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ESSENTIALS OF VOTER REGISTRATION

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ESSENTIALS OF VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration is at once the most difficult and the most rewarding kind of political action. It is difficult because local administration of registration laws is different everywhere and often in the hands of overly - cautious officials, because the laws themselves tend to discourage rather than encourage registration and because the job of finding the right combination of techniques is long, laborious and unglamorous. The rewards of registration are obvious -- every newly - registered voter adds to the voice of the Negro community.

Hundreds of techniques have been used to promote voter registration -- some have worked successfully, some have failed and some might work if handled differently. Simply to catalogue these techniques would require a large volume, and an individual volume would be necessary to describe every successful registration drive. Yet despite the great variety in local conditions and methods, our experience has shown that there are certain basic essentials which a registration drive should incorporate. These can be divided into three steps: ORGANIZATION, IDENTIFICATION and REGISTRATION.

I. ORGANIZATION

A. Steering Committee

Careful planning is crucial to a successful drive. The first organizational step is to establish a Steering Committee of persons interested in registration and willing to assist the drive. All participating groups should be represented on the Steering Committee, and it is often possible to gain the support of other influential individuals by placing them on the Committee. The Steering Committee should be as small as possible but as large as necessary. It is the single coordinating body within which each group or faction has a voice.

The duties of the Steering Committee are:

1. Appoint Registration Director.
2. Appoint Volunteer Director.
3. Organize necessary subcommittees. (REMEMBER, do not rely on a structure of committees to get the job of registration done. Certain subcommittees may be necessary, such as finance, publicity, and transportation. And there are always some otherwise good workers who will not cooperate without some kind of title and they can be appointed subcommittee chairmen. But successful registration in the precincts is accomplished by hard work, and too many committees can organize you out of business. The fewer the committees, the better.)
4. Arrange for headquarters and supplies. The registration office can be located almost anywhere, but it should be a permanent headquarters. It is often possible to obtain rent - free space.
5. Use influence to persuade local officials to expand registration facilities.

In other words, the Steering Committee is an organizing committee. It is a method by which leaders of the community can agree upon registration goals, select personnel, raise funds and keep the drive in motion.

B. Registration Director

One good man in charge of day-to-day operations can mean the difference between success and failure. The Registration Director should have administrative ability, be able to work with people, be acceptable to the various supporting groups -- in short, he should be the best man you can get. If possible, he should work full time and receive a salary.

C. Volunteer Director

The care and feeding of volunteer workers is often overlooked in registration drives. Volunteers must be given definite work schedules and specific

tasks to complete. Refreshments and transportation also should be provided whenever possible. Volunteers will continue to report for work if they feel a sense of organization and accomplishment, and this requires supervision by a full-time person, preferably a woman. The Volunteer Director is also responsible for recruiting workers from supporting groups, church groups, women's groups and young people's organizations.

D. Tools

Certain working tools are required before the organizational step is completed. These are:

1. Street Index (Criss-Cross) Telephone Directory or City Directory.
2. Registered voters list.
3. Ward and precinct maps of Negro areas.

II. IDENTIFICATION

Successful registration drives begin with a great deal of hard work and very little glory. To register large numbers of voters, it is first necessary to find out how many citizens are not registered, then identify who they are and where they live.

It is relatively easy to determine how many unregistered Negroes live in your city or county. First, obtain from the Board of Elections either the number of registered Negroes or the number of registrants living in identifiable Negro wards or precincts. Second, subtract this figure from the total number of non-whites who are of voting age. (This information is found in the Bureau of the Census publication for each state entitled, General Population Characteristics, 1960.) The result is the approximate number of unregistered Negroes in your community.

Now the job is to find out who they are and where they live. This can be accomplished by a RECORDS CHECK and a DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASS.

A. Records Check

The records check makes it possible to target your efforts directly into unregistered households. It provides field workers with a list of unregistered Negroes by name, address and telephone number.

The method is simple: compare the voters' list against the Street Index (Criss-Cross) Telephone Directory or the City Directory. Those names appearing in the Directory which do not appear on the voters' list represent unregistered households.

Before the list of registered voters can be easily compared with the Directory, the voters' list must first be arranged by street and house number rather than alphabetically. This is a time-consuming process, but it can be done handily if many volunteers are assigned to the task. The best way to rearrange the names is to transfer each onto a separate index card, then sort the cards in the correct street - address order. After the cards are properly arranged, the names can be typed onto a new list which will look something like this:

REGISTERED VOTERS

Ward 2
Precinct F

<u>House No.</u>	<u>Name</u>
<u>Elm St.</u> 5500	Dunn, O. F.
5500	Dunn, Marie
5504	Holloway, J. M.
5507	Wilcox, R. D.
5510	Johnson, Mrs. J. M.
5515	Gentry, R. J.
5611	Miller, Herman A.
5612	Rasheim, O. C.
5614	Henderson, L. L.
5615	Osteen, James B.
5615	Craig, Sally
5618	Steele, Ruth

Once the unregistered voters have been checked off in the Directory, their names, addresses and telephone numbers should be transferred to worksheets for use by the door-to-door canvassing team.

On the next page is a sample work sheet.

STREET CANVASS WORKLIST
Voter Registration Drive

Ward 3 Precinct F
Street Catalpa
From # 5501 to # 5611

Signature of Canvasser

John P. Crawford

House Number	Name	Telephone Number	Remarks
			A. Needs Ride B. Needs Baby-sitter C. Will Volunteer D. Died E. Moved F. Lacks Resident Status G. House Vacant
5501	RYAN, JOHN	JU8-9585	
5502	ALEXANDER, MRS. R.W.	JU8-9680	
5508	BLAKE, JOEL	JU8-0989	
5511	PAIGE, S. T.	JU8-7231	
5517	TINSLEY, GEORGE L.	JU8-1190	
5607	ROBINSON, MRS. NILMA	JU8-2175	
5611	CONYERS, NATE	JU8-1193	

IS A RECORDS CANVASS NECESSARY ?

At first glance, some people think the records canvass is impractical and a waste of time. Certainly in some areas this would be true -- communities with very low registration, communities with out - dated voters' lists and Directories and places where high mobility makes records worthless. In these areas, door-to-door canvassing from scratch is the best substitute.

But in many Negro areas -- and the successful 1964 registration campaign proves it -- the records canvass is a very useful and effective tool. Why?

First, it provides specific tasks which can be assigned to volunteers in the early stages of the drive, promoting the feeling of participation in a going organization.

Second, it enables the Registration Director to assign specific names and addresses of unregistered voters to his door-to-door workers when they go into the field. The worker then has a specific assignment which he is expected to complete and report on. Our experience with volunteers has consistently shown that they work better and continue to work if they are given simple, direct jobs to do.

Third, the Records Canvass gives great psychological assistance to the door-to-door worker. He has a name to ask for when he knocks on a door and is able to say, "Our records show that you are unregistered," thereby discouraging unregistered persons from telling him they are registered. The canvasser already possesses basic information and does not have to start from the beginning.

Fourth, the Records Canvass makes it possible to send workers directly to unregistered homes -- the job of targeting is completed before a doorbell is rung.

Fifth, the Records Canvass enables the Director to maintain tight organizational control at his central headquarters. He knows which assignments he has made and can deal immediately with his field workers' reports.

B. Door-To-Door Canvassing

Once the records canvass is completed, the Registration Director deploys his volunteers in the field. Each volunteer is assigned a specific area and is given worksheets with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the unregistered voters in his area.

The Registration Director must give each field worker a briefing on the registration requirements of the state. Each canvasser must KNOW THE LAW.

The canvasser then goes to each home on his worksheet. He asks for the unregistered voter and finds out how many other unregistered persons live there. The canvasser first explains the great importance of registration and what the power of the ballot can do for Negroes. He should make them feel a part of the community effort. He tells them how, when and where to register and answers their questions about registration and voting. He gives them literature emphasizing the importance of registration and voting, and containing the specific information of how, when and where. He offers to provide transportation or baby-sitting assistance on Registration Day. It is often effective to ask each unregistered voter

to pledge that he will register. In addition, the canvasser will find some people willing to do volunteer work.

The canvasser makes appropriate notations on his worksheet -- "needs transportation at a certain time," "needs a baby-sitter at a certain time," "will volunteer," "house vacant," et cetera. He also makes changes in his worksheet when he discovers deaths or changes of address.

If enough volunteers are available, canvassers should work in pairs (preferably a man and a woman). Each team should be assigned a specific precinct or other geographical area.

The door-to-door canvass should be conducted as close as possible to Registration Day. Reminders to register will be forgotten if made too far in advance.

Second, in making the registration list, the canvasser should be sure that the names of all registered voters in his district are included. The canvasser should be sure that the names of all persons who are eligible to register are included. The canvasser should be sure that the names of all persons who are not eligible to register are excluded.

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Part II - The Canvasser

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III. REGISTRATION

Now that you have found the unregistered voters and encouraged them personally to register, the final phase is to get their names on the books.

While the door-to-door canvass is in process the follow-up begins. Every kind of available publicity should be used.

A. RADIO - TV - NEWSPAPERS

Radio and TV stations are prime channels for promoting registration. Stations should be urged to give free time for:

- Special five - minute talks by prominent civic leaders about the importance of voter registration.
- Spot announcements urging registration, giving the dates, times and places.
- Announcements about the drive in regular news broadcasts.

Daily and weekly newspapers should be urged to run:

- News stories on the registration drive.
- Information on how, when and where to register, especially on neighborhood registration days.

B. OTHER CHANNELS

Other sources for reaching the public should be used:

- Businesses can be persuaded to include registration slogans and information in their window displays.
- Handbills can be distributed door-to-door, at street corners, in front of factories, schools and supermarkets -- anywhere large numbers of people are found.
- Theaters can be asked to run registration spots between films.
- Clergymen can be asked to urge their congregations to register.

C. TELEPHONE FOLLOW-UP

The telephone is an effective follow-up tool. Volunteers can call unregistered voters, reminding them when and where to register and offering transportation and baby-sitting services. Like the door-to-door canvass, the telephone follow-up should be made as close as possible to Registration Day.

It will be beneficial to set aside a telephone and a volunteer in the central headquarters to answer questions about registration. The number should be well - publicized so unregistered voters can call in for information.

D. LITERATURE

ABOVE ALL ELSE, LITERATURE MUST BE HELPFUL. Every piece of promotional material should tell when and where to register. A basic mimeographed flyer can be run off and the necessary information for each precinct filled in with a felt-point pen. These will be much more effective than a few expensive color posters.

E. THE FINAL PUSH

The registration organization moves into full swing on the days and nights of neighborhood registration. Every available volunteer is used to telephone unregistered voters, drive automobiles, knock on doors, provide temporary baby-sitting, drive sound trucks and distribute handbills.

The transportation system on Registration Day should be centralized. A telephone number at central headquarters should be well - publicized so unregistered voters can call for transportation. The names and addresses of all those who have requested rides previously should be assigned to drivers.

In addition to the specific appointments for rides made by callers and during the door-to-door canvass, teams of volunteers with cars should be used in all unregistered areas. Drivers should go to homes on the unregistered list, urge the residents to register and offer immediate transportation.

A variation of this technique is the "hopper" system. Two-man teams of volunteers, one driving and one knocking on doors, go to unregistered homes and remind residents that today is Registration Day, urge them to register and offer immediate transportation. High school and college students make good "hoppers" during the late afternoon and evening hours when they are needed most.

Chartered bus transportation to registration offices can be used where distances are significant and buses available at little or no cost. Schools, churches or labor groups might be willing to loan available buses. The use of buses must be backed up by publicity in the areas where they will be available.

If enough volunteers are available on Registration Day, door-to-door block workers can be assigned to priority blocks in the Negro community. This type of activity, even when cars are not available, is often highly effective.

The rewards for all your previous work of identifying and contacting unregistered voters come on Registration Day. No effort should be spared.