



RELATIONAL ORGANIZING RESEARCH

Definition: Leveraging personal relationships with other people to promote causes or candidates.

Bottom line: Relational organizing is the most impactful tactic that individuals can use to influence elections.

CONSIDERATIONS

- **Pros** - Cost-effective; allows for more intimate conversation; personal information about the voter is highly accurate; higher contact rates; bigger effects than traditional organizing
- **Cons** - Can feel awkward; possibility of social consequences; people may feel uncomfortable sharing personal information about contacts with campaigns

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Relational organizing is highly effective for turnout.

- Industry sources suggest that it is tied with social pressure mail as the most effective mobilization tactic.¹
- Academic research similarly suggests that we are more likely to be influenced by people we know, like, or find familiar compared to strangers.^{2,3,4}
- Unlike social pressure mail, relational organizing is easily accessible to individuals.

We can build relationships with new people through organizing, not just influence people we already know.

- Research on mere exposure indicates that we are more likely to be attracted to, like, and/or recognize people that we have been previously exposed to, even just visually in passing.^{5,6}
- Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff both used the [Reach app](#) to great success (Ocasio-Cortez's campaign saw a higher contact rate on Reach compared to traditional methods and the Ossoff campaign found a turnout increase of 3.8%).^{7,8} This app allows organizers to build sustained relationships with voters they meet.
- There is evidence that repeated conversations can help to build relationships.⁹

Contact rates and response rates are generally high.

- People are highly likely to have accurate contact information about people they personally know and have relationships with.
- People are more likely to engage with and return communications from people they actually know (e.g., answer the phone, respond to a text).

There are tools available to help identify existing contacts who are the most likely to need to be encouraged.

- Campaigns can also employ other relational organizing apps like [Impactive](#) and [Team by Tuesday Company](#) to get volunteers to contact people they know that might vote for the candidate or issue.
- These tools match your personal contacts to the voter file to identify unregistered people and sporadic voters.
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It can work in a variety of mediums and for a variety of purposes.

- Both academic and industry research suggests that highly effective relational organizing can be done by phone, in person, over text, over email, through the mail.^{1,9,10}
- SDAN has found evidence that “friendraising” or relational organizing among friends to raise money for candidates, yields both higher contact rates and higher individual donation amounts than emails from Sister District HQ.^{11,12}

Areas for Further Exploration:

- Scaling relational organizing programs.
- More research on how to improve the volunteer experience when relational organizing.
- More research on how to train volunteer activist to initiate and structure effective relational organizing without the context of a program.

References and notes:

1. Industry source (SDAN has access to various research reports by progressive organizations that we are not allowed to disseminate or cite but are sharing broad strokes of here).
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4. Cialdini, R. B. (2006). *Influence: the psychology of persuasion*, revised edition. New York: William Morrow.
5. Zajonc, R. B. (2001). Mere exposure: A gateway to the subliminal. *Current directions in psychological science*, 10(6), 224-228.
6. Bornstein, R. F., & D’agostino, P. R. (1992). Stimulus recognition and the mere exposure effect. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 63(4), 545.
7. <https://www.geekwire.com/2019/app-helped-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-get-elected-spreading-progressive-campaigns-across-country/>
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9. Christens, B. D. (2010). Public relationship building in grassroots community organizing: Relational intervention for individual and systems change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(7), 886-900.
10. Schein, A., Vafa, K., Sridhar, D., Veitch, V., Quinn, J., Moffet, J., ... & Green, D. P. (2020). A Digital Field Experiment Reveals Large Effects of Friend-to-Friend Texting on Voter Turnout. Available at SSRN 3696179.
11. <https://sisterdistrict.com/research/friendraising/>
12. <https://sisterdistrict.com/friendraising-works/>