



WLN Academy

Effective Campaigning with Little or No Money

by Richard P. Burke

DON'T LET THE PUNDITS ON TV FOOL YOU Old-fashioned hard work pays off!



Campaigns are more sophisticated, but don't be intimidated! With improved polling, micro-targeting, and other technologies, political professionals keep coming up with new ways to win people over, or at least manipulate them. But no matter what they come up with, NOTHING will take the place of a good ground campaign and elbow grease. This unit will offer proven and effective ways of doing the fundamental campaign work that lies at the heart of winning races.

Not every example here will be right for you or your group. You may come up with ideas of your own not shown here. But whatever you do, develop a written plan, preferably with a calendar. Assign responsibility to someone for each activity you undertake. Make sure someone follows up.

1. **Letters to the Editor.** These still work – don't ignore them! Send letters on a consistent basis. First, tell the reader what you want them to do. Second, provide a reason why the reader should do what you want. Third, offer a personal comment demonstrating why you are taking the stand that you are. Finally, repeat what you want the reader to do. Keep it VERY short.
2. **"Desktop Activism".** Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email lists, and other Internet outlets are great for getting your message out. You can be sure that your opponent will be using them. When you see posts of news stories, leave comments favorable to the candidates and ballot measures you support. Take issue with those who support your opponents!
3. **Call Talk Radio Shows.** Don't limit yourself to major statewide talk shows. Call into talk shows offered on smaller stations. Call "Trading Post" type shows, even if you have nothing to sell, and shows where people are allowed "thirty seconds of fame." While larger stations may not offer such opportunities, struggling small stations do. Their audiences are smaller, but they vote! Refer to WLN Academy units on the media.
4. **Bulletin Board Campaign.** Grocery stores, laundromats, bus stops, laundry areas at apartment complexes, and other such places provide "Community Bulletin Boards" where people can post event information, business cards and so on. You can post campaign materials on these boards. Management may take them down, but people will see them first!
5. **Lobbying Local and Legislative Office Holders.** Prevail upon your elected local, county, and legislative leaders to make strong public statements in support of the campaigns you support. Refer to the WLN Academy units on lobbying. If the issue is sensitive, assure the local official that he or she will have the support of you and your friends. If the official refuses, ask why – you will learn a lot about that official from their answers.
6. **Hold a Voter Registration Drive.** You or a group you are affiliated with can secure booths at county fairs, gun shows, food festivals, or other exhibitions where you can offer to register people to vote. As they register, you can familiarize them with the positions, candidates, and ballot measures you support. You will find allies along the way to help in future campaigns!

7. **Testimony to Public Boards.** You can testify to public boards such as city councils and school boards during their "Open Communication" segments, where people can testify on any matter not on the meeting agenda. Emphasis should be placed on meetings where local newspaper reporters will be present or meetings covered by public access television. Better yet, inform newspapers in advance of your intent to testify on a particular campaign.
8. **Direct Voter Outreach.** You can do things on your own or you can coordinate with a group or a professional campaign. If you want to work with a group but one is not available, form one and coordinate with the campaigns you support.
 - a. **Door to Door.** Distributed literature or just shake hands with people going door-to-door. Do not get involved in long discussions or any arguments - you want to hit as many doors as you can. Dress neatly, and use sidewalks. Bring someone with you if you can. Wear a campaign button if one is available. Work at reasonable times. Do not litter or put literature in mailboxes or newspaper delivery boxes. Keep presentations short.
 - b. **Phone Banking.** If there is a funded campaign associated with your effort, you can volunteer to take part in phone banks. If not, you can call your friends or neighbors. You may wish to work with others in your group or with campaign representatives to come up with a script, but try to present it in your own words. Can't get to the phone bank headquarters? No problem... get a list from them and use your own phone.
 - c. **Get Out the Vote (GOTV).** A lot of winnable elections have been lost simply because campaigns simply failed to get their supporters to vote! In any case, if there is no GOTV effort behind a campaign you support, do one of your own! See WLN training materials on personal and "desktop" GOTV projects. You can do a lot with very little!
9. **Town Hall Meetings and Retirement Center Presentations.** Your group can hold a town hall style meeting or an open house where people can talk to members about the races you want to focus on. Perhaps you can organize a debate or a forum for your candidate. You might also want to make presentations to retirement centers. The elderly vote with high reliability, and the social managers of retirement centers are always looking for meeting content.
10. **Submit a Voter Pamphlet Argument.** You, either alone or with a group of friends, could raise a limited amount of money to publish a Voter Pamphlet statement for or against a ballot measure. This is a good way for groups to do community outreach and increase membership. You will have to raise a few dollars, but there is no less expensive way to reach every voter in a particular electoral district! No money? It is often possible to get your Voter Pamphlet argument published by collecting a few signatures!
11. **Sign Campaigns.** Signs or posters can be produced to be placed in the windows of businesses. If large field signs are available from a big-dollar campaign on your side, it may be possible to find high-visibility locations for them. Lawn signs can be a key component to any sign campaign. Friends and other activists can be asked to put up signs in their yards, find other locations to put up lawn signs, and pick up signs when the campaign is over. It may be possible for you to coordinate with a professional campaign. As election day approaches, you and your friends can hold signs over bridges and at well-traveled intersections.
12. **Hold an Election Night Party.** Victory parties give a sense of closure, accomplishment, and camaraderie. They can cement relationships built during a campaign and can provide a venue to come up with ideas about what to do next. They allow volunteers to share a common experience and compare notes in an informal environment. They offer a venue for your group to gain favorable media coverage, raising your group's profile thereby making it easier to recruit new members. ☑