

# The Untold Story of the 2008 Election

## *The Role and Impact of 501 (c)(3) Organizations*



*Prepared by:*  
Tom Novick, Dan Cramer, Andy Bechhoefer  
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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. Introduction

On November 4, 2008, a record 132 million Americans went to the polls—9 million more voters than in 2004. That 62.3% turnout was the highest this country has seen since 1964.<sup>1</sup> Even more impressive, most of these new voters came from traditionally underrepresented communities. The increase included about 3.4 million youth voters, 2 million African-American voters, 2 million Hispanic voters, 2.5 million single women voters, and about 600,000 Asian-American voters. Tellingly, the number of non-Hispanic white voters remained statistically unchanged.

The knee-jerk reaction has been to credit this increase to the excitement and energy of the 2008 election—both President Obama’s empowering campaign and the excitement Sarah Palin created as the first female Republican vice-presidential candidate. There is some truth to this common-sense analysis. These unique candidates were clearly a driving factor in the high turnout story. But the data tells a more complex story, and one that is ultimately more empowering for those focused on increasing civic engagement. Organizing by 501(c)(3) groups played a critical role in significantly increasing turnout, particularly for traditionally underrepresented communities.<sup>2</sup> The numbers speak to the importance of 501(c)(3) organizations in the 2008 election: they registered more than 4 million new voters and turned out 2.2 million voters.

To put this in context, the number of votes cast by individuals who were registered by non-partisan civic engagement efforts in the '08 cycle, regardless of whom they chose to support at the polls, exceeded the vote margin in the presidential contest in five states: FL, IN, MO, NC, and OH. In addition, there were three states (AK, MN, OR) where the vote margin for a US Senate race was exceeded by the votes cast by individuals registered by c3 organizations in the '08 cycle alone. Votes cast by these individuals also exceeded the vote margins in seventeen US House races (7 of them having been won by Republicans and 10 by Democrats).

Right now, it’s particularly important to examine 2008 because those civic engagement successes haven’t carried over to 2009. In fact, voter turnout in underrepresented communities in New Jersey, Virginia, and Massachusetts has been dismal. For example, youth turnout was below 20% in both New Jersey and Virginia, and reached rock-bottom in the recent special election in Massachusetts (15% according to exit poll data).

These numbers are not out-of-the-ordinary; the new voters that turned out in 2008 are among the populations most likely to drop off in mid-term election years. But this “ordinary” drop off would be a real tragedy for our democracy if it carried into 2010. Every study on the subject shows that new voters who vote in consecutive federal elections become lifetime voters.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html)

<sup>2</sup> "All references to 501(c)(3) voter registration, GOTV, and other civic engagement efforts were exclusively non-partisan and were not in support of or in opposition to a candidate for public office or a political party."

Significant drop off in underrepresented communities in 2010 would wipe out many of the impressive gains of 2008, putting the civic participation community back at square one in 2012.

## **B. Report Overview**

This report reviews the 2008 non-partisan civic engagement work of the grassroots 501(c)(3) community, with a major focus on voter registration efforts. It was born out of the recognition that many people, including funders, are far more aware of the partisan results of the election than they are of the crucial participatory role played by the c3 civic engagement community. Additionally, while many evaluations and studies of individual or coalition programs were conducted over the past year, almost none of them knit together the entire picture of 501(c)(3) activities and the value they added.

It is also essential to note on the front end that this project was not designed as an evaluation or an assessment, but rather as an exercise to consolidate and tell a coherent story about the work of the c3 civic engagement community. However, even telling this story would not be possible if it were not for the important and exceptional work conducted by many others that provide the basis for the data summarized in this report. We would like to highlight the work provided by Catalist and the New Organizing Institute towards the creation of this report, and thank them for their contributions.

Catalist made their entire national voter file available to us in order to allow us to examine the turnout impact of c3 groups on newly registered voters. They also generated data on c3 registration applications, and whether or not these applications made it onto the eventual voter registration lists in their respective states.

The New Organizing Institute (NOI) compiled a comprehensive study on these newly registered voters over the course of 2009. NOI compiled a dataset of registration applications for over 30 c3 groups, determining how many of them eventually made it onto the voter registration lists and how many eventually voted. To accomplish this, NOI took application data from the Catalist voter file and then (through a series of experiments) estimated the number of successfully registered voters that were not identified through Catalist's matching process. Finally, NOI compiled a series of demographic profiles of the registration data, showing how the efforts increased representation in the electorate among underrepresented groups such as African-American voters, younger voters, and single women. Telling this story would not be possible without their work and support.

The major sections of this report include the following:

- Executive Summary: Provides an overview of the content and recommendations.
- New Civic Engagement Infrastructure: Highlights the impressive array of civic engagement infrastructure that supports the work of all the individual organizations.
- 2008 501(c)(3) Civic Engagement: Recounts the story of what the organizations collectively accomplished in 2008.

- Recommendations: Suggestions for funders on what is needed to continue to advance the field of civic engagement in 2010 and beyond.
- Organizational Snap-Shots: A high-level look at the work of four individual 501(c)(3) organizations that did effective and representative civic engagement work in 2008, along with a look at their plans for 2010.

Thanks to Jay Halfon, legal counsel for Public Interest Projects, who provided legal review for this report. Funders, however, are encouraged to consult their own legal counsel about specific questions related to support of nonpartisan voter engagement activities.

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The civic engagement work done by 501(c)(3) organizations in 2008 was hugely successful by any measure. The most obvious of which is the pure numbers: In 2008 the grassroots 501(c)(3) community registered and turned out millions of new voters—particularly new voters from underrepresented communities not typically reached by political parties or government registration efforts.

### A. Four Major Factors in Civic Engagement Success

The success of 2008 was the next step of a concerted effort, begun after the 2000 election, to build a more effective civic engagement structure. We believe there are four major factors that led to the success of 501(c)(3) civic engagement efforts; increased capacity, collaboration and sharing, new technology, and innovation. While we examine these as separate factors, it is clear that each of these is complimentary. The 501(c)(3) civic engagement work succeeds when every piece of the machine is working—remove one piece and it will impact all the other work.

- I. Increased Organizational Capacity and Impact: Over the past five years there were significant resources put into civic engagement organizing. Those resources helped to build the capacity of organizations, expertise, leadership and infrastructure that culminated in the tremendous impact made in 2008. 501(c)(3) organizations registered more than 4 million voters. The vast majority of these voters were newly registered, or voters with a substantive change to their previous registration (such as a change of address). These 4 million+ voters represented more than 12% of the national voter registration total (33 million new registered voters seen on Catalist from 2007 and 2008) and are distinct from other newly registered voters, such as those registered by political parties and candidates (like the Obama campaign). These registration numbers are more impressive in that they're focused almost entirely on the hardest to register voters, particularly youth, African-Americans, Hispanics, single women, and low-income voters. C3 organizations registered a larger share of voters in all of these underrepresented groups.

Based on the best information available, 501(c)(3) groups directly turned out almost 70% of the new voters they registered, or 2.8 million voters in 2008. Nationally, turnout percentage of c3 registrants to voters is slightly lower, but comparable to the overall percentage of registrants to voters (69.8% vs. 69.2%). However, for every targeted

demographic (including low-income voters, African-American voters, Hispanic voters, and single women), the percentage of turned-out voters to registrants is higher than the national average for those groups.

2. Collaboration and Sharing: Over the past five years, collaboration and sharing amongst 501(c)(3) organizations has greatly improved their civic engagement work. For decades, c3 organizations have registered voters, educated them about important current issues, and encouraged them to participate in the electoral process. In the past several elections a substantial change has occurred in how charitable organizations conduct their civic engagement work. As recently as just six years ago, civic engagement efforts were often disconnected from each other—groups were working alone in silos and not well coordinated. In many cases this lack of coordination resulted in duplication—organizations targeted the same geographic areas or people, and often paid twice for access to the same data files. Since that time, a number of important collaborations have developed. For example, State Voices, Center for Community Change, Generational Alliance, and others have allowed organizations to coordinate and share information. At the most basic level, these collaborations have made for a far more efficient use of resources. They've also led to improvements which, while difficult to quantify, are clear. Information sharing has allowed the best new strategies and tactics to spread more quickly. Peer-to-peer training and support have built the capacity of 501(c)(3) organizations. And these new networks have meant more effective civic engagement strategies. The bottom line is that this new spirit of collaboration and sharing has allowed for the use of new technology, supported innovation, and helped build capacity.
3. New Technology: New technology has had a major impact on civic engagement and promises to continue to improve the work in the future. Gone are the days when organizations were storing, or losing, voter contacts on 3X5 cards in shoe boxes. The founding of Catalist in 2005 has been a leap forward, offering “affordable access to a comprehensive, well-maintained national database of voting-age individuals, along with the tools and expertise needed to use this data to target, communicate, and campaign more effectively.” “Catalist operates as a utility—an industrial-strength resource that spreads the cost of providing data across many organizations.” In addition to Catalist, VAN (Voter Activation Network) provides voter file technology that offers the same technology to all organizations, so volunteers and organizers are familiar with the program. Collaborations have allowed even small community groups to access these cutting edge tools. Reciprocally, this centralized voter database has spurred collaboration by allowing for better planning. The centralized database also provided a platform for the development of specialized tools and resources to help the c3 community with activities such as voter registration. Among the advances seen in 2008 were the development of a specialized voter registration tool, and the creation of a centralized data entry center for voter registration applications.

Technological advances go beyond the data technologies. Online tools to register and contact voters were a huge step forward as well. For example: Rock the Vote “used an innovative online voter registration tool on its website to simplify the voter registration process.” This tool generated a registration form for the applicant to print, sign, and mail. RTV followed up with e-mail and text messages to usher the user through the voting process. This online registration technology was given to all who wanted it for free. More

than 2.27 million unique voter registration applications were generated by the RTV online registration tool.

4. Innovation and Experimentation: The past few years have been a time of dedication to innovation and experimentation. This new spirit has been driven by both the access to new technology and the increased collaboration among c3 organizations. The new technology has made evaluation of organizing experiments more scientific by providing real data to organizations more cheaply and easily than ever before. Collaborations have allowed for the possibility of larger experiments with the many organizations participating, and the quick spread of findings to the network of c3 organizations. An effective new tactic or strategy can now be implemented throughout the country very quickly. Get out the Vote best practices provide a useful example. Dozens of scientific randomized studies involving millions of voters have looked at what works and what does not in GOTV contact. The Analyst Institute compiled a list of these best practices and held weekly conference calls as civic engagement groups were planning their efforts to highlight and discuss the latest findings. As a result groups were able to use their GOTV resources in the most effective manner benefiting from the latest research.

These factors have renewed interest and shifted attitudes around evaluations from both organizations and funders. No longer do organizations dread evaluations and worry that the main purpose of an evaluation was to criticize their work. There has been a cultural shift in recent years and civic engagement organizations and funders have embraced ongoing evaluation. New technology and collaboration has made it possible to see the results of an organization's efforts clearly, and evaluations are now seen as a strong tool in an effort to improve, rather than exercises in blame.

## **B. Looking Forward—Summary of Recommendations**

As organizations look to 2010 they are seeking to apply the lessons learned from 2008 and to continue to refine and improve their civic engagement efforts. In order to build on the success of 2008, the following recommendations address key points funders should consider relating to civic engagement in 2010. These recommendations are detailed later in this report but are listed below for overview purposes.

1. Support organizations' efforts to communicate with and mobilize voters they registered in 2008.
2. Maintain emphasis on opportunistic new voter registration and mobilization.
3. Ensure civic engagement programs and organizations continue to have access to data and voter file tools.
4. Encourage and fund grantees to integrate evaluations and assessments into their work.
5. Fund and encourage experiments.
6. Provide opportunities for ongoing training and technical assistance.

7. Support efforts that encourage collaboration.
8. Monitor new trends and support pilot projects to test new voter registration methods.

### III. NEW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

#### A. The Evolution of New c3 Infrastructure

For decades, c3 organizations have registered voters, educated them about important current issues, and encouraged them to participate in the electoral process. In the past several elections a substantial change has occurred in how charitable organizations conduct their civic engagement work. It's important to note that the core of c3 civic engagement work remains the organizations working on the ground to register and mobilize voters. Without the efforts of groups like Project Vote, Women's Voices, Women's Vote, Rock the Vote, the Center for Community Change, and hundreds of others, 4 million new voters would not have been registered in 2008.

As recently as just six years ago, civic engagement efforts were often disconnected from each other—groups were working alone in silos and not well coordinated. In many cases this lack of coordination resulted in duplication: organizations targeted the same geographic areas or people, and often paid twice for access to the same data files. Because of the expense, most c3 organizations didn't have access to voter files to aid their work. For those that could afford voter files there were few, if any, sources of technical assistance to train community groups and c3 civic engagement efforts on the data and how to use it effectively in their work. Although coalitions existed, there were few formal entities dedicated to coordinating groups' efforts and helping minimize duplication. There were few shared communications resources, and the lack of good data and technology meant that evaluations were often only qualitative in nature. Solid quantitative data was just not available to measure the electoral impact of work being done by c3 civic engagement organizations.

A number of changes have occurred over the past six years to address many of these issues, fueled in part by significant technological advances and infrastructure developments. Funders have stepped forward to provide tools and help build needed infrastructure, and civic engagement organizations have been active participants in adopting these tools and integrating them into their work, and helping to build these new pieces of infrastructure.

Because of this, in 2008, many in the civic engagement community had access to sophisticated databases and voter files, tools and user interfaces to easily access the voter files, and a range of technical assistance providers to help organizations effectively use the tools. State tables and other entities have also formed to provide coordination and technical assistance. While there is still progress to be made—more organizations accessing these tools and integrating them into their ongoing work—the transformation in a relatively short time has been remarkable.

These advances, in turn, have helped organizations work more efficiently and collaborate with each other more effectively, increase accountability, facilitate evaluations, and contribute to ongoing learning. For many c3 groups, civic engagement is part of a year-round cycle of accountability that includes issue work, ongoing organizing and basebuilding, and holding public officials accountable. This is often referred to as a “permanent campaign,” and these tools and infrastructure provide new opportunities to marry issue work and civic engagement.

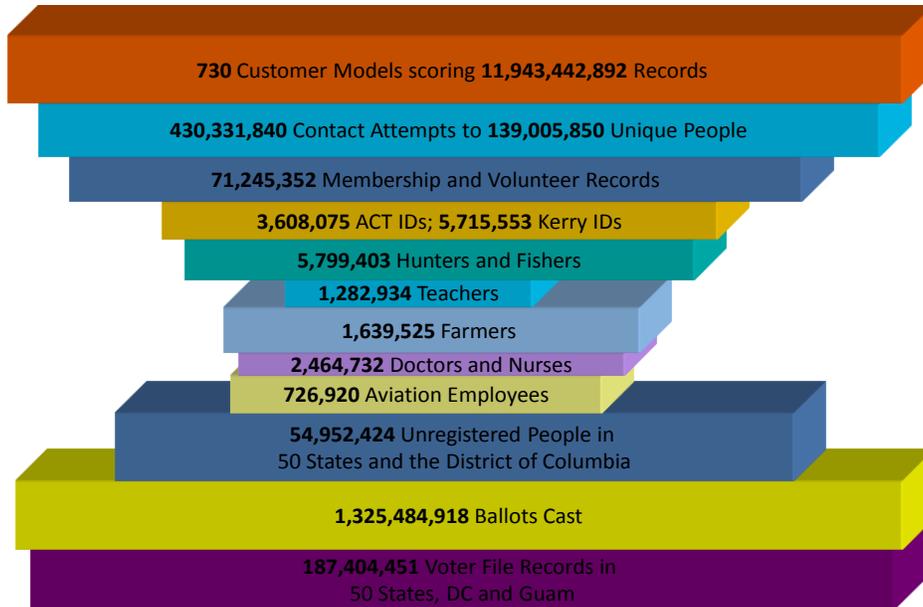
## **B. Data and Voter Files**

A voter file is a list of all registered voters in a state. In most instances the voter file contains the name, birth date, date of registration, political party (if the state has party registration), and voting history (indicating those elections in which the voter voted, not the voter's actual votes) of every voter. Vendors often “enhance” this basic information by adding phone numbers and other information. This type of data helps organizations target their efforts, and has become an increasingly important tool for effective civic engagement. With access to updated voter files, organizations can tell whether or not someone is registered to vote and glean other important information that can help them to utilize their resources more effectively. And working off of a voter file allows groups to better coordinate and avoid duplication. Yet for years, many civic engagement efforts did not have access to voter files and other databases to assist their work. Barriers included cost, no centralized national database resource, a patchwork of vendors servicing different states, and a lack of the technical skills necessary to work with sophisticated data. Past evaluations of civic engagement and voter registration efforts identified three components that are necessary to effectively allow community and c3 groups to work effectively with voter files: good data, an effective interface, and staff dedicated to providing training and support.

In 2004, few civic engagement and voter registration efforts had access to voter file technology. Those that did were hampered by low-quality data, or lacked the in-house resources to use the resource effectively. All too often work that was done was lost from cycle-to-cycle because organizations lacked an affordable and consistent central data repository. Rather than staying in touch with individuals they had registered, too many organizations repeatedly started back at square one, with untested and unimproved data.

One important development that has changed that pattern has been Catalist, a relatively new national voter file that maintains a comprehensive national database of all voting-age individuals in the United States. Formed in 2005, Catalist offers organizations affordable access to a comprehensive, well-maintained national database of voting-age individuals, along with the tools and expertise needed to use this data to target, communicate, and campaign more effectively. Catalist operates as a “utility”—an industrial-strength resource that spreads the cost of providing data across many organizations. And the data available from Catalist goes well beyond the basic information previously obtainable from state files or other commercial vendors.

Catalist’s core voting-age database now contains over 187 million voter records, more than 79 million records of unregistered voters, and it covers all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. These records include issue and other response data added to 146 million unique person records, organizational membership information added to 34 million records, and many other enhancements. Catalist builds economies of scale by providing data and data services that are integral to a wide variety of basic operations common to most organizations, including membership recruitment, fundraising, grassroots organizing, opinion research, and communications targeting. High-quality data and data tools can help reduce costs and increase efficiency in every one of these areas. Catalist also works to develop models that allow organizations to better target their efforts.



In 2008, Catalist added 13 new national models that predict: likelihood to be married, and/or to be a college graduate, turnout propensity, probability of donating to progressive causes, propensity to be supportive of LGBT issues, likelihood to be a gun owner, likelihood to be pro-choice, and propensity to be active on environmental issues. New predictive models this year include: individuals' propensity to be willing to take action on health care reform, likelihood to support energy and climate change reforms, propensity to support immigration reform, turnout propensity in off-year elections, and others.

In 2008, several hundred c3 organizations were able to access Catalist data for their civic engagement work, either as direct subscribers, or through intermediaries like State Voices or the Center for Community Change. These c3 organizations ranged from large national entities—like Project Vote, that registers hundreds of thousands of voters across the country—to small grassroots organizations and community groups that tend to work in neighborhoods and run small targeted outreach efforts. Catalist data helped Women's Voices. Women Vote to identify, mail, and phone more than 6 million unregistered single women in 2008; Rock the Vote used Catalist's peer-to-peer organizing tools designed for use inside Facebook as part of their successful effort to reach young voters and collect over two million voter registration applications; the Center for Community Change Community Voting Project's partner groups registered over 100,000 new voters and personally communicated with hundreds of thousands of additional voters using Catalist data.

Using a centralized voter database helped the civic engagement community coordinate their activities in key states around the country. The centralized database also provided a platform

for the development of specialized tools and resources to help the c3 community with activities such as voter registration. Among the advances seen in 2008 were the development of a specialized voter registration tool<sup>3</sup>, and the creation of a centralized data entry center for voter registration applications (the Data Entry Consolidation Center).<sup>4</sup>

Funders play a crucial role and have helped groups access Catalist data by providing direct grants to organizations, or by contributing to a pooled fund which subsidizes low-cost subscriptions for c3 organizations. Because of that assistance, more and more civic engagement groups now have access to sophisticated data.

### C. Effective Interfaces

Good data is critical. Just as important is the ability for end users to access and manipulate data so that it can be used effectively in their civic engagement programs. Different programs have differing needs, diverse techniques, scale and models for outreach, and varied levels of technical sophistication. Because of this, a variety of tools have been developed. A few examples are profiled below.

1. The Catalist “Q” Tool: The Q Tool is a web-based query application that allows Catalist customers to access and download data using standard voter file information, along with commercial data and clients' own membership, outreach, and contact data. Many of the larger, more sophisticated organizations access their Catalist data using the Q tool. The Q tool also allows organizations to match their own membership and contact data to the national voter file.

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Person Details" with the following sections and options:

- Gender:**  Female,  Male,  Unknown
- Marital Status:**  Married,  Unmarried,  Unknown
- Race:**  Asian,  Black,  Caucasian,  Hispanic,  Jewish,  Middle Eastern,  Native American,  Other,  Unknown
- Race Confidence:**  Voter File,  Highly Likely,  Likely,  Possibly,  Uncoded
- Ethnicity:** A grid of checkboxes including: Armenian, Asian Indian, Austrian, Belgian, Chinese, Croatian, Cuban, Czech, Danish, Dominican, Dutch, English, Filipino, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hmong, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Jewish, Korean, Mexican, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Romanian, Russian, Scottish, Serbian, Somali, Swedish, Swiss, Thai, Uncoded, Uncoded British Islander, Uncoded Scandinavian, Uncoded Slavic, Uncoded Western European, Vietnamese, Welsh.
- Party:**  Citizens Party,  Constitution Party,  Democrat,  Declined to State,  Green Party,  Independent,  Libertarian,  No Party,  Other,  Reform Party,  Republican,  Socialist Party,  Socialist Workers Party,  Unknown.

2. Voter Activation Network (VAN): VAN is a third party commercially available tool that is tailored towards traditional field campaigns. VAN marries voter file data with the most powerful tools available for canvassing, phones, and collecting vast amounts of new data.

<sup>3</sup> Voter registration tool developed jointly by the New Organizing Institute and the Voter Activation Network (VAN).

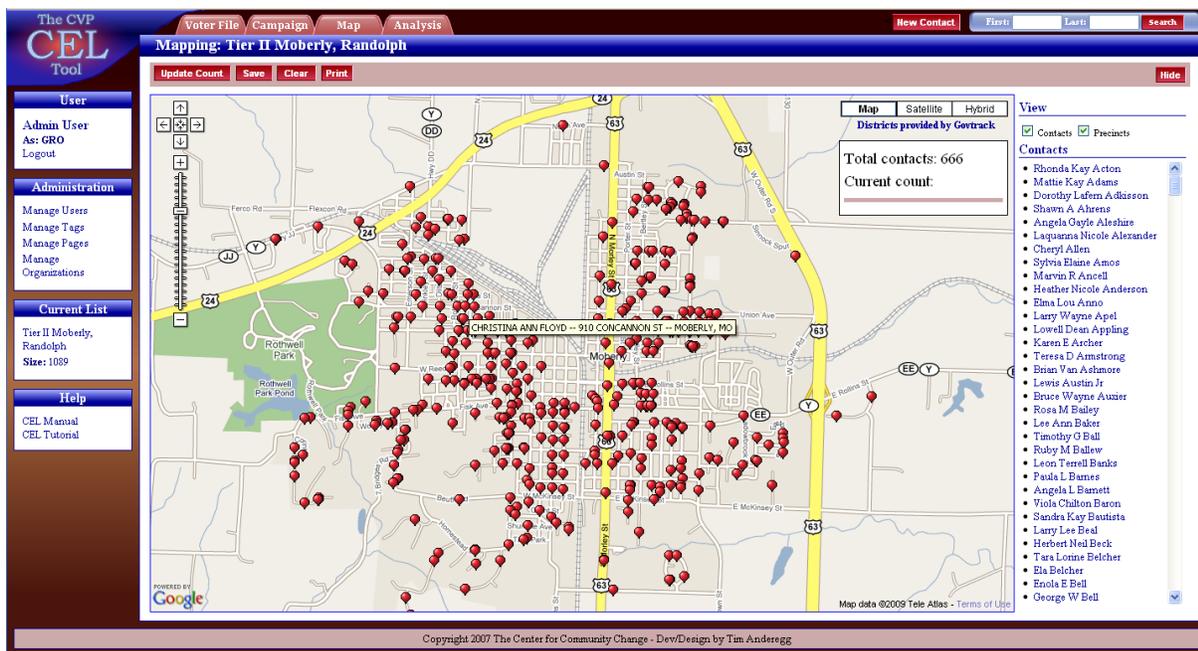
<sup>4</sup> DECC was developed jointly by SEIU, ISSI, and NOI.

VAN provides their interface to a broad array of clients, and has become the industry standard for field and voter contact efforts. Many c3 civic engagement organizations utilize VAN to manage their voter contact programs, ranging from voter registration to issue education and Get-Out-The-Vote efforts. Organizations access VAN through individual contracts, or through national organizations and intermediaries like State Voices. State Voices is a national network of 16 state-based coalitions that helps grassroots organizations win shared policy and civic engagement victories and build long-term power. VAN is distributed by State Voices to its broad coalition of progressive, charitable, non-profit organizations for civic engagement, volunteer mobilization, and member management.

### VAN Screen Shot

3. Center for Community Change’s Civic Engagement List or CEL Tool: CCC’s Community Voting Project (CVP) works with community-based groups around the country. Because commercially available interfaces were cost prohibitive for small groups, CVP developed a customized online database called the Civic Engagement List (CEL) in 2006 to assist partners in utilizing Catalist data. The goal of the CEL was to give partner groups a tool to hold their enhanced membership and voter registration lists in one centralized, password-protected area, and to be able to access it online. CVP also sought to enhance groups’ existing membership lists with publicly available data, including state voter files, address corrections, updated phone numbers, and demographic and publicly available market data. In 2008, about half of the CVP partners used the CEL tool, while others used commercial products like the VAN.

### CEL Tool



## D. Technical Assistance

The third component necessary for civic engagement organizations to work effectively with sophisticated data is technical assistance. Many organizations don't have in-house expertise or adequate staff resources and they need various forms of assistance to be able to work with data and voter files. Assistance is delivered through a variety of levels, including training existing organizational staff on how to utilize the tools and data available to them. In other cases, some entities also assist organizations by providing on-call expertise from their own staff. Finally, a number of organizations belong to networks like State Voices that provide staffing and access to an in-state data person to assist organizations with their work.

- I. State Voices: Launched in 2005, State Voices supports networks of c3 nonprofit organizations in 16 states. Over 600 organizations working in historically underrepresented and socially responsible communities belong to these state tables, and they come together to share ideas and resources, and cooperate to win policy and civic engagement victories. Through State Voices, networked groups share tools and best practices, and test new strategies.

State Voices provides access to Catalyst data and the VAN to member groups in its 16 state network. In addition, State Voices (through a contract) provides staff that work directly with member groups on data management, utilizing the VAN, and targeting. These shared services allow organizations to save resources and provide smaller groups with access to advanced tools, staff assistance, and knowledge that they couldn't afford on their own. Another important component provided by state tables in the State Voices Network is a coordinating function. Groups around the table share their workplans and engage in joint planning. This helps assure that groups are not duplicating efforts or working at cross purposes.

2. Intermediaries and Training and Technical Assistance Organizations: Many organizations utilize in-house staff to provide technical assistance to partner organizations. For example, the Center for Community Change Community Voting Project has a fulltime data manager who works with partner groups, and they added two additional staff during the height of their program in 2008. Many other national networks, such as U.S. Action, also provide support to their state-based affiliates.

Many organizations also provide specialized training and assistance to civic engagement groups. A sampling includes the Progressive Technology Project (PTP), which supports social change community-led organizing and civic engagement in low-income communities and communities of color. PTP assists grassroots groups in developing new technology skills that enable them to do organizing work more effectively, and provides technical assistance to address the unique needs that organizers face in their use of technology. Another example is the New Organizing Institute (NOI) which runs advocacy and campaign training programs focused on cutting-edge online organizing techniques, political technology (e.g. using data effectively, progressive technology infrastructure), and the intersection between field and management within these areas of new organizing.

## **E. Coordinating Communications**

Civic engagement organizations working at the state levels have also recognized the importance of communications support in their work. In recent years a number of entities and structures have been created to assist local community groups. In many cases the entities act as communications hubs that coordinate communications work, help to develop messages, and provide technical assistance and backup for individual groups. Some examples of these entities include State Voices and the Progress Now Network.

An example from Michigan illustrates the role that communications hubs can play. In the fall of 2008 a group in Michigan announced they would challenge the voter registrations of individuals who faced foreclosure on their homes. They would send mail to those on the foreclosure list and create a challenge list based on returned direct mail, a practice known as “voter caging.” The group backed down, but the controversy left many Michigan voters facing foreclosure confused as to whether election challengers could legally use foreclosure lists to challenge voters' residency and thus, eligibility to vote on Election Day. Michigan Voice, part of the State Voices network worked with partners on an extensive press outreach campaign to ensure these voters knew the real story.

## **F. Measuring Impact**

These new tools and resources allow organizations, evaluators, and funders to better analyze programs, determine best practices, and test techniques in ways that weren't possible just a few years ago. Voter registration data entered into Catalist can now be easily matched back to updated voter files. With this information, organizations can tell if the voters they register make it onto the voter rolls, whether or not they vote, and how their programs compare with others.

The past few years have also seen a renewed interest and shift in attitudes around evaluations from both organizations and funders. In the past, some organizations dreaded evaluations because they worried that the main purpose was to criticize their work. There has been a cultural shift in recent years and civic engagement organizations and funders have embraced ongoing evaluation. Because of new technology it's now possible to measure the results of organizations' efforts. Organizations and funders are jointly working together to utilize this information to improve programs.

These new tools help answer questions such as: which outreach techniques work best, how organizations can run more effective programs, and what is cost effective. Funders and organizations are hiring independent evaluators to help learn lessons from ongoing programs, and are sharing results through entities like the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation. Organizations are also working with academics and others to design controlled experiments as part of their programs. Finally, new entities have also organized to help facilitate experiments and share learning. The Analyst Institute is one example, and was formed to help foster a progressive and civic engagement data community, assist organizations with conducting experiments, and widely share results and best practices.

## **G. New Infrastructure Conclusion**

While these advances in technology and infrastructure are important, it is useful to note that their real purpose is to support on-the-ground programs. Organizations that register and mobilize voters, engage their members in civic life, and focus their efforts on underrepresented constituencies have the ability to conduct their programs more efficiently, effectively, and in a more collaborative way because of this new infrastructure. As organizations pivot from election year work, which focuses on registration and voter mobilization, this new infrastructure can be used to better target their advocacy resources in order to promote legislative reforms such as health care, climate change, and immigration. And as more and more organizations gain access to these tools the entire civic engagement field will benefit.

## IV. 2008 AND 501(c)(3) CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This report has been prepared with the assistance and cooperation of the 501(c)(3) civic engagement community and the organizations highlighted within this report. In many cases, these organizations shared with us their internal post-election reports, as well as voter contact data from their programs, and this report would have been impossible without their contributions. As noted in the Introduction, special thanks go to NOI and Catalist for their assistance, analysis, and support.

This report looks at turnout amongst voters registered by the c3 civic education community and compares it with the turnout of other demographically similar newly registered voters. There was not one comprehensive study (with control groups) of turnout across the c3 community, so that means that there are some limitations in terms of the data available to study. However, even with that qualification we still believe this look at c3 registration and civic engagement work tells an impressive and powerful story.

### A. Voter Registration Generally

In 2008, the grassroots 501(c)(3) community registered more than 4 million voters<sup>5</sup>. The vast majority of these voters were newly registered voters, or voters with a substantive change to their previous registration (such as a change of address). These 4 million+ voters represented more than 12% of the national voter registration total, and are distinct from other newly registered voters, such as those registered by political parties and candidates (like the Obama campaign).<sup>6</sup> It also does not include any registrations submitted from local candidates, or groups affiliated with political parties (such as the Young Democrats or Young Republicans).

The 4 million registration total is the combined effort of c3 groups that submitted registration applications through Catalist. While the range of groups that worked with Catalist is comprehensive, there were certainly other registration efforts that did not work with Catalist, or did not agree to have their data included in the NOI study, and as such are not a part of this c3 story. With this in mind, it is safe to assume that the figure of 4 million newly registered voters cited throughout this report represents a floor for the 2008 work of the 501(c)(3) community and not a ceiling.

The NOI study compiled all this registration data into a national database and isolated the number of unique applications and unique registrations that were the result of those applications. This avoids double-counting of applications to better determine the true impact of these collective programs.

The national totals for the c3 registration programs are as follows:

Unique voter registration applications<sup>7</sup>:      5,042,802

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<sup>5</sup> NOI Voter Registration Study, December 2009.

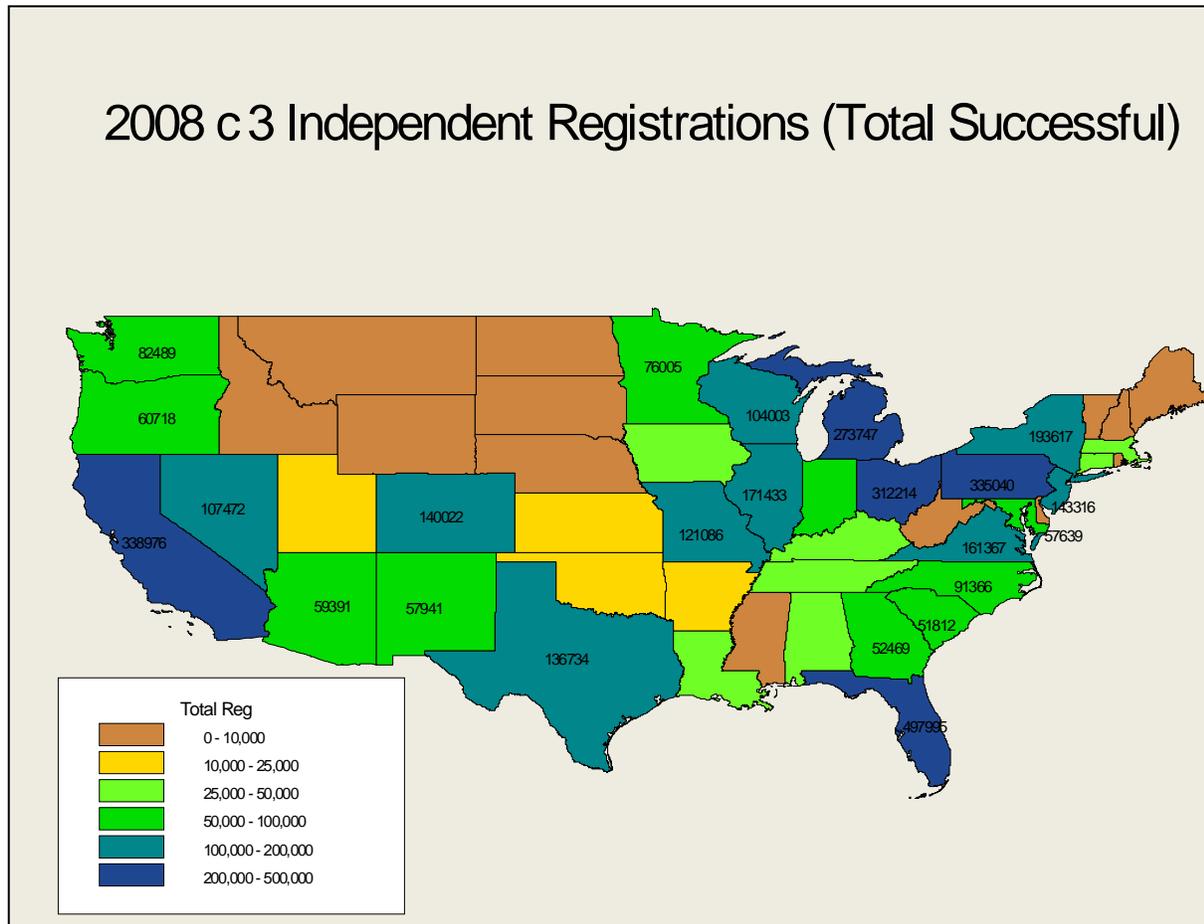
<sup>6</sup> 12% refers to the 33 million new registered voters seen on the Catalist from 2007 and 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Voters might have submitted more than one registration application. Only one application (and successful registration potentially) is counted here.

Unique successful voter registrations: 4,081,330 (80.9% of applications)  
 Unique role-changing registrations: 3,660,515 (72.6% of applications)  
 Votes from successful registrations: 2,829,508 (69.3% overall turnout)

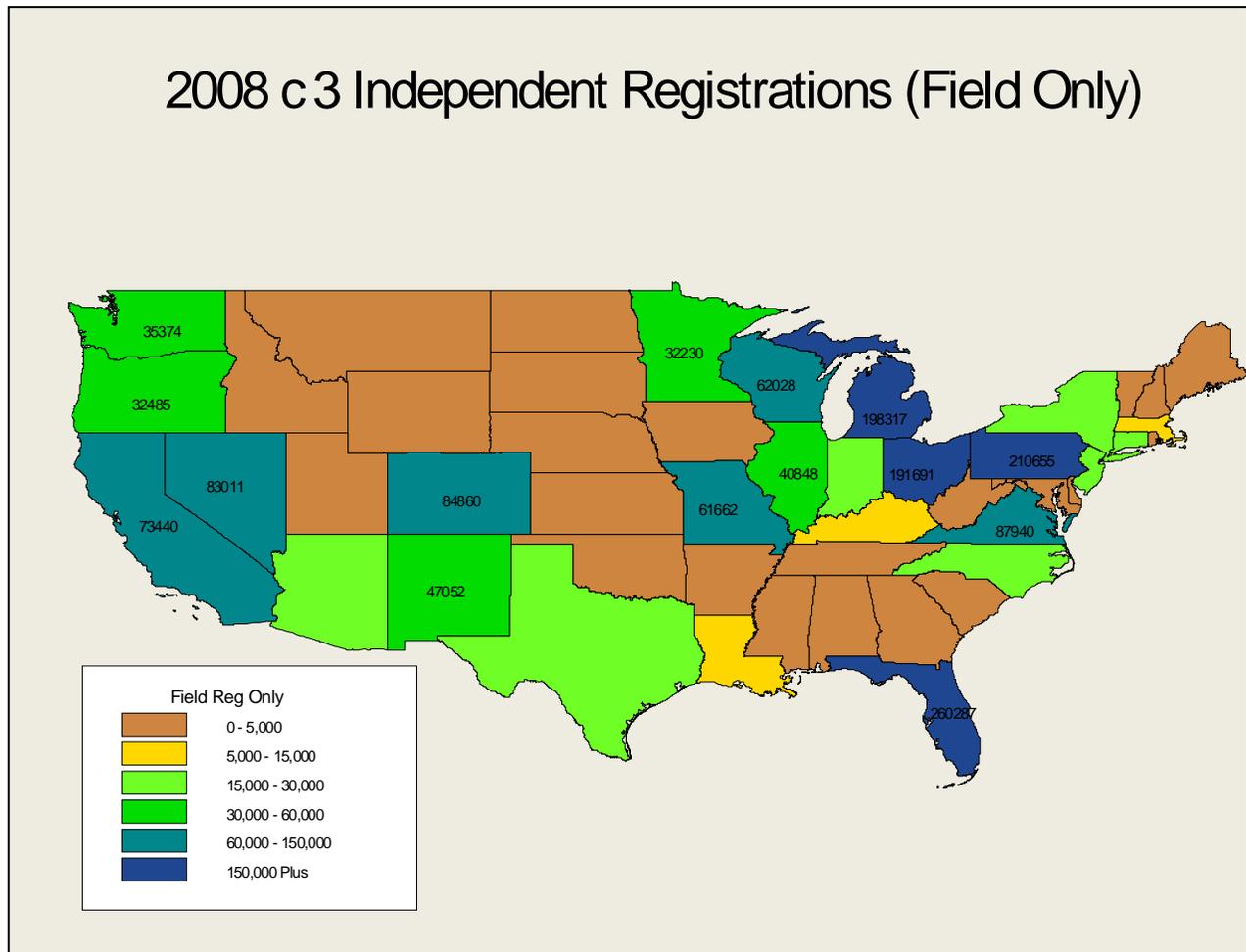
A role-changing registration was one where there was a substantial update to the voter's registration status. This would include completely new registrations and any changes of name or address. The registrations that were not role changing might still have had a positive effect on turnout, as they might be from voters who were unsure of their voter registration status. Those voters would have received contact from one of the c3 organizations and would consequently have been more likely to vote than if they had not received that communication.

The states with the largest number of successful registrations are shown on the following map:



<sup>8</sup> The number of successful registrations in key states are noted in the state labels on the map.

It is also interesting to see where the majority of the field registrations occurred, as some of the online and mail programs targeted voters more broadly nationally. The field programs were active on the ground, building infrastructure in their respective states.



Later in this report when we look at the turnout of these newly registered voters, we will look at the turnout of all successful registrations in comparison to all newly registered voters. This was necessary because it is impossible to isolate nationally the number of role-changing new registrations. The only way we can know that a registration is new is if the voter's registration date has been updated. The turnout comparisons use the same standard of an updated registration date to compare the new c3 registered voters to the national list of newly registered voters.

## B. Summary of Organizational Activity

Dozens of organizations submitted voter registration applications through Catalist. The following chart summarizes the number of applications submitted by organization and breaks them down into the three major categories: mail, field, and online.

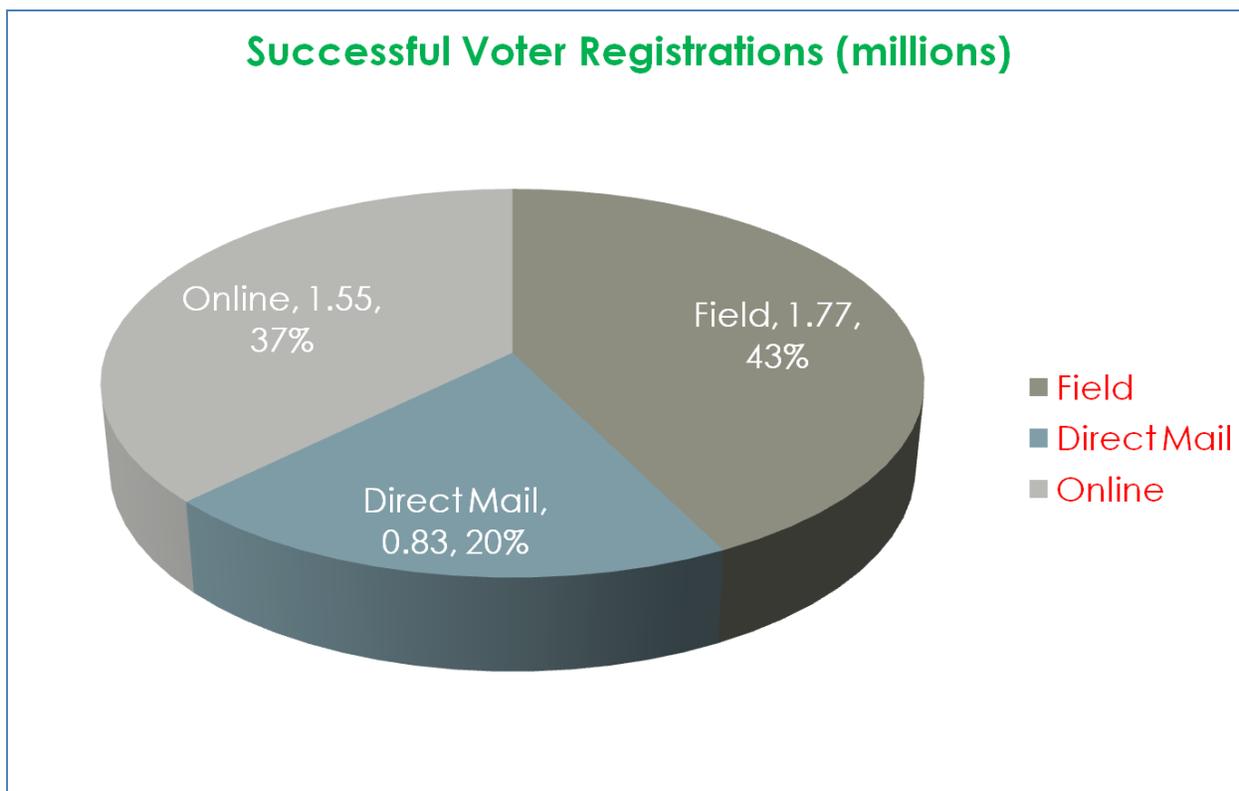
Type of Program	Group	Unique Applications	Successful Registrations	Percent Successful
Mixed	Rock The Vote Total	2,003,574	1,538,121	76.80%
Mixed	ACORN/Project Vote Total	1,095,431	833,113	76.10%
Mixed	Women's Voices. Women Vote. Total	946,822	831,385	87.80%
Mixed	Student PIRGs New Voters Project Total	98,660	76,858	77.90%
Mixed	HeadCount Total	59,686	53,782	91.80%
Mail	Women's Voices. Women Vote.	924,220	813,314	88.00%
Mail	Rock The Vote	22,729	20,002	88.00%
Online	Rock The Vote	1,976,991	1,514,861	76.60%
Online	Credo	111,873	88,083	78.70%
Online	ACORN and Project Vote	38,446	29,314	76.20%
Online	Student PIRGs New Voters Project	28,676	20,742	72.30%
Online	Women's Voices. Women Vote.	22,602	18,071	80.00%
Online	HeadCount	16,190	13,696	84.60%
Field	ACORN and Project Vote	1,056,985	803,799	76.00%
Field	Progressive Future Ed Fund, Community Voters Project	301,614	271,258	89.90%
Field	Democracia	136,042	124,955	91.90%
Field	NAACP	130,087	107,380	82.50%
Field	USAction	109,855	91,553	83.30%
Field	Student PIRGs New Voters Project	69,984	56,115	80.20%
Field	HeadCount	43,496	40,086	92.20%
Field	CHIRLA - Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of LA	35,063	31,913	91.00%
Field	Bus Federation	36,200	31,379	86.70%
Field	Other Center for Community Change (CCC) Partners	34,104	29,017	85.10%
Field	Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)	27,767	24,382	87.80%
Field	ONE AMERICA	22,590	20,194	89.40%
Field	Oregon Bus Project	22,864	19,660	86.00%
Field	Other State Voices Partners	16,446	13,888	84.40%
Field	Sierra Club/ Sierra Student Coalition	11,585	9,042	78.00%
Field	New Era Colorado Foundation	10,283	9,000	87.50%
Field	Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC)	8,089	7,324	90.50%
Field	United States Student Association (USSA)	8,464	6,812	80.50%
Field	Minnesota Public Interest Research Group (MPIRG)	5,029	4,484	89.20%
Field	Rock The Vote	3,854	3,259	84.60%
Field	Progressive Leadership Alliance Nevada (PLAN)	3,390	3,057	90.20%
Field	League of Young Voters	3,355	2,751	82.00%
Field	Washington Bus	3,053	2,740	89.80%
Field	Mi Familia Vota	2,270	2,065	91.00%
Field	Other	2,597	2,049	78.90% <sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Data from New Organizing Institute Voter Registration Analysis '08, page 32-33. Note that some registrations are counted with multiple organizations.

### C. Sources of c3 Voter Registrations

As the previous chart indicated, voter registrations were submitted from a variety of methods, but have been divided into three different categories:

Registration Category	Total Applications	Successful Registrations	2008 Votes from Successful Registrations	2008 Turnout Percent
Field Registrations	2,161,506	1,770,801 (81.9%)	1,051,912	59.3%
Mail Registrations	945,645	832,344 (88.0%)	639,958	76.9%
Online Registrations	2,020,174	1,548,017 (76.6%)	1,182,452	76.4%



Each of the methods had their advantages and contributed to an overall effort targeting underrepresented parts of the electorate: low income voters, minority voters, single women, and immigrants. Each type of voter registration had unique strengths and weaknesses:

- I. Direct Mail: Direct mail registrations typically involved a pre-printed application sent to an unregistered voter in the mail. Many of the mail programs used the Catalyst file of unregistered voters. In addition, the direct mail programs took advantage of National Change of Address files (NCOA) to identify voters that had moved.

The mail registrations had the highest success rate of the three different methodologies. This was largely due to registration forms that were pre-printed with the unregistered

voter's name and address. All the voter had to do, in most cases, was to sign the application and send it in. This led to a relatively low error rate compared to other registrations, which were typically filled out by hand. The direct mail registrations also had a relatively high turnout of 76.9%, with the largest target being single women (from the Women's Voices. Women Vote program). **Women's Voices. Women Vote successfully registered more than 800,000 voters in their mail program.**

2. **Online:** Online registrations typically used an Internet widget to help voters download a voter registration application from their respective state.<sup>10</sup> These applications had the lowest success rate, because it was incumbent upon the prospective voter to submit the application (usually by mailing it in). The advantage of the online widget is that it creates an easy way for the c3 organization to get the name, address, and contact info (such as email or cell phone number) for the applicant, making it easier to contact them later in the campaign.

Online registrations also had a relatively high turnout. While part of the reason the turnout was high may be attributable to the contacts they received from the c3 organization where they signed up, an additional reason could be that the online voters were not targeted individually, as most of the other c3 targets were. While the online programs targeted important groups such as younger voters and college students, they accepted any individual that found them on the Internet. Thus, they may have registered some voters from groups that typically have higher turnouts than the targets of other c3 organizations. **Rock The Vote comprised the largest share of the online registrations, registering more than 1.57 million voters on their website and an additional 700,000 through partners.**

3. **Field:** The largest category of registrations from the c3 community is broadly defined as field registrations. Field registrations include those gathered door-to-door, through tabling at events, and from other community organizing. The targets for the field programs included the demographic groups most underrepresented in the electorate: low-income voters, immigrants, African Americans, and Hispanics.

The percentage of successful registrations from field programs was an impressive 81.9%. Since most of these field programs depended on the efforts of organizers and canvassers, there was much more room for human error. In addition, the field programs often targeted highly transient urban populations where voters often move residences. This naturally lowered the success rate (and the eventual turnout rate) of the field registrations.

While the turnout rate of field registrations (59.3%) was the lowest of the three different methodologies, the field programs generally targeted voters where the expected voter turnout was lower. Later in this analysis we will show that the turnout of those voters most often targeted by field programs (low-income minority voters) was higher than the turnout of similar newly registered voters nationally.

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<sup>10</sup> Many of the online registrations used an Internet tool published by Credo that was widely distributed by Rock The Vote.

Six organizations submitted more than 100,000 field registration applications: ACORN/Project Vote, the Community Voter Project, Democracia, the NAACP, Progressive Future, and U.S. Action. **Project Vote led the way among field organizations, with more than 800,000 successful registrations.** The breadth of the field effort was such that more than 20 organizations registered at least 5,000 voters during the 2008 election cycle.

In terms of total turnout, the national turnout of 69.3% c3 newly registered voters was higher than the 64% turnout rate for all eligible voters, and close to the 69.8% turnout rate for all newly registered voters. The field registrations were the only group that lagged behind the national average, though it is important to note that those programs targeted voters that typically have a lower turnout (low-income, minority, immigrant voters). Later in this analysis, we will show how the turnout for c3 newly registered voters was higher than the turnout for all new registered voters within the demographic groups that the c3 community had targeted.

#### **D. 501(c)(3) Registration Impact**

The national c3 registration program totals had a positive impact on the share of demographic groups that are underrepresented in the electorate. Those groups include single women, younger voters, and minority voters. While individual c3 programs did not necessarily target all of the groups, the collective impact of the c3 programs did increase the share of the electorate for these groups. This is incredibly important to note given that the focus of c3 civic engagement efforts is most often in underrepresented communities, so studying the participation of these communities in the electoral process is critical for assessing the impact of c3 civic engagement efforts.

The volume of the program was also impressive. The 4 million successful registrations were more than 12% of the national total of new registrations. The share of targeted groups, such as African American and-low income voters, was even greater. The vast majority (80%+) of the c3 newly registered voters came from a group that is underrepresented in the electorate (i.e. single women, younger voters, African Americans, Latinos, low-income voters, etc.).

The following table shows how the c3 group of registered voters increased the share of underrepresented demographic groups in the overall electorate:

<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>2008 Total Registered Share</b>	<b>2008 All Newly Registered Share</b>	<b>2008 c3 Newly Registered Share</b>
Unmarried Women	23.9%	31.3%	49.9%
Age 18-24	10.3%	29.7%	33.3%
Age 25-34	15.5%	22.1%	26.4%
Age 18-34 Total	25.8%	51.8%	59.6%

African Americans	11.9%	16.3%	32.4%
Hispanics	7.9%	11.1%	14.2%
Asians	2.7%	3.1%	2.6%
Income \$0-\$30k	17.7%	19.8%	23.0%
Income \$30k-\$50k	41.7%	43.7%	46.9%
Income \$0-\$50k	59.4%	63.4%	69.9% <sup>11</sup>

All the percentages on the above table are expressed as shares of the national electorate. When a group registers voters at a rate higher than the total electorate (i.e. a higher share of voters), they are increasing the share of that demographic group in the electorate. For example, if Hispanic voters represent only 7.9% of all voters, and if 14.2% of c3 newly registered voters are Hispanic, then the overall share of Hispanics in the electorate has increased.

C3 registered voters represented a larger share of all these underrepresented groups in the overall electorate and among all newly registered voters. If a group is underrepresented in the electorate, one would need to register them at a higher rate to correct the imbalance. The above chart shows that in each of these demographic groups the c3 community was registering voters in their target groups at rates higher than the overall electorate, and also higher than the rate of all new registrations. Each of these groups was targeted because they made up a smaller share of the electorate than their population, while also having a history of supporting and progressive issues.

Highlights from 2008 c3 registration efforts include:

- **Single Women:** While single voters typically represent a much larger share of newly registered voters than all other voters (as younger and single voters must often register for the first time after they turn 18), almost half of the c3 registered voters consisted of single women. The 49.9% share of single women was 18.6% greater than the share of single women amongst all newly registered voters. While many of the single women were registered through a direct mail program, even the field registrations were disproportionately single women (42.1%).
- **Younger Voters:** Almost 60% of the c3 newly registered voters were under the age of 35 (compared to only 51.8% of all newly registered voters). C3 gains were seen among voters age 18-24 (+3.6% share) and voters age 25-34 (+4.3% share). Young voters typically make up a large share of newly registered voters, though the c3 gains contributed to a 1.8% turnout increase among all eligible voters age 18-24 in 2008 compared to 2004.<sup>12</sup> Online voter registration tools, such as the one employed by Rock the Vote, were a major factor in producing this increase in youth turnout.

<sup>11</sup> Data for table from 2008 U.S. Census CPS survey and Catalist voter file

<sup>12</sup> Census 2008 and 2004 CPS surveys – turnout among eligible voters age 18-24.

- African-American Voters: Almost one third of the voters registered by c3 groups (32.4%) were African American. This was double the share of all newly registered voters (16.3%), and more than 20% greater than the share of African-American voters in the overall electorate (11.9%). These voters were in addition to any voters registered by the Obama campaign. The impact of all these registration efforts was seen in the historic level of African-American turnout where, for the first time, the African-American turnout of eligible voters (64.7%) exceeded the turnout of all eligible voters in the electorate (63.6%).<sup>13</sup>
- Hispanic and Asian-American Voters: Hispanic voters comprised 14.2% of c3 registered, slightly greater than the share of Hispanics among all newly registered voters. Asian-American voters registered by c3 groups represented a slightly smaller group than all c3 voters. Hispanic voters represented a greater share of all field registrations (18.1%), though smaller shares among online and direct mail registrations brought the overall Hispanic share down.
- Low-Income Voters: Almost 70% of the voters registered by c3 groups consisted of voters in areas with a median household income of \$50,000 or less. The c3 registered voters represented a greater share of low-income voters than the overall electorate in both the under \$30,000 income group (+5.3%) and the \$30,000-\$50,000 group (+5.2%). These registration increases helped lower the persistent turnout gap between lower-income and upper-income voters in 2008. In 2008, low-income voters turned out at a rate 11.5% lower than the overall electorate, where in 2004 that gap had been 15.8%.<sup>14</sup>

#### **D. Impact of c3 Voter Turnout Programs**

In 2008, c3 grassroots groups ran significant turnout programs that targeted their newly registered voters, as well as other low vote propensity targets in the same geographic areas and demographic groups as their registration targets. We have good data on the c3 registered voters that matched the Catalist file, but a complete analysis would also include data on all of the GOTV targets, which was not available.

*One note of caution: There were no control group studies conducted for voters turned out by the entire c3 community. Thus, it is difficult to state causality for any turnout gains seen among the c3 newly registered voters. In a control group turnout study we could compare the c3 newly registered voters to a subset of similar voters selected randomly. Without that type of study available we must look at the turnout of all voters by demographic group. The Catalist voter file contains demographic data such as age, race, and ethnicity, along with census data in categories such as income. Using this demographic data we then looked at portions of the c3 newly registered voters and compared them to voters with similar demographics in the overall electorate (such as low-income African-American voters). Without a control group, however, it is impossible to say whether the c3 community was completely responsible for any turnout increases.*

With all the caveats from the previous paragraph, turnout among c3 group registered voters was consistently higher than national averages among the demographic groups that were heavily

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<sup>13</sup> 2008 Census CPS survey.

<sup>14</sup> 2008 and 2004 Census CPS surveys – turnout data for adults with family income of \$30,000 or less.

targeted. The national list of newly registered voters appears to have a higher turnout (69.8% versus 69.2% for c3 voters)<sup>15</sup> because it includes many upper-income and suburban voters where one would expect a higher turnout. The fact that the c3 voter turnout was close to the national turnout rate while targeting lower turnout voters is impressive.

While the overall turnout of the c3 newly registered voters was slightly lower than the national average for all newly registered voters, c3 groups did achieve a higher turnout within their specific targets. C3 targets included low income voters, minority voters, younger voters, and single women. All of these groups typically have a lower voter turnout than national averages.

The following chart shows the comparative turnout of all newly registered voters compared to the turnout of c3 registered voters. The top line shows the national totals. Each subsequent line shows subtotals for various demographic groups that were prominent c3 targets in 2008.

The column on the far right of the chart shows the comparative turnout. A positive number in this column represents the increase in turnout for c3 registered voters compared to similar voters nationally. While the national total has a negative turnout number in this column (-0.7%), each subsequent demographic category shows a turnout increase. The national number is not significant as the national numbers include lots of voters that are supposed to have a high turnout (i.e. well educated, upper and middle-income suburban voters). The c3 groups showed turnout increase where it matters: among underrepresented groups in the electorate.

### IMPACT OF C3 VOTER TURNOUT PROGRAMS

Category	National Turnout %	c3 Turnout %	c3 Versus National
Total	69.8%	69.2%	-0.7%
Income			
\$0-\$30	63.2%	63.6%	0.4%
Black \$0-\$30	59.4%	62.8%	3.4%
Hispanic \$0-\$30	59.2%	63.0%	3.8%
Black	65.7%	67.4%	1.7%
Hispanic	65.5%	68.6%	3.1%
Age 18-24	62.4%	64.9%	2.5%
Age 25-29	69.6%	70.7%	1.1%
Age 30-34	72.3%	72.8%	0.5%
Single Women	68.4%	71.4%	3.0%

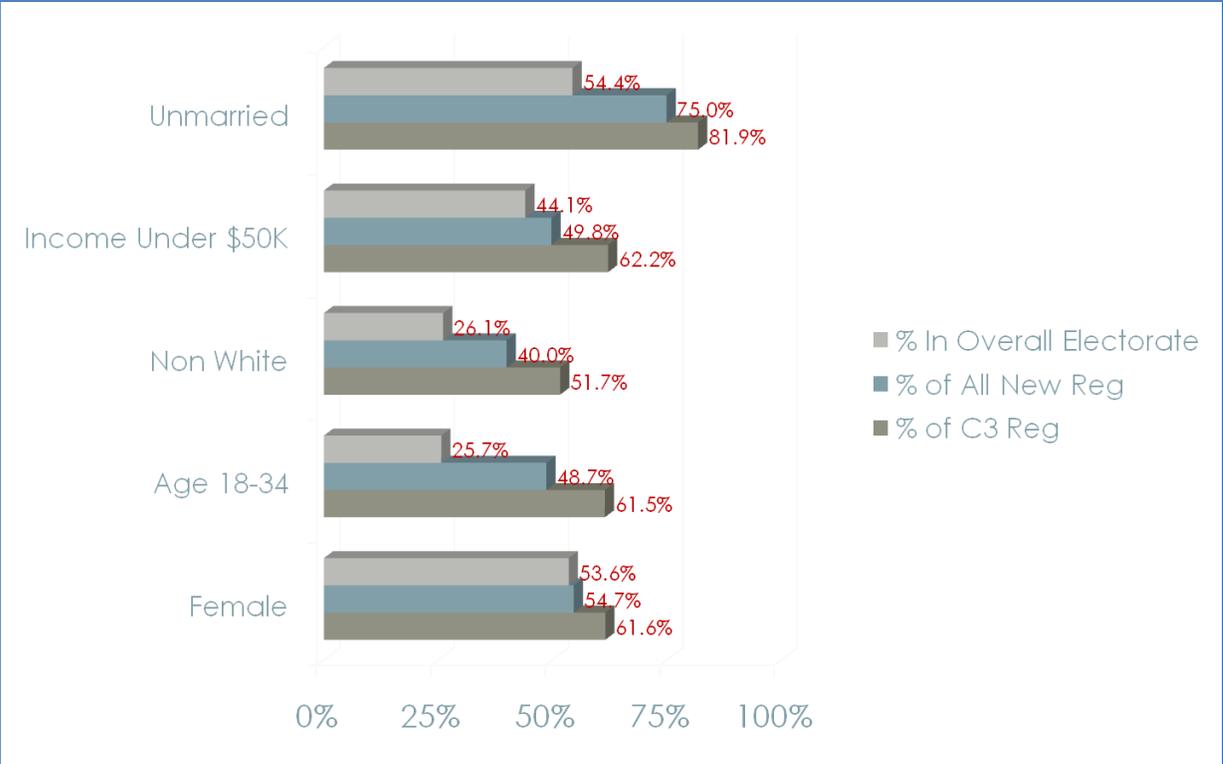
<sup>15</sup> 69.8% turnout for all voters on Catalist file with a registration date from 1/1/07 to 11/04/08. 69.2% turnout is also based upon Catalist data for all matched successful c3 registrations.

The turnout gains in the above chart are different from the voter registration gains highlighted in the previous section. This chart shows the percentage turnout of registered voters. The previous chart showed that the registration increases occurred among groups that were underrepresented in the electorate. The two charts together show that the c3 community had a positive impact on both registration and voter turnout.

Highlights from the turnout chart include the following:

- Small turnout gains were scored among low-income voters (defined as those living in areas with a census median household income of \$30,000 or less). Gains were much greater among African-American (+3.4%) and Hispanic (+3.8%) voters. While the national gains among low-income voters are not as impressive, the national data most likely includes more rural and exurban areas where the expected turnout is typically higher than the urban targets of numerous c3 field programs. The African-American and Hispanic gains are significant, because low-income minority voters were a prominent target for the c3 community.
- Substantial turnout gains were seen among both African-American and Hispanic voters. The Hispanic turnout gains show the effectiveness of some of the c3 ground programs. While the overall volume of c3 newly registered Hispanic voters was smaller than the number of newly registered African-American voters, the turnout impact appears to be greater.
- Turnout gains were seen among younger voters, with the highest gains among the youngest voters (age 18-24). Many of the youngest c3 registered voters were the product of online programs, and the turnout gains may be an indication of the effectiveness of the outreach (e-mail, text) associated with these programs.
- Turnout among single women also showed a strong gain of 3.0% compared to all newly registered single women nationally. Since single women represent almost half (49.9%) of all the c3 newly registered voters, these turnout gains would represent a large share of any national turnout gains from the combined c3 programs.

The following chart shows how the c3 voter registrations increased registrations in underrepresented groups. The bottom bar in each grouping shows that the c3 groups registered voters in those groups at a higher rate than the current electorate and all newly registered voters:



## V. RECOMMENDATIONS – LOOKING FORWARD

501(c)(3) civic engagement work in 2008 was both significant and impactful. Capitalizing on the excitement generated by the presidential election, organizations registered millions of new voters, communicated with even more, and got them to the polls. In addition to enlarging the electorate and helping to make it more representative of the larger community, these groups helped lay the groundwork for ongoing issue work and organizing. As organizations look to 2010 they are seeking to apply the lessons learned from 2008 and to continue to refine and improve their civic engagement efforts. In order to build on the successes of 2008, the following recommendations address key points funders should consider relating to civic engagement in 2010.

**A. Support organizations' efforts to communicate with and mobilize voters they registered in 2008.** Significant resources were invested in c3 civic engagement efforts to register over 4 million voters in 2008 in underrepresented communities and turn them out to vote. Almost 70% of those individuals turned out. Researchers have found that past experience voting is the single most important variable in predicting future turnout. The research also suggests that voting is habit forming—those who vote in this election are more likely to vote in the next election. Skip voting in this election and they become less likely to vote in the future. Utilizing new tools and updated voter files, individual organizations now know which of the voters they registered made it onto the rolls successfully, and whether or not they voted. They also know where these voters live, and in a large percentage of cases also have phone contact information.

Off-year, non-presidential elections generally see lower turnout and drop-off voters. These drop-off voters (those that vote in presidential elections, but not in off-year elections) tend to be the same voters that the c3 community targeted for registration in 2008: younger voters, low-income voters, single women, immigrants, and other minority voters. Funders should consider supporting efforts of organizations to continue building relationships and communicating with these new voters. Get-Out-The-Vote efforts targeted at these first time voters are cost effective, can help turn them into regular voters, and help increase the percentage of underrepresented communities voting in off-year elections.

**B. Maintain emphasis on opportunistic new voter registration and mobilization.** Although we strongly encourage resources to be directed to GOTV efforts in 2010, there is still a need for targeted and strategic voter registration efforts. One example is people who registered in 2008, but who may have moved since. According to the U.S. Census, renters, young people, and people living below the poverty line are far more likely to make changes in residence—almost double the rate of the population as a whole. In order to participate in the 2010 election, these frequent movers will have to be identified and reregistered.

Potential opportunities for organizing strategies often arise, when issues or ballot measures motivate or impact a particular community. As an example, coalitions have pushed “pay day loan” rate caps and minimum wage increases to help motivate low income voters. In the same vein, some strategies focus on positioning a particular constituency in anticipation of an upcoming policy fight. For example many funders supported efforts to increase civic

participation in immigrant communities in 2008, in preparation for advocacy efforts on comprehensive immigration reform. These types of strategic and targeted efforts should be considered in 2010.

**C. Ensure civic engagement programs and organizations continue to have access to data and voter file tools.** Organizations with strong leaders, solid plans, and good execution are ultimately the key ingredients to civic engagement. Access to Catalist and user interfaces like the Voter Activation Network (VAN) have allowed groups to work more efficiently and collaborate with each other more effectively, and hundreds of civic engagement groups are now using these tools. Funders have played a crucial role, and have helped groups to access Catalist data and user interfaces by providing direct grants to organizations, or by contributing to a pooled fund at the Tides Foundation which subsidizes low cost subscriptions for c3 organizations. It is important that the funders continue to support the pooled fund, individual organizations, and aggregators like State Voices to ensure the existing groups have access to these tools, that new groups can utilize them, and to extend the tools and support to additional targeted states.

**D. Encourage and fund grantees to integrate evaluations and assessments into their work.** The new tools help ensure accountability because new technology makes it possible to see the results of an organizations' efforts in a timely manner. At a minimum, civic engagement programs should be required to match their records against updated voter files for analysis. Practitioners, organizations, and funders are eager to learn. Evaluations help funders and the broader civic engagement community to learn which outreach techniques work best, how organizations can run more effective programs, and what is cost effective. Funders can continue to help this field of learning by encouraging organizations to build evaluations and assessments into the front-end and in the planning phase of projects, and by providing funds for evaluations as part of their civic engagement grants.

**E. Fund and encourage experiments.** Randomized experiments utilizing control groups are helping civic engagement efforts in three areas: program evaluation, identifying best practices, and informing ongoing programs. Conducting experiments before implementing voter contact programs allows organizations to choose the most effective communications and techniques to reach their targets. Although the practice is relatively new, there is a tremendous amount of useful information on program effectiveness being assembled. Organizations have worked with academics, individual evaluators, and organizations like the Analyst Institute and the New Organizing Institute to conduct experiments. Funders should support groups' efforts to experiment and to share the results and best practices with the broader progressive and civic engagement data community.

**F. Provide opportunities for ongoing training and technical assistance.** One of the key reasons that groups have successfully integrated new tools and resources into their work has been the access to support, training, and technical assistance. The presence of these intermediaries and technical assistance providers has greatly accelerated the pace for groups to effectively utilize these new technologies. It has allowed even small community-based organizations to have access to cutting edge data and targeting tools. These entities and aggregators have become an important part of the civic engagement infrastructure. They play a significant role and take advantage of economies of scale while providing needed services.

**G. Support efforts that encourage collaboration.** Over the past several years, a variety of entities (including state c3 tables) have been built by organizations and supported by funders to help foster collaboration. Individual organizations and their leaders understand that effective collaboration allows for integrated work, saves resources, and helps to avoid duplicative efforts. Experiences with collaborative efforts in other sectors are instructive. It takes time to build trust and for organizations to become comfortable collaborating fully. The first steps include holding joint meetings, having conversations around shared plans, and mapping where each organization is working. A second phase involves coordinating activities so that organization can change individual programs to reduce overlap, or carving up turf to ensure the same voters are not being contacted by multiple organizations. Full collaboration would include running joint programs, working from a unified campaign plan, identifying gaps, and developing programs to fill them. Supporting individual organizations' efforts to collaborate, as well as entities like the State Voices c3 tables, can help encourage and foster this type of collaboration.

**H. Monitor new trends and support pilot projects to test new voter registration methods.** New voter registration methods and requirements may impact and fundamentally change how civic engagement groups do their work. One example of an area to watch closely is online voter registration. Arizona was the first state to implement online voter registration in 2003, followed by Washington in 2008, with six other states following last year. Other states have proposed similar legislation, and online registration continues to grow in popularity. In Arizona, 25% of all new voter registrations took place online in its first year, and within a few years that number reached 70%. As more states move in this direction, funders should consider grants to pilot projects that allow civic engagement groups to test outreach and contact methods and share best practices with the civic engagement community.

## VI. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT SNAPSHOTS

As the chart on page 17 illustrates many organizations do exciting and meaningful civic engagement work that has an impact. For this report, we chose a small set of organizations that use differing methods to engage citizens in order to help illustrate the breadth of the 501(c)(3) civic engagement community. The following snapshots provide a brief overview of these organizations:

- Center for Community Change: Functions as an effective intermediary to support a network of community-based organizations that perform civic engagement work.
- Rock the Vote: Focuses on youth engagement and on-line voter registration.
- State Voices: Functions as a major collaborative and support entity for hundreds of nonprofit organizations.
- Women's Voices. Women Vote: Registers and mobilizes a particular constituency, in this case single women utilizing and innovative direct mail program.

## PROJECT SNAPSHOT: Center for Community Change



### Center for Community Change: Community Voting Project

Over the past three election cycles, the Center for Community Change (CCC) has worked directly with grassroots organizations to register and mobilize voters in low-income communities through its Community Voting Project (CVP). In 2008, the CVP helped 37 grassroots organizations in twenty-four states register, educate, and mobilize voters in low-income communities and communities of color.

The 2008 CVP operated in the same general framework as in the previous two cycles, though it grew in scale and scope. The premise of the Community Voting Project is that trusted local organizations who can leverage existing relationships offer the most effective way to engage voters in low-income communities, and that civic engagement work can help build the capacity of local grassroots organizations. In addition to helping local partner organizations build civic engagement capacity and voting programs into their work, CVP also introduced and made available state-of-the-art voter file and data services to their partners.

At the center of the Community Voting Project is a vision of blending community organizing and nonpartisan electoral organizing into a seamless whole that helps the local partner build greater capacity and power to advance their issues. As CCC describes it:

“The goal is not to win elections, but to win the more important battle of who gets to shape America’s future. Low-income people and people of color have been historically underrepresented in voter turnout. Our Community Voting Project equips these communities with the skills and resources to work year round to increase the number of people who vote and become fully engaged in American democracy.”

The Community Voting project, led by CCC, works with its local partners to develop comprehensive civic engagement plans, provide training on plan development and field work, and by offering ongoing technical assistance and access to Catalist data through a combination of the VAN and the CEL data interface tool that was developed by CCC. In 2008 a new Fellows Program recruited, trained, and placed 22 Fellows (largely young people of color) with CVP partner groups in 18 states. These Fellows helped to increase the capacity of the local partners and many of them stayed with the organizations following the election.

CCC’s approach to civic engagement work, and the focus of the Community Voting Project, is based on the belief that 501(c)(3) groups are committed to their community, and to this work for the long term. In many ways, CVP was developed in response to a history of partisan political efforts that would come into a community for a short period of time, close to the election, and in some ways “take advantage of the community.” CVP relies on a much different long term model. As one CCC staff leader explained:

“Local c3 grassroots groups are here for the long-term and they are from these places. So when you invest in c3 civic engagement work you are investing in communities so they can use these resources to elevate themselves. This is a vastly different approach than going in there and using the community.”

### **CCC Community Voting Project Highlights from 2008**

- Registered more than 113,000 voters during the 2008 cycle.
- Made 1.15 million GOTV contacts.
- Recruited over 9,000 volunteers.
- Catalyst records CVP contacts to a minimum of 555,000 unique individuals.

### **Looking Forward: 2010 Focus**

After doing intensive community-based voting work for the past three election cycles (2004-2008) and conducting extensive qualitative and quantitative evaluations after each cycle, the Center for Community Change is confident that its model is highly effective. It has also learned that making the work even more effective means working with its partner organizations to more seamlessly link voter registration and voter mobilization with ongoing issue organizing. To that end, CCC is going to intensify its support and focus with a core number of partner organizations.

2010 will see a continued emphasis on leveraging cutting edge lists and technology to advance not just civic engagement efforts, but the issue work of partner organizations as well. In addition, CCC will focus on providing an even broader array of technical assistance support to help strengthen its partner organizations, so that they in turn are in a position to help strengthen other organizations and advance the field as a whole. CCC’s commitment to linking all of the various civic engagement activities with broader issue organizing, and building this all around trusted local messengers, will remain at the forefront of their civic engagement work in 2010.

“Although the 113,000 registrations and the over one million GOTV contacts in 2008 were important parts of our program, I’m most proud of how our partner organizations began intentionally connecting their electoral work to their organizing strategy. The evidence and feedback from our groups is clear: The integration of grassroots electoral and grassroots organizing builds power! In 2010, we hope to build on this idea by focusing in on four to six key states to increase capacity and scale so that, over time, our partner groups can command the attention of decision makers.” - Rudy Lopez, Political Director, Center for Community Change

## PROJECT SNAPSHOT: Rock the Vote



Rock the Vote (RTV) is a nonpartisan organization that uses music, popular culture, and new technologies to engage and incite young people to register and vote in every election. In 2008, Rock the Vote (RTV) sought to take advantage of the presidential elections in order to animate young people's interest in politics and strengthen their commitment to progressive change, engage young people in registering and voting at increased levels for a third election in a row, and demonstrate their power potential to the political establishment, media, and general public.

On November 4, 2008, more young people voted than in any election since 1972 when 18 year olds won the right to vote. Nearly 22.5 million 18 to 29 year olds voted, the most young voters to ever cast a ballot, and turnout for 18 to 29 year olds went up 2% compared to 2004, while turnout for the overall population went down. While there is no doubt that youth engagement was in part fueled by the presidential candidates' reaching out to the young and traditionally disenfranchised in meaningful ways, it was also the result of work by RTV, and others, to register and engage young people.

In 2008, Rock the Vote used new technology, popular culture, and peer-to-peer organizing to engage young people in voter education and turnout efforts. RTV has identified the registration process as the largest barrier to civic participation for new and young voters. Once registered, young people vote (84% of registered 18 to 29 year olds cast a ballot in 2008 according to the US Census). Since only 60% of young Americans are registered, RTV's primary focus in 2008 was on voter registration.

RTV used an innovative online voter registration tool on its website to simplify the voter registration process. This tool generated a registration form for the applicant to print, sign, and send. RTV followed up with email and text messages to shepherd the user through the voting process. This online registration technology was given to all who wanted it for free. More than 2.27 million unique voter registration applications were generated by the RTV online registration tool. Seventy percent of the registrations, totaling 1.5 million, came from RTV's website and the balance came from partner sites who utilized RTV's online registration tool. Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and others encouraged peer-to-peer communication and voter registration on their social networking sites.

In 2008, RTV took their show on the road, reaching young people in their off-line communities, and giving them the tools to learn, engage, and organize around the elections. This included a 16-state bus tour ("the Road Trip") that involved 23 artists who promoted registration, education, and early voting. In its wake, the Road Trip left behind trained volunteers who continued the efforts.

### **Rock the Votes 2008 Highlights**

- 1.57 million voter registration applications completed at Rock the Vote's websites.
- An additional 700,000 voter registration applications from partner organizations, from CNN to Microsoft's Xbox.

- A combined 2.27 million unique voter registration applications were downloaded via their online tool, grassroots efforts, and the direct mail program, including approximately 500,000 African-American and 270,000 Hispanic voters.
- 5.7 million people visited the Rock the Vote website, 1.6 million signed up with their email addresses and over 200,000 opted into a mobile program.



*Jack Johnson at Road Trip event in VA*

### **Looking Forward: 2010 Focus**

RTV's work has shown that when efforts are made to demystify the elections process and young people are asked to register and participate they will respond. In 2010 and 2011, RTV aims to break down this registration barrier and ensure that more and more young Americans have the opportunity and support they need to register and vote, and ultimately have their say in the direction of their country. They also aim to expand their learning and impact, especially among Hispanic and African-American youth voters.

RTV's program will be national with a specific focus on five states (to be chosen later this year). The core programs that RTV will focus on in 2010 and 2011 are (1) voter registration, education, and turnout in the mid-term elections; (2) high school civics, and; (3) research and outreach. RTV's specific goals for this election program are to register and re-register at least 200,000 young voters in 2010; provide voting information and reminders to all RTV registrants (new and old), and to turnout young voters in the five targeted states at rates that exceed the 2006 turnout levels in those states.

RTV will organize targeted registration, education, and turnout programs in statewide and local races using models that utilize and build on best practices from 2008 and 2009, including on-the-ground organizing by Street Team volunteers, and an online Elections Center that will provide voting information, online (and other) paid advertising to educate and motivate young voters, direct mail and email programs to re-register voters who have moved, and mobile reminders.

"In 2008, Rock the Vote ran the largest nonpartisan voter registration drive in our history, engaging unprecedented numbers of new, young voters in the political process. In 2010, we will build on our success and continue our work to innovate new and effective ways to register and turnout young people, strengthening our democracy, and the building the political power for young Americans to have their voice heard in the direction of our country." – Heather Smith, Executive Director, Rock the Vote

## PROJECT SNAPSHOT: State Voices



State Voices is a national network of state-based “tables” where grassroots organizations come together to build power and leverage shared capacity and resources to expand individual organizational capacity. There are currently 16 state tables, or networks, that make up the national State Voices network. All told, there are over six-hundred diverse 501(c)(3) organizations participating and receiving support from State Voices.

In many ways, State Voices resides at the intersection of infrastructure, collaboration, and direct civic engagement and issue work. Through the 16 state tables, State Voices provides centralized access to resources such as Catalist voter files and the VAN interface, as well as technical assistance in using these tools. State Voices also provides direct support coordinating civic engagement efforts and issue campaigns to maximize impact and reduce duplication. In 2007, State Voices established clear goals that it wanted to achieve between 2008 and 2010, and the organization made substantial progress on each of these goals during 2008.

1. Vote Share Growth: State Voices seeks to measure its political power by examining the vote share of underrepresented and/or socially responsible voters. It has established a goal of a 2% to 5% annual increase in vote share. The analysis is just being done, but it appears that in 2008 over half of the State Voices tables experienced growth in vote share.
2. Diverse Usage and Leadership: State Voices has a long-term goal of both growing and strengthening its local partners and ensuring that a majority of table participants are serving low-income or communities of color. As of November 2008, State Voices had made real progress towards this goal by piloting organizational development programs and remaining steadfastly focused on expanding participation among groups serving low-income populations and communities of color.
3. Resources for State and Local Work: In 2008, 14 state tables granted a total of \$3,081,053 to their local partners, well on the way to the 2010 goal of at least \$5,000,000 for local civic engagement and issue work.
4. Costs Saved with Economies of Scale: State Voices has a goal of generating annual cost-savings of \$250,000-\$500,000 per state through shared resources. In 2008, State Voices estimated that it averaged at least \$500,000 in savings per state.
5. Experimental Evaluation: In 2008, approximately 42 controlled experiments were successfully carried out. This represents a dramatic sea change in terms of accountability and commitment to learning-based work.

In addition to these goals, State Voices helped its partner organizations achieve significant issue victories in 2008-2009. In Colorado a small, grassroots immigration rights organization was able to build a strong coalition that defeated a local anti-immigration initiative. In Washington State in 2009, the Win/Win Network (State Voices' Washington table) used the power of a diverse network and voter file technology provided by State Voices to help pass Referendum 71, upholding full rights for domestic partnerships. Similar examples of issue victories can be found in almost every state.



### Looking Forward: 2010 Focus

One of the most impressive things about State Voices is that they are constantly focused on achieving both immediate and measurable impacts in each individual election cycle, while simultaneously remaining dedicated to building long-term sustainable capacity. In 2010, state tables, supported by national staff and in-state shared staff and tools, will set and meet goals to increase the portion of the 2010 electorate made up of historically underrepresented or socially responsible voters in their states or localities by 3-5% over 2006. Through the use of benchmark polls, media tracking, and other means, state networks will also measure and seek to influence the growth of socially responsible issue environments.

Each state will conduct two to three successful treatment and control group evaluations that seek to establish causal links between organizations' work and the vote share and issue environment changes. Tables in two to four pilot states will work extensively in 2010 to train partner organizations to collectively set statewide "to scale" leadership training program goals, and to begin to develop field teams rooted in underrepresented and socially responsible communities. By the end of 2010, State Voices will have a majority of organizations that use the state tables and shared tools who are led by, or serve, low-income or communities of color. Finally, State Voices will generate \$10 million in annual collective costs saved for partners.

"Nonprofit civic engagement is undergoing an *evolution* and a *revolution*. The *evolution* is a strong and growing commitment to electoral work that complements traditional advocacy and constituency organizing. The *revolution* has come in the creation of statewide tables and networks that coordinate and leverage this work, using new technologies." - Ryan Friedrichs, Director State Voices

## PROJECT SNAPSHOT: Women's Voices. Women Vote



Started just four years ago, Women's Voices. Women Vote (WVWV) plays an important role in increasing the participation of unmarried women in the democratic electorate and policy process. WVWV has pioneered new approaches to voter registration and voter turnout and their program uses innovative techniques to locate unmarried women and speak to them about issues that matter to their demographic.

Unmarried Americans are the fastest growing large demographic group in the country. But despite their numbers, unmarried Americans are underrepresented in national elections. According to the U.S. Census, in 2008, 47.5% of all voting-age women were unmarried, and 57% of all women not registered to vote were unmarried. Fifteen million unmarried women were not registered to vote in 2004, and nearly 20 million single women did not cast ballots on Election Day. WVWV's registration and mobilization programs work to change that. In this election, 20% of unmarried women voted for the first time, compared to 4% among married women, and 11% of voters overall. Unmarried women are significantly more likely to be recent registrants than their married counterparts, 41% of whom registered to vote in only the past four years, versus 25% of married women.

A hallmark of WVWV is its willingness to test programs and share their research with the broader civic engagement community. This includes not only how to message to unmarried women and other underrepresented demographic groups, but also the types of programs to which they are likely to respond, and which individuals are likely to respond to a voter registration mailing or a vote-by-mail request.

Voter registration is a major component of WVWV's program. The first step in increasing the political participation of unmarried women is to convince them to register to vote. WVWV's innovative programs include a targeted registration program which is research driven—both in the methods used to identify unmarried women and the messages used to motivate them. WVWV takes the most up-to-date voter file provided by Catalist and matches it against several consumer data sources to compile a list of individuals they believe to be unregistered, and then they apply a marital status model to narrow the list to women they believe to be unmarried and unregistered. These targets are then mailed voter registration forms.

The program uses a pioneering approach to track nearly all the individuals who submit registration applications through the program. Utilizing these techniques, WVWV generated over 900,000 voter registration applications in 2008. Once these women register, WVWV continues to communicate with them to remind them to vote, and to send important information about polling places, election hours, and ID requirements, as well as the issues.

Based on data entered in Catalist, WVVV made over 30 million contacts to 12.8 million individuals during the 2008 election cycle. The vast majority (85%) of these contacts occurred by mail, while 10% were pre-recorded robo-calls, and 5% were live phone calls. Data analyzed by Catalist show these contact programs make a difference. First time registrants registered by WVVV turned out at a rate 10 points higher (76% to 66%) than new registrants. All other WVVV applicants (including re-registrants) turned out at a rate 18 points (81% to 63%) higher than the average registered voter.

“WVVV has developed distinctive research, registration, and participation strategies that rank WVVVs as a clear leader among U.S. voter engagement organizations; in three successive election cycles—2004, 2006, and 2008—WVVV effectively targeted and registered unmarried women and other historically underrepresented groups to vote.” - Page Gardner, Executive Director WVVV

### **Women’s Voices. Women Vote 2008 Highlights**

- 931,647 voter registration applications completed.
- Over 30 million contacts made through mail and phones.
- Communicated with 12,852,387 individuals. According to Catalist, 81% of the contacts made by WVVV were “unique,” meaning no other group or campaign had contacted them.
- WVVV new registrants turned out at a rate 10% higher than other new registrants.

### **Looking Ahead to 2010 and Beyond**

WVVV plans to use their list of program participants to increase the number of unmarried women taking part in advocating for issues that matter in their lives. They believe the logical next step for single women, after they register and are voting, is to play a role in advocating for issues that impact their daily lives. They are also working to develop an advocacy model to reach unmarried women that are not their program participants. This will help WVVV predict which individuals are the most likely to take some form of action around an issue.

WVVV’s civic engagement efforts in 2010 will be focused in three areas. First will be re-registering voters who have moved. This spring they will be testing a number of packages and approaches on mover’s registrations to be deployed later in the year. The second component will be continuing their very successful “Birthday Program,” which focuses on young people who will turn 18 on or before Election Day. The third focus will be on turning out voters that WVVV re-registered or newly registered, and those who have participated in WVVV programs in the past. WVVV will also continue testing and re-developing models, including a new improved marital status model, a new movers’ registration response model, a drop-off voter model, and a new vote-by-mail model.

“WVVV is working to develop groundbreaking and effective outreach and turnout strategies for unmarried women, youth, African-American, and Latino voters to ensure that those who make up the Rising American Electorate—those who are the most likely to drop off in 2010—stay engaged, energized, and make their voices heard.”  
- Page Gardner, Executive Director, WVVV

## VII. CONCLUSION

Grassroots and nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations play an important role in our country's civic infrastructure. Fully 12% of the voter registrations in the country come from c3 civic engagement organizations. Traditionally underrepresented communities, including communities of color, lower-income, young voters, and unmarried women are often ignored by political parties and campaigns, and lag far behind the turnout seen amongst the rest of the electorate. The 501(c)(3) community is uniquely positioned to help address this challenge, and is working through their voter registration, voter education, and voter-turnout efforts to more fully engage these underrepresented communities in civic life.

While more remains to be done, civic engagement groups have made significant advances in how they conduct their voter registration and mobilization efforts. Fueled in part by significant technological advances and infrastructure developments, these advances have helped organizations work more efficiently and collaborate with each other more effectively, and they have given the groups new tools to reach constituents and better evaluate their efforts to learn from them. Because of the determined work of these organizations, and the ongoing support of foundations and donors, the civic engagement sector continues to improve its work and contribute to civic infrastructure.