

Chapter 9 Grassroots Activities

“Top Ten” Simple Things You Can Do

10. **CHANGE YOUR VOICE-MAIL GREETING.** Several people hear your voice on your answering machine at home or your cell phone voice-mail each day. When the election nears, update your voice-mail greeting with a reminder to vote for your local and statewide candidates and include early vote and election-day dates.
9. **TAKE YOUR CANDIDATES WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO.** We meet people every day who need to hear about the Democratic Party and our agenda. We have materials to help. Pass out flyers in your neighborhood. Use talking points and issue papers to persuade friends and family. Give signs and placards to fellow supporters.
8. **RECRUIT MORE VOLUNTEERS.** Always keep your eyes open for individuals or groups willing to work for the Democratic cause. Keep lists current and be sure to contact volunteers often and keep them involved. Focus on young people; they are the future of our party.
7. **MONITOR THE MEDIA.** If you hear negative or inaccurate information on radio programs, do not hesitate to call in and provide an alternative viewpoint.
6. **MAKE A DONATION.** Any donation, large or small, to your state and area parties will help. Become a Texas Democratic Party Majority Builder for only \$10 a month. Pass on the message to friends and family. (*Call TDP at 512-478-9800 for more information.*)
5. **MAKE THE WINNING CONTACT LISTS.** Candidates will always need help with local phone banks and canvass programs. Be sure area phone banks start early and that you have enough volunteers to knock on all the doors, so we have time to identify ALL supporters before the election.
4. **HELP DURING EARLY VOTE.** In Texas, we have a unique opportunity to get people out to vote for almost two full weeks. Focus on Early Vote. Early voting wins Democratic campaigns. Let's bank those votes early.
3. **REACH BEYOND.** We need to create relationships outside of our normal circles.
2. **TAKE ELECTION DAY OFF.** Actually, we want you to work on Election Day, but instead of going to your job, help lead the Democrats to victory. The pay is low and the day will be long, but it will all be worth it when we celebrate on election night.
1. **VOTE EARLY AND NEVER VOTE ALONE.** We all know several people who have to be reminded repeatedly to go vote. Make it a social occasion. Gather your friends and go vote early as a group, and then go out and have some fun. Early Vote is a perfect time for this, since everyone in your county can vote at any early voting location.

Getting Involved

There is nothing more important at the grassroots level than participation. No party or candidate has ever been successful without an army of grassroots volunteers. Whether a novice or veteran volunteer, there are a variety of ways to participate at all levels in a campaign as well as directly in the Democratic Party.

Campaigns may be long and difficult, and as a volunteer you will be giving of your time and money. Be mindful not to overextend yourself time-wise or financially.

If you have more time than money, recruit new Democrats, volunteer your time, write letters to the editor, call in to a talk show, serve as a surrogate speaker, or organize a Democratic block meeting. If time is a problem, maybe you could help with fundraising. Remember: The world is run by those who show up! Participate.

How to Participate

The activities listed represent some of the many ways one can participate.

Become a Precinct Chair: The precinct chair is the heart and soul of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party and our candidates do not succeed without active precinct chairs. For instruction on how to become a precinct chair, please see Chapter 3.

Assist Your Precinct Chair: If the precinct chair is the heart and soul of the Democratic Party, then the grassroots volunteer is the heart and soul of a campaign. The duties and responsibilities of the precinct chair are listed in Chapter 3, but you can assist the precinct chair in writing letters, making phone calls, and canvassing your precinct. This helps volunteers learn about the local workings of the Democratic Party.

Show Your Colors: One of the easiest ways to participate is to have a Texas Democrat bumper sticker on your car. Let others know that you are proud to be a Democrat. Place Democratic candidate yard signs in your yard during elections. Let your neighbors know who's worth supporting.

Join Your County Party: There are many activities that occur on the county level, as the county chair is responsible for a multitude of duties. Assistance is always greatly appreciated. This is especially true during the primary and fall election cycles.

Join Local Democratic Clubs: In many places local Democratic clubs are very active and bring in speakers, hold events, participate in campaigns, open and operate campaign headquarters. This is an excellent method of meeting fellow Democrats and learning about the local workings of the Democratic Party. To expand your participation you may also wish to join nearby local clubs or statewide clubs, such as the Young Democrats or Texas Democratic Women.

Donate Your Time and Money: The political process requires both, and there is nothing more important than volunteering your time. Okay, money is important, too. If you can't give time, give money. If you can't give money, give of your time.

Work on a Campaign: There are many activities that fall into this category. To name a few, you can write letters for the candidate, make phone calls, block walk, deliver yard signs, or work in the campaign headquarters. As you become more comfortable with the process, you may even wish to organize phone banks, block walks, and events. Detailed lists of campaign activities are listed later in other chapters.

Work on Local Elections: Local elections are an excellent way to learn about your community. These elections include, but are not limited to, city, school board, MUD districts, and water boards. Under Texas law these are nonpartisan elections, but you do meet other activists and meet the local "players." One reason many city elections are not held in November of an election year is to keep the partisan and nonpartisan elections separate.

Write Letters to the Editor and Call in to Radio Shows: Let your voice be heard. If you are passionate about a specific subject, write letters to the editor of your local newspapers and call in to radio shows that solicit input.

Get on Democratic E-mail Distribution Lists: Many county Democratic Parties and Democratic clubs distribute useful information by e-mail. This is rapidly replacing regular mail notification because of its speed and low cost. This is an excellent means of keeping informed of the many activities occurring in your area. Caution: While chat rooms are popular, they may or may not be useful to a volunteer.

Join Non-Political Activist Groups: Membership in groups such as the League of Women Voters, Save Our Springs, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and others allow you to meet other active people in your community. In many cases these people will agree with your slant on politics and give you the opportunity to bring them into the fold.

Vote in the Democratic Primary: The easiest way to be officially identified as a Democrat is to vote in the Primary, because Texas does not have political party registration. Alternatively, you may sign an oath of affiliation to identify yourself as a Democrat (see TDP rules and Texas Election Code, Chapter 162).

Vote a Straight Democratic Ticket in General Elections: You strengthen the Democratic Party locally, statewide, and nationally, when you vote a straight Democratic ticket.

The following are the rules for a ballot to be counted as a straight-ticket vote:

- If you have voted a straight-ticket and then you vote individually for up to two candidates, the ballot is still counted as a straight-ticket vote.
- If you have voted a straight-ticket and then you vote individually for more than two candidates, the ballot is not counted as a straight-ticket vote.

Voting individually for all of the Democrats on the ballot does not officially count as a straight-ticket vote.

Party Building and Campaign Activities

Party building and campaign activities are integrated processes, in that no one activity stands alone, but rather each supports the other. There are also several components, all of which are important. As an active Party officer or volunteer you should be involved in many of these activities.

As you become more comfortable with the process you may want to move up to become an activity coordinator. From being a coordinator you may wish to help run a campaign. Who knows, some day you may want to run for office. No matter where you fit in, you need to know the different components of a campaign.

Phone Banking

Phone banks provide a direct, relatively personal means of communication between the Democratic Party or a campaign and voters. Phone banks can be used for a variety of purposes:

- Identify voter attitudes toward the Party and its candidates (canvassing)
- Deliver a message to a select group of voters
- Invite voters to rallies, protests, and fundraisers
- Find yard sign locations and volunteers
- Get-Out-The-Vote during early voting and on Election Day
- Identify voter attitudes to separate undecided voters from those who support the Party or a candidate and only need some motivation and a reminder to ensure that their ballots are cast

Other methods are best for persuading voters.

Phone Bank Coordinator: The most important single factor in phone banking is having a capable phone bank coordinator. This will reduce confusion and duplication.

Setting Up a Phone Bank: Calls can be made from either a centralized phone bank where all the phones are under supervision or in a decentralized operation using volunteers who call from their homes.

- **Central Location:** The most efficient method of phone banking for calling a large number of people is utilizing a central location. You need to install phones at a headquarters or find phones already installed. Union halls or real estate, insurance, car dealerships, and law offices are locations that often have a number of phones and lines already installed. Callers need sufficient space for their telephone lists and report forms.
- **Home Calling:** Home calling is less desirable than centralized calling for calling a large number of people. Volunteers lose the fellowship of a headquarters and are more easily distracted. Someone must collect the information from the caller on a frequent, regular basis. However, with highly motivated volunteers this system can work well.

Targeting Calls: Target all the Democratic areas with one general phone message, or divide the area into logical groups (geographic, ethnic, DPI). Use a different phone message with each group. Decide who/where you'll be calling and for what purpose before you begin calling. Write different scripts for IDing versus encouraging people to go to the polls. Remember, phone banks are not good tools for persuasion and other methods of voter contact should be employed for that purpose.

Plan in Advance: Volunteers are easier to get if pre-selected dates and times are advertised. Canvassing/IDing should occur well in advance of early voting. Encouraging supporters to go to the polls (GOTV efforts) should occur immediately before and during early voting, through Election Day.

Caller ID: Today's technology allows for identifying incoming calls. Depending on the type of call, you may wish to block your ID. However, many people block unidentified calls.

Calling Times:

- For canvassing / IDing (to speak to a person.)

Mon – Thus	6 PM to 9 PM
Fri	Typically not a good day to call
Sat	10 AM to 8 PM
Sun	1 PM to 5 PM and 6 PM to 8 PM

Mon – Sat To speak to senior citizens call 10 AM to 5 PM

- For Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) (or a message that can be left on a recorder)

Mon – Thus 9 AM to 9 PM

Fri 9 AM to 5 PM

Sat 10 AM to 8 PM

Sun 1 PM to 5 PM and 6 PM to 8 PM

Necessary Supplies:

- **Location:** Phone banking is best accomplished in a location that has several phone lines and sufficient space for telephone lists and report forms. Check union halls, real estate offices, insurance agencies, car dealerships, and law offices.
- **A List of Registered Voters with Voting History:** Voter registration lists may be obtained from your database manager, the county chair, the campaign, or by using the TDP on-line voter management system.
- **Precinct Maps:** Precinct maps may be obtained through the county clerk, election office, or the county engineer.
- **Phone Books and Criss-cross Directory for your Area:** Borrow criss-cross directories from local businesses, particularly insurance and real estate offices, or use a copy in the library.
- **Prepare Scripts for each Caller:** Sample scripts are available in Appendix G.
- **Print Notation Explanation Sheets for each Caller:** Codes for calling lists are helpful. Examples might be N/A for no answer; D for supporters; I for those claiming to be Independents; R for those against us; YS for the person wanting a yard sign, SL for send literature. Place a line through bad telephone numbers.

Block Walking

Block walking means going door-to-door and trying to speak to voters in each household. This is the single best method to persuade voters, to get information, to organize and build the Party, and to get supporters to the polls. This door-to-door activity can be as simple an activity as covering a single precinct, as a precinct chair might do, or a supervised, targeted effort to reach as many voters as possible in a certain period. The downside of block walking is that it is the most labor-intensive method of voter contact, involving lots of hard work with little glamour.

Block walking should not be confused with literature drops (lit-drops) or door-hanging. In a block walk you knock on doors and speak to people, while lit-drops and door-hanging are used only to deliver material. Block walking is far more effective with a candidate, but it is also done without a candidate.

Block-Walk Coordinator: As with any campaign activity, it is helpful if one person is in charge to reduce confusion and duplication.

Targeting Your Area: A campaign must select where to expend its resources. Precincts with a high density of voting Democrats yield the best results. Precincts are typically listed with their Democratic Performance Index (DPI) in many available databases. DPIs are determined by previous election voting patterns. Precincts with a DPI of 65% or higher should be worked first, then the “swing precincts” with a DPI between 45% and 64%. Work precincts with a DPI below 45% only under special circumstances.

The impression any block walker makes at the voter’s door will last far longer than anything the block walker says. You are block walking to change or reinforce the voter’s attitude toward the Party and make citizens want to elect its candidates. People are friendlier, easier to approach, and more receptive if you are polite and dress neatly. Wear name tags to look more “official” and make the voter more comfortable. It’s also important for walkers to be familiar with any material they are distributing. **Be sure to wear comfortable shoes.** You may also wear a candidate’s t-shirts so that you are visible from a distance.

Necessary Supplies

- **A Block-walk List of Registered Voters:** Voter registration lists in a block-walk format (by street – split odd and even addresses) may be obtained from your database manager, the county chair, the campaign, or by using the TDP on-line voter management system.

- **Precinct Maps or Street Maps:** Precinct maps may be obtained through the county clerk, election office, or the county engineer.
- **Hand-out Material:** Campaign material and “sorry we missed you” cards should be provided.
- **Safety Equipment:** A cell phone with pre-programmed phone numbers, water, a snack, and a buddy make a safer walk.

Getting Ready to Walk

The following are steps to use in getting ready to walk.

- Map and sort walks by street. Obtain a map of the precinct (generally from the county clerk) and highlight the streets. Subdivide a large precinct into several “walks.”
- Create a walk package for neighborhoods. Take a 9x11 envelope and staple your map to it. If this is a small precinct then the map is OK. If it’s a large precinct, you must create two walk packages. On one map use a pink highlighter to section off one half of the precinct, and on the second package use a green highlighter. Two people walk one half and two walk the other. Place your survey form, script, literature, bumper stickers, voter registration forms, etc., inside the walk package. Use string and tape one end to a pen and the other to your packet so no one loses the writing instrument. Make sure to include a lapel sticker or button for identification, or provide the walkers with Democratic t-shirts.
- Walk with a partner who can log responses, tell you the names and voting history of a person without you having to manage a clipboard, list, pen, and push-cards/leaflets. Remember: You are trying to reach as many voters as possible.
- When you ring a doorbell, wait a little longer if the voter is elderly or if you see some indication that the voter may move slowly, for example, a wheelchair ramp to the house.
- Address a voter by name (“Mr. Smith?”). Voters will respond and warm up and are more inclined to be favorable.
- If no one is home, write a note in a bold, thick pen across the card. Something such as, “Ms. Smith, I look forward to visiting with you soon. - John.” You can write the message beforehand to save time on the street and just add the name at the door.
- Volunteers may need some training before they go block walking. Organize volunteers into teams of two, with one person walking the right side and one the left side of the street.

Optimum Block Walking Times

Weekdays	4 PM-7 PM
Saturdays	10 AM-5 PM
Sundays	1 PM-7 PM

Literature Drops and Door-Hanging

Literature drops (lit-drops) and door-hangings are excellent methods to distribute material over a wide area. This activity can be as simple as covering a single precinct or an effort to reach as many voters as possible in multiple precincts in a certain period. Lit-drops can be accomplished on foot or by tossing the material from a vehicle. The disadvantage of block walking is that it is a labor-intensive method of voter contact.

Lit-drops and door-hangings should not be confused with block walking. Lit-drops and door-hanging are used only to deliver material, while block walking entails knocking on doors and speaking to people.

Coordinator: As with any campaign activity, it is helpful if one person is in charge to reduce confusion and duplication.

Targeting: A campaign must select where to expend its resources.

Be sure to wear comfortable shoes.

Necessary Supplies

- **Precinct maps or Street Maps:** Precinct maps may be obtained through the county clerk, election office, or the county engineer.
- **Material:** Campaign material, such as “sorry we missed you” cards, clipboards, lists, and pens must be supplied.
- **Safety Equipment:** A cell phone with pre-programmed phone numbers, water, a snack, and a buddy are necessary.

Getting Ready to Walk or Drive

- Map and sort walks/drive by streets. Obtain a map of the precinct (generally from the county clerk) and highlight the streets. Subdivide a large precinct into several “walks.” Mark streets covered using a highlighter.
- Walk with a co-worker for safety reasons. One person does the even side of the street and the other person the odd side. Wear a lapel sticker or button for identification, or wear Democratic t-shirts.
- Volunteers may need some training before they go walking/driving.

Basic Safety: “Do’s and Don’ts” of Block-Walking, Lit-Drops and Door-hanging

- Do not start on the next street until both walkers are ready. It’s not safe and splitting up does not help you cover the area faster.
- Beware of dogs, and don’t go into fenced and gated yards.
- Always carry a bottle of water and a snack.
- Establish a time to meet back at the headquarters or central location.
- Do not go into anyone’s house, even if invited.
- Never walk across people’s yards.

U.S. Mailbox Reminder

Remember: It is against the LAW to place ANY material in or on a mailbox.

Canvassing

Canvassing is the term given to soliciting useful information. Precinct chairs use canvassing to identify Democrats and like-minded supporters in a precinct. Campaign canvassing seeks to find supporters over a significantly larger area. In rural or undeveloped areas, a phone canvass may be the most practical method to find supporters. There are two accepted methods of canvassing: going door-to-door and phoning.

The best way to canvass is by going door-to-door, but it requires more volunteers with transportation and a significant amount of time as compared with phoning. When canvassing door to door, try to update phone numbers, so phone lists and phone services can be used more effectively. (See Block Walking)

Phone canvassing is an excellent means of identifying supporters, especially when integrated into an overall voter contact program. It requires fewer volunteers, takes less time, and requires fewer resources than going door-to-door. However, less than 50% of voters can typically be reached by phone due to inaccurate lists, people moving, and phone number changes. (See Phone Banking)

Voter Registration Drives

Voter registration drives strengthen and expand the party's voting base and increase our candidates' chances of winning in November. Voter registration is best accomplished in Democratic high-density areas.

Locations: The best locations are those where you will find people that believe as we do. A few examples are stores, PTO meetings, houses of worship, neighborhood association meetings, unemployment offices, public access clinics, public events, high schools (senior events), sports events, and colleges (during registration).

Suggested Practices:

- Always ask permission to set up your table.
- Dress appropriately for the area you are visiting.
- Volunteers should reflect the makeup of the community (ethnicity / language).

Placing Signs

Yard signs and large signs are an important part of any election. They provide important information to voters. Signs should be put out for the Primary and General Elections.

Locations: The best locations are high-traffic areas such as intersections or along busy streets and highways. Signs at business locations are also important. Finding locations should be accomplished during phone banking and canvassing, by asking elected officials, and by asking in person. Signs should also be placed at polling locations.

Ordinances: Know the local, municipal, and county regulations on sign size and location. Follow them!

Suggested Practices:

Remember these rules when placing signs:

- Always ask or have permission before erecting a sign.
- Keep track of the locations of placed signs.
- Never touch a sign of the opposition party or campaign.
- Dress appropriately for the work you are doing, including using gloves and wearing eye protection and sturdy footwear.
- Retrieve signs after the election.

Organized Activities and Events for Visibility

Events are an excellent way to show our colors, get like-minded people together, and have fun. Besides being fun, they can also be high-visibility activities. They can be casual or formal and for just a few people or a few hundred. The list of events is almost endless but here are a few of the more popular events: picnics at public parks, backyard barbeques, yard sales, art auctions, ice cream socials, carnivals, book sales, wine tasting parties, lunches, dinners, coffees, dog shows, and meet-the-candidate events. Some of these events are easier to do than others, and some require more help than others.

It is vital that the Democratic message be displayed far and wide. The number of possible activities and events one can participate in or organize is endless.

The following are some of the possibilities for displaying the message:

- Democratic vehicle or float in a parade
- Democratic booth at fairs and community events
- Democratic hot dog picnics, ice cream socials, and backyard barbeques
- Democratic potluck dinners
- Democratic informal and formal dinners
- Rallies, protests, and town hall meetings

Event Responsibilities and Roles

Make sure one person at every event is responsible for identifying key participants and getting correct spellings, titles, and addresses. You are going to want to send thank-you notes to people who helped make the event possible and dignitaries who joined your event.

And at every event, someone must be prepared to record the names, e-mail addresses, and other information of people who want to volunteer or contribute. This list is valuable for future use.

Crowd-Building Techniques

Good crowd-building requires enthusiasm, tremendous organization, creativity, and hard work. Be sure to solicit additional suggestions about techniques that might be productive in a particular area or community.

The following sources of communication vary in their effectiveness depending upon location:

- Leafleting and posters
- Mass e-mailing
- Group invitations
- Paid advertisements
- Web pages
- Phone Banks
- Sound trucks
- Radio talk shows
- Phone banks
- Free media and public service announcements

Crowd-Pleasing Ideas

The following activities can be used to enhance an event:

- Music
- Pre-programs
- Ticker tape, confetti
- Enthusiastic speakers
- Organized enthusiasm
- Loads of signs and flags everywhere
- A core group of people to interact with the crowd
- Local business involvement (food vendors, local radio stations)
- “Crowd toys,” e.g., beads, pennants, pom-poms, glow sticks, other spirit items