

GREEN ORGANIZING AND CAMPAIGNS

by Dean Meyerson, Co-chair, Green Party of Colorado

I don't claim to be a master organizer. But I have a wide view of Green organizing around the country, some experience, and I have read about different aspects of organizing. Greens haven't written the book on organizing, but I think we have a chapter to add. That deals with how to combine issue-based activism with electoral campaigns in a way that builds both. I call it the Green Synergy.

I think there are four parts to Green organizing, though they overlap.

1. Foundation work

This involves getting newsletters out, managing mailing and member lists, and having regular meetings. It also involves registering your organization with the government in some cases, and in the case of a state Green Party, involves much more bureaucratic red tape. It is the least exciting part of organizing, but it is what ensures that there is an organization to organize for.

2. Issue activism

This is what most activists already do. Issues can be anything under Green values. This is important because it gives Greens credibility among voters that we actually are active on issues that are important to them. Two things can increase the effectiveness: if Greens do their activism in the name of the Greens as much as possible, and if they choose issues that are important to our voters, rather than issues which are more distant or abstract.

3. Party Building

This is what takes the actions of issue activism to build on the foundation of the organization to make it bigger. Party building is defined by actions that reach out to the public that doesn't know about you. It includes coalition-building with other progressive groups, but for a political party, it mostly means mixing with the public at large and avoiding being ingrown and working only with the already-converted.

The most popular form of party building is tabling at public events. But any time you mix with the public and let them know what you are, you are party building. Political parties will often focus on registration drives where party registration exists, but any activity that brings new people into your group is party building.

4. Electoral activity

Electoral activity requires issue activism to develop credibility so that voters will trust us, and it requires party building so that we are more well known. It takes advantage of election time, when both the press and the less politicized public pay more

attention to political matters. We can get far more free press during campaigns, and have the opportunity to spread our message farther. And while we always run to win, the key is making sure that campaigns build us, whether we win or not.

THE GREEN SYNERGY

The Green Synergy is a two way street between elections and issue activism. Candidates that are invisible between elections will not make any headway in elections as third party candidates because there is no bond with voters. Third parties have a huge barrier to overcome in our two-party system, and most voters will not vote based on a platform alone. They need to see that we act on our platform and live by it. Then they will see an alternative and will be willing to risk their vote on us, even if we are unlikely to win very often.

The other direction on this two-way street is to ensure that the electoral effort builds the party and Green movement, whether you win the election or not. This requires adequate coalition and party building prior to the actual election. And it particularly requires post-election organizing. Just after the election is the most important time for making an election build your organization, even if you and your team are tired and needing a rest. To bring new volunteers into the longer-term effort, you need to do something right after the election to bring them in. Most new volunteers only gave a little time and aren't burned out. An event or meeting, or at the very least a mailing, needs to happen right after the election while it is still hot on their minds.

If you win, that's easy. But if you don't, some kind of action needs to take place to draw them in while the attention is still there. Since most elections occur right before the holiday season, this is a challenge. But waiting until after the New Year is too late. The Boulder Green Alliance had a meeting right after Colorado Green's first gubernatorial campaign in 1994. It had the best turnout we had had in a couple of years, and some of our tired campaigners got new energy seeing those new faces. A couple of those new faces are some of our best activists today.

There are, of course, many more details: how you prioritize issues, press strategies, fundraising, etc. But most of these are common to progressive organizing in general. The Green Synergy is critical to making the Green Party and the broader Green Movement a force that will change the world.