

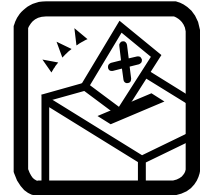
# Technology Tools for Organizing Civic Participation in the Democratic Process



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You should incorporate the technology you use or plan to use into your overall strategy for any campaign. Civic engagement is no exception.

Here are some examples of technologies that you may want to consider:



## Engaging Membership:

- A **database** is crucial for keeping track of leadership development and membership engagement work you do. Your database should track all relationships that your organization develops and will be crucial to your civic engagement work. It should allow your organizers and leaders to record issue interests, as well as generate walking lists and phone lists. Your database should also be secured with a password so that only authorized users can access the vital data contained in it.
- **Handheld computers** can carry information from your database during door-knocking field operations. FileMaker makes a version of its database software for the Palm OS that will allow you to transfer information between your handheld and eBase. Palm Pilots and Handspring Visors run on the Palm operating system, as do many other handheld PDAs.
- **Presentation software** like Keynote or Power Point can provide up-to-date and reusable visuals for strategy meetings and popular education sessions if you also have access to a **projector**. OpenOffice, an open source office suite that can run on Windows, Mac or Linux computers also includes presentation software that you can use to create and maintain slides for your presentations.

## Targeting Your Outreach:

- A **voter information file** contains records of the recent voting activity of all registered voters along with each voter's party affiliation, address and date of birth. You can't see how someone votes, of course, but you can see how often. These files are public records, available from the board of elections in your county or state for a small fee. If the voter information files available in your jurisdiction don't include enough data about voting patterns, you may need to turn to a private company that stores voter lists over longer periods of time. Many such companies will offer their data or services pro-bono (free) to small grassroots groups if you explain your work to them.
- **List enhancement** is the process of matching information in your database to an external file like a voter information file. Matching your member database to a voter file can help you target your outreach work, by giving you better information about your own members' voting patterns.

- Demographic information from the US Census Bureau can also help you identify areas where you should target your outreach efforts. **Census reports** are available from [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).
- **GIS (Geographic Information Systems)** can be used to generate maps that display multiple layers of information about an area. Layers can include legislative districts, member residences and information from your database to allow you to visually identify areas affected by a particular policy or useful areas to target in your organizing. GIS can help your members visualize census data, or understand how proposed redistricting will affect the makeup of legislative districts. Because GIS software is expensive and data intensive, you should consider partnering with a university or technology assistance provider on a GIS project.

There are oceans of information out there to be tapped. Take a look at what is available and plan your strategy, so you don't find yourself lost at sea.

### **Communication Enhancements:**

There are a lot of ways you can use beefed up communication tools to get your message out to a wider audience. What's important is that you have a clear strategy about how you are communicating, so that your engagement goals can also be reached.

- **Voice Message Broadcasting** - a tele-messaging system that automatically dials phone numbers and delivers a prerecorded message to whomever answers. When you come home to an answering machine message from Jessie Jackson or Bill Clinton asking you to vote for so-and-so, it was probably a voice message broadcasting system that called you.
- **Predictive dialers** make outbound calls and only connect calls when a human being answers the line. Predictive dialers make for a more efficient phone banking effort, because volunteers don't have to dial and dial until they reach someone - the computer does that part. Many large unions have predictive dialing technology and make it available to like-minded not-for-profit organizations for a fee.
- **Email alerts** can get timely information out about crucial information. **Email distribution lists** can provide a quick and easy way to reach an audience of people such as members, leaders or allies. Keep information in alerts short so they are easy to digest, and provide links to your **website** for further information and background.

While using these tools its important to keep in mind that you want to *push* information out about issues while *pulling* people into your organization. Always provide ways for individuals to become more deeply engaged: **an action** the person can take, a **sign-up form** for more information, and an opportunity to **donate**.

***Using any of these technology capacity building tools in your civic engagement campaign will require an implementation plan that includes a full assessment, training and maintenance. For more information on incorporating technology into your economic justice campaign contact the LINC Project.***