

**GRO - Grass Roots Organizing
Missouri Voter Issues Project (MO-VIP)
Review of Spring 2004 to Spring 2005**

Accomplishments: “Building Power and Showing Power”

I. MO-VIP: the Buy-In for GRO members

- a. Before most of the country had turned their full attention to the 2004 Presidential Election we had already made our voter project our number one priority.
- b. Our leader volunteers (many themselves first time or infrequent voters) were trained, enthusiastic and out on the streets by April 2004 weekly competing to get the most people registered and pledged to vote.

II. Voter Education: Empowerment through Information

- a. Conducted multiple Community Voter Education Forums in 2004 with voting machines and local County Clerks present
- b. Developed Voter Education Flyers for Presidential Election and two 2005 local elections that have sparked civic interest in our neighborhoods
- c. Mailed out over 3,500 voter education flyers.
- d. GRO canvassers put 6,725 door hangers into our neighborhoods.

III. Voter Rights

- a. Challenged the Cole County Clerk on numerous occasions of voter confusion and disenfranchisement, including filing a complaint of HAVA violations to the Dept. of Justice Civil Rights Division and the Missouri Secretary of State.
- b. Registered and took many people with mental disabilities to vote despite the fact the Saturday before the 2004 Presidential Election some received a letter saying that they were removed from the voting rolls because they had a legal guardian.
- c. Continuously corrected confusing messages that our people had received from local election authorities.

IV. Increased Civic and GRO Participation

- a. Registered over 3,300 new voters in under represented communities in six central Missouri counties from April through October 2004.
- b. Pledged over 2,000 people to vote in the 2004 Primary and General Elections
- c. Turned out over 4,000 new and infrequent voters and gave rides to the polls for over 560 voters in the General Election. We also mobilized 600 to vote in the 2004 August Primary Election dress rehearsal and had 240 riders.
- d. During the last half of 2004 we increased GRO membership by 20%
- e. In a recent city primary election we turned out over 30% of the vote (from our main target precinct), which led to the defeat of the incumbent mayor by a margin of 30 votes.
- f. In our primary target precinct in Mexico, Missouri we more than doubled the voter turnout for the April Municipal Election from the previous year (213 in 2004 to 576 in 2005) with only 8-10 volunteers and three vehicles.
- g. GRO volunteers have knocked on over 7,500+ doors.
- h. Over 215 volunteers have played some part in the MO-VIP since April 2004.
- i. GRO phone bankers have made over 7,800 calls to newly registered voters.

Challenges

I. Defeated Attitudes in Our Neighborhoods

Our people are under attack by policy makers and are feeling hopeless. So many residents in our base think that their voice will not be heard.

II. Anti-Democratic Attitudes and Practices Among Public Officials

We are amidst battles and possibly a federal law suit to maintain access to the doors at local public housing high-rise towers. Polling places are becoming more obsolete and more inaccessible for low-income and under-represented constituencies.

III. Incompetent and Under-resourced Election Authorities

Local county clerk staff is not prepared for a group like GRO when we request information and often information requested is inaccurate or not explainable.

IV. Resources and Technical Assistance for Ongoing 501© 3 Civic Activities

Non-profits are struggling to fund and maintain issue organizing work. To develop the infrastructure and maintenance of our systems we will need to find resources and professional consultants that understand the complexities of both.

V. Integrating Electoral Work with Intense Issue Campaigns

Our issue and advocacy work to save anti-poverty programs and benefits is extremely difficult, to put it mildly. In Missouri we are faced with the reality that many of our members will lose their access to health care in the very near future. It is overwhelming to consider that we must continue involving people in MO-VIP and the fight for Medicaid while they are becoming sick and losing basic function ability.

Next Steps / Goals

I. Developing Needed Organizational Infrastructure

- a. Creating a “user friendly” organizational and voter database
- b. Developing a voter tracking system method to keep us up to date on registration and changes in our super transient neighborhoods.
- c. Organizing in our targeted precincts with improved contact lists obtained from data systems.

II. Expanding Target Areas (and Precincts) in Central Missouri

- a. Identifying new under-represented communities and neighborhoods
- b. Recruiting and training community volunteers and members from those areas

III. Building Urgency Behind Key Elections for our People

- a. Continuing voter registration in all our campaign and community organizing work
- b. Educating and demonstrating how the political and electoral process can work to the advantage of our constituents’ issues