



## RURAL ORGANIZING & ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR PRECINCT CAPTAINS

Democrats are a strong and united voice for rural Americans, as we recognize the important bond between our nation's heritage and its future. Democratic values, policies, and candidates benefit all Americans, in all parts of our country. It is our collective job to modernize our work, build long-term engagement, organize on the ground and ensure that Every ZIP Code Counts.

We are asking that rural Democrats become more engaged with their local party and form relationships with other Democrats in their community in order to effectively organize and win elections from the school board to the Oval Office. Rural counties are often crucial communities for local officials and hold power by greatly influencing the outcome of close elections.

- From 2008 to 2016, Republicans gained nine points and Democrats lost eleven points among rural voters in presidential elections. The twenty-point shift among rural voters played a large role in swinging from a seven-point Democratic win in 2008 to the narrow Republican victory in 2016.
- Rural voters are a diverse group: it's estimated that nine out of ten rural places experienced increases in diversity between 1990 and 2010, with these changes occurring in every region of the country.

Democrats in rural America are uniquely positioned to organize and execute their political power to influence effectively in 2018 and beyond. Getting involved with local party leadership, like county and precinct chairs or participating in the service-based initiative "Dems For You" are easy ways to start supporting local Democrats, build capacity and recruit volunteers for the state and local Democratic party. For example, precinct chairs are extremely important to our party's success, as they are the face of the Democratic Party at the local level. This precinct captain toolkit provides examples on how to get involved, along with a variety of strategies to organize everywhere and early, to ensure the Democratic Party is the party that is fighting for all Americans – regardless of their ZIP code.

If you have questions or need support on any of these objectives you can email [rural@dnc.org](mailto:rural@dnc.org).

*Betty Richie, DNC Rural Council Chair & Jaime Harrison, Associate Chair & Counselor of the Democratic National Committee*



## PRECINCT CHAIR PROGRAM

Precinct chairs help develop and relay a cohesive Democratic message to voters and spur involvement at the local level. Different states and counties will have different precinct chair programs, or may not have any at all. Some precincts are elected and some are appointed, and many precinct chair positions remain vacant on a regular basis. This portion of the toolkit should give you a foundation to build on if you are a precinct chair, would like to become one, or would like to build a precinct chair program in your county.

Follow these steps to develop a more active precinct:

### 1. Learn about your county leadership

- County chairs are responsible for organizing and strengthening the party at the county level and run the County Executive Committee, while precinct chairs are local voters who represent the voting precinct and sit on the County Executive Committee. You can find out who your local county and precinct chairs are by reaching out to your state party. Ask your chair what you can do to be more involved or ask how you can find more Democrats in your area. If your area does not have a precinct chair, then work with your local party to create a precinct chair program.

### 2. Learn about your precinct

- You should have a working knowledge of the boundaries of your precinct so that you know the voters you are trying to reach. Contact your local or state party and ask for a detailed precinct map so that you know exactly what area you are working with.
- Find out how many registered voters live in your precinct and what the voting history of your area is. This information should guide you in developing programs or events for the people in your precinct, e.g. if your precinct has a low number of people registered to vote or low voter turnout, you should probably set up easily-accessible places to register before local elections to remind voters. This is public information and should be obtainable through your county clerk or local elections official.

### 3. Recruit a precinct team

- In order to plan events and coordinate Democrats in your area, you will likely need at least a small support team. You should start building this team by asking Democrats that you already know in your family and friend groups.
- After this step, you can move on to other groups in your area like clubs and religious groups that may have Democratic members. Even if you do not think there will be many Democrats in these groups, offer an email or a way to reach the precinct chair outside of your initial meeting.



#### 4. Create a Democratic presence in your community

- In many rural areas where Democrats may not be as activated or vocal, it is crucial to create a Democratic presence in the community to raise awareness and organize. A few ways local Democratic groups can do this is by:
  - Registering people to vote before local elections.
  - Having an informational booth at a fair and recording visitors contact information.
  - Making a Democratic float for town parades and festivals.
  - Writing letters to the editor of local publications that promote Democratic causes, ideas, and campaigns.
  - Organizing monthly meetings with your county Democratic committee if there aren't formal meetings already scheduled.
  - Planning and leading service-based events through the Democratic National Committee initiative "Dems For You." Use these events as continuous opportunities to show your neighbors that Democrats lead with their values, support our communities, and win elections.
    - Raising money to donate to local community centers or libraries in the county party's name.
    - Coordinating food or clothing drives for the less fortunate with other local Democrats.
    - Creating a scholarship fund for high school students in the area.
    - Starting a back to school campaign to donate school supplies to local children.
    - Organizing volunteer groups within precinct programs to do things like clean up roads and work in community centers while representing the county party.
    - Having bake sales in town in order to fundraise as well as raise awareness.
    - Speaking on local radio stations about some of the events the party has as well as the volunteer work, scholarship funds, etc. that are done to help the community.
    - Adopt a local charitable organization that serves your rural community.

#### 5. Organize activities to help introduce local Democrats

- Getting to know other Democrats in the area will help build a more active party in your county and precinct. Plan small activities to get people introduced. Pizza parties, pot lucks, book clubs, picnics, fundraisers for candidates, etc.
- Create a precinct website or Facebook page, where you can post information about elections and activities that you are planning in your area. Another way to update voters is to make fliers and materials that you can distribute out with information about precinct activities and local elections (Remember that it is illegal to place anything on or in mailboxes). If your budget allows, you can also make t-shirts, stickers, or other items that will make people feel more involved with the precinct and therefore create more visibility for Democrats in the area.



- Invite Democratic candidates running for local office to your events. This will give them a good opportunity to meet with potential voters and it will help draw a larger crowd to your event. Contact your county party to see if they have any contact information or resources to assist!

## **6. Get out the vote (GOTV)!**

- Knock on doors! Contact your county or state party to see if there are opportunities to canvass for Democratic candidates ahead of elections.
- Call voters! Contact your county or state party about votebuilder access or ask how you can obtain phone numbers and addresses for your precinct. If you have phone numbers, you should be calling voters to remind them about the election and urge them to vote.
- Provide important scheduling information to voters like the deadline for mail-in ballots and early voting as well as the date and time of the scheduled election. You can do this by creating an email list, distributing literature, and publicizing the election on social media.
- Hold social events as described above for specific candidates and if they are a local then try to get them to attend! Provide candidate literature at events and remind voters of polling dates, times, and locations.
- Distribute yard signs, bumper stickers, and other campaign materials to raise awareness.



## SAMPLE GOTV PHONE SCRIPT

Confirm you are speaking with the voter on the list, introduce yourself.

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ I am your Democratic (block captain, precinct chair, neighbor, etc.)

How's your day going?

Wait for response

Great - I'm calling today to let you know that there is an election on **election day** that will decide who the next **position being elected** will be. Are you planning to support Democratic candidate **[Insert Name]**?

If no, thank them for their time and get off the phone

If yes, thank them for their support and make a plan to vote:

Remember that our polling location is at **polling location**. The polls will be open from **time to time**.

- What time are you going to vote?
- How will you be getting there?
- Are you coming from home, work, or somewhere else?
- Will you bring anyone else with you?

Great! Voting is easy and convenient, and all you need to bring is a photo ID (rules will vary depending on state, if you're unsure about what is needed to vote in your state you should contact your local or state party for more information).

**Optional:** Would you like to volunteer for the Democratic Party in our precinct?

- If yes, record their name, phone number, and email.

Thank you for your commitment to vote for **Candidate Name** on **election day!** Have a great day, and happy voting!



## HOUSE PARTY TOOLKIT

A good way to get involved in your community and meet other local Democrats is to host a house party. Gather likeminded locals and discuss what is going on in your community and how you can be engaged and activated to best make a difference. These are resources and action steps to help you organize your own house party.

### 1. Find other Democrats in your area

- Find other Democrats in your area to invite to your house party! You can do this by talking to people involved in your local party. Ask if events like this already happen or have happened in the past and for them to share resources for you to get started. If not, try to create your own listserv of local Democrats by talking to people in other community organizations and by getting to know other local party volunteers. To engage local Democrats, you can create a Facebook group to keep those in your listserv up-to-date on new events and resources to help. You can even set up an information or interest table with a sign-in sheet at community events near you to meet new people and get their contact information.

### 2. Determine the purpose and message of your gathering

- Decide the main purpose and message of your house party. Do you want to mobilize Democrats in your area? Organize more events or volunteer opportunities? Create a stronger relationship with the party? Make sure you have a clear vision for what you want the outcome of your party to be so that you can steer the event in that direction.

Some sample discussion points may include:

1. What is the biggest local issue you are currently facing?
2. How can you get involved in helping to solve that issue or advocate for yourselves and the party?
3. Give information on how attendees can get in contact with their precinct chairs if they have not already.
4. How to run for positions in county party leadership.
5. Local candidates and campaigns that you can help this cycle.
6. Open up the floor for others to share ideas on how they think you should be getting people more involved with the local party and what events they would be interested in attending or hosting.

### 3. Determine party logistics - timing, location, etc.

- Make sure that you try to accommodate everyone's schedules when planning your party. An evening gathering would likely be the most convenient for everyone and increase attendance. If your home or the location of your party is not easily identifiable or accessible make sure that you prepare and send out detailed directions and include your cell phone number so that attendees can call if they are lost. If you can, provide drinks and snacks too!



#### 4. Set an agenda for the evening

- Make sure you have a plan for the night so that you accomplish all of your goals without running out of time! Make sure you schedule in some time to chat and get to know everyone as well, you want to build relationships with the people in your community.

An agenda may look like this:

- o 7:00PM – Snacks and socializing
- o 7:20PM – Begin talking about X issues
- o 8:00PM – Talk about what everyone can do to get involved in the local party
- o 8:30PM – Address any concerns attendees have about getting involved
- o 8:45PM – Open the floor to others to share ideas they have for the local party
- o 9:00PM – Plan another meeting/event

#### 5. Have fun—and plan another event!

- Make sure that if any of your attendees brought friends that you get their contact information to add to your listserv. During your meeting you should also encourage attendees to add their friends to the Facebook group and listserv you created. These groups can be used to plan future events and raise awareness about local issues!



## SAMPLE HOUSE PARTY EMAIL INVITATION

Dear XXX,

My name is XXX and I am a local resident and organizer here in XXX. I have been working hard to bring together Democrats in our area to talk about local issues and plan new ways to get involved. Getting involved is key to getting our local officials to know what we care about as Democrats and pushes them to act on it. We need to be more engaged as a community and make a difference in local politics!

I would like to invite you to join me as well as other members of our community for a **house party on XXX** so that we can get to know each other and talk about our goals for the local party. We will brainstorm ideas for increasing our visibility on the local level as well as extending our influence!

Please let me know if you are able to attend and I will send you more information and directions!

Best,

XXX

