

Training skit written by the NO on California Civil Rights Initiative Campaign

This script demonstrates the various stages of an electoral field campaign. It requires three people, large cardboard posters or cartoon illustrations that introduce each segment and an easel to hold the title cards. No rehearsal is required. Usually, the Narrator role is read by an organizer. The other two people can be completely untrained, so long as they can read, have loud voices and are, preferably, inclined to ham it up.

It takes about 15-20 minutes.

The script is based on a 1996 initiative campaign in California. Organizers who use this skit should change the specific information to their own campaign or non-partisan project.

What's so great about this exercise? Organizers who've used this activity in electoral training have found that it can persuade entire community groups to volunteer, and it has helped to convince groups with a foot in the election game (for example, unions or lawyers) that the young people of color they were seeing doing voter outreach knew what they were doing. It has also been performed in languages besides English.

INTRODUCTION

NARRATOR: I'm (Trainer's Name) from Educators for Justice. We're a statewide organization dedicated to building political power in the communities that have been pushed to the margins in California — people of color, poor people and young people. Taken together we are California's emerging majority. EFJ is about empowering that new majority to fight conservative attacks like Proposition 187 and the California Civil Rights Initiative, and to be able to set our own agenda, instead of always having to be on the defensive.

Winning an election almost always requires a combination of tactics. Successful campaigns involve a variety of activities including paid media like radio, TV and/or print media; unpaid media like letters to the editor, op/ed pieces and editorials; direct mail to targeted voters; gathering and publicizing endorsements by important individuals and groups like unions, churches or political clubs. All of these are important elements of an electoral campaign — but none of them are a field campaign.

Electoral campaigns also include important grassroots activities, like holding forums and educating and motivating the public through house meetings, flyers, marches and rallies. But none of these are a field campaign, either.

So what is a field campaign? Our actors (Trainer 1 and Trainer 2) are about to illustrate the answer to that question. A field campaign uses voter targeting and direct contact — in person, by telephone or both — to identify the voters on your side and make sure they vote. It's very technical; almost a science. And it's all about numbers — figuring out where our numerical majority is, setting measurable goals for each stage of the campaign, making a plan to meet those goals, and checking the campaign's progress against the goals as the weeks go by.

In order to be successful, a field campaign must be wide, but not very deep. You need to contact a large number of people in a short period of time, figure out which ones are on your side, and on Election Day, get them to the polls. This means that a field campaign is not where you build deep organization or political consciousness. On the other hand, the discipline and organizing skills your volunteers develop are highly transferable to other kinds of organizing after Election Day.

A field campaign must be constantly growing, always attracting more volunteers and other resources. Here are the stages of a field campaign:

POSTER #1 — VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

NARRATOR: The first phase of a field campaign is finding the volunteers who will make it happen. Good sources of volunteers include lists of people who've worked on past campaigns, members of organizations like churches and unions, and the general public. One method uses a petition to find campaign volunteers.

Trainer 1: (Approaching Trainer 2 with clipboard) Hi! Would you like to sign a petition in favor of affirmative action? (Hands him the clipboard.)

TRAINER 2: Sure. I support affirmative action. Isn't there supposed to be something about it on the ballot in November?

TRAINER 1: There sure is. It's called the California Civil Rights Initiative. We call it the Civil Wrongs Initiative, and we're building a campaign to beat it. Would you like to volunteer? Just check that box and we'll call you up.

TRAINER 2: That would be great!

NARRATOR: In this phase you're also building your financial resources!

TRAINER 1: Could you kick in a dollar to help with the campaign?

TRAINER 2: Here you go! Don't forget to call me.

TRAINER 1: Don't worry! We'll call you! (To an audience member) Hi! Would you like to sign a petition in favor of affirmative action?

POSTER #2 — TARGETING

NARRATOR: The next step is targeting. You want to put those volunteers and those dollars where they will do the most good. Basically, you have to make educated guesses about which potential voters are already on your side and which can be swayed to your side. Targeting can be geographical (over 70% of Berkeley residents will vote our way); demographic (occasional Democratic Party women voters between the ages of 18-50 will probably come around to support affirmative action) or some combination of the two. Once you have decided who your target is, you need lists of registered voters who meet your criteria. These cost a lot of money from list companies; sometimes the Democratic Party or particular candidates have lists they will be happy to have you work with.

Usually you'll be organizing your field campaign by precinct. Precincts are geographical divisions established by the Registrar of Voters.

TRAINER 1: We're looking for voters in communities of color, so we need to figure out which precincts we should work in. We don't have enough money or volunteers to cover every precinct, so we have to figure out where we can get the most return for our effort. I got this precinct map from the Registrar of Voters to help us think about it.

TRAINER 2: And I got the data from the latest census, like you asked me to. That should help us get a general idea of who lives where by census tract. Basically, we're dealing with these areas. (Points to precinct map.) We can use the map to figure out which precincts fall into the areas where we want to work.

TRAINER 1: Even then, we might not have enough volunteers to cover all those precincts. We can get closer by looking at past voting patterns. At the Registrar of Voters I also picked up a printout of the results from the 1994 elections. Here's a list I made of the 100 precincts that had the biggest NO vote on Proposition 187.

TRAINER 2: Let's see which ones fit the census data we're working with. It's a good thing Local 2850 lent us this computer. But we could have done this by hand, too, if we had to.

TRAINER 1: Looks like we have about 75 precincts to concentrate on. Now let's figure out how many new voters we want to register in each one and how many NO votes we should aim for.

TRAINER 2: Wow! This is almost a science!

TRAINER 1: Yeah. And if we keep checking how we're doing against our goals, on the night before the election, we should know exactly what to expect the next day!

POSTER #3 — VOTER REGISTRATION

NARRATOR: The next step is to increase the number of people who will vote your way by registering more of them to vote. There are lots of ways to organize this, including voter registration drives in community organizations or churches, and setting up tables in places where people come together, like flea markets or shopping malls. People of color are 47 percent of California's population, but in the 1994 election, we were only 19 percent of the electorate. We have a lot of voter registration to do.

TRAINER 2: (Approaches Trainer 1 with voter registration forms on his clipboard.) Hi! Do you need to register to vote?

TRAINER 1: I'm not sure. I was registered where I used to live, but I moved.

TRAINER 2: Then you need to register again. It just takes a minute. (Hands her the clipboard.) Don't forget to sign and date it.

TRAINER 1: There. I'm done. I guess I'd better find a mailbox for this.

TRAINER 2: That's okay. I'll be happy to mail it for you. Here's your receipt. In a few weeks you should get a mailing from the Registrar of Voters.

TRAINER 1: Thanks a lot!

NARRATOR: Notice that our volunteer kept the voter registration form. There are several reasons why: That way you make sure the form really does get mailed. And before you mail it, you photocopy it. That new voter is precious. She could turn out to be a volunteer, or even a Precinct Captain.

POSTER #4 — VOTER IDENTIFICATION

NARRATOR: This is the part of the campaign where we contact every voter in our target precincts to find out which side they're on. Sometimes we work from lists that exclude people we're pretty sure will be against us — like white male Republicans over sixty. Remember — field campaigns are wide, not deep. Even if some of these folks might be on our side, we still need to put our resources where we have a better chance of finding our voters.

The best form of precinct organizing is to find a volunteer who lives in a target precinct who will agree to become “captain” of that precinct. Starting in September before a November election, that volunteer goes house to house evenings and weekends meeting the voters, cleaning up her list, and identifying the people who will vote our way. She also phones those who have phone numbers supplied on the lists and looks up numbers for the ones without. She registers additional potential (good) voters she finds in this process. She reports the results of all this (her “numbers”) to an organizer twice a week. On the last weekend, election Monday and Tuesday she reminds her “good” voters at least three times to go to the polls.

You will almost never get all parts of the ideal precinct operation described above for more than a few precincts in any campaign. But there are numerous ways to use a large volunteer base to substitute for the ideal situation, including mass phone banks, mass precinct walks, blitzes, and weekend mobilizations.

TRAINER 1: (Seated, mimes using telephone.) Ring! Ring!

TRAINER 2: Hello?

TRAINER 1: Hi. May I speak with (consults list) _____ (trainer 2's name)?

TRAINER 2: This is _____.

TRAINER 1: My name is _____ (trainer 1's name). I live around the corner from you on Victory Street.

TRAINER 2: Uh huh.

TRAINER 1: I'm working as a volunteer with the No on Nasty Initiatives Campaign. Have you heard about this so-called “Civil Rights” Initiative that would outlaw state affirmative action programs?

TRAINER 2: Yeah, I've heard about it.

TRAINER 1: Would you mind telling me how you plan to vote on it in November?

TRAINER 2: Oh, I'm totally against it.

TRAINER 1: That's great! So am I. (Mimes circling something on her list.) By the way, do you think you might have some time to work on the campaign? We're going to go house-to-house in our neighborhood this weekend, and we could sure use your help. We're meeting Saturday at noon at 123 Franklin St.

TRAINER 2: Sure, I can make that.

TRAINER 1: Great! I'll look forward to seeing you there. 'Bye!

NARRATOR: Notice that _____ (Trainer 1) is doing two things at once here — she's ID-ing her voters *and* continuing her volunteer recruitment. It's great when volunteers work in their own precincts. Often they already know the people they're calling or visiting.

TRAINER 1: Well, I've called through my whole list once now. I've got 50 people for CCRI and 124 against it. Of course I still have about 200 calls to make to people who weren't home. But now it's time to call the campaign office and give them my numbers.

POSTER #5 — ABSENTEE VOTING

NARRATOR: Many campaigns encourage absentee voting in order to get some of their votes “in the bank” before election day. Conservatives have done especially well at encouraging their voters to mail in ballots, so absentee voting is almost a fad with many political campaigns. Certainly it is an advantage not to have to chase down your people on Election Day, but many of the folks we’re targeting in this campaign aren’t used to voting at all, let alone by mail.

Still, if you can make absentee voting a community experience, it can be a useful part of a field campaign. Just don’t put all your energy into it.

TRAINER 1: Pastor Dooright, how are preparations coming for your voting party this weekend?

TRAINER 2: Well, about 150 people applied for absentee ballots when we announced it in church a month ago. Now we’re calling everyone back to remind them to come to the voting party. After we vote we’re going to have a potluck and the choir’s going to put on a little concert. We’re hoping that will make folks want to come.

TRAINER 1: Were people glad to have a chance to come together to vote?

TRAINER 2: Yes. In fact several folks have called up to thank us in advance. They said the whole thing was really confusing. The numbers on the ballot don’t correspond to the proposition numbers, and people are afraid of making a mistake. This way we can go over the ballot together. Everyone can decide which way they want to vote on each candidate and issue and make sure they do it right.

TRAINER 1: Well, thank you Pastor Doright, for organizing this.

POSTER #6 — GOTV

NARRATOR: Now we're down to the wire. There is no such thing as reminding someone to vote too often! Good programs reach each identified voter at least three times in person and/or by phone over the last weekend. On Election Day, masses of volunteers check the voter lists at polling places during the day and drag out identified voters who haven't made it down yet! It really takes this kind of effort to get people to vote. If you do it in an organized, consistent way, the results can be awesome!

Here's contact #1 on Saturday afternoon.

TRAINER 1: Ring! Ring!

TRAINER 2: Hello?

TRAINER 1: Hi. May I speak with (consults list) Julius C. Voter?

TRAINER 2: This is Julius.

TRAINER 1: Hi, Julius. This is your neighbor (Trainer 1) calling to remind you to vote NO on CCRI this coming Tuesday.

TRAINER 2: Wow! Is the election really on Tuesday? I had no idea!

TRAINER 1: It sure is, and it's really important that you remember to vote NO on CCRI.

TRAINER 2: I sure will. Thanks for reminding me.

NARRATOR: Notice that Julius didn't even know when the election was. Of course we've been focused on the day for over a year, but that doesn't mean that everyone else is!

Here's the second contact, on Monday evening.

TRAINER 1: Ring! Ring!

TRAINER 2: Hello?

TRAINER 1: Hi. Is this Julius Voter?

TRAINER 2: Sure is.

TRAINER 1: Hi, Julius. It's your neighbor (Trainer 1) again. I'm just calling again to remind you to vote NO on CCRI tomorrow. Do you know where your polling place is?

TRAINER 2: Oh right. The election is tomorrow. I know where I go to vote — it's that garage on Victory St., right?

TRAINER 1: You know what? They changed it. This year our precinct is voting at Harriet Tubman Middle School at 3rd and Franklin St.

TRAINER 2: Oh, yeah. That's where my daughter goes to school. Thanks for telling me.

TRAINER 1: Don't forget to vote NO on CCRI tomorrow. The polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

TRAINER 2: I won't forget. 'Bye.

NARRATOR: Notice that Julius Voter has already forgotten that the election is tomorrow. And even though he may actually have read his voter pamphlet when it arrived, he didn't notice that his polling place has changed since the last election. People can't vote if they don't remember and they don't know where to go. Our job is to make it as easy as possible.

Now, here's the last contact. It's 6:30 p.m. and Andrea has just checked the list outside the polling place to see which of her identified voters have been there. She sees that Julius still hasn't voted, and the poll is closing in half an hour. She goes to his house.

TRAINER 1: Knock! Knock!

TRAINER 2: (Sitting with his feet up. When he hears the knock, he switches off the remote control on his TV, gets up and goes to answer.) Hello? Oh hi, (Trainer 1).

TRAINER 1: Hi, Julius. I was just down at Harriet Tubman School and I noticed you haven't voted yet. The polls are closing in half an hour, you know.

TRAINER 2: Oh, man! I completely forgot. Look, it's been a long day. I'm exhausted. I'll vote next year, okay?

TRAINER 1: Next year will be too late to save affirmative action. Come on. It'll just take a few minutes. I'll walk down there with you.

TRAINER 2: You know, you're starting to get on my nerves.

TRAINER 1: But think how much worse you'll feel if you don't vote.

TRAINER 2: Oh, all right. Let's go.

NARRATOR: Finally! Right now Julius is a little pissed off with Andrea. But tomorrow when he knows he was one of the millions of Californians who helped beat CCRI, he'll feel proud.

So, that's what a field campaign is all about. Any questions?