



EIGHT TAKEAWAY MESSAGES ABOUT GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS

Charlie Bruner, May 2025 Values to Votes Project of the Grassroots Iowa Network

1. **Grassroots campaigns are different from candidate and partisan campaigns.** The strength of grassroots campaigns is in **people power**. Grassroots campaigns have a singular ability for constructive, deliberative, relational dialogues that inform and influence voters – before traditional candidate and partisan campaigns heat up.

Grassroots Campaigns vs. Candidate Campaigns

Grassroots Campaigns	Candidate Campaigns
PEOPLE POWER (Volunteers/Priceless)	MONEY/MEDIA POWER (\$25 M IA CD1)
Engagement, Education, and Persuasion (Relational Campaigning)	Marketing through Paid Media (“ Hot Button ” Issue Campaigning – ½ Negative)
Focus upon the year leading up to election season and persuadable informed voters	Focus upon last six weeks of campaign and still undecided
RESULT: Informed electorate	RESULT: Scared electorate frustrated with campaigns and government

2. **Grassroots campaigns win votes and elections by persuading swing voters and getting out soft support voters.** While 70 to 80 percent of those who will vote already have made up their minds and will go to the polls, winning elections requires actions directed to the other 20 to 30 percent, either increasing turnout of those with soft support or winning

the votes of those who consistently vote but are swing or persuadable voters. The key role grassroots campaigns play is in personally engaging those soft voters and persuadable votes.

Effective Targeting – A Framework for Engaging Voters

Who to Prioritize and for What Purpose

	Vote Progressive	Swing Vote	Vote Conservative
Consistently Vote	RECRUIT	PERSUADE	Avoid
Sometimes Vote	GET OUT THE VOTE	Basebuild	Avoid
Rarely Vote	Basebuild	Ignore	Ignore

3. Grassroots volunteers have superpowers as messengers and influencers.

Grassroots leaders know people and know things. The key to effective grassroots campaigning is not only having the right messages, but the right messengers to deliver them to the right voters.

Doing it Through the Best Messages and Messengers Reaching the Most Persuadable

Messages – rooted in community and Iowa values that present the positive role government can and should play and share information about issues of most concern and needed political actions to advance them.

Messengers (INFLUENCERS) – grassroots leaders recognized for their integrity and knowledge and relationship with the issues that are of concern and to the people most affected by them.

Messagees (PERSUADABLES) – people in the community who are most concerned about and affected by the issues and can be engaged, educated, and persuaded by trusted messengers.

4. **Grassroots messages and dialogues are critical. Both start with shared values and making policy choices real at the ground level, but they involve different types of actions.**

Messaging and Dialogue – Same Value Base But Different Roles

VALUE-BASED MESSAGING

One-way communication establishing value and translating to policy and voting

Suitable for statements at events, letters-to-the-editor, postcards, and other earned social media

Enhanced by own personal stories

Most effective if transmitted to voters with particular concerns about issue(s) addressed in message

VALUE-BASED DIALOGUE

Two-way communications involving setting values and active listening leading to policy and votes

Suitable for listening sessions, town halls or community event, and interactive presentations to groups

Personal stories from participants enhance dialogue and meaning

Most effective if led by trusted messengers in a safe and supportive environment

5. **Grassroots campaigns can reinforce that Iowans have shared values and make clear which candidates and parties reflect these through what policies they support.** This may take time and best be achieved through conversations and town hall activities, but this also is what grassroots are best positioned to do.

THE FACTS: (small “d”) Democratic Values are Iowa Values

IOWANS BELIEVE: *Iowans want government to be efficient and fair but also recognize it must play a positive role in ensuring broadly shared and sustainable prosperity for ALL Iowa residents and their families. This requires government by and for Iowa that:*

1. *Supports Children and Families as the Cornerstone of our Society*
2. *Values Seniors, Veterans, and Those With Disabilities and Ensures Their Inclusion in Society*
3. *Provides a Foundation in Education for All*
4. *Ensures a Sustainable and Productive Economy*
5. *Guarantees Worker Rights and Broadly Shared Prosperity*
6. *Provides Fair and Productive Taxes to Meet the Common Good*

These Values Translate to Policies that Voters Want (D's, I's, and R's) and Extreme Project 2025 and DOGE Actions are Dismantling

1. **Children and Families:** Child care, paid family leave, child health care (Medicaid), child nutrition
2. **Seniors, Veterans, and Those With Disabilities:** Medicare and social security, increased home and community services, strong VA system
3. **Education for All:** Inclusive public education as underpinning, including IDEA and special education and affordable post-secondary career education
4. **A Sustainable Economy;** Support for small business and family farms and a level playing field with corporate interests, regulations to prevent predatory practices and to support clean air, water, and the environment
5. **Worker Rights and Shared Prosperity:** Collective bargaining, OSHA, minimum wage, fair pay
6. **Fair Taxation** – Rollback on tax breaks for wealthiest, increase in child tax credit and support for working families

6. **Grassroots campaigning is key to winning back rural and small-town Iowa voters, where the ground has most shifted, but it applies to all parts of the state and electorate.** High on the list of persuadable voters needs to be those one in five voters in rural and small town counties who shifted their votes between 2008 and 2024. This also involves recognizing the concerns of those voters and the value messaging that has caused many to shift. One of these has been around the value of family and home.

Iowa Voting Trends over Last First Presidential Elections: Greatest Shifts in Rural Counties

Iowa has moved from **bluish-purple** to deep **red**, primarily through voter shifts in rural counties and communities.

Presidential D Vote	2008	2012	2016	2020	2024	
10 Metro Counties	58.6%	57.2%	53.9%	55.5%	53.1%	-5.5%
89 Rural Counties	51.1%	48.6%	36.0%	35.4%	32.3%	-18.8%
Iowa Vote Total	54.8%	53.0%	44.9%	45.8%	43.3%	

Family Matters: Current Party Dichotomy

Party	Values	Issues	Votes
Democrats	Protect individual rights and equal opportunity and public services to provide them	Investments in health care, child care, education, etc. to level playing field	Liberal voters and those providing or served by government services
Republicans	Preserve traditional family from threats (faith, family, love of country) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family values • Parents matter • Rural way of life • Personal responsibility 	“Hot button” cultural wars” issues Parental choice and school vouchers Work requirements for personal responsibility Need for reign in liberal government	Working class, white, small town and rural voters who feel economy doesn’t work for them and benefits others Others who feel government doesn’t

7. **Grassroots organizations can endorse candidates but also can be effective operating from a nonpartisan and value-base.** This, however, does not mean holding back for bipartisan agreement.

GIN Niche: Starting from a Value (Nonpartisan but not Necessarily Bipartisan) Base

NONPARTISANSHIP – Basing advocacy on underlying values and resulting policy issues and making the case, through education and advocacy, for those positions and the representatives and candidates who support them (regardless of party):

- **Nonpartisan sponsorship and voices can engage community voters strictly partisanship sponsorship may not reach.**
- **Nonpartisan actions and events can draw upon many civic and community leaders hesitant to participate in partisan events and create listening opportunities and opportunities for dialogue. *It takes two parties to be bipartisan.***

BIPARTISANSHIP – Reaching out and seeking to secure support from both major parties and enact legislation with bipartisan legislative voting.

- **Nonpartisan advocacy is always possible, but bipartisan advocacy is dependent upon both parties being willing to negotiate and agreeing to underlying values. Extreme right MAGA/DOGE/Project 2025 have rejected bipartisanship.**

8. Others can help with the words, but grassroots voices and stories are priceless. Grassroots campaigning must be built upon grassroots leadership and the talents and passion of that leadership, but grassroots campaigning does not need to do it alone. Both for providing up-to-date policy information and resources and action alerts and offering training and support in organizational development, there are national and state organizations who can help, and there are opportunities to connect and share with other grassroots groups as an overall Iowa grassroots network.

Values to Votes is a project of the Grassroots Iowa Network.



The Grassroots Iowa Network

Stressing Values Voters Share
Connecting Values to Policies Voters Want
Supporting Grassroots Leaders in Taking Action
Providing a Hub for National and State Resources and Peer Networking
*Energizing Constituents to Speak Out and Vote *

Grassroots Campaign Strategies To Bring Voters Back

www.grassrootsiowanetwork.com