



College Democrats

OF AMERICA

CDA Campaign Organizing Manual

In local, state, and national elections, young voters can *make it happen* by registering to vote and turning out at the polls in record numbers.

Students from across the country are organizing and mobilizing their fellow students to support Democratic candidates because they know young people can have an enormous impact on elections.

Organizing your College Democrats chapter around a candidate for office is an effective way to organize students. You can register voters, track supporters, engage volunteers, and create a plan to get out the vote on Election Day. This manual outlines how to get started, and where to take it from there. The action plan is long, but don't feel like you need to complete all of the tasks. You know your campus and community best; pick and choose which ideas will be most appropriate and effective on your campus. And if you have an idea that isn't on the list, go for it!

Contents of this Manual:

- How to Organize a Student Group
- Tips to Getting Started
- Get Out The Vote Ideas
- Helpful Tips
- Sign-Up Sheets

How to Organize a Student Group

Hold a General Interest Session

It's the start of a new school year and a great time to start organizing your campus behind a Democratic candidate for office. Back from summer break, students are energized and eager to organize for Democratic candidates. A general interest session is a great jumpoff point -- this is the meeting to get it started.

- After gathering together a handful of students that you know are supporting a Democratic candidate, organize a meeting for other students to learn how they can get involved. This is the jumping off point for weeks of excitement and activity. This event should motivate and inspire potential members about being involved, and be fairly short and entertaining.
- Prepare for the session by advertising (but be sure to check with the Student Activities Office for rules about where and how you can advertise):
 - Hang flyers and posters
 - Table outside of high traffic areas (such as dining halls, the library, bus stops, large classrooms)
 - Chalk sidewalks
 - Place ads in campus publications
- Ask organizations and progressive professors if they will mention your meeting to their members and students and, even better, let you come speak to the group or class.
- Invite a special speaker who will inspire enthusiasm:
 - A representative from the campaign
 - A local elected official
 - An activist who has experience in organizing young supporters
- At the meeting: introduce yourself; outline your organization's campaign goals; explain what you hope to do in the weeks before the election; let people know what kinds of activities they can participate in; and leave time for questions.
- Have an action item at your welcome event: register five friends to vote; or call friends at other schools and ask them to organize a College Democrats chapter. Students will come away from the meeting energized and with a sense of having something to accomplish.
- Make sure that before everyone leaves, you set the date and time of your next meeting, and send them home with an action item.
- Use the College Democrats sign-up sheets to collect contact information — names, phone numbers, campus addresses, and e-mail addresses.
- Follow up with new contacts quickly – thank them for coming to the meeting, invite them to become more involved, and advertise your next meeting or event.

Create a Flexible Group Structure

Participation will vary from person to person; some people will be able to work long hours, while others will not be able to attend every meeting and event, but are still interested and supportive.

Try to gauge who would like to take on additional responsibilities, such as being a dorm captain or organizing a voter registration drive. Make sure that people are able to participate on their own; schedule some tasks, like going door-to-door in the dorms or writing letters to the editor, can be done anytime.

Try creating a campaign officer system for your chapter, including:

- **GOTV Director** - Coordinates your campus's GOTV program
- **Dorm Captains** - Students who reside in each dorm who communicate with the GOTV director, receive literature from GOTV director, and plan canvassing operations.
- **Floor Captains** - Student who canvasses each dorm. Freshman Floor Captains should walk with a more-experienced upperclassman.
- **Greek Director** - Responsible for organizing leaders in the Greek system for the College Democrats
- **Off-campus Director** - Responsible for finding ways to remind students that live off campus to vote in their respective towns and make sure they get to the polls.
- **Visibility Director**- Responsible for visibility around campus.

Getting Started 1

Visit Campaign Websites

The Internet is an enormous tool and students have unprecedented access to it. At campaign websites, you can learn about a candidate's biography and their plan once elected.

- Websites also often includes cool features like organizing manuals, television commercials, a photo gallery, and a blog.

Sign up for Campaign

Be sure to register your school with the campaign so it can track your organizing. This is also a great way to ensure that you are linked into the campaign network so you can:

- Receive regular communications about the campaign
- Have access to new organizing tools
- Stay informed about upcoming events

New Student Orientation/Student Activities Fair

Many schools hold New Student Orientations and Activities Fairs during the first few weeks of school and this is a great time to recruit new Students for the College Democrats. Recruit some friends or volunteers to table at the event and bring plenty of sign-up sheets to record contact information.

Attend the meetings of allied organizations

This is a good way to reach new activists and help spread our message. Contact the leaders of like-minded clubs and ask if you can speak for just a few minutes at one of their meetings early in the semester. You can also reach out to fraternities and sororities, intramural sports teams, and arts/performance groups. Make sure to bring along plenty of sign-up sheets to sign-up new supporters.

Voter registration

This should be one of your first tasks, especially if your state has a registration deadline. Check with the local or state Board of Elections to find out your state's registration deadline. Incorporate voter registration into all of your events before the registration deadline.

If your chapter is near any INS naturalization ceremonies, consider setting up a voter registration table outside the event – just make sure you have permission. This can be a great way to register enthusiastic new citizens, and their enthusiasm will rub off and help motivate members of your chapter. It's worth researching!

Create a calendar

Many schools have online calendars, which will give you an overview of what is happening on campus.

Create a calendar that includes important dates:

- The last date to register to vote in your state
- Early vote start date, if applicable

- Last day to request an absentee ballot
- Homecoming weekend and important related events
- Student activities fair
- Major sporting events on and off campus
- Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates; campus debates
- Concerts and music festivals

This will give you a good idea ahead of time about which dates are important and plenty of time to organize and prepare.

Table with information and materials.

Set up a table in a high-traffic area with information about Democratic candidates, voter registration, and upcoming events.

- This is a good way to get your organization and gear and sign up new supporters each week.
- Be sure to have sign-up sheets to record contact info and information about your next College Democrats meeting.
- Try to table at least once a week and vary the days. Ask supporters or volunteers to take shifts staffing the table.
- Food is a great motivator – consider selling food items as a fundraiser, and to help draw people to the table.

Getting Started 2

Create a “dorm captain” network.

In the 2000 election, Vice-President Al Gore lost the state of Florida by 537 votes – at most schools, that is less than one dorm. The most effective way to organize students on your campus is to create a network of dorm captains, who take responsibility for one floor or one dorm.

Dorm captains are responsible for:

- Developing a Voter List of all students on their floor or in their dorm
- Registering all students to vote on their floor or in their dorm
- Identifying all campaign supporters and undecided voters
- Distributing literature and other materials, and following up with undecided voters
- And, most importantly, getting out the vote on Election Day!

The dorm captain system allows you to:

- Reach out to all students on campus in an organized fashion
- Track progress on voter registration and voter identification
- Communicate more easily with your key activists
- Create a built-in mobilization plan for Election Day.

Visibility.

During Presidential campaign years, the debates offer a great chance to make your voices heard and visibility will make your presence known!

- Create some campaign gear or buy some online.
- Something as simple as wearing a button on your backpack is a great conversation starter and another way to get people involved.

You can also coordinate larger visibility events:

- Get a group to stand on the sidewalk near busy streets to wave signs and pass out palm cards, stickers, or other materials.
- Sticker students walking to class
- Hold a party at football games and signs and a banner
- Flyer, chalk, hang banners – just make sure to follow your school's guidelines.
- When a Republican is doing a campaign event nearby, organize a publicity stunt for free media. If a Republican is giving a speech on health care, dress up in scrubs and doctors outfits and pass out information about the Democratic agenda, which offers a better prescription for America's problems.

Volunteer locally.

Volunteers from across the nation are working countless hours in support of Democratic candidates. Your help is greatly appreciated and vital to campaigns. Join their forces and visit the local campaign office for a couple of hours after class or on weekends. You can call undecided voters or go door-to-door in the community. Find out info at the campaign website or your local Democratic Party.

- *Take a tip from organized labor: If your chapter has enough volunteer capacity, work with the campaign to identify specific precincts that you can “own” for the campaign – do all door-knocking, phone-banking, and GOTV. **If you organize your Adopted Precincts effectively**, your chapter will gain huge credibility with campaign workers and also local elected officials.*

Phone bank.

Campaigns often reach out to voters over the phone, calling them at home and asking them for their support. Talk to the local campaign office about creating a phone bank for your campus. They may want you to use their lists or phone bank locations, or you can create your own using your campus directory. On-campus phone calls are often free but if not, remember that you get free nights and weekends with many cell phone plans!

Host debate watch parties.

In close elections, many undecided voters are influenced by the debates. Campaigning can be hard work and Debate Watch Parties are good a time to order some pizza, find a TV, and rally support. Advertise the event in advance and consider teaming up with other campus groups to reach a larger audience.

Campus debates.

During camaigns, students will be talking about the issues – affordable education and health care, America's foreign policy, finding a job after school. Issues that are important across the nation are also important to students. Challenge the College Republicans to debate the issues and ask the debate club at your school to moderate. You can prepare by reading about the Democratic plan on campaign websites. And remember to collect contact information at the event!

Road Trip to Victory.

Many groups throughout the country plan on visiting targeted states or districts in the weeks leading up to an election. Whether you want to travel for one weekend, or take an extended trip, campaigns need you help. Stay informed about important races by checking in with the College Democrats of America, the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Governor's Association, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Get Out The Vote (GOTV)

After months of organizing, all of your hard work comes down to one day: Election Day. It is essential that you make sure that people on your campus and in your community get to the polls on Election Day.

Prep work:

- Dorm captains should continue to canvass and call undecided voters. Have campaign literature and materials to leave behind, and some talking points ready to help persuade them.
- If you do not have polling locations on campus, ask supporters if they need a ride to the polls on Election Day. Create a carpool system or a shuttle system to help get students back and forth from campus to the polling site.
- Identify poll watchers to staff polling sites on Election Day. You should work with the local campaign or Democratic Party; they may already have a system in place.
- Know who to call at the campaign and/or Board of Elections if there are problems on Election Day.
- Place ads in the campus newspaper or on the campus radio station. (you may need to arrange this weeks in advance)
- Ask students to write letters to the editor of campus or community newspapers, encouraging students to vote for Democratic candidates.
- See if professors will let students make announcements in class to remind students to vote.
- Organize a watch party. Pair up with other campus groups or the campaign and host a watch party where supporters can gather to watch election returns. Try to have multiple televisions so you can monitor more than one channel. And don't forget the food!

Use your dorm captains as the basis for your GOTV efforts. If a significant number of students live off-campus, duplicate these efforts by block or neighborhood.

Saturday, Sunday, and Monday before Election Day:

- Canvass your supporters either by door knocking or calling.
- Tell them what is at stake and that Democratic candidates need their support.
- Remind them where their polling location is and what the hours of operation are. Also remind first-time voters to bring identification with them to the polls.
- If you live in an early vote state, encourage supporters to go vote today and miss the Tuesday crowds. You may want to create a carpool system or shuttle system for the weekend as well as Election Day.
- Visibility – show up at every major event on or around campus and create your own events.
- Organize a GOTV rally. Work with the campaign or local party to arrange for speakers, such as candidates or celebrities.

Tuesday, Election Day:

- Early in the morning (or very late the night before), place door hangers on the door of all identified supporters and make sure to indicate their polling location.
- Have an early-morning meeting with your dorm captains and other volunteers to go over the schedule for the day. Make sure everyone knows their specific tasks and who to contact if there is a problem.
- Begin your carpool or shuttle service from campus to transport students to the polls.
- Round one GOTV phone call. Dorm captains should leave a message for their supporters in the morning, reminding them to vote and telling students their polling locations. You may be able to create an automated call through your campus voicemail system.
- Visibility – go crazy! This is your last chance to get the word out. Teams should pass out palm cards, stickers, or other materials at high-traffic areas (make sure you are the proper distance from polling

locations). Have visibility squads stationed near entrances to campus or major buildings. Flyer, chalk, hang banners – just make sure to follow your school's guidelines.

- Round two GOTV call. A few hours before the polls close, dorm captains should call their supporters. This should be a personal call to see if the supporter has voted, and to remind them when the polls close and their polling location.
- Round three GOTV call. Anyone who you did not personally speak to should get another call an hour before polls close.
- Go join your friends and supporters at the watch party once the polls close.

Helpful Tips

- **Always collect Contact Information.** Whether they are new supporters, volunteers, or people looking for more information, the more names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses we have, the more we can reach out to voters.
- **Have voter registration forms with you at all events.** Be sure to make people aware of the registration deadline (if your state has one) and tell how they can locate their polling site. Also, ask if people need absentee ballots, and help them connect with the local Board of Elections. See our Guide to Voter Registration for more information.
- **Adapt, revise, add.** This plan is just a suggested outline of ways to organize your campus and get out the vote. Adapt it to fit your needs; revise your plan as you see what works and what does not work on your campus; and add new events or ideas.
- **Follow up!** Thank new supporters and volunteers with a quick email, phone call, or note after you sign them up at an event.
- **Help us help you.** Be sure to upload the contact information you receive onto the CDA online database system. By managing your eChapter and keeping its membership up-to-date, you will allow CDA and the Democratic National Committee to track its nationwide campus network.

THANK YOU!

Your dedication and support will help lead to Democratic victory on Election Day. Keep up the good work, and remember, young voters make it happen!

