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The impact of GOTV programs on turnout

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Bcc:

I thought it would be useful to send out some observations from the perspective of the Fairfax Victory 2011 to those of you who participated in the effort. Thanks again for all of the time and energy you put into making this a success. The goals of the program were as follows:

- Provide a Countywide GOTV program which would increase turnout among our supporters; the absence of this program would have resulted in lower turnout.
- Maximize the effectiveness of volunteer efforts by focusing those efforts on activities that have proven to increase turnout.
- Minimize the duplication of efforts by multiple campaigns that represent the same geographic areas.
- Increase turnout among Democratic supporters at a higher rate than our opponents.
- Maximize return on investment for funding partners by providing a program which would be cost prohibitive if each campaign were to set up and run it on their own.

It is best to frame the discussion around the impacts of these efforts in a way that focuses on conclusive objective data, rather than relying on unfounded conjecture and anecdotal evidence. If we were to compare turnout percentages in '11 to those in '07 we would see that the percentage of the electorate that voted is lower. However, to do so is to start with a false premise: the goal of GOTV programs is to increase the turnout percentage from the last similar election. Thus, we would also ignore the impact of the large amount of time, money, and energy that has been spent on expanding the electorate by registering new voters since '07. These new registrants led to an increase in voter registration of 34,427 total active registrants compared 2007.

These voter registration efforts render any discussion of turnout percentage meaningless because looking at percentages of total active registrants that vote ignores the fact that GOTV programs can increase the number of total ballots cast while yielding a smaller percentage in turnout due to this increase in voter registrants. Instead, I propose we look at the impact of a Countywide GOTV program by comparing the number of ballots cast in 07 and 11, as well as using NCEC expected vote numbers for baseline analysis. We will also look at turnout in our most targeted areas that received the most treatment. This will give us a clear picture of the impacts of our efforts.

What was Fairfax Victory 2011 and what were its goals?

Before discussing turnout, the results of our efforts, I will discuss the goals of the program and our work at a fairly detailed level. We ran a full scale voter contact program that began 8 weeks prior to the election in order to avoid organizer and volunteer burnout and maximize effectiveness (i.e. talk to voters when they were likely to be receptive). Our tactical goals were:

1. Hire enough paid canvassers to send out 55 per day
2. Hire 7 Field Organizers to organize volunteers

3. Use NOI's team model to expand the capacity of each organizer by delegating traditional organizer responsibilities to volunteers.
4. Use technology to maximize volunteer time.
5. Leave good records for FCDC/OFA to utilize in future campaigns.

We were successful in each of these goals except for #1. While we had more than 60 canvassers on staff, we never averaged more than 40 canvassers per shift for a given week. This was largely due to forces outside of our control. Our recruitment rates were strong throughout the process, but retention of canvassers was the problem. In particular the large amount of rain we experienced and the lack of a catalyzing personality at the top of the ticket made it difficult to keep canvassers on staff beyond the first week. However we made up for this by reallocating funding to build our volunteer network and completing one pass through our phone universe by hiring Landmark Strategies to do a paid I.D. call.

Starting on August 1, we began the organization-building phase of the program and met with volunteer leaders, campaigns, and key partners to begin to establish our volunteer model. When voter contact began on September 12 we had met with over 800 potential volunteers individually. We filled roughly 50 volunteer shifts during each weekend leading up to GOTV. We incrementally increased voter contact until October 24 when Phase 1 of our GOTV program began. Using the team model, we began to vet and identify volunteer leaders who were capable of and responsible for volunteer recruitment, staging canvasses, and organizing data. Developing this leadership was the key to the dramatic increase in volunteerism that we experienced during the final phases of GOTV.

Prior to GOTV we were able to make one full pass of our universe on the door, and two full passes over the phone. GOTV began October 24 with Phase 1 running until November 5, Phase 2 was November 6th and 7, and Phase 3 was November 8 and 9. Below is the number of volunteer shifts that were filled during each phase.

Vol Shifts	Door	Phone	Total
Phase 1	386	138	524
Phase 2	657	333	990
Phase 3	596	332	928

These shifts enabled us to do the following when you add the numbers together with the paid canvass:

Knocks	357,945
Contacts	70,126
Calls	81,461
Contacts	12,150

As you can see we talked to a total of 82,276 voters during the last two weeks of the election.

Targeting

We used polling information and existing VAN scores to contract ISSI to model turnout and support scores which we used when building our voter contact universes. We focused on likely supporters who were reliable, occasional, and rare voters. These were the people that needed additional motivation to turnout in large numbers in order to elect our candidates. This targeting allowed us to be more efficient and focus on the segment of the electorate that was most likely to support our candidates and least likely to vote. On a macro level we focused on areas where competitive races overlapped and added in precincts that were important to funding partners in non-competitive contests (i.e. the Reston area for Sen. Howell, Del. Plum, and Chairman Bulova).

Results

Total Votes	2007	2011	Difference	NCEC Projected Vote	Difference
County Wide	191,408	206,635	15,227	180,598	26,037
Dranesville	20,374	27,095	6,721	19025	8,070
39th SD	19,566	25,863	6,297	22941	2,922
37th SD	29,438	36,877	7,439	33775	3,102
36th SD	8,313	12,986	4,673	9168	3,818
37th HD	5,685	7,175	1,490	6644	531

You can see from the table above that the number of voters who participated in the 2011 election was indeed significantly greater. One way to quantify the impact of our efforts is to use the formula from [Table 10-1](#) from *Get Out The Vote: Second Edition*, by Donald Green and Alan Gerber. This book uses peer reviewed experiments and studies to test the effectiveness of GOTV tactics. According to Green and Gerber we generate 1 vote for every 14 conversations at the door, and 1 vote per 38 phone contacts. This means we increased turnout by 5009 voters through canvassing and 320 votes through phone calls, for a total of 5329 votes. We can also see from this table that there are no known tactics that produce reliable results, nor is any tactic more cost effective.

I think the numbers above speak for themselves when considering the impact of the coordinated campaign on the election. Given the large number of variables that factor into voter turnout it is impossible to say what exactly led to the margin of victory for our candidates. It is more accurate to say that all of the tactics employed played a role and led to the success of our candidate. I do however think that is accurate and fair to say that the GOTV operation, therefore all of those who volunteered, contributed and made a positive impact on the margin of victory in many of these elections. It is clear after looking at these numbers that volunteer driven GOTV programs have an enormous impact on elections when you consider the impact on total vote—not just turnout percentages.

Thanks again for all of your hard work.

Best,

Jason Tipton

Executive Director, Fairfax Victory 2011