

# **A GUIDE TO THE POWER OF RELATIONAL ORGANIZING**

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Version 1.0



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## What is Relational Organizing?

Relational Organizing is the simple, proven concept that people talking to their friends and family is more effective than strangers talking to strangers. Relational Organizing isn't new, but it's become an increasingly popular formalized tactic in recent campaign cycles. As trust in politicians and institutions decreases, the messenger is becoming as important (if not more important!) as the message.

This is a natural way to organize. If you needed ten people to show up at an event, you wouldn't start by calling through the voter file, knocking on doors, or putting out a digital ad, you would start by texting or calling your friends and family and asking them to attend, because you already have a relationship with them. Your friends and family are more likely to pick up the phone when you call, and they're more likely to say yes because they know and trust you.

Your friends and family are likely agreeing (at least initially) because you asked. The actual thing you're asking them to do (show up to an event, for example) is less important than the fact that you've communicated to them that it's important to you. Part of the effectiveness of Relational Organizing is due to the social capital you already have with friends and family who trust you.

Relational Organizing is just organizing – but we give it its own term (“relational”) to differentiate it from other campaign organizing like phone banking and door knocking, which are based around volunteers calling and canvassing voters who they don't know.

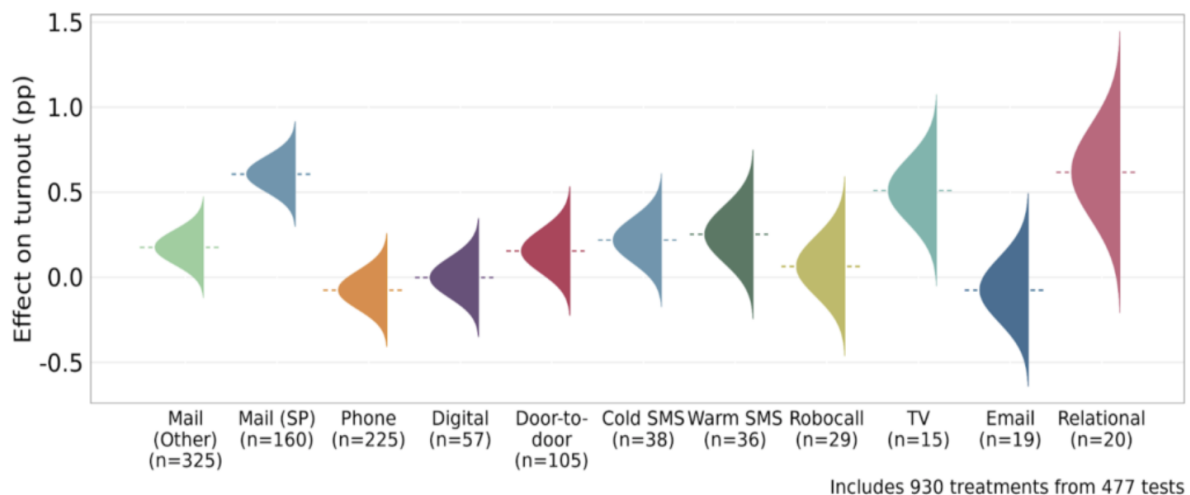
Effective field programs include both friend-to-friend outreach (“warm” outreach) and stranger-to-stranger outreach (“cold” outreach), and effective campaigns are able to weave relational tactics into all levels of their voter-contact operations. If you can reach a voter through a trusted messenger – a friend or a family member who is volunteering for your campaign – that's the most impactful way to reach them. If you can't, you can knock on their door or cold call them. Some programs include a combination of cold and warm outreach. Relational is effective everywhere. It's a great way to reach voters who live in rural communities where knocking doors takes a lot of time. It's an effective way to reach students

on college campuses where you can't typically knock doors or call through a voter file. And relational is a particularly impactful way to reach young voters (who are more likely to move frequently), low-propensity voters, and voters of color, who are traditionally harder for campaigns to reach.

## A Few Numbers

As mentioned above, a conversation between people who trust each other has been found to be at least **twice** as effective than a conversation between two strangers. The effects of these conversations also last much longer than a cold phone call and door knock.

Contact rates are also significantly higher between people who know each other. You're much more likely to pick up the phone or respond to a text message when it's someone you know. We estimate that relational contact rates are around 80 percent; in contrast, contact rates for phone calls are about 5-10 percent, and canvassing contact rates are about 15-20 percent.



## Who should be doing Relational Outreach?

Everyone on your campaign should be talking to their friends and family about the campaign and the election. (Sometimes we assume that everyone in our life knows what we're doing and what they can do to help – but that isn't necessarily true. Actually asking people one-on-one is the best way to get them to take action, always.)

- The candidate should absolutely be asking their entire networks to not just support them, but also to volunteer and donate.
- All staff should be asking their friends and family members to support the campaign (especially if they're in the district), volunteer, and donate. Make this a system – either set goals around it for staff, or set time to do it all together so it actually gets done.
- All volunteers should be asked to talk to their friends and family about the campaign, whether they live in the state or district of the campaign or not. (Relational outreach – talking to friends and family who live in the district – is a particularly good ask to make of volunteers who don't live in the state or district of the campaign.)

## How to include Relational in your Campaign Plan

Relational Organizing can help with every part of your campaign plan, whether you're recruiting volunteers, registering voters, persuading undecided people, raising money, or mobilizing supporters to vote. More on each below:

- **Volunteer recruitment:** Your volunteers can ask their friends and family to also volunteer for your campaign, whether that's attending campaign events, knocking doors, making phone calls, sending text messages, or talking to their friends and family.
- **Voter registration:** Your volunteers should make sure all of their friends, family, acquaintances, everyone are registered to vote at their current address. This is a great first ask for volunteers who might be nervous about talking about politics with their friends and family. Just have them ask: are you double sure you're registered to vote?
- **Persuasion:** Your friends and family should be persuading everyone in their networks to support your campaign. This can take a lot of different forms – they can send your

campaign's ads or social media posts to people in their networks, they can have 1:1 conversations with them about the campaign and candidate, they can invite them to campaign events to hear from the candidates, etc.

- **Grassroots fundraising:** Your volunteers can also ask other supporters in their networks to chip in money for your campaign, especially if they know people who are already supporting your campaign.
- **GOTV:** We know a relational ask is the most effective way to actually get someone to actually return a ballot or show up to vote. Your volunteers should be asking every supporter in their network to vote for you. If your focus is on getting supporters to sign up to vote by mail, your volunteers should be asking everyone in their networks to sign up to vote by mail, and then ask them to fill out and send back their ballots once they've gotten them. If your focus is pushing supporters to vote early, your volunteers should be asking everyone in their networks to vote early. And at the end of the election, your volunteers should be pushing everyone in their networks to vote on Election Day.

**NOTE:** Once a supporter has voted, they should absolutely be recruited to get all their friends and family to vote! Sometimes we hope this will just happen naturally – but we know that people need to be actually asked and trained to mobilize their friends and family members and get them to the polls.

As we mentioned earlier, you won't be able to reach everyone you might need to win through your volunteers. (The homophily effect is real: people are likely to surround themselves with people who share similar characteristics and values, which is Relational Organizing's biggest limiting factor.) When you're building your campaign plan, relational is the best first ask. Figure out who your staff and volunteers are and who they know and can reach.

*Think: parents who are members of a PTA, people who are involved in church groups, students on campuses, people who are active on Nextdoor in their neighborhoods, etc.*

Once you have a sense of who you can reach through networks, you can figure out who you can't reach and build a cold outreach program to reach, engage, persuade, and mobilize enough people to win.

## Measuring your Relational Program

When you're building a relational program, you'll want to measure it. Many campaign programs measure attempts at trying to reach people – for example, the number of doors a volunteer knocks, or the number of phone calls a person makes. With relational, here are some metrics that might be helpful to measure:

- How many people are talking to their friends and family
- How many people in the community they know
- How many conversations they're having with friends and family (per week or month)

This will vary widely by state, congressional district, and even neighborhood, and by who's doing the relational work (moms versus students versus staff). A good place to start when you're building metrics is that each volunteer will know 30 people in their network. Some will know many more people and some fewer, but it's a helpful starting place.

## Relational Tools

There are many organizing tools that can help support your relational program. These tools typically do two things: 1) allow your volunteers to match their contacts to the voter file (either manually or by uploading many contacts at once) and 2) facilitate the communication between your volunteers and their friends/family (for example, sending them a text through the tool).

Costs for these tools will vary by how big your campaign is, how many people will be using the tool, and how many months you'll be using the tool.

When you're planning your relational program, it's important not to let the tool dictate the strategy. Some of the best relational programs are run using a Google spreadsheet.

Here are tips for deciding on a tool:

1. **Write out your strategy.** What is your path to victory? Who do you need to reach? What groups or communities in your district do you need to connect with? Do your volunteers already likely know those people? (Would your volunteers even want to use a tool?)
2. **Consider your budget.** Do you have money to spend on a tool?

3. **Consider your scale.** If you're running a statewide campaign, it might be easier to scale your relational program by using a tool. If you're in a smaller district, you might not need to worry about scale and can do a lot of this through pen and paper or a spreadsheet.

It may also be helpful to talk to other campaigns using a tool and hear about upsides and pain points for them.

## Training

Training is one of the most critical elements of a successful relational program. It may seem like people talking to their friends, family, and community members about politics and elections is easy and obvious, but in many cases, it isn't. Effective trainings will help your staff and volunteers feel more comfortable and confident when they reach out to their networks, will help them have more impactful conversations, and will help them record what they're doing so you can measure how many of your volunteers are talking to how many voters.

Here are some tips for training on relational outreach:

1. **Explain the basics.** Again, it may sound obvious that people should be talking to their friends and family about your campaign and about the election, but if you don't make it a priority, people won't do it (and you certainly won't be able to measure it). When you're training someone, explain why relational is effective (see the first part of this document). Explain that THEY are the best messenger, and THEY know which message is most effective for each person. Peel back the curtain on the strategy, and people will understand much more what they're being asked to do and how to do it effectively.
2. **Build a ramp or curriculum.** When people are told they need to talk to friends and community about politics, they sometimes immediately think they need to convince the hardest person in their life. Not true! Have people take it slow and build up to harder conversations. For example, have people start by posting something about the campaign or candidate on social media and seeing who likes the post, then having them reach out to those people one-on-one and engage. Or have people start by texting the last ten people they texted or called and inviting them to a campaign event. Taking small and specific steps will make people more comfortable talking about the

campaign with their friends and family, and the more comfortable they become, the more they'll do it.

3. **Prompt people on who they should talk to.** It may be hard for people to think of people in their networks they should be talking to. Here are some prompts you can give them on who they should reach out to first:
  - Who are the last 5-10 people you called or texted?
  - Do you know anyone who has moved lately?
  - Do you have anyone who you regularly talk about politics with?
  - Who are people you work with?
  - Who are people you live near and talk to?
  - Who do you talk to over social media? (What social media groups are you a part of?)
  - Are you a part of any communities, like religious groups, local neighborhood organizations (NextDoor), PTAs or other parenting groups, school communities/clubs, sports teams or clubs, alumni networks, etc?
  - Do you know anyone who doesn't live in the state or district right now but who would also know a lot of people in the state or district?
4. **Train people first on the theory, *then* on the tool.** One best practice is to not train people right away on the tool. Tools can be confusing, and it can be harder for a volunteer to learn the theory behind what they're doing – delivering an important message to their own network – if they're focused instead on how to upload their contacts into the app. It might be better to first have your volunteers literally write down who they know on paper or in a notebook and then, down the line, have them enter those people into an app. They'll learn what you're asking them to do, and they'll likely trust the process more.
5. **Don't over-think how people should reach their contacts.** If they talk to their mom every Sunday evening on the phone, have them wait until that call to talk about the election. If they feel more comfortable sending someone a DM over Facebook, have them do that. People should reach their contacts in whatever way is most natural to their relationship.
6. **Train people to train their friends!** Once someone is talking to their friends and family, they should be asking any of their friends and family who are supporting the



campaign to talk to their networks. That's how you can scale your program. You can set metrics around this – if each volunteer has a goal of talking to 30 friends and family, ask them to recruit 5 friends and family to talk to their friends/family.

## Events to support Relational Outreach

If your campaign is asking your volunteers to prioritize relational outreach, make sure you prioritize it in the time you're spending, too. Make relational outreach a part of every event. Schedule 1:1s with each volunteer to coach them through conversations with every person in their network. Pair people together with similar networks so they can learn from each other, share best practices, and hold each other accountable.

Here are some other ideas for ways to build relational outreach into your events:

- **Volunteer 1:1s.** Either in-person or virtually, make time with each volunteer to talk about who is in their network and brainstorm best practices for how to talk to each. This is also a good way to gather anecdotal data about how conversations are going and what people are saying about your campaign or candidate.
- **House meetings.** Ask a volunteer to invite everyone in their network to their house (or to a Zoom). You and the campaign team can run the meeting, but the volunteer will be the best at inviting their own networks.
- **Friend banks.** You can also have an event where everyone sits together while they contact their friends (also called a “friend bank.”) It's a way to make the process more collaborative and communal.
- **Make relational a part of other campaign events.** Spend the first 10 minutes of a phone bank or canvass explaining why relational is important and have them reach out to friends. (It's really effective to have people reach out at the beginning of a shift and then see who responded by the end of the shift). If you're opening an office or having a donor strategy call, spend part of your time walking through relational and asking people to think of friends/family to reach out to. Integrate it into everything you do!

## Recap

Relational Organizing – people talking to their friends and family about a candidate or an election – is the most effective way to recruit new supporters, persuade people who are undecided, and mobilize people to vote. It’s a very natural way for people (especially women with large networks in the community) to organize – and it’s a critical way to not just build a short-term organization but also an effective way to build long-term power.

Relational is another tactic in your toolbox as you reach and persuade enough people to win. Make your relational program (and a tool, if you choose to get one) work for YOU.