

HOW TO CONDUCT A REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN



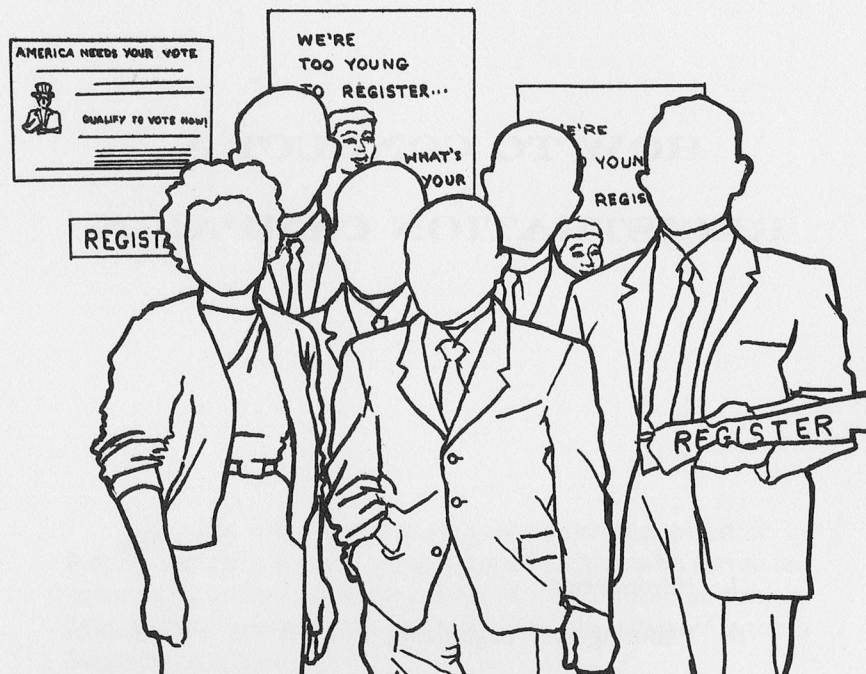
VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT
SOUTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL, INC.

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First Edition May, 1967
Second Edition March, 1968

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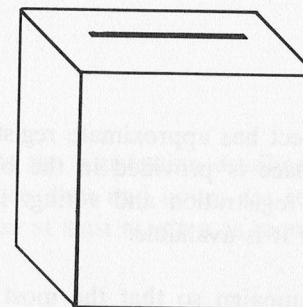
I. Introduction

A registration campaign in full swing is exciting to watch. People are out knocking on doors, meetings are being held, telephone calls are being made, and drivers are busy with buses and cars bringing people to the registration offices.

All this doesn't happen automatically. A well-organized registration campaign takes thought, careful planning, hard work and plenty of determination.

During the past year, the Voter Education Project was associated with nearly one hundred voter registration programs. Many of the experiences reported by these various programs have been used in writing this booklet. We hope the booklet will help others in planning their registration campaigns.

Of course, no two communities are alike. Rural areas may not want to use approaches used in urban areas, and vice versa. Each community should know what will work and what won't. Each community will have to make these decisions for itself. The purpose of this booklet is to offer suggestions that might be helpful in making the decisions.



II. Planning and Organizing

The key to a successful registration campaign is good planning and organizing. Don't wait until the last minute to start. Begin planning well ahead of the registration deadline.

The campaign should be planned and organized to fit the needs of the community. Make sure there is someone to fill every job. Then make sure every job gets done. A really good registration campaign leaves no loose ends. Here are some suggested steps which can be followed:

1. The first step is getting someone to serve as campaign director. He should be a responsible and capable leader. He should be someone who can get volunteers and raise money. He should be someone who knows the community. His is the most important single job in the campaign, since he will be responsible for leading the campaign every minute of every day until it is completed.
2. It is helpful to have a group of capable men and women working with the director as an advisory committee. These also should be responsible people with a thorough knowledge of the community.
3. Decide what area will be covered by your campaign. It may be several counties, one county, part of a county, a city, or part of a city. Get detailed maps of the area. Mark off your target area so that everyone who takes part in the campaign will know exactly where it is.
4. Get registration and voting figures for the target area, as well as figures on the voting-age population. Voting-age figures can be taken from census reports. Registration and voting figures often may be found at the courthouse or city hall. Sometimes a registration list can be obtained. However, it may be necessary to make a house-to-house survey to find out who isn't registered. (We'll talk later in this booklet about door-to-

door canvassing.) The Voter Education Project has approximate registration figures by counties for seven states. Space is provided in the back of this booklet for writing down figures on registration and voting. It is important to get the actual registration list, if it is available.

5. Study the figures and plan your campaign so that the most attention will go to the areas that need it.

6. Study past registration drives. If these were not successful, where and how did they fail?

7. Set a budget for the registration campaign. This will tell you how much you will have set aside to spend for transportation, office supplies and other items. It also will tell you how much money has to be raised to pay for them. Remember, a campaign can succeed with a small amount of money if it is well organized. Wherever possible use volunteers. And ask businesses, churches and clubs to donate such things as office space and meeting halls.

8. Study state registration laws and the federal Voting Rights Act. (Copies of the Voting Rights Act can be obtained from the Voter Education Project, 5 Forsyth Street, N. W., Atlanta, Georgia 30303, or from the U. S. Civil Rights Commission, Washington, D. C. 20425.) Make sure you know what the county registrars are required to do and when their office is open. Get the names of registrars, election commissioners and other key officials. You may want to write their names in the space provided at the end of this booklet.

9. Draw up a list of local issues that can be used in persuading people to register and vote. This will help you explain the importance of voting in down-to-earth, practical terms. A section on local issues appears later on in this booklet.

10. Call on the registrars early. Don't go alone. A committee of two or three is better than a single spokesman. The committee of spokesmen should tell the registrars that workers will be bringing in people to register. The committee should ask the registrars to make it as easy and convenient as possible for people to register.

11. Urge the registrars to increase registration days and hours. Ask them to stay open on evenings and weekends while registration activities are going on. Ask the registrars to keep the office open for business as

near the registration deadline and as near election day as possible. Where office days and hours are set by law, make sure that the registrars stay open at least as often as required.

12. Request that the registrars appoint some deputy registrars to travel the area and register people at large gatherings. Also urge the registrars to let you (or the deputy registrars) register people at schools, libraries, community centers, shopping centers and other convenient places, where it is legal to do so.

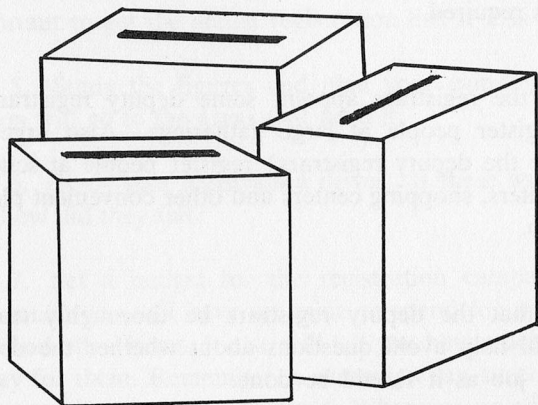
13. Recommend that the deputy registrars be thoroughly trained for their work. This will help avoid questions about whether the deputy registrars are doing the job as it should be done.

These last four steps call for meetings with the registrars. Keep after the registrars about every right that belongs to you and your group. If the registrars refuse to cooperate and give no good reason for it, go with your committee of spokesmen to the county governing board. Let everyone know you will ask for everything you rightfully can expect.

Point 8 above is highly important. The campaign director should know exactly what the law is. So should the advisory committee and other campaign leaders. Then as questions come up, these questions can be handled without troublesome delays. And someone will know exactly what the registrars are supposed to do.

In counties where the U. S. attorney general has assigned federal examiners, you will find that many Negroes would rather register with these examiners than go to the courthouse. Federal examiners generally set up their offices in post offices. But in some counties, the examiners have rented space in such buildings as stores and motels. Sometimes they set up offices in trailers.

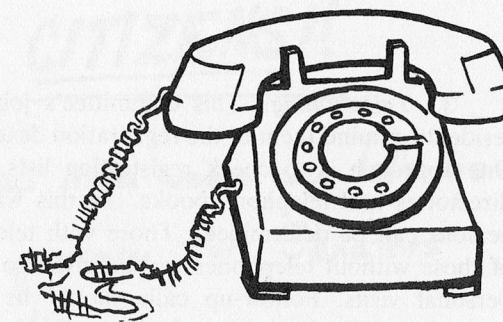
Many Negroes feel more comfortable and confident about registering with federal examiners. And registration with examiners can continue even after state registration deadlines have passed. It is possible to vote in an election if you register with a federal examiner as much as 45 days before the election.



III. Setting Goals

You may want to set certain goals for your project—that is, things you hope and expect to do. Be sure everyone in the drive knows these goals and what is expected. The goals may include the following (some of which were used in Madison County, Tennessee):

1. Registering as much of the voting-age population as possible. This may mean setting some sort of target figure—five hundred, a thousand, or even ten thousand, depending on the community.
2. Offering classes on the basic facts about government. (Be sure the facts are carefully checked.)
3. Encouraging young people to participate.
4. Developing leadership of all ages for the future.
5. Urging civic groups (PTA's, fraternities, neighborhood organizations and the like) to inform the public about local issues and participate in ongoing citizenship education.



IV. Committees

You may want to set up several or more committees for your drive. The number will depend on the size of your community and the goals of your drive.

A large campaign may well need a campaign committee. This committee's job is to work with the director in guiding the day-to-day operation of the drive. Its membership could be the same as the advisory committee mentioned earlier. Or it could consist of chairmen from the various wards, precincts, blocks, beats and other voting areas.

Now decide on any special committees that you will need. Here is a list of committees that have been used in other projects:

1. *Canvassers, or Blockworkers.* These people are used in door-to-door operations. They may work under captains or coordinators. Or they may work under the precinct, block and beat leaders mentioned in the campaign committee above. Often these canvassers are students and young people. But they can be housewives, farmers or anyone who wants to do the work.
2. *Transportation.* This committee carries people to the courthouse and various places of registration. Many people do not have cars and are much more likely to register if they are given transportation. Members of the transportation committee should know the streets and roads. Their job is to locate and arrange transportation for the entire registration drive—cars, buses, trucks and whatever might be available. This might include transportation, when necessary, for registration workers. (Chapter VI in this booklet discusses transportation.)

3. *Telephoning.* This committee's job is to telephone unregistered residents, remind them of the registration deadline and urge them to register. One approach is to check registration lists, where available, against city directories and telephone books. In this way, the names of unregistered persons can be determined. Those with telephones can be called. Names of those without telephones can be given to the canvassing committee for personal visits. Follow-up calls should be made to see whether those promising to register have done so. Card files might be made, both of registered and unregistered residents. People on the telephone committee can be housewives, elderly people, teenage girls and anyone who would like to work in the campaign without leaving home.

4. *Public Relations.* This committee handles newspaper stories and calls upon radio and television stations to try to get announcements broadcast. (Radio is especially important in many communities. Disc jockies can be particularly helpful.) Committee members write press releases and announcements. If free space and time is not available, it may be necessary to buy advertising (if, of course, the campaign budget permits it). The committee may also arrange neighborhood, precinct and area mass meetings.

5. *Leaflets and Posters.* It is up to this committee to prepare catchy posters, bumper stickers, leaflets and handbills for use in the registration program. A sample locally prepared leaflet is shown on the page opposite. This is a good leaflet because it ties a local issue (the election of legislators) to the importance of voting. It tells about the removal of old barriers to voting, such as the poll tax and the literacy test. And it lets people know somebody stands ready to help if help is needed.

6. *Speakers.* This committee must supply speakers for mass meetings, rallies, civic club meetings, church services and other public occasions. Speakers should be selected who can tell the story well and stir the listeners. The job of arranging mass meetings may be assigned to this committee instead of the public relations committee.

7. *Churches.* The church committee seeks support for the registration campaign from ministers and ministerial associations. The local ministerial alliance should be asked early to officially endorse the campaign. And ministers should be asked to kick off the campaign with a "Citizenship Sunday." This could be connected with a sermon on citizenship. Ministers could announce the registration campaign themselves, or they could permit a registration worker to make a brief announcement and address from

NEGRO CITIZENS!!

Only a few more weeks are left before the July primary for Senators and Representatives.

There are only 3 more days to register before the books close:

JUNE 4

JUNE 9

JUNE 11

TIME: 10:00 A.M. til 2:00 P.M.

PLACE: LUNENBURG COURT HOUSE

NO POLL TAXES

You do not have to be able to read or write in order to register. There will be someone there to help you. From: VSCRC
Lunenburg County, Va.

the pulpit. The ministers should be asked to make periodic announcements to their congregations during the registration campaign. And workers in the campaign should visit revivals and gospel sings to urge people to register. In many communities, churches are used for meetings and church buses are used to transport people wishing to register. Some churches may not want to take part in these activities. In many communities, however, ministers have been among the leaders in registration campaigns.

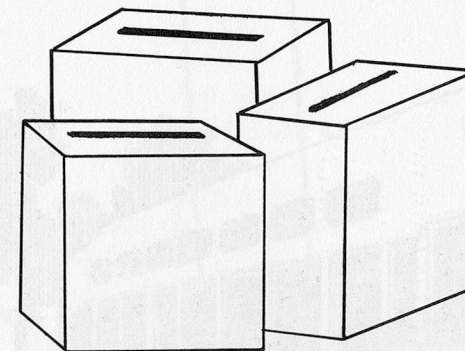
8. *Babysitters.* This committee's job is to take care of children while parents are registering. It also may take care of the children of registration workers. The committee often is composed of high school age and college age young ladies. But elderly people can be quite helpful here too.

9. *Soundtrucks.* In communities where they are permitted, soundtrucks are a good way to reach a lot of people and get them to listen to what you have to say.

10. *Prizes.* Awards and prizes often encourage registration workers to work harder. The competition can be between individuals, or it can be between groups such as precinct committees or various churches and civic bodies. The prizes can be cash or they can be goods, such as a sack of groceries to the worker who registers the most people during the week. Or the prize can be a trophy or plaque.

Again, it is not necessary to have all of the committees listed above. It all depends on the size and nature of your campaign. But appointing committees is a good way of making clear who is responsible for what job. If you want only a few committees, several of those on the list above can be combined. For example, the public relations committee could be given the additional task of handling leaflets, posters and speakers.

Committee appointments can be made by the campaign director or by the advisory committee or by both.



V. Students and Young People

It is a good idea to have students and young people in your project because many of them are full of enthusiasm and new approaches. Most young people are willing to work long and hard. They are unusually dedicated and energetic.

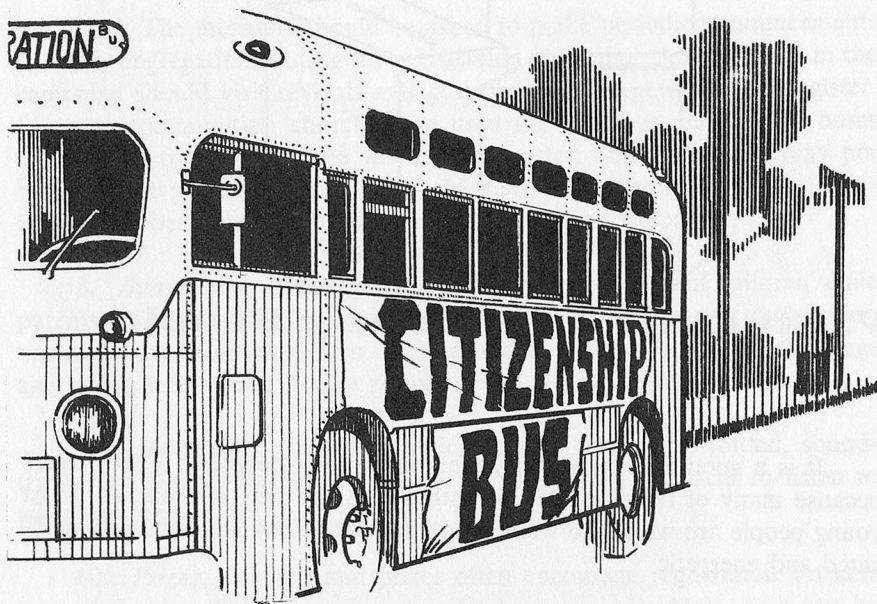
Students and young people to work in your project may be contacted through:

1. Other registration projects.
2. Local and nearby colleges, especially those having pre-college programs and summer sessions.
3. Letters to officials of Negro colleges.
4. Letters to student groups and youth organizations.
5. Local high schools.

Often, students and young people will work without pay. Sometimes they will ask only for a small allowance to cover the cost of meals and other necessities.

In some instances, a coordinator for the young people may come from outside the community—possibly from such groups as civil rights organizations, the American Friends Service Committee, and student religious organizations.

It would be wise to pick out some of the more promising young people and give them responsible jobs in your project. This is a way of developing leadership for the future.



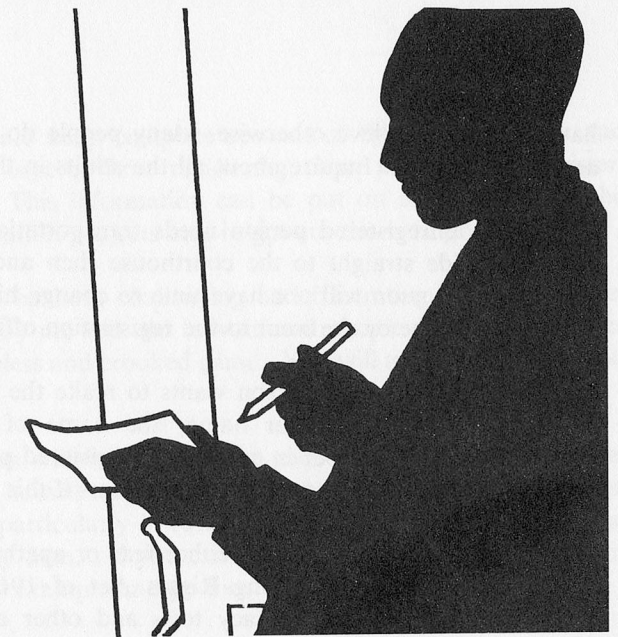
VI. Transportation

Transportation is important enough to discuss further. It can be a real problem in rural areas and in any area where people live some distance away from the registration office.

As suggested previously, many churches have a bus or station wagon that could be used. And the congregations could be asked to provide private cars.

Cab companies, bus companies, and ambulance services also can be helpful in providing transportation to get people to the registration office. In one rural Georgia county where the cost of gasoline was a problem, canvassers used bicycles.

When you feel discouraged, remember the story of the registration worker in rural Mississippi who had no transportation for the long trip to the courthouse. She sat on the edge of the highway for three hours until she and her potential voter got a ride into town. That's determination!



VII. Canvassing

Door-to-door canvassing is the heart of most registration campaigns. This is the person-to-person part of the project.

Canvassing should start well ahead of the registration deadline. Time should be allowed to contact some residents more than once, if necessary.

Suppose you are a canvasser. Here are some things you should do in canvassing:

Choose a time when you will be able to talk to the largest number of people. The best time usually is between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays.

It helps to have a registration list, perhaps on index cards as mentioned previously. This will tell you who is registered and who isn't.

When the door is opened, introduce yourself. Some canvassers wear badges or streamers identifying them as registration workers.

Come straight to the point or chat awhile, depending on the circumstances. Assume that all the adults in the home are unregistered until you

have reason to believe otherwise. Many people do not like to admit they are not registered. Inquire about all the adults in the home.

If the unregistered person needs transportation, it helps to be able to offer a ride straight to the courthouse then and there. This way the unregistered person will not have time to change his mind. This way you will know that he or she went to the registration office.

If the unregistered person wants to make the trip later, set a certain day and time. Leave your name, the name of the project, and the project telephone number in case the unregistered person decides he wants to go earlier. Also offer to provide babysitters if this service is needed.

Sometimes the problem is either fear or apathy. It might help to tell these people about the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Voting Rights Act stopped poll taxes, literacy tests and other devices that have kept Negroes from voting in the Deep South. This covers Virginia, Georgia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and part of North Carolina.

You should know how to tell those who are reluctant to register about this law. You also should know about state registration laws. This will make it possible for you to answer such questions as how long a voter must live in the state and county, how old he must be, how soon he must register, and so on.

Some communities hold training workshops for canvassers. At these workshops canvassers learn all the basic facts they need to know—where, when and how to register, and who can register. Canvassers also decide at these workshops what is the best way to approach people to get them to register.

It helps to have a handbill, similar to those described previously, with all the basic facts on it. This handbill can be given to residents of the home. Or it can be left in the mailbox.

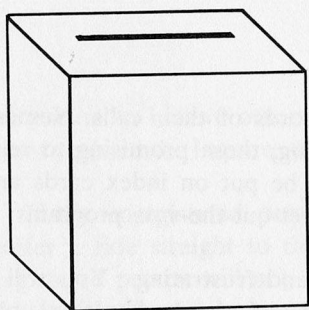
Make follow-up visits at the homes of those who promise to register later, in order to make certain that they have. Also make follow-up visits to families that were not at home at the time of the first visit. Some registration projects use doorknob cards, in addition to handbills, as a means of letting families know that a registration worker had been there while they were away.

Canvassers should keep complete records of their calls. Names and addresses should be kept of those registering, those promising to register, and those refusing. This information can be put on index cards and be used in future registration projects and in get-out-the-vote programs.

Canvassing can be both challenging and frustrating. You will meet people who think they are too old to vote and people who think politics is nothing but a hopeless and crooked game. You will meet people who just aren't interested.

Sometimes doors will be slammed in your face. But if you can get one person to listen, he will talk to his neighbors and lessen their fears and doubts. Sometimes, particularly in rural areas, you will find someone who is known as the "key man." If you can persuade this man to go register, others will follow his example and go too.

Stick to the job and keep going back. Know your facts and know how to present them. If you really believe in voter registration, chances are you will be able to get others to believe in it too.



VIII. Putting Issues to Use

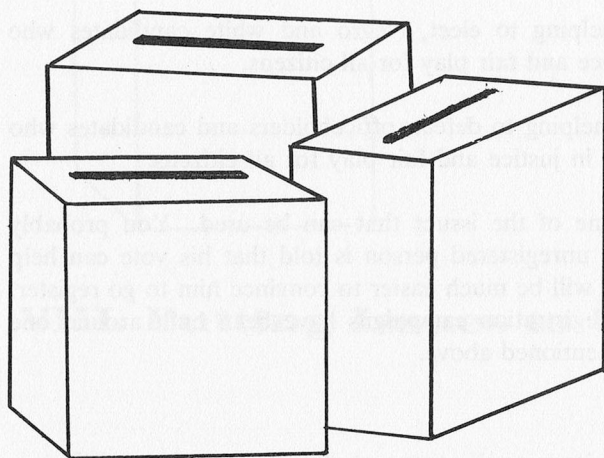
It is much easier to talk to people if registration is tied to local issues. In every community, there are problems and needs that are close to the hearts of the people. It helps to be able to point out that registration and voting can be steps toward solving these problems.

Depending on the community, such issues might include the following:

1. Getting good schools.
2. Getting good streets and roads, sidewalks, streetlights, sewers, garbage collection and other services.
3. Getting anti-poverty and welfare programs that are needed.
4. Getting Negro law enforcement officers, legislators, school board members, tax officials and other officeholders and public employees.
5. Getting fair fines and sentences in the courts, and stopping un-called-for "nuisance" arrests.
6. Ending police brutality, both inside the jail and outside the jail.
7. Doing away with restrictions such as curfews that apply only to Negroes.
8. Gaining the necessary political power to do such things as demanding representation on selective service boards that decide which Negro and white youths will be drafted.

9. Electing, or helping to elect, Negro and white candidates who believe in justice and fair play for all citizens.
10. Defeating, or helping to defeat, officeholders and candidates who do not believe in justice and fair play for all citizens.

These are but some of the issues that can be used. You probably know of others. If the unregistered person is told that his vote can help solve these problems, it will be much easier to convince him to go register. In some cases, whole registration campaigns have been built around one or more of the issues mentioned above.



IX. Timing

Timing is important in a good registration project. Each step—and the project itself—should be planned so that it comes just at the right time.

Keep in mind that your project will not be finished in a day or two. Most registration drives last several weeks or even several months. This means planning far into the future. And it means keeping people interested and working for a long time.

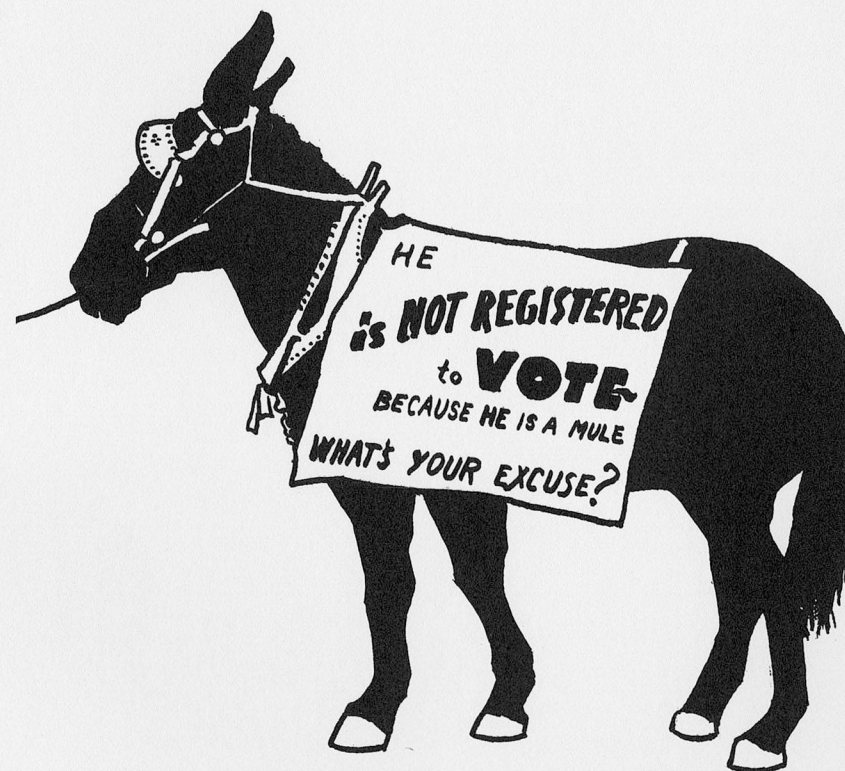
Don't start so fast that people lose interest after the first few days. Many campaign leaders have found that it is best not to go too fast at the beginning, but to move ahead gradually. This way there is something to do all the time, and people are just as busy at the end of the campaign as they were at the start.

It might be helpful to draw up a long-range timetable before the campaign begins. This timetable could be posted in the campaign headquarters, where it could be used to plan activities and check progress from day to day and from week to week.

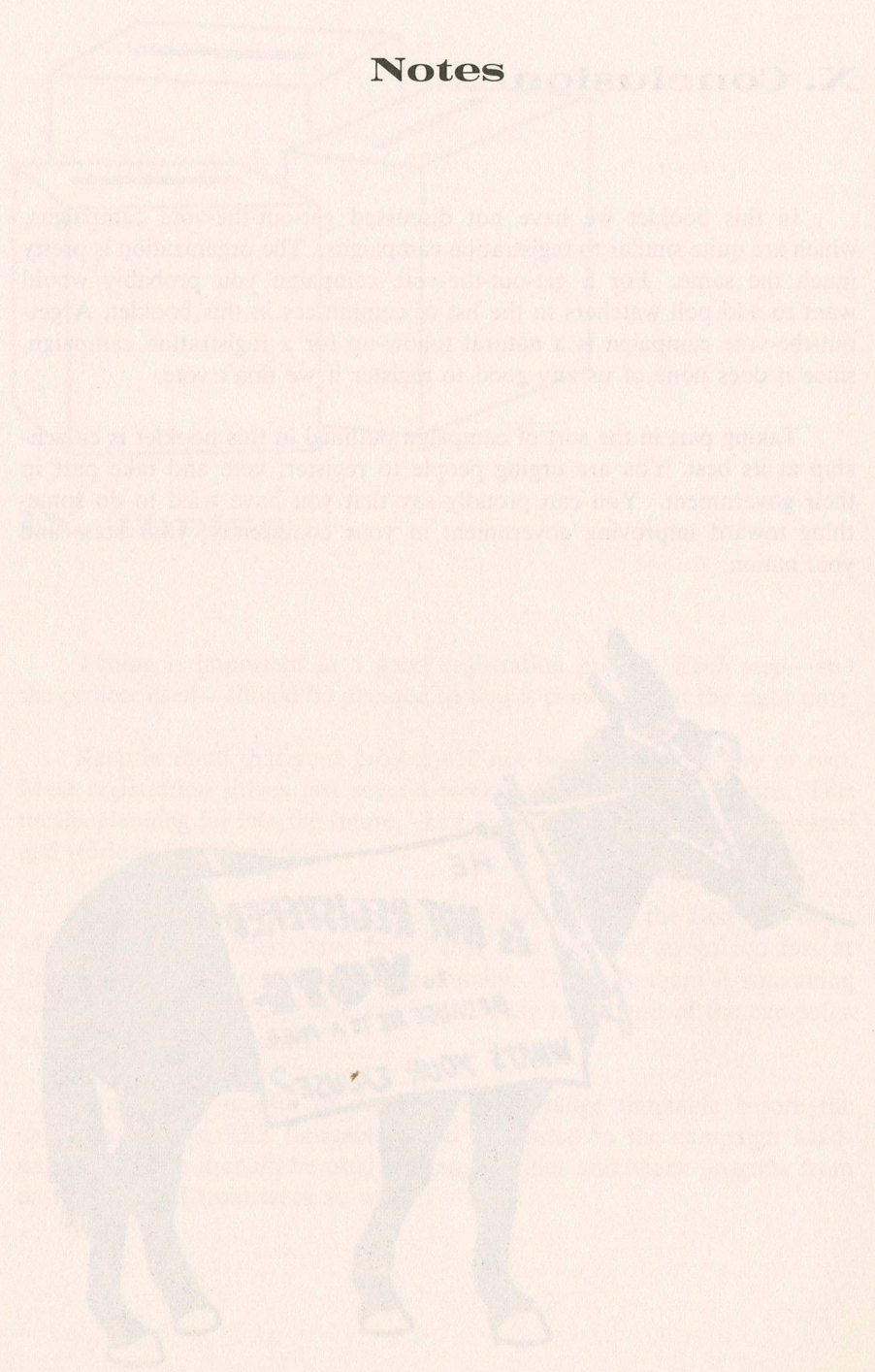
X. Conclusion

In this booklet we have not discussed get-out-the-vote campaigns, which are quite similar to registration campaigns. The organization is pretty much the same. For a get-out-the-vote campaign you probably would want to add poll watchers to the list of committees in this booklet. A get-out-the-vote campaign is a natural follow-up for a registration campaign, since it does none of us any good to register if we don't vote.

Taking part in the sort of campaign outlined in this booklet is citizenship at its best. You are urging people to register, vote and take part in their government. You can proudly say that you have tried to do something toward improving government in your community, your state and your nation.



Notes



Notes

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