



## **Chapter 10**

# **Neighbor-to-Neighbor Precinct Organizing**

**Organizing at the most local level**



# Take Back Your Country – Starting In Your Own Backyard

## Precinct Organizing Overview

Electoral districts come in varying sizes and scopes. States and U.S. Congressional districts are the largest with state senate, and state house districts getting progressively smaller. Organizing from the ground up, starting at the grassroots, needs to happen with the most basic of all electoral districts, usually called a ‘precinct.’ The common trait of these basic electoral units is that people in the same geographic vicinity all use the same voting station. For the sake of ease, this section refers to the basic electoral unit as a precinct, though it sometimes goes by other names. The general concept of this section is to emphasize the importance of neighbor-to-neighbor organizing and get grassroots groups started on local efforts.

Campaigns typically group the voters of each precinct together to predict or influence voting behavior. Ideally, Party members working at the precinct level connect the precinct to state-level Party organizations. In other structures, activists have been known to create their own network to compliment, compete, or substitute for the Party.

Precincts are not an arbitrary unit of division created by the campaign or a Party, but an administrative unit set by the county. Since precincts exist continuously, with or without any particular campaign working in them, so should your organizing efforts.

## Campaign Oriented vs. Community Oriented Organizing

Electoral campaigns organize precincts as part of their field plan. A campaign will organize a precinct in ways that make sense for a temporary organization with a one-time specific numerical goal. Currently, most precincts organized by a Democratic organization in this country are organized for short-term campaign work. This is not the only way to organize a precinct. Precincts can also be organized along a community oriented model. In these models the organizers are people who live in the precincts themselves and have a more personal connection with their neighborhood. This kind of organizing lends itself to greater sustainability through multiple election cycles.

**What is a Precinct?**  
 Sometimes known by other names, a precinct is the smallest administrative political unit, composed of a number of registered voters in a defined area. All voters in this area vote at the same location, on the same machine. Specifics vary by county; check with your local County Board of Elections.

A number of precincts often comprise larger administrative units such as wards, counties, state House and Senate districts, and U.S. Congressional districts.

Though larger electoral districts tend to change every decade, precincts generally remain the same.

### Traits of campaign and community oriented models

Traits of campaign oriented precinct organizing	Traits of community oriented precinct organizing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Precincts activated from two to five months before an election.</li> <li>- Field organizers are often marginally familiar with the area.</li> <li>- Unfamiliarity with precinct gives impression of impersonal, remote, or distant relationship to voter.</li> <li>- Field organizers are often trained in electoral organizing and are paid to dedicate many hours a day to working for the precincts they are assigned.</li> <li>- Allows for controlled, consistent messaging from the campaign.</li> <li>- Connected to and directed by larger organizations with material and staff resources.</li> <li>- Focused on winning an election on a specific date.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can sustain itself independent of the election cycle</li> <li>- Greater control over organizing timeline</li> <li>- Genuine relationships developed with voters: credible, easily accessed.</li> <li>- Organized in-precinct by organizers intimately familiar with the precinct itself.</li> <li>- Volunteer activists: unpaid, limited time available, frequently untrained.</li> <li>- Typically resource poor.</li> <li>- Might be disconnected or poorly connected to campaigns or Party organizations: off-message, duplicated work, voter confusion.</li> <li>- Focused on long range community building.</li> </ul>

**Campaign Oriented vs. Community Oriented Organizing: Which is better?**

Both models have advantages and disadvantages. To leverage the advantage of both models, activists and Party organizations should utilize the traits of both. Ideally, a precinct organization is built from the ground up by local activists and endorsed and supported by the state and county Party organization. When a campaign is ready to contact voters, it will utilize the existing precinct organizations to supplement their direct voter contact work. This ideal scenario requires both the local Party and the local activists to work together from the beginning to formulate local precinct plans.

Before anything else, local activists should check to see what precinct efforts already exist. The Party or like-minded organizations might have something set up. Duplicating efforts might serve to confuse the voter. Work with the existing efforts to improve them (if a precinct program exists and the voters don't know about, the program could probably use some help). If no precinct level organizing is taking place, propose starting a precinct program to the local Party and get to work!

**Strengths of Your Precinct Program:**

A campaign's limited resources shape its organizing in particular ways. Campaigns are not meant to build a district's democratic performance in the long-term, only take advantage of what performance currently exists in the district at the time of the election. It does not usually make sense for a campaign to spend resources registering new voters, developing strong relationships with the voter, engaging GOP-rich areas, or preparing for anything past Election Day. An electoral campaign should be spending its resources on people likely to vote and in targeted (swing and/or base) precincts.

Your precinct program has an interest in the sustaining performance of your precinct, has local knowledge on the precinct's voters, and has substantially more time to invest. Precinct organizations are not limited by a campaign's typical field organizing time frame (three to six months). Because of these advantages, a precinct program can engage voters in all precincts.

Priorities over the long term (continuous)	Priorities over the short term (campaign)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintaining an updated voter list</li> <li>- Maintaining your activist base</li> <li>- Identifying and engaging infrequent and drop-off Democratic voters</li> <li>- Finding and registering new Democratic voters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintaining an updated voter list</li> <li>- Identifying and maximizing Absentee, Early, and/or Vote-by-mail supporters.</li> <li>- Identifying, and persuading undecided voters likely to vote.</li> </ul>

This section brings together skills from other sections (activist recruitment, voter contact, etc) for use year-round in our own neighborhood. Even if you do not work or volunteer on a specific campaign, you can always work to maintain your precinct.

In a campaign setting, precincts are ranked in order of importance for targeting purposes. Base precincts are targeted for turnout. Swing precincts are targeted for persuasion. And GOP precincts are ignored completely. This makes sense from a resource management standpoint for most campaigns. For your continuous precinct organizing strategy, you have a larger, long range view: Increase the Democratic voter turnout cycle after cycle.

The voter targeting section elsewhere in this manual discusses voter targeting in a campaign environment. This section will discuss precinct organizing for the long run.

**Close elections are won or lost at the precinct level.**

In 1960, John F. Kennedy beat Richard Nixon by one vote per precinct. One vote!

This phenomenon becomes more apparent in close local elections.

## Organizing Individual Precincts

Your precinct is the first piece of a precinct network in your county, your district, and your state. The goal is simple: build a political community to increase Democratic voter performance.

### Step One: Get to know the political landscape

The first step in organizing your precinct is to understand the precinct, and where the precinct fits into existing electoral organizations. Check around and see what efforts have been made in the area. Duplicating efforts of another organization is not only frustrating for organizers and volunteers, but confusing for the voter.

#### A Step-by-step guide

1. Know the landscape
2. Recruitment
3. Planning and Management
4. Be a resource
5. Work it!

**Know the Players:** Developing a good relationship with state and county Party leaders is a priority for a precinct organization. The Party's County Chairs will have access to vital information such as the precinct's voter file, and potential activists in the area. Even with initially unenthusiastic Party officials, the county Party or local precinct committee person will see the power of your organizing by seeing the results you produce. The first step is to sit down and meet with the County Party or other Party official. Having a good relationship with the county and state Parties will help campaigns plug into your existing precinct work.

Get to know your...	
- Existing Precinct Leaders	- State House Representative
- Ward or Area Leaders	- State Senate Representative
- County Party Chair,	- City Councilor for the dist.
- State Party Chair	- School Board member for the dist
- State Party Field Director/ Organizers	- Local judge of elections
- Local campaigns' field staff	- County Clerk
- Community Leaders	- County Board of Elections Officers
- Local issue groups	- Neighborhood associations

**Know the Numbers:** Your most important asset in organizing your precinct is the 'voter file.' The Party's voter file is more substantive than the publicly available voter roll kept by the County Board of Elections. The previous section, Developing a Field Plan, indicated that different precincts may be targeted and prioritized by campaigns in different ways depending on their vote share and Democratic performance. Knowing what kind of precinct you are organizing will help you set goals in a similar manner.

The number of registered voters is important insofar as letting organizers know what they will be working with, but a truly effective electoral organization relies much more heavily on Democratic Performance, Voter History, and a sustained Voter contact program to hit its goals. To do this, you must obtain voter file data for your precinct.

Numbers you need
- Voter Registration Numbers: Democrats, non-affiliateds, other Parties.
- Voter Turnout: Similar election years, turnout for each office down the ballot
- Democratic Performance Index: How many voters can you expect in an election?
- Democratic Base and Persuasion: How many die-hards? How many persuadable?
- Voter Histories: Among your voters, who votes most often, and who doesn't vote at all?

**Know the Dates and Places:** Just as with field planning, an organized precinct must have a timeline and benchmarks. Keep track of the significant election calendar dates. Don't forget Absentee/Vote-by-Mail/Early voting registration, application, and submission deadlines. Consider both Primary and General election schedules. Keep track of precinct voting locations and attempts to move the polling place. Every precinct team member should have a map of the precinct with borders and polling location clearly marked.

## Step Two: Initial Recruitment

After you've met with the local Party and/or any other local players, get started on recruitment right away. You can not, and should not, do this alone. A precinct captain should create a precinct team and invest these activists in the success of the precinct. Refer to the section of this manual, "Building An Activist Base," for an in-depth view on how to grow your organization and develop your activists.

**First Tier: Relational.** Remember to start close to home, literally, and cast a wide net around your neighborhood. Call on your existing local network – people who would help you because they know you. Known DFA and Party activists in your area are also a good first outreach. Elected officials and Party activists might know a number of reliable activists in your neighborhood. As always, the best source of volunteers is from other volunteers. Utilize other people personal networks.

**Second Tier: Voter History.** The bulk of your initial recruitment can be done using your voter file. You may know nothing else about the people on your list, but you know the most important facts – their voting frequency and how to contact them. Identify those voters who never fail to vote. People who have voted in every election in the last four cycles are likely to take a great deal of pride in the fulfillment of their civic duty. A good recruiter can appeal to this sense of civic pride. Also identify voter who have voted in any recent Democratic primary. These voters are passionate about the country, but also about their Party.

Name	Address	Phone	'00 Pri	'00 Gen	'02 Pri	'02 Gen	'04 Pri	'04 Gen
Joe Black	121 main lane	555-1357	D	X	D	X	D	X
Rachel Sadler	125 main lane	555-2468		X				X
Henry Armatage	137 main lane	555-1256	D	X			D	X
Julia Silbergeld	139 main lane	555-3478		X		X		X
Laura Quayle	149 main lane	555-9865						
Erin Dame	120 main lane	555-5421		X				
Ilya Shayman	128 main lane	555-0921				X	D	X
Ari	144 main lane	555-4567		X				X

**Third Tier: Public Displays of Affiliation.** Wearing buttons is not enough. But it is a good way to see who is passionate in the neighborhood. These are people with liberal bumper stickers, lawn signs, buttons, and other visible displays of friendly politics. If this person is a stranger, work on becoming familiar. A knock on the door or a sidewalk chat is a great way to create a neighborly bond.

### Turning Volunteers Into Team Members: The Initial Precinct Meeting

One of the most powerful tools in neighbor-to-neighbor organizing is the House Meeting, or in this case, a 'Precinct Meeting.' This isn't a meeting for folks to get together and commiserate or rant about politics. The precinct leader rolls out a plan, explains how people can make an impact, and commits people to a role.

Potential activists are invited to a meeting at an activist's house. The meeting starts out with some time to get to know each other and connect, but it is important to get down to business quickly. The precinct leader should briefly explain the value of precinct organizing, giving the context of the organizing project. This includes a numerical breakdown of the precinct – how it has voted in the past, and how it can be organized to vote differently in the future. The precinct leader works out a goal for the precinct (# of volunteers, # of events, target for future Democratic performance, etc). The precinct leader discusses the importance of direct voter contact and layered communication as a strategy and lays out tactics used in the precinct (how much canvassing, how much phone calling). A rough timeline with benchmarks should be rolled out.

At this point, many potential activists will be impressed, overwhelmed, or a combination of both. Make sure the numbers and the plan are accessible to people who might not have a campaigning background, but do not sacrifice the serious tone of the project.

The precinct leader should break down the plan into small, manageable chunks. The precinct-wide contact goal can be broken down block-by-block. Every potential role in the precinct is written out for people to see.

**Delegating tasks.** It is easy enough to work out an impressive sounding plan, but the challenge is to get your team to execute it. You'll need to invest people in their own part of the plan. Because everything is quantified and broken down, people can see the impact one person can make. Even in a group setting, it is important to commit people by asking them individually. Everyone at the meeting should be offered a chance at being the captain of their and their neighboring blocks or areas. Additional tasks for those who want to take leadership positions should be laid out. Each person should be asked, one-on-one at the meeting and for everyone to hear, "Can I count on you to take care of the voters in your block" (or something similar). The precinct captain goes around the room, asking each person in turn, until each person has been asked. Start with the strongest, most enthusiastic team member – the first response will set the tone for each subsequent ask.

After people have been asked to take care of their block, you can ask the room as a whole for people to take on additional responsibilities (see box for examples). Don't worry if not all the roles are filled, everyone on the team is responsible for recruiting more team members. The precinct captain should expect attrition over time, so positions will need to be constantly filled.

After roles are fulfilled, take a minute to celebrate your new team. Boost the energy level of the room. Before concluding, the team should head right into the plan sketched out by the precinct captain. This will be the precinct leader's opportunity to get team members to work out and internalize their individual goals. As a group, start filling in your timeline or calendar and determine an action item that can be taken and completed in a week's time. Determine the date of the first round of voter contact (identifying supporters) and the first precinct Democratic social event. Keep the momentum of the first meeting going by making sure to call and follow-up with each of your attendees within two days of the meeting.

### **Always Be Recruiting: Additional Volunteer Pushes.**

The initial precinct meeting is the culmination of the first recruitment push. Your precinct organization must always be recruiting. The social chair, precinct captain, or other person should be in charge of making sure the team is constantly growing. Recruitment must be one of the benchmarks to measure the success of the organization.

Every now and then the initial precinct meeting should be replicated to give new volunteers a sense of context. The team should evaluate progress toward benchmarks and celebrate successes. Different tactics can be used to build up the names of potential activists in your neighborhood. Neighborly, social events and community service projects are excellent ways to build a political community as well as build you volunteer list. Precinct Democratic BBQs or similar events in the neighborhood can be a great first event. Having your initial team invite their assigned Democratic voters is an easy contact for the team member and a fun event for the voter. These social events serve as a community-building opportunity, a voter ID opportunity, and a recruitment opportunity. Be sure to have a sign-in sheet for all attendees, and follow up with all new attendees with a phone call or personal visit to plug them into a volunteer opportunity.

**The Precinct Captain:** is responsible for recruiting, training, motivating and coordinating team members. Holds team members accountable to goals.

**Block Captains:** is responsible for voter contact along a given block/area. Each precinct activist should be assigned to a small area to call their own.

**Data Director:** responsible for updating and maintaining data from all voters contacted. Block Captains report their contacts to Data Director for tracking.

**Research Director:** is responsible for research on issues important to the precinct. Should also assist the Data Director by looking up information missing from the precinct's voter file (wrong numbers, etc).

**Early Vote Coordinator:** responsible for encouraging, assisting, and keeping track of all absentee, vote-by-mail, and/or early voting in the precinct.

**Poll Captain:** responsible for E-day poll watching, for obtaining election judge certification, or building a relationship with the existing election judge.

**Social Chair:** responsible for BBQs, social events, service opportunities, and visibility. Can also be responsible for continued recruitment.

### Step Three: Planning and Precinct Management

Refer to the section of this manual, “Building An Activist Base,” for an in-depth view on how to manage activists in your organization. Also refer to the section, “Planning” for greater detail on developing a plan for your precinct. Refer to the section, “Voter Targeting” to see what kind of precinct you live in to predict how you will interact with campaigns once they establish themselves.

#### Precinct Captain Responsibilities:

- Recruit
- Train
- Motivate
- Coordinate

### Planning

As with any campaign planning, your precinct plan should start with a goal and work backwards from there. The ultimate goal of the organization is to increase the number of Democratic votes cast in the precinct. Additional goals can include the number of volunteers on the team, the number of social events and service events, and so on.

Example Vote Goal for Precinct			
2004 Performance:	%	2008 Goals	%
771 registered voters	-	810 registered	-
312 Total votes cast	40.5 turnout	332 expected	41%
143 Dem votes cast.	45.8 of votes	173 votes	52%

Set your timelines and benchmarks as specifically as possible. If the precinct is in its activist recruitment phase, how many activists is it looking to get by what times? If the precinct is identifying supporters, how many households does the precinct team need identified, and by what time? If you know you need to identify a certain amount of supporters, you should set monthly and weekly goals leading up to the election weekend for the number of supporters you've identified.

Remember to consider your resources. If you live in an area where houses are spaced far apart or where people are seldom home, then your team members will require more time to contact the precinct's voters. Understanding your phone and canvass rates are crucial to planning and setting expectations for your team members.

Good planning requires good data management. The precinct data manager should be tracking voters contacted and volunteers recruited. For the voter contact operation, block captains report to the data manager and the data manager to the County Party so they can report it up to the State party. Figure out a regular reporting system for your team. For example, you might decide that team members report into the data manager twice a month on a certain date. As that date approaches the precinct manager checks in with each team member to check in on progress. After that date the data manager call each team member who has not reported in to see what happened in that area.

### Managing

Just as recruitment is an ongoing process, so is developing the team you've recruited. The tone set by precinct captain will determine the success of the precinct team. Celebrating successes and highlighting those who've done good work are the key to any campaign organization. But your focus should also always return the impact a small group of people can make in their own backyards. The precinct captain is building a team, not merely recruiting volunteers. Ideally, you'll work with these team members over a period of many years. Keep the tone casual, friendly, and neighborly.

Encourage in your activists a sense of ownership over the program – this is their neighborhood. If you are part of a larger precinct network, let your activists know from the start. People will feel more confident of your plan knowing that others nearby are doing the same.

Utilize the leadership ladder (as described in “Building Your Activist Base”) to encourage your team member to take on greater responsibility. You should have a plan for your best activists to take increasing leadership. Meet with your best team members individually to reinforce their sense of ownership over the precinct.

#### **Step Four: Make your presence known – be a resource**

One of the greatest benefits of having a robust precinct program is building a local and personal connection between your Party or organization and the voter themselves. Does your Party have a local Party Headquarters in every single precinct? Probably not. Building a precinct program will serve that function, literally bringing politics close to home for more people. Instead of being confused as to who or what the Democratic Party is or what they stand for, your neighbors will have a resource easily available to them. You are the local representative of the Party.

Modern campaigning has become more efficient, but runs the danger of becoming remote and impersonal. Voters increasingly ignore strangers calling their homes, knocking on their doors, and sending them mail before an election. It's not that people ignore callers, knockers, and mail – they ignore strangers who do it. This is the greatest strength of community-oriented precinct organizing – familiarity.

#### **Relationship Building: Your Precinct's Voters**

Your next task is to build up visibility and awareness for the organization letting your neighbors know they have a Democratic resource easily available to them.

An easy and engaging project for your team early in the cycle is to invest your activists and build a sense of community by creating a quick visibility campaign. Even though bumper stickers and lawn signs have a negligible impact on voter persuasion and turnout, it can create a sense of community for those who share a similar view. Get as many Democrats to post signs in their windows, cars, yards or wherever indicating that they support a Democrat or that they support a particular issue. The precinct captain might display something like “Precinct XY Democratic Headquarters” to indicate that the precinct program has arrived. Other team members put up their own signs. The signs might be a generic Democratic or issue-oriented sign or something specific to the precinct. This is a particularly encouraging project in areas with a large Republican population because Democrats will realize that they are not alone in their neighborhood.

Team members can canvass every Democrat, Independent, or unaffiliated with an issue survey and/or with an informational flyer listing all of the public officials representing the area and how to contact them. One of these officials would include the Democratic precinct leader. Mail or deliver a sign to all registered Democrats in the neighborhood and follow up to encourage them to display the signs. Your precinct team members are establishing themselves as a resource of the voters. Voters will know that they can go to a neighbor with questions about issues, registration, and voting.

Be sure to do an ID canvass to make sure you know who your Democratic supporters are. A voter's explicitly stated preference is more accurate than their listing on a voter file. This is why Voter ID and Democratic Performance are more important than Democratic registration numbers.

Precinct Events – Casual, targeted precinct events are a high impact activity which will motivate your activists and volunteers as well as engage ‘ordinary’ Democratic voters. These events can be ordinary, such as a neighborhood BBQ in your backyard – except that all the attendees are neighborhood Democrats. Especially in Republican dominated areas, this serves to build community among the precinct's registered Democrats. The event can be as conspicuous or inconspicuous as you feel appropriate for your neighborhood, but the point is to start putting a local, familiar face on electoral organizing. The first events do not need to have an explicit agenda except for a few key items:

#### **Democratic Precinct Event Guidelines:**

- Everyone should know how you got their name (publicly available registration).
- Everyone should know that the event is a local precinct event – one of many to come.
- Inclusively. The invite list is targeted to registered Dems, but no one should feel alienated. No ‘litmus’ test for attendance, unless they're just there to heckle.
- Data collection. Always important. Have everyone sign a ‘guestbook’ with contact info.
- You have a plan, let people know. Everyone is having fun at the event, but you're also doing serious work and people are welcome to join.
- Make an ask.
- Make your contact info available, and have basic materials on voting, registering, etc on hand.

Future events can be structured according to the needs of the precinct. These events can be entirely social (i.e. neighborhood Democratic Bowling night), educational (political movie/DVD night), or volunteer-oriented (precinct mailing night). Ideally, your events are a little of everything (for example, 'Mailings and Margaritas' at Susie's house).

The frequency of these events can vary from precinct to precinct. At a minimum have events once every other month.

### **Relationship Building: Your Precinct Network**

Just as your precinct team is a resource for your precinct's voters, it is also a resource for the County Democratic Party and for the other precinct teams in the area. If there is a network of precinct captains in your area (county, ward, district, or other geographic area), be sure to get in contact with these activists. Your County Democratic Party will have an idea of other activists organizing the area. These people can provide experience and resources for your precinct team and likewise your precinct team might be able to provide insights for them. It might be a good idea to meet regularly with these other activists once every other month.

Regular contact with the County Party will also help the Party stay up to date with what is happening on the ground in your area. The most basic form of contact is to send your updated voter file over to the Party on a regular basis. In most states, campaigns rely on the State Party to provide them with the most up-to-date voter lists. In practice the campaigns do not have fully accurate information, largely because such information doesn't exist or didn't get passed on from one campaign cycle to the next. The continuously organized precinct organization is the solution to this common problem. Your precinct sends its information to the County Party, the County sends it to the State Party, and the State Party to the campaigns running in the state.

Inter-precinct events also help build a sense of community for your activists. Having a picnic with five or six different precincts shows each team member how they are part of a larger effort. These events can also show voters that the Democratic Party is not a foreign, distant, or faceless organization; instead the Democratic Party is their neighbor.

**Step Five: Work Your Precinct – Local, direct voter contact.**

The greatest strength of community oriented precinct organizing is the very local and personal nature of the work. As politics get larger and more impersonal, it becomes more important for activists to put a familiar face to the issues which affect them and to do so year-round.

The bulk of your precinct organizing work will be direct voter contact. Everything else is just a prelude to the real work of contacting potential voters and keeping track of these contacts. From the very beginning, your precinct should have a plan with goals, strategies, tactics, timelines, and benchmarks. If you know that your precinct cast 200 Democratic votes in the last similar election (2002), your precinct goal might be to increase to 250 votes. If you have an entire year to work on this plan, this might be realistic. If you have three months, you might have a harder time. Either way, your events and activities follow a plan and have a purpose.

On the most basic level, your precinct’s tactical plan is:

- 1) Walk
- 2) Phone
- 3) Update
- 4) Repeat

**Finding New Votes** – A continuous, neighbor to neighbor organizing program has the time and the local knowledge to increase Democratic voter performance in a way no temporary campaign can afford to. As a precinct level organization, your voter contact priorities can play to these strengths (for more on targeting from an electoral campaign’s perspective, see the section in the manual on Drafting Your Field Plan).

**Absentee, Early Vote, and Vote By Mail** – All electoral campaigns should have a solid plan for organizing absentee, early vote, and vote by mail. Precinct organizations are a good place to distribute, explain, and collect absentee and vote-by-mail ballots. The familiarity of having a neighbor explain an alternative process will help add new advance voters to each precinct, freeing up resources on election day. If precinct captains are working closely with the campaign and have been trained on advance balloting, precinct volunteers might be a good way to reduce the costs of an advance ballot program.

**Strategy and Tactics: Variations and Considerations** – There are literally hundreds of thousands of basic electoral districts in the country. The principle of neighbor-to-neighbor organizing is the same in all of them, but more targeted tactics may vary greatly. Starting early and planning far into the future is the best way to maximize available tactics. The gold standard is accomplishing direct contact with every supportive and undecided voter multiple times.

<b>Tactical Variation based on Precinct Characteristic</b>		
<u>Precinct Characteristic</u>	<u>Consequence</u>	<u>Tactical consideration</u>
High Retiree population	More likely to be home, sleep earlier	Higher contact rate, cannot contact late evening, can contact all afternoon.
High Student population	Less likely to be home, sleep later, irregular schedule, moves frequently	Low contact rate, can call/canvass late, can call/canvass in the afternoon. Yearly re-ID to see if students are still around
Rural	Houses far apart, value face-to-face contact	Canvass is higher impact, but fewer canvass contacts/hour. Supplement with phone contacts.
Urban	Houses close together, less likely to be home	Low contact rate, but many houses/hour. Need multiple rounds of canvassing.
Ethnically/racially Homogenous	More open to similar race/ethnicity	Use similar race/ethnicity to canvass.
Apartments/ Condos	Difficult to access	Find volunteer inside condo/ apartment to canvass. Supplement with phone.

**SUGGESTED VOTER CONTACT PRIORITIES:**

(non-campaign, Party-building phase)

<p><b>Top Tier</b></p> <p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Early Education</li> <li>2) Repeated contact</li> </ol>	<p><b>Drop-off and Infrequent Dems</b> – This is an effective way to find more Democratic votes for your elections over the long term. A great many Democratic voters are unreliable in mid-year elections or for offices lower down the ballot. These are people who probably would vote Democratic, but often stay home because they do not understand the importance of the election or office. In most districts the discrepancy between presidential year turnout and Midterm turnout is large. Because these voters are already on your side, because there are many such voters, and because these voters are easy to locate, this can be your most lucrative target to increase turnout. The better your relationship with Infrequent Dems, the easily you can turn them into ‘always voters.’</p>
<p><b>Second Tier</b></p> <p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Targeted Outreach</li> <li>2) Committed Follow-up</li> </ol>	<p><b>New registrants, new voters</b> – Newly registered Democrats are always an exciting prospect. It is important to remember, however, that a new registration is not a new voter. If you are registering voters without any sort of follow up, consider that registration wasted; that person will probably not vote. Make your neighborhood registration effort meaningful with a good tracking system and a targeted follow up plan.</p> <p><b>Voter Registration Drives</b> – Be smart about voter registration drives. Registration canvasses can be effective in Democratic base precincts (65% or higher Dems), or in targeted households (Dems tend to live together). Open registration at Supermarkets and libraries can be risky because you might register more Republicans than Democrats (conspicuous liberal or Democratic paraphernalia may mitigate this risk).</p> <p><b>Students and Young Voters</b> – It is important to note that students will turn out to vote if they feel they have a stake in the election, and if the process of voting is not confusing. Young people in the neighborhood should be targeted as soon as they turn 18. They can be registered in college and at home, so be sure you know which location they are voting. Young people should be recruited as precinct activists and given meaningful responsibilities in the organization.</p> <p><b>New Neighbors</b> – The obvious sign of impending new neighbors are ‘For Sale/Sold’ signs. Keep an eye on apartments and fluid populations such as students and military personnel. Your neighbor might not be political or might be a conservative Republican. A precinct activist should greet the new neighbors shortly after arriving. A precinct activist can help the neighbor move in or bring treats or some other apolitical interaction. The best way to engage newcomers politically is to begin by chatting about local issues to get a feel of where they lie on the political spectrum. If their political views are friendly, help register to vote, show them the polling location, and let them know about your precinct organization.</p>
<p><b>Third Tier</b></p> <p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Listen.</li> <li>2) Meet them where they’re at.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Independent or Swing Voters</b> – People who claim to “vote for the person, not the Party.” Finding common ground (rather than points of contention) outside of an election cycle will put you in the strongest position as the election approaches. As always, make sure you are making the most of your opportunities with Democrats and new voters before spending resources on this category. Precinct organizations are a good fit to spend time with this group because of the time organizations have between elections.</p>
<p><b>Fourth Tier</b></p> <p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Think about resource allocation.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Persuading the Opposition</b> – Many activists feel a great satisfaction knowing they’ve ‘converted’ a voter. Persuading a Republican to start voting Democratic is relatively uncommon. From an organizing perspective, such persuasion is either a luxury or a last resort. It requires a large commitment of resources for a small and unlikely return. You could spend the same amount of time elsewhere and make a greater impact.</p>