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# MOMENTS,



# MOVEMENTS,



# AND MOMENTUM:

*Engaging Voters, Scaling Power, Making Change*

By Manuel Pastor, Gihan Perera, & Madeline Wander





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While we hope we have accurately reflected the wisdom, thoughts, and experiences of those we spoke with, we take full responsibility for any inaccuracies and misstatements. And with that, we dedicate this work to all those who are on the ground and in the states building grassroots power through the integration of voter engagement and deep community organization.

– Manuel Pastor, Gihan Perera, and Madeline Wander

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# Executive Summary

The elections of 2008 saw unprecedented minority and youth turnout, with many newly-registered voters inspired by a charismatic candidate who would soon become the first African-American President in U.S. history. Four years later, many observers predicted that those who had been mobilized once would surely stay home, particularly given a lackluster economy, dashed hopes, and shifts in voting rules that made it even harder to cast one's ballot.

Yet in one of the states where the rules were tightened most—Florida—even more voters turned out in 2012 than in 2008. Among those showing up: Ms. Desiline Victor, a 102-year-old Haitian immigrant who waited in line for three hours to vote and was eventually featured in President Obama's State of the Union Address. But she was not alone: thousands of Floridians waited in far longer lines, determined that the hard-won right to have one's voice heard would not be stripped away.

That resolve was rooted in a long history of voter suppression (and hanging chads) in the Sunshine State, but it was also the result of a new model of Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) developed and practiced by a group called Florida New Majority (FNM). FNM was not alone in either adopting this approach or seeing "their" voters provide critical margins for progressive candidates and ballot measures: in California, a similar effort called California Calls helped develop and pass a ballot initiative that raised taxes, mostly on the wealthy, to patch a budget tattered by recession.

In some sense, IVE is not all that new: its basic argument is that voters need to be contacted and involved between elections and not just during elections. What is new is that it is being practiced now by state-based groups more rooted in grassroots organizing than in electoral machinations, more aimed at creating a permanent infrastructure for civic engagement than in electing any one candidate or party, more focused on seeing an electoral moment as simply one way to build a long-lasting movement that can achieve steady momentum on social justice.

In this report, we detail what IVE is, why it is important now, and how it played out in the state of Florida (with some comparisons to experiences in other states, including California, Ohio, and Virginia). As we note, a coalition of grassroots organizations across the state joined

**The basic argument of Integrated Voter Engagement is that voters need to be contacted and involved between elections and not just during elections.**



under the banner of the Florida New Majority (FNM) to carry out an IVE effort at scale. There was also a new—but not always easy—alliance with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), a part of the story that highlights the potential for labor-community efforts but also the challenges. And there was a new embrace of measurement, with community organizations adopting data-driven approaches that may improve their effectiveness in other areas of social change.

We suggest that IVE holds great promise for scaling up change. For one, organizations build up their contact lists as they knock on doors and in the year following, work to turn those contacts into new members who will turn out for policy campaigns. Second, IVE takes neighborhood concerns and addresses them by equipping community members to get the people and policies into place that will positively affect their neighborhood. Third, because it requires social movement organizations to reach beyond their own comfort zone—to mobilize thousands, not hundreds—it creates a practice of “moving the middle” through values-based approaches that can widen the base of supporters for social justice.

Finally, this newest iteration of *state-based* IVE is key because states are where the rubber often hits the road on national policy development and implementation. It is where those opposed to social justice have often dug in on issues ranging from marriage equality to immigrant integration. Indeed, the right has successfully used state-based battles to build and energize a committed base, shift public discourse, shape governance, and change the rules of engagement. And in recent years, progressive forces are following suit, building and linking state-based efforts to leverage new understanding of the common good and forge new face-to-face alliances to confront America’s challenges.

Despite our optimism, we see a set of real tensions in this work (after all, two of us are academics, and pessimism is part of that job description). The overarching tension is exactly the balancing act IVE implicitly seeks to address: How do you insure that electoral

moments turn into lasting movements for change? One key issue is the allocation of resources to insure that the gritty work of building a base is not supplanted by the shiny new toy of predictive dialing. Striking the right balance requires keeping one’s eyes on the prize of long-lasting change, but that is not always easy given the urgency of increasing voter turnout and quickly expanding the electorate.

Beneath this overall dilemma, we highlight five specific tensions that arise when coupling voter engagement with movement building. The first is *mobilizing* and *organizing*: Elections can sap the resources of an organization even though pairing this with organizing and leadership development can result in longer membership rosters and more powerful bases for fights between elections. A second tension is *tools* and *transformations*: IVE needs to combine the typical tactics of organizing—door knocking, one-on-one conversations, updating databases—with the transformations that happen in the heart and keep people committed to the work despite adversity.

Another tension exists between *pragmatics* and *principles*: In the pressure cooker of a campaign, the focus is on how to pick winnable issues, concentrate on canvassing efforts, and get out the vote, but a set of principles that stay constant over time needs to guide an organization’s frame for choosing strategic fights. A fourth tension is *partnerships* and *alliances*: here, the key question is how to insure that imbalances in power, particularly between labor and community groups, do not sink the ship before it has arrived on shore.

A final tension is between *interests* and *values*: With the newest innovations in transformative organizing insisting that values can help groups overcome division when interests conflict, doing electoral work that goes beyond winning an election to winning a mandate requires a new set of frames as well as skills. Strangely assisting in this effort has been the recent attempts at voter suppression: they have made citizens realize that the vote is not simply a tool to effect change; it is itself a fundamental building block of democracy that must be protected at all cost.

Based on Florida and other state-based experiences with IVE, we offer a set of recommendations—some for organizers, some for funders, and some for both. These include: having organizers step up their data game and technological skills even as they realize the potential of IVE to reach new constituencies and convert lists into leaders; having funders support innovations as well as base-building even as they recognize that IVE efforts will require a multiplicity of organizational forms (well beyond the 501c(3) constraints); and having those working in the field and those funding the field prioritize strategy over urgency even as they understand the new opportunities and pressing challenges, particularly with regard to combatting voter suppression and developing new forms for self-funding.

As the election results were reported in November 2012, many media commentators were struck by how the nation’s demographics had changed, how the electorate had evolved. That may have frightened some, but it has also lulled others who somehow think that demography is, if not destiny, at least

determinative. While we do not disagree with the projections, we worry that the challenges facing the country are too big to let them simmer while new voters slowly come on line; changing and expanding not just the electorate but the range of policy options will require a very conscious effort, of which state-based IVE is a crucial part.

After all, the new America that demographers are discussing is not really all that new. Beyond the changes in who we are as a people and beyond the electoral moments in which we decide on a candidate or a proposition, there is a more long-lasting and deeply-held value: In America, every voice is equal, and everyone should stand and be counted. That has always been a radical idea—and the efforts in Florida, California, Ohio, and elsewhere are really an attempt to make real the democratic promise, often unfulfilled, that has been at the heart of the American experiment.



# Introduction

The results of the 2012 presidential election were perplexing. How could a president with an economy in the doldrums, an energized opposition, and a sagging approval rating actually pull off a re-election victory? Was it the successful branding of the opposition's policies as handouts to the "one percent"? Was it the specter of "self-deportation" that worried immigrants and drove Asians and Latinos to the polls? Was it the efforts of sophisticated data mavens in Chicago who combined behavioral science with "big data" methods to facilitate a remarkably accurate approach to voter targeting?

All those questions point to reasons that make some sense—and all contributed to a minority and youth electorate whose turnout fell below the standard set in 2008 but not as much as many had expected. There was, however, something else happening on the ground that went beyond dynamics at the top of the ticket—after all, this was the second coming of Obama and in the prophetic words of B.B. King, surely the thrill was gone. What explains the resilience of Desiline Victor, a 102-year-old woman who was a respected elder in Miami's Haitian community, a retired farm worker, and a naturalized U.S. citizen? Recently featured in the President's 2013 State of the Union address, Ms. Victor was forced to wait in line for three hours to cast her ballot—but wait she did.

And her story is not unique. Voters all over Florida—and more often than not, people of color, the young, the old, and immigrants—waited for up to nine hours simply to register their opinions at the polls. Part of their determination stemmed from a sense that what was at stake was not simply the outcome of their votes, but the right to vote itself. And there was something else at hand and in play: a new model (harkening back to an old model) of mobilizing voters by seeing their civic engagement as extending beyond the

ballot box to being part and parcel of a broader struggle for social justice.

This approach, labeled by the somewhat clunky term, "Integrated Voter Engagement" (or IVE—try using that in regular conversation), emerged from community and labor organizers who united forces and embarked on an innovative—and, in some ways, intuitive—strategy: fold voter mobilization efforts directly into the deep community organizing work they had been doing for decades. Unlike the typical campaigns that pop up almost instantly to meet the electoral moment and disappear even more quickly, this organizing model considers Election Day as just *one of many* efforts to build a stronger national grassroots foundation for economic and social justice.

It worked with unexpected force and effect—and not just in Florida. In California, a remarkable multi-year and multi-organizational effort managed to actually lift the youth vote beyond what it was in the fevered election of 2008 and, in the process, secure the passage of a ballot proposition that contained progressive tax reform. Meanwhile, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative fought against voter intimidation in that state and brought together white and Black voters in a groundswell that proved critical in what many had thought would be a tight election. And in Florida itself there were victories up and down the ballot—not just in terms of candidates with social justice values winning in unexpected places like Miami's Little Havana, but also, for instance, in the successful blocking of a constitutional amendment to repeal reproductive rights.

The experience in Florida and elsewhere deserves both celebration and analysis—particularly because the underlying strategy about what to do before and after the voting was nearly the exact opposite of what occurred in 2008. In that year, the engagement apparatus that had been built up for the



election was essentially shut down, with its remnants given over to the Democratic National Committee. With no independent force focused on keeping a movement going, those fighting for social justice were left twisting in the wind even as the Tea Party emerged as a contender for power and popularity. If this time is different, it will be because organizers are looking beyond mobilizing for the electoral moment to the more long-term goal of building a movement.

This report examines the promise of strategic Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) efforts—particularly, those at the state level that can engage in deep organizing work and, at the same time, scale up to have national impact. We do this not with abstract theory but with specific examples of what has worked, particularly in the case of Florida. And we do it in what may be an unusual way: co-authoring this report with one of the main architects of the effort in the Sunshine State. Doing so allows us to bring in a particularly authentic perspective on what did and did not work on the ground.

We argue in this report that this season’s organizing was really IVE 2.0—a new and improved version that included elements such as:

- A highly strategic application of IVE at the state level that included resources for both voter contacts *and* organizing;
- A sophisticated data-driven approach to voter targeting and organizing;
- An emerging willingness on the side of unions to work with community groups by uniting electoral resources and working as one, in common or coordinated efforts; and
- A vision, agenda and organizing structure that consistently looked beyond elections and toward new levels of civic engagement that could build a united, democratic, popular movement between labor, community, and faith sectors.

While we focus mostly on Florida, we also suggest that these were elements of this newer version of IVE in other locations in the country and that they provide guideposts for the future. After all, we continue to face a highly volatile political period with limited resources and relatively weak organizations on the ground. The strategic direction forward will have to navigate a series of outstanding questions: Will the Tea Party re-emerge with rejuvenated

strength? Will grassroots movements once again fall short of the strength needed to hold political figures accountable? Or will we start to see a powerful base of people form to create the change we want to see at the local, state, and national levels?

The answers to these questions are not clear-cut. As Deepak Barghava writes, this is a “liminal” moment in which “aspects of very different futures are manifest in our present” (Bhargava 2012). What may be

clearer is that part of what happens is up to us: The organizing path we choose now will determine both our short-term realities and long-term futures. In our view, IVE—particularly when practiced by state-based power organizations—can be an important part of a more progressive path forward, drawing on the deep attachment people have to the vote, helping them see activism as an extension of that simple act of civic engagement, and bringing communities together in sustained interactions to see their common interests and interwoven destinies.

**Organizers are looking beyond mobilizing for the electoral moment to the more long-term goal of building a movement.**

# A Roadmap to the Report

This project is part of a broader effort funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies to strengthen the infrastructure for social movement research at American universities, which will help (and already has helped) deepen academic engagement with community-based efforts, leaders, and organizers. It also fits into an arc of work undertaken by the University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) on the nature of contemporary social movement building and how foundations can help in strengthening this critical part of the infrastructure for social change and social justice.

Over the last several years, we at PERE have interviewed nearly 300 organizations and individuals involved in social-movement organizing, gaining a privileged view of change as it is occurring in the field. That work has led us to define a "successful" social movement as sustained groupings that develop a frame based on shared values, maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and build for long-term transformations in systems of power (Pastor and Ortiz 2009). We have also explored the important role of alliance building within social movements, broken new ground by providing an evaluative framework and key milestones to gauge movement building, and written about the major innovations in organizing that emerged as movement organizations in Los Angeles sought to respond to the underlying crisis that triggered the 1992 civil unrest (Pastor, Ito, and Ortiz 2010; Pastor, Ito, and Rosner 2011; Pastor and Prichard 2011).

Now, following the 2012 election cycle, we are embarking on the next phase in our arc of social-movement research: how to fold elections and political organizing into the broader goal of social-movement building for scaled change. This project is special for us. It not only digs deeper into questions about

movement building, it also elevates our goal of community-engaged research to the next level: Rather than just writing *about* movement building, we have produced this piece *with* a movement builder. For this project, we had the privilege to reflect, theorize, and write with the widely-recognized veteran of organizing, Gihan Perera, co-founder and executive director of Florida New Majority (FNM)—a grassroots organization organizing in diverse communities of color across the Sunshine State to build collective political power through on-the-ground training, education, and voter mobilization.

To fulfill our goal of integrating community knowledge and wisdom into social movement research—in which researchers too often observe and document organizing efforts but forget to ask organizers and community leaders exactly what they think about it—we interviewed over 40 people involved in IVE efforts, focusing primarily on the work of FNM during the 2012 election cycle. The interviews included a broad range of players—volunteer leaders, paid canvassers, community and labor organizers, executive directors, expert consultants—from a variety of regions across the state, including Miami, Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville, Sanford, and Palm Beach.

And while we focused almost exclusively on the work of FNM during the months leading up to and directly following the presidential election, we also sought a comparative perspective through interviews with organizers and leaders conducting similar efforts in Virginia, New York, and Minnesota (as well as the home state for two of us, California). In addition, we conducted a review of the existing literature on IVE, social movements, and community-labor alliances; many of these references are listed at the end of this document and in a forthcoming academic article, we will, in proper academic fashion, discuss them to the point of exhaustion. However, in the interest of not exhausting those who might be reading

this report, we make only modest references along the way; suffice it to say, we read a lot, we learned a lot, and we have sought to apply what made sense for this project.

Unlike our other reports, much of the data for this project came directly from co-author Gihan Perera, who has been organizing communities and collecting stories in Florida for almost two decades. We facilitated that data gathering by assigning one member of our research team to follow him around the state and capture his various pearls of wisdom in real time. Gihan also made several visits to California in order to give talks on the USC campus, participate in debriefs of the FNM experience, and engage in intensive team writing. The co-authors, assisted by Jennifer Ito and Vanessa Carter, then engaged in several months of drafting, re-drafting, and finalizing the manuscript.

The resulting report is organized as follows: We begin by briefly expanding on what we mean by “Integrated Voter Engagement.” We describe the current political context for this type of organizing and note how the current IVE efforts build on earlier approaches. We also

suggest that the state is a strategic level at which to focus building political power through IVE because it can act as the gateway to both deepening grassroots engagement and scaling up efforts to have national impact.

We then dive into the unprecedented effort of community and union organizers in Florida during the 2012 elections who led a strategic, statewide IVE effort. We detail the work of Florida New Majority and note how their battle to restore and expand fundamental democratic rights for all has continued and evolved after the election. Along the way, we provide some contrasts with IVE efforts in California, Ohio, Virginia, and New York.

We then attempt to extract analytical lessons from the Florida New Majority experience. We first acknowledge a set of balancing acts that arise when merging in-the-moment electoral work with deep community organizing. We offer no easy answers to what we label a conflict between “moments” and “movements” but rather suggest that such tensions are inherent and unavoidable in the work. We then make recommendations for both movement builders



in the field and interested funders about how to best practice and support this work to ensure short-term victories for long-term change. Finally, we close by considering the implications for an America that is itself at a demographic and political tipping point.

A few words before we proceed. First, we acknowledge that we will never do justice to the full range of stories that we collected in Florida; we were often moved to tears by the sheer tenacity of those who wanted their votes to count, and we can only hope that we capture part of their passion and commitment. Second, we note that we are writing this very soon and very quickly after the election season; we ask forgiveness for any analytical errors such haste may cause, but we are also determined to lift up these grassroots lessons before the narrative of the election settles in as a tale of Machiavellian machinations by political experts and not the story of a 102-year-old Floridian determined that her voice be heard.

Third, we acknowledge the support of the Solidago Foundation in helping us to complete this report. While Atlantic may have provided the bulk of the funds for the research that went into this project, it was Solidago that decided that our vision of a solid academic article on the nature of IVE—we, too, can hear the yawns that might greet such a contribution—probably should and could be stretched into a more popular and perhaps more widely-read report. We hope that this report will manage to engage our audience on par with how FNM managed to engage the Sunshine State's voters—and that, as in Florida, this will lead to long-term rethinking and social change.

Finally, a word about the authors. Part of this unique collaboration between activism and the academy was made possible by the fact that two of us, Gihan Perera and Manuel Pastor, director of USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE), have known each other for nearly 20 years. They met when Gihan came knocking at Manuel's office door to recruit student labor organizers, and they solidified their relationship while working together to build a grassroots network of community organizers concerned with the local effects of globalization (Pastor and LoPresti 2007). So

it was only natural when PERE used funding from Atlantic to launch a new Visiting Action Researcher program—in which a movement organizer would be supported to write up his or her experiences—that Manuel went knocking on Gihan's door.

What we did not count on was the lucky (for us) involvement of Madeline Wander, Data Analyst at USC PERE. A recent graduate of UCLA's Urban Planning program, she had worked on the Obama campaign in Colorado and witnessed the office fold up promptly after they won. And like many eager (and younger) graduates, she was happy to travel—in this case, to make several trips to Florida to observe Gihan in his natural habitat, a vantage point that allowed her to observe FNM organizing and conduct dozens of interviews to get a 360 degree view of IVE in action. She also harangued both Gihan and Manuel (and others) into actually writing parts of this report, partly because it was her job, but mostly because it was her mission—to see if the lessons of 2012 could make sure that no electoral organizer would again be left frustrated with a mobilized base that was all fired up but had nowhere to go.

So this is Gihan's story and the story of Florida New Majority. But it is also Madeline's story—or how she wishes her earlier story had turned out. As for Manuel, well, he helped . . .

# The Rules of Engagement

## Why Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE)?

We think of social movements as long-lasting collective efforts to make social change which have an authentic and organized community base, which form commonalities based not simply on issues but on values and vision, and which effectively use geographic scaling to make a difference at multiple jurisdictional levels (Pastor and Ortiz 2009). This is a high standard—met by the civil rights movement, the conservative evangelical movement, and most recently the efforts of the so-called DREAM Act students—and it suggests that one of the primary challenges facing organizers is leveraging individual campaign victories to build a more permanent infrastructure of grassroots power for far-reaching change.

This is a key issue that has emerged in many of our interviews with movement builders over the last half decade. What has also emerged is that this disconnect between issues and institution building, between mobilizing moments and movement momentum, is often felt most sharply in the context of elections. Each election, after all, can involve intense outreach to get out the vote, but too often the scaffolding created to drive citizens to the polls is quickly disassembled after the ballots have been counted.

Indeed, this was the frustration experienced by many—including one of the authors of this report—after the 2008 campaign to elect the country's first African-American president. It was no ordinary electoral season and not simply because of the oratorical skills of the eventual winner or because of the simmering economic crisis lurking in the background. Among the many firsts was the fact that organizing theory was a key template for victory: Many of the campaign's staff and volunteers went through Camp Obama, a training session built on the precepts of

community organizing that was designed by famed organizer and now Harvard professor Marshal Ganz. The training introduced Obama proponents to the idea of building relations by translating the “story of self” to the “story of us” to the “story of now.” But beyond all the mechanics, it helped those doing get-out-the-vote work think about their efforts in terms of the relational work of community organizers.

The model worked at mobilizing an electoral coalition that seemed to cross traditional boundaries of race and class, generation and geography—and it was quickly shut down, leaving the one of us who had organized in Colorado (Madeline) wondering just how something that had been so beautifully crafted could be so quickly abandoned. The basic elements of the effort were handed over to the Democratic National Committee where the overall structure atrophied, and the result was a Presidency with no social-movement wind at its back. Thus, just when there was a perceived opportunity to move more dramatic social change at a national level, another grassroots effort—the Tea Party—grew to fill the gap and address the sense of ill ease as the economy collapsed, the government expanded, and the national mood soured. As a result, the politics of the country shifted dramatically to the right, and progressive policy change was frequently stymied.

While not the only reason—the idea behind blending organizing and elections has many roots—this frustrating experience has led to a renewed interest in IVE. IVE seeks to synergize voter mobilization over multiple election cycles with the deep and ongoing community organizing work—and veteran organizers and funders have been suggesting for some time that IVE can be a successful model for accomplishing both short-term wins and building long-term movements *at the same time* (French American Charitable Trust 2011, Funders Committee for Civic Participation

(FCCP) and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) 2006; The New World Foundation 2005; Winkelman and Malachowsky 2009). But before we jump into exploring the IVE efforts that shaped election turnout and results in 2012 and drawing what lessons we can for the future—particularly from the Florida experience—we must understand how IVE works.

## What is IVE Anyway?

Traditionally, electoral organizing involves episodic infusions of resources into candidate or issue campaigns and employs tactics like paid canvassing, phone calls, ads, and mailers. Following elections, resources for organizing, along with funder interest, tend to evaporate, which hinders organizers' ability to sustain movements for change. Quite often, the electoral effort grafts on top of, and generally disrupts, existing efforts, with little conversation or assessment of lasting impact—what movement builders affectionately call “parachuting.”

In 2009, the Funder Committee for Civic Participation released a report that described this relatively new concept in community organizing known as integrated voter engagement (Winkelman and Malachowsky 2009). It highlighted four community organizations (Ohio ACORN, Colorado Progressive Coalition, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and SCOPE in California) that were beginning to incorporate voter engagement as part of their overall strategies for community change.

IVE efforts aim to raise voter turnout, of course, but also to extend the organizing beyond one electoral cycle. Elections are seen as *one of many* tools within an overall strategy to build and shift power, and campaigns are seen as a key arena to build an authentic base—one that cuts across sectors and geographies, and one that connects constituencies and issues—that can then insert community voices in broad decision-making processes. Elections are crucial moments but not the totality of an organization's life.

The crux of IVE is the strategic intention to leverage important political moments—particularly, elections—to build a permanent movement-building infrastructure that shifts political debates, shapes public policy, and moves voters at scale to affect long-term change. By nurturing community contacts before, during, and after elections and by training community members to reach out to their neighbors in a continuous way, IVE represents a departure from traditional electoral organizing by translating deep leadership development into political power and utilizing political resources to scale up existing relationships and reach.

The good news is that IVE is not just a theoretical model for organizing: early investments have made on-the-ground experiments possible (French American Charitable Trust 2011; The New World Foundation 2005). And even before the 2012 cycle, IVE actually seemed to be working. According to the Funders' Committee on Civic Participation (2009), IVE efforts in different parts of the country—particularly, in Colorado, Ohio, Illinois, and California—had:

- Increased voter registration and turnout;
- Heightened awareness about election issues;
- Helped get more “unlikely voters” to the polls;
- Mitigated intimidation tactics to scare voters away from the polls; and
- Developed authentic community leaders.

Of course, IVE appears much easier to execute on paper than it is in practice. IVE can be a messy and, at times, tense process (which we detail in our lessons from Florida later in this report). Fortunately, organizers pursuing IVE have a bank of best practices from which to borrow. In reports capturing early IVE experiments, some best practices include: building long-term relationships, cultural competency, voter file acquisition and management, and strategic communications (FCCP and GCIR 2006; Winkelman and Malachowsky 2009). And the Progressive Technology Project has even provided a web-

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based Voter Techkit for doing IVE (see <http://votertechkit.progressivetech.org/>).

In recent years, these best practices have gotten, well, even “better.” Improvements in which might be called IVE 2.0 include polling and message development, use of technology to improve efficiency and scale, and clearer metrics and accountability mechanisms. Moreover, movement builders have gleaned and adapted these tools from electoral craftwork and adapted them for long term, sustained work. While we discuss the mechanics of these improvements below, our main purpose is not to provide a longer list of best practices but rather to argue that IVE is useful because it not only impacts elections but because it shapes the social, cultural and civic space between them.

## Why States? Why Now?

In our view, geography matters—a lot—when thinking about building and scaling power. We readily acknowledge the intrinsically local character of base building: We know that developing grassroots leaders in local communities through relationship building, training, and education forms the foundations for movement building. At the same time, in order to develop power to shape policy and politics, local efforts need to be elevated to larger arenas. Successful social movements are able to maintain the depth of relationships in localities and “jump” scales to present a much more powerful force and influence.

While an ultimate goal of such movement building might be big shifts in national policy—such as a more generous reform of our immigration system, a deeper commitment to job creation and social equity, or a more determined approach to environmental protection—it is clear after the last four years of the Obama administration that an independent, progressive national voice has not emerged that consistently shapes the debate and moves power at the base. Part of the reason is historical—this is a traditional gap in the American landscape—but it is also the case that many of the progressive community’s best and brightest went into

national campaigns, organizations, and the Administration in 2008, thinking the time was ripe for a national movement and national policy change. In fact, national ambitions were stymied by not having solid building blocks in the states. For example, as congressional representatives went back to their states during the health care debate, it was the Tea Party that dominated the discussion.

State-level IVE is not seen as a substitute for national power and voice but rather a mechanism for getting there. The states are a key battleground for ideas as well as testing new framing and new policies and for linking deep local engagement with pressing national issues. This is not a new idea—at least, not to the political right. For over three decades, conservatives have employed a geographic strategy that funnels allies into neighborhood councils, and then to city councils, and then to state legislatures, and so on. As Thomas Frank explains in *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (2005), the Right has commandeered American values as its platform, and through a state-based political strategy, formed a national “conservative coalition” across states. The conservative movement has also successfully used state-based power as a counterforce to urban progressive politics, diluting minority political voice in the process.

In order to re-set the political agenda, some progressive groups have begun building state-based electoral vehicles connected to values-based policy initiatives. Veteran organizers Anthony Thigpenn and Dan Cantor have also argued for creating a “national network” of such state-based efforts so that those fighting for social justice can have real impact at both local and national levels (Cantor and Thigpenn 2012). The state level is particularly appealing in an era in which racial and demographic change is, implicitly or explicitly, at the center of political discourse; state organizations, by their very nature, provide a scaled vehicle for connecting communities and racial justice interests so that they are better represented.

## Tipping Points and Strategic Pivots: California Calls

The Integrated Voter Engagement approach played out significantly in a state that had no “swing” status at all: California. Behind the effort was California Calls, an alliance of local grassroots organizations, focused on building “tipping point” electoral power among underrepresented voters and developing a policy agenda to address the state’s fiscal problems. It was because of California Calls’ efforts to gather enough signatures to qualify a Millionaire’s Tax for the ballot that the governor altered his own revenue initiative that would have put a greater burden on poor and working-class people. Once this agreement was negotiated, California Calls joined with a broad coalition under the banner of Reclaim California’s Future and gathered more than 1,470,000 signatures in less than a month to qualify the new hybrid proposal, Proposition 30, for the November 2012 ballot.

How did California Calls pivot to a new initiative and garner enough public support so quickly? It did so because of a four-part strategy. First, it is building a permanent infrastructure over multiple election cycles. As of November 2012, that infrastructure comprised of 14 anchor organizations and 31 individual organizations across 10 counties. Second, it is building the network’s technical and technological capacity to engage voters at scale. That means equipping each region with phone banks that have predictive dialing systems, precinct targeting, voter lists, and precinct maps. Third, it is shifting the narrative and messaging to motivate voters to the polls, enroll them in a longer-term vision, and ultimately countering anti-government sentiment. Lastly, it is building statewide collaborations strategically to create a new center of gravity for a multi-year fiscal policy reform agenda. And while the goal is statewide reform, its efforts allow for local hooks, such as having locally-tailored survey questions added to the canvassing and phoning efforts.

The strategy is working: California Calls supporters turned out at an average rate of 80 percent, which was 9 percentage points higher than the state average. Prop 30 passed with a nearly 11 percentage point margin, or 1,360,477 votes. In the weeks leading up to the elections, grassroots leaders trained through Camp Calls to target newly registered and infrequent voters to motivate them to get to the polls. Collectively, California Calls contacted over 415,000 voters of whom 320,000 supported Prop 30. Including Reclaim California’s Future efforts, over 666,000 voters were contacted and California Calls estimates that the voters it mobilized provided more than six percent of the ‘Yes’ vote—which was more than half of the percentage difference that made the difference.

Because the work is anchored in local organizations, the infrastructure is not mounted and dismantled for every election cycle. Instead, organizations continue to engage voters in their on-going policy and community organizing work by following up with supporters they contact at the doors and on the phones and by training grassroots leaders to engage voters throughout the year. Over nine election cycles, California Calls has identified more than 576,000 supporters of a progressive tax and fiscal agenda. Next steps are transforming these individual supporters into a more formal voter base, and arming themselves with research and data, a solid commitment by key allies, and a multi-year plan for tackling the third-rail of California politics – commercial property tax reform.

Sources: Thigpenn, Anthony, “Long-term Strategy and the November 6 Elections,” presentation at New Organizing for a New America: How to Make Electoral Organizing Count for Long-Term Base Building on November 15, 2012 at USC; California Calls, “California’s Calling: tipping the scale of the change,” [www.cacalls.org](http://www.cacalls.org), November 9, 2012; California Calls, “Local Organizing Turns California’s Demographic Shift into a Political Shift,” [www.cacalls.org](http://www.cacalls.org), January 31, 2013; and Huerta, Dolores, “Reshaping the Politics of the Golden State,” [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), October 2, 2012.



But, even if state-based IVE has the potential to transform grassroots activity into long-term power, why is it a path forward right now? We think there are five reasons.

First, while there is no denying that Barack Obama led the most grassroots get-out-the-vote effort of any presidential candidate in recent history, the 2008 campaign fell short of its promise to sustain a movement for change—which resulted in sweeping defeats in 2010 elections across the nation. As Thigpenn and Cantor say, in order to “ensure that 2013-2016 is not a repeat of 2009-2012,” we must pursue a different sort of approach and state-based IVE is one of those on the menu of possibilities.

Second, IVE helps shift community organizers to the task of “moving the middle.” Many organizing groups are neighborhood-focused and center their work on some combination of mobilization, direct action, developing policy platforms, and a commitment to leadership development. With IVE, they move from hundreds of contacts to thousands, an exploration that generates a re-look at their fundamental theory of change: building a following that can have electoral weight broadens the view of who has to be involved and engaged.

Third, voter engagement strategies also force community organizers to grapple with the underlying question of governance and real-life political power—areas that are traditionally left to groups who do “inside” work, while an organizer’s job is to bang from the outside and pick up the fruit. IVE is causing a re-shifting not just in electoral work but also in organizing work: to have an influence on governance, groups must confront the realities of which constituencies have political influence through vote share and turnout and the practical dearth of power and infrastructure amongst low-income communities.

Fourth, as the case study of Florida below exemplifies, there is an emerging interest on the side of unions to partner with community allies. Labor has traditionally had a strong electoral presence through its ability to provide campaign contributions and the mobilization of its members, including between election cycles.

But with rates of private sector unionization steadily falling, public sector workers increasingly the target of right-wing budget cutters, and immigrant workers becoming one of the few sources of growth for unions, the relative strength of labor’s political impact faces serious challenges. This is no truer than in the South where union density, for example, in Florida, has dipped below three percent in the private sector, and below six percent overall (Hirsch and Macpherson 2013).

New forms of organization are emerging, some from within labor, some from the outside, and a number of hybrids. At the local level, we have seen the emergence of networks like the Partnership for Working Families group of labor-community think tanks (such as the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy) that have crafted joint strategies to secure community benefits agreements that empower both workers and neighborhood residents (Dean and Reynolds 2008, 2009). But the new labor interest in community alliances was also profoundly signaled by the decision of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) at their 2012 national convention to work through strategic collaborations to make their electoral work more effective (Nulty 2012).

Finally, as the rampant voter suppression efforts not just in Florida, but in other important “swing” states like Ohio and Virginia, showed, voting is no longer just an organizing tool; rather it has re-emerged as one of the main fights of our time. Thirty-three states tried to institute voter identification laws, and many like in Florida, restricted voter registration, curtailed early voting, and challenged eligible voters in ways that produced racially differential results. IVE brings into stark contrast all of the obstacles and active roadblocks put in the way of political participation by marginalized communities. In doing so, it deftly re-connects the act of voting with the deep struggles of the civil rights movement, reminding us that democracy is hard-won and that civic engagement is key.

## Getting Souls to the Polls: Ohio Organizing Collaborative

While the lines for even early voting in Ohio were long, few can say they voted with John Legend performing live in the background. Ohioans not only had top notch entertainment, but the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) helped coordinate the “Souls to the Polls” initiative, so that church congregants could go right to the voting booth after service – with the motivation of holding onto the right to vote in the face of increased voter suppression. It is these creative and collaborative efforts, in coordination with registering 41,000 new voters and having one-on-one contact with 92,500 previously-registered voters that energized the more vulnerable members of the state’s electorate.

Every four years, the eyes of the nation are on fixed on swing states like Ohio to decide the outcome of important elections. Social justice organizations like the Ohio Organizing Collaborative capitalize on movement-building momentum to ensure Ohioans’ voices are heard—and their needs are addressed—in off-election years, too. The 14-member, 501(c)3 coalition is dedicated to transformative social change through racial and economic equity in the state. By uniting community organizing groups, labor unions, faith-based organizations and policy institutes collective action is achieved. Instead of galvanizing the troops to tackle unique incidences of discrimination, disenfranchisement or injustice, the OOC’s goal is to create long-term, permanent alliances for systemic change in Ohio. And voter mobilization is one part of their strategy.

Member organizations include Mahoning Valley Organizing Collective, The AMOS Project, The Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope, The Ohio Baptist State Convention, SEIU Local 1, UFCW Local 75, UFCW Local 1059, CWA District 4, The Kirwan Institute at OSU, Policy Matters Ohio, and the Ohio Justice and Policy Center.

OOC member organizations are united in multiple civic campaigns to create and maintain jobs with fair pay for Ohio workers, increase fair housing options and reverse foreclosure trends, provide leadership training for local community organizers, develop a statewide clergy network, protect publicly funded higher education, and create retirement security for older Ohio workers. In addition, member organizations have been involved in initiatives to curb gun-related violence in urban cities, including programs to aid formerly incarcerated individuals in community re-entry and employment, treat trauma caused by gun violence and increase civic engagement.

Sources: Ohio Organizing Collaborative, “Ohio Organizing Collaborative,” 2012, [www.ohorganizing.com](http://www.ohorganizing.com); Harris, Hamil R., “Diverse Clergy Group Launches Effort to Curb Urban Violence,” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2013.

# Making a New Majority Count: *A Florida Story*

Since the Funders' Committee on Civic Participation's 2009 publication, the field of IVE has evolved and innovated rapidly. State-based power organizations are multiplying throughout the country and becoming more and more coordinated and connected. Their scale, sophistication, and range of capacities and strategies have transformed the nature of the work and the basis of progressive power. And they have actually begun to win some key victories on the policy side as well as show strong results in terms of mobilizing voters to the polls.

A full approach to analyzing this new iteration of IVE—sort of IVE 2.0—would capture the experiences in multiple locations and draw a wide range of lessons. We do a bit of this through a series of text boxes that accompany this document and by allowing the nuances of different efforts in different states to inform the recommendations we offer at the end. But a complete accounting would result in a document that would be too long (to either write or read), and it would miss some of the details (and emotive force) that can be gleaned from a more specific focus.

We, therefore, concentrate on Florida and the experience of Florida New Majority (FNM). FNM is a good case study choice for many reasons: it is neither the most nor the least mature of the IVE efforts; it involved a new collaboration between labor and community that is worthy of deep analysis; and it occurred in a state where the politics are in what may be an unexpected transition. Indeed, well before this cycle, Florida was considered by PowerPAC (2012), the New World Foundation (2005), and the Funders Collaborative for Civic Participation (2009) as an important place that might actually tip the politics of the nation. And it is a good case for another really simple reason: one of the co-authors actually helped direct the experience while the other co-authors provided the in-

person visits and outside analysis to flesh out the story.

## A Moment is Not a Movement

On the night of November 4, 2008, hundreds of people gathered in the streets of Liberty City, a low-income Black neighborhood of Miami, to watch the election coverage projected on a metal hurricane gate. Never before had they had the opportunity to vote for a presidential candidate who looked like them, who could perhaps understand their struggles. Now, in this moment, they waited anxiously to see if their votes had made a difference. When the TV anchors announced Barack Obama as the next president of the United States, cheering, dancing, and fireworks erupted every which way. It felt bigger than one election; it felt like the beginning of something new. An overwhelming sense of pride filled the air: the country had just elected its first Black president—marking the dawn of a different, more inclusive America.

As the street party wound down and everyone went home, there was a collective sigh of relief—the fight was over, and they had won.

But soon after the election, organizers from the Miami Workers Center, who had been working to empower underserved communities long before Barack Obama's bid for the presidency, saw a familiar flight of resources to Washington. The Obama campaign quietly and quickly closed up shop in Florida. Nationally, philanthropic and policy expert attention shifted to the nation's capital, seeking to leverage what seemed to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make change at the federal level. Miami's underserved communities of color were left to fend for themselves—a pattern to which they had grown all too accustomed. In short, the notion of a

vibrant post-election movement that had been fueled by an unprecedented upsurge in voter participation seemed to fizzle instead into a moment—a historic and inspiring one, but a moment nonetheless.

We have argued elsewhere that the rush should not have been to Washington but rather to the grassroots (Pastor et al. 2010). The risks inherent in not shoring up the base were national, but the state-level implications became all too clear when Florida’s right-wing managed to energize an authentic and angry base under the Tea Party umbrella. By stirring up fear of changing demographics and a government takeover of personal freedoms, the Tea Party mobilized voters at such a large scale as to sweep the Sunshine state in 2010 (Fountain 2010).

It was a phenomenon that spread far beyond Florida, but, as is often the case, Florida managed to take things to an extreme. A newly-elected governor promptly began his administration with a program of budget cuts, privatization, and rule changes, including signing HB1355, the notorious voter suppression law. And while the shifts blindsided many progressives who were still riding the euphoric wave of victory from two years before, organizers and community members in Florida’s most underserved communities were not entirely surprised.

Indeed, even before the 2010 elections, many had realized that they needed to do something different moving forward. As a result, leaders from the Miami Workers Center, a grassroots organizing group in South Florida, and the Florida Immigrant Coalition, a statewide alliance of diverse advocates and organizations fighting for the fair treatment of immigrants, came together to rethink their approach to building political power. The leaders shared decades of organizing alongside one another and had experienced both victory and defeat together. One worked very locally; the other

worked at the state level. They knew that for change to stick they needed to mobilize voters across sectors and communities, particularly between immigrant and Black communities, to win elections. But they also had a deep understanding that the electoral strategy needed to be in service to their goals of movement building and building long-term political power from the ground up. So why, they thought, don’t we try doing both at the same time?

## Expanding the Electorate

From this set of discussions, a new political vehicle emerged that would integrate community organizing, an electoral power-building strategy, and personal transformation. It was quite a cocktail—social justice organizing and voter engagement had traditionally run on parallel tracks in Florida and had never been so intertwined. Yet it was more than

just a new approach; it was the cultivation of a new electorate—one that would empower citizens to take ownership of politics through voting and beyond. Such a bold goal required a bold new name—and so they called themselves the Florida New Majority (FNM).

FNM’s movement vision challenged people to imagine politics much different than the one they experienced in their day-to-day lives. It was

an invitation to imagine their lives if they governed—coupled with an electoral approach that provided the discipline and dictated what it would take to making that vision real. But the mix also required a new way for organizational leaders within FNM to be—and to be together. So, for a year, 30 staff trained with Social Justice Leadership (SJL) and generative somatics, both organizations dedicated to transformative leadership and organizing, on how literally to reshape organizations and leaders to imagine and be intentional in shaping a new movement.

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“The strategies that have gotten us here are not going to be the same that will take us forward.”

*-Burt Lauderdale, Executive Director of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (2012)*

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They also had to practice the basics of electioneering and get good at it. In 2010, FNM partnered with the Miami Workers Center and the Florida Immigrant Coalition and deployed its first field efforts to organize communities in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties around the U.S. Census count—to ensure that traditionally undercounted groups, particularly immigrant and minority households, were counted. As we have noted in a report on the Census count in California, this can be a start to movement building if done with an eye toward developing contacts, providing education about political decision-making, and providing a vision of why people should be part of the count so that they weigh in on those decisions (Ito et al. 2011).

FNM followed the census work with efforts around redistricting, then pivoted to focus on mobilizing those “drop-off” voters who are less likely to vote in mid-term elections (especially single women, youth, and low-income African Americans and Latinos). To identify “drop-off” voters, FNM and its partners combined its community organizing work with a sophisticated voter targeting model using data from the Voter Activation Network (VAN) voter file for Florida. Additionally, canvassers used smart phone technology when going door-to-door so they could upload results in real time, greatly enhancing the organization’s voter targeting. This was the first time that any get-out-the-vote effort had used this technology in Florida. And, their approach worked: In the precincts that FNM targeted, there was a 14 percentage point increase in voter turnout as compared to 2006 (Florida New Majority 2011).

But these local efforts were happening in the middle of a political storm. The Tea Party tsunami of 2010 may have spared California and the West Coast, but Florida fell prey to the far-right drift. Floridians elected Governor Rick Scott, Senator Marco Rubio, and Congressman Allen West, all of whom echoed the Tea Party mantra of small government and self-reliance. Conservatives held super-majorities in both the House and Senate, a shift that muzzled moderates and emboldened extremist elements. It became clear that FNM needed allies across sectors and communities statewide to reclaim a voice

in state governance. This would require an all-hands-on-deck effort.

## Connecting at the Crossroads

In the meantime, Monica Russo, head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199, and other SEIU state leaders—who had been experimenting with building power across union lines—came to the realization that they needed to change strategies to make labor’s voice more impactful, reverberant, and long lasting. Having lived through the aftermath of the 2008 election, in which the Employer Free Choice Act and other initiatives died without broad support, Russo decided that SEIU Local 1199 would do something very different this cycle.

In November 2011, Russo broke through the well-established division between labor and community-based organizations, and declared, “We are Florida New Majority.” Instead of setting out simply to win in 2012, they set out to “win with a mandate.” The intention was to build a ground force that would not only challenge candidates and elected officials to champion issues for working families and immigrants, but also to build leaders and organizations for the long-term work of holding them accountable *after* the election. As Russo put it herself: “We’re talking about our members’ investment—investment in the long term. Our members’ legacy here in Florida is to transform lives by empowering our communities to stand for justice, dignity, and respect for all.” So, SEIU took an unprecedented chance on a new approach, and put its electoral resources, and faith, into a partnership with FNM.

With less than a year to go, the leadership of FNM and SEIU embarked on an intensive planning process for the 2012 election cycle, and—departing from business as usual—they kept a strategic eye toward setting the groundwork for organizing in the days, months, and years to follow. But operationalizing this idea was no easy task. How could they carve out spaces within the inherently hierarchical electoral campaign to develop authentic

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“ [People] don’t know what exactly is going on in our communities, and they can’t know if we don’t make a voice. ”

—FNM volunteer,  
Jacksonville

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leaders that would carry on the work after the election was over? And, just as important, how could SEIU and FNM break from their traditional silos to truly integrate their field efforts?

They started by folding SEIU organizers into the transformative training with SJL and generative somatics that FNM had already been doing, which was designed to help organizers from the different organizations build trust with one another and collectively re-think how to build grassroots power. This training led them to jointly develop a highly innovative field structure that integrated canvasses, phone banks, SEIU member organizing, and a deep, volunteer-building infrastructure called Impact Organizing. With the expert assistance of Wellstone Action, the country's largest training center for progressives and one of the first organizations to push the integration of electoral and community organizing, the leadership of FNM and SEIU designed a field program that could use the electoral moment as a catalyst for concurrently building permanent volunteer bases as well as integrating the field programs of FNM and SEIU. To do this, they created a full set of political and organizing vehicles that they would use in combination to conduct genuine leadership development with, as Erik Peterson from Wellstone explains, "direct electoral benefit."

Specifically, this field program—called the Breakthrough Campaign—featured three tracks that worked in tandem: a targeted canvass made up of both SEIU and FNM leaders working together, a member-to-member track that worked inside SEIU-organized facilities, and an Impact Organizing track that worked with partners to recruit, train, and engage volunteer leaders. In theory, the Impact Organizing effort would draw from all three tracks and create a network of civic engagement leaders drawn from labor, community, and faith groups. They would be trained during the election to build a volunteer structure that, by design, would outlive the campaign itself; it would sow the seeds for a harvest that would come long after the electoral season.

Impact Organizing was an entirely new invention. It had fewer resources and lower quantitative goals than the paid-canvassing program—a program which tore through turf and numbers at an amazing speed. However, as an experiment, Impact Organizing held out the promise that the returns would continue long after the canvass had concluded. A new volunteer and leadership development tracking system was developed in the VAN database, and a curriculum around voter suppression brought focus and vision to the training program. The volunteer leaders were taught to self-organize meetings and to 'own' pieces of their neighborhood turf. Nearly, 4,000 people volunteered over the six-month campaign, and over 40 precincts, about 17,000 people, were mobilized solely through this volunteer network.

Another maturation was the use of different funding and organizational forms. Within the effort we describe, there were actually four legal organizations that worked separately, yet in tandem as legally permissible: a 501(c3)—Florida New Majority Education Fund—that did the non-partisan work of organizing and educating communities to exercise their right to vote; a 501(c4) that developed the leadership of activists and engaged in the endorsements and campaigns for local candidates; a 527 that did elections communications; and a federal Super Political Action Committee (PAC) that was engaged in federal electoral campaigns. It was a complicated arrangement but one suited to complicated times.

Of these different components, it turns out that simply organizing people to vote—the activity that one would think to be the least controversial—turned out to be one of the most profound and important efforts. In 2011, state legislators passed a sweeping election reform package that slashed the early voting period in half—a period in which communities of color disproportionately turned out to vote in 2008. Legislators also passed restrictions that made registering new voters more difficult, risky, and costly; groups, many of which had done this work on a volunteer basis, now had to register with the Department of State, get numbered voter registration forms, and submit the forms within 48 hours of completion. Any misstep would be punishable by law and pricey

finer—as one well-meaning civics high school teacher in Volusia County found out when she registered her senior students and then discovered she should have first registered as a third-party voter registration organization.

As the 2012 election cycle approached, state officials tried to purge over 180,000 of Florida’s voters from the registration list, claiming they were either non-citizens or ineligible to vote. While both the voter registration restriction and the purge hit list was eventually narrowed to less than 3,000, and then 200, it still struck a little too close to home in a state where Jim Crow ruled in the not-so-distant past. Concern and consternation grew in Black churches, on campuses, and amongst ordinary citizens who now could be under the specter of fraud. A number of groups stopped registering voters and became cautious about supporting voting itself.

But a funny thing happened on the way to voter suppression: There is nothing like taking away a right for people to remember how precious that right is. While state officials pursued these reforms under the guise of cracking down on voter fraud, many of Florida’s residents thought they heard another message: Someone did not want young people, African Americans,

immigrants, unmarried women, and other occasional voters to show up at the polls and register their opinions. FNM’s charge in 2012 was no longer to simply expand the electorate—it had become a full-fledged fight to protect it.

## From Suppression to Empowerment

By June 2012, FNM and SEIU had set up joint operations across the state. Canvassers—some SEIU members, some established community leaders, and some new blood—hit the streets in Miami, Palm Beach, Tampa, Orlando, Sanford, and Jacksonville. FNM’s in-house data analysts elevated the voter-targeting methods that they had developed in 2010 to cover all the major urban, and some suburban, areas. Canvassers used smart phone technology to update the database in real time—making it so the data team could produce more accurate walk lists in shorter periods of time.

And while the sophisticated use of data drove the overall voter-turnout strategy, the main source of fuel and fire propelling FNM and SEIU’s voter-engagement vehicle forward was the deep commitment of volunteers,

## Democracy in the Sunshine State

It was at the end of Florida’s last day of early voting at the North Dade Regional Library. Almost 850 people were still waiting in line; many more were rushing to join before the poll shut down. One voter arrived just two minutes before the line was to be closed for the night. Still in her car as poll workers made their way to the end of the snaking queue to stop anyone else from stepping in, she pleaded from her window that she needed time to find parking.

The poll workers said “no” but what happened next was quite remarkable (at least for those of us who have grown up in urban communities where trust is sometimes scarce). Catching the eye of one of the authors (Gihan) standing nearby, she simply stepped out of her car, tossed him her keys without a word, and scrambled to join the line without looking back. The car was parked, the keys returned, and a vote cast.

And in keeping with the principles of IVE—and the notion that there was something different this time around—she called the office of Florida New Majority two days later both to report that she voted at 12:34 a.m. and then asked, “What’s next?”

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“You can stop believing in the sun, but it’s going to rise and fall every day. Politics is just as real as the sun. It’s going to affect you whether you wish to believe in it or not. Believe in politics so you can make a positive change.”

--FNM canvasser,  
Jacksonville

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canvassers, organizers, and union members to make sure their friends, families, and neighbors exercised their right to vote. In Palm Beach, a blind man trained by the Impact Organizing Team organized his Braille Club to help people with disabilities plan out how they were going to get to the polls. In Jacksonville, on a day in which bus service shifted so that a young woman who had her fare in pennies could not board, she walked for over an hour and a half along highways with no sidewalks to make her canvassing shift on time. In Orlando, a retired nurse who had emigrated from Trinidad in 1969 went to the FNM-SEIU office every morning to call his fellow retirees and urge them to vote. This was the first time he participated in our country’s democracy, and he was determined to get others do so as well.

Beyond canvassing and phone banking, Impact Organizers held house meetings during which residents shared stories about the barriers to voting facing them every day: A Haitian immigrant received a letter saying she had been purged from the voter registration list. An elderly man was worried he would not be able to make it to the polls because he was no longer able to drive. An ex-felon wondered how he could make a difference, since his right to vote had been taken.

And while the tools of canvassing, phone banking, and house meetings were nothing new, there was something different this time around. In the office, in the house meetings, in the trainings, and in the volunteer shifts, there was a collective understanding that this one campaign was not going to alone change the conditions in Florida’s more underserved communities. As one volunteer in Jacksonville explained: “This time it seems as if people are more worried than normal, so they’re trying to stay on board, stay focused, and stay informed about what is going on in the future.” So, while they knocked on their neighbors doors to talk about getting out to vote, this time, they were also talking about how and why to stay involved *after* the election, too.

Still, there was immediate work to do, particularly as Florida’s polls opened for early voting on October 27. Since elected officials had slashed the period in half, and

since Florida had one of the longest ballots of any state, organizers expected even longer waits at the polls than before—and they were right. Between the first day of early voting all the way up to Election Day itself, FNM and SEIU organizers braced themselves for what would surely be day of long lines and voter frustration. Starting at 7:00 a.m., lines at the polling locations grew instantly. FNM and SEIU organizers went precinct to precinct, gathering vote totals for their data team, and checking on any potential problems at the polls.

While voters in other states experienced an average of 14-minute wait times, Florida topped the list at an average of 45-minute lines (Stewart III 2013). At some points in the day, voters—primarily in the urban communities of color where FNM and SEIU focused its efforts—were waiting up to nine hours, often with no food, water, or a place to sit—just to cast their ballots. But while these lines discouraged some from voting—indeed an estimated 200,000 of Florida’s voters gave up in frustration and walked away from the polls—others stood their ground, transforming suppression into empowerment (Peters 2013).

Ultimately, FNM and SEIU members contacted 300,000 of the state’s voters—which turned out to be key in an election in which the margin for the president turned out to be about 74,000 votes. But these numbers miss the real story—the one about the deeply-rooted commitment of FNM and SEIU organizers and members to the rights that their ancestors had fought so hard to get. The broad array of voter suppression mechanisms inadvertently ignited an anger about Florida’s long history of voter disenfranchisement. The leaders contacted and developed during this campaign became the faces of those targeted and the voices of resilience.

In the end, the election in Florida was not about the top of the ticket. Even after the victor in the Presidential race had been announced, the lines at the polls remained long. From the blind man helping others with disabilities vote, to the young woman walking hours to volunteer, to the elderly immigrant participating in our democracy for the first time, there was a resolved determination to preserve and



# Florida Freedom Charter

*We, the people of Florida, declare that too many of our families and communities face declining wages, staggering workloads, mounting debt, unemployment, homelessness, violent and declining neighborhoods, schools in crisis, unaffordable health care, incarceration, deportation, and isolation; that our state belongs to all who live in it, and that we cannot be prosperous until all residents enjoy equal rights and opportunities; that our success is measured by our treatment of the least fortunate, not the most wealthy; that we stand together now to insist that every family in every neighborhood has an equal opportunity to prosper.*

## **Public Education**

*We stand for equal education for all of our children. Education shall prepare our children for success, unleashing their full potential for creativity, leadership, and service. All our children deserve safe schools and small classes in which to flourish. The teachers who educate, empower, and challenge them should be well-trained and well-compensated. Adults who are motivated to further their learning should have access to affordable, quality education.*

## **Access to Good Jobs**

*We stand for jobs that can sustain our families. We call on all employers to recognize that all workers shall have the right to form unions, free from intimidation or coercion. Wherever communities are excluded from a workplace, we will fight for their inclusion. We stand together to demand that workers be compensated with full-time hours, living wages and affordable healthcare, a decent retirement, and that they be treated with dignity and respect.*

## **Housing**

*We stand to empower every family to achieve an affordable, livable, and secure home. We support affordable rents that provide stable communities for working families. We resist gentrification when it tears neighborhoods apart and prevents those working here from living here.*

## **Health Care**

*We stand to achieve affordable and comprehensive health care coverage for all. We insist that illness is not a crime nor should it lead to debt and poverty. We stand to support of public health systems that serve the uninsured and under-insured.*

## **Immigrant Rights**

*We stand for all immigrants, in honor of our nation's rich immigrant history and in celebration of the vitality of all of our communities. We declare that no human being is illegal. People in our neighborhoods have been arrested, separated from their children, and denied civil rights, simply for trying to support their families. We resist employers' attempts to take advantage of immigrant workers' vulnerability to keep wages low and crush unions. No worker's wages and conditions are secure as long as another worker's vulnerability is exploited.*

## **Civil Rights**

*We stand for the restoration of civil rights which are critical to restoring dignity to anyone who has repaid their debt to society. This is a dignity that is engrained in the right to vote, the right to work for fair wages, and the right to strive for a better quality of life.*

## **Public Transportation**

*We stand for access to good public transportation which is a lifeline to access good jobs, housing, health care, and services for many working families. A lack of good, affordable public transportation restricts opportunities. Public transportation is vital to healthy communities and a healthy environment.*

Source: Florida New Majority website, <http://www.flnewmajority.org>

exercise the basic right to vote. Voting was not just a way to win elections—instead, voting itself was something to fight for. And that single message signaled that this was really about the movement for fundamental rights, laying the groundwork for FNM organizing to come.

## Build to Win, Build to Last

In hundreds of electoral campaigns, smart and impassioned people say that the campaign will continue after the election, but it rarely happens. The difference in Florida is that there were structures built to track, recruit, and train people for the day after. In the midst of the campaign itself, volunteers were given responsibilities and challenged to take ownership as FNM tried to hit highly-ambitious daily voter contact numbers. And then when the ballots were cast, Impact Organizers followed up on contacts from the door knocking immediately following Election Day, and trained community members how to continue organizing their precincts.

But it wasn't just the tools of the trade. In every region, coalitions vetted and ratified the "Florida Freedom Charter"—a tool originally used in the South African struggle against apartheid and was first adapted in Miami by the local hotel workers union. The Charter declared the collective demands of disenfranchised communities across Florida ranging from affordable housing to accessible transportation to immigrant rights—all under the umbrella of equal opportunities for all—and further focused the volunteer training curriculum of the Impact Organizing teams across the state on a longer-term vision.

By building alliances across sectors and communities, using data and messaging in strategic and targeted ways, sharing resources to solidify unity, fostering a mass consciousness around voter suppression, and combining deep community organizing with electoral mobilization, FNM helped secure victories for progressive candidates, defeat divisive amendments, and make significant

gains for social justice issues up and down the Florida state ballot.

But where IVE may be paying off is in the days after the vote. On December 15, 2012, FNM convened over 100 community members in Central Florida to discuss what was next for Florida's burgeoning voter rights movement. The room was filled with volunteer leaders from Miami, Tampa, Jacksonville, Sanford, Orlando, and Palm Beach, all of whom had knocked on doors. They were union members, community leaders, organizers, DREAMers, ex-offenders, and many whose first political experience was the 2012 presidential election. The group raised every issue you could think of: poverty, youth violence, worker rights, mass incarceration, immigrant rights, marriage equality, gentrification, affordable health care, and more. But it all boiled down to one thing—the same thing that ignited folks to vote in the first place: restore our rights and expand democracy.

Two months later, FNM welcomed home Desiline Victor, the 102-year-old Haitian immigrant who stood for three hours to cast her vote, after she attended the President's State of the Union speech to Congress. Not only was she a featured guest, but the president used her story to springboard the issue of voter rights on to the national agenda. Now, FNM and the Advancement Project—a key legal partner throughout the entire barrage of voter suppression attempts in the 2012 election cycles—are working with Florida State Senator Oscar Brayton to pass a bill to protect voting rights and improve the voting process, appropriately named: "Desiline's Free and Fair Democracy Act."

If there was ever an example of scaling grassroots issues to the state and national platforms—this is it. The electoral work of 2012 not only actively trained and executed voter protection, it was able to pivot directly into systems work in the Florida legislature to fundamentally change the way Florida thinks about elections. FNM moved the conversation from election fraud to the assertion that voting is a fundamental right. It did so because it was not just built to win—it was, with intention, structure and resources, built to last.

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“It is not that I wanted to lose all that time voting for a Democrat; it was about being part of the democratic process.”

—Desiline Victor (*Francilus* 2013)

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## A New Southern Strategy: Virginia New Majority

In 2012, the work of Virginia New Majority (VNM) organizers and volunteers affected turnout for the presidential and senatorial elections, simultaneously laying the groundwork for post-election movement building. VNM's canvassers and volunteers registered 15,500 new voters and reached over 140,000 infrequent voters, focusing primarily on communities of color in three of the most important electoral regions in the state. VNM combatted voter suppression efforts by sending 183 volunteers to be protection poll watchers. And to build for the future, during the elections VNM held meetings—both in person and over the phone—with over 120,000 seniors to educate them on health care issues and to identify new organizing targets for its 2013 Medicaid expansion and voting rights campaigns.

According to VNM Executive Director Jon Liss, the goal is to “transform a slim electoral majority into a ‘political’ majority with a shared set of values and a vision about how society should be organized and run. This includes new conceptions about an expanded role for government, an understanding of the importance of progressive taxation and a redefined relationship with nature. Perhaps, most importantly, we believe in an expanded democracy in which public decision-making is deeply inclusive and participatory. We see our work as creating a new common sense for a rising majority that starts with African Americans, immigrants, white working women and white new economy workers.”

Since its inception in August 2007, VNM has launched Democracy Schools to aid Virginians applying for citizenship. It has run get-out-the-vote efforts in which more than 250,000 voters have been contacted. Additionally, VNM has led successful policy campaigns to amend a town's anti-solicitation ordinance, stop state-level anti-immigrant bills and voter suppression bills, and to prevent Prince William County from opting out of the 1965 Civil Rights Act review of redistricting processes.

While demographics are not destiny, economic and demographic changes have created new political and policy openings in the South. Virginia and Florida, followed by North Carolina and Georgia, are taking advantage of this opportunity to break the historic holds of conservatives in the region and to build power in traditionally disenfranchised communities. VNM's “New Southern Strategy” is to turn the South into a solid progressive bloc over the next generation that expands and deepens democracy, creates and maintains a strong public safety net, and establishes a sustainable relationship with nature.

Sources: Virginia New Majority, “Virginia New Majority,” 2013, <http://www.virginianewmajority.org/> and <http://virginianewmajority.wordpress.com/>; Vozzella, Laura, “Virginia New Majority Group Pushes Health Care, Voting Rights,” *The Washington Post*, August 13, 2012; PERE Interview with Jon Liss, Executive Director, Virginia New Majority, November 30, 2012.

# It's Hard Out Here: *IVE's Tensions and Tightropes*

While the FNM story is an inspiring one for progressives—partly because it made a difference in a generally more conservative part of the country and therefore offers lessons for those active in similar terrains—it would be a mistake to paint too rosy a picture of the experience.

Organizers had to work long and hard to create a vehicle—actually, a fleet of different vehicles—that they could drive together. The very nature of Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) raises age-old tensions between community and electoral organizing; between deepening engagement at the grassroots level and scaling up to matter in terms of vote share and contacts. So while we certainly celebrate the success, we co-authors share a trait common among activists and academics: even when something turns out well, we wonder if it could have turned out better.

In this section, we try to further that drive for self-improvement by identifying the inherent tensions in this work, the most basic of which is the difference between moments and movements.

Moments—such as the election of our first Black president in 2008, the mass immigrant rights mobilizations in 2006, the emergence of the Occupy Movement, or even the March on Washington—can create openings for public dialogue, temporarily shift the debate, and even catalyze concrete change in the moment. However, they do not necessarily hold people to a strategy, course of action, belief system, or set of values—and gains that are achieved (solely) in the moment are easily eroded and

rolled back if there is no organized power and commitment to sustain them.

The hard work of organizing—building strong leadership and an informed base at the ground level—must happen between the big moments in order to weave together a sustained movement. An independent, organized base is needed to hold people to a common goal, be part of an on-going strategy, and to stay on a course of action; otherwise, the moment passes, the energy dissipates, and the demonstrators go home—and stay home.

Partly because of this, we have argued that both social justice advocates and their philanthropic supporters need to shift focus from supporting specific projects or campaigns to investing in long-term movements (Pastor et al. 2010; Pastor and Ortiz 2009). While this is still our main conclusion, we acknowledge that creating moments is indeed critical to building movements (The New World Foundation 2003). And this is where the electoral work comes in. As Dan Cantor of the Working Families Party explains: “You need a way to reach the mass voting public and nonvoting public, for that matter, which is best done, like it or not, through elections. You never get enough people to your meetings, but you can get millions of them out to vote—that’s the beauty of the electoral moment.”

The promise of IVE is that it can combine those series of moments with efforts to scale political power from the ground up to affect long-term change. However, as Erik Peterson from Wellstone Action deftly describes, each goal—immediate wins and long-term leadership development—requires different resources, different time frames, and different intentions. This requires specific investments into the effective infrastructure that can do both—and being able to do both simultaneously is a bit of a dance, one that has its difficult and awkward moments, one that involves plenty of bumping

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“There’s just so much money in Miami right now [because of the election]. There are resources available to us now that won’t be available in a few months. And so we need to figure out how we’re investing, not just spending.”

-- FNM organizer

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into each other, one that requires plenty of practice before the steps are executed with grace.

The following section examines five dyads in that dance, each with a “moment” element and a “movement” element, all emerging not from our outside analysis but rather from interviews with volunteers, canvassers, union members, and community organizers involved in the joint FNM-SEIU organizing work during the 2012 election cycle as well as with others involved in statewide IVE efforts across the country. And just as moments need to be woven into movements, we draw the distinctions not to highlight competing imperatives but rather to illustrate how striking the right balance in each dyad is necessary to fulfill IVE’s vision of building powerful vehicles for long-term change.

## Mobilizing and Organizing

To affect an election, organizers must mobilize as many targeted voters as possible. To build organizational capacity and bottom-up power over the long term, organizers must nurture relationships with community residents and develop grassroots leaders who will take ownership of issues in the future. As we have described, the idea behind IVE is that if we invest in the hard work of organizing *in between* elections, then it will pay off when we must mobilize voters *during* elections. If the organized base becomes strong and vocal, it can not only set the terms of the debate *before* elections, but also hold elected officials accountable *after* elections.

This sounds perfectly sensible in theory, but it is much harder in practice. One tension between mobilizing for the moment and organizing for the movement emerges from the capacity and need to scale outreach efforts. Traditional community organizing has often targeted neighborhoods and has gone deep to build leadership. This, for the most part, involves reaching hundreds, maybe thousands, of people over a long-term period to build a base. In contrast, electoral organizing, even at a very local level like a city council district, involves reaching thousands, tens of

thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of people over a short period of time. The math alone makes it clear that the task of scaled voter engagement far outstrips the ability of organizers to build real relationships and develop grassroots leaders—even though these are necessary foundations for building long-term power.

This tension carries over into the very design of campaigns and the prioritization of resources—both money and time. During elections, there is a sense of now-or-never, and it becomes hard to look to the future when the present is so important. In the moment, the quantity of identified voters trumps all else—and this is especially true when funding is tied exclusively to electoral metrics. Consequently, as Erik Peterson notes, “All resources are going to focus on the urgent in a campaign, not anything long term, or anything that is considered peripheral.”

However, experience is showing that there can and should be ways to “set up” the long-term work while being highly disciplined at accomplishing the task at-hand. On the West Coast, California Calls has created ways for organizations to integrate their on-going work into the state-level coordinated electoral campaigns. For example, at the doors and on the phones people ask the same set of questions that relate to the statewide campaign, but can also add a question for their local policy campaigns, a feature that helps them identify potential leaders with whom organizations can follow up post-elections. Additionally, anchor organizations (or organizations that take on the responsibility of recruiting allied organizations, volunteers, and paid canvassers) now have access to predictive dialing systems that increase their ability to reach scale—and that technology can be used for their off-elections work.

In Florida, the key strategy was to build a model of volunteer-based leadership development and activation alongside a paid effort with the ultimate goal of cultivating trained and committed volunteer leaders reaching an increasing scale of voters. As an FNM organizer explains, “If we’re not able to hand over the responsibility of leading a community

or precinct to our leaders”—through deep community organizing—“we will have to do it all over again next election...it’s unsustainable, in terms of resources.” Of course, keeping one’s eyes on the prize was a challenge in the last cycle: the margin in key races was expected to be razor thin, and while the dedicated organizing resources were smaller than the canvass, the closer the election got, the more pressure there was to pull folks from their organizing work to contribute as part of the paid door-to-door effort. This tendency to draw down the organizing capacity to help the mobilization effort is typical and understandable, but it fundamentally hurts the potential for longer-term success.

The good news is that state-based power-building organizations are actively experimenting with these tensions and, in doing so, are adapting electoral methodologies so they drive towards organizing. Part of the power of organizations that stay committed to the work over multiple electoral cycles is the

ability to build a recognizable “brand” that becomes the basis for continued organizing. If organizers understand that electoral and community organizing can have a reciprocal relationship, they are more likely to find ways for mobilizing and organizing to feed into one another—as opposed to take away from one another—to build for the long term.

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“Everybody’s fully aware that during election season you get a mass amount of resources and then when it’s done they dry up. They also know that it’s not just the money that moves political actions, or issues, or justice for us, it’s them themselves. They have to take ownership, because if they don’t do it, nobody else will.”

-- SEIU organizer

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## Tools and Transformations

In the thick of an election, organizations need to pull out all the stops to get out “their” electorate. Tools to do this include targeted and often paid canvassing, phone calls, polling, ads, mailers, rallies, social media—all driven by the ever-increasing availability of data, sophistication of analysis, and a mass web-based communications apparatus. Certainly, the recent presidential campaign was marked by the development, on the Obama side, of one of the most complex, stratified and, most important accurate, models to predict election outcomes ever utilized (Parsons and Hennessey 2012). But this played out in state-based IVE efforts as well: FNM followed suit by using smart phone technology to update its database and field deployment in real-time—a tactic never before seen within Florida’s grassroots organizing.

While these tools were developed to turn out voters, they are increasingly being adapted to help make on-going organizing more data-driven. Polling is now being used to help shape messages for public policy campaigns. The tracking procedures used in elections are being adapted to help visualize leadership development activities and legislative contacts. However, at the core of this adaptation and deployment is the need for resources. Many of the electoral campaign activities are just not possible on a long-term sustained basis: The activities are costly, and the money dries up when election seasons pass.

Even if the tools remain available after an election, the spirit may not. As an SEIU organizer in Florida explained in the thick of the 2012 election: “It’s a question about [if] paid canvassers and leaders who are being paid right now, if they [will] stick around when they’re not as resourced.” To get them to stick requires transformative leadership development that converts campaign volunteers into self-sufficient organizers and life-long political actors. This requires making the volunteer experience one that builds their capacity, teaches them the basics of organizing, but also taps into their deepest sense of purpose. It is not just about giving them a script to use at the doors; it is about helping them find their personal story and

communicating their commitment to both the person who opens the door and their own social networks so that their engagement will be broader, deeper, and more sustained.

After the 2012 election cycle, the joint FNM-SEIU paid canvass had been shut down, but many canvassers remained on as activists and leaders. FNM also maintained a few organizers in each region to continue to work with identified leaders and is continuing to mine its contact list for members. FNM is also using more inexpensive phone technology to return to contacted voters, collect stories, and continue to identify potential grassroots leaders. FNM, in short, is using electoral tools for transformational objectives, something mimicked by other IVE efforts—and the very essence of leveraging a moment to build a movement.

## Pragmatics and Principles

In the midst of a hectic campaign, organizers have to focus on the pragmatics: Where do we concentrate our canvassing efforts? How much money do we need to spend on delivering voters to the polls? What is the step-by-step agenda to step up turnout this time around? Ideally, these immediate goals align with the organization's guiding principles, but sometimes they can come in conflict with one another. Immediate campaign goals tend to be narrow and reactive to in-the-moment politics and conditions. Principles, on the other hand, stay constant over time; they define the missions of organizations, and guide an organization's frame for choosing strategic fights to fulfill a long-term vision to strengthen grassroots communities.

Leading up to the 2012 elections, FNM organizers and members were very cognizant about the need to carry their organizing and political work past this specific political cycle. In order to position their election work into a longer organizing trajectory to build power, they were intentional about aligning their short-term election goals with their long-term principles of creating a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to prosper. And they

had to be very intentional because these two objectives do not get aligned by chance.

Specifically, by collectively ratifying the Florida Freedom Charter—the aforementioned document that outlined the tangible goals that community members want to see in their neighborhoods, under the overarching principle of equal opportunity for all—they aligned their goals and principles and solidified their commitment to long-term movement building.

So, while it is important to have defined and specific goals in a campaign or electoral moment, if immediate goals diverge from long-term principles, organizers have little hope of keeping leaders in the game over the long haul. In the case of FNM, the long-term vision of the Freedom Charter provided a framework for staying on track not just to win but to stay rooted in values and build transformative power.

## Partnerships and Alliances

Although alliance building is not a necessary condition for state-based IVE work, it is a necessary condition for sustaining movements (Pastor et al. 2010). FNM's experience—in which SEIU leaders took an unprecedented gamble by investing their electoral resources in a joint FNM-SEIU on-the-ground voter mobilization program—suggests that incorporating alliance building into IVE efforts can greatly expand both community and electoral organizing opportunities. In fact, nearly every state-based IVE effort has developed alliances and partnerships to further build power.

Of course, tensions arise when diverse parties—in the case of Florida, unions and community-based organizations—come together around a common goal. And even more conflict can arise when they try to maintain their alliance over the long term. After all, in the electoral moment, it makes sense to come together and pool resources for a short window: that strength exists in numbers is not lost on anyone, particularly when numbers add up to votes. But what happens over the longer haul can be more of a challenge.

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“When one group controls all of the resources, they can control everything—even when there's recognition that we need each other.”

--FNM organizer

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The partnership between SEIU and FNM was unprecedented. In some ways it was a natural fit: their respective members had relationships with each other as well as overlapping interest. And they may have little choice. When reflecting on the partnership between FNM and SEIU during the 2012 elections, an FNM organizer puts it bluntly: “Both sides knew not working together was just stupid and suicidal.”

But it was not always easy—tensions are normal when building alliances within an electoral context and more often than not boil down to resources and decision-making. One of labor’s strengths is that unions can bring resources to the table; indeed, they are one of the only institutions that can do so on behalf of working families. However, this means that they are both donors and partners, creating a potential imbalance of resources in a partnership, especially with less well-resourced community groups.

A key lesson for us is the need for transparency of decision-making. There are many different arrangements and agreements that organizations can make, ranging from more transactional relationships where each

organization simply executes an agreed-upon set of tasks, to a more collaborative structure in which both decision-making and implementation are interwoven. Any of these arrangements is fine, but we have found that clarity is key—and if the goal is for more future voluntary collaboration, then it seems that intentionally and clearly building in more room for collaborative process is warranted.

Indeed, as we mention above, FNM and SEIU anticipated these issues and worked with Wellstone and organizational development experts from November 2011 to May 2012 to detail the structure of their collaboration. The result was a hybrid vehicle of top-down voter targeting and bottom-up grassroots organizing. Given electoral pressures, the paid-canvassing program was significantly more resourced than the organizing/leadership development component, but it was a breakthrough to resource it at all within a major electoral effort. And both this pre-work and the ongoing structures of collaboration helped top leadership to stay aligned as they worked through mutual institutional problems grounded in deep trust.





A second inherent tension in translating temporary electoral partnerships into permanent movement-building alliances goes beyond resources; the tension between coming together around immediate common interests for the short-term and working through “uncommon common ground” for the long term (Blackwell, Kwoh, and Pastor 2010). During an election, it is easier to find a commonality—usually, it is a candidate, a ballot initiative, or simply shared interest in increased turnout. But, in order to build together before and after elections, alliances must work through the inevitable differences of culture and institutional interests while also figuring out the long-term vision and mutual gain.

As noted earlier, FNM and SEIU worked with Social Justice Leadership and generative somatics to help them do just this. Organizers from community-based organizations and SEIU staff went through a year-long process together that focused on institutional and individual transformation. The process began before the heavy lift of the electoral season, continued directly through it, and concluded after the elections in December. An intentional investment in such trust building and non-campaign development spaces is crucial to supporting the type of transformational alliances that are being imagined in Florida.

A third point of conflict is simply different approaches to organizing, some having to do with conflicts in style between unions and community groups but really more to do with the difference between electoral work and base-building. Elections by nature tend to have more highly directed, top-down organizing structures with lots of accountability, while community organizing often requires a more flexible and consultative style, often with “softer” metrics of success (Dobbie 2009a, 2009b). That tension was resolved in Florida through the multiple strategies of the Breakthrough Campaign—and in the case of California Calls, state-based IVE has created new systems of accountability between groups.

In the Florida, only time will tell if unions, community-based organizations, and others will be able to sustain an alliance past this one election cycle. It is promising, however, that at

the FNM leadership conference a month after the 2012 election, community residents and union members alike gathered to collectively plan for their next steps.

## Interests and Values

Community organizing has seen a dramatic shift in recent years. To slightly overstate the case, the traditional Alinsky-model of organizing was based on bringing together uncommon partners based on very narrowly-defined shared interests. Newer transformative organizing suggests that more uncommon alliances will stick if instead they are based on shared values *and* an expanded sense of common interest.

After all, you can meet your interests in multiple ways. If you want your kids to have a better education, you can work with your neighbors to improve local schools or you can figure a way to get your own child into a better private education, either through spending your own money (much easier when you have lots of it) or through securing a slot in a charter through a lottery. But if you value education as a fundamental building block of American democracy, as the way that our kids learn not just to be productive but to be citizens, then there really is only one path: you have to work with others to improve education for all.

In a society so highly fragmented by race, class, and geography, the risks of narrow interest-based organizing are clear. It often produces tactical alliances that are limited to very short-term concrete outcomes. It may result in issue-based coalitions with little ability to aggregate and sustain efforts around a strategy for fundamentally shifting power. This approach is at the heart of some modes of organizing, and it is certainly inherent in the way we think about and practice electoral politics. The

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“Pollsters and campaign consultants often develop messaging based on where voters are at — the most direct path to winning. Unfortunately, messaging to win often works against our long-term goals.”

--Sabrina Smith, *California Calls*  
(Klingensmith 2012)

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general notion is how do we persuade the median (or middle) voter to go our way, so that we achieve fifty plus one, win the actual seat or ballot initiative and worry about a broad base for effective governance later (if at all).

How do we make a shift to a practice of values-based electioneering that both shifts seats and shifts political culture? Certainly, the conservative (particularly evangelical) movement has done just that, with many progressives bemoaning the fact that certain voters seem to be not recognizing their own interests. But that belittles the intellect of those voters—what has happened is that they are motivated to stick with their values (say, around what “family” means) above what some think are their economic interests because they are deeply engaged with and derive meaning from their relationship with key institutions and organization.

One could argue that FNM leveraged the voter suppression efforts to actually reclaim a “values” platform, one based on the fundamental right to

have one’s voice heard. And it is certainly the case that California Calls, the multi-year IVE effort in the Golden State, has been explicitly targeting voters not based on race or ethnicity but on a more complex metric that emerged from social-values polling and identifying constituency groups based on commonly-held values (California Calls 2010). Rather than the traditional approach of talking about problems and policies, California Calls worked with strategic communications experts to develop a new story around government and taxes in a way that taps the aspirational values that hold the greatest potential for moving people in a progressive direction. As a result, the language used is not so much about California’s problems as it is about a collective effort to rebuild the California Dream.

While not inherent in the model, IVE offers a way to go beyond issues-based voters and create a movement of values-motivated voters. This is partly because IVE tries to develop deeper contacts and partly because IVE is being practiced now in an era in which the very act of voting expresses a deep value. Still, blending interests and values, interests and vision can be new territory both for those moving elections and for those organizing communities. But understanding the interconnection can insure that the particular questions movement-building organizations take on during election cycles can fall within a broader frame of social justice and equal opportunities for all.

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“One of the opportunities [of working with FNM] is organizing people around values. It’s harder but makes a difference...people organize when people lose their jobs because for them it’s the choice of that or not having anything. And so we have to make our electoral organizing about those personal choices and our decisions about the value that people want to have in their lives.”

*--SEIU organizer in Florida*

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# DrIVEing That Train:

## *Recommendations Going Forward*

Ultimately, Integrated Voter Engagement is a not just a way to turnout voters during big election cycles—it is a means to reconcile long-standing tensions between episodic campaigns and long-term movement building. But in order for future IVE efforts to succeed at their longer-term goal of building a more just America, they need to pay attention to the tensions discussed above—and in order for the IVE field to develop, funders will have to provide resources for continued innovation, experimentation, and maturation.

But while a call for more resources is actually, well, called-for, it is also a bit pedestrian: What set of authors having discovered a cool new thing would not suggest that more philanthropic dollars would be a useful addition to the mix? We think the more interesting question is a variant of what the youngest child present is supposed to ask at Passover Seder, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Funders and field builders need to ask, “Why is this sort of organizing effort different from all other efforts?”—and adjust their investments accordingly.

Below, we make a series of IVE-specific recommendations in three categories: building the field, funding the field, and shifting the field. We see the first set of recommendations as primarily aimed at organizers, the second at philanthropic leaders, and the last at what the two groups might do together (perhaps with help from other actors).

### Preparing the Ground

Farmers (and organizers) know that yields are connected not just to the efforts of the day but also to the longer-term work put into maintaining the quality of the soil. You cannot just shift community organizers to electioneering or election experts to the

slow steady drip of base-building. You need to build the capacities of groups, as well as the relationships between groups.

To do this, we recommend the following for those involved in building the field:

- **Get serious about data tracking and scale.** One hallmark of the various IVE efforts has been an attention to developing databases that can track contacts and connections. A number of times in this report, we have mostly identified places where technology is being utilized to shift how the work is done on the electoral side—but this has huge potential to transform the metrics of long-term organizing as well. This emphasis on data collection can be a cultural shift for organizers who may currently measure their success by the hearts they have touched and the minds they have stirred—but a relentless focus on numbers, accountability, and visibility is key. At the same time, we need to measure more than just contacts and turnout, figuring out new ways to track how those who were mobilized to vote show up for other protests or policy decisions as well as how to track non-voters, social media presence, and other key variables. And all this must be done to scale: Another hallmark of the newer state-based IVE efforts is the ambition to get big, make a visible difference, and then let people know about it (more on that later!).
- **Use IVE to reach out to unusual suspects.** IVE is not simply a way to engage those who were already showing up for events and elections. Indeed, its real promise is that it can help citizens move from the act of voting to the sort of activism that can change the world—and thus do the base-broadening that is crucial to strengthening the progressive movement in America. Whether through forming external partnerships, hiring in-house staff, or a

combination of both, organizations need to develop strategic messaging, framing, and outreach activities that can reach voters who may not be part of their “natural base” in certain neighborhoods, and perceived constituencies. The state-based power organizations we have examined are able to reach out to a much broader base—as in the campaign to shift taxes in California—while still putting directly-impacted, working-class and minority leaders in the center of the narrative. We call this not moving to the middle but actually “moving the middle”—not by settling for a middle-of-the-road politics but by reaching for new common values and interests.

- **Stay focused on converting lists to leaders.** One of the key goals of IVE is the conversion of a targeted percent of those who are on voter lists to the process of becoming active leaders in their communities. Ultimately, the vision of IVE organizers in Florida and many other states is to develop an active and independent base of volunteer leaders that can play increasingly large roles in activating other voters—and that volunteer leadership can replace paid canvassing in core areas (a shift which has positive cost implications as well). Like many things, saving money

later requires spending money now—and there needs to be upfront investments in training, deep political education, and skills development for leaders to be supported at scale. This requires specific infrastructure inside the organization and requires support from outside the organization. In Florida, this overall system was called Impact Organizing, and now it is focused on building the volunteer field teams (Freedom Clubs). In other states, the form of organization and the methods vary, but the infrastructure for going from moment to movement needs support.

- **Invest the time and resources to build common ground among those collaborating on IVE strategies.** As we have noted, the IVE efforts have involved significant collaborations between groups and sectors, partly because communities have needed to pool efforts and partly because they have teamed with labor. Such opportunities to connect across the usual lines of organizational difference are, we think, more likely in the future: In California, for example, mainstream environmentalists and groups rooted in communities of color have had formed new electoral alliances



to protect the state’s greenhouse gas reduction program and this has led to deeper discussions about the relationship between equity and sustainability (Lerza 2012). Whether it is part of a capacity-building, leadership development, or alliance-building program, it is important to take the time for consistent “strategic sessions” among a cohort of organizational leaders between election cycles or campaigns. Otherwise, tensions will develop even over simple things like language: For example, in the case of Florida, “building capacity” for SEIU meant a database of names and contact information and for FNM it meant new leaders who can continue to organize in different places post-election. Coming to the same language and goals is a time-consuming preparatory process, and groups need resources for planning the sessions, recruiting the right constellation of people and organizations, and bringing people together with a realistic view of what power each group brings to the table.

- **Make use of changing technology.** In reaching out to new voters, IVE efforts will need to continue to use and integrate old and new technology—like real-time database updates via smart phones, text messaging, and integrating voter data with social media. IVE efforts also need to become familiar with database systems that allow movement-building organizations to track voter contacts, supporters, and turnout over multiple election cycles. And finally, IVE efforts need to be quick to jump on technology that is coming down in cost and just getting within the reach of community-based organizations. For example, predictive dialing systems increase the efficiency and impact of phoning voter rolls—and have become much cheaper. Organizations should stay on top of any changes in the pricing and effectiveness of tracking and market segmenting software. More generally, innovating new ways of building relationships with a wider set of people—“moving the middle”—will require not just new technology and communications, but will also change

the way movement builders think about their overall relationship building and organizational structures. And these evolving forms of communication need to be tested and compared in terms of resource efficiency, impact, and ability to build broad relationships.

## Supporting the Field

More resources are always needed, but we know that resources are scarce and there are many competing efforts. We recommend the following for funders:

- **Fund IVE innovations year-round.** This is not a funding area suited just for presidential election years. The strength of IVE is its use of electoral moments to build long-term movements, which requires resources in all the in-between times. As the cases of Florida, California, Virginia, Ohio and others show, state-based power-building organizations are making significant breakthroughs in a variety of areas—not just in turning out voters, but also in creating scaled, systemic change. Some of these innovations include: building self-organized volunteer leadership structures like FNM’s post-election Freedom Clubs; adapting polling research to message more broad-based, data-driven organizing; using emerging technologies such as predictive dialing, mass tele-town halls, and text messaging to efficiently stay engaged with voters during and after elections; and working through multiple election cycles, as in the case of California Calls, to move a coherent set of fiscal reforms. As we are starting to see, the real potential of state-based IVE efforts moves far beyond voter turnout to actually changing the face of organizing and power building, politics and policy. And much of this innovation happens in between election cycles, rather than in the midst of them.
- **Recognize the range of legal vehicles being utilized.** Movement-building organizations are getting much more sophisticated about employing various

Now, voting is not only an organizing strategy but it is also an organizing issue.

organizational forms and legal entities to execute their strategies. State-based power organizations are, in fact, usually some combination of organizational infrastructures, including, but not limited to, 501(c)3s, 501c(4)s, and political action committees (PACs). They work directly with legal counsel to set up and manage the interrelated organizations to maximize their range of impact under the law—but they need additional legal and training capacity to appropriately utilize the range of tax and legal entities to fulfill strategic objectives. This also has direct implications on funding itself: While funders sometimes put the vehicle ahead of the destination, we encourage the strategic consideration of what is the best and highest use of various sources of funding. Increasingly, both funders and organizations have a complement of choices that they can use strategically and within tight legal considerations. The experiences in multiple states suggest that sticking with the traditional 501(c)3 get-out-the-vote framework is not enough to move change let alone expand an electorate that will be motivated to participate by an embrace of specific social justice objectives. We understand that not all funders, will be able to work the mix: Our simple plea is to not be surprised when your grantees do just that.

- **Use anchor community organizations as intermediaries.** This has been one of the key features of California Calls. It partly means giving the ability of such intermediaries to regrant—those who are deeply invested in place and in building for the long-term often have their ears closer to the ground than funders. Such regranting authority can also help grassroots organizations secure more respect, recognition, or parity when at the table with better-resourced organizations, like labor. Additionally, it allows the anchor organization to better align and structure efforts.
- **Continue to invest in leadership development, base building, and organizing.** This is a perennial recommendation for philanthropy—resources are always needed and most

frequently fall short for organizing. But it is of particular importance in this arena in that civic engagement funding is almost always tied to specific voter-engagement metrics. We recommend that dedicated leadership development resources be bundled with direct-engagement dollars to allow organizations to both contact voters and develop them for the future. With the adaptation of voter databases for organizing and the ongoing work of defining metrics for movement building, we are getting closer and closer to being able to effectively track movement-building data as well as voter-engagement data. Both the resources to invest in volunteer leadership development infrastructure, and the capacity to track and target leadership development efforts and their impacts should be supported. Moreover, the metrics should aim to capture some of the efforts at transformation that fundamentally change the political landscape by creating leaders with ‘skin in the game.’

- **Work with state-based movement-building organizations to develop new funding sources.** The most important resource can be self-sufficiency. While the Obama campaign was successful in generating millions of dollars from large numbers of low-dollar donors (and Howard Dean before that), it is because candidates and political parties are seen as the primary—and for most, the only—vehicles for everyday citizens to participate in our electoral democracy. Until formations such as Florida New Majority, Virginia Organizing Project, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, or California Calls are seen as legitimate institutions of democracy, it is going to be difficult to generate the scale of grassroots financial support that is needed to sustain this infrastructure over time. Experiments are needed to see whether those touched by voter outreach can become contributors to the resource base of IVE organizations. This has been the dream of many community-based organizations for a long time—but the scale, impact, and breadth of electoral activities make them a strong context

for the development of individual donor strategies. Here, the very developed strategies and techniques of electoral campaigns and fundraising can be tapped into as a take-off point for these organizations, especially as they become better known in these circles.

## Winning the Future

Building a new majority will require a network of institutions that can develop and channel grassroots power, shape a new common sense, and demonstrate a disciplined ability to deliver vote share. This requires doing election work with an eye toward that longer-term goal—and it includes paying attention to leadership development at the grassroots level, mobilization at the state level, and intervention in issues important to the debate at the national level.

This can only be done by forging collaborations between those on the ground and those with the resources to invest in the next level of this development. It also requires that we increase thought leadership and thought collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and funders—as we have attempted with this report brought to you by FNM, PERE, Atlantic

Philanthropies, and the Solidago Foundation. To both our field and funder colleagues, we recommend the following:

- **Recognize the strategic importance of state-level work.** Anthony Thigpenn, executive director and founder of California Calls, talks about “building power in concentric circles.” State-level power is one such circle and while IVE is not the only way to do this—there has been significant interest in other state-level efforts in recent years, including the State Voices project—IVE is a particularly effective mechanism for statewide progress. In general, paying attention to place and scale is key: Given the dysfunction of national policy-making, building a new majority will require a new type of organizing that touches hearts, connects constituencies, and provides evidence of impact—and this is more easily done further down the geographic scale. State investment should build the field, develop shared infrastructure, and support anchor organizations within states to ‘go to the next level.’ Whether it goes directly to state organizations or through national vehicles, resources should be targeted to build state capacity and organizations.
- **Poll and organize on issues and values.** Older forms of organizing were often based on issues of identity—and one sees much



of the residue of that in the ways in which analysts of the last election have focused on the Latino, youth or female vote. Our funding infrastructure can also reflect a similar slicing of the demographic or social landscape. What this misses is that Americans frequently identify themselves by their aspirations and hopes, not just their backgrounds—and this can be a successful bridge to widening the base. Consider the DREAMers who managed to capture a nation’s imagination (and persuade a president to pursue deferred action) by appealing not to their identity as ethnic immigrants but rather to their sense of being aspiring Americans with full fidelity to their own reconfigured American Dream. California Calls, for example, has organized on the basis of “values voters” and used a complicated set of metrics to determine who will be moved by what. More of that needs to happen.

- **Prioritize strategy over urgency.**

Americans are an impatient lot: Once we know something might work, we want to try it everywhere and in exactly the same way. We are convinced that IVE has great potential, particularly if done statewide, but we also know that we need more experiments and more time to strategically develop the practice. We referred early to the famous book about the rise of the conservative evangelical movement, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (Frank 2005). The right had a patient and strategic approach to building power that included erecting a broad infrastructure of supporting institutions and taking on issues only when the time was right. Despite pressing needs, we will have to sometimes wait (as in California, where the victory in raising taxes in the short-run has prompted demands for more and quickly, and a wise response from key organizers that the ground for reform must be laid carefully and over time).

- **Make the case for IVE.** This is exactly what we are doing here—but more of it needs to be done. This will require raising awareness among traditional media

outlets so that the work gets reported and recognized, something that will make it easier to recruit people and get them to financially support such efforts. It will also require more careful attention to multiple forms of evaluations, ones that capture the increase in turnout but also demonstrate the qualitative differences in leadership and alliances. Funders need to be convinced, to be sure, but so do others: movement builders, some of whom are still reluctant about methodological electoral work, hard-nosed politicos who scoff at the need for base-building, and most importantly, community members whom we must move to get jazzed by citizenship—and convinced that it goes beyond ballots to civic engagement at all levels.

- **Protect the vote itself.** As the country’s demographics continue to change, skewing younger, to people of color, and towards those who value inclusion and diversity as well as innovation, some political and civic leaders have graciously adapted and bent to the new realities. Others have sought to change the subject by changing the subjects—that is, to suppress the vote but people are seeing this for what it is. What was once a mainstay of the civil rights movement has come back as a central trope for IVE: once again, voting is not only an organizing strategy (a tool) but is also an organizing issue (a goal). Protecting the vote will require legal advocacy, policy strategies, and organizing. This combination of capacities is already making strides in some of the most targeted states like Ohio and Florida where the Advancement Project is teaming up with organizations in the state. The strategy must be diverse—looking for policy advances, the right fights, and the best combination of aspirational demands and concrete changes that make for a more robust democracy.



# Conclusion:

## *Coming to (the New) America?*

For those of us who have studied the nation's changing demographics, the night of the election was a sort of out-of-body experience: Talking heads filled the news channels remarking with great surprise that the country's ethnic composition had changed. Meant to impart a sense of new insights, instead it came off as an unconscious admission that the national media simply had not been paying attention.

However, even we will admit that we did not expect that the shift to a majority-minority nation, now slated to occur in 2043, would have such significant political impact so soon. The results have motivated some positive change in the public tone—helping to trigger, for example, a new-found interest in immigration reform as well as seemingly obvious advice to certain political figures that railing at “illegals” might not be a rhetorical winner.

At the same time, the coming changes may have caused a lull for some who think that demographics is destiny. For these analysts, the notion is that a new America is coming—and with it, a progressive constituency just lying in wait; as they see it, we simply need to get through the next few election cycles to witness a more far-reaching shift in our structures of opportunity and success.

We think that this view is wrong for two reasons. First, time is of the essence: significant policy damage can be done between now and then, with permanent effects that would curtail our nation's future. Second, values matter: there is no way to be sure which

policy direction the country's newer voters might swing, and whether they embrace social justice and broader opportunities or simply their own self-interests. This will depend on the habits of civic engagement that they acquire now.

This report has argued that Integrated Voter Engagement (IVE) at the state level is one way

to make change in real time *and* fundamentally transform the nature of civic engagement. Coupling electoral organizing with long-term power-building and constituency development, IVE is intended to make sure that the “moment” of voting intertwines with the ambition to create a broader “movement” that can secure a more inclusive America.

We acknowledge, of course, that IVE is not something birthed just in time for the 2012 election; in a forthcoming academic article (replete with all the citations eschewed in this report), we review a bit of the history, both in the world and in the literature. And even in this cycle, it was not just the state-level efforts we discuss here that made all the difference: There is now a developed donor infrastructure for state investment nationally and many states have developed data capacities, field operations, and good coordination

mechanisms between funding streams (we're shouting out at you, State Voices and America Votes).

But, there is certainly something new and exciting about the version of Integrated Voter Engagement we have discussed here. Sprouting from the ground up rather than

Integrated Voter Engagement is intended to make sure that the “moment” of voting intertwines with the ambition to create a broader “movement” that can secure a more inclusive America.

from the top down, IVE is a way to scale the progressive ground game of deep community organizing to the state and national levels. It is a way to reconcile decades-long hopes of social justice and racial equality with one of our major tools for change and one of our major platforms for civic discussion: elections.

As we were completing this report, Miami-Dade County Commissioners named February 13th as Ms. Desilve Victor day in honor of her commitment to vote. She deserves the nod, but she was not alone: thousands of others persevered this Election Day, refusing to leave until they registered their opinions at the polls. Voting was not simply a means, it was an end in-and-of-itself; people voted, not necessarily for a particular candidate, but simply, to vote.

And while this might lead some to cynicism—thinking that the progress of the Civil Rights

movement has been rolled back and we are simply reclaiming old ground—we read it another way: With our nation’s changing demographics, the invigorating energy of immigrants, and the emergence of new community-labor alliances, this may be the time to actualize the hopes of those who marched to expand and secure the rights.

For the new America is not all that new. Beyond the changes in who we are as a people and beyond the electoral moments in which we decide on a candidate or a proposition, is a deeper sense—that in America, every voice is equal, and everyone should stand and be counted. That has always been a radical idea—and the efforts in Florida, California, Ohio, and elsewhere are an attempt to make real the democratic promise, often unfulfilled, that has been at the heart of the American experiment.



# List of Interviewees

**Danilo Balladares**

Regional Field Organizer, Florida New Majority

**Xochitl Bervera**

Program Coordinator, Social Justice Leadership

**Eric Brakken**

Director of Florida District, SEIU Local 32BJ

**Andre Broussard**

Central Florida Organizer, Florida New Majority

**Dan Cantor**

Executive Director, Working Families Party

**Isaac Carter**

Chief of Staff, Florida New Majority

**Anne Chernin**

former Palm Beach Regional Coordinator,  
Florida New Majority

**Badili Jones**

Program Coordinator, Florida New Majority  
Education Fund

**Coy Jones**

Orlando Organizer, SEIU Local 1199

**Jon Liss**

Executive Director, Virginia New Majority

**Alphonso Mayfield**

President, SEIU Florida Public Services Union

**Roxey Nelson**

Political Director, SEIU Local 1199

**Angie Nixon**

Jacksonville Regional Coordinator, Florida New  
Majority

**Serena Perez**

Interim Field Director, Florida New Majority

**Erik Peterson**

Director of Strategic Initiatives and Labor  
Program, Wellstone Action

**Anne Pierre**

Palm Beach Regional Organizer, Florida New  
Majority

**Jonathan Rodrigues**

Impact Organizer, Florida New Majority,  
Brazilian Cultural Center

**Annie Rodriguez**

Impact Organizer, Florida New Majority,

**Juan Sousa-Rodriguez**

Central Florida Youth Organizer, Florida  
Immigrant Coalition

**Maria Rodriguez**

Executive Director, Florida Immigrant Coalition

**Monica Russo**

Executive Vice President, SEIU Local 1199

**Rick Smith**

Chief of Staff, SEIU Florida Public Services  
Union

**Wendi Walsh**

President, UNITE HERE Local 355

**Hashim Yeomans-Benford**

Lead Organizer, Miami Workers Center

**Martina Bryant**

Organizer, Florida New Majority, Board Member,  
Leader

**Canvassers and Volunteers:**

Nikita Alexander (Jacksonville)

Devon Coleman (Jacksonville)

Hati Coleman (Miami)

Keren Frederick (Miami)

Shantee Hall (Sanford)

Justin Jones (Orlando)

Emma Ladson (Miami)

Howard Patrick (Orlando)

Harold Pendas (Miami)

Orlando Reyes (Jacksonville)

Chloe Bedenbaugh (Palm Beach)

Ricky Troiano (Palm Beach)

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950 W. Jefferson Blvd., JEF 102  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-1291

E: [pere@dornsife.usc.edu](mailto:pere@dornsife.usc.edu)  
W: <http://dornsife.usc.edu>  
P: 213.821.1325