writing the Plan

One of the most difficult decisions in writing a plan is deciding who will be involved in writing it. The answer is simple and vague – whoever needs to be. The essential participants are the candidate and campaign manager. But the list should also include people to whom the candidate listens closely – the so-called “kitchen cabinet” – as well as those with special knowledge or expertise that will be called on, such as campaign consultants and key staff people.

Once you have the team determined, call everyone together and begin hashing out what the goals are and how they will be achieved. Using either big wall calendars or computer calendar programs, fill in upcoming dates and events to give an understanding of the existing playing fields. Discuss goals and break them into broader categories that need voter contact programs, then working backwards, develop a timeline for each.

It is important not only to determine programs, but to establish frameworks for evaluating them as they proceed. Include measurable goals, and a timeline for achieving them in your plan.



This planning process should also address the nuts and bolts of the campaign – not just staffing and campaign structure, but basic systems the campaign will use, such as scheduling, financial management, interaction with the press and the like.

It is particularly important that during this process you get buy-in from key stakeholders as to the lines of authority within the campaign. If you do not spell out clearly who is empowered to make what decisions, who they report to, and who reports to them, you can expect the normal chaos of a campaign to turn into an unmanageable whirlwind. These are questions you'll have to address no matter what – the only issue is whether you do so in a calm way before problems develop, or not.

In addition, it is essential that throughout the planning process you are as clear and honest as possible. While it may be emotionally satisfying to run the campaign as an issue-driven cause, the facts might argue that the only way to win is by creating a negative image for your opponent. While you might want to rely on the local Democratic apparatus to turn out voters, an analysis of its capabilities may convince you of the need to build your own grassroots organization. And while you might envision an overwhelming media campaign, a review of budgetary realities might show that to be impossible.

Planning Goals

1. Polling

Goals: Timeline and budget for acquiring whatever information the pollster needs that's not already compiled. Time for detailed presentation of analysis and formulation of strategy. Pollster provides high end/low end budget and timeline for future polls.

2. Press Plan

Goals: Overall plan by media market. Timeline and budgets for press hits/events that reinforce the message. Press schmoozing and traveling plan. Write/practice stump speech. Op-Ed schedule.

3. Direct Voter Contact

Goals: For each type of direct voter contact, develop goals for the number of contacts you will have with each segment of voters as well as when you need to have the contact. Set numeric goals, on a weekly basis, for the pieces of literature you will distribute and lawn signs you will put up.

4. Scheduling Plan

Goals: Develop weekly goals for the candidate's time, based on fundraising requirements (time spent asking for money), geographic requirements (where in the district/state we go), and demographic requirements (who we talk to). These goals are fluid throughout the course of the campaign.

5. Endorsement Strategy

Goals: Develop list of endorsements you want. How do you get them? What's the timeline for each of them? What opinion leaders are you meeting and when? How are you using the endorsement and the endorser if you get it?

6. Media Plan

Goals: Media consultant provides high end/low end media plan with dates for scripts, shooting, air time and budget requirements.

7. Budget

Goals: Dates for completing the first draft of a weekly spreadsheet matched with weekly cash flow through Election Day.

8. Washington Strategy

Goals: Timeline for communicating and meeting with friends and doubters in D.C.

9. Primary Program

Goals: In a non-contested or lightly contested primary, develop a program to take maximum advantage of increased political awareness around the election. In a contested primary, in addition to winning the primary, plan to win the general election spin that night and the next week. The night of the primary is the first night of the general election.

Direct Voter Contact/Field Activity

Determine how you will communicate with voters and through what tactics.

Voter contact, the act of reaching out to voters, is both an art and a science. Many people also refer to it as "field" or "grassroots organizing." Voter contact is a dynamic process that is adjusted and changed throughout the campaign.

The goal of an effective voter contact program is to persuade and/or turn out a sufficient number of voters to win. Remember – you are not trying to simply come close or almost win, but to come out on top on Election Day. Therefore, the first and most critical thing you need to know in a campaign is how many votes it takes to win – your vote goal. This will inform all of your decisions about particular programs.

Once you know your vote goal, you can decide what the right mix of tactics and resources is to increase turnout among likely Democrats and go after persuadable voters.

No campaign will ever be able to afford every element of a voter contact plan. Your voter contact plan should be based on the mix of tactics necessary to achieve your vote goals. If a tactic you're considering doesn't further these goals, it doesn't belong in your voter contact plan.



You're not going to be able to do everything you would like to get your candidate elected. Instead, use your budget to determine the most effective combination of tactics possible.

All campaigns have limited resources – people, time and money. There is no use developing a “pie in the sky” voter contact plan that in no way reflects the resources available to your campaign. Assessing your resources is key to developing a realistic voter contact plan. You must ask, what are the resources you have at your disposal and how do you use them to create a voter contact plan?

1. **People** - How many people hours do you need to accomplish your goal, where are you going to find these people (volunteers, allied organizations), what kind of staff time or oversight is involved?
2. **Time** – How much time does it take to accomplish your goal? If you need a goal accomplished at a certain time, what needs to happen prior to that time so that you can accomplish this goal (have you walked through every step of the process to ensure that you know everything that must be done and WHEN it needs to be done)?
3. **Money** – How much money do you need to accomplish your goal? Do you need cash? Can you receive an in-kind contribution? Make sure you check out all contributions for legality with the State Party.
4. **Technology** – How does having appropriate technology help save you people, time or money.
5. **Materials** – What do you need to perform your task? (e.g. for canvassing you need literature, for phone banking you need phones.)

There is no one right way to reach targeted voters. There is no one mix of voter contact tactics that wins. Successful voter contact relies on reaching targeted voters repeatedly through a variety of tactics. Various voter contact tactics have different degrees of impact on targeted voters, specificity and campaign resources (people, time, money). You need to decide how your campaign will contact voters in that universe effectively while staying within the campaign's budget.

Tactics you might want to use include:

- Phone banks (effective for candidate or issue identification, persuasion, absentee ballot collection, volunteer recruitment, event turnout, and GOTV);
- Auto calls (less expensive than traditional paid phones – very effective for event turnout and base organizing);
- Door-to-door campaigning (very labor-intensive, good for highly targeted purposes);
- Lit Drops (low impact, low cost – an effective visibility tool in high Democratic performance areas);
- Lawn Signs (low impact, medium cost, good visibility tool – very effective when organized to go up in a single weekend so that you get visual punch out of the signs).

Earned Media

Determine how you will make and manage news.

The first step in crafting a campaign's earned media strategy is developing the best possible press list. Do your own research to determine the reporters who are covering or likely to cover your race. You should also collect other lists from various sources, including other political organizations, consultants, and commercial directories. Assume they are out-of-date or inaccurate – check everything. Verify that the contacts you have collected are actually the people who will be covering your race, and update contact information. To the greatest degree possible, get e-mail addresses for individual reporters; this tends to be the most effective way of reaching journalists.

The best way to reach reporters is through e-mail.

Make sure that you are accessible and responsive to the media's requests and stay in regular contact with the reporters who are covering your campaign. Don't overload them but make sure they know what you are up to by sending information such as media advisories, press releases, policy statements, etc.



Providing them with this information is important because shaping a reporter's opinion of your candidate will affect his or her coverage and ultimately have an impact on the voters. Also, because many weekly and smaller papers have smaller staffs, they are likely to print things exactly as you have written them...if you get them the information.

Relationships with reporters are critical. The media allows you to disseminate your message to a larger audience so it behooves you to develop a positive relationship with them. In most races, there are a handful of— or maybe even just one — key journalists who will have enormous influence on the election. The better your relationship with them, the better off your campaign will be. You can't assume that coverage will always go your way just because you've spent a lot of time talking with a reporter, but it will ensure that you get fair access and your side of the story told.

Treat editorial writers similarly. Newspaper editorials do not have the influence they once did over voters' decisions, but are still an important factor. Making sure that those who control them have as much information as possible about your campaign is absolutely critical.



Make sure everyone in the press is tuned in to what you're doing in the campaign.

Top ten media tips

- 1. Be prepared and do not make factual errors.*
- 2. Never lie to a reporter; they will find out and it will hurt you in the end.*
- 3. A reporter is not your friend.*
- 4. Respect a reporter's deadlines.*
- 5. Clearly state if you are "on the record" or "on background" before the interview begins and make sure that you and the reporter have the same definition of these terms.*
- 6. Don't speculate or answer hypothetical questions.*
- 7. Don't pass along rumors about your opponent to reporters.*
- 8. Don't accept the premise of a reporter's question unless it fits into your message, and don't be afraid to disagree with the premise.*
- 9. Don't feel obligated to fill in long pauses.*
- 10. When you are going on camera for an interview, look in the mirror beforehand.*

One of the most difficult strategic decisions in earned media planning is when to “go negative” and release potentially damaging information about an opponent’s record, positions, or other factors. You never want to be the first to go negative if you can help it. Assessing what will be considered negative and what has been said in the campaign up to that point about negative advertising will help you make your decision.

Depending on the size and budget of a campaign, the number of communications staff people can vary from a single person (or, in very small districts, part of someone else’s duties) to a dozen or more people in a larger race. The typical positions are:

- **Communications Director:** Oversees communications strategy (message, research, communications, scheduling).
- **Press Secretary:** Acts as day-to-day spokesperson and is usually the primary contact with the press.
- **Specialty Media:** Performs outreach to specialty press specifically, and often is bi-lingual depending on the state. Usually a position for larger races only.
- **Press Intern:** Gathers clips and manages radio actuality process.
- **Webmaster:** Gets daily message content and product up on the Web.

Paid Media

Create a paid advertising plan.

Paid media, at many levels, represents a campaign’s biggest cost and most important tool. Advertising, particularly on television, is the most effective way to reach a large number of people in a compelling fashion. Used intelligently, paid media serves multiple strategic purposes: building a profile or name recognition, moving a particular message (either positive or negative) and providing a contrast between candidates.

Because paid media is expensive, it is important to be targeted and strategic in your decision-making so that you serve your purposes in the most cost-effective way possible.

There are four primary media used for political advertising:

- Broadcast television is most commonly used for larger races, and may not be affordable for lower-budget races until the final weeks of the campaign, if at all.
- Radio is more commonly used for lower-budget races. In most media markets, it's possible to dominate this medium without spending a fortune.
- Cable television, by itself, often does not prove to be a very effective buy for most campaigns because it is harder to reach the target audiences. Cable television's viewership is generally not measured by gross ratings points (GRPs), the metric used by broadcast stations to base cost on how many viewers are reached. It can be very difficult to know exactly what a cable television station's viewership in a particular market is. Be cautious about any ratings the cable television station presents to you. Often these ratings are not obtained through a truly scientific process. Many times they are just something a person at the cable station put together. If you really want to do a cable television ad and you have the financial resources, you can include a question in your early polling to find out what cable television stations voters are watching.
- Specialty Media (minority press outlets) are important in many markets. Decide if you need to produce bilingual ads or ads in another language completely. You may need to add a separate media firm that specializes in this type of media to your team.

The key to planning a media buy is understanding demographics – who are you trying to reach? Your polling will provide you with this information as well as the messages you should use to move your targeted voters.

Never lose sight of your target audience. Each one of your voter contact methods, including paid media, should be focused on moving the voters you need.

Media buys are measured in Gross Rating Points (GRPs), which are the best way to know how many people will hear the message during a particular television or radio broadcast. One Gross Ratings Point means that one percent of the television or radio audience is reached by the ad at least one time. Five hundred GRPs means that the ad will reach the average viewer or listener five times. Stations charge a fee per GRP, based on various factors.

You need to be careful when calculating the value of a buy based on GRP, though. Cable television is hard to target. A recent survey indicated that increasing numbers of people are getting their news from cable, rather than broadcast, television. Managers should pay attention to trends and expect viewing habits to evolve, instead of just relying on numbers.

Typically, advertising is developed by specialized media consultants who charge both a retainer and a percentage of the cost of your media buy (typically 11-15%). In planning, it is vital to keep in mind production costs, which can often spiral out of control if there is not an agreed-upon budget that is strictly followed.

Essentials of Paid Media Strategy

- Pick one medium and dominate that medium – in lower budget races this most likely means radio.
- Once you go up on the air, have the money to stay on the air. Buy your media backwards from Election Day so that you are on when the majority of undecided voters make up their minds. If you raise more money you can always add more media at the back end.
- Rapid Response – if an opponent goes on the air attacking you, you need to decide if and how you respond. While the general rule is to respond to attacks in a timely manner and in the same medium, there can be exceptions.
 1. If your campaign has anticipated the attack, you may have an ad prepared (or nearly prepared that can be turned around quickly).
 2. In some cases you may know from the polling that the issue is not that effective and therefore you will choose to ignore the attack and continue on with your planned flight of media.
- Media monitoring – make friends at the stations, check in regularly and find out what your opponent is airing. Also have volunteers monitoring and recording ads.
- When does it make sense to go on the air?
 1. Early – you have the money and you need to raise your profile or want to set the agenda.
 2. Late – usually a money issue.
 3. Two-Track – campaigns with enough money can run two tracks of media – a positive and a negative flight, but you need to put enough money behind each spot to make sure it penetrates.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is a powerful medium, for several reasons. It can be less expensive than radio or TV, so you can do more repeat messages to a segment of the electorate. It is narrowcast, meaning you can aim to reach a specific segment of the population with a very specific message. And it is “stealth,” meaning it does not attract the same degree of press scrutiny as broadcast advertising, making it a valuable tool for spreading negative messages.

The key to direct mail success is targeting. Direct mail specialists, using your polling data, information on past voting histories, sophisticated technology, and mathematical analysis, can develop lists of voters with a high propensity to respond to particular messages. Instead of spending large sums to cast a wide net, as you do in broadcast advertising, you can save money reaching out only to those individuals whom you are trying to reach, with messages designed specifically for them. Narrowing your audience will save you money so make sure that you are fully-assessing your polling and other research to determine what your targeted mail universe is.

Direct mail production is a collaborative process. Mail vendors use polling information and other message research to find the most powerful messages, and design concepts for the campaign to approve, including both art and text. Typically, multiple people on the campaign will be involved in editing and approving pieces, which are then shepherded through the printing and mailing process by the vendor.

The cost of direct mail varies widely. A general guideline is 30-50 cents per piece, but numerous factors come into play, including volume, the uniqueness of the piece, the number of versions, the printer (union printers are generally more expensive but highly recommended for any Democratic candidate), the paper and ink (recycled paper or soy ink increases costs but is important to Democratic constituencies), number of colors, and the kind of postage you use.

The timing of direct mail depends on what kind of purpose each piece serves – persuading swing voters, turning out supporters, reaching voters who vote by mail, etc. Work backwards on the calendar. Determine how many pieces you want to drop, when you want them to hit in the cycle and add the dates to your calendar. Your mail consultant should give you a schedule of when pieces should drop and when they will need approval on the various components in order to meet those deadlines.

Use your polling to determine when people in the district make up their minds. Also, in states where this is appropriate, study how many people vote by mail or vote early and adjust your program accordingly.

Scheduling

Decide how the candidate's time – the campaign's most valuable resource – will be allocated.

In almost every case, the candidate is the best messenger for the campaign and therefore its greatest asset when it comes to fundraising, getting press or gathering political support. Therefore, a campaign must be vigilant in ensuring that the candidate's time is well spent. Part of your campaign plan should break out exactly, by percentage, how much time the candidate will spend on each of the activities for which the campaign needs him. If your Finance Director tells you that the candidate needs to be raising money on the phone 10 hours a week, you need to make sure that happens so that you can raise the money your budget requires. Once these guidelines are established, you need to get buy-in from the candidate and the staff. The communications director must understand that if she is going to interrupt the candidate's fundraising time to go over a speech that the money she had planned on for television may not come in.

Some larger campaigns have a scheduler but smaller ones may have the communications director or even the campaign manager take responsibility for the schedule. The person in charge of the schedule must have a keen understanding of the campaign's goals and also what opportunities each event provides the campaign. While attending a volunteer meeting may not seem a high priority for the campaign, there may be an earned media opportunity—the scheduler must be able to make these assessments.

Not every week on the campaign will be the same. Set aside time in staff meetings to ask what time each staff person may need from the candidate in the upcoming week.

Budget

Determine how much money it will take to win and how it will be spent.

The most important element of any plan is a budget, which is the plan expressed in dollar amounts. A realistic and detailed budget helps you manage the campaign, allowing you to keep your eye on the ball by making only planned expenditures and informed decisions when something unexpected comes up in the campaign (which it always does). Additionally, it allows you to get buy-in from your candidate and staff on the plan – when people have crazy ideas you can go back to the budget and use it to evaluate whether or not the crazy idea warrants a shift in strategy and therefore take resources from something else.



Budgeting starts with determining the costs of everything you want or think you need to do, including administrative as well as program costs. It is always advisable to have the person in the campaign responsible for each program area provide a budget for his or her program, which forces them to set the kinds of strategic priorities that a budget requires.

Estimate costs that you don't know exactly. Ask consultants, colleagues and vendors for rough costs and estimates. Better to have a placeholder than to be completely surprised at the last minute. Have room for error – factor in hidden and last-minute costs.

A budget is a living document that changes over time. It is always useful to keep all calculations so you know how you arrived at a particular decision or estimate.

The most important part of budgeting is comparing your proposed budget to your expected funding, and making adjustments to make sure you can afford your highest-priority activities. If additional funds come in, you can add in things that have been cut. But it is much better to devise a campaign strategy based on a real budget than a “pie-in-the-sky” budget that forces you to make all sorts of strategic adjustments when the money does not come in.



Determine how much money you will need on a monthly and closer to the election, weekly basis so that you can plan your fundraising in a way that gets you the money when you need it.

Once you have completed your overall budget, you should turn it into a cash flow budget that shows expenses on a monthly and even weekly basis, so that fundraising programs can be planned to match spending needs. As the campaign progresses, your fundraisers need to know when you need to spend money so that they can get it in the bank at the appropriate time.

Fundraising Plan

Decide how will you raise the money to cover your budget.

Without a plan of action, it is impossible to meet your fundraising goals. Crafting a fundraising plan is crucial for several reasons – it will enable you to set achievable goals, monitor your results and refocus your efforts if a particular portion of your plan is under-performing.

A fundraising plan is a work in progress. You will make certain strategic assumptions when you prepare the first draft of your plan that will be tested throughout the campaign. If you are continuously monitoring the results of your efforts, you will be able to refine your plan as you move forward.

As you prepare your plan, resist to the temptation to tell others what they want to hear. Often the candidate or the manager will insist that you can raise a certain amount of money. Remember, it's your professional obligation to present a fundraising plan that can be empirically proven. Collaborate with the team to maximize the amount of money you are able to raise. During the planning process, tell the manager what you need to do your job. Any good manager will provide you with additional resources, whether freeing up the candidate's schedule for additional call time or hiring additional staff. Negotiate with the manager to find that point where the amount of money that you can raise equals that which is needed to win the race.

Once you select the appropriate method to approach each of your donor groups, develop a timeline and accompanying cash flow analysis. For instance, work with the manager to schedule a set number of hours of call time. Keep in mind that it takes between one and two weeks to begin to receive a financial return from calls. By tracking the number of calls that the candidate completes per hour and the average hourly pledge rate, you can calculate the total revenue expected from call time.

Remember that developing a fundraising plan is part art and part science. Not everything is quantifiable, so temper your projections with common sense. For instance, remember that picking low-hanging fruit in March is more productive than making cold calls in July.

Timing is everything. Raising your entire budget in the last five days of the campaign does not pay for polling in August, direct mail in September or television in October. One of your primary responsibilities is to provide daily updates to the manager on your progress. As a rule of thumb, if you are working on a

congressional campaign, you can expect to receive 25% of your money in the off year, 15% in the first quarter of the on year, 10% in the second quarter of on-year and 50% after Labor Day. Projecting cash flow based on your timeline and monitoring whether or not you are meeting your goals will enable the manager to make strategic decisions.



It takes money to raise money. When developing your fundraising budget, include salaries, printing, postage, event and administrative costs.

Campaign managers and consultants don't like surprises. Expect the unexpected by preparing a best and worst case scenario plan, in addition to your baseline fundraising plan. This will enable the campaign team to prepare alternative budgets in advance.

Campaign Calendar / Timetable

Create a calendar that includes important external and internal benchmarks.

The only factor that cannot change is time. Despite the wishes of most over-achieving workaholics, such as candidates and professional campaign staff, there are only 24 hours in a day and seven days in a week. Time in a campaign is the most precious resource, so don't forget, time is finite and fixed. Time may be spent wisely or poorly, but can never be added.



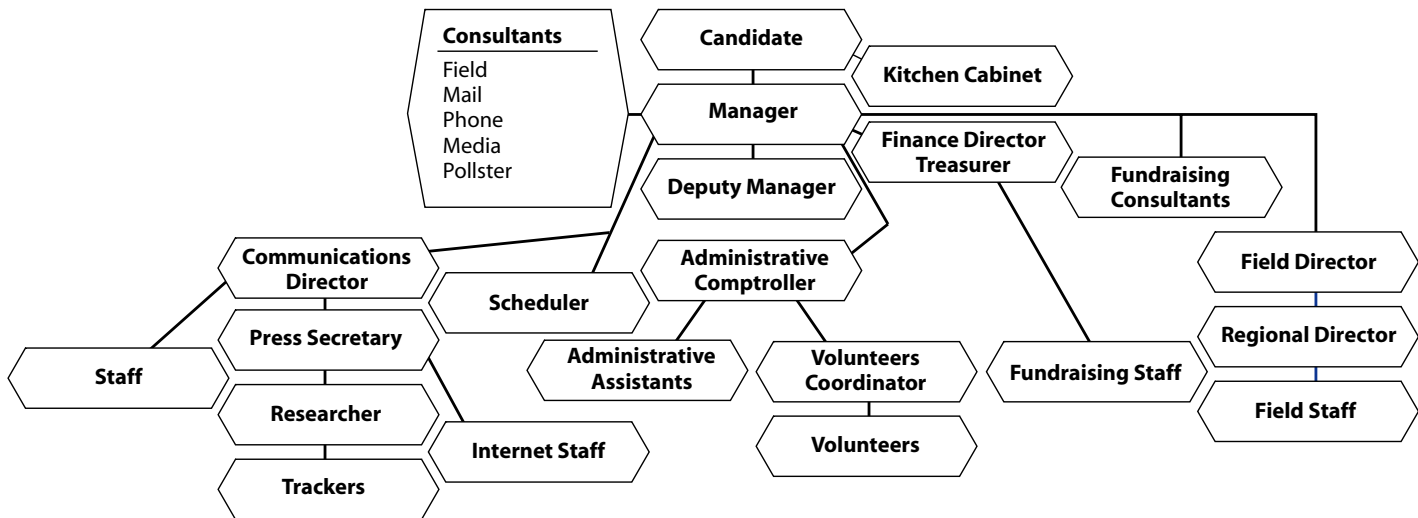
To help you plan, buy a big calendar that includes days roomy enough to write in and shows months through the election – it is best if this is an erasable wall calendar.

The campaign plan will embody many strategic decisions you have made to win the election. For example, you will have to decide what emphasis to place on turning out base voters and what affect that has on your ability to persuade undecided voters. What image does your candidate have, and can or should it be altered. How will you interact with other Democratic candidates and office-holders, with various constituency or issue groups, with labor and with the business community? What role will the candidate's family play in the campaign? Every important decision you can envision encountering between the time you begin writing the plan and the first Tuesday in November should be addressed in the planning process.

Organization

Create the campaign structure (staff, kitchen cabinet, etc.).

The way in which you structure your campaign team can affect how productive you are as a campaign. While every campaign is different, the following is a sample campaign structure that many campaigns follow:



Note: This organizational chart should be used only as a guide. Larger campaigns will need to create additional staff positions, while smaller campaigns may be able to fill some of these positions with volunteers.

Administrative Staff — Responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the campaign are running smoothly.

Communications Director — Works with the Campaign Manager to devise an overall press plan, including long-range planning and event media, speechwriting and scheduling and advance.

Comptroller — Audits the campaign and regulates all finances.

Field Organization — Contacts, identifies and mobilizes voters for Election Day.

Finance Director/Treasurer — Writes and implements a finance plan that tracks money by method and date, and ensures that all legalities are met.

Fundraising Consultant — Supplements the on-staff fund-raising operation by organizing events with representatives of PACs or other interest groups with supportive constituencies.

Fundraising Staff — Sets fund-raising goals and figures out how to meet them, prepares materials to distribute to donors and plans fund-raising events.

Kitchen Cabinet — The candidate's team of personal advisors.

Mail Consultant — Produces persuasion mail to complement other paid media.

Manager — Makes all strategic and tactical decisions; oversees budget, cash flow and daily management of operations.

Media Consultant — Creates television and radio advertising based on information about persuadable voters, the candidate's record and that of his or her opponent.

Pollster — Conducts polls that will be used to target voters and develop efficient messages.

Press Secretary — In charge of day-to-day event planning and interaction with the media.

Researcher — Gathers information to be used in campaign materials, collects background on the candidate and their opponent and verifies accuracy of everything put out by the campaign.

Scheduler — Determines which invitations the candidate accepts by balancing the demands for the candidate's time.

Trackers — Staff dedicated to tracking press coverage of the candidate.

Volunteer Coordinator — Consults with all divisions of the campaign to best utilize volunteer resources.

Volunteers — Can be used in all aspects of the campaign.

CHAPTER THREE

Step Three: Execute

Often, the difference between success and failure in a campaign (or any other enterprise) is not the quality of the plan, but the ability to execute it effectively. Some of the most basic strategic decisions you need to make are in how you operate the campaign to turn the plan on paper into the reality of a victory on Election Night.

Campaign Plan Monitoring

Plans are only as good as the way in which they are carried out. One of a campaign manager's tasks is monitoring how well the plan is being followed, and how well it is working.

You should set up mechanisms for monitoring key programs, with periodic evaluations of how successfully they are working. The goal should be two-fold: first, seeing to it that consultants, staff and volunteers are doing what they should be doing, so that you can set them back on course if they aren't; and second, seeing if the plan is achieving stated goals so that you can make adjustments as necessary.

From time to time, you should review the entire campaign plan to ensure that you are keeping up with the commitments made, and that the plan continues to match the reality that has developed.



Never stop reviewing your campaign plan to make sure it's still in touch with what you're trying to do.

There's never been a campaign that's gone completely according to plan – life doesn't work that way. Treating the plan as a living document will save you from undue rigidity and stress. But sticking to the plan as it develops will protect you from merely being blown by the political winds.

Working With Your Candidate

A campaign is only as good as its candidate, and being a good candidate is hard work. Campaign managers should see that the candidate has what he needs to be at his best. That means adequate staffing at all times, to ensure that he is well briefed for events and meetings, that he has whatever materials he needs, and that feedback gets back to the campaign (for example, that if potential donors hand business cards to the candidate, they get back to the fundraising team).

It's also important to think about your candidate's personal support structure and needs. Don't forget that they're human, and can't be at their best without occasional rest, decent care and feeding. Sometimes, making sure a candidate has time with family on a regular basis is what keeps him able to interact effectively with the public at large. Sometimes, it's a milkshake at a key moment during the day. Make it your business to know what the candidate's needs are and your responsibility to ensure they are met.

One thing that all candidates need is information – about what's happening on the campaign, what opponents are up to, what decisions they need to make, etc. Don't leave the process of providing this information up to chance – set up systems to ensure an orderly flow of information, in both directions. On many campaigns, the manager will have a set time every day to speak with the candidate either by phone or in person – with a two-way commitment that these times are sacred.

Working with Consultants

On most campaigns, outside consultants who aren't part of the day-to-day operation play critical roles, both in providing such essential services as polling and media ads, and in guiding strategic decisions. But by definition, consultants serve multiple clients, and aren't always as fully engaged as the people for whom a single campaign is their full-time focus, if not obsession.

Managing this dichotomy can be difficult, but shouldn't be if certain basic steps are taken. First of all, both sides should be clear from the start what the expectations are for the consultant's availability and focus. This should guide the hiring process, as well. If your candidate wants to consult her pollster daily, hiring someone with a dozen other clients is not a wise decision, even if that person is otherwise the best for the job.

To ensure that you're getting the full benefit of your consultants' expertise, and that they are getting the feedback and information they need to be effective, you should set up regular conference calls. Like any meeting, these will work best with some preparation – keep a running list of issues to be discussed, and distribute an agenda ahead of time, so that the conversation doesn't devolve into political gossip, or get bogged down on an insignificant issue.

It is also incumbent on you – recognizing that campaign consultants have busy schedules – to set and lock in place key meeting dates well ahead of time. If you announce a major strategy session the day before it's scheduled, it's your fault if key participants are unable to attend.

Another key to working with consultants is developing relationships with their entire staff. You always want access to the firm's top person when you need it. But you should also make a point of knowing which people in their operation can answer certain questions or provide particular information. And you should know how to reach all of these people at any time, day or night. You hope that you'll never need to get a phone vendor out of bed in the middle of the night to find out why you're getting complaints from people receiving auto calls at 3:00 a.m. But, if such situations arise, be prepared to deal with them.

Working With the Staff

Management is an art form, and doing it well is just as important to your campaign's success as making good strategic decisions. The value of a campaign manager's ability to keep the staff productive and motivated cannot be underestimated.

One of the most important aspects of campaign management is sharing information. By the nature of the campaign, much important information will come to you first – decisions made by the candidate, intelligence called in from a supporter, feedback from the kitchen cabinet. Make it a priority to get relevant information to those who will be expected to take action.

Additionally, recognize that everyone on staff has a legitimate need to know what the strategy is and how the campaign is developing. Your operation will run much more smoothly if you keep it well lubricated with the kinds of information that make people feel they are important players, not just functionaries.

Keep everyone involved with the campaign, in the loop.

Managing yourself is an important part of this process. If you aren't good at delegating, learn to be – you shouldn't be spending your time on a project someone else on staff could do. Hold regular office hours during which people can be sure to reach you with whatever questions or concerns they have. And, if at all possible, hire a talented person as your assistant who can keep you on track, and make sure that priority issues get addressed in a timely fashion.



CHAPTER FOUR

Tools

The Voter File

Your plan should address how you will obtain and manage one of the most important assets you have: the voter file – a list containing the names and addresses of voters in a given area. Most files will contain each voter’s name, address, phone number, age, precinct, and congressional or legislative district. Some include additional information such as voting history, party preference, gender, race, marketing data (buying activities such as magazines ordered, etc.), census data, and NCEC data.

Voter files can be obtained from several sources: state parties, other campaigns, Secretaries of State, and commercial providers. One thing you have to decide is who will manage the file – a commercial vendor or in-house by the campaign staff.

The voter file is used to generate lists for various direct voter contact activities, such as mailings, phone banks, canvassing and such. Typically, you should be able to request particular “selects” for each purpose – such as households with a strong voting history and Democratic propensity in a particular geographic area – and produce lists in a format that is convenient for the activity in question (i.e. lists in order by precinct, mailing labels, etc.)

Voter File Terms

- Counts – number of people that fit a specific criteria you request.
- Select – description of which voters you want to choose for a certain activity.
- Vote History – data on the file describing voters’ activity in past elections.

- Demographics – data attached to each voter defining their age, gender, race, etc.
- Product – defines format you would like the data in, walk sheets, electronic, lists, etc. Think about how you will use the data before ordering, otherwise it may not be in the optimal format for your activity.
- Census Data – information obtained by the Census Bureau. Note – this data doesn't define the specific voter but rather the area in which the voter lives in terms of education level, income, race, households with children, etc.
- NCEC – targeting data appended to the file to define area where voter lives.
- Commercial Data – consumer information about the voter's household. There are often additional charges to use this data, but you'll be better able to identify households with interests in environmental issues, identify families with children, etc.
- Party preference – defines with which party a voter associates. Make sure you understand how this is identified on the data you receive.
- Individual v. Household – identifies whether you are talking about an individual voter or a household in which more than one voter lives.

Campaign Database

Throughout the campaign, you will work with a variety of lists - fundraising, voter, volunteer, etc. To ensure that all of the information your campaign has on each individual is accessible to those who may need it, you should have a centralized system for keeping names, contact information and relevant notes. This can be a database you create in-house or one that you purchase. If you have more than one office, make sure that you have the technology to access your campaign database from each location where people may need it.

Internet

The Internet has transformed how we communicate with people and on a campaign. Because time and resources are hard to come by, you need to assess how the internet can help you do more with less. For example, on some campaigns, fundraising over the Internet can be a worthwhile effort on which to spend time. Other campaigns may find it useful to send out weekly email updates to keep donors and volunteers invested. Whatever the case, after determining your campaign goals, you should assess the opportunities the Internet provides and invest time and resources accordingly.

CHAPTER FIVE

Planning Case Study

Will Wynn for Mayor of Austin: A Case Study

Will Wynn was elected Mayor of Austin, TX, in May of 2003. Here's what happened.

THE CITY

Austin, the capital of Texas, is right in the center of the state, on the eastern edge of the Central Texas Hill Country, a little over an hour north of San Antonio, two-and-a-half hours west of Houston, and three hours south of Dallas-Fort Worth. It's the fourth largest city in Texas and the 16th most populous in the nation, but it doesn't feel quite that large. Just over half of everyone living in the metro area, which is the 32nd largest in the country, lives inside the city limits – the suburbs are part of the city. Austin is in Travis County. The Austin-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area includes Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson Counties.

One year before the election, Austin had a population of approximately 681,000 people – 53% white, 31% Hispanic, and 10% African-American (note: need to identify other 6%). It is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Half a century ago, when Lyndon Johnson emerged out of Austin, the metro area was one-tenth its current size. Its population has doubled since the beginning of the 1990s, mostly because Austin was one of the tech boom's most active hubs outside of Silicon Valley, and the world headquarters of Dell Computers. The city's furious tech-related growth of the last 20 years was spawned in turn by Austin's intellectual and liberal pedigree. The University of Texas has 50,000 students, and Austin has long maintained a liberal tradition that has endured even as the rest of the state has become one of the most conservative and Republican in the nation.

The old Austin was arranged in a relatively dense cluster around a bend in the Colorado River, and that traditional core of the city is now known as the central city, one of three loosely defined regions. The other two sections of the city to the east and southeast are predominantly Hispanic and African-American. The sections to the west and northwest are more affluent and white, and have been the main areas of rapid growth over the last two decades.

The City of Austin has a Council-Manager form of government. The City Council has seven members, including the Mayor. Council Members are elected at-large for staggered, three-year terms. The city has considered moving to single-member districts, and that change will probably take place sometime in the near future. Each Council seat, including the Mayor's, is elected by a simple majority in a non-partisan open primary. If no candidate wins a majority on Election Day, the top two vote-getters advance to a run-off roughly one month later. Individual contributors can give no more than \$100, though donors can make a second \$100 contribution in the event of a run-off.

THE ISSUES

Everything about Austin in 2003 was fundamentally about growth – from shifting demographics and political philosophy, to the city's unique character and quality of life, to economic and environmental impact – the 2003 mayoral election was about what rapid growth had done to Austin, how growth had been managed and mismanaged, and how growth would further shape the city over the next three years.

Within that framework, the most important single issue in the mayoral race was the city budget. Estimates varied, but Austin's projected budget shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year was somewhere between \$60 and \$90 million – a record sum. After the dot-com bubble burst, the city was faced with declining revenue, increased dependence on city government for services, and short-term fiscal policy that was written from a dramatically different economic perspective. The new Mayor's first, second, and third priorities would be to close the budget gap and put the city back on sound financial footing.

Beyond that, voters were concerned about environmental protection, traffic, new business development, and preserving Austin's unique character – again, all issues that were intimately interwoven by the growth dynamic.

A successful candidate would have to demonstrate a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the interconnectedness of all those issues, and have a clearly communicated vision of how to address all of the electorate's concerns by guiding Austin's continued growth in the most productive way possible.

THE CANDIDATES

Eight candidates for Mayor were on the May 3 ballot – four serious contenders (Will Wynn, Max Nofziger, Marc Katz, and Brad Meltzer), two non-contenders who were nevertheless potential factors and contributors to the public discourse of the campaign (Jennifer Gale and Leslie Cochran), and two candidates on the extreme fringe (Christopher Keating and Herman Luckett). The following is a brief description of each of the top six candidates, and how they finished:

Will Wynn, 58.3% - Wynn ran for Mayor after serving one term on the City Council. He had 20 years of experience in the commercial real estate industry, and his resume painted the picture of a successful businessman, a leader in the community, an environmentalist, and a thoughtful urban planner. Wynn's greatest asset in the race was his mainstream appeal, as well as a legitimate claim that he could work with all stakeholders in city government – he could, for example, point simultaneously to environmental and development bona fides. In his late 30s, as an established Austinite and the only current Council Member in the race, Wynn was the obvious, easy choice in the field. His opponents would say that he was too conservative and pro-growth for the central city, where preserving Austin's character was paramount, and that he was a political careerist who would be more interested in moving on to higher office than in making the most of his term as Mayor.

Max Nofziger, 16.0% - Nofziger had lived in Austin for 25 years, had worked as an activist and was, for three terms and nine years ('87-'96), a Council Member with a brief stint as Mayor pro-tem (question: should this be capitalized?). He was the mainstream candidate that best embodied the ongoing "Keep Austin Weird" movement. Nofziger was a dedicated liberal and a Green Party voter, which would give him a committed base to activate in the central city and South Austin. Nofziger could honestly make the case that he had more experience in city government than all of the other mayoral candidates combined. He was vulnerable, however, to claims that his time in city government had come and gone, and that he might not well understand fundamental differences between the new Austin – the 16th largest city in the county – and the pre-tech boom, quirky capitol he had moved to a quarter century ago. Nofziger would try to run a liberal, grassroots campaign, but he would also have to convince newer, wealthier, and more conservative Austinites in the west and northwest that he was more than a fringe candidate.

Marc Katz, 13.2% - Katz was one of Austin's largest, most prominent personalities. As the owner of Katz's Deli on bustling Sixth Street (note: "not sure"), voters were intimately familiar with this transplanted New Yorker and Floridian who had successfully branded himself and his small business with catch phrases like "Katz's never Kloses" and "I can't help it, I gotta tell ya!" As a self-funded candidate, the \$100 contribution cap would not pose a problem for Katz, though he filed a suit – unsuccessfully – early in the race to have the limit removed. He would set himself up as the outsider with a fresh perspective on city government and fiscal management skills honed over decades of entrepreneurship. His critics would seek to paint him as an entertaining side-show and turn the comprehensive name id (note: there is a note that says "what?") that instantly made him a legitimate candidate into a liability. Additionally, Katz had to deal with a few events from his past that tarnished his image – he had sued his son over a joint business venture gone sour, there were rumors that he had physically abused his wife, he had never voted in Austin, and he was a recovering drug addict, clean for about five years.

Brad Meltzer, 8.3% - Meltzer was the other restaurateur in the race, and though he didn't have the charisma and public persona of Marc Katz, he had more disposable income to throw into the race. In a non-partisan election, Meltzer was nevertheless the obvious Republican in the race. His campaign would be characterized by the curious decision to buy billboard space all over the city (especially in low-turnout East Austin), an enormous sum of money spent on poorly-targeted, poorly-produced television spots, and the unfortunate claim that he would turn city hall's (question: should this be capitalized?) red tape into "green tape." It was clear early on that, though Meltzer's heart was in the right place and he seemed to have the best intentions behind his decision to run for Mayor, he lacked the political savvy, personal appeal, and clear vision it would take to convince liberal Austin to elect a Republican Mayor.

Leslie Cochran, 1.9% - Cochran, the self-proclaimed Mayor of Weird Austin, was never going to win, but he had proven before that he could be a factor. A trans-gendered homeless man who spent his days at the busy intersection of 6th (note: sixth?) and Congress, Cochran was on the ballot in 2000 against popular incumbent Mayor Kirk Watson, and he earned almost 8% of the vote. If he garnered even half that total in 2003, he could change the outcome.

Jennifer Gale, 1.8% - Gale, the other fringe trans-gendered candidate in the race, was also on the 2000 ballot, and she received 3.5% that year. Like Cochran, she never had a chance to win, but her presence in the debates, in the field, and on the ballot (especially as the only female name – isn't Leslie a female name - on the ballot) had to be taken into account by the more mainstream candidates.

THE WYNN STRATEGY

Wynn was the front-runner from the moment he entered the race, early in 2003. From the start, and especially given the fact that, as the field grew, no particularly competitive opponent emerged, the goal was clear – win without a run-off. The new Mayor was going to face a difficult series of decisions right at the start of his term. Success in dealing with Austin’s fiscal crisis would take sacrifice, and if the city was to emerge from the budget process in better financial health, it was going to need a strong Mayor who could call on different constituencies and interests to make concessions and work together to solve a series of difficult problems. Wynn didn’t just need to win – he needed to win decisively. Anything less, and he would arrive at city hall (question: should this be capitalized) without a much-needed mandate to lead the city through its fiscal woes. (note: “???”). While the goal of every campaign is simple – win – it’s not always the only goal.

Winning without a run-off (earning more votes than the seven other candidates on the ballot combined) meant beating each candidate on his or her own turf – Nofziger in the central city and South Austin, Meltzer in the Republican ground to the north and northwest, and Katz with young new voters who may be attracted to his celebrity status.

Given the colorful cast of characters on the ballot, the Wynn campaign decided that its message should be about “serious leadership.” Wynn would talk intelligently about issues that mattered to each of those voting blocs, and he would emphasize what bound them together – growth. By talking about growth, Wynn could drive the discourse of the campaign in the direction of his strengths. None of the other candidates could match the combination of experience and expertise that Wynn had on the issue of growth-related issues: new business development and urban design, environmental protection, regional transportation, and the city’s shifting economic situation. If the campaign could successfully demonstrate how all those issues were connected by the concept of growth, Wynn could talk about environmental issues in Nofziger’s backyard, small business growth on Meltzer’s (note: cannot read note) turf, and avoid being caught between the two on his left and his right, appearing indecisive, unprincipled, or weak. And if Wynn could clearly communicate a substantive message, he could keep Katz’s one-liners to no more than a publicity stunt.

THE MATH

At the registration deadline for the 2003 municipal election, Austin had roughly 465,000 registered voters. Over the course of the two-week early voting period, during which 10 to 15 polling locations were open each day, and on Election Day, approximately 45,000 to 50,000 voters were expected to cast a vote for Mayor – a poor expression of local democracy, and a potential mixed bag for Wynn.

Low turnout meant that a higher percentage of the electorate would be comprised of activists and attentive participants in city government. On the one hand, voters who follow the work of City Council and take its responsibilities seriously and realistically would likely vote for Wynn. On the other hand, activists from the central city and South Austin would give Nofziger his highest percentage. The huge numbers of registered non-voters also presented an organizing opportunity and a challenge to any campaign that could move new voters to the polls. Potential new votes could be created from almost any constituency, from almost any neighborhood in the city. But bear in mind, with eight candidates on the ballot, the chances of earning a majority of any new (and by extension, less informed) voting bloc would be slim. Since it is generally a targeting guideline (need to explain) that a GOTV universe must yield at least a two to one margin to be worth the resources, and the Wynn campaign's goal was to win without a run-off, it was unlikely that the campaign would be able to identify and turn out any group of new voters who would give Wynn a large enough margin to make it a smart strategic decision. (note: there is a note asking, "what about our targeting guidelines?")

Turnout expectations were based on a couple of factors. The 2000 municipal election results – the last Mayoral year – could be used as a benchmark. That year, 8.4% of the 424,000 registered voters, or 35,614, cast a ballot for Mayor. In 2003, that number would go up, for two main reasons. First, the 2000 Mayoral race was not competitive, with Watson sailing to an uncontested re-election. Second, the 2003 ballot would include a referendum on a dedicated tax hike to provide more funding for Austin Community College. Especially in light of the fact that several early vote locations were on ACC campuses, everyone expected a spike in turnout among ACC students. The absence of prepared targeting data for the election, such as NCEC, made it more difficult to gauge the expected turnout, so the campaign had to rely on past election returns, the opinion of local experts, and common sense. Common sense said that it would take 25,000 votes to win without a run-off.

Turnout would be low everywhere in the city, but not equally so. Precincts in the 2000 election ranged anywhere from 2% to 35% turnout, and the variation was tightly bound to geography. The highest turnout precincts were clustered around and just west of MoPac, from the river due west of downtown, north to highway 183, with four additional high turnout boxes in Travis Heights and Bolden – white, liberal neighborhoods south of the river. The next highest turnout group of precincts would be the remainder of the central city, the northern and southern edges from the center to the west, and a small group of precincts in the far southwest known as Circle C – a new, large planned community with a relatively conservative activist culture. Everywhere else, and most notably the entire eastern half of the city, would vote at roughly 5% or less. The vast majority of votes would be cast within a corridor from just south of the river on either side of Congress Avenue, to the northwest.

When Wynn first ran for office and won his Council seat in May of 2000, he narrowly escaped a run-off by 172 votes out of 33,647 cast. He won big in the northwest, where he lived. That high turnout area is wealthy, white, and moderately Democratic, so it was a good match for Wynn – he expected to do well there, and he did. He also did well in the southwest, thanks in no small part to the endorsement he received from the Circle C homeowners' association, though his margin there was not what it was in his home area. He won 62.4% in the northwest, and 56.2% in the southwest. His poorest showing was in South Austin, where he got only 38.4% of the vote. It was the only region of the city where the votes received by his two main opponents combined – both more liberal than Wynn – beat him. South Austin contributed only 8% of the total vote. Of equal concern for the 2003 campaign was Wynn's showing in the central city, where he failed to earn a majority at 47.4%. Over 30% of the vote came out of the central city in 2000, and if the campaign couldn't deliver a straight majority there this time, Wynn's chances of avoiding a run-off were slim. One of the campaign's best and simplest early moves was made to address that challenge. Early in 2003, the campaign manager hired an artist from South Austin to design a poster that looked like a cross between a traditional campaign placard and a hand-drawn advertisement for live music or a garage sale. The campaign blanketed the central city and South Austin with the image in an attempt to endear Wynn to partisans of the Keep Austin Weird (should we put quotes around this like earlier?) movement, and to loosen and liberalize his image there.

The Budget

Before writing a campaign budget, you have to figure out how much the campaign can afford to spend – how much can you raise, and how much, if anything, can the candidate contribute? It's relatively easy to answer the second part by asking the candidate; the first part can be harder to pin down. How to raise money is covered in the fundraising manual, but how to plan based on expectations is a fundamental challenge of writing a campaign budget. If you overestimate what you can raise, you risk running out of money before the campaign is over. But if you underestimate, you risk failing to do everything you can to earn votes.

The Wynn campaign estimated that it could spend \$250,000. Wynn was willing to put in a maximum of \$100,000 of his own money, and a fundraising goal of \$150,000 represented a productive but conservative estimate. In the end, the campaign spent almost exactly the \$250,000 that it had budgeted, but since they were able to raise \$180,000, Wynn ended up contributing \$70,000.

The candidate's significant contribution gave the campaign flexibility in terms of when it could spend money – they could spend money before they raised it. Nevertheless, a campaign budget must be detailed in terms of not only how but when money will be spent. The Wynn budget is broken down by month, something all campaigns should do to manage cash flow. (note: "campaign must follow that model" is underlined, should it be underlined in manual?)

Polling and Media

The largest single line item in the budget was the TV buy, at \$75,000, and just under 30% of the total. The campaign planned to go up with a 30-second positive spot in the last month of the contest, which would air during evening news shows, and on Austin's local cable news channel. With that targeting, a high percentage of the audience would be politically active, likely voters in a very low turnout election.

The campaign budgeted \$7,500 for a poll in the second to last month of the campaign. In a race of this size, the standard polling strategy is to do a benchmark poll early on, to help the campaign decide which elements of its message to focus on with particular constituencies, and then a second poll early in the last month of the campaign, to refocus its message and targeting for the final stretch. In the case of the Wynn campaign, Wynn and his campaign manager knew enough about the voters who would make it to the polls on May 3rd, and the salient issues among that electorate, to forego the benchmark. Furthermore, it was clear from a cursory understanding of the field that the campaign's chief aim would be to build a commanding fundraising and endorsement advantage early to reinforce Wynn's claim that he was the only choice for Mayor.

Direct Mail

The campaign budgeted \$32,000 to print and drop a total of approximately 110,000 pieces of mail – three different pieces, one of which would go to roughly 50,000 households, one to 40,000, and the last one to 20,000. It's important to note that, at that rate, the campaign could not afford to buy a \$0.37 stamp for every piece of mail. The first two rounds of mail would have to be sent bulk rate, and the last round would be a GOTV postcard. (note: I think the note reads that all mail should be sent bulk rate except for GOTV and if so, we need a price for GOTV mail.)

Operations

The campaign was managed by a pair of Austin politicians who own and operate a statewide campaign consulting group – an unorthodox structure, and one that ended up costing the campaign more than it would have for a manager and a fundraiser. But given the quality of people Wynn hired, his productive history with one of the consultants over the course of his political rise in Austin, and the professionalism he sought to establish on a level above his opponents, it was the right choice for him. Beyond that, the campaign office, which was subsidized by one of Wynn's supporters, opened at the beginning of the year and they budgeted a small but sufficient amount for office supplies and miscellaneous office expenses.

Field

The first step the campaign had to take in its targeted voter contact plan would be to secure a voter file. With turnout expected in the 12% range, it would have been inefficient for the campaign to buy the whole file of 465,000 registered voters in 305,000 households. The campaign's direct, targeted communication – activities dependent on a voter file – included door-to-door canvassing, phone calls, and direct mail. The campaign was not in a position to send mail or make phone calls to all registered voters, nor could they muster the volunteers or afford the paid walkers to canvass more than 30 to 50 of the city's 200 voting precincts. The city is larger than a congressional district (Wynn was fond of saying, when making the case for single-member council districts, that as the Place Five Council Member, he represented more people than Tom Daschle), but the campaign's budget was less than a quarter of a serious congressional campaign. The only viable direct contact strategy would be to cut out a large percentage of the eligible electorate. Accordingly, the campaign decided to purchase a voter file that included only voters who had voted in one or more of the last three municipal elections, or zero of the last three municipal elections

but both of the last two primary elections, estimating that from two-thirds to three-quarters of the total vote in the election would come from those 50,000 households. Additionally, they decided to include new registrants in precincts where the number of voters meeting those criteria was greater than 20% of the total registration, meaning the most active precincts in the city.

The non-management staff budget for the campaign was allotted in two ways. First, Wynn's City Council campaign was managed by a local political consultant who Wynn felt was important to include on his team this time around, and the campaign was obliged to follow that instruction. Second, they budgeted for a field director for the last two-and-a-half months of the campaign, whose responsibilities would center on volunteer recruitment, canvass organization, earned media, and GOTV activities. Remember, though, the campaign was focused not on turning out new voters, but on making sure that those who were most likely to vote felt that Wynn was their best and only choice. So while the campaign did focus significantly on making sure that identified supporters with spotty municipal vote history (or with no municipal vote history but regular primary and general election vote history) made it to the polls, most campaign activities, including field, were about persuasion, as opposed to turnout.

The field budget also included:

- \$8,000 for yard signs and 4x4's, to be spread all over the city, including in the lower turnout areas of the city as an insurance plan to boost Wynn's percentage of the new and casual voter bloc.
- \$5,000 for paid block-walkers, recruited from UT and other college campuses. The idea behind this program was to send thoroughly briefed, diligently trained college students door-to-door to targeted voters in the 40 or so highest turnout precincts. Twenty-three paid canvassers worked an average of approximately three canvass shifts per week, and they talked daily with Wynn and/or the campaign manager to hone their understanding of the issues in the campaign and Wynn's message, so that they could be effective surrogates for him in the field.
- \$17,500 for early vote and Election Day GOTV, most of which would be earmarked for paid phones, provided that the campaign could generate enough volunteer support to provide the necessary poll workers, rides to the polls, and visibility.

Fundraising

The campaign sought to raise \$150,000 in \$100 increments in two ways – direct mail and events. They budgeted \$8,250 for paper, printing, and postage, allowing them to send roughly 10,000 direct solicitations for contributions. \$3,000 was budgeted for event expenses, which would allow campaign supporters and friends of Wynn to host parties at their homes and offices, inviting guests who would contribute.

This represents the first budget. As with any campaign, the Wynn campaign revised this budget on a daily basis to account for shifting costs, priorities, and fundraising productivity. It is critical that you write a detailed budget early in your campaign, and it must be your best guess or estimate of how you intend to spend money over the course of the campaign. But it is equally critical that you revisit that budget every single day, comparing your initial estimates and plans with the way in which the campaign is actually unfolding.

Web and Collateral

The campaign sought to drive Internet traffic to the campaign website, which it used to disseminate information, fundraise, and recruit volunteers. They estimated a cost of \$5,000 for design and maintenance of the website – a cost that was no doubt driven down by the scores of unemployed dot-com refugees who were willing and able to do a little contract work. That left an additional \$6,750 in the budget as a cushion.

Vote Goal Worksheet

Calculate using NCEC data (see appendix)

How many votes does it take to win?

Expected Vote _____ X (.50) + 1 = _____ Minimum Votes Needed To Win

Expected Vote _____ X (.52) = _____ Comfortable Margin of Victory

Who will vote for you no matter what you do?

Select three "bad" elections

	Election/Race	Democratic %
Election 1		
Election 2		
Election 3		
Average		

(Average %) X (Expected Vote) = Dem Base Vote

(_____) X (_____) = _____

How many more votes do you need?

Find the size of the deficit:

(Comfortable) - (Dem Base Vote) = Vote Deficit

(_____) - (_____) = _____

How well does a Democrat usually do?

(Democratic Performance) X (Expected Turnout) = Expected Dem Vote

_____ X _____ = _____

Glossary

Benchmark poll — A poll conducted early in the campaign that explores potential messages and your supporters.

Campaign Timetable — A timeline of what will be accomplished and when on a campaign.

Constituency — The group your candidate is hoping to represent.

Democratic Performance — The percentage of the vote you can reliably depend on.

Earned Media — Media attention that the campaign did not pay for, “earned” by merit of providing interesting news.

Focus Groups — Sessions in which groups discuss campaign-related topics.

Gross Ratings Point (GRP) — A measurement of how many people will be reached by your campaign. One GRP point means that one percent of the audience will have seen or heard an advertisement at least once.

Message — A brief statement of the candidate’s beliefs and values, to be repeated over the course of the campaign.

Opposition Research — Investigation of your opponent, used to formulate a campaign message and to combat attacks.

Paid Media — The purchase of advertising space on television, radio, the Internet or print media.

Self-Research — The act of investigating your candidate in order to prepare for attacks by your opposition.

Slogan — A single, short phrase used to define the campaign.

Tracking Polls — Polls frequently conducted during a campaign, used to monitor changing public opinion and response to the campaign message.

Tully Message Box — A simple box used to designate each campaign's message about themselves and their opposition.

Vote Goal — The number of votes you need for victory based on the expected turnout.

Campaign Strategy Checklist

- Calculate the number of votes you'll need to win.
- Research your candidate and the geography and demography of the area you'll be campaigning in.
- Write your plan.
- Determine who you'll need to hire to accomplish the plan (i.e., consultants).
- Determine how you will hold the campaign accountable to the plan.
- Get buy-in from all key campaign staff.
- Schedule campaign activities around the plan.

At set intervals, reevaluate the campaign plan and revise if necessary.

