

Chapter 13 Get Out The Vote (GOTV)

Put It All Together

When the Democratic Party has a strong GOTV effort, we have a much better chance of winning. Many elections are decided by only a few votes per precinct. GOTV is the culmination of the long days and nights of campaigning. It is the busiest time of any campaign, and it is critical to our success. There is one deadline: the closing of the polls on Election Day. That deadline will not change. There are no time-outs. GOTV techniques must be applied during both early voting and on Election Day. Goals must be made and met.

The objective of GOTV is to get more of our voters to the polls than the opposition. Every supporter you have identified must be reminded over and over again to vote. On Election Day, your volunteers cannot be allowed to sit at home or hang out at headquarters. Especially in non-presidential years and special elections, our candidates win or lose as a result of the GOTV effort.

To use your assets—time, money, and people—where they will do the most for the GOTV effort, you must have a planned GOTV strategy. You will never have enough resources, so the resources you do have must be allocated to maximize their impact.

During the mayhem of the closing days of the campaign, you will not have time to take a break, sit down, and develop a thoughtful, effective plan. Develop a plan early through your integrated campaign steering committee and refine it as the campaign season progresses. Ultimately, every campaign program must be designed and executed with GOTV in mind.

Appoint a GOTV Coordinator

The GOTV coordinator, the head of the GOTV team, should be established early in the election cycle and work closely with the CEC and county chair. The GOTV coordinator is responsible for the GOTV effort and must be a strong motivator, an excellent organizer, and have a persuasive, outgoing personality.

The job requires a great deal of time and dedication. It is extremely important that the GOTV coordinator have a thorough understanding of the GOTV precincts and excellent relationships with community leaders in GOTV areas.

The CEC integrated campaign steering committee should participate in the selection of the GOTV Coordinator.

Operation Communication among Campaigns

Every candidate needs to participate in the GOTV effort, on their own or as a part of the integrated campaign. Each campaign must have access to and confidence in the GOTV coordinator. Each candidate's campaign must believe and trust that the other campaigns will do what they agreed to do. That kind of trust comes only as a result of regular, on-going communications established early in the campaign season.

Target Precincts and Voters

Precinct targeting, done by analyzing past election returns, tells you where and how to use your resources. In areas with very high past Democratic support (65% or higher Democratic Performance Index, DPI), for example, it is not necessary to I.D. voter preference before GOTV. In marginal or "swing" precincts (45-65% DPI), however, you will want to contact only those registered voters whom you have identified as Democrats through canvassing.

GOTV Target Precincts

Precincts with low turnout but a high tendency to vote Democratic (65%+ DPI), are the first priority for GOTV. Be cautious, however, in ranking your precincts. A few precincts (usually, the very poorest) may have a turnout that is chronically so low that it cannot be raised effectively through normal GOTV. In such precincts, innovative, high-profile programs are necessary. Generally, though, all 65%+ Democratic precincts should be targeted.

Marginal “Swing” Precincts

"Swing" precincts (45-65% DPI) are the second priority for GOTV efforts. Swing precincts are usually most effectively reached through a phone bank operation.

Swing precincts must be phoned early in the election cycle to identify Democratic, Republican and undecided voters. This allows time to target voter persuasion mail and other activities aimed at “swinging” voters to our side. Early I.D. calling will also allow all phones to be available for GOTV near Election Day.

Group GOTV Targeted Precincts and Voters

The GOTV team should sort targeted precincts and voters geographically. This allows an efficient allocation of resources.

Build Block Walking and Phone Banking Teams

GOTV block walkers and phone bank teams are critical. The GOTV coordinators must gather as many volunteers as possible for these activities. Volunteers should be a reflection of the GOTV precincts where they will be working. GOTV block walking operation is described more fully at the end of this chapter.

Knock and Take Block Walking

Specialized block walking teams should be formed to participate in Knock and Take block walking. These teams literally must be prepared to knock on doors in targeted precincts and take people to the polls.

Early Voting Strategy

An early voting program is extremely important as it can win or lose the election. There are two different but equally important types of early voting: (1) early in-person voting, especially during extended voting hours on weekends and the last week of the early voting period, and (2) early voting by mail.

Early Voting In Person: The Long Election Day

A major problem with in-person early voting in many counties is that early voting polls are open hours such as 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, making it difficult for working people to vote early.

Under our early voting law, in counties of 100,000 or more population, all early voting polls, including branch polling places, must remain open for twelve hours on the last Saturday of early voting, five hours on the last Sunday, and twelve hours each weekday of the last week. In smaller counties, similar hours can be achieved by petition of 15 registered voters.

In counties under 100,000, you must secure signatures of 15 registered voters on a petition and submit it to the county clerk in order to require extended hours for your county. The signatures must be submitted prior to these dates:

- For the Primary Election, the 5th day before the first day of early voting for that election

- For the General Election, the 5th day before the first day of early voting for that election

Note: Small, rural counties that do not need seven days of extended hours may still be petitioned to open the early voting box on one designated Saturday or Sunday. In these counties, be flexible and work with local officials to design programs that save money and still make the polling places available to the people.

Early Voting and Your GOTV Plan

Your GOTV plan should take into account the following in regard to early in-person voting:

- If you petition for early vote, make sure you have a program and use the program to turn out votes. Otherwise, you'll make enemies in the courthouse.
- Secure favorable early vote polling place locations, especially commercial or mobile voting locations and branch locations, by working with the county commissioners' court, county clerk, and election officials.
- The designated hours for early polling place should be set favorably. Block walk, mail, and phone bank messages should encourage Democrats to vote during the early voting period. Use Election Day techniques to encourage voting the weekend of extended hours.
- Rallies should be planned for the last Saturday of the early voting period where participants can be encouraged to go to a nearby polling place to vote early.
- Houses of worship should be worked to encourage voters to vote early during the mandatory hours on Saturday and Sunday.
- Develop workplace programs with unions. Flyers can be used to encourage workers at Democratic businesses to vote early at nearby polling places.
- Volunteers and their families should be encouraged to vote early. That makes more time to work on GOTV on Election Day!

The Early Vote Plan

Commercial Early Vote Locations

The program to "take the polls to the voters" is to establish early voting polls at commercial locations and other shopping center sites where there is a high volume of foot traffic. This is one of the most successful aspects of the early voting effort.

Studies of early vote turnout show that the commercial locations experience much higher voter participation. By starting early and working with local officials and business leaders, locating and establishing polls in commercial areas frequented by likely Democratic voters can become a civic "good government" project.

Mobile Early Voting Polls

Counties can now establish mobile polls. This is clearly allowed by early voting law. Under this concept, you could literally have a station wagon or bookmobile-type polling place that moves around the county to convenient locations.

Such mobile voting locations should be well publicized and coordinated with specific events and GOTV projects aimed at bringing people out to vote on the days and hours a voting location will be in their community. A rally at a park near the early voting location is an example of how to get folks to a convenient poll location.

Voting by Mail-In Ballot

Disclaimer: Before beginning a mail-in ballot program, be sure you fully understand the law. If you have any questions, call the TDP for guidance.

The purpose of each element of a GOTV campaign is to turn out the voters who can be counted upon, if sufficiently motivated to vote, to cast their ballots for Democratic candidates. Rather than use a shotgun approach to turn out large numbers of voters we *hope* will vote Democratic, we are more effective when we aim our sights toward those we *know* will vote Democratic.

Democrats have traditionally run successful mail programs targeting senior citizens: the 65-and-over population in Democratic precincts and retirement or nursing homes and those identified through phone banks.

There are things you can do to support these mail programs locally:

- Send your voter persuasion literature immediately to those voters who are getting mail-in ballots. Your job is to persuade them by the time they vote and make sure they vote. Have your literature or phones ready in advance, so you can implement this program in a timely manner.
- Mail-in ballots must be received by Election Day. Call those targeted voters and remind them to mail in their ballots.
- **Remember these two very important laws.**
 - You cannot have an open mail-in ballot envelope in your possession.
 - You cannot assist the voter in filling out the ballot.

Always refer to Chapter 86 of the Texas Election Code if you have any questions.

Local Mail-In Ballot Campaign

Voting by mail is somewhat complicated process requiring voters to understand and complete several procedures. Each procedure must be done properly and in a timely fashion for the voter to have a valid ballot.

Who Can Vote by Mail?

The categories of voters who may vote by mail are: (1) military personnel, (2) people who will be away from their home precinct during the voting period, (3) disabled persons, and (4) people 65 years of age and older. The voters we typically focus on are people who are 65 years of age or older.

Targeting Mail-in Ballot Voters

Focus the effort on the predominately Democratic areas known as the get-out-the-vote (GOTV) precincts or neighborhoods.

Getting Started

The first step is to choose a Mail-In Ballot Committee chair. This chair then chooses committee members. Committee members should carry blank ballot applications and stamps.

Choosing the Mail-in Ballot Committee Chair

The chair of the Mail-In Ballot Committee must be a diligent person who has good organizational skills, is willing to conduct this important task, and will follow it through to completion. In some counties, there may be two or more committees to work different towns or areas.

Timeline

Mail-in ballot applications may be received by the election administrator starting 60 days before the election. The mail-in ballot application must be designed and printed and ready for mailing 75 days prior to the election. The application **must meet specific requirements**. Therefore, it is critically important to work with the election administrator to ensure its correctness. Address labels should also be available 75 days before the election. The applications should be labeled and mailed between 75 and 65 days before the election. Phone banking to the eligible voters begins 10 days after the applications are mailed.

The Daily Routine

The Mail-In Ballot Committee, using developed lists, begins calling the voters who were mailed applications about 10 days after the committee mailed the applications. The voter should be asked if they received their applications, and, if not, asked if they would like one. If they have not received their application and want one, mail another application immediately. When all of the voters have been called once, begin the process of calling everyone that was re-mailed an application.

Basic Procedure for Mail-In Balloting

Everyone on the committee should understand the mail-in ballot procedure.

The following steps are necessary to vote legally by mail-in ballot.

1. The voter must use a ballot application to request a ballot. Committee members should carry blank ballot applications and stamps. Ballot applications are frequently sent by the Party to voters over 65.
2. The voter fills out the application or a second party may fill out the application **except the signature**. The voter must sign the application or make a mark. If the application is filled out by a second party, the second party must fill out and sign the assistant/witness statement. If the voter makes a mark, it must be witnessed and the witness must fill out and sign the assistant/witness statement. (There are strict rules on assisting voters. Read and understand Chapter 86 of the Texas Election Code before assisting voters).
3. The ballot application must be mailed or taken to the elections administrator. It must be received between 60 and 7 days before the election.
4. The elections administrator will mail a ballot and two envelopes to the mail-in voter.
5. The voter or a second party must fill out the ballot. Assistance can be given by election officials or any other person except your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union. Any interpreter or translator must be a registered voter of your county. If an assistant is used, the assistant must fill out and sign the assistant/witness statement. The ballot must be signed by the voter or the voter must make a mark. If the voter makes a mark, it must be witnessed and the witness must fill out and sign the assistant/witness statement. (There are strict rules on assisting voters. Read and understand Chapter 86 of the Texas Election Code before assisting voters).
6. The ballot is put in the “ballot envelope” which does not need to be signed.
7. The “ballot envelope” is put the “carrier envelope.”
8. The “carrier envelope” is then sealed.
9. **The “carrier envelope” is then signed by the voter or the voter makes a mark.** This signature must “match” the signature on the ballot application in step 3. If the voter makes a mark, the witness must also sign the envelope.
10. The signed “carrier envelope” containing the ballot in the “ballot envelope” must be returned to the elections administrator.

If mail-in ballot is not mailed in, the voter may opt to vote in person, by returning the mail-in ballot to the election judge.

What Happens with Applications and Ballots on Election Day?

Early voting is considered a separate precinct in the county. Therefore, an early voting judge and early voting ballot board (clerks) are appointed by the county commissioners. Both political parties submit representatives' names. That board receives the ballot applications and the mail-in ballots that have been received at the courthouse.

In determining whether a mail-in ballot is valid, the board matches the signature on the ballot application with the signature on the outer envelope in which the ballot is mailed. The inner envelope holding the ballot (the ballot envelope) is not signed. The outer envelope, however, must be signed after it is sealed. THE SIGNATURE OR MARK ON THE OUTER ENVELOPE MUST "MATCH" THE SIGNATURE ON THE BALLOT APPLICATION OR THE BALLOT WILL NOT BE COUNTED.

Most judges and clerks know that a person's signature will vary. Certain characteristics, however, are good indications that the same person has executed both signatures. For instance, a person will usually make the same capital letter similarly each time.

Mail-in Ballots Make a Difference!

There is probably not another single GOTV effort that will make a bigger difference in the outcome of elections than the mail-in ballot campaign. You will not have to guess whether or not all the work paid off. You will know when the early votes are counted that you and the committee have made a significant contribution to the Party.

Working with Campaigns

From the beginning, work with local Democratic clubs, local elected officials, and all campaigns in your area, including state and local campaigns.

Some campaigns will be mailing, phoning, walking, and running special radio or TV ads in the area. Hopefully, the messages are similar and the timing of your efforts will complement theirs, but candidates often have a message that works in swing precincts, but does not motivate the hard-core Democrat or minorities. This is where the slate materials and straight-ticket message discussed previously come into play.

Avoid coordination with federal candidates as this violates new laws.

Access and Allocate Resources

Resources of money, people, and time must be assessed constantly throughout the GOTV effort. Rarely is there enough of anything. Resources must be re-allocated as necessary, but avoid miscommunication.

A major assessment must be made at the conclusion of early voting. Check the effectiveness of the GOTV efforts and plan Election Day accordingly.

Election Day

Every tool in the toolbox must be in play on Election Day. Phone banking and block walking should run from early morning through 6:30 PM, while knock and drag should run until 6:45 PM. Permits may be required and times may be set by local entities for sound trucks. Polling locations must be fully staffed all day. Material, food, and drink must be delivered. Data retrieval teams (DRTs) must report to the headquarters for the GOTV effort. Rallies must be set up and operated.

The headquarters must be fully staffed and have plenty of food and drink. As the polls close, turn the work party into a real party.

Checklist: GOTV Components

Vote by Mail

Do we have mail out mail-in ballot applications that can be mailed in a timely fashion?

Do we have enough callers to follow up once the applications are mailed?

Do we have people in place at the courthouses to make sure that those votes do not get thrown out?

Drivers

Do we have enough drivers for early voting (EV) and Election Day (E-Day)?

Do we have enough forms of transportation?

Are we going to have “Sound Cars” and if so, where is the equipment coming from?

Walkers

Do we have enough people and materials for block walks?

Do we have enough water and snacks?

List Checkers

Do we have a system to make sure that we cross voters off our contact lists after they have voted?

DRTs

Have we set up training for the Campaigns to be able to follow the voting on E-day to see where we need the most work throughout the day?

Callers

Do we have enough phones and people to be able to phone bank?

Do they have phone lists?

Do we have enough locations (law offices, campaign HQs, and boiler rooms?)

Protection

Have we gotten enough people together that know how to protect voters at the polls and then to protect their votes?

Does every county know whom they should call, if voter intimidation is reported?

Do we have lawyers on stand by to help ensure the safety of voter's rights?

Do we have phone numbers that go directly to the county and state officials, if we detect voter fraud and intimidation?

GOTV Block Walking

This section covers the mechanics of door-to-door block walks in precincts that are 65% or more Democratic. This kind of block walk is used in the General Election.

In counties with a permanent Party Block Captain Program in place, the block captain, walkers, and drivers would all be in place in the targeted precincts. The Block Captain Program is the best of all possible worlds, but it is hard to create and even harder to maintain. Whether or not your county party has a Block Captain Program, you should organize the following Block Walk Program in the core (65% or higher) precincts.

The Block Walk Program is designed to be a paid program. However, once you have planned a Block Walk Program for all the core precincts, you can scale back your efforts to match the resources available. You may be able to use well-trained volunteers in some precincts. You may choose to eliminate some doors (households) or precincts or cut the number of walks to match the resources you have available.

Cover a smaller area very well instead of a large area poorly. Go to every door, other than Republicans. Don't worry about voter history. In the core precincts the vast majority of the people not voting would be Democrats if they voted. Play the percentages.

Finding Walkers

The best way to compile lists of walkers is to hold events in the targeted communities long before the election. Gather together people from the targeted area. Give them some ownership in the event. Make it fun. Have interesting speakers. Have a program to teach them about grassroots politics. Keep a list. This list will be the foundation to create the walks months later.

Locate potential paid walkers and give them initial training. So little serious door-to-door (knock and take) effort has been made in Texas that lists of trained community walkers are generally not available. Pick potential leaders from these events—the introductory events and the training sessions.

Working with Campaigns

From the beginning, work with local Democratic clubs, local elected officials, and all campaigns in the area you are walking, including state and local campaigns. Some campaigns will be mailing, phoning, walking, and running special radio or TV ads in the area. Hopefully, the messages are similar and the timing of your efforts will complement theirs, but candidates often have a message that works in swing precincts, but does not motivate the hard-core Democrat or minorities. This is where the slate materials and straight-ticket message discussed previously come into play. Some campaigns may be running their own GOTV block walking program. Be sure you are working with them and not duplicating efforts.

Door-to-Door Mechanics

- All walks should be conducted during early voting hours and on Election Day.
 - o On weekdays it is best to walk from 5 PM until dark. But use 9 AM to 5 PM to target age 65+ households for vote-by-mail programs or rides to the polls during early vote. Walk all day on Election Day.
 - o Early-voting walks should be after work and on weekdays, from 10 AM until the poll closes on Saturday, from 1 PM until the poll closes on Sunday, and from 9 AM until the poll closes on Election Day.
- There should be at least two (2) block walks during early voting and one (1) block walk on Election Day.
- Estimate the doors (households) on the walk lists for the area targeted. On average there are two (2) registered voters per door.

- Estimate walkers needed:
 - It takes one (1) hour for each walker to cover an average of twenty (20) doors with "knock and drag." Walk lists should be divided into pieces that a person can walk in two (2) hours.
 - The walkers from local communities shall be trained shortly before the walks begin.
 - Walkers should be of the same ethnicity as the neighborhood they will work, and preferably from the same locality.
- Estimate supervisors and equipment needed:
 - You need a supervisor (team lieutenant) for each six (6) walkers, and a team captain for six (6) sets of six (6) walkers.
 - There should be one (1) polling transport vehicle for each team captain. Borrow one (1) if possible.
- The walkers should have colorful construction flags or surveyor flags and put one in the yard of everyone willing to be taken to vote. Vehicles travel a prearranged route and picks up the flags as they pick up the voter. They return until all flags are gone.
- All walks should be "knock and take" not just "knock and talk" or just "knock and hang."
- There should be one (1) sound unit for each team captain. It should have a tape player with tapes of someone who would excite the neighborhood. The chatter on the microphone and the tape should back up the walkers' message, which should be to get in the car now to go vote. Run the sound when the walkers are walking. You can get an adequate sound unit at Radio Shack. Get one with a microphone.
- Find an appropriate place to begin and end each walk.
- Have an occasional gathering of the walking team with refreshments. Team spirit!
- Put Area Captains in charge of large areas. Area captains organize the walks, assemble the walkers, train the walkers and fill out the information sheet on each walker with name, address, phone number, social security number, e-mail, fax, age, etc.

Materials

- Construction flags can be purchased at Lowes, Home Depot, etc.
- Paper walk lists and clip boards - keep it simple.
- Handouts (door hangers) should be different for each walk, becoming more intense for each succeeding walk. The pictures should feature a candidate or candidates and the issues most likely to motivate the neighborhood to vote.
 - Remember, we are walking where people vote for Democrats if they vote.
 - Be smart about the use of picture(s) and words.
 - Print one side in Spanish in appropriate areas.
 - A handout is cheaper than a door hanger.
- Water and snacks for walkers.

Making Your Block Walk Program Accountable

- Treat walkers as professional employees
- Remove any walker with a bad attitude.
- Audit the results
- Assure follow up where needed
- Make sure your program is doable