

RESEARCHING YOUR DISTRICT

Version 1.0



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You've heard the tip to "research your district," but what does that entail? Researching the area you are running in provides a familiarity with the entire district, directs your campaign strategy, and allows your campaign to be strategic in utilizing resources. You are making educated guesses about the district, so the more well-informed you are, the more accurate your guess will be.

Resources to Start Your Research

Where do we recommend finding this information? For New York women running for office, here are the best places to start:

Voter Files

- You can request access to Voter Files on the Board of Elections website; a simple Google search can steer you in the right direction.
 - The voter file lists show voting history - this may lack information on people who have recently moved or registered to vote.
- VAN, GOP Data Center, Aristotle, or a voter database of your choice
 - Using these tools, you can find breakdowns of different voter trends, such as how many voters participated in the last three primary or general elections.

District Information

- [Statistical Atlas](#): a helpful tool to find out what other districts, municipalities, unincorporated areas, and zip codes intersect with your district, as well as demographic information. Note this tool has not been updated with new legislative districts.
- [Ballotpedia](#): a valuable platform to see outcome, candidates, and context from previous election cycles. Note this tool has not been updated with new legislative districts.
- [Dave's Redistricting](#): a platform that includes new districts redistricting resources and allows you to analyze new districts for the State House and State Senate.
- [Legislative Coordinating Commission](#): interactive maps, files, and reports to understand recent changes to districts.

- [VoteSmart](#): a website that showcases information on elected officials such as stances on issues, speeches, funding, and voting record.

Utilizing Your Research

Researching the district can provide context on who lives in your district, but maybe outside of your neighborhood, and who the electorate is for your election. This research can help inform how to campaign and communicate with voters effectively.

Understanding Previous Elections and Your District

Researching previous elections can direct strategy and provide insight into allocating resources. Looking back at the earlier elections can help you determine your win number, target voters, and develop a more profound knowledge of the area you will represent.

Questions to ask:

- What was the turnout in the last several similar elections?
- How many people voted in the previous comparable elections?
- Who are the super voters in your district?
- Outside of the super voters, where can you expand your universe?
- What are the demographics of your district overall?
- Since precincts and neighborhoods vary, what are the breakdowns by precinct?
Finding this information on tailoring your message and distributing resources.

Connecting Research to Campaign Tactics

On the campaign trail, time is a finite resource. Your campaign can find how to use the best available resources and effectively connect with voters. By understanding the demographic breakdowns of your district, you can efficiently tailor your outreach.

- Prioritizing your canvassing and phone banking efforts
 - Example: if one precinct has significantly higher super voters than another, prioritizing the first precinct would ensure that you are reaching your canvassing goals in a timely manner.
- Utilizing different tactics to reach voters
 - Example: if your district has a significantly higher rate of older voters, connecting with voters through phone banks, robocalls, or door to door would be more impactful than using a texting platform.

- Shaping your messaging to voters
 - Example: if your district has a high immigrant population, then it would be beneficial to integrate immigration-related issues into your platform.

Finding Top Issues

Understanding what issues are at the forefront of voters' minds is crucial on the campaign trail. Depending on your budget, there are a variety of directions to tackle this research.

- Look at past candidates who ran for office in your district, either for the seat you are running for or candidates running for mayor or congress in your district.
- Watch and listen to county or municipal meetings to see what is being discussed. However, it's important to note that people who are speaking at these meetings are very involved and may not be reflective of the entire voting population.
- Poll voters in your district. If your campaign can afford to poll, this is a good way to find out what issues are concerning to voters.
 - NOTE: if you do want to poll but have a budget constraint, you don't have to poll from a big universe but ensure that your poll has a diverse demographic.
- Connect with your canvassing and phone banking programs. While you are knocking on doors or speaking with voters on the phone, start the conversation off by asking people what issues they are passionate about or what issues are they concerned about in the community. While this option is more time-consuming, it does allow you to focus on canvassing, and gathering information regarding issues, and costs significantly less than polling.

Frequently Asked Questions

What mistakes do first-time candidates make and how to avoid them?

An easy mistake many first-time candidates may face is holding a “cookie-cutter” mindset when it comes to what your campaign and targeting should look like. Every district is different, and your campaign should reflect your district.

What are the best practices in approaching targeting a universe?

The first component of targeting is capturing super voters, individuals who have a pattern of voting in similar elections to yours. Since these voters are likely to vote in your election, it’s important for you and the campaign to be touching and connect with these households. Think: who does your campaign need to mobilize?

The second step you can take is looking at who your campaign can activate. Consider what can give you an edge over your opponent and who your campaign can bring to the table. Through this second step, think about what demographics in your district are often overlooked and from there, who is likely to vote for you if your campaign reached out to them.

Do you try to get super voters from only your party or across the aisle? Is it better to target supervoters from both parties, or partisan?

This entirely depends on what type of election you are running in and the landscape of your district. To attract voters not in your party, think about your edge and qualifications that would convince them to vote for you, especially if that means pulling a different ballot. It’s important to remember who you need in order to achieve the 50%+1 on Election Day to win.

Is it worth the effort to make voter education part of your campaign?

Absolutely! It’s important to remember that most voters are not as aware of election information as you and your campaign team are. Updating voters on where and when to vote, changes with polling locations, and even the election date are incredibly helpful; especially if your election is not held in November.