

CAMPAIGN TERMINOLOGY



A GLOSSARY

OVERVIEW

It's come to our attention that campaigners use *a lot* of jargon. We hope the definitions in this glossary will help you to build your campaign vocabulary and successfully navigate a world where “universe” refers to a list of voters, and not the cosmos. If, in your work, you come across a term is not defined here, get in touch and we'll add it to our glossary!

Activist Code

A tag created in a database to track voters, volunteers, and engagement. For example, one might tag Neighborhood Team Leaders, Canvass Captains, Phone Bank Captains, etc.

Attempts

An effort to directly reach an individual voter. When referring to attempts, people are typically referencing door knocks, phone calls, or text messages.

Canvassing

An effort to contact and speak directly to a list of targeted voters. Canvassing is used almost exclusively to refer to knocking on doors.

Contacts

Refers to conversations held between targeted voters and the campaign (usually at the door or on the phone). This term “contact” is often used interchangeably with “conversation” or “touch.”

CRM

Customer Relationship Manager; a database used to track engagement of donors, voters, and volunteers (commonly used CRMs include NGP/VAN and Nation Builder among others).

Day of Action

A day on the campaign during which volunteers are organized to take collective action (such as house meetings, canvasses, phone banks, text banks) en masse across the district, state, or country.

Direct Mail

Mail pieces sent directly from your campaign to a targeted list of voters.

Direct Voter Contact

Attempts by the campaign to directly reach or engage voters. Direct Voter Contact tactics include face-to-face conversations (usually at the door), phone conversations, text messaging, and mail.

Double/Triple Prime Voter

A person who has voted in two of the last three primaries, or three of the last three primaries. Generally speaking, these voters are considered “likely voters” because they have reliable voting behavior histories.

Earned Media

Free media or press that is “earned” by the campaign, rather than paid advertising. For example, campaigns may choose to put together events in order to attract press who will cover a particular story or narrative.

Field/Organizing Director

A member of the senior staff who is responsible for writing the organizing plan, hiring the organizing staff, and managing the organizing program and all direct voter contact for the campaign.

Field Organizer/Organizer

A campaign staffer who is responsible for recruiting, training, and managing teams of volunteers to register, persuade, and turnout target voters in a specific geographic area.

GOTV

An acronym that stands for “Get Out The Vote”; the final weeks or days of the campaign in which the entire focus of the campaign is turning out supporters to vote for the candidate.

GRPs

An acronym that stands for Gross Rating Points. In a TV advertising campaign, this is the measurement used to quantify impressions as a percentage of the target universe.

Impressions

An ad view (though not necessarily a view that is active or lasts the entire length of a video or TV ad). When used in reference to a digital ad, an impression is counted when the web page is located and loaded.

Neighborhood Team Leader

A committed volunteer who is empowered to run the campaign's direct voter contact operations in their neighborhood. This person usually manages other volunteer leaders, such as Canvass Captains, Phone Bank Captains, and Data Captains.

Pass

An attempt to directly contact a complete universe (list) of voters. People typically refer to “making multiple passes on the universe” in order to account for contact rates. For example, if for every 100 doors knocked, you only contacted and had conversations with 25 voters, then your contact rate is 25%, and you would need to make roughly 4 passes to contact every individual in your target universe.

Pathway to Victory

A calculation of the campaign's vote goal (also called the win number), and how many voters must be persuaded, registered, and/or turned out to reach that vote goal. A sophisticated pathway to victory will also include an analysis of who the target voters are for persuasion, registration, and turnout.

Penetration

A term that refers to the percentage of a voter universe / list that has been contacted by the campaign. For example, one might say that we've reached 70% penetration, to indicate that we have had conversations with 70% of the voters the campaign is targeting. This term is often used interchangeably with “saturation.”

Persuadable Voters

Refers to voters who the campaign will target and attempt to persuade to vote for the candidate. Typically, this term is used to refer to voters who are somewhat likely to turnout to vote but are currently undecided or do not have a strong partisan identity.

Snapshot

A data analysis of a district's voters and demographics that includes projections for expected turnout, voter targeting, and pathway to victory.

Snowflake Model

A distributed leadership model used to organize communities in labor movements, advocacy efforts, and electoral campaigns. The Snowflake Model was adopted as “The Neighborhood Team Model” on President Obama's campaign in 2008, with the help of organizer Marshall Ganz, and has been used widely by Democratic campaigns since. It is called the “Snowflake Model” because

when you draw it as an organizational chart, it looks like a snowflake. The model’s success depends on empowering and training volunteers to take on leadership roles so that they might be multipliers for the campaign.

Sporadic Voters

People who are registered to vote but only occasionally turn out to vote; this term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term “drop off voters”—people who tend to vote in Presidential elections but not in Midterm or local elections.

Strategy

How the campaign will employ its resources to meet its goal

Surrogate

An influential or well-known person—often an elected official, celebrity, or local civic leader—who travels and speaks to donors, volunteers, and voters on behalf of the campaign or candidate.

Tactics

The specific actions a campaign will take as part of its overarching strategy to meet its goals

Targeting

The selection of voters whom the campaign will directly engage in order to register, persuade, and/or turn out to vote. Campaigns rarely have the capacity and resources to engage all voters, so they have to select a smaller number of voters whose support they believe they can garner through interventions such as direct voter contact or paid media.

Turf

A specific region or area that includes voters who an organizer or volunteer is responsible for contacting. Sometimes, one refers to an organizer’s turf as the region in which they organize. Other times, someone might refer to a turf and simply mean a canvass packet (also called a walk list).

Turnout

Refers to the voters showing up to cast their ballots. For example, if one says “turnout is high,” they mean that a high number of registered voters have cast their ballots (in person and/or by mail).

Universe

A list of voters who the campaign has targeted for engagement. The campaign has a universe for direct voter contact (door, phone, text conversations, mail), and also for paid media (TV, digital ads).

Virtual Phone Bank (VPB)

A tool arranged by a campaign so that volunteers can call and speak to their target voters from anywhere, with a script and data recording capabilities provided by the campaign.

Voter File

A database of all registered voters in the state, that includes their publicly available data (usually address, phone number, gender, date of birth).