

ACORN POLITICAL PROGRAM



2005-06 AND BEYOND

July 2005

The ACORN Political Program: Introduction

Built on a Base of Community Organizing

ACORN's political program is unique in that it is built on a solid base of **community organizing**. The 1200+ local ACORN neighborhood chapters in 86 cities and 33 states are powerful vehicles for civic engagement. These organizations are:

Permanent: Many local ACORN neighborhood chapters have been around for 10, 20 or more years – they have an institutional presence in their communities, much like the gun clubs and the churches of the right. ACORN maintains permanent offices in all 85 cities where we have neighborhood chapters, and we have a staff of 400 full-time year-round paid community organizers working out of these offices.

Indigenous: ACORN neighborhood chapters are membership-based organizations; they elect their own officers, choose their own priorities, and, through membership dues and other fundraisers, pay for their own operations. They communicate through neighbor-to-neighbor conversations, and their block captains and local officers are the “go-to” leaders in their communities.

Engaged: ACORN organizers reach out to potential members the old-fashioned way, through one-on-one, in-person conversations. Most ACORN members say that they had never been active in their community until an ACORN organizer knocked on their door, asked them about their concerns and their dreams, and then challenged them to join and become involved.

Active: ACORN neighborhood chapters meet monthly, and they take action on issues throughout the year, every year, regardless of election cycles; local ACORN chapters have an ongoing presence and reputation in their communities.

Successful: ACORN delivers for its members, winning real benefits for the communities, cities, and states where we are organized, including: improvements in local public schools; more affordable housing; curbs on predatory financial practices; better city services; higher minimum and living wage laws; and much more.

Credible: Not surprisingly, ACORN members are the “trusted advisors” on their blocks: when members talk to their neighbors about issues, campaigns, or politics, they are listened to. Polling results and informal surveys indicate that the ACORN “brand” is widely known and well-respected in the communities where we have chapters.

Leveraging our Community Organizations to Get Out the Vote

The ACORN political program is designed to leverage the unique attributes of our existing community organizations, **Importantly, we do not need to rebuild or re-create this program from scratch every election cycle.** ACORN's program:

Recruits local political activists from within our membership: We run a permanent program, year-in and year-out, to recruit, train, and manage volunteer precinct leaders who register their neighbors to vote, educate them on the issues, and then turn them out to the polls. These volunteer workers are supplemented by paid workers in election years, who are also recruited from our membership and our communities.

Focuses on the African-American, Latino, and lower-income white communities where we are organized: ACORN's political program operates primarily in the communities where we already have neighborhood chapters, so we are able to take advantage of our infrastructure and our credibility to run a successful program. Furthermore, these are the communities where registration and turnout are critical for progressive political outcomes. Within these communities, ACORN targets unregistered voters for voter registration, and newly registered and infrequent voters for our get-out-the-vote program.

Connects voter engagement to issue campaigns: The ACORN program explicitly connects the issues that ACORN chapters and members have been working on all year to the positions of candidates for office during the election season. Neighborhood residents who have been fighting for an increase in the minimum wage are more likely to turn out to vote for a candidate who supports that position – and ACORN is uniquely situated to get out the word on how the candidate stands.

Utilizes technology to increase the effectiveness of our activists: ACORN's voter program utilizes voter files to ensure that our local campaign workers have up-to-date information on the registration, voting history, and issue interests of their target population. ACORN is in discussions with America Votes and with a range of 501c3 voter engagement organizations on how to most effectively collaborate in sharing this data.

Is based on the latest research about what works: ACORN has worked with Professor Donald Green at Yale and other experts in the study of voter mobilization to design controlled experiments with a goal of figuring out how best to turn out our targeted voters. Based on these experiments, our standard program includes four personal visits to the voter's home and three GOTV phone calls, for a total of seven personal contacts.

Produces results: In the 2004 election cycle, ACORN recruited, trained, and mobilized 10,057 election activists; registered 1,131,768 new voters (more than any other organization), and reached 2.3 million newly registered and infrequent voters with 8,777,552 personal voter contacts.

Goals for 2006 and Beyond

Over the next several years ACORN plans to expand and deepen our political program, in part by reaching new communities, cities, and states with our community organizing program, and in part by increasing the capacity of our members and staff to do effective political work. Priorities include:

Increasing turnout through Minimum Wage ballot initiatives: As we demonstrated in our successful 2004 ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage in Florida, putting measures on the ballot that appeal to our targeted constituencies helps increase turnout among infrequent progressive voters. ACORN has begun similar Minimum Wage initiative campaigns in OH, MI, AZ, and CO, which (assuming we collect the necessary signatures) will all be on November 2006 ballots. All four of these states have important Gubernatorial, Senate, House and/or state legislative races that will be on the same ballot. Progressive candidates will benefit from the increased turnout of base voters that these initiatives will generate. In addition, candidates will be able to use their public support for the initiative to bring swing and independent voters – among whom raising the minimum wage polls at over 75% -- into their column.

Expanding our community organizing program: ACORN currently has permanent offices in 86 cities in 33 states. Over the next three years we will be opening offices and building local community organizations in another 60 cities, with a significant concentration of these new cities located in electorally significant states and congressional districts. This expanded base will dramatically increase the reach of our political program in the years ahead.

Recruiting and training more volunteer activists from within our membership: ACORN volunteer members are already active year round on ACORN issue campaigns as well as in our political program. In order to expand this involvement, we are currently implementing the ACORN Precinct Leader Action Network (PLAN), an organization-wide program to recruit, train, and mobilize ACORN members who will systematically conduct voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout drives among their neighbors.

Making sure every vote counts, and every vote is counted: In 2004 ACORN, in collaboration with Project Vote, began a non-partisan Election Administration program that took advantage of our direct on-the-ground knowledge of local election administration issues and our ability to reach and influence local public officials who had the ability to correct problems. We are expanding this program in 2005 and beyond, focusing on issues such as verifying new registrations and challenging voter roll purges. Our partners in this work include the Advancement Project, Project Vote, and the Brennan Center.

Collaborating with partner organizations on “state takeover” strategies: Within states, local ACORN chapters (existing and projected) are in legislative districts that are critical to coordinated strategies to win progressive majorities in state legislatures. We are and will be working with local partners, and especially state America Votes tables as they are formed, to develop comprehensive electoral plans aimed at building a governing majority in targeted states.

Conducting voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns in targeted states: See the attached narrative for a list of target states. In the 2005-6 election cycle, ACORN has a goal of registering 650,000 new voters, and a goal of mobilizing 1,500,000 new and infrequent voters during the 2005 and 2006 elections.

More Details on the Program

The following pages provide additional details on these aspects of the ACORN Political Program in the coming years:

- 1. 2006 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiatives**
- 2. Voter Registration and Voter Mobilization**
- 3. Precinct Leader Action Network (PLAN)**
- 4. Election Administration Program**
- 5. Sample State Level Plans**
- 6. Budget Summary**

2006 Minimum Wage Ballot Initiatives

In November 2004, voters in the “red“ states of Florida and Nevada overwhelmingly approved ballot initiatives to boost the minimum wage to \$6.15 and permanently index it to inflation. In Florida, the minimum wage passed with 71% of the vote, carrying every single county including those in the conservative panhandle. While delivering a raise to 850,000 workers, the minimum wage campaign also facilitated unprecedented registration of low-income, African-American, and immigrant voters and energized these constituents to participate in the political process.

With the federal government now less likely than ever to respond to the proliferation of low-wage, no benefits jobs in our economy, the Florida and Nevada experiences offer a roadmap for how organized communities with a plan can win new policies to protect working families even in traditionally conservative regions of the country. Building on these 2004 victories, labor-faith-community coalitions led by ACORN are developing campaigns to expand this strategy to new states in 2006. Ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage are now being planned and drafted for Arizona, Ohio, and Michigan, with serious interest emerging in Colorado.

These 2006 ballot initiatives will offer an important opportunity for restoring an adequate minimum wage to more regions of the country, while at the same time energizing low-income and minority voters.

What follows is a brief summary of the campaigns that are already underway:

Arizona

Political Opportunities

- Governor Napolitano (D) running for re-election
- Kyl (R) running for Senate re-election
- Anti-gay marriage initiative will drive turnout for the Right

Coalition Partners

ACORN, Arizona AFL-CIO, Arizona Education Association, AFSCME, Arizona Leadership Institute, ACT, the Firefighters, SEIU, UFCW

Campaign Summary

Arizona ACORN has organized a coalition to put a minimum wage initiative on November 2006 gubernatorial ballot. All the major coalition partners contributed to the cost of a March 2005 poll conducted by Lake Snell Perry Mermin & Associates that demonstrated overwhelming support for raising the minimum wage by Arizona voters. Legal support is being provided by the Brennan Center for Justice, Paul Weiss (NY) and Davis Cowell & Bowe (SF) nationally and by Andy Gordon locally. The coalition meets

bi-weekly, has developed an initial campaign plan and has almost finalized initiative language for submission.

Signatures

180,000 to be collected in order to insure sufficient number valid; will start on Labor Day

Likely wage

\$6.75 plus indexing

Michigan

Political Opportunities

- First-term Senator Stabenow (D) running for re-election
- First-term Governor Granholm (D) running for re-election
- Right-wing (Ward Connerly) anti-affirmative action initiative on 2006 ballot

Coalition Partners

UAW, SEIU, ACORN, AFSCME, Michigan Democratic Party, Michigan AFL-CIO, MFT

Campaign Summary

To provide the impetus for putting minimum wage on the November 2006 Michigan ballot, ACORN's first strategic step in Michigan this winter was to develop a partnership with the State House and Senate Democratic (minority) leadership to support and draw attention to Democrat-sponsored legislation to raise the minimum wage to \$7.15 plus annual indexing for inflation. Toward that end, ACORN conducted a "pledge drive" - complete with a successful media campaign - that allowed Michigan's Democratic legislators to go on record with their support of this critical issue while highlighting the Republican majority's refusal to allow the measure to come to a vote. Throughout the winter and spring, ACORN helped convene the state's largest 20 largest unions around the issue and conducted outreach to other key organizations to begin to lay the foundations for a broad-based steering committee. ACORN and the Brennan Center have recruited Wilmer Cutler Pickering to handle the legal work.

Signatures

Need to collect approx. 480,000 to insure sufficient number valid (330,000); will be collected January-June 2006.

Likely wage

\$7.15 plus indexing

Ohio

Political Opportunities

- Republican governor term-limited; hotly contested open seat
- Sen. DeWine (R) running for re-election
- Key 2008 Presidential battleground
- Number of marginal state races in districts that would be heavily impacted by a minimum wage increase

Coalition Partners

ACORN, Senate Minority Leader C.J. Prentiss, Ohio AFL-CIO, UFCW, SEIU, and Ohio Education Association

Campaign Summary

In Ohio, as in Michigan, Republicans who oppose raising the minimum wage control both houses of the legislature, so ACORN's initial work on the campaign was to provide support to the Senate Minority Leader - sponsor of a bill to increase the minimum wage to \$7.15 an hour plus indexing. ACORN and Senator C. J. Prentiss held news conference this Spring highlighting the need to raise wages for Ohio's low-wage working families and Senator Prentiss then led testimony in support of the bill. ACORN conducted a series of meetings with key organizational leaders for the first major coalition meeting that took place in May. With the steering committee formalized, draft language for the initiative is being developed by a legal team headed by the Brennan Center, Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler of New York, along with a local attorney experienced in Ohio initiative law. The language is set to be filed August 9, 2005.

Signatures

Need to collect approximately 500,000 in order to insure sufficient number valid; petitioning kickoff planned for Labor Day; major push planned for election day 2005

Likely wage

\$7.15 plus indexing

Colorado

Political Opportunities

- Republican governor seat open
- Democrats narrow control of statehouse means several marginal state races will be a major priority for both parties
- Three marginal Congressional seats open

Campaign Summary

In mid-July of 2005, the Colorado AFL-CIO and ACORN convened a meeting of Colorado political, legislative and organizational leaders and donors to review polling data and explore the prospect of including a minimum wage ballot measure as part of an

overall 2006 progressive electoral strategy in Colorado. Results from a June 2006 poll showed that an overwhelming 79% of Colorado voters favored a ballot measure to raise the minimum wage. The group asked ACORN and the CO AFL-CIO to head a task force to develop a proposed campaign plan for a minimum wage ballot measure and to report back to the full group by mid-September. This planning process is now underway.

Signatures

71,641 valid required

Voter Registration and Voter Mobilization

2005-06 Voter Participation Deliverables

- During the 2005-06 election cycle, ACORN will conduct voter participation work to the following states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.
- ACORN will register 650,000 voters over the course of the cycle using a combination of high-volume site and door-to-door canvass work, with a goal of between 6,000 to 140,000 registrations per state.
- ACORN will mobilize 1,500,000 new and infrequent voters over the course of the cycle (including 2005 and 2006 elections).

Project Description

In 2005, large-scale voter participation programs are important in New Jersey and Virginia, both of which have gubernatorial elections, and in California where Governor Schwarzenegger has called a November 8th special election in support of a series of right-wing ballot measures he has placed on the ballot. Large-scale programs in 2006 are of course critical given the large number of Senate, Gubernatorial, and House seats at stake, along with state legislative races in many states with closely balanced legislatures.

All of our priority states will need strong voter registration over the course of the cycle as approximately 17% of all households move during the course of a year. This turnover is even more pronounced in ACORN's constituency. Similarly, the 2005-06 GOTV programs face added opportunity and urgency this cycle in order to convert the large number of new and infrequent voters from the last election into habitual voters, a process that generally requires a minimum of 3 consecutive elections to take hold permanently.

A final reason to begin voter mobilization efforts now is that while ACORN demonstrated that it can ramp-up very quickly, such last minute efforts are extremely inefficient, both in terms of cost and quality control. Lengthening the time of the project reduces costs because this allows more time to train staff. This reduces turnover and increases the quality of the work. Further, most counties are not prepared to deal with tremendous influxes of voter registration cards over a short period of time and this situation leads to strained relationships between registration organizations and the local Boards of Election. A longer, steadier program can eliminate some of the stress of the

process and help maintain strong and positive relationships between local Boards and ACORN.

Project Methodology: Registration

ACORN is able to register literally hundreds of new voters every day from all around a neighborhood by working at “high volume sites”. High volume sites are simply places where large groups of people are continually coming and going, like bus stations, grocery stores or malls. All of our workers and volunteers are trained to approach people, capture their attention with an issue-based statement that encourages their participation, and have them fill out voter registration cards as they come and go from these sites. Filling out a registration card takes no more than a minute and our engaging and persistent workers register many people to vote every hour they are working.

ACORN also goes door to door in targeted precincts, registering people to vote, using the same methodology, connecting issues to voting, to get people engaged and motivated. Crew members speak to the person who answers the door, but also ask if there are other residents in the house who may not be registered. They also make sure that people who say they are registered are in fact registered at their current addresses, since there is a high rate of turnover in low-income communities, especially among renters.

Building on a program instituted in the past cycle to reach young voters, ACORN will be targeting high schools to reach voters who will be turning 18 during their senior year. Civic engagement school assemblies provide an opportunity to register a large number of young voters within a short period of time; afford the additional time to give young voters context for the importance of voting and how voting can impact their own lives; and involves a large part of the school community.

Project Methodology: Mobilization

Newly-registered and infrequent voters in low-income and minority communities are among the hardest voters to move to the polls. ACORN has overcome that challenge by recognizing that these voters are most likely to vote if they can connect the issues they care about with participation in the electoral process.

Get Out the Vote (GOTV) messaging is based on local issues, as identified by our members and community partners. For example, our 2004 GOTV messaging in Florida was tied to the state initiative to raise the minimum wage, a campaign conducted by Florida ACORN. Likewise, the messaging of our GOTV program in Washington State was tied to a statewide initiative to provide more funding for public education.

ACORN’s GOTV strategy of connecting low-propensity voters to the local issues is made real through a tested combination of many different tactics. Specific GOTV tactics include:

- Use of a voter file of new registrants and occasional voters in targeted precincts

- Ongoing door-to-door contacts, conducted by members, organizers and volunteers
- Ongoing recruitment of volunteers, by getting selected voters to sign “Count On Me” pledge cards to assist with GOTV efforts
- Intensive volunteer training
- Phone banking conducted by both professional vendors and local, supervised volunteers.
- Use of educational flyers and fact sheets to tie the importance of voting with ongoing local issue concerns and campaigns
- Use of election protection materials developed in cooperation with our election protection partners to help voters "know their rights"
- Use of high visibility materials such as door hangers and yard signs, urging people to vote
- Use of earned and (when funding permits) paid media
- Soliciting commitments for early vote and applications for vote (by mail in states where ease of regulations and cost-effectiveness)
- Assisting voters with vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot process (where applicable)

In addition to the flyers and the lawn and window signs that will proliferate in their communities, **every targeted voter will receive six contacts: Three personal visits and three GOTV phone calls.**

Precinct Leader Action Network (PLAN)

The Precinct Leader Action Network (PLAN) is a vehicle for recruiting, training, and mobilizing existing ACORN members so that they can become effective year-round electoral activists on their blocks and in their precincts. ACORN already has a massive network of active members who regularly engage their neighbors in campaigns to improve community safety, or reform their local public schools, or fight for more affordable housing. Through PLAN, these volunteer activists will expand this work to include a systematic program of voter education, registration, and mobilization. If PLAN members do their work effectively, we believe we can embed a culture of regular voting in the low income and minority communities we are targeting.

The key to the success of the PLAN is that this effort will rely on the volunteer efforts of the targeted voters themselves. For example, PLAN team members will take responsibility for researching issues, researching elections (such as the number of people registered in the precinct, the number that voted in the last election, the margin of victory for the winning candidate, etc.), reaching out to candidates, organizing candidate forums, etc. The goal of this work is to help citizens make the connections between the decisions that affect their lives and how the decision-makers can be influenced through the electoral process – and therefore increase voter participation in targeted communities over the long term.

An integral part of the PLAN program is a series of trainings and skill-building workshops. These events can cover a range of topics including 1) how to secure commitments from friends and neighbors to help with the work, 2) understanding the public policy decision-making process and the electoral process, 3) learning how to testify at hearings, 4) learning how to organize and turn people out for public forums, and 5) learning how to engage elected officials on issues of importance to the community.

PLAN Precinct Teams, headed by Precinct Captains, coordinate voter registration and education activities, such as precinct walks. They conduct regular, on-going outreach using the voter file in addition to their Election Day mobilization work. The PLANs organize popular education trainings to provide leaders with the skills to engage voters and to learn about the issues, candidates, and elections that concern their communities. Thus the PLAN works to connect electoral campaigns to issues that affect our members' daily lives, and ensures that voter engagement efforts occur year-round.

Through an intensive process of education and training, ACORN members active in their PLAN learn the following skills:

- Recruitment
 - Signing up Provisional/Associate Members
 - Organizing and Recruiting for House Parties
 - Tapping into existing networks

- Registering Voters
- Getting Commitments
 - To attend events
 - To vote in the next election
 - To register a certain number of voters
- Using a Voter File
 - For recruitment to events
 - To make phone calls
 - To do precinct walks.

Each PLAN will:

- Develop a Precinct Team of 3-5 people in at least 6-10 precincts for a total of between 1600 and 3200 precinct leaders.
- Develop a Precinct Captain that leads the team for a total of 310 captains.
- Each Precinct Team will aim to register and keep 90% of the CVAP registered.
- Do Monthly door-to-door outreach using the voter file.
- Each PLAN will hold a minimum of 4 popular education trainings each calendar year. Member leaders turnout and train community volunteers to do a precinct walk.

Election Administration Program

ACORN's voter registration, voter mobilization, and voter engagement programs are hugely successful at bringing new and infrequent voters into active participation in our democracy. However, as we have seen in recent election cycles, registering voters and moving them to the polls does not always guarantee their names will appear on the registration rolls or that their vote will be counted.

In 2004, ACORN embarked on an Election Administration Project to ensure voters were able to make their voices heard at the polls. In working with partner organizations, including the Advancement Project, Project Vote, the Brennan Center, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and the ACLU, we found that ACORN fills a unique need, with staff who are knowledgeable about election administration issues and who know how to organize communities in order to make things happen.

In 2004, we found local election administration bodies faced a number of challenges that disenfranchised citizens, particularly low-income and minority citizens. In particular, election bodies:

- **Lack capacity** and the resources to ensure that voters are able to vote easily at the polls. A chronic shortage of trained poll workers and voting machines along with under-funded election bodies make it difficult for people to register and to vote.
- **Lack of Access** of voters to their records. Many election inconsistency go unchecked because citizens don't have a way to monitor their own voting history. Compliance with Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to provide accessible statewide databases, while allowing citizen access through Public Access portals.
- **Failure to register new voters** in a timely manner, and failure to notify voters when their registration cards have been rejected. Confusing ballots and rigid regulations mean a high number of voter registration cards of legitimate voters are initially rejected.
- **Exhibit discrepancies between election administration law and local practice.** Provisional ballot guidelines, identification requirements, and other policies are confusing and implemented haphazardly.
- **Face partisan challenges and faulty purges** that remove valid voters from voter rolls.

In order to address these issues, ACORN is working locally with local, statewide, and national organizations to create fairer elections through measurable reforms. By developing relationships with local election officials, public office holders, experts, and community members, we are able to develop and implement policies and systems to increase capacity, streamline registration, and have fairer regulations. We will also

continue our voter verification and voter defense work to ensure the maximum number of voters have the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Developing Capacity

Training Poll Workers – To address the shortage of trained poll workers, we are working with leading academic experts to develop a training model for poll workers and testing the model in a target state, with plans to deliver the model to other states. Many local ACORN chapters are also working to recruit poll worker volunteers

Policies, Systems and Funding – We will be working to identify specific problems, both locally and at the state level, creating solutions with stakeholders, building public support for these solutions, and monitoring the implementation of the changes. To this end, we are working to build and strengthen a coalition around making fair elections a reality. To identify problems and discuss potential solutions, we are surveying and meeting with local election bodies, in addition to meeting with elected office holders. In our meetings with elected officials, coalition members will also identify and develop allies who support improving the election system and increasing funding for election administration.

Engaging the public and developing public support for fair election administration is a key component of our work. We will be organizing popular education meetings on the problems and proposed solutions, working with the media to put a human face on the reality of voting problems, and organizing citizens to testify at hearings and attend rallies. Coalition members will also work to be a part of the design teams and test teams of the new policies, in addition to monitoring the new systems as they are implemented.

Successfully Registering Voters

Simplifying Registration Cards – Often, voters are not registered simply for failing to check boxes or other small mistakes. The registration cards are often confusing and difficult to complete, particularly for those with disabilities or with low English literacy skills. ACORN is working with academic experts to develop a registration card that is easy to use, and we will be pushing for cards like these to be used in a number of states. In addition, we will continue to pressure election bodies that disenfranchise a large number of voters for simple mistakes to reinstate voters.

Voter Verification – All too often voter registration cards are rejected without the registrants receiving notification. ACORN reaches out to rejected voters by obtaining the list from the election board, and calling, mailing, or knocking on their doors to either correct the information or provide the voter with the election body's contact information or a new registration card. We plan to use a voter file to continually monitor the election body's record of registered voters and reach out to voters we registered who fail to appear on voter roles. In addition, we will be working with election bodies to develop systems for notifying voters of their registration rejection. We also must continue to advocate for more accessibility to election body records so that advocacy organizations like ACORN can reach out to voters who have difficulties.

National Voter Registration Act- ACORN chapters completed surveys evaluating the social services offices and providers required to offer registration to their clients as part of National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), yet many states are not in compliance with this law. Another success story from the 2004 cycle, and social service offices and providers. ACORN and our local coalition partners are in the process of building relationships with these agencies to improve compliance with the National Voter Registration Act. As such, ACORN working in 9 key states estimates an annual increase in voter registration through these agencies of 250,000 to 478,000 a year. .

Bridging the Law and Practice

While often a symptom of the shortage of resources and trained poll workers, greater monitoring of local election administration practices by coalition members, the development of relationships with local election administration bodies, and changes in policies will facilitate make elections run smoother and fairer.

Partisan Challenges and Faulty Purges

In 2004, we saw increased number of partisan based election day challengers at the polls. These challengers delivered messages intended to intimidate potential voters from voting. We will continue to work with allies against unfounded voter challenges and purges of legitimate voters from the voter rolls. Our excellent field capacity here has made a difference in the 2004 Ohio voter challenges, where we illustrated the validity of challenged voters and the discrimination in the challenges and created the necessary public pressure through the media and allied advocacy groups to drop the challenges.

By working with elected officials at the local and state level, and by developing our relationships with local election bodies, we will identify local problems and develop solutions within the first year of a three-year program. In the second year, we will advocate for changes by meeting with public officials and organizing public education and public support activities. In the third year, we will work with allies to monitor and test the changes, and evaluate our success in the fourth year. Through improved elections systems, voters will have confidence that their vote will be counted when they go to the polls.

Sample State Level Plans

We've included here state profiles of six of our most important targeted states, picking ones we think will be especially important for the life of this plan. Each profile outlines the political context for the state including discussion of upcoming elections, ACORN's 2004 accomplishments, the implications of redistricting in the state, and other factors that influence decisions regarding the development of progressive politics within the state. Similar state plans have been completed or are in development for the rest of the states that ACORN is targeting.

Arizona

Overview:

Arizona continues its rightward drift in politics—the election of a Democratic governor notwithstanding—despite the progressive potential of both the state’s considerable Latino population and the large numbers of low- and moderate-income voters who identify as independents. The challenge we take up is to help those groups identify with progressive politics and mobilize them.

ACORN has grown quickly in Arizona over the past 5 years, and we stand out as one of the very few grassroots organizations capable of mobilizing our base for political purposes. This position us to play a leadership role in plans to solidify existing progressive political gains in Arizona while also pushing the state in a more progressive direction. We are pursuing a number of strategies to make this happen.

ACORN continues to expand and deepen our neighborhood-based community organizing, partly by doing much more of our registration and mobilization through a neighborhood-based network of precinct leaders and member volunteers. ACORN and our allies are developing a more strategic and targeted political plan that focuses on electoral opportunities at every level of government. And we are using the state minimum wage ballot initiative campaign to help identify and mobilize a majority of voters who care about fairness for low wage workers. The minimum wage campaign, the signature gathering it requires, and the increased electoral capacity of base, will leave us even better positioned to lead progressive politics in Arizona.

ACORN Organization and Expansion

Maricopa County’s 3 million residents makes it the state’s population center and the fulcrum for political power. As a result, ACORN has built a formidable presence there, with offices and chapters in Phoenix, Mesa, and Glendale, and chapters in the smaller municipalities of Tolleson and Avondale near Glendale. ACORN also has office and chapters in the reliably Democratic county of Pima (Tucson), the state’s second largest county with almost 850,000 residents.

In Phoenix our chapters are in the largely Latino Western and Southern portions of the city, and we plan to continue to grow in these areas, and also in the Sunny Slope neighborhood in North Phoenix— a low- to moderate-income section of the city whose residents include both Latino and white families. In Tucson we are in the South and in the Northwest parts of the city, with the membership including about equal parts white and Latino residents, and will grow in both of these areas. Our Glendale and Mesa offices are newer; in both cities we are organizing in both white and Latino neighborhoods and have room to continue to grow in each city. Tolleson and Avondale are overwhelmingly Latino towns and we plan to be organize in all the towns’ neighborhoods

In 2003- 2004 ACORN ran significant voter registration and GOTV programs. One of our GOTV programs—to mobilize Latino voters in support of funding for Maricopa’s

public hospital—was part of a controlled political science field experiment designed and analyzed by Yale Professor Donald Green, a national expert on voter participation. Green found that “ACORN’s campaign increased turnout from 7.4% in the control group to 15.9% in the treatment group. Among the 2,622 two-voter households, the effects were even larger. The control group voted at 6.9% and the treatment group at 21.0%.” He concluded that “Among Latinos in the targeted precincts, voter turnout more than doubled when voters were mobilized by ACORN canvassers. But despite the prove effectiveness of our GOTV program, electoral participation levels among Latino citizens in Arizona remain very low.

Voter Registration and GOTV:

ACORN 2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Maricopa County		55,952
<i>Maricopa (Avondale)</i>	185	
<i>Maricopa County (Glendale)</i>	22,731	
<i>Maricopa County (Phoenix)</i>	21,473	
<i>Maricopa County (Mesa)</i>	11,563	
Navajo Reservation		103
Pima County (Tucson)		20,985
Total		77,040

*Voters targeted for GOTV by ACORN and contacted at least 3- 4 times in the weeks leading up to the election: **65,076***

2005-06 Plans

In this context, with a contested Gubernatorial race, and what looks likely to be an extremely well funded (self funded) Democratic campaign to contest Senator Kyle’s seat, along with our minimum wage campaign, ACORN expects to do substantial amounts of voter registration and GOTV in Arizona in this election cycle.

The 2004 Presidential election was not particularly close in Arizona; there was a 10.5% spread between the two candidates. However, that 210 to 211 thousand vote difference was still only about half of the minority Arizona citizens eligible to vote in that election who did not go to the polls. The rates of electoral participation by minority voters in Arizona remained particularly low even in that high turn out election. Of course many people who voted in 2004 are not likely to vote in the up-coming off year elections, but it will be an important task to keep those numbers from dropping relative to the rest of the electorate, and indeed to push them to increase relatively.

Redistricting

Since passage of proposition 106 in 2000, Both Congressional and State Legislative redistricting in Arizona are controlled by a non-partisan commission. The State Legislative districts they drew, and which were used in 2004, were thrown out by the court in 2004, and the commission is expected to produce new district maps by this fall. It

is likely that the new maps will increase the number of competitive State Legislative seats, and the opportunities for successful Democratic challenges.

Congressional, State, and Local Elections

Arizona ACORN is thinking aggressively about organizing, identifying, and mobilizing progressive voters around the minimum wage campaign and around community issues in both “red” and “blue” portions of the state with the goal of holding the elected officials representing our members neighborhoods accountable for dealing with neighborhood problems, and with the goal of building up a critical mass of voters engaged around ACORN issues.

As we think about 2006, we are focusing particularly on the area which includes South Glendale, Avondale and Tolleson, (District 10 - currently represented by Republicans in the State Senate and House); on central Mesa, a part of District 21, where all seats are held by particularly conservative Republicans; and on the Sunny Slope section in Phoenix (District 20), all of which are areas where ACORN’s constituency could play a more important, and even a decisive role, in determining electoral outcomes.

There are active Arizona ACORN chapters in 4 Congressional districts, including 2 currently represented by Republicans, although we do not currently have a membership base in the district currently considered most likely to see a change of party control – the very large first district in the north and east of the state.

For 2005, as we begin strengthening our membership based electoral structure, we will work not only on the minimum wage campaign, but also on local elections in Phoenix and in Tucson.

Other Key Projects

This year ACORN has led the development of an Arizona coalition to raise the state minimum wage through a ballot initiative campaign. Organizations committed to playing a major role along with ACORN include SEIU, the Arizona Education Association, the Maricopa Area Labor Federation, AFSCME Council 97, along with community and religious institutions like Lutheran Advocacy, Arizona Leadership Institute, Church of Beatitudes, St. Matthews Church, and others. Polling on the minimum wage in Arizona has found that increasing the wage rate has even more support here than it did at a comparable early moment of the campaign in Florida, where the proposal ACORN put on the ballot ultimately carried 71% of the vote. Virtually all demographic groups in the state support an increase along the lines of what the coalition will propose, and key voting groups do so overwhelmingly. For example 96% of infrequent Latino Democratic voters either strongly or moderately support the proposal, and 64% said it would make them more interested in voting. Ballot language is being completed now, and we expect to begin gathering signatures by the end of the summer; 123,000 valid signatures are required.

ACORN’s plan for work on the minimum wage will focus first on a member and volunteer driven signature-gathering effort. We want our members to “own” their blocks

and precincts through a door-to-door and neighbor-to-neighbor project of collecting signatures and commitments to work on the campaign and to vote, building lines of communication and mobilization from household to household. ACORN and our coalition partners will collect the remaining signatures outside of these core areas with a paid crew.

2005-2006 State and Federal Contested Races

US Senate: *none*

US House: 01 Rick Renzi, Lean R

Governor: Janet Napolitano (D),
Cook says Likely to be re-elected
Voted in by 46% last election

Margin of Presidential win

54.9% of votes for Bush, 44.4% for Kerry

10.5 percentage points

2,012,585 votes total

1,104,294 for Bush

893,524 for Kerry

210,770 more votes for Bush than Kerry

For information by county, <http://www.azsos.gov/results/2004/general/GEN-100.htm>

Party affiliation of state legislature: R

House: 38 R

22 D

60 Total

16 more R than D

Senate: 18 R

12 D

30 Total

6 more R than D

Party affiliation of current Governor: D

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: Commission

For Congress: Commission

California

Overview

California's political context includes solid Democratic majorities in both houses of the legislature and in its Congressional delegation; a Republican Governor who was – until very recently – extremely popular; a general reputation for being “liberal”; and a history of conservative victories in the very frequently used initiative process. The most infamous of these is Proposition 13, which continues to have dire consequences for the state's educational system, and also includes the more recent anti - affirmative action propositions, and the defeat of a pay or play health care measure signed by Davis in the final days of his administration. Taken together, California is at once an important battlefield full of contradictions and a place ripe with opportunities for aggressive progressive politics.

The state is the first in the nation with a majority “minority” population; at the same time other population shifts mean that California is growing fastest in those - mostly suburban - areas that have traditionally been conservative strongholds such as Orange County and the Inland Empire. ACORN is the only grassroots community organization in the state which has both an established presence in the state's mega cities, and an aggressive plan already underway to organize in the growing population centers outside of them, areas which we recognize as significantly populated by immigrant families, and by low- and moderate- income families of all races.

ACORN has a strong history of both local and statewide political and legislative work in California, including playing a significant role in voter registration, GOTV, and neighborhood based campaigning in races like the recent election of Antonio Villaraigosa in LA. Our history also includes work in issue based campaigns both statewide and locally, including the voter education and turn out that were crucial to securing passage of Just Cause eviction measure in Oakland, as well as increasing turnout (for an important Gubernatorial election) substantially in the precincts we worked. We have conducted ambitious statewide signature gathering, like our recent work gathering 150,000 signatures in about 8 weeks for a series of union-led initiative efforts, and statewide legislative campaigns that have taken on tough and well funded opponents and pushed normally business-friendly Democrats and Republicans to support pro-consumer and protean legislation, campaigns that involved work in key districts around the state, as well as sustained local organizing, and a sophisticated presence in Sacramento. We also have a history of building effective partnerships with a wide range of groups around the state, including labor, consumer and tenant advocacy organizations, and other community based groups.

Our base building, expansion, and successful use of a wide array of tactics and strategies for issue organizing, increasing voter participation among lower income and minority voters, and holding elected officials accountable puts ACORN in good position to be a key player in realizing the potential of a more genuinely accountable and progressive future for California politics. We think the state's political culture of increasing governance by initiative makes building deeply rooted local organizations

within a statewide network particularly important. Only trusted neighborhood voices with experience communicating through a network of channels built over time have a hope of being heard in the face of money-driven media campaigns in favor of often disguised proposals that would hurt working families and communities.

ACORN Organization and Expansion

California ACORN has grown rapidly in the past 5 years, leaping from 4 to 12 offices. We now have organizing operations and chapters in Los Angeles, San Diego, Sacramento, Oakland, San Jose, San Francisco, Fresno, Contra Costa County, Orange County, San Bernardino County, Long Beach, and Chula Vista. At this point California ACORN members have a permanent presence in 27 (of 80) State House districts and a track record of doing work in another 18.

In addition to continuing to grow these existing organizations, and in particular to dramatically increase the range of our organizing in Los Angeles, including opening 3 satellite offices in different parts of the city, our expansion plans for the remainder of 2005 include opening offices in Stockton and Riverside. By the end of 2006 we will also have offices in San Mateo County (directly to the south of San Francisco) and Bakersfield. Next in line in our expansion plans are smaller cities in Orange County and the Inland Empire where we believe we can organize out of existing offices: Anaheim from Orange County, Ontario and Fontana from San Bernardino County, and Palm Springs out of Riverside.

Voter Registration and GOTV

ACORN 2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Alameda County (Oakland)	5,771
Contra Costa Co (Bay Point)	1,920
Fresno County (Fresno)	283
Los Angeles County (L.A.)	10,401
Sacramento County (Sacramento)	1,217
San Diego County (San Diego)	1,321
San Francisco County (San Francisco)	16,723
Santa Clara County (San Jose)	766
Total	38,402

Voters registered in 2003-2004 by ACORN: 38,402

2005-06 Plans

With important legislative issues on the ballot in both 2005 (unless the 2005 special election is called off entirely) and 2006, and an important and increasingly likely to be closely contested Gubernatorial election in 2006, ACORN expects to do considerable voter registration and GOTV work around the state. Voter registration and

participation rates remain significantly lower in minority communities, and especially amongst Latino citizens in California, and programs to engage these potential voters around efforts to improve their communities, and affect issues they care about will be crucial in determining the direction of the state as a whole.

Redistricting

Redistricting is currently controlled by the legislature, whose Democratic majority has in recent years opted for protecting very safe seats, rather than producing more competitive districts.

Governor Schwarzenegger's redistricting proposal will not be on the ballot in 2005 (it was disqualified because the petition language and the approved initiative language were different from each other), unless the ruling is overturned. It is certainly possible that a similar proposal will reappear in future years, and if it succeeds the electoral map will look different. It seems likely, however, that the growing suburban and central valley areas in which ACORN is building a presence would only increase in importance.

Congressional, State, and Local Races

There are no Congressional races in California considered likely to be close in 2006. Many of the State Legislative races considered "swing" - including both seats currently held by Democrats where Republicans could be competitive, and (fewer) seats held by Republicans where Democrats could be competitive - are found in the Central Valley, on the one hand, and the Inland Empire on the other. Both areas are the site of recently-opened ACORN offices and we are in the process of opening more.

Other Key Projects

Statewide Education Organizing

In addition to our other local, regional, and statewide work, ACORN has begun an ambitious multiyear schools organizing project, in partnership with the teachers unions, other unions, and education advocacy organizations. This campaign aims both to involve parents and community residents in demanding improvements on a range of school problems - from the poor quality of meals to the absence of qualified teachers, and adequate teacher training programs - and, even more ambitiously, to build the massive base of Californians necessary to take on one of the fundamental problems afflicting the state's educational system: the funding limitations created by Proposition 13.

Initiative Projects

ACORN has a history of strong work on initiative efforts in California, and this work will increase in scope over the next few years. We began this initiative cycle with Citizens Services, Inc (CSI), a sister organization dedicated to gathering signatures for progressive ballot initiatives nationwide, collecting 150,000 signatures for the progressive coalition's set of ballot proposals, and we expect to play a major role in the ground campaign around those that have made it on the ballot, most notably the prescription drug proposal.

2005-2006 State and Federal Contested Races

US Senate: *none*

US House: *none* – potential open seat Duke Cunningham (R) CA-50 may retire

Governor: *Arnold Schwarzenegger (R)*

Cook says Likely to be re-elected

Elected by 49% last election

Margin of Presidential win

54.4% of votes for Kerry, 44.4% for Bush

10 percentage points

12,590,863 votes total

6,745,485 for Kerry

5,509,826 for Bush

1,235,659 more votes for Kerry than Bush

For information by county,

http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/sov/2004_general/formatted_pres_detail.pdf

Party affiliation of state legislature: D

House: 48 D

32 R

80 Total

16 more D than R

Senate: 25 D

15 R

40 Total

10 more D than R

Party affiliation of current Governor: R

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: State Legislature

For Congress: State Legislature

Florida

Overview

The overwhelming victory - with 71 % of the vote - of the ACORN-led ballot initiative campaign to increase the minimum wage in Florida was particularly striking in the context of the generally bleak state of progressive forces there. (Democrats losing additional legislative seats each election cycle in recent years, a deeply conservative Governor, the switch of one Senate seat from D to R in 2004, and - despite all of ACORN's, ACT's and many others' work - a shift from a Gore victory in actual votes cast in 2000 to a Bush victory in 2004). The minimum wage victory was one indication that a majority of Florida voters can and will be on our side if we pick the issues and opportunities correctly.

Going forward Florida ACORN wants to play a key role in finding and engaging that majority constituency on statewide and federal issues. We see getting and keeping our core membership engaged in the political process so that they form a growing part of the electorate as one key piece of this goal; choosing and working on statewide issues where we can win victories for Florida families, workers, and consumers as another piece; and working to hold elected officials at all levels of government accountable around these issues as a third component.

The building blocks of this plan include deepening the level of permanent organization in key areas around the state; continuing the voter registration and GOTV work we did in 2004; defending the initiative and voter registration processes that made those actions possible; beginning to work in the State Legislature and in state and local races; and building Precinct Leader Action Networks to work on both issue and electoral campaigns.

Permanently increasing levels of electoral participation in the African-American and some parts of the Latino community in Florida is one important part of pushing politics statewide back in a progressive direction. We think that the combination of election year registration and GOTV programs, with longer term organization building which develops structures of communication and participation in the neighborhoods, and repeatedly makes connections between elected officials' decisions and what happens back home is the most likely strategy to accomplish this end.

Developing opportunities to focus Cuban voters in Miami-Dade County on economic and neighborhood issues, rather than the single foreign policy area in which a majority holds more conservative views, is another area where ACORN's strategy of building lasting community organizations that start with a very local focus provides opportunities for progress. In Hialeah and Miami we will continue to build a Latino membership around local issues and begin to mobilize people around issue campaigns. We will also use state and local races in ways that hold elected officials accountable for their positions on those issues, be they the lack of quality affordable housing, outrageous car insurance rates, or electric company policies with no protections against summer time

turnoffs for seniors and the disabled. These Latino voters are another important potential component of a more progressive majority statewide.

In other areas we will hold Democratic House and Senate legislators accountable to their constituency and not special interests.

ACORN Organization around the state

ACORN now has offices and local neighborhood chapters in Miami, Fort Lauderdale (and elsewhere in Broward County), Palm Beach, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Hialeah, Orlando, Jacksonville. Additional offices will open in Tallahassee by the fall, and Gainesville by the end of the year. Pensacola is next on the list after that. We will then be in all of the state's largest cities, and in cities with the largest minority populations in the state (everywhere but Key West, which doesn't really count). In addition, as demonstrated by our signature gathering, VR, and GOTV efforts last year, we have the capacity to quickly open additional offices to do discrete pieces of political work elsewhere in the state as needed.

Voter Registration and GOTV

ACORN 2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Dade County (Miami)	58,749
Alachua County (Gainesville)	5,972
Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale)	24,048
Broward County (Hollywood)	9,769
Duval County (Jacksonville)	16,548
Escambia County (Pensacola)	1,952
Hillsborough County (Tampa)	26,688
Leo County (Tallahassee)	12,598
Orange County (Orlando)	21,040
Osceola County (Orlando)	789
Palm Beach County (Boca & Lake Worth)	11,032
Pinellas County (St. Petersburg)	11,035
Polk County (Bartow)	304
Seminole County (Sanford)	1,686
Volusia County (Daytona Beach)	8,490
Total	210,700

*Voters targeted for GOTV by ACORN, and who received at least 3 –4 contacts in the weeks leading up to the election: **622,084***

2005 –2006 Plans

We expect that in 2005- 06 the contested Senate race for Bill Nelson’s seat (which leans Democratic) and the Governors race (which is a likely Republican victory) will generate substantial interest in voter registration and GOTV activity in ACORN’s core neighborhoods, and we are gearing up for major efforts, including both paid workers and volunteer registration and GOTV work through our membership and PLAN networks.

There continues to be enormous room for increasing minority voter participation in Florida; a few numbers provide some sense of scope of the space in which ACORN intends to work here. The almost 1 million unregistered minority voting age citizens in the state are almost three times the 380,000-plus margin in the 2004 Presidential contest; and according to census self reporting, only 44.8% of the state’s more than 1.5 million African-American potential voters in fact voted last year, along with only 34% of the state’s more than 1.4 million potential Latino voters.

Redistricting

Today committees of the State Legislature draw both state and federal legislative lines, and with lines drawn as they are, there is virtually no prospect of a change of partisan control in either house. ACORN has therefore chosen to commit Citizens Services Inc. (CSI), a sister organization dedicated to gathering signatures for progressive ballot initiatives nationwide, as the lead contractor in an effort to collect the 610,000 valid signatures necessary to put an initiative on the ballot to shift redistricting to a non-partisan commission. We expect to be successful in the signature gathering, and to work with our allies towards passage of the proposal.

Congressional, State, and Local Politics

ACORN has active members in Fort Lauderdale and Broward County and Palm Beach County in the Florida 22nd Congressional District currently held by Clay Shaw, and likely to be a hotly contested race in 2006, and we plan to continue to grow in the something like 20% of the district which is substantially inhabited by low and moderate income families.

In the rest of the state, ACORN is now developing our plans with regard to registration and GOTV work on a few selected State Legislative races, and the ACORN political action committee is likely to make a number of endorsements and do partisan work in a few local and state contests. The most likely areas for work include:

- Miami, where there is an open State House seat in Little Havana (the 107th district),
- St. Petersburg area in an open State Senate seat, currently held by Republican Jim Sebesta, a competitive race is developing. In this same area there are a number of open House seats and Jim Davis’ congressional seat. The Davis seat will be open as well because of his run for Governor (the 11th CD – a pretty solidly Democratic seat). In this area, to build capacity for 2006, we expect to do electoral work in the 2005 St. Petersburg city commission race.

- There are also potentially interesting races in the Orlando area, including a Democratic primary race and a vulnerable Republican House member (Quiñones in the 49th District, who won with 52.4% of the vote in 2004) in whose district ACORN has members, and plans to continue organizing more.

Other Key Projects

Save the Voters Voice

As the whole country knows well, voting rights and fair election processes have been under severe attack in Florida. ACORN is playing a leadership role in defending an open voter registration process, and access to the polls. On a related but distinct front, conservative forces, which once supported the initiative process in Florida, are now – firmly in control of the legislature and Governorship - campaigning hard against it, and ACORN is likewise playing a leading role in defending the mechanism which made the minimum wage victory possible, and which we and our allies see as a mechanism for continuing political change in the state.

This past legislative session ACORN helped prevent the passage of a number of anti-democratic measures with regard to both the initiative process and elections in general (including, for example, a bill which created a whole new set of felonies for electoral crimes such as not turning in voter registration cards swiftly, or for photocopying registration forms).

Now we are reconvening a “Save the Voters Voice” coalition made up of the range of groups doing voter registration and mobilization along with initiative work in the state. With Save the Voters Voice we will closely monitor election administration processes and procedures (including the new restrictions which we were unable to prevent passage of this session), along with preparing a legislative and campaign strategy to defend the initiative process, and against the next round of attacks on voting rights. This will likely include introducing proactive legislation to create a statutory initiative process (at present you can only amend the constitution, and not simply vote on new law) along with battling changes that would effectively make initiatives impossible, and preparing a campaign strategy for process changes that do pass the legislature (as one to require a supermajority for passage did this year) and will then appear on the 2006 ballot.

Wal-Mart Organizing

ACORN and our union partners have begun organizing Wal-Mart workers and former Wal-Mart workers in a number of cities in Central Florida, and these campaigns are quickly engaging us in City and County policy and electoral work with regard to healthcare and zoning requirements for large employers. These efforts also are expanding the ACORN family of organizations base, and mobilizing community residents to take political action.

2005-2006 State and Federal Contested Races

Senate: Bill Nelson (D), Lean D (*against Katherine Harris?*)

House: 22 Clay Shaw (R), Lean R

Governor: Open, Toss Up (*Jeb Bush term-limited*)

Margin of Presidential win

52.1% of votes for Bush, 47.1% for Kerry

5 percentage points

7,609,810 votes total

3,964,522 for Bush

3,583,544 for Kerry

380,978 more votes for Bush than Kerry

For information by county,

<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/elections/resultsarchive/Index.asp?ElectionDate=11/2/04&DATAMODE=>

Party affiliation of state legislature: R

House: 84 R

36 D

120 Total

48 more R than D

Senate: 26 R

14 D

40 Total

12 more R than D

Party affiliation of current Governor: R

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: State Legislature

For Congress: State Legislature

Michigan

Overview

In Michigan – a presidential battleground with contested races in ‘06 for both Senate and Governor in which Democrats seek to retain seats they now hold – ACORN has launched an aggressive medium-term effort to promote and drive a ballot initiative to increase the minimum wage, giving a running start to a longer term plan to build sustained community organizations in at least 5-6 parts of the state, and issue-based canvass and membership capacity in strategic areas statewide. After running a huge GOTV operation in the state last year, ACORN has already been able to catalyze engagement by major players across the state in this minimum wage plan.

As was the case in Florida two years ago, ACORN began this effort with a permanent operation in only one Michigan city, Detroit (although we have done voter registration and GOTV in other parts of the state as well), but will emerge with offices and a track record across the state. ACORN and our allies will use the minimum wage effort to drive and organize signature gathering, voter identification, voter registration, and GOTV around this tremendously popular issue.

In addition to the elements that are similar to the Florida campaign, we believe there are additional opportunities in Michigan to have a major impact, and to build a lasting infrastructure. Of course, Michigan begins with a much stronger existing network of progressive organizations, most notably labor, and here these organizations are eagerly participating in the campaign from the outset. Our own plans also call for a signature gathering and message delivery strategy that depends much more on building and activating members and volunteers, rather than a paid staff of petitioners. Between the two, there is a greater opportunity to use the campaign as an organizing vehicle in a more thorough way. In addition, there is already a greater identification between the issue campaign and elected legislators and candidates, which will help magnify the message, and the impact of the message, around fair wages and tie them to particular races.

ACORN Organization and Expansion

ACORN’s plan in Michigan includes growing the existing ACORN organization in Detroit dramatically, and establishing new offices and chapters in the short term in Flint, Lansing, Saginaw and Grand Rapids. Staff for Flint and Lansing are ready to go, and the offices will be open by the end of July, and Saginaw and Grand Rapids by the fall. After these, our medium- to long-term plans include opening offices in Muskegon, Wayne County outside of Detroit, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, and Jackson.

In addition to building traditional ACORN organization in low-income urban areas, ACORN has already begun a program of recruiting Associate and Provisional members in suburban and more moderate- to middle-income areas of the state through a canvass, beginning even before traditional ACORN organizing gets under way. We have started with a canvass focused on asking for support for increasing the minimum wage, in moderate-income white neighborhoods in and around Lansing.

Voter Registration and GOTV

2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Berrien County	740
Genesse County (Flint)	938
Kalamazoo County (Kalamazoo)	1,460
Kent County (Grand Rapids)	1,531
Oakland County (Pontiac)	3,314
Wayne County (Detroit)	68,932
Total	76,175

*Voters targeted for GOTV in 2003-04 by Project Vote and who received at least 3-4 contacts in the weeks before the election: **318,771***

Michigan now has an extremely high rate of voter registration, and in 2004 ACORN's large voter registration program was complemented by an even larger GOTV program. The 318,000 people we reached with GOTV messages were about 6.5 % of the total electorate in 2004, and 1.9 times the vote difference between Kerry and Bush.

2005-06 Plans

With two contested statewide races (for Senate and for Governor) in 2006, along with our minimum wage campaign, we expect once again to do substantial voter registration and GOTV work in the next two years, both through paid staff and through member volunteers working to register and contact their neighbors and friends.

Redistricting

In Michigan the State Legislature controls redistricting (or reapportionment, as it is called in the state) for both its own member districts and for Congressional districts. Republicans currently hold a 6-vote majority in each house (6 of 38 in the Senate, and 6 of 110 in the House), and substantial majorities on the respective redistricting committees. Observers in Michigan, however, believe that with an aggressive and coordinated plan, the Democrats can win a majority in at least one of the two houses in the next three election cycles before redistricting decisions are made.

Congressional, State, and Local Politics

Despite continuing to elect Democrats to many statewide offices, Michigan's legislature is majority Republican in both houses, with a 6-seat Republican advantage in each. As we build statewide, we will prioritize areas where we believe we can have an impact on State Legislative races, as well as statewide and federal contests.

Priority areas will include increasing voter participation in minority and low-income communities, both in areas that are already parts of solidly democratic districts at the state and federal level (like Detroit) and those like Lansing or Pontiac. Lansing is part of the sometimes-close 8th Congressional district once held by now Senator Stabenow (before redistricting tilted it more Republican). Pontiac, with its large African-American Democratic-leaning population in the 9th CD, has recently voted solidly Republican for Congress and Democratic for President. Priorities will also include building networks of members and voters concerned about issues like raising the minimum wage in more “swing” turf, as we are already doing.

At the State Legislative level, ACORN is already in discussions about registration, GOTV, and issue canvassing / voter persuasion work that we may be able to do in a number of the 3 Senate districts and 4 House districts identified as most hotly contested for 2006. Among the contested districts are House seats 51 and 91, which include pieces of Flint and of Muskegon, respectively; and Senate district 32, which includes the area from the outskirts of Saginaw all the way to near Lansing; and Senate district 17, which includes the city of Muskegon.

We have also already begun to tie the minimum wage effort to State Legislative positions through a pledge signing effort, in which ACORN members, staff and our allies approached every member of the legislature and asked them to sign a statement promising to support an increase in the minimum wage. Every Democrat except for two in the legislature signed the pledge, and every Republican refused to do so. Signature gatherers and GOTV workers on the minimum wage campaign will thus have the opportunity to inform voters about candidates’ position on this issue as they gather support. And candidates can choose to highlight their choices in the context of a grassroots campaign to raise the minimum wage.

Other Key Projects

Minimum Wage Ballot Initiative Coalition

The minimum wage coalition, which Michigan ACORN has catalyzed, already includes all of the largest labor organizations in the state along with other faith-based and community groups. Democratic leadership from both houses of the legislature, along with the Governor, has also already expressed their interest and support.

The coalition expects to have to gather between 290,000 and 320,000 valid signatures (depending on whether our proposal is ultimately a statutory or constitutional one; we will know by Labor Day), and ACORN is proposing to take responsibility for 1/2 of these, which we will gather through a combination of member volunteers working with their families, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow church members, alongside a paid effort.

In addition to the signature gathering and campaign work with our members, ACORN is planning to take responsibility for working with independent community-based, service and other similar organizations around the state to engage them in the minimum wage effort and in signature gathering.

Progressive Michigan

The American Votes Table, which ACORN worked closely with last year on our voter registration and GOTV efforts, is in the process – moved in part by ACORN’s convening of the minimum wage coalition - of reformulating, expanding and reestablishing itself as a coalition that can make comprehensive statewide plans together under the name of Progressive Michigan. ACORN is arguing that this group, which includes substantial union presence in the state, Citizen Action groups, environmental groups, women’s organizations and more, should take up the minimum wage campaign as one of its key initial efforts. ACORN leaders have already done over a dozen presentations on the minimum wage campaign to clubs, community groups and town hall meetings.

2006 Contested Races

Senate: Debbie Stabenow (D), Lean D

House: *none*

Governor: Jennifer Granholm (D), Lean D

Voted in by 51% last election

Margin of Presidential win

51.2% of votes for Kerry, 47.8% for Bush

3.4 percentage points

4,839,25 votes total

2,479,183 for Kerry

2,313,746 for Bush

165,437 more votes for Kerry than Bush

For information by county,

<http://miboecfr.nicusa.com/election/results/04GEN/01000000.html>

Party affiliation of state legislature: R

House: 58 R

52 D

110 Total

6 more R than D

Senate: 22 R

16 D

38 Total

6 more R than D

Party affiliation of current Governor: D

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: State Legislature

For Congress: State Legislature

Ohio

Overview

Having opened our first office in Ohio only 4 years ago, ACORN is now building permanent organization in 5 cities, and has launched a major effort to put on the ballot and pass an initiative to increase the state minimum wage. As in Michigan and Arizona, we plan to use the initiative as a vehicle to engage our membership along with others across the state in the issue campaign and electoral work, gathering substantial numbers of signatures through a volunteer leadership process in addition to using paid efforts.

Meanwhile, we have begun the process of building active groups in all the largest metropolitan areas of Ohio, in both low- and moderate-income African-American and white communities (along with the smaller Latino population in Cleveland and elsewhere), which are working on local issues ranging from healthcare to neighborhood safety along with the statewide ballot initiative.

We see the combination of these efforts as key to maintaining and expanding the level of electoral participation by more progressive voters in the state, along with playing a role in pushing voter alignment along axes of community concerns and economic security.

ACORN Organization And Expansion

ACORN has offices and active membership chapters in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, and most recently Akron, and we expect to open an additional office in Dayton by the end of the summer. Our organization growth in Ohio in the years to come will include deepening the level of organization and increasing the number of active chapters in these cities, along with likely adding additional focus in the suburbs/small cities to the Southeast and east of Columbus with substantial low- and moderate-income white populations, and in the Mahoning Valley area stretching between Akron, Canton and Youngstown. In most of these Ohio cities and their surrounding areas there are ACORN chapters with predominantly African-American membership working alongside chapters with predominantly white membership, along with some multi-racial chapters where individual neighborhoods are themselves more multiracial.

Voter Registration and GOTV

ACORN 2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Cuyahoga County (Cleveland)	59,867
Franklin County (Columbus)	53,064
Hamilton County (Cincinnati)	30,080
Lorain County (Elyria)	2,093

Lucas County (Toledo)	32,174
Total	177,278

Voters targeted for GOTV by ACORN and who received at least 3-4 contacts in the weeks before the election: 377,058

2005 – 06 Plans

With an important and hotly contested Governor’s race along with our minimum wage ballot initiative, ACORN plans to do substantial GOTV and some voter registration work in Ohio in 2005- 2006.

There are important opportunities in Ohio for continued voter registration and GOTV work in minority communities to have a significant impact on the state’s politics. One glimpse of the extent to which this is true is provided by the fact that Bush defeated Kerry in Ohio by a 118,651 vote margin, while there were at least 350,000 (according to self reporting to the Census) minority voters who did not go to the polls.

Redistricting

The State Legislature, which has very substantial Republican majorities in both houses, controls redistricting for Congressional seats. For the Legislature, redistricting is controlled by an Apportionment Board, which includes the Governor, the Secretary of State, and the State Auditor, along with members chosen by the majority and minority leaders of both houses. Building a statewide progressive majority is thus the decisive factor for the redistricting process.

There is considerable debate within Ohio political circles about a possible redistricting initiative to be placed on the ballot in 2006; it appears more likely that this will not happen, but that such a project will be considered again in 2008, at which time ACORN will be well positioned to play a major role.

Congressional, State, and Local Politics

One Ohio Congressional seat, the 6th in the rural southeast of the state, is considered a toss up for 2006 when the popular incumbent runs for Governor. ACORN does not expect to build an organizing base in this part of the state, but we are hopeful that the minimum wage campaign will provide a (rare in Ohio) proactive progressive agenda around which to work in this largely low-income area, and much initial discussion around the campaign has focused on ways this may be done.

It is also worth noting that ACORN’s membership and immediate expansion plans include many areas of Ohio currently represented in Congress by Republicans. Few of these seats are currently close, but many include substantial numbers of ACORN constituency voters (for example, the 12th CD in Columbus, where 22% of the electorate is African-American) and are places where increasing organization and electoral participation will be important in holding office holders of either party more accountable to this piece of their electorate, as well as potentially important in the longer run to shifting party control.

ACORN expects to do substantial work in local elections in 2005, especially in Columbus and Cleveland, as a piece of working towards meaningful victories for our members on their city wide campaigns, and as a step in the process of building permanent and effective voter mobilization mechanisms in these areas.

Other Key Projects

Minimum Wage Campaign

ACORN has successfully built a coalition in Ohio committed to putting an increase in the state minimum wage on the ballot for 2006. The coalition already includes the largest labor organizations in the state, major faith based groups, housing and other advocacy organizations with a history of effective political work, and continues to grow. The effort has also already been tied into action in the state legislature; the Senate minority leader, with ACORN's support, introduced a bill to increase the minimum wage this session, and the Republican leadership refused to allow the measure to come to a vote.

Ballot language for the initiative is being finalized now, and we expect to begin collecting the just over 286,000 valid signatures required before the end of the summer. ACORN expects to collect roughly half of these ourselves, through a combination of paid staff and volunteer efforts by our members in their own neighborhoods, taking advantage of important opportunities like local elections and county fairs around the state. (Ohio requires that a petition include signatures from 5% of the electorate state wide, and from at least 5% of the electorate in at least 44 of the 88 Counties.) We are similarly encouraging our allies to join us in developing their own volunteer networks as part of the signature plan.

2005-2006 State and Federal Contested Races

Senate: *none*

House: 06 Open, Toss Up, (*Strickland (D) running for Governor*)

Governor: Open, Lean R (*Taft term-limited*)

Margin of Presidential win

50.81% of votes for Bush, 48.71% for Kerry

2.1 percentage points

5,722,443 votes total

2,859,768 for Bush

2,741,167 for Kerry

118,601 more votes for Bush than Kerry

For information by county, <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/results/index.html>

Party affiliation of state legislature: R

House: 59 R

40 D

99 Total
19 more R than D
Senate: 22 R
11 D
33 Total
11 more R than D

Party affiliation of current Governor: R

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: Board
For Congress: State Legislature

Pennsylvania

Overview

Pennsylvania is a perennial Presidential swing state, and perennially the site of contested Senate races, including in 2006, when Senator Santorum's fight for reelection is likely to be among the most watched in the nation.

ACORN has had a strong base in Philadelphia since the 1980's, but only in recent years have we begun to grow substantially outside of Philly. During the 2003-2004 election cycle we registered more than 134,000 voters in Pennsylvania, and more than half of those were outside of Philly, including in Pittsburgh, Harrisburg/Allegheny County, and Allentown/the Lehigh Valley, in all three of which we now have permanent community organizing chapters.

Pennsylvania ACORN's plans over the next years focus on continuing to grow permanent community based organizations in the largest metropolitan areas in the state and in the counties that surround them, and on significantly increasing the extent to which these offices and chapters are tied together as a single statewide organization.

In and through these organizations we want to engage our members in issue-based campaigns on the local, state, and federal levels, to build volunteer-based structures of communication and mobilization in the neighborhoods, and to increase our members' ability to use these issue campaigns and the structure of their community organization to hold elected officials at every level of government accountable. Tactics to achieve this include voter registration and GOTV efforts and issue-based and ACORN Political Action Committee (APAC) partisan political work. It is building this kind of permanent and rooted structure which will help create the increased levels of political engagement by low- and moderate-income people necessary to shift the results of State Legislative and Congressional elections more in line with voters' choices in recent Presidential and Gubernatorial races.

ACORN Organization and Expansion

Pennsylvania ACORN currently has offices and active membership chapters in Philly, Harrisburg, Allentown and Pittsburgh. Along with organizing additional chapters in all of these areas, our medium-term plans include expanding and building new chapters in the areas surrounding these offices. We have begun to organize in the Philly area outside of the city, in Norristown, which is in Montgomery County, and will begin work in Chester, Abington, Darby and Upper Darby, which are communities with substantial moderate income African-American populations. From Harrisburg we are preparing to grow into Central Pennsylvania, specifically Reading, York and Lancaster, including both the substantial low-income population in these cities, and then the low- and moderate-income communities in the counties around them. From Pittsburgh we will expand to additional areas of Allegheny County, including Beaver, and from Allentown to Bethlehem and Easton, along with Monroe County on a somewhat longer time line.

ACORN's membership in Philly is overwhelmingly African-American, though it also increasingly includes some new predominantly Latino neighborhoods. Outside of Philly, it includes both African-American and some Latino (as in parts of Harrisburg, for example) and some white (as in parts of Pittsburgh, for example) members.

Voter Registration and GOTV

ACORN 2003-2004 Voter Registration and GOTV Successes

Voter Registration

Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)	28,516
Beaver County	487
Berks County (Reading)	3,737
Dauphin County (Harrisburg)	6,038
Lancaster County (Harrisburg)	6,642
Lebanon County (Harrisburg)	1,970
Lehigh County (Allentown)	8,122
Miscellaneous	93
Miscellaneous Counties (Allentown)	76
Montgomery County (Norristown/Philly)	5,809
Northampton County (Bethlehem)	1,678
Philadelphia County (Philadelphia)	63,246
Washington County	79
Westmoreland County	191
York County (Harrisburg)	1,394
Delaware County (Philly)	6,436
Total	134,514

Voters targeted for GOTV by ACORN and who received at least 3-4 contacts in the weeks leading up to the election: 326,747

2005-06 Plans

With a “toss up” Senate race in 2006, ACORN plans to do significant amounts of GOTV and voter registration work in 2005 – 2006.

Votes from African-American and Latino voters made up around 10% of the 5,765,764 votes cast for President in Pennsylvania in 2004 (according to self reporting to the census) and, in fact, the number of such voters was fairly close to Kerry's margin of victory in the state. Maintaining these voters' participation in the coming “off” election year, and continuing work to register and engage new voters, so that minority rates of electoral participation move closer and closer to levels of participation among white voters will be an important ingredient in the state's political make up.

Redistricting

In Pennsylvania Congressional district lines are drawn by the State Legislature, where the Republicans have substantial majorities in both houses (by a margin of 18 of 203 total in the House, and a margin of 10 of 30 in the Senate). The Republican Legislature's 2002 redistricting (designed to create 12 of 19 safe Republican Congressional seats in a state where party registration was even) was challenged, and then upheld, by the Supreme Court. State Legislative district lines are drawn by a Reapportionment Commission which is more or less balanced in party composition, with 5 members including the majority and minority leaders of each house, along with a fifth member selected by the initial four.

Congressional, State, and Local Elections

In early 2005 Pennsylvania ACORN has already worked on a number of local and state races, including a special election in Allentown to fill an open Senate seat previously held by a Republican. ACORN held the largest candidate forum in the area around the event, which was attended by both candidates – both incumbent House members, both of whom pledged to support specific items on ACORN's legislative agenda. We did not make an endorsement, but did non-partisan GOTV work for the race, successfully increasing turn out in our neighborhoods by an average of 4.5 percentage points. Lehigh Valley ACORN used the same GOTV formula for the subsequent Special Election to fill the seat resigned by newly elected Senator Pat Browne. Once again ACORN increased voter turnout through fieldwork and organized a candidate forum in which the candidates pledged to support ACORN's legislative agenda.

Additional plans are in motion around the state for targeted work leading up to November 2006. Among areas we are particularly considering are Harrisburg and the Allegheny Valley, where there are a number of local elections our members are concerned about in 2005 which will give us the occasion and opportunity to build political capacity, and where there are a number of potentially interesting State Legislative races in 2006. There are also a number of interesting races in Montgomery County, which includes a number of the suburbs outside of Philly where we have begun to work, and intend to do more organizing and canvassing.

The 6th Congressional district, one of only 10 races nationally which Cook rates a "toss up," has its southern edge near Philadelphia, and includes Norristown, where ACORN has already done both organizing and GOTV work, Chester, where we have done GOTV work, and Reading, where we plan to begin ACORN organizing soon. Substantial portions of the rest of the district are areas we plan to target for the ACORN Membership Canvass about to get underway. The 8th CD, also likely to be a competitive race, includes a number of low and moderate-income areas not far from ACORN's Allentown office.

Other Key Projects

ACORN Membership Canvass

Pennsylvania ACORN is kicking off a new program of issue-based canvassing in moderate-income communities where staff will door-knock around specific neighborhood and statewide problems, ask families for a one-time membership contribution, and sign them up as Provisional members. We will then follow up with additional contacts to keep people updated on the issue they signed up on, and to attempt to convert them to full ACORN members. The canvass will begin in the Philly suburbs, and we plan to expand its reach north from there, focusing initially on towns included in the strategically important 6th CD.

Defending Democracy

Pennsylvania ACORN, along with Project Vote, has also undertaken a series of projects to protect and expand voting rights in the state. Our work in 2004 helped uncover some of the problems, which made Allegheny County among the most trouble-filled in the country, and we followed this up with a report outlining both problems and potential solutions. The Governor's electoral commission has embraced some of those solutions; others remain unaddressed even at the level of recommendations, and our electoral work this year has continued to uncover problems. In the primary elections this spring, for example, election officials violated law and told significant numbers of voters they could not vote for the ACORN school board write-in candidates.

2005-2006 State and Federal Contested Races

Senate: Rick Santorum (R), Toss Up

House: 06 Jim Gerlach (R), Toss Up

08 Mike Fitzpatrick (R), Lean R

Governor: *none*

Margin of Presidential win

51.0% of votes for Kerry, 48.5% for Bush

2.5 percentage points

5,765,764 votes total

2,938,095 for Kerry

2,793,847 for Bush

144,248 more votes for Kerry than Bush

For information by county,

<http://www.electionreturns.state.pa.us/ElectionReturns.aspx?control=StatewideReturns&ElecID=1&OfficeID=1>

Party affiliation of state legislature: R

House: 110 R

93 D

203 Total

17 more R than D

Senate: 30 R

20 D
50 Total
10 more R than D

Party affiliation of current Governor: D

Who Controls Redistricting?

For State Legislature: Commission
For Congress: State Legislature

Projected Budget Summary

We are still working to finalize the budgets for this activity over the life of the Plan, but we have included estimates here based on our work-in-progress. These budgets cover ACORN's voter registration, voter education, and voter mobilization efforts, the minimum wage campaigns, the voter file project, and the costs of National Political operations in managing and directing this program.

2005-06 VR and GOTV	\$16,200,000
2005-06 Election Administration/Protection	\$ 3,400,000
2005-06 Minimum Wage OH	\$ 3,000,000 - \$5,000,000
2005-06 Minimum Wage MI	\$ 3,000,000 - \$5,000,000
2005-06 Minimum Wage AZ	\$ 2,000,000
2005-06 Minimum Wage Albuquerque	\$ 160,000
2005-06 Voter File Project	\$ 300,000
2005-06 National Political	\$ 1,700,000
2005-06 Total:	\$29,760,000 - \$33,760,000
2007-08 VR and GOTV	\$19,000,000 - \$30,000,000
2007-08 Election Administration	\$ 4,000,000
2007-08 Ballot Measures	\$12,000,000
2007-08 Voter File Project	\$ 1,000,000
2007-08 National Political	\$ 2,400,000
2007-08 Total:	\$38,400,000 - \$49,400,000
4-Year Total	\$68,160,000 - \$83,160,000

NOTE: Approximately half of the \$24 million in this budget for 2006 and 2008 ballot measures is for media. Much of those funds are likely to come from funds already planned to be spent on election media that will see ballot measures such as minimum wage as the best vehicles to drive turnout of certain segments of voters, as was the case with the 2004 Florida minimum wage campaign.