

Relational Organizing 101

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What is relational organizing?

Relational organizing is the simple, proven idea that people talking to their own friends and family is more impactful than strangers talking to strangers.

Data shows that a relational touch – a person talking to someone they know and have a relationship with – is more than 2.5 times more effective than a stranger talking to a stranger. It's also more efficient – if you're knocking doors or making phone calls, you're likely to talk to 1 in every 10 people; but with relational organizing, if you were going to call or text 10 people you know, you'd likely reach and talk to most (if not all!) of them.

It's also common sense! You could reach out to your mom, your best friends, your two coworkers, and your neighbor about the election and have quality, impactful conversations with each of them. If I were trying to reach those people by calling them and knocking on their door, it would take me much longer – and they wouldn't trust me in the same way they trust you.

We know that the messenger is as important (if not more important) than the message – and THAT is why relational organizing is so effective.

How does a campaign run a relational program?

Relational organizing on a campaign typically happens in three steps:

- 1. Recruit volunteers.**

Ask people to talk to their friends and family about a candidate/an election. Recruit these volunteers by making phone calls, sending text messages, holding events, posting on social media, sending out emails, etc.

- 2. Ask them to map their networks.**

Have people make a list of who they know. (Most people can map between 10-60 people.) You can prompt them: who do they typically talk about politics with? Who are their family members? Their friends? People they work with? Do they go to church or a synagogue? Are they a part of a team or organization, like a PTA? Who are the last twenty people they called or texted? Are they a part of any groups on Facebook or Nextdoor?

3. **Have them talk to their networks.**

Once they've mapped out who they know, they should talk to their people. If their friend or family member is a regular Democratic voter, they should be asked to talk to *their* networks about the election. If their friend or family member doesn't vote in every election, they should talk about why voting is so important and help them make a plan to vote (these people are "GOTV targets" – get out the vote). If their friend or family member isn't sure why they should vote for Democrats, have them talk to them about the stakes of the election and the good work that Democrats have done (these people are "persuasion targets" – we need them to vote for Democrats).

One of the benefits of relational organizing is that you don't have to only have one conversation – you can have many! For example, I email my parents when I know their ballots have been mailed to them; I go over to their house on a weekend and we fill out our ballots together; I put their ballots in the mailbox for us; and then I call them when I get the notification that they're received.

How to measure relational outreach

There are different ways to measure relational organizing happening. You can measure how many volunteers are talking to their friends and family members, and how many people they're talking to. For example: 75 volunteers are talking to an average of 15 people each, so the campaign is reaching 1,125 voters.

To keep track of that, you can use pen and paper or a spreadsheet. There are also apps available to help facilitate relational organizing and track it, including [Empower](#), [Impactive](#), [Reach](#), and [OutreachCircle](#).

Questions from Candidates

Why does relational organizing feel so hard?

Most political data management programs do not capture relationships between people, which makes it hard to track the work you are doing and measure it. This can make a campaign feel as if they are not making progress.

How do we reach out to people initially? Is it best to give them phone call, text, email?

As a candidate you will know your community best, but a good rule of thumb is whichever is easiest. But for volunteer recruitment, the more asks the better, which may mean an email or text blast at first. People need to be asked several times before they say yes. As a campaign you may end up emailing, texting, and calling before they say yes to volunteer.

It also may be important to do the ask in a different way. Start by asking to have coffee and talking about issues dear to them, then make your ask. If they say no, ask who else they could point you to in that community who may be interested.

Many individuals establish themselves as the “political” one in their friend group. This is who you want to go to for this type of outreach program. You ask them to post on social media for you, bring you up when they gather with friends, and even talk to their banker, doctor, or grocery cashier when making small talk. Normalize talking about voting, the election, and you as a candidate.

When you have a trusting relationship with someone, how can you help them feel courageous to have these conversations and broach the subject with others?

Train your volunteers on how to have conversations. However, these conversations are not prescriptive and should be tailored to the person they are talking with. This process is organic.

Again, establishing a robust social campaign template for them will help individuals begin to be recognized as the election expert in their networks. Provide them a basic schedule of posts that they can put in their own words to push your information out. When someone “likes” a post, the volunteer should follow up with them to talk about you as a candidate further. Again, normalize talking about voting and the political process in general.

Pro Tip: If your volunteers wear quirky t-shirts it opens the door to conversations with a wide array of folks.

How do you help volunteers become more versed in particular issue areas?

Volunteers do not need to know the ins and outs of every issue, they just need to talk about what they care about. Often people feel you must know every detail about an issue to talk about it, and that is a disservice to our community members as it leaves so many people out of the process. These are going to be values based conversations that connect people together through relationship building.

How can campaigns help volunteers do really cool events to draw more people into the process?

Let volunteers do what they want to do (within reason). Do not stick to the same old prescribed activities of Field work and you will see creativity grow. Let them figure out what they really like to do in the community and run with it. Do what is fun, and bring a little politics into it. Some examples: cast iron cookouts, Boba and Ballots events, attending Magic the Gathering tournaments.

Help your volunteers organize the first couple, but then let them run with it and build their own ownership into the campaign. This adds to the inclusivity of your campaign as they will be able to invite a broader range of community members to the table.



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AND WIN

If you are a candidate that is not already established in communities of color to do this work, how should you proceed?

Do NOT treat people transactionally. Do NOT come in and tell them what they need, be ready to learn from the community. You are there to establish a long term relationship that should last well beyond the election.

Have multiple conversations in that community, not just one and done. Hear about things that are important to them and follow-up with action around those things. Meet them where they are literally and figuratively. Show that you care about the community and do it in a way that is long-term focussed.

Consider having a coffee date with someone from that community to be honest about your needs and internet to build a relationship. They can connect you with others and act as a validator in the community.

Additional resources:

<https://relentless.vote/resources>

Arena: [A Guide to Relational Organizing](#)

MotherJones: [The Secret to Beating Trump Lies With You and Your Friends](#)