

A Framework for IVE

The goal of Integrated Voter Engagement is to build powerful year-round organizations in key cities and states that have an organized and growing constituency of people who register to vote, turnout to vote, mobilize others into political activity, and hold their elected officials accountable through issue campaigns and public action between elections. This constituency is the source of the organization's power to expand the electorate, to move bold issue agendas, to shape a humanized values-based public narrative, and to ultimately build the power to change the rules of our democracy in ways that deliver maximum benefits to working people. In most states there are a handful of constituent-based political organizations responsible for the majority of the voter engagement, issue campaigns, democracy reform and earned media work across a whole range of economic and social equality issues, from raising the minimum wage and winning paid sick time for workers, to fighting for immigration reform and sentencing reform, to pushing back budget cuts and generating new sources of revenue.



Fundamentally, integrated voter engagement is:

1. **Organizing a deep base of constituents into year-round power organizations:** through institutional and neighborhood recruitment, trainings, relational work, leadership development and public action
2. **Leading that base to engage, motivate and mobilize the broader electorate:** through voter registration, petition/signature gathering, conversations with voters, voter turnout efforts and mass public meetings with public officials
3. **Shifting the public narrative:** by creating values-driven moral narratives, developing authentic local spokespeople, and moving those narratives through direct voter engagement, earned and paid media, as well as grasstops and elite organizing strategies

4. **Leading strategic issue campaigns:** in ways that create new precedent, embolden elected leaders to strive for a higher standard, create a motivational issue environment that incentivizes voting, and deliver concrete and substantive improvements in constituents' lives
5. **Shaping the rules of the game:** the ultimate goal of constituent power organizations is democracy reform that ensures equality of voice in both voting and governance so that future issue wins that benefit large numbers of people are easier to achieve.

The key to successful IVE is investing in growing the underlying constituency of an organization on which its power and capacity to turnout voters and to lead successful issue campaigns rests. This foundational work of moving people into well-run organizations requires trained organizers who recruit social networks through faith congregations, schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods, training leaders in those networks to lead teams of volunteers, and coaching them in an ongoing basis to develop their political acumen, their ability to build and move their own base, and their skill at moving issue campaigns. This work of building an organized constituency is often underfinanced. The result is that organizations can end up expanding rapidly at key election and issue campaign moments and then quickly losing that capacity when the election or campaign is over and staff are let go. Without funding for constituency building, organizations can end up bouncing from issue to issue without growing the infrastructure and organizational capacity to win the next fight. The goal of IVE is build a dense network of volunteers, organized by skilled staff, who identify with the organization and are involved as members throughout the year and across multiple cycles.

Our research seeks to identify the best strategies and tactics for growing the capacity of our own and others' organizations to do IVE effectively year in and year out.

Return on Investment

The value of investing in IVE in independent constituent power organizations is that they can hold, nurture and deploy the deep social networks that determine political behavior, whether that results in voting, or calling a legislator, or engaging in a public mass meeting with an elected official. For example, in 2012 PICO's Missouri federation in Kansas City, Communities Creating Opportunity, collected petition signatures to put minimum wage and a cap on payday lending on the ballot. In 2013 CCO called people who had signed those petitions the year before and asked them to call their legislators to support Medicaid expansion. The response rate of people calling their legislators far exceeded typical phone banks. Similarly in 2014, CAFÉ in Las Cruces, New Mexico collected petitions to put an increased minimum wage on the city ballot. Since the number of petitions they collected was larger than the Mayor's margin of victory, or the entire votes garnered by any one city councilor, those elected officials sat up, took notice, and decided to legislate a minimum wage increase themselves that was large enough for all Las Cruces workers to be able to rent what HUD would consider affordable housing—a key indicator of decreased poverty.¹ In the first three months after the election, 248 out of 6000 petition signers joined CAFÉ trainings and actions who had never before participated in CAFÉ, and CAFÉ organizers have been calling and engaging the other signers to develop their capacity to take action themselves, and to move their social networks into action on future issue campaigns. This is the goal of IVE—to mobilize voters through elections who are moved to greater and greater levels of civic participation through constituent power-based organizations who follow up with them after the election to secure wins that directly improve their lives.

The investment in civic engagement carried out through independent organizations also pays dividends in the organization's capacity to move public officials to legislate more bold policy solutions. One goal of IVE is to make

¹ Weitzel, 2015

elected officials accountable to their local constituency. It is a self-reinforcing cycle. When elected officials are held accountable to deliver on what they campaign on, voters keep coming back because they see they have a real voice and real choice. Alternatively, when elected officials fail to deliver meaningful progress on key issues voters get disenchanted and stay home. In a successful IVE program there is a self-reinforcing cycle between voter engagement, the power to legislate, and subsequent voter turnout. In Minnesota in 2012, for example, the success of voter engagement programs by ISALAH, Take Action Minnesota and their allies helped pave the way for big legislative victories in 2013 when the Governor and state legislature passed a progressive tax increase that resulted in a \$1billion surplus in 2014. This win was followed by a minimum wage increase in 2014, which independent organizations worked to strengthen, moving Minnesota from one of the lowest wages in the country to a trendsetter in the Midwest. And in the 2014 election Minnesota voters were one of the few states to hold the majority of their progressive legislative and statewide offices. Importantly, elected officials did not just decide to pass these reforms; they were held accountable by constituent power based organizations who had engaged significantly in the 2012 election and who kept up the heat through legislative visits, mass public meetings, earned media and negotiations during the 2013 and 2014 legislative cycles.

Organizations working to support IVE in states in a way that builds power to move issue agendas and democracy reform include the major national organizing networks and their city and state partners: the PICO National Network, the Center for Popular Democracy, the Center for Community Change, National People's Action, the Partnership for Working Families, and National Domestic Workers Alliance among others.

