

Relational organizing

Relational organizing is simply the practice of leaning on the people you already know—your friends, family, and neighbors—to mobilize and build sustainable collective power.

Why it works

The theory is simple: Organizing is about relationships. Reaching out to someone you already know—someone who trusts you—is much more effective than having a conversation with a stranger. This isn't new, but we know that it works. In fact, research shows that it's at least twice as effective as more traditional engagement methods.

Increased reach

In today's political climate, the messenger can matter just as much as (if not more than) the message itself. We can't ask someone to get involved or take action (like calling an elected official or registering to vote) if we can't get in touch with them. That's one reason this strategy is so effective—a potential volunteer or voter is more likely pick up a call or answer a text from someone they know than from someone they don't.

Increased effectiveness

We know that social pressure can be an effective tool for getting someone to take an action—and few people can exert more pressure than a friend or family member. Asking your friend to volunteer or go to a town hall meeting with you is going to be more effective than if a stranger had asked them to take the same action.

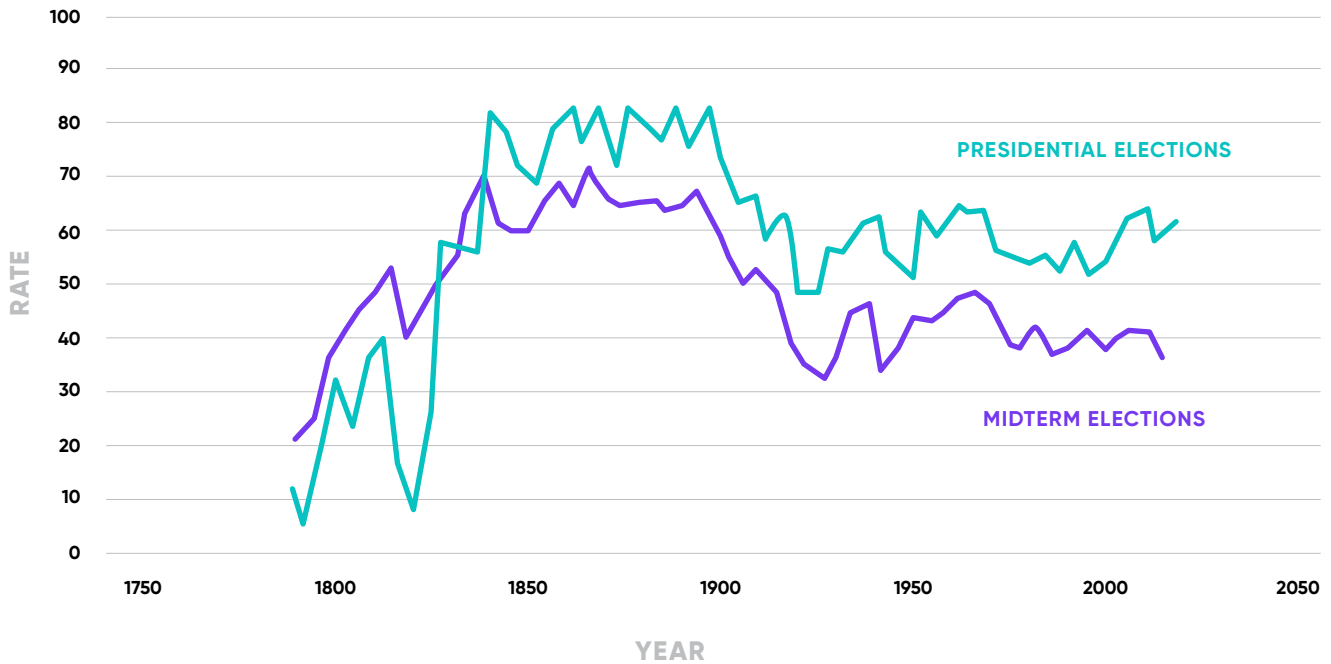
And because there's already a relationship established, you don't have to spend valuable time trying to develop trust and build a new relationship from scratch.

Why it's important

In the last presidential election, nearly 40% of Americans who were eligible to vote failed to turn out. In the last midterm in 2018, the number was even higher. Yes, some were disenfranchised, and others were suppressed or intimidated, but still too many just decided not to vote. We have to do better.

U.S. Election Turnout Rates (1789–2016)

Source: United States Election Project

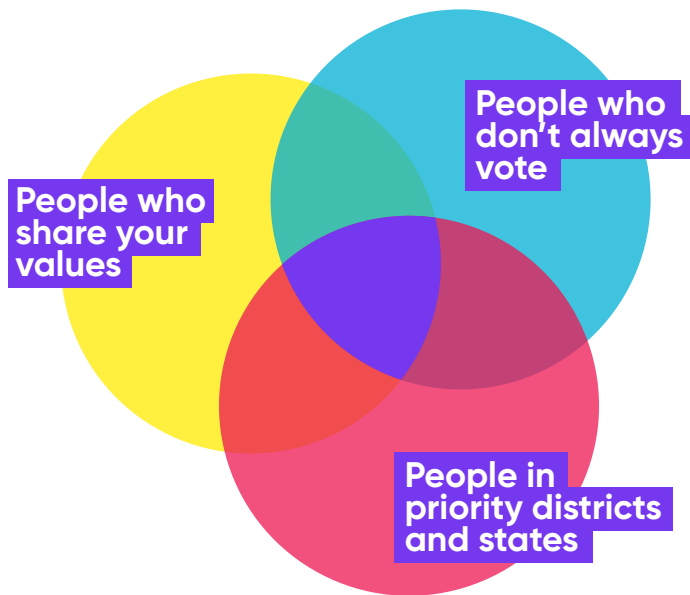


And in every election cycle, there are races all over the country that are decided by just the slimmest of margins—sometimes even a single vote. That means that even a handful of votes can make a difference and we can't afford to leave any on the table—especially those of the people we know. We also can't just rely on those who vote on a regular basis. We need to turn our allies and supporters into engaged citizens, and ultimately voters.

Talking to people in our own networks is one of the most effective methods for increasing contact and turnout rates for both voters and volunteers.

Activity: Friend Mapping

This simple activity will help you identify those in your network who need to hear from you the most and help get them activated on the issue(s) that you both care about. No matter where you live, you can have an impact—and not just within your own community, but in states across the country where organizers are fighting for a fairer democracy.



Who should you prioritize?

Prioritize people who live in priority districts or states, who share your values, and who might not be planning on voting this year.

Here's how it works:

Step 1: Focus your efforts

You don't want to just ask anyone and everyone you know, so think about who in your network votes and who doesn't. Think of those friends who care about the same issues that you care about—issues like health care, voting rights, climate change, gun violence, or immigration reform.

During an election

People who vote regularly are already bought in and will need the least amount of your time, so focus on those who don't vote on a regular basis. It may take more than one or two conversations to get them engaged and committed to vote, so use this guide to help you prepare.

Between elections

This is the perfect time to build and grow a network of volunteers who will be ready to mobilize when the moment calls for it (marches, town halls, elections, etc.). Focus on those who vote on a more regularly basis or post on social media about issues you both care about. These are good leads to ask to come volunteer if they're not already.

Step 2 : Write down your contacts

Take 10-15 minutes to brainstorm all the people who'd want to reach out to—people you know who care about the issues. Then write down their names and phone numbers in the contact sheet provided below.

Some questions for you to consider as you're forming your contact list:

- Who would you send a holiday card to?
- Who chats with you after church or temple?
- Which family members sometimes forget to vote or say they get too busy?
- What issues might impact the lives of your friends, family, or co-workers?

Step 3 : Collect resources

Make sure you're prepared with the right information and next steps for your friend or family member to take, including one or more of the following:

- Where they can [check their voter registration status](#)
- Where they can [register to vote](#)
- How they can [look up their local representatives](#) and find their contact information
- How they can find local organizations already working on their preferred issue

Step 4 : Say What?

Now that you have a list of contacts to reach out to, think of what would be the most effective ways for activating them to start getting involved. What are some of the issues that your friend or family member cares about most? For example, if access to affordable health care is something they really care about, talk with them about how the issue impacts you both and where their elected officials stand on the issue.

Pro-tip: When elections are coming up, try to avoid simple Yes/No questions like “Will you vote this year?” Instead, be prepared with a few resources (see Step 3) and try using questions that can help address some of the typical challenges that can prevent people from voting. For example:

- When was the last time you updated your voter registration status?
- Will you be in town on election day?
- Do you know if your state has an early voting period (or even vote by mail), and when that is?
- Will you vote early or on election day?
- Is your polling location close enough to walk or drive?
- Do you plan to vote before or after work?
- Who can you bring with you to vote?

Step 5 : Make the call (or text!)

Once you feel relatively comfortable with what you're going to say, start reaching out to your contacts. Feel free to catch up with them first and then let them know why you're calling. Touch on the impact that their election or their community can have on the issues we all care about and that we really need everyone to start getting involved.

Family & Friends Contact Sheet

Scientific research shows that friend-to-friend outreach can be highly effective in activating new volunteers and increasing civic engagement.

Directions: Use this list on a regular basis to call and/or text friends, family members, or neighbors who may need your encouragement to vote or get more involved. Keep this list somewhere visible, where you can see it—like on your fridge!

YOUR NAME: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

Name of friend or family member	Contact method <i>E.g. Text, FaceTime</i>	Issue of interest <i>E.g. Climate, health</i>	Priority location <i>E.g. Texas, CA-49</i>	Outcome(s)
				<input type="checkbox"/> Spoke to voter <input type="checkbox"/> Left voicemail <input type="checkbox"/> Text w/response <input type="checkbox"/> Text, no response
				<input type="checkbox"/> Spoke to voter <input type="checkbox"/> Left voicemail <input type="checkbox"/> Text w/response <input type="checkbox"/> Text, no response
				<input type="checkbox"/> Spoke to voter <input type="checkbox"/> Left voicemail <input type="checkbox"/> Text w/response <input type="checkbox"/> Text, no response
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