

PRECINCT WALKING

"A good battle plan that you act on today can be better than a perfect one tomorrow." - General George Patton

There is no substitute for getting out and meeting the voters. Ads, yard signs and endorsements help build name recognition, but they don't convince people to vote for you as effectively as looking directly in their eye, shaking their hand and a positive statement like, "I'm John Candidate and I want to serve on your city council. I'm asking for your vote."

This chapter describes a method for organizing precinct walks that reach the largest number of high-propensity voters in your district. The model can be used for large or small races. You can use it for city council and school district races without much modification. For larger races - such as county, assembly and state senate offices, the fundamentals remain the same, but the scale would be bigger and you would employ more sophisticated and detailed analysis of voting patterns and trends than are offered here.

I recently managed a campaign for a first-time candidate running for school board. This is how we planned our precinct walks.

What You Need

Here is what you need to prepare for and execute a precinct walk:

- voter list (in electronic form if possible - in some places you can download these files from the Registrar's Web site)
- district map
- precinct maps
- Microsoft Excel or campaign software
- pens, pencils and highlighters
- push pins
- stick-on stars
- walk lists
- walking script
- folders
- name tags
- campaign literature
- info sheet with instructions for volunteers

Note: Get voter lists, district and precinct maps from the city or county office responsible for your race. You can also get voter data from vendors who clean up the lists before they sell them to you.

PLAN FIRST, WALK LATER

You may be tempted to just walk out of your house and start knocking on doors and ask for votes. After all, time is an issue. However, here are (at least) three obvious problems with this approach:

- 1 If no one's home, they won't know you were there = wasted time.
- 2 If someone is home, they may not be registered = wasted time.
- 3 If they're registered, they may not vote regularly = wasted time.

Don't waste your time. You have too little as it is. You can avoid these pitfalls by planning. "A failure to plan is a plan to fail."

Precinct walks are a steady, methodical invasion that serve a number of purposes:

- establish your presence as a serious candidate
- meet voters and convince them to vote for you
- find people willing to donate and put up yard signs
- get your message out
- hear what the voters are really concerned about
- build enthusiasm and community within your campaign staff and volunteers

BREAK DOWN THE RACE

Understanding the political landscape is key to choosing a walking strategy. An assessment of where we stood in our race helped shape our strategy. From there, we mapped out the voter landscape to determine our tactics.

Political Landscape

What to do

Take stock of the political landscape in your race. On paper, assess these categories:

- name recognition
- party affiliation and party support (there is no such thing as a non-partisan race for the average voter)
- financial and volunteer resources
- opposition - how many candidates, seats, incumbents
- how many votes do you need to win? Check past election results.
- issues
- campaign rules and style

Example

In the school board race, here's what we were up against:

- Mr. Candidate had zero name recognition.