

Concept Paper: Building Organization Off the 2008 Election Cycle

In the 2004 and 2006 elections, we registered 1.7 million folks, but we only joined about 75,000/4% as members, we had no structure to actively engage any of them in the organizing work of our offices, and we struggled to heavily engage members in the work.

Essentially, that means that over \$12,000,000 moved through local offices JUST to register voters. This is not meant to negate the importance and need for voter registration, but to bring attention to the opportunity that we missed to use voter registration as a tool for building power in our local offices.

Moving Forward

Now that we've grown more experienced in delivering the product (voter reg cards), the discussion in 2007 around designing the 2008 program has taken an interesting and exciting turn: how can we use the voter registration program to build and move mass membership, and build power for our members through campaign victories.

Themes

Here are a few of the themes that have been coming out of the many conversations happening on this topic of how we use the election cycle to build the organization:

- How can we integrate resources to build organization during and after election cycle? This includes: membership, campaigns, and resources.
- How can the election cycle build, communicate, and move a mass based membership?
- Is there a way to integrate dues renewal and current member communication into the program?
- How is leadership built? How do we build a program that develops a structure for staff to be managed on leadership development?
- How can we harness ideas across organizations/operations, so that we aren't recreating the wheel, but moving good ideas and not recreating programs that don't work.
- How do we maintain work once election cycle is over?
- Is there a role for an internal organizer long-term?
- How do we build in an earned media strategy?
- How do we use the effort to strengthen our local relationships?

We've broken our thought pieces into 3 sections:

- 1: Building and Moving Mass Base
- 2: Voter Registration as a Campaign
- 3: Integration

1: Building and Moving Mass Base

On the Street

On the street voter registration workers will approach people in the community leading with an issue. It's important that the issue VR workers are using is linked to a local campaign in progress. Depending on the size of the voter registration project this issue could be as community specific like "we are fighting for a better grocery store" to city/state wide "we are fighting to get payday lenders to charge lower rates" This isn't to say this is the only issue this potential registrant cares about, but it is the issue we will most likely follow up with them on.

We have designed a new voter registration/membership card that makes it easier to sign folks up as provisional members. Below is a sample. There is a new picture on the final that includes a Latino.



Have you moved since you voted last?



You don't have a felony on your record

VR CARD

**I want to get more information about work happening in my community!
Sign me up as an ACORN provisional member!**

The best time to reach me is (circle): *am* *afternoon* *pm*

Email:

Cell:

—

Where do you work? _____

Union? _____

Church? _____

School? _____

I'm concerned about high LG&E and other bills

I'm concerned about violence and crime

I want more positive community programs

I want free help filing taxes for past years and getting EITC refund for those years.

I, or someone I know, is having a problem with mortgage foreclosure

I'm fired up about the issue of _____

We think we can manage staff to get at least 60% of new registers to join as members. At this level we would have joined over 700,000 new provisional members in 2004.

One of the biggest reasons for our failure for only signing up 4% of those registered as ACORN members is frankly we just didn't do it, and when we did we didn't make it a priority. Things that must change from the onset of any vr program is including new membership in our daily tracking and performance evaluations and a system for getting all VR cards electronically entered in a timely fashion. We also believe that the new design of the ACORN VR cards will make it easier for local offices to make copies and not loose information. This year every political organizer will be trained that it's part of their job. We will supervise folks in the field that not getting a member is like getting a vr card without a phone number, it will be part of their daily goals and employee evaluation.

Other ways to do registration and increase membership pool

-ACORN Housing: asking every person who comes through housing to register to vote

-ACLOC: in turf that matches up with priority list, adding VR to visit raps

-ACORN Field: when out doorknocking, knocking with VR list and registering everyone not on there right; when folks come into office, asking everyone to register to vote.

Organizing Call Center (OCC)

As we register new voters in the field we generally don't approach them with the question "do you want to register to vote", as a matter of fact, we train against that question. We ask potential registers "do they want to see something changed" or "do they support something". When the answer is yes we move into action, that action being registering to vote. As we build this list of people who want change, and who are now registered voters, we should have a plan on how to move this list both to the polls to vote as well as into an organization that fights everyday for positive changes in the low and moderate income community where they live.

As part of our paid voter registration program there is "quality control". These are calls made to new registers to confirm that they were in fact registered by us and their applications and complete and correct. What if the rap of these calls changed? What if we called people to follow up on the issue that got them to register? For example "Hi, You were registered to vote by us and you said you are angry about your high light bill? People are getting together to force the company to come down on their rates, can you come to a meeting about lowering your bill?" Insert local issue rap and next campaign meeting invitation.

Right now there are three different models of how the Organizing Call Center could bring people into the organization and start them on the road to active participation in ACORN. 1) we call people and ask them to come to us. This model would rely more heavily on providing a service to that member, or an "intake" meeting 2) having the OCC set up appointments for organizers to do house visits with the member. This might work for a neighborhood organizing drive. 3) we can invite new registers/members to come to an exciting big public ACORN event, with this being their first ACORN contact.

It is important that we have consistency in the the rap. The rap we use on the street to register someone is also the basis of the rap the OCC workers use.. Clearly as folks get better they can interview registrants on the phone and tailor their rap and asks to the specific member, but keeping it simple and clear what the next step is for a member is key. Also the OCC can sign up folks who did not become provisional members in the field (phone numbers will be required) and get missing emails.

The devil is in the details. Organizational details that need to be figured out include to make the OCC successful:

- 1) What is the local campaign we will be pushing both to register folks and get them in the door?
- 2) How will the yes's be tracked
- 3) What kind of meeting will be inviting people to come to

- 4) Who will do the reminder calls
- 5) What organizer staffs it out
- 6) What is the calendar of events
- 7) Do the economics work? Can one day a week, one day a month, etc. can call center can switch off of VR based calls and use the call capacity to do membership renewals? Can we sign up bankdrafts on the phone?
- 8) How do we use the OCC to track leadership potential
- 9) What's the plan to follow up with members for leadership development

A call center could also be run by members through regular phone banks, like what is done in Louisiana. As folks are registered and join ACORN they could be called by members inviting them into the organization and to the next meeting. Members would get excited about the 200+ new members we signed up this week and like to work a fresh list.

Below is a sample phone rap.

Call center rap

Hi, may I speak to _____? How are you? I'm calling because one of our canvassers registered you on the street to vote, is that right?

Great, they talked to you about the _____ issue. Is this something your still concerned with? How is this issue affecting you? What do you think should be done about it?

That's what a lot of people are saying. That's why we are having _____ at _____ time at _____ place. We are getting people together to do something about it. Does that sound like a good idea?

Can we count on you to come?

(If they did not become a member on the street say this....)

I noticed you didn't fill out the free membership application at the bottom. Let's do that now. By being a member you can hear about the cool things ACORN is doing to fight on these issues.

(if person did become a member, confirm info, get email ect)

(be sure to end the call with this)

Lastly to make sure there are no problems with getting you registered. May I verify some information on the application?

This is (your first registration); (an address change); (other)

Your date of birth is _____??

Your address is _____ ???

The first election you can vote in will be the Nov election. You won't be able to vote in _____ . The first election you can vote in will be Nov. Ok?

Great, see you at _____.

Data tracking for the OCC

Data management is our Achilles heel. For the OCC to be effective there needs to be a way to get all VR card/member combos to be data entered within 2-3 days of being collected on the street. If not, the contact goes cold. For this quick turnaround to exist data entry may need to be done locally. It is possible cards could be scanned and emailed to a national data entry provider. Both means have challenges, however working from an electronic list from the get go is key to a successful follow up program.

Once VR cards/membership card responses are entered they can be put into phone lists for OCC workers. Calls should be made within 3-5 days of the contact being made on the street. It has been suggested that each OCC worker should have an electronic list of new registers/members in front of them. This means a computer on every desk of an OCC worker, along with a phone line. As callers make calls they record answers, and suspicious activity, directly into the data. In this way it is easier to generate "yes" lists or appointments for organizers. Also when using a data base, depending on the size of the list, we may want to do mailings, or email blasts. It would also be great to give every name a bar code to swipe them into the data base.

Challenges:

- How we get all the data back into the member database. We will need to use the system we used in 2006 with provisional members recruited through the Minimum Wage canvass, in which the data entry will be done through the voter registration data entry we're doing with an outside vendor, and then later merged electronically into ANDB.
- Turn around time and accuracy of data entry is the biggest challenge. In the office or centrally? Pol Ops staff are working on cost scenarios as well as impact on Quality Control process and card turn in times for several different options.

Harvesting full membership and activating members

Assuming the OCC is effective, provisional members will start showing up to our office and other activities. Of all the potential new ideas for building organization off of the election opportunities, how we mobilize these folks into active, dues paying members, and identify and build leadership, is where real organizational consensus and a solid organizing plan is needed.

Services are one way that voter registration lists and the Organizing Call Center (OCC) will get folks in the door from off the street. Many offices have already set up benefits services, financial justice centers, utilities justice centers, immigration service centers, affordable housing intakes, tenant rights, etc. People come because they think they are going to get some service. As organizers we can tailor almost any issue into a "servicy" rap. We should continue to build on the successes of the intake organizing experiments in places like Arizona, where 400 people came to a citizenship fare, 200 came to ESL classes.

Basically intake meetings are run like a group OC- or a group rap. We are asking folks to join and to take a specific action.

Sample work plan leading up to the intake:

1) 2-3 days after cards have been collected in the field the folks are called by the OCC. All cards and responses are entered into a database.

When calling through cards twice, what percentage of people will we reach at home? What percentage of people will say Yes?

2) Folks are asked by the OCC to come to an intake. (see sample rap) The intakes should happen at least once a week (on Saturdays) or twice a week (Wed's and Sat). Folks are asked to come to the closest one, if they can't make that one then the next closet. The intakes are run by members and an organizer.

3) Yes lists are generated nightly. Reminder calls happen nightly. An organizer is responsible for making reminder calls.

What percentage of triple yes's will show up? What percentage will join as full or associate members?

4) Gathering materials needed for intake. An organizer is responsible for this.

Place and time to have it

Members prepped to run it

Yes list to do reminder calls 2-3 hours before the meeting

Next action date, time, place, demands

Agenda copies

Membership cards

Pens and clipboards

COM's

Articles of past victories, or victories on current campaign

Sign in sheet

Sample intake agenda (get AZ agenda)

- 1) Welcome and Introductions 5 minutes
- 2) What is ACORN 5 minutes
- 3) Recent Victories 5 minutes
- 4) Discussion on issue at hand 10 minutes
- 5) What can be done about it (working together as a group) 10 minutes
- 6) Joining ACORN 15 minutes
- 7) Campaign plan (overall plan and strategy and date and time of next action) 10 minutes
- 8) Making commitments 15 minutes

Lastly for the OCC to work offices need to be engaged in an active campaign. This means that offices should have on their calendars and their leaders should be invested in about 2 actions each month and 1-2 planning/leadership meetings each month around the campaign.

Possible number based on 1000 voter registration cards a week

80% with numbers = 800 cards

All cards called twice reaching 40%= 320 contacts

50% of folks say yes= 160 yes's

50% confirm their yes= 80 double yes's

25% of those show up= 20

50% of the 20 join= 10 new members

75% of the 20 agree to do work= 15

Hopefully my numbers are low, since given the resources this isn't that many members, however exactly how much additional resources the OCC is commanding is still undetermined. These numbers are also higher than an organizer knocking would do a week.

Identifying Leadership

The OCC provides a great opportunity for members to self identify as potential leaders. During the OCC work day they will be asking members to come into our office, or meet with an ACORN organizer individually, or come to a cool ACORN event. Those that say "yes" and then do, have just self identified. Because of the sheer numbers of contacts that will be made, a system is needed to track and manage leadership development. One proposal is that initial leadership potential is decided by the organizer during the intake or one-one-one.

Developing leaders is a more difficult skill to teach and manage organizers around. Like all pieces of this proposal serious adjustments need to be made to our traditional thinking around use of our voter engagement

resources in order to operate at a larger scale. Same is true in evaluating potential leaders. Where the street canvass helps us in scale it lacks in ID'ing leaders. Labor Unions will use a rating system to allow leads and campaign coordinators to gage where workers are at in the campaign. In this system we would ask organizers to rank the people that come into an intake/one-on-one on this system.

1's-Leaders-Someone who immediately does work or asks about what work they can do for the organization.

2's-People who join without much of a challenge, who are solid, but need to get pushed to become active .

3's- Those we need to challenge to join, and those we need to challenge later to become active

4's- No's

0's- Those who have not been contacted for membership yet.

Clearly the 1 to 4 rating system is only about initial judgment and not a qualitative assessment based on turnout, participation in leadership roles, etc. What the system does provide is an easy structure to manage organizers around prioritizing leadership development.

Example: If an organizer has a list of 50 people that came into office, 5 were rated as 1's, 10 as 2's, 15 as 3's, and 10 4's's, how can the rating system be used? The 4's didn't join so the organizer does not worry about follow up with these people. The 1, 2 and 3' all showed up to the office and increased their membership commitment by paying dues. Perhaps the 3's get put on turnout call lists and if they turnout they become a 2 that the organizer then does a 2nd visit to. The 1's and 2's both agree to do work off the intake/one-on-one. Does the organizer then do 2nd visits with these folks? At the morning/weekly staff meetings, are organizers held accountable to how many 1 and 2's they've identified and visited—similar to membership goals? Once an initially rated 1,2 or 3 does real work, they should be slated as "hot" leadership leads. What does this follow-up look like? How is management of leadership development worked into current local office management structure?

Below is a sample COM



Mesa ACORN

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

555 W. University, Suite #10, Mesa, AZ 85201 Telephone: 480-834-9097

azacornme@acorn.org

www.mesa.acorn.org

___ **Yes!!! I want to be a Community Leader**

As a Leader I am willing to educate and register to vote _____ # of my fellow citizens

___ **I am willing to knock on doors in my neighborhood, during the hours of _____ and the days of _____, _____, _____**

___ **I am willing to hand out flyers and get petitions signed in my community.**

I think the biggest problems facing my neighborhood are...

These are the names of people I know that might want to get involved

Name	phone number
------	--------------

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Name _____ **Signature** _____

Address _____

Phone # _____ **Cell phone** _____

Email _____

ACORN office use:

Leadership code (circle one) 1 2 3 4

Membership status (circle one) full associate provisional

One possible way to manage development of 1's and 2's is on a ranking of activities and staff are managed on goals of moving leaders up from A to E activities. With A being the starting point and E being your best leaders. Examples may be

- A- Coming to a meeting
- B- Registering new voters, turning out multiple times to events/meetings
- C- Phone Calls, lead a section on a meeting
- D- Lead a meeting, volunteer for an intake session, lead a lobby group
- E- Block Captain, etc.

Organizers need more tools for leadership visits. We should develop a generic "house visit rap" and or "house visit worksheet" that organizers can use to guide their discussions. This piece of paper is also a management tool to supervise the number of visits happening each day, ensure particular asks are being made, and a place to rate the members leadership ability. These forms should be stored in an office binder, until we figure out a way to store electronically.

Below is a sample second visit form

House visit report form

organizer name:

Name: _____

Address _____ **Zip** _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

What is their primary issue?

What issues do they care about that we are working on now?

What work does the member feel strongly needs to get done/they would be good at?

What work did they commit to (voter registration, petitioning, calling a network list)

In what time frame?

What support/training do they need to succeed?

When are you supposed to follow up?

Follow up section

Work completed?

What changes have happened to the plan?

What is the new timeline?

For data entry purposes:

Leadership level (circle one) A B C D E

Role of an Internal Organizer (IO)

It needs to be somebody's job to follow up with all the new members coming into the office. Right now, that person should probably be the best organizer in the office (who is not the HO). But in the long run I bet we can figure out how to break down leadership development and member movement the same way we have systematized the rap and signed up of thousands of members on the doors. The focus of the IO is to move members up the membership ladder- from provisional/associate/need to be renewed to full active bankdrafts. Secondly, but not less important, is to move members up the leadership ladder- from just coming to events to knowing how to plan, implement, lead, and train other members. One of the base lines for making this successful is having a clear city wide/state wide/ national campaign planned out that members can be plugged in to. Or to have this be a part of their job. This should include a start and end, event/action/meeting timelines, dates or at least week of's when things are happening, turnout goals, possible allies, demands, ect. All the components of a good campaign.

Job responsibilities would include:

Signing up through the OCC 10+ full and associate members each week

Turning 50+ members out each month to events/actions (this includes existing leaders)

Getting 10+ members each month to do work register voters, do turnout work, do campaign research, recruit new members, ect

Planning and implementing with members 3 + campaign events each month (1 action, 1 member workday, 1 planning meeting)

Possible daily work schedule:

4-5 hours in the field- visiting members who are the 1's and 2's, or those that have done work, and or come to something

2 hours on the phone- doing turnout, doing reminder calls, confirming appointments, prepping leaders, talking to members on the phone

1-2 hours planning and thinking

Expanded Member Communications Strategy

This is all new territory in most cases. How can we use this campaign effort to expand our member communications strategy? And more importantly, how much does it hurt us if we don't really figure out this question? Labor has great power in elections, because they can really move their membership on a set of ideology and more importantly get them to vote.

Some things to ponder:

- If we get 500,000 provisional members off of VR added to our member roles, how are we communicating with them past the initial Organizing Call Center concept. Can we afford to never talk to them again before GOTV? Can we really say we can turn out our membership?
- How do we envision our member GOTV program looking like? -- it takes new meaning, as the base grows larger and density in precincts increases. Do we model it after labor?:
 - member to member turnout work/taking PAL to next level
 - the lost-time concept of members working full-time to activate and communicate with other members
 - mail to members around message and endorsements
 - phone blasts to get member turnout.

2: Doing Voter Registration Drives like we would do a Campaign

The second piece of building the organization off of the election cycle, is around how we can use voter registration itself as a campaign tool. Since Field Ops many staff in field, political, and communications have been apart of various discussions to flush out how we can more strategically think about the opportunities that voter registration can provide, and how we can leverage our work proactively before any attacks happen.

Looking at a Campaign Timeline

One idea is that we start our campaign work before we collect any cards, and that we time earned media events and coalition outreach strategically throughout the cycle. One proposed timeline looks like this:

- Aug-Sept 07 ■Local meetings with allies around what our 2008 voter registration and voter rights campaign will look like. Initial inoculation around attacks, etc.
- Sept-Oct 07 ■Meetings of Voter Rights or Voter Registration tables/coalitions. Either that we are starting one because it doesn't exist, or we are doing it locally because they only exist state-wide, or we are attending an existing meeting and determining how to position ourselves.
- Nov Dec 07 ■Local meetings with press contacts, postings on blogs, etc.
- Jan 08 ■ Local Kick-off event/tie-in to primary coverage if possible.
- Feb/Mar ■Events timed around primary coverage?
- April-May ■Kick-off a local policy campaign: feature a study, action around voter suppression issue.
- June-Aug ■Re-newed kick-off event/announcing how many cards we've collected to date
 ■At least one member event around registering voters or policy campaign.
 ■Local meetings with press contacts, postings on blogs, etc.
- Sept. ■Our National Report is released on the state of voters rights/voter suppression/local press Conference on report, with local tie in to # of total cards registered, impact locally, etc.
- Sept/Oct ■actions/coalition events/litigation announcements where attacks happen
 ■Pitch stories around total # of cards we collected, APAL GOTV work, etc.
 ■Push particular voter suppression stories with sympathetic mainstream reporters, progressive media, blogs.
- Oct/Nov. ■Local/National media event surrounding GOTV work.
- Post e-day ■ National/Local credit-claiming events.

Staffing

An additional position has been created within the current voter registration funding structure: a state VR director who reports to the state HO and is also supported by national Political Operations. They would manage political field director, but also bottom line all voting rights and election administration issues, as well as relationships building with relevant local and state election officials. A main component of the job will be working with the State HO, to design what the campaign should look like, and in many cases, fill the role that a communications staff person would fill. In states with the largest programs, we feel that an assigned communications staff person is integral to the success of this proposal.

3: Integration

We've made GREAT strides in integration of field and political operations on joint planning and movement on the straightforward program of hiring paid crews to collect registration cards. This concept paper lays out several areas for discussion that would entail full integration of operations in the non-partisan voter engagement program to be successful. What parts would everyone have to play in making this work?:

Field Operations:

- Work with political operations to write registration/membership rap for on the streets, write the rap that the Organizing Call center will be using, and design the membership card.
- Design the intake model the OCC will be getting folks in through.
- Developing and moving the local campaign we will be pushing both to register folks and get them in the door around.
- Identifying and managing the organizer(s) that will be dedicated to this program.
- Engage local and state boards around the program and their involvement.

Political Operations:

- Work with field ops state based staff to identify and train staff for voter registration program as well as Organizing Call Center.
- Work with field ops staff to make sure that the street program and call center are up to date and relevant and moving forward agenda of local office.
- Develop and manage data entry, solve all the issues around turn around time, getting into members database, etc. including resource questions and logistics around call center technology.

Project Vote:

- Provide studies, litigation, etc. for local offices to get earned media attention around and to provide value at local and state coalition tables.

Communications:

- Provide a national staff team that will coordinate national earned media message,
- Work with state staff who are doing communications work around local earned media message and events including press releases, event preparation, etc.
- Provide talking points on inoculation message, message around how ACORN is using Project Vote reports and data, dealing with press around attacks or our quality control system, etc.
- Communications director to sit on weekly national VR management team calls.

Housing:

- Register voters/sign up provisional members at intakes and home buyer classes.

Labor

- In places that match up, add registration/ACORN provisional membership to ask.