

# THE PROGRESSIVE TURNOUT PROGRAM FOR PENNSYLVANIA

A Best Practices Implementation Guide



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Paralleling the 2020 US presidential election, in the waning days prior to the 2022 US midterms, the fate of the American election process seemingly hung in the balance. Filing lawsuits across the country, Republicans mounted a coordinated effort to disqualify thousands of Democratic mail-in ballots in a direct assault on our democracy, and an attempt at partisan voter disenfranchisement. In Pennsylvania, the state Supreme Court agreed with the Republican National Committee that “election officials should not count ballots on which the voter neglected to put a date on the outer envelope – even in case when the ballots arrive before Election Day.”<sup>1</sup> Suddenly, six days prior to Election Day, in a state where the fate of the 2020 presidential election hinged on a few thousand critical votes, Republican officials and candidates resorted to increasingly desperate anti-democratic tactics. The ruling from the PA Supreme Court meant that over 10,000 ballots would be set aside – at risk of the shredder.

The stakes and necessity of a progressive turnout program across the state of Pennsylvania are clear. Through this best practices implementation guide, I will introduce the context of The Progressive Turnout Program for Pennsylvania, my role within the 2022 midterm program in Pennsylvania, and its political relevance. I’ll then review the historical context that got us to the present political moment. Next, the process by which we explored our methods for the program. We will then weave into an in-depth analysis of the 2022 PA midterm program, and finally I will propose future recommendations to meet the ambitions set forth by the Working Families Party (WFP) and progressive organizations in the future.

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<sup>1</sup>Amy Gardner, and Emma Brown. 2022. “Republicans sue to disqualify thousands of mail ballots in swing states.” The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/2022/11/07/gop-sues-reject-mail-ballots/>.

# I. INTRODUCTION

**The Progressive Turnout Program for Pennsylvania** will serve as a blueprint for PACs, non-profit organizations, WFP and its allies, and political strategists in battleground states across the country in advance of the 2024 presidential election. This project includes an in-depth analysis of the 2022 PA midterm program in which program leadership and volunteers made over 1.8 million calls, knocked over 400,000 doors, sent nearly 1.13 million texts, and cured as many as 10,000 at-risk ballots in the final days before the election. Going forward, to meet the ambitions set forth by the Working Families Party (WFP) and progressive organizations in the future – this coalition needs a battleground state turnout program that incorporates robust grassroots voter organizing and mail-in ballot curing in advance of the 2024 presidential election. Through robust analysis and considerations, this review offers a 2024 Progressive Turnout Program for Pennsylvania.

The WFP had two main objectives heading into the 2022 midterm elections. Those two goals were both strengthening the Democratic U.S. Senate by adding progressives to the total and adding WFP progressive candidates in the House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup> Heading into the 2022 midterms, Democrats and progressives faced major headwinds – as the Party in power tends to underperform when voters are unhappy with their current conditions. Additionally, Americans are facing systemic partisanship and class dealignment – meaning fewer working-class people identify with the bread-and-butter economic issues Democrats historically champion.

In response, WFP and progressives recruited and endorsed working-class candidates, and went on the offense fighting hard throughout the election season by reaching out to voters about the issues that mattered to them most. In Pennsylvania, through the PA WFP independent expenditure (IE) program, the management team mobilized low-turnout voters in Philadelphia and communities of color around the state – building one of the largest direct voter contact programs in the state’s history.

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<sup>2</sup> Working Families Party, 2022. “Memo: The Gravity of the 2022 Midterms.” <https://workingfamilies.org/2022/11/memo-the-gravity-of-the-2022-midterms/>.

## II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### A. THE 2022 MIDTERMS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Historically, progressives know that the Democratic Party has been out-maneuvered in major races due to a lack of grassroots development and coordination.<sup>3</sup> Proactively aware of this potential disaster, the PA Working Families Party – along with other activist organizations across the state once again sprang into action, as they had in 2020. Through the independent expenditure (IE) program at the PA Working Families Party, program directors led thousands of community activists and volunteers in an all-out sprint to recover the discarded ballots in the run up to Election Day. Training volunteers through hourly Zoom meetings over the course of a few days – with the steadfast effort of thousands of Pennsylvanians – the three-person IE team tracked down thousands of Pennsylvanians and guided them through “ballot curing” to recover their vote. Ballot curing is the process by which voters may fix their mail-in ballots if they have made a mistake. The IE directors programmed voters’ names, the types of discovered ballot issues, and PA county of residence into a software that created a tailored script for volunteers. Fortunately, through their rapid statewide canvassing, the management team flooded places like Philadelphia’s City Hall where over two thousand

frustrated mail-in voters lined up to correct their ballots just before the Election Day deadline.



<sup>3</sup> Julia Azari. 2016. “Weak parties and strong partisanship are a bad combination,” Vox, November 3. <http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2016/11/3/13512362/weak-parties-strong-partisanship-bad-combination>.

Sources claimed as many as 1% of mail ballots were set aside for errors – the potential deciding amount in what politicians perceived to be an incredibly tight US Senate race between John Fetterman and Mehmet Oz. Over 1.1 million Pennsylvanians cast their ballots by mail, with over 70% of them Democrats. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the case brought forth by the Republican National Committee, the Republican Congressional Committee, and the Republican Party of Pennsylvania – stating: “We hereby direct that the Pennsylvania county boards of elections segregate and preserve any ballots contained in undated or incorrectly dated outer envelopes.”<sup>4</sup> While some counties across the state chose not to review mail ballots for voter errors, prior to our exhaustive effort – over 10,000 mail ballots were set aside to be discarded due to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision.

Staff and volunteers for the PA WFP IE program contacted these Democratic voters multiple times, and as a result of the team’s coordinated efforts – not only did Democrats win at the top of the ticket with Fetterman for the US Senate and Shapiro for PA Governor – but the team also flipped the State House for Pennsylvania Democrats by winning many seats on razor-thin margins of less than one-hundred votes. The PA Democratic Party won control of the State House for the first time in more than a decade.

There is ample evidence that Republicans will not stop in their anti-democratic efforts to disenfranchise voters across the country in future elections. It is time for progressives – and all those who want to protect our fundamental American right to vote – to go on offense. There is now strong evidence demonstrating that one weapon to stave off these attacks is proactive support for concerted grassroots coalitional efforts to engage with voters year-round to prevent Republicans from denying voters’ their rights. Progressives need to mobilize early to win this fight nationwide in 2024. The 2022 midterms served as an auspicious testing ground for PA WFP’s mobilization efforts, and there is now opportunity to build on their program learnings through a detailed review – and sharpen their strategy and tactics for the 2024 presidential election in Pennsylvania.

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<sup>4</sup> Dianne Gallagher. 2022. *CNN*, November 1, 2022. “Pennsylvania Supreme Court rules incorrectly dated or undated ballots must be set aside.” <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/01/politics/pennsylvania-supreme-court-undated-mail-ballots/index.html>.

## B. PROGRESSIVE SUCCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA MIDTERMS

The PA WFP made over 1.4 million calls, knocked over 400,000 doors, and sent nearly 420,000 texts as part of its statewide field operation to mobilize voters ahead of 2022 Election Day. WFP also made hundreds of thousands calls to make sure voters returned their mail in ballots, and helped thousands cure rejected ballots across the state. In particular, WFP went big for Summer Lee, running for Congress in PA-12 – where PA WFP spent \$350,000 on TV and digital ads to fend off a scorched earth campaign against her by the conservative AIPAC-affiliated United Democracy Project. Lee won her race by over 10 points.

In addition to voter persuasion and turnout, WFP also championed the efforts to cure ballots and make sure

every vote was counted. PA WFP organized 1,400 volunteers in the final days to make 71,000 phone calls to the over 10,000 voters whose votes were at risk of not counting due to minor errors like unsigned ballots and missing secrecy envelopes. In extremely tight races in PA House District 142 and PA House District 151, the number of ballots PA WFP helped voters to cure was the deciding factor pushing them, and the Democratic caucus, over the top.

Through their efforts during the 2022 midterms in PA, program leadership found that the real muscle for coordinated voter strategy and implementation efforts came from grassroots organizations across the state – including Make the Road Action PA, PA Stands Up, API PA, SEIU 32BJ, America Votes, For Our Future, Reclaim Philadelphia, and PA WFP. Program leadership could not rely on traditional institutional support such as the PA Democratic Party to magnify, validate, or provide additional support to their turnout efforts.

The PA WFP IE team of paid organizers and volunteers across the State of Pennsylvania provided the grassroots voter identification, engagement, and turnout functions that would ideally be run by the

### 2022 POST GENERAL IE REPORT GENERAL ELECTION OVERVIEW: *By Tactic*

<b>Phone Calls</b>	<b>1,416,052</b>
<b>Texts</b>	<b>419,195</b>
<b>Doors</b>	<b>408,399</b>
<b>Relational</b>	<b>9,200</b>

state and local Democratic Party. Programs like the one run by PA WFP serve as potential proving grounds to fill the void left by the lacking PA Democratic Party voter engagement infrastructure. Typically, a state party would be focused on what it takes to win an election. Independent expenditure programs focused on voter turnout now provide an outsourced capacity that, for the time being, benefits both Democratic and Republican Party's on election day in a general election.

In the case of the Working Families Party's 2022 general IE program, involved progressives made over 2.24 million attempts to contact voters and successfully identified nearly 90,000 Pennsylvania voters. Through coordinated efforts, their canvassers knocked on Pennsylvania voters' door on behalf of the Democratic candidates for Governor and Senate. On behalf of the PA Democratic candidate for Governor, Josh Shapiro, PA WFP identified 36,019 total positive IDs (i.e., voters positively identified through conversation with canvasser) with a support rate of 62.34% on the doors – meaning that nearly two-thirds of voters that organizers met indicated that they supported Shapiro. For the PA Democratic candidate for Senate, John

Fetterman, organizers identified 41,355 total positive IDs with a support rate of 67.7%. On average our canvassers managed a 19% contact rate across the state – in line with a 19% national average contact rate detailed in a report on the 2018



midterm election cycle by the US Election Assistance Commission <sup>56</sup>

In the future, progressives will face steeper challenges as right-wing and corporate PACs take aim at any gains recently won. Summer Lee's race is an example of a close call – where those same conservative forces spent millions of dollars on negative ads to smear a Black woman fighting to restore the Voting Rights Act; for higher wages for workers; for healthcare as a human right; and for first-rate public education for all Pennsylvanians. If the PA Democratic Party supports fighting for

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<sup>5</sup> Post General Election IE Report 2022, PA Working Families Party.

<sup>6</sup> "National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993 Report" by the US Election Assistance Commission. ([https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac\\_assets/1/6/NVRA%20Biennial%20Report%20-%202018%20Cycle.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/NVRA%20Biennial%20Report%20-%202018%20Cycle.pdf)).



these causes, it is an immediate imperative that it build its grassroots infrastructure to complement the efforts of the WFP year-round – and not simply rely on the progressives’ ground-game to engage with voters on behalf of the Party. It is ill-advised and risky for the Democratic Party to overlook working closely with progressives, or developing their own robust grassroots infrastructure, because without it the Party lacks both control and insight.

### **C. PROGRESSIVE SUCCESS IN PHILADELPHIA**

“Completely unelectable” – the words Larry Krasner once used, joking about his candidacy for district attorney given his career as a public defender in the City of Philadelphia. Prior to his candidacy for



district attorney, Krasner had sued the city’s police department and city government for civil rights abuses over 75 times throughout his career. When Larry Krasner decided to run for District Attorney of Philadelphia in 2017, his candidacy was met with immediate hostility and opposition from all corners of the traditional Democratic and Republican bastions of power in the city. The city police union and The Philadelphia Inquirer, both of which typically back Democrats, endorsed the Republican in

the race.

In the face of this imposing opposition, while understanding the unique opportunity to elect a criminal justice fighter with a groundswell of local progressive support, the Working Families Party endorsed Larry Krasner. With the support of the Working Families Party and other progressive organizations on the ground, Krasner went on to win the 2017 election by over 75% -- and romped again in his 2022 re-election campaign by a 2:1 vote margin.

In 2019, Kendra Brooks was elected to Philadelphia’s City Council as a member of the Working Families Party, capturing a seat held for a minority party. The Republican Party had maintained control of the seat Brooks’ won for nearly seventy years.<sup>7</sup> Through a deep, and local fundraising apparatus along with a groundswell of community engagement, support, and the WFP independent expenditure program – Brooks shocked the Democratic and Republican establishments by invigorating voters against a business-as-usual approach to Philadelphia City Council elections.



Often voters will cast straight-party ballots in elections, however Brooks’ election in 2019 ought to signal to both the Republican and Democratic Party in the state – that voters are looking for candidates that speak to their every-day issues and work for their vote. It is evident that the Working Families Party through its independent expenditure program provides opportunity for progressive breakthroughs and the PA Democratic Party can ignore it at its own peril.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparing this guide, I have reviewed prevailing literature on the state of modern elections in battleground states in the US and incorporated this into the narrative of the project. By reviewing these texts, I will introduce important concepts and arguments about the state of the American political system that frame the work that program directors at WFP and I have done for the 2022 midterm program – and which undergirds our analysis of the work. In summary, the research reveals that 1) campaigns are ineffective at swaying disaffected American voters; 2) persuading voters is more robust when party labels aren’t available; and 3) the American political parties are disconnected from

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<sup>7</sup> Anna Orso, 2022. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 2, 2022. “The progressive Working Families Party is gearing up to try to oust the few Republicans left in Philadelphia government.” <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/philadelphia/philadelphia-2023-election-working-families-party-targets-republicans-20221202.html>.

the people. It is through elucidating and clarifying the depth of the crisis Americans face in US elections in the present, that organizers and progressive program managers can better understand the urgency for a Progressive Turnout Program for Pennsylvania heading into the 2024 presidential election.

## A. THE DEMOCRATIC CRISIS IN US ELECTIONS

### I. The necessity of ballot curing.

Ballot curing is the process by which voters may fix their mail-in ballots if they have made a mistake.<sup>8</sup> In Pennsylvania, the ballot curing process is fraught and complex. As Gina Castro reveals in her piece for *The Center for Public Integrity*, in advance of the 2022 midterm elections in Pennsylvania, voters encountered contentious legal efforts led by the state and national Republican Party's since 2020 to entirely prohibit the process of ballot curing across the state.<sup>9</sup> GOP officials put forth a textualist argument in court, arguing that because "ballot curing" is not explicitly mentioned in the PA state election codes, it ought not be legally permissible. Democrats in the state submitted nearly three times as many mail-in ballots as Republicans during the 2020 presidential election – revealing the underlying rationale for the fervor of the coordinated GOP legal efforts.

### II. Vote-by-mail; an inflection point.

While the ballot curing process will undoubtedly be an ongoing legal fight in the coming years, vote-by-mail in its entirety will be an inflection point in our elections as well. Published just one day before the 2022 midterm election, on November 7<sup>th</sup> Amy Brown and Emma Gardner wrote in *The Washington Post* about the immediate context around mail-in ballot court decisions recently made in swing states around the country. In the states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin Republicans have pushed for the disqualification of mail-in ballots since the 2020 presidential election on the grounds of alleged voter fraud.<sup>10</sup> Brown and Gardner articulated the degree to which the grassroots

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<sup>8</sup> Ashley Lopez, 2022. *NPR*, September 27, 2022. "Voting explainer: In many states, there's a process to fix an error with your ballot." <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/27/1125179062/voting-explainer-in-many-states-theres-a-process-to-fix-an-error-with-your-ballo>.

<sup>9</sup> Gina Castro. 2022. *The Center for Public Integrity*. October 6. Accessed December 20, 2022.

<sup>10</sup>Amy Brown, and Gardner Emma. 2022. *The Washington Post*. November 07. Accessed December 20, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/2022/11/07/gop-sues-reject-mail-ballots/>.

response by the Working Families Party and other progressive organizations on behalf of people whose ballots were rejected played a role in the unfolding dynamics and eventual outcome of the Pennsylvania races.

### III. Debunking the voter fraud myth.

To properly understand the severity of the crisis that the democratic process of voting in the United States is under, it is important to lay out the rationale that anti-democratic forces use to illustrate their argument – namely, the issue of perceived voter fraud in elections. Following the relentless claims of voter fraud during the 2016 presidential election from former President Trump and his supporters, the *Brennan Center for Justice* published a report exploring the subject. In reality, voter fraud very rarely occurs; between 0.0003 percent and 0.0025 percent – Americans are likelier to be struck by lightning than commit voter fraud.<sup>11</sup> Through their work, “Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth,” the *Brennan Center* incorporates court opinions, government investigations, and various rigorous academic analyses indicating no evidence of voter fraud in American elections.

A challenge that muddles the narrative around voter fraud, vote-by-mail, and ballot curing is that due to the byzantine and particular nature of each state’s approach to counting and reporting ballots during elections – there is not a consistent ballot curing process across the country. As indicated earlier by the *Brennan Center’s* work – while election officials in different states have been known to reject ballots for signature mismatches, voter fraud of any type is extremely rare. Automatic verification is used in 70 large counties across the country. Signature verification software was developed over 15 years ago for the banking industry – not yet fully implemented for American elections.<sup>12</sup> There is not a consistent ballot curing process across the country, instead each state has its own rules. States vary widely in how they approach the issue of verifying signatures and validating ballots – some allow early voting months in advance, others – such as Pennsylvania, don’t allow early voting at all. Skeptics in the validity and efficacy of voting, who believe voter fraud could be

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<sup>11</sup> 2017. "Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth." *Brennan Center for Justice*. January 31. Accessed December 22, 2022. [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/Briefing\\_Memo\\_Debunking\\_Voter\\_Fraud\\_Myth.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/analysis/Briefing_Memo_Debunking_Voter_Fraud_Myth.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Larry Buchanan, and Alicia Parlapiano. 2020. "Two of These Mail Ballot Signatures Are by the Same Person. Which Ones?" *The New York Times*. October 7. Accessed December 29, 2022.

occurring in our elections, raise eyebrows at this lack of coherence – at what is, in reality, an intentionally constructed design flaw of our federated byzantine election process.

#### **IV. Absentee voting is a bipartisan issue.**

Counter to the prevailing legal narrative put forth by the vanguard of the conservative movement in the US, public polling data has indicated that on an entirely partisan-neutral basis, the American public increasingly supports expanded access to absentee and mail-in voting. In *The Conservative Case for Expanded Access to Absentee Ballots* published in 2020, Kevin Kosar and Steven Greenhut establish that mail-in voting is secure, cost-effective, popular, and is a decent solution for the elderly and physically disabled to vote. For all the aforementioned reasons, absentee voting has become a cross-cutting issue through which both parties have benefited and seen increased importance due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Kosar and Greenhut establish the conservative case for expanded access to absentee voting in the US, corroborating research affirms and expands their work. A study by Daniel W. Thompson, Jennifer A. Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew B. Hall published in: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 117, no. further bolsters Kosar and Greenhut’s case. This study provides comprehensive analysis about the effects of vote-by-mail in US elections. The authors provide design-based analysis of the effect of universal vote-by-mail on electoral outcomes through data collected from 1996 to 2018 on the three American states that implemented universal vote-by-mail. Thompson et al. reveal that expanding the franchise to a universal vote-by-mail would have no impact on partisan turnout or vote share.<sup>13</sup>

## **B. STATE DETAILS AROUND VOTE-BY-MAIL**

There are varying state rules and requirements for mail-in ballots to be counted in elections. Pennsylvania's unique ballot curing process played a significant role in the 2022 midterms, particularly in closely contested races. By allowing voters to correct errors in their ballots, Pennsylvania ensures that more ballots are counted, and more voters have their voices heard. While

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel M. Thompson, Jennifer A. Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew B. Hall. “Universal Vote-by-Mail Has No Impact on Partisan Turnout or Vote Share.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 117, no. 25 (2020): 14052–56.

Pennsylvania does not have a statewide law requiring ballot curing, it is the only state in the country that allows counties to do manage the ballot curing process on their own – apart from the state government. Twenty-four states require officials to notify voters to allow voters to correct signature errors through ballot curing, while some states don't permit ballot curing at all.

In the 2020 election, Pennsylvania's ballot curing process played a critical role in ensuring that more than 10,000 votes were counted, which could have otherwise been invalidated. In some counties, as many as 5% of mail-in ballots were initially rejected, but most were later cured and included in the final count.<sup>14</sup> This process was especially important for communities of color, who were more likely to have their ballots rejected due to discrepancies in signatures or other technicalities.<sup>15</sup>

Pennsylvania's ballot curing process has already been the subject of political controversy. Following the 2020 election, former President Trump and his allies launched numerous legal challenges to the state's election procedures, including its ballot curing process. Some Republicans have argued that ballot curing is an invitation to voter fraud, though – as established earlier – there is no evidence to support this claim.<sup>16</sup> Democrats, on the other hand, have defended the process as a critical tool for protecting the integrity of elections and ensuring that all votes are counted.

## C. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS INVESTMENT & PROJECT

### I. Standard campaign spending is ineffectual.

Through their research published in the *American Political Science Review*, Joshua L. Kalla and David E. Broockman reveal the futility and limits of standard modern campaign spending. Campaigns' spending has been revealed to have virtually no impact on persuasion regarding swing voters' interest in voting for one candidate or another.<sup>17</sup> However, the findings reveal a few hopeful caveats to their

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<sup>14</sup> "How Pennsylvania's 'naked ballots' could cost Joe Biden the election," The Guardian, September 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/29/pennsylvania-naked-ballots-2020-election>.

<sup>15</sup> "Black voters in Philadelphia waited in long lines. Then GOP officials came to watch them," The Philadelphia Inquirer, November 6, 2020, <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/election/pennsylvania-trump-philadelphia-voter-fraud-lawsuit-20201106.html>.

<sup>16</sup> "Republican attorneys general group that backed Trump in election sues to block Pennsylvania ballot-curing," The Philadelphia Inquirer, November 20, 2020, <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/election/republican-attorneys-general-pennsylvania-lawsuit-ballot-curing-20201120.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua L. Kalla, and David E. Broockman. "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 1 (2018): 148–66. doi:10.1017/S0003055417000363.

conclusion on voter persuasion. 1) Campaigns can benefit from experiments to identify and target persuadable voters; 2) campaigns can have an impact on persuading voters when tactics are implemented months in advance; 3) persuading voters is more robust when party labels aren't available; 4) findings do not contradict prevailing research demonstrating the efficacy of voter registration and mobilization to get supporters to vote; 5) if campaigns try new and creative ideas for how to persuade voters, they may succeed dramatically – “psychology enhancements” have effects of 2 percentage points on average, in comparison to those that don't at 0.2 percent (a 10x differential).<sup>18</sup> Since party labels are an unpopular way to motivate disengaged or swing voters, it is increasingly incumbent on campaign operatives and funders to come up with new ideas about how to personalize their message and connect on an individual level. Two concepts – relational organizing and deep canvassing – explored later in this guide serve as examples of new, personalized ways campaign operatives can engage with potential voters.

## **II. The parties are disconnected from the people.**

As Kalla and Broockman illustrate through their work – the American party system does not cultivate personal, grassroots relationships with the average person. Schlozman and Rosenfeld expand on this point in their work, *The Hollow Parties*, arguing that the US suffers from strong party partisanship, but hollow parties. Meaning that the Democratic Party has a party increasingly bourgeois in orientation without mobilization of traditionally irregular or non-voting people.<sup>19</sup> They argue the Democrats are a loosely-knit group of constituencies. The Republican Party, also hollow, but is less coreless – but is distinctly divided between a mass base and an establishment elite.

The authors advocate for a “pro-party” agenda – one that enables parties to mobilize popular participation, integrate disparate groups, interests, and movements, and foster meaningful choice and accountability in policymaking. They argue for parties to continually engage with voters, activists, and politicians. One example that can lead to revitalization of parties and political accountability is: “deep canvassing.” Kalla and Broockman emphasize the potential impact deep canvassing can have on

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<sup>18</sup> Joshua Kalla and David Broockman. 2022. *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2017. “Persuading voters is hard. That doesn't mean campaigns should give up.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/11/our-research-shows-that-persuading-voters-is-hard-that-doesnt-mean-campaigns-should-give-up/>

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Schlozman, and Sam Rosenfeld. “The hollow parties.” *Can America govern itself* (2019): 120-52.

the average voter. Deep canvassing can be defined as engaging in conversation with a person through mutual understanding.<sup>20</sup> Through this canvassing conversation the campaign organizer emphasizes non-judgmental, open-ended questions, sharing vulnerability about one's own life, and asking questions about the voter's life – especially how their experiences have shaped how they feel about political issues. Broockman and Kalla found through three placebo-controlled field experiments, the positive impact deep canvassing can have on conditions for lasting opinion change and reductions in prejudice. For example, their work revealed that a 10-minute “deep canvass” conversation reduced transgender prejudice for at least three months.<sup>21</sup>

### **III. Weak parties and strong partisan, undemocratic governance leads to public mistrust of the US government.**

Without strong party organizations in the US, parties are unable to wield real influence or control over their endorsed candidates or officeholders. Julia Azari writes about this bad combination – arguing that because party organizations are weak and wield little control over their candidates; voters do not have to listen to elite signals, and elites do not have to listen to each other.<sup>22</sup> Parties have been stripped of their ability to coordinate or bargain. This combination of factors undermines democracy and deprives voters of the ability to hold politicians accountable through the party. It is through emboldened grassroots tactics, such as deep canvassing, that the progressives can cultivate more meaningful relationships with voters and candidates who want to build stronger party infrastructure.

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<sup>20</sup> *The New Conversation Initiative*. 2022. <https://www.newconvo.org/what-is-deep-canvassing>.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Resnick. 2022. *Vox*, April 8, 2016. “These scientists can prove it's possible to reduce prejudice.” <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/7/11380974/reduce-prejudice-science-transgender>.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Azari. 2016. “Weak parties and strong partisanship are a bad combination,” *Vox*, November 3.



## D. TACTICS IN THIS PROGRAM PROVIDE THE SOLUTIONS FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE IN THE US

Deep canvassing and relational organizing are two impactful grassroots campaign tactics that have shown encouraging initial results over the past few years in American elections. Through widespread popular adoption and engagement in the campaign process, these two tactics could significantly embolden popular support for democratic candidates and issues in the future.

### I. Deep canvassing

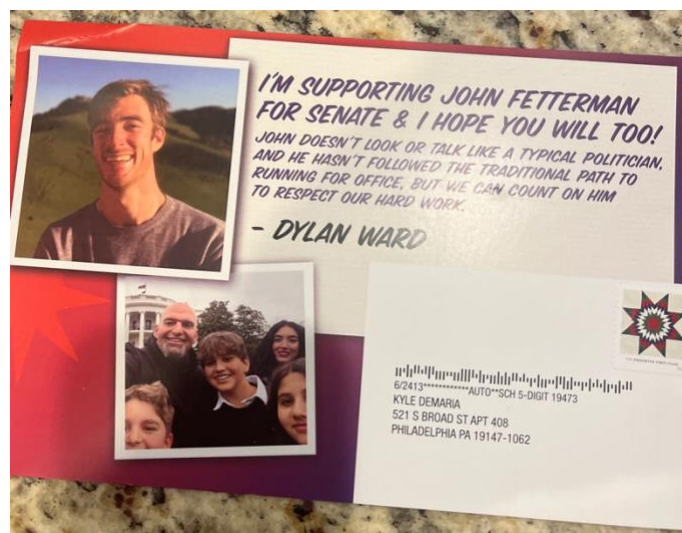
Through the organizing strategy of “deep canvassing,” People’s Action had a 4.9% impact on Trump’s vote margin with women and an 8.5% impact on independent women. People’s Action’s brief on the 2020 election relays that their deep canvassing strategy had a 3.1% overall impact on Trump’s vote margin and is the one of the only proven field strategies to shift presidential vote choice.<sup>23</sup>

### II. Relational organizing

An organizing strategy through which program volunteers, staff, and paid organizers identify every voter they know in an app called Reach -- connected with the state voter directory. Instead of getting a call, text, or mail from a stranger on a campaign – the people in Reach get a call, text, or mail from you, their friend or family member, asking them to vote. You then ask them to join Reach and contact people they know.

Continuing with the theme of cultivating stronger, more meaningful relationships with the American voting population – during the 2021 Jon

Ossoff for US Senate campaign – his staff developed the extremely effective organizing tactic called



<sup>23</sup> 2020. "How to Defeat Trump and Heal America." *People's Action*. August. Accessed December 29, 2022.

“relational organizing.” Published by the *Analyst Institute* after Ossoff’s election, Joshua Kravitz and Evan Roseman investigated the impact that “relational organizing” had on the probability of people voting in an election – analyzing the efficacy of this tactic on behalf of the 2021 Jon Ossoff for US Senate (JO4S).

As the lead architect of the relational organizing program for the Jon Ossoff for Senate campaign, Davis Leonard lays out the details and mechanics of a successful relational organizing program, having scaled this program in less than one month. Without leaving out the degree to which years of progressive cultivation paid dividends as they scaled the relational organizing program during the campaign in Georgia, Leonard emphasizes the benefits of a combined paid and volunteer relational organizing effort. While Democratic campaigns have historically implemented relational programs, this guide introduces the paid relational program as a new opportunity for campaigns to expand their organizing capacity, and the electorate – particularly among low propensity voters. Paid relational organizers – known as “community mobilizers” were paid \$500 per week for two to three weeks, in which they were required to attend an introductory training, meet their supervisor each week, and share two social media posts on their platform of choice, as well as hit internally structured goals to mobilize their networks.<sup>24</sup>

The Ossoff campaign built a relational network of more than 160,000 Georgia voters, resulting in a number of key findings: 1) canvassers share many attributes with the average voter in their network, 2) paid canvassers reached more and different voters than volunteers, 3) the JO4S relational program improved turnout by 3.8% points for voters in the relational network; 4) the program had a disproportionate impact on turnout for young voters; 5) the program would have improved turnout by 12.1% points if the relational network consisted of all young, low-turnout voters in GA.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Davis Leonard. 2022. *Medium*, January 5, 2022. “How we built a relational network of 160k voters in less than a month.” <https://medium.com/@davisleonard/how-we-built-a-relational-network-of-160k-voters-in-less-than-a-month-92262926fdb0>.

<sup>25</sup> Joshua Kravitz, and Evan Roseman. 2021. “Scaling Relational Organizing on Jon Ossoff’s Campaign for U.S. Senate: Analysis of Program Impact and Key Takeaways.” *Analyst Institute*. April. Accessed December 28, 2022.

## IV. 2022 PROGRAM REVIEW

Through consultation with the 2022 IE program coordinators and directors from the National and PA WFP organizations, it has been possible to gain perspective on what performed well in the 2022 midterm IE, and where program leadership could improve for future development of a progressive turnout program in Pennsylvania.

Program staff preferred individual phone conversations ranging from 30-60 minutes as the mode with which to communicate their assessment and takeaways of the 2022 WFP IE program. Through open-ended questions and conversation regarding the efficacy of the program – its successes and lessons, we established a number of key takeaways. As a result, the 2022 program review integrates a synthesis of program leadership’s lessons learned from those conversations.

### A. LESSONS LEARNED

#### I. The program engendered coordinated support of different PA interest groups.

One of the benefits of having an Independent Expenditure (IE) program focused on progressive voter turnout rather than a traditional PAC, which is focused on work for individual candidates. The broader motivation of engendering progressive voter turnout in PA brought together an extensive list of grassroots PA organizations, such as Make the Road Action PA, PA Stands Up, API PA, SEIU 32BJ, America Votes, For Our Future, Reclaim Philadelphia, and PA WFP, among others.

Consensus among the program managers from WFP is that through an IE, and the 2022 PA WFP IE in particular – due to the urgency of impending legal challenges to the right to vote – the mission motivates the program, rather than potentially isolating groups. Additionally, the IE program brought in different groups of people to events – allowing these groups to talk with differing constituent populations, laying the foundation for long-lasting infrastructure and ties.

## **II. The program facilitated and implemented the grassroots functions of local parties.**

Through the success of the 2022 PA program, the grassroots coordination established through canvassing, ballot chase, and the program's numerous extensive voter outreach efforts – there is potential to improve, fill the void of, or create a separate party apparatus to compete with legacy party infrastructure. Reflecting on the state of coordinated grassroots efforts by the Democratic Party, program managers raised the notion that ideally, efficient state Democratic Parties would collect, harvest, and distribute accrued resources to win elections. The PA Democratic Party does not distribute resources effectively – which is where IE programs, like this one, comes in. Currently, given the frailty of grassroots party infrastructure across the PA Democratic Party, IEs are necessary to win elections in Pennsylvania. These programs serve as the backstop and safety net against complete electoral fallout.

## **III. The program would have benefited from more paid, distributed staff & volunteer training throughout the operation.**

There are inputs program managers believed could have been adjusted to advance the mission of the program. Most notably, paying organizers to develop more deeply their relational organizing efforts. The 2021 Jon Ossoff campaign for Senate in Georgia advanced a very successful paid relational organizing program. Consensus among staff reflected that more training, and hand-holding for volunteers earlier on to take on more responsibility by making deeper efforts to connect in the mode that best fits them – whether it be in-person, phone, over text, or email would have had broader benefit empowering volunteers to lead distributed programming in disparate counties across the state.

## **IV. When money comes in is when work gets done.**

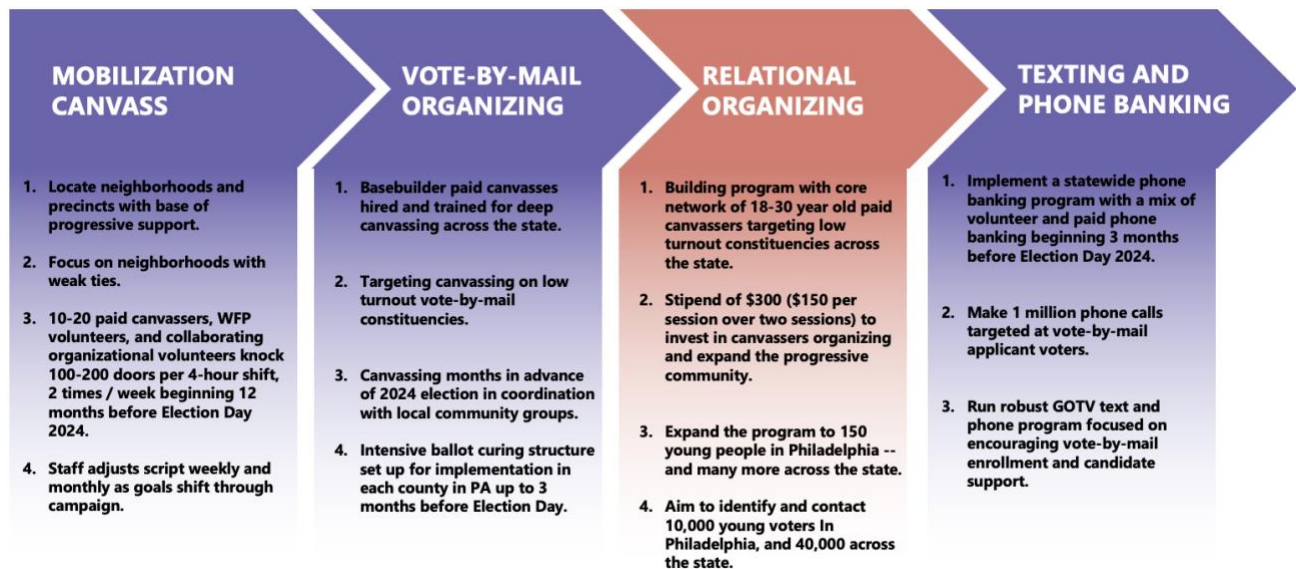
There is a distinct 'chicken-or-egg issue' in political campaign work – without money can't get work started. Without evidence of momentum from work – it is incredibly challenging to raise money. While organizations that program leadership partnered with through the IE program eventually managed to bring together millions of dollars to benefit the voting people across Pennsylvania, donor organizations are notoriously reticent to give to a new program without substantial proof of concept and tangible prior success. The solution going forward is that organizations, such as the PA WFP and

partner groups, ought to proactively come up with gameplans based on post-mortems and past successes to better demonstrate momentum, which will get funders interested before too late.

## V. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS: 2024 TOOLKIT

Lastly, the prepared materials include a guide for the 2024 presidential election in PA, and a blueprint for a replicable program in other battleground states, as well as the potential impediments in the way. These recommendations will detail how the progressive left can win in PA in 2024 – defining each strategy, why it’s important toward the goal of improving our democracy by winning elections, and the specific implementation steps.

In total, the step-by-step toolkit for 2024 is summarized by the infographic below – and broken out in detail in the following section.



## A. MOBILIZATION CANVASS

Program management will conduct volunteer, paid persuasion, and GOTV canvassing in partnership with local partners and utilizing PA WFP’s year-round national canvassing operation, BaseBuilder. PA WFP canvassers are trained to build rapport and have real conversations with voters, helping them make plans to vote and responding to specific issue concerns – and getting some of the best contact rates in the state at over 20% in Philadelphia during this primary season. We’ll be identifying supporters for the 2024 Democratic presidential candidate.

Between mobilization and vote-by-mail doors, WFP canvassers will knock 600,000 doors statewide. The PA WFP is prepared for this scale—having knocked over 120,000 doors in the primary in Philadelphia alone in just a few weeks in April 2022.

### MOBILIZATION CANVASS – IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- 1. Locate neighborhoods and precincts with base of progressive support.**
- 2. Focus on neighborhoods with weak ties.**
- 3. 10-20 paid canvassers, WFP volunteers, and collaborating organizational volunteers knock 100-200 doors per 4-hour shift, 2 times / week beginning 12 months before Election Day 2024.**
- 4. Staff adjusts script weekly and monthly as goals shift through campaign. Initially issues-focused deep canvassing, then in months closer to the election – more geared toward identifying and evaluating candidates’ support.**

## B. VOTE-BY-MAIL ORGANIZING

Since Act 77 made no-excuse vote-by-mail voting a reality in Pennsylvania in 2020, progressive groups have debated its role in an overall organizing plan. Several studies show that the turnout effects of no-excuse vote-by-mail are mixed, and that some significant portion of the take-up for vote-by-mail ballots are voters who would have voted anyway. However, when lower-turnout voters *do* request vote-by-mail ballots, they are extremely likely to return those ballots, at higher rates than voters with stronger voting histories (the cited research here analyzed VBM voter turnout data in statewide elections in the state of Washington from 1996-2010 between VBM and non-VBM

counties, in order to account for election-specific confounding factors).<sup>26</sup> This reasoning informed the experiment the PA WFP conducted during the 2022 primaries, in which leadership measured the impact of two different interventions on vote-by-mail signups.

The hypothesis grounding the work reasoned that if organizers could make a high-touch intervention (repeat in-person canvassing) to voters with a low likelihood of turning out to vote, the registrations organizers did receive would be “net” votes, rather than just shuffling high-turnout voters around between voting methods. Additionally, since “lack of trust” is one of the most commonly cited reasons voters don’t vote by mail, PA WFP organizers sought to bridge the trust gap by connecting some of the voters with resources like utilities and rent assistance, so that when they came to register folks for vote-by-mail, they were already a trusted community resource. The PA Working Families Party partnered with the Analyst Institute for this research. While the organization await full results and analysis from their efforts in the May 2022 primary, early indications are promising.

The WFP received exciting early data from deep canvassing operations last spring. They knocked over 120,000 doors and reached 25,947 unique voters. Of these voters, over 6,500 responded that they would request a mail-in ballot, and over 3,600 of those canvassed eventually did request one.

For the 2024 presidential election, program organizers would like to triple the scale of this program, knocking 360,000 doors to drive over 10,000 vote-by-mail registrations, locking in marginal votes as early as Spring 2024

## VOTE-BY-MAIL ORGANIZING – IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- 1. Basebuilder paid canvasses hired and trained for deep canvassing across the state.**
- 2. Targeting canvassing on low turnout vote-by-mail constituencies.**
- 3. Canvassing months in advance of 2024 election in coordination with local community groups.**
- 4. Intensive ballot curing structure set up for implementation in each county in PA up to 3 months before Election Day.**

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<sup>26</sup> A. Gerber, G. Huber & S. Hill (2013). Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout: Staggered Reform in the Evergreen State. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 1(1), 91-116. doi:10.1017/psrm.2013.5

## C. RELATIONAL ORGANIZING

Through this program, progressive organizations in PA will double down on the grassroots organizing that has always been their strength in Philadelphia by building a relational organizing program amongst young people ages 18-30. Through PA WFP's various state legislative races in Philadelphia this year (Cass Green, Andre Carrol, and Paul Prescod), their organizers built an incredible base of engaged young people in Philadelphia's North and West neighborhoods. These folks have their own networks, typically comprised of some of the most politically disengaged folks in the city. A paid relational program that offers a stipend of \$300 (\$150 per session over two sessions) to people in their network will help us not just invest in their organizing, but also expand the progressive community. 2024 program managers' hope to work with 150 young people over the course of this program.

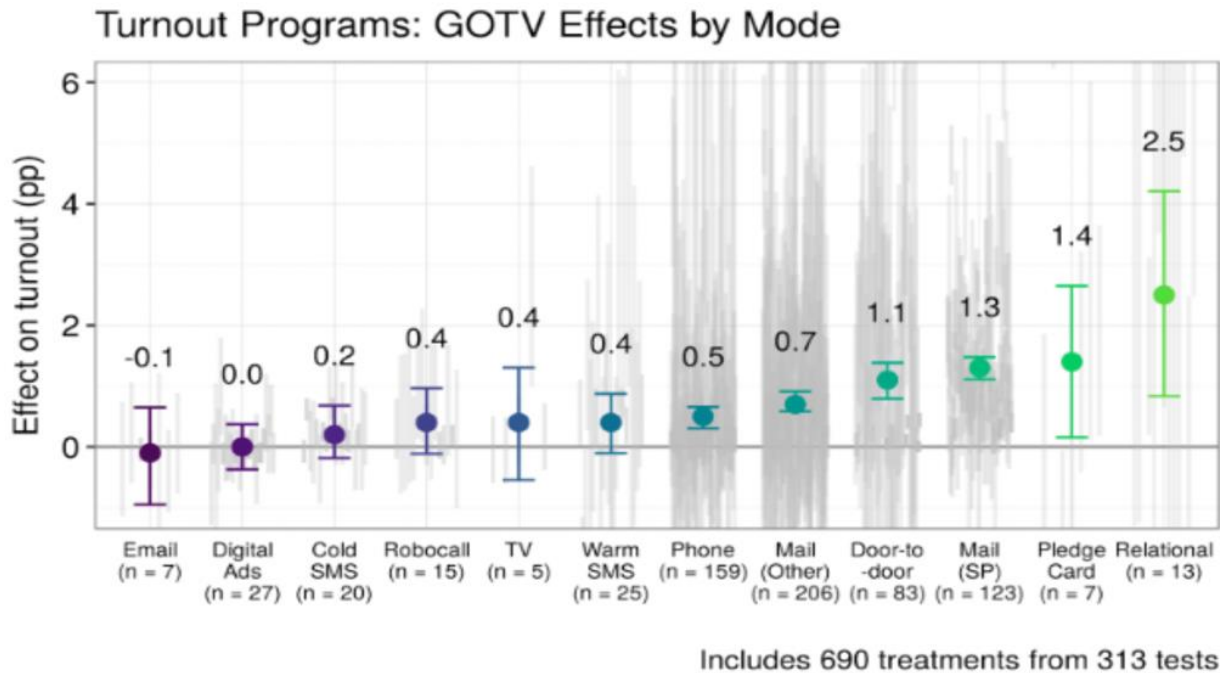
PA WFP will use these sessions to offer political education training, share information about what is at stake in the election ahead, and train folks to map their networks and canvass their friends and neighbors. The organization is excited by the promising data on paid relational programs from Georgia's Ossoff for Senate program, which demonstrated that paid programs (versus volunteer-based programs) best connect to the networks of younger and lower-turnout voters prioritized and can have significant impacts on turnout.<sup>27</sup> Through these programs, program managers hope to identify and contact 10,000 young voters in Philadelphia.

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<sup>27</sup> Analyst Institute. [\*Scaling Relational Organizing on Jon Ossoff's Campaign for US Senate: Analysis of Program Impact and Key Takeaways.\*](#)



As we learned from the Ossoff 2021 election data – what is particularly exciting about relational organizing as a grassroots tactic is that it has serious potential to drastically increase turnout and is the



most effective GOTV turnout tactic by far.

Moreover, a robust paid relational organizing program has the potential to serve as an opportunity to develop politically sophisticated grassroots organizers from low-propensity voters beyond the bounds of Election Day. The Ossoff 2021 research established that low-propensity voters added more low-propensity voters to their relational organizing networks than any other group. By bringing disengaged, low-propensity voters into the election process initially through financial inducement – through the process of a paid relational organizing program, lower-propensity voters are much likelier to vote in the next election.

Future research ought to explore whether these same paid relational organizers are then likelier to develop into ideologically-driven local political organizers beyond the initial financial inducement. A successful paid relational organizing program would both bring more voters into the electorate on Election Day and has the long-term potential to develop these newly active paid canvassers into political organizers with ideological commitments to the positive impact they are having – fighting

for issues that benefit working people and their community – as they understand the political value of their work.

## RELATIONAL ORGANIZING – IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. **Building program with core network of 18–30-year-old paid canvassers targeting low turnout constituencies across the state.**
2. **Stipend of \$300 (\$150 per session over two sessions) to invest in canvassers organizing and expand the progressive community.**
3. **Expand the program to 150 young people in Philadelphia -- and many more across the state.**
4. **Aim to identify and contact 10,000 young voters in Philadelphia, and 40,000 across the state.**

## D. TEXTING AND PHONE BANKING

### I. Peer-to-Peer Texting

In the 2020 election cycle, progressives activated over 9,400 texting volunteers and sent over 27 million text messages nationally. Today, the progressive community of local and national texting volunteers is trained and excited to help win in the 2024 general elections. Program leadership have found that their texting program is the most efficient way to channel energy and integrate their national volunteer network in ways complementary to their programming happening on the ground. In 2024, they plan to send over 1.4 million messages on behalf of the endorsed candidate for President to encourage vote-by-mail enrollment and turnout in priority geographies across the city and state, including thoughtful layered communication (texts to follow up from phone calls or door knocks that have higher response rates, for example). This texting initiative is not aimed to be a typical texting program. This plan incorporates thoughtful layered communication in priority geographies across the state – meaning hire-response rate engagement: specifically, texts to follow-up from phone calls or door knocks.

### II. Phone Banking

PA WFP also plans to run a large-scale phone banking program with a mix of volunteer and paid phone banking, making 1 million phone calls targeted at vote-by-mail applicant voters in their communities. Through WFP, program leadership have run large-scale phone banking programs

reaching hundreds of thousands of voters in many of our races, especially in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

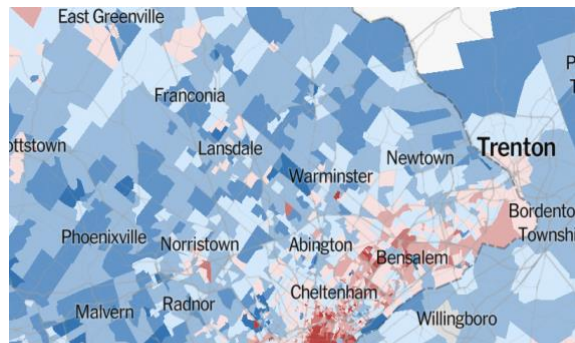
## TEXTING AND PHONE BANKING– IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. **Implement a statewide phone banking program with a mix of volunteer and paid phone banking beginning 3 months before Election Day 2024.**
2. **Make 1 million phone calls targeted at vote-by-mail applicant voters.**
3. **Run robust GOTV text and phone program focused on encouraging vote-by-mail enrollment and candidate support.**

## VI. CONCLUSION – FOCUSING ON PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia is the center of the progressive base across Pennsylvania. Progressives have been organizing here since 2015, winning elections all over the city, from Rep. Chris Rabb in Northwest Philadelphia to DA Larry Krasner, to Councilmember Kendra Brooks, who made history as the first WFP-only candidate (neither Democrat nor Republican) on Philadelphia City Council. PA WFP narrowly lost an endorsed election in the 2022 primary (Cass Green for HD 10) by just over 100 votes in West Philadelphia’s Mantua neighborhood, and they supported Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta for US Senate, who won Black Democratic primary voters in the city handily.

These races have solidified their deep relationships in the North and West parts of the city, where it is extremely important that PA



WFP shore up support ahead of the primary election. PA WFP organizers also knocked nearly 200,000 doors in Philadelphia since the start of 2022, continuing to build on the foundation in the city progressive organizations have organized the most.

Overall, Philadelphia voted 2.8 points more Republican in 2020 than it did in 2016, driven by increases in Republican vote share in the North, Northeast, West, and some parts of South Philadelphia. Concentrated efforts to win these voters back from an organization they trust to fight for us will be essential to building progressive success in 2023 and 2024.

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## VIII. APPENDIX

Figure I.

	Community Canvass / VBM Registration	Political Canvass	Ballot Cure	Voters Canvassed	Total
Doors	156,834	251,565		78,860	408,399
Phones		399,771	71,000	28,556	1,416,052
Texting				7,469	419,195

Figure II.

## Unique Voters Canvassed

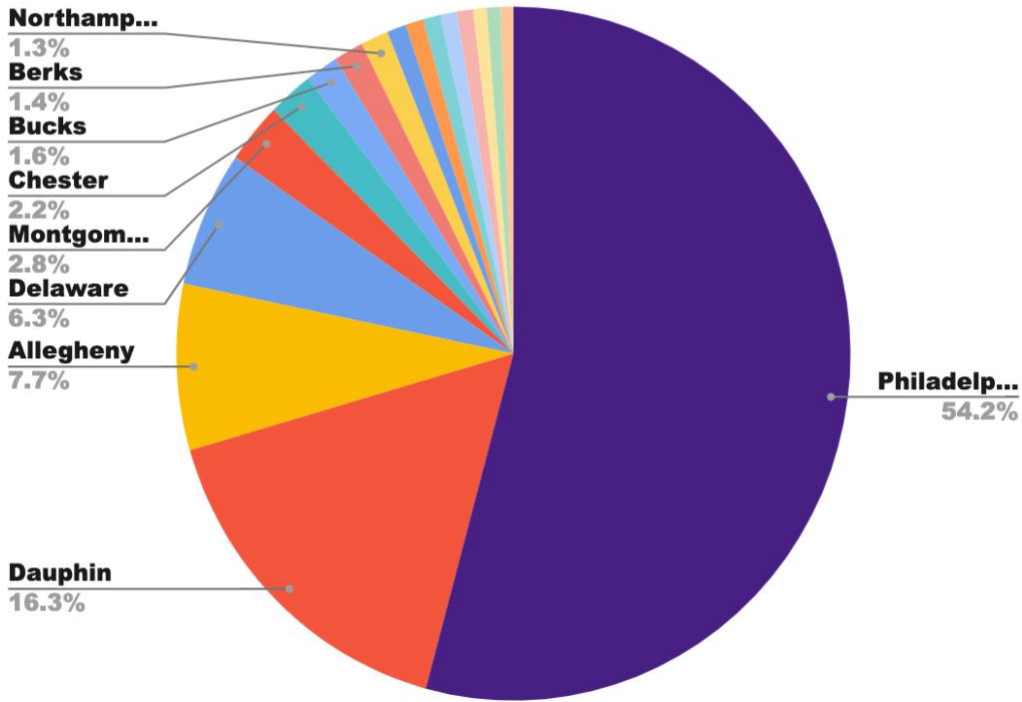


Figure III.

Progressive Turnout Program - Pennsylvania 2024					
					TOTAL COST: \$3,860,230
Pennsylvania Program Budget					
		Quantity	Price (Per Attempt)	Total Cost	Subtotal
Paid Canvass		430,000	\$6.50	\$2,795,000	
					<b>\$2,795,000</b>
VBM Chase Dialer		1,000,000	\$0.05	\$45,000	
Paid Call Labor		500,000	\$0.83	\$416,667	
					<b>\$461,667</b>
Staff	5 Neighborhood Field Coordinators	5 months	\$6,000	\$180,000	

					<b>\$180,000</b>
<b>Canvasser Materials</b>	Literature			\$172,000	
	Tablets	250	\$200	\$50,000	
					<b>\$222,000</b>
<b>Texting</b>		1,433,333	\$0.04	\$62,063	
					<b>\$62,063</b>
<b>Misc. Expenses</b>				\$75,000	
					<b>\$75,000</b>
<b>Paid Relational Program</b>	150 Participants		\$250	\$37,500	
	1 Coordinator			\$15,000	
					<b>\$52,500</b>
<b>Office Rent</b>	Office (6 months' rent)	6	\$2,000	\$12,000	