

# 2024 Summit – Digital Organizing in a Presidential Year

Facilitator: Sarah Mercy

Panelists

1. Lyzz Schwegler, Co-Founder, SVP of Digital, Sister District
2. Tifrah Akhtar, Senior Social Media & Content Manager, Sister District
3. Carla Martin, Lead Digital Strategist, Middle Seat

## Introduction

- Focus of the workshop: exploring digital organizing strategies in a presidential election year.

## Panel Discussion

- Overview of Digital Organizing Strategies (Lyzz)
  - **Can you share more about Sister District's digital organizing campaigns and why it is so crucial for power-building? How do our audiences differ from social media and email?**
    - Sister District's digital organizing campaigns focus on four key areas:
      - Fundraising for candidates
      - Fundraising for the State Bridges program
      - Fundraising for HQ
      - Providing educational content through newsletters, etc.
    - Different audiences are targeted through email/text and social media:
      - Email/Text Audience:
        - Consists of volunteers and donors, serving as the organization's database.
      - Social Media Audience:
        - Often comprises individuals who are new to Sister District, younger, or may not have taken any action yet.
        - Referred to as the "top of the universe" in terms of engagement.
    - While there may be some overlap between the two audiences, the ultimate goal is to achieve 100% overlap to maximize engagement and support.
- Social Media Engagement (Tifrah)
  - **How do you incorporate down-ballot messaging on social media specifically in a presidential election year?**
    - **Contextualizing Presidential Elections:**
      - Each presidential year presents a unique political landscape, despite having the same candidates as in the previous election.

- Notable shifts in the political terrain have occurred since the fall of Roe vs. Wade, leading to what's been termed a "blue wave" in state legislative races.
  - **Emphasis on Down-Ballot Issues:**
    - Abortion rights have been a significant focus, consistently winning in various political settings, including red states and counties where there's significant partisan disparity.
    - Highlighting the importance of state legislatures and down-ballot voting as avenues for addressing critical issues like abortion rights.
    - Continual advocacy for abortion access in states, regardless of the immediate impact on federal policies.
  - **Expanding on Other Issues:**
    - Recognizing other critical down-ballot issues, such as the stagnant federal minimum wage compared to the proactive measures taken by many states.
    - Acknowledging the predominant focus on the presidential race while also addressing political disillusionment at the top of the ticket.
  - **Unity in Voter Engagement:**
    - Rejecting the notion of a binary choice in voter engagement strategies, emphasizing that all voters are equally important.
    - Stating that voting down-ballot can have consequential impacts on higher-level races, reinforcing the interconnectedness of electoral participation.
- **Can you share any strategies for maximizing reach and impact on social media platforms?**
- **Audience Understanding:** Analyze audience metrics to tailor content effectively to the demographics and interests of followers.
  - **Consistency is Key:** Emphasize the importance of consistent posting to maintain engagement, even if it means starting with just one social platform initially.
  - **Readiness for Rapid Response:** Be prepared to respond quickly to current events or trending topics relevant to your organization's mission.
  - **Content Repurposing:** Utilize content across different platforms, adapting materials from one platform to suit the format and audience of another.
  - **Seek Inspiration:** Look for similar accounts for inspiration and to customize your feed for better engagement.
  - **Local Influencer Partnerships:** Collaborate with local influencers who align with your organization's goals to expand reach and credibility within specific communities.

- Utilize Canva Templates: Take advantage of available resources such as Canva templates provided by Sister District to streamline content creation.
  - Additional Resources: Explore platforms like "[Into Action Lab](#)" for political gifs, posts, and inspiration to maintain regular posting schedules and foster original content creation.
- Email Campaigns and Strategy (Carla)
  - **Walk us through what you recommend for the anatomy of a grassroots email program. (do not read out loud) For example: how many emails should a group be sending? What kind of Call to Actions (CTA) should they utilize? What's an effective layout for an email? How long should an email be?**
    - Our Philosophy/Approach to email:
      - View email lists as more than just fundraising tools; they represent the movement and collective power. Aim to inspire and engage subscribers while treating them with respect.
        - We want people to stay on our list and engage with us.
      - Avoid spammy or deceptive tactics.
    - Cadence:
      - Email regularly to maintain an active and engaged audience, but avoid excessive emailing for the sake of it. Typically, sending once or twice a week is sufficient, but adjust frequency based on relevance and necessity.
    - Theory of Change (ensuring that the reader understands that the action that you're asking them to take is a part of a larger plan):
      - What is the change we want to see?
      - What can we do to achieve that change?
      - Why should we do it?
      - And why now?
  - **Thanks Carla, you've explained what your approach to framing an email should look like, now can you explain how to actually make the ask and what format the call to action should take?**
    - Call to Action (CTA):
      - Tailor the CTA to current needs, which may include financial contributions, volunteering, event attendance, or social sharing.
      - Ensure alignment with a strong Theory of Change to reinforce the purpose and impact of the requested action.
      - Diversify CTAs to offer varied opportunities for engagement and support.

- Format:
  - Hook: Begin with a compelling hook to grab the reader's attention and pique their interest in the issue or opportunity.
  - Problem: Clearly articulate the problem or issue that you are trying to address, emphasizing its significance and urgency.
  - Theory of Change: Provide context on Sister District's strategy for creating change, outlining the steps needed to achieve the desired outcome.
  - Ask: Clearly state the specific action or actions requested.
  - And make sure it's skimmable!
- **What strategies have you learned work particularly well for our Sister District audience?**
  - High Engagement Level: Sister District's email list is extremely engaged and excited about the work, which is really impressive.
  - Candidate and State Bridges fundraising: There is always a lot of energy around these programs
  - Countdown to important dates (Election Day, fundraising deadlines)
    - Sister District is great of being respectful of the list so when there are deadlines folks are really receptive of that
  - Big moments (Dobbs, the Wisconsin special election, attacks on a candidate, candidate endorsements, etc.)
  - Newsy topics - breaking news coming out of a particular state
  - Line item fundraising - donors want to know where their money is going. Starting a fund for a specific project has been very successful
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- For All Panelists
  - **In a year with intense focus on the presidential election, how do you ensure that down-ballot races receive adequate attention and support through digital organizing efforts?**
    - Lyzz - the more you can capitalize on existing energy, the better
      - You probably notice through your volunteer team that there has been more interest in taking action in 2024 just because its a presidential election year.
      - Stay consistent with your list
        - Maintain regular communication with the audience, recognizing that they are actively engaged and willing to participate in various actions.
        - Not everyone opens every email, so don't be afraid to have repetitive CTAs. Continue to engage the audience with relevant opportunities for support.

- Seize both big and small moments in the political landscape to galvanize support and action from the audience.
  - Carla - The folks on our list don't need persuading. They understand the stakes and understand our theory of change.
    - Providing people with as many opportunities to take action as possible will keep them engaged with our work and down ballot races.
  - Tifrah - Building on rapid response. So critical to social media.
    - Because social is moving so fast, something she will do to prep for rapid response moments, is to utilize existing quotes and statements that Sister District staff has used in the past.
      - Important to continue to be thoughtful even in a rapid response moment.
      - Into Action Lab already has content available to you
      - Sister District has existing templates are there that you can also utilize.
      - Super critical to be as thoughtful as possible about staying ahead of the game.
- **Could you share any lessons learned or best practices for overcoming challenges in digital organizing, particularly in reaching and engaging diverse audiences?**
- Carla - Not everyone reads emails, so don't be afraid to say the same things to drive home your message. Don't worry about being too repetitive.
  - Continuously test messages to determine what resonates best with your audience. Experiment with different formats, lengths, and visual elements to gauge engagement.
  - Tailor your approach based on what works best for your specific audience. Some organizations may find success with lengthy emails, while others may benefit more from graphics and pictures.
  - Don't be discouraged by previous failures. Experimentation and iteration are key to finding effective communication strategies.
  - Examples of elements to test in platforms like Action Network include subject lines (iterations, length, sender), email length, inclusion of graphics/pictures, font size variations, and testing different issues.
  - Set meaningful metrics for evaluating campaign success, such as open rates for subject lines and sender identification, and click-through rates or conversions for buttons and email length.

- Lyzz - Acknowledge the variability of engagement levels in different years and political contexts, such as presidential versus midterm election years or changes in leadership.
- Emphasize the importance of embracing this variability and adapting strategies accordingly.
- Testing and flexibility are crucial, particularly in response to unexpected shifts in audience behavior or engagement.
- Be prepared to adjust strategies based on what works best, even if it contradicts previous assumptions.
- Focus on more meaningful metrics like clicks, sign-ups, and donations, as open rates may be skewed due to changes in technology and privacy regulations (e.g., Google's new iOS rules).

### **Q&A Session**

- How do you contact the local influencers to hook up with them?
  - Types of Influencers: Influencers can range from directly politically related figures to individuals whose content may not primarily focus on politics but who have a history of political involvement or interest.
  - Finding Influencers:
    - Monitor social media platforms for individuals discussing topics related to your local area, even if their content isn't explicitly political.
    - Conduct searches on platforms like Twitter or Instagram using relevant keywords, such as "Michigan Democrats," to identify potential influencers.
  - Utilize Facebook Groups:
    - Join political groups specific to your area on Facebook, where influencers and politically engaged individuals may be active.
    - Engage with group members and identify potential influencers who align with your organization's goals.
  - Approaching Influencers:
    - Reach out to identified influencers via direct messages or emails, expressing interest in collaboration or partnership opportunities.
    - Be respectful and transparent about your intentions, highlighting how working together could mutually benefit both parties.
    - While responses may vary, some influencers may be excited to work together and contribute to your organization's efforts.

### **Closing Remarks**

- Key takeaways
  - The importance of tailoring messaging: Craft messages that resonate with your audience's interests and preferences to boost engagement.

- Maintaining consistency: Ensure regular communication across channels to keep your audience informed and engaged.
- Understanding your audience: Gather insights to tailor your messaging and strategies to meet your audience's needs.
- Aligning actions with broader goals in both social media engagement and email campaigns. This provides actionable insights for maximizing impact and engagement, ultimately contributing to the success of grassroots organizing efforts.