Election Math

Start with this. One of the very first (probably the first) things you should do to plan and run a successful campaign is figure out how many votes you need to win and how many supporters you will need to get those votes.

<u>Get the data</u>

In order to do this you will need information about previous elections in your district. The results of those elections (broken down by precinct) are available from city and town election departments. Some of this information is also available from the Secretary of the Commonwealth either on the website or published in books called P.D. 43s.

<u>Do the math</u>

The end of this section has a worksheet that walks through all the steps. Be sure you are careful and methodical about all the steps.

<u>Tips and guidelines for election math</u>

- Look at the data. It seems obvious, but you wouldn't believe how many people screw this up.

- Make sure your similar elections are really similar. If there isn't a perfect match then you can compensate for that, but you need to understand how previous elections are similar and different.

- If it feels like you are guessing, that is because you kind of are. They are educated guesses, but the truth of the matter is no one knows for sure how many people are going to turn out in this election. The election hasn't happened yet! There are better and worse guesses and better and worse guessers, but anyone who tells you he knows for sure how many people are going to vote is lying.

- Overestimating is better than underestimating. You want to be as accurate as possible, but err on the side of over-estimating expected turnout. That will lead you to over-estimate your votes to win and ID goal, but there is no such thing as getting too many IDs or too many votes.

- It isn't rocket science. The math is really important, but don't be intimidated by it. It is just adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. You learned how to do it all in fourth grade.

- Don't do it alone. Get a couple of smart people, and preferably a couple that have some real experience running elections, to help you with it. The math is easy, the hard part is the judgment calls involved, so find people whose judgment about elections you trust.

Targeting

Targeting is the process that you use to decide which people you need to talk to in order to get the votes you need on Election Day. This process is different for every election, but there are some things that are universal.

<u>Start with a voter file</u>

A voter file is a database of every voter in your district. It should include basic data you can get from the town clerks or election departments in your district. This is public data that you are entitled to as a candidate. You may have to pay a processing fee to get the data. This data includes:

- Name
- Address
- Date of Birth
- Date of Registration
- Gender
- Ward & Precinct
- Party

You can also get the voter history for every voter in your district from the same place (sometimes for an additional fee). You will probably have to request each specific election you would like to have. You definitely want any similar elections to yours and probably every election since 2002. Voter history data will show:

- Whether a specific voter voted in a given election
- Whether they pulled a Democratic or Republican or other ballot in a primary

You should add information to your voter file.

- Add phone numbers immediately (there are lots of places to buy these)
- Add information about when and how you contact voters
- Keep track of issues they care about or other details you learn about them
- Merge in any lists you acquire (IDs from other campaigns, list of community organizations etc)
- KEEP TRACK OF ALL YOUR IDS! Every time someone tells you whether or not they are going to vote for your candidate make sure it gets entered into the voter file

There are several voter file products on the market. They can do some awesome things and save you a great deal of time and effort. Buying one is highly recommended.

Build a Target Universe

Now that you have the actual data and you remember which people you need to be talking to from your targeting box you can start to build a universe of actual people to talk to. **You will use this for everything** – from your walk list to your mail. You will evaluate events and media by how well they reach these people. So get it right!

Targeting is about directing your resources to where they will produce the most votes. You want to strike the right balance between conserving your resources and also reaching everyone who needs to hear from you in order to vote for your candidate. Your targeting decisions need to be durable. You want people in the universe to get the whole program. So you are aiming to get the right universe of people for the whole campaign.

Who is likely to vote in this election?

- Start by adding people who voted in recent similar elections to the target universe.
- If your similar elections were a while ago, add people who voted in those elections AND also voted in the most recent Presidential Election (this should eliminate people who have moved or died).
- Make sure you aren't leaving people out because they were sick for one Election Day. To do this, use several similar elections.
- Make sure to eliminate anyone who will be ineligible to vote in your election (e.g. Republicans in a Democratic Primary)
- You also want to add newly registered people who have voted in somewhat less similar elections, if your most recent similar election was a while ago.

Who could be persuaded to vote for my candidate?

- Of the people who you have just added, there are there some that won't vote for your candidate (e.g. hard core Republicans in a General if there is a Republican
- Of the people who are in your universe, whom can you definitely count on (e.g. Super Democrats in a partisan election)? Don't eliminate them altogether (make them a separate group). You will want to mobilize them, if not persuade them.
- Remember the general rule that you don't really know who people are going to vote for until you ask them. In some elections, there may not be any people you can count on to vote for you or your opponent before you start asking them.
- Don't eliminate whole neighborhoods or demographic groups, they may not be where you focus, but you will get some votes out of every neighborhood and community. If there are good voters there you should talk to them if you can, even if it is just to get the 20% of voters who are progressives in a conservative neighborhood.
- Don't assume that because people seem to like you they should love your candidate and they should be disproportionately represented in the universe. For example, women candidates tend to think that women voters will automatically want to vote for them. Make sure that is really true before you use that assumption to change your target audience.
- Use data from polling for targeting. Based on that you may be able to add in some demographics that are up for grabs for your candidate. But you need data to know this.

Am I reaching enough people?

- When you have finished your preliminary targeting ask yourself if this universe is enough to get the votes you need.
- Even the best field campaign never reached everyone.
- As hard as it is for candidates, not everyone you talk to will be a supporter.
- You will need a target universe that is between two and three times the size of your ID goal. It is fine if it is bigger, so long as the people in it are really likely voters.
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- If you are thinking about adding additional people to reach your goals, recheck your calculations of expected turnout and votes to win.
- If you really need to reach out to additional people, you can add some lower turnout voters. REMEMBER, this will affect your ID goals. A yes from someone who has only ever voted for governor is much less likely to turn into an actual vote in your city council race.

Refine your work over time

- Revisit your targeting when you get new polling data. Use the results of your field campaign to check and refine your work. Is your candidate's home neighborhood really supporting her disproportionately? If not, maybe you shouldn't talk to more people there than in other neighborhoods.
- There are lots of secondary targeting decisions throughout the campaign. Which neighborhoods will be canvassed a fifth time? Who will get the negative mail? Use both polling and field data to make those decisions.
- Evaluate your targeting against your resources. If you suddenly have so many volunteers that you are reaching all of the regular voters, maybe you can reach out to some lower turnout voters. If you are raising less money than you thought, maybe you send some mail just to the unenrolled voters within your universe.

Don't get too clever

Targeting feels great. It feels (and is) strategic and important. But there is huge temptation to try to do more with targeting them you really can. Fundamentally, you are going to have to talk to a lot of voters and ask them to vote for your candidate.

TURNOUT		
How many people will vote in this election?		
	1. How many people voted in the last similar election? (or the average of several similar elections)	
	Note: You are looking for a similar type of election (primary v. general, municipal v. state) and also similar circumstances (open seat v. challenge), same kinds of other things on the ballot	
	2. Add additional turn out for:	
	3. Percentage Increased Population	
	4. More Exciting/Hotly Contested Races	
	5. Well run field and GOTV Campaigns	
	6. A candidate that is particularly mobilizing to a normally low turnout base	
	Note: Be realistic about these. Are Latinos really going to be super motivated by your African American candidate? Remember your opponents can drive up turnout too.	
WIN NUMBER		
How many votes do you need to win?		Take appropriate number from line 7, 9, or 10
	Two Way Race	
	7. Multiply your calculated turn out by 51%	
	Three or More Way Race	
	8. Make a good guess and how *few* votes your weakest opponents could get	
	9. Subtract this number from expected turnout and then calculate 51% of the remainder	
	Races where you vote for more than one candidate	
	10. Use previous election data to see how many votes it usually takes to win a seat. Don't forget to raise the number if you have estimated higher turnout	
ID GOAL		

How many supporters do I need to identify?		
	In most circumstances	
	11. Calculate 133% of your win number	
	We use 133% because even the best ID and GOTV campaigns don't get everyone to turn out	
	If there is some special reason people might lie about their votes	
	12. Calculate 150% of your win number	
	This might be the case if you are a person of color running in a largely white and prejudiced neighborhood. It might also be true if voters don't know who you are challenging (the better solution to this one is just to tell them)	
	If you end up needing to target lots of infrequent voters	
	13. You will need more IDs from the infrequent voters to net the same number of votes, but you can still use the percentages above for your more frequent voters. **GET HELP**	
DAILY ID GOAL		
How many people do we need to identity each day to meet our goal?		
	14. Subtract any IDs you have already (including donors and volunteers) from your ID goal.	
	15. Calculate how many days of field campaign you have left before election day. Remember to subtract any days you are planning to take off	
	Note: This number and hence the Daily ID Goal is going to change every day. If you slack off, it will go up!	