

MEMORANDUM

6/18/05

To: Political Operations Management Team
From: ZAP

RE: Proposed Process for Developing a 5-Year ACORN Political Business Plan

Both to focus the strategic thinking of our political work and to put ourselves in position to attempt to raise the funds to support an ambitious, multi-year political program that grows out of ACORN's base and strengths, I believe we need a serious, well-argued business plan. On the fundraising side, places we will want to share this business plan include "the millionaires club" (Democracy Alliance), the billionaires (Sandlers', Soros, etc.), friends and opinion leaders in the voter engagement world (e.g., Frank Smith, John Podesta), SEIU, the voter participation foundations, etc.

Although part of this process may take several months, we need at least the initial overview very soon, probably in the next 2 – 3 weeks. I would like to engage some of our management team to work on this and, indeed, some of the elements have already been prepared, for example in the 2005 – 2006 voter registration and GOTV plan that Nathan and Jo have developed.

Other groups are also preparing such plans. ACT has told us that they are working on theirs. America Votes had a small meeting last week, that ACORN participated in, to start thinking through what its 5-year plan should be, spurred by some interest from Soros in funding it.

A key element of and argument for our plan – why ACORN? – is that ACORN's model and history of building ongoing, multi-issue, geographically-based, politically-engaged membership organizations, plus the large organizing staff and organizing culture that ACORN brings, mean that ACORN is the perfect entity to build the kind of long-term, permanent electoral capacity that progressives need to take back power in America.

This weekend Steve Kest and I spent an hour and a half on the phone drafting a possible outline for such a business plan, which I have written up and appended to this memo. Please review and email back any thoughts. I'd like us to spend part of the time at our management meeting as a work group, with laptops blazing, improving this outline and putting some of the flesh on the bones.

ACORN Political Business Plan Initial Draft Outline

- a) Overview: Speaks to ACORN's model and the major strategic directions and expansion plans that ACORN is pursuing. Steve prepared a 2-page piece after our meeting with the Sandler's that can serve as a point of departure for the overview. A copy is attached.
- b) Targeting (NOTE that this could either be a separate short section or one part of the methodology section below)
 - a) African-American: Major emphasis on voter registration, voter motivation and GOTV. Some parts of this work can be done c3
 - b) Hispanic & White Working Class: Key component of the initial voter contact is issue identification and persuasion. More time and money needs to be spent on screening and recording issue and policy priorities to determine message for future communication.
 - c) Though major focus of ACORN's work will continue to be in urban communities, both of-color and low-income white, part of ACORN's focus will be in inner-ring suburbs and lower-income and working class areas in exurbs and more rural counties, particularly where they fall in important state legislative or Congressional districts.
- c) Methodology (I think it would be good for NATHAN to take the first cut here)

NOTE: What I have here is probably more of a listing of elements that should go in a methodology section than the outline of how it should be structured)

- a) traditional ACORN organizer job description
- b) activists (ACORN member/leader volunteers): volunteer recruitment, training & deployment out of the membership --- NOTE 1: We should come up with a good name for what we call these member volunteers. (In 2004, for example, SEIU used the term SEIU Heroes for their program.) NOTE 2: In thinking about the methodology of the work these member/volunteers do, it probably falls into 2 categories:
 - (1) block leaders – a door-to-door approach
 - (2) networks (“friends and families”) – getting members to commit to move a list of, say, 50 of their friends, relatives, church members, co-workers, and use sourced data-bases to keep up with who is doing the contacting and who they are contacting.

Since I believe we'll want to use both of these methodologies, we may want to use a term that is different from Precinct Leader, since part of the rap in voter engagement circles these days is that “precincts are passé.” That argument is less critical for ACORN, actually, since we are about the only group in the voter engagement/political base-building world, whose existing membership and unit of organization is down-the-block

geographic, but nonetheless, we may want to use a different term than Precinct.

- c) Deepening the base – growth of a provisional membership, volunteer list-building. Thus where we have member volunteers contacting their neighbors and friends, part of their ask is for the person to become a provisional member of ACORN, probably with no dues payment. And organizers and outreach workers will also be having people sign “Count-on-Me” type forms that are also provisional membership applications, either with small dues or no dues.
 - d) ACORN Membership Canvass – id and electoral-capacity, building door-to-door operation, which Ids and motivates on issues, signs people up as low-dollar or no-dollar members, and then follow-up with email follow-up, future door-to-door follow-up. This is similar to the AFL-CIO’s Working America project that they built at great expense in ’03 and ’04.
 - e) Voter file: we’re purchasing voter files and recording all the contacts and updated information on them, so we have a systematic way to keep and track contact information with voters long-term, as well as using door-to-door contact to harvest email addresses and get up-dated phone numbers and cell phone numbers.
 - f) Voter registration, combination of door-to-door where resources are available and high-traffic sites when cost is a more critical question. Professional management and training, hiring and training people from the communities to do the work, photocopying (where legal) and databasing all, combining with an election administration program to ensure that the maximum # of cards actually get on the roles, and then door-to-door, precinct-based follow-up for voter education and gotv.
 - g) GOTV door-to-door canvassing, utilizing the indigenous base through both paid part-time programs and volunteer methods using both block captain and personal network systems.
 - h) Visibility work prior to elections (? – not sure if this deserves inclusion in the methodology section.)
 - i) Building and utilizing email network of ACORN voters (?) – for gotv, for issue education and persuasion, and for generating low-level volunteer activity
- d) State pages -- This section would include initially a 1 – 2 page plan for each state that we will be including in the plan. Later we will need to expand this state section to be a more detailed plan of the work – both for ’06 and beyond – in that state. Elements of state page could include:
- a) upcoming races and political context
 - b) ACORN existing base – both membership and staff
 - c) ACORN expansion plans
 - d) VR Plan
(what we did in 2004, what we will do in 2006)

- e) GOTV Goals – network focusing on education and GOTV
- f) Provisional ACORN membership
- g) Precinct Leader/Volunteer Goals
- h) Redistricting section

States to include are those states ACORN is in that have '06 or '08 key Senate races, are '08 battlegrounds (generally same as '04) and others with important redistricting opportunities.

- e) Budget section

We can say that detailed budgets are being prepared but we'll need something.

One way to do this would be:

- a) National political budget at so much per year: \$1.5 million - \$2 million?

State Budgets: 2006 cycle
2008 cycle
2010 cycle

For AZ, OH, MI we probably want to add as a separate “line item” the cost of the 2006 MW initiatives in those states.