

A GUIDE TO
YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

IN LOCAL
CAMPAIGNS

BY THRISHA MOHAN

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INTRODUCTION

When I first got involved on a campaign I was fortunate enough to work with hundreds of other teens, and after continuing to stay involved, I realized that there is a tangible difference between campaigns with a strong youth base and without. Through working on multiple local campaigns, starting teen-driven branches of their campaigns and interviewing campaign managers, field organizers and other youth volunteers, I have compiled this guide to hopefully help bridge the gap between students who want to work on campaigns and campaigns that would benefit from youth involvement.

If you are reading this guide, chances are that you probably understand the value of having students work on campaigns. But for the few skeptics that are questioning the usefulness of teen volunteers let me explain the value of having teens be a part of political campaign.

Running a successful campaign usually consists of a large amount of grunt work; making canvassing packets, counting literature, knocking doors, phone banking and so much other work essentially requires as many people as possible to spend as much time doing work as possible. Since students don't generally have full time jobs, they are far more willing to work longer hours and for most of the campaign season. Their interest in dedicating and knowledge to the campaign over a long period of time is unique to the youth.

Students are also more flexible about the type of work that they do. Often, volunteers come in with the expectation of doing some specific work. Whether it's canvassing 250 doors or doing research via the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) the willingness of teens to work within the amorphous structure of a campaign allows managers to provide students with a wide range of work with different levels of difficulty.

Lastly, one of the special opportunities that comes with actively encouraging teens to work on campaigns is the mentorship aspect of working with them. This experience is a huge learning experience in their lives, and your involvement in this can impact the decision they make. The ability to work with and shape a generation that is going to be the future of the country is truly unique and comes with supporting teen interest at the campaign level.

I hope the information in this guide helps you take the first step to improve student involvement in local campaigns.

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1. ATTRACTING STUDENTS TO CAMPAIGNS

Over the course of this project, this is one of the biggest questions that campaign managers have wanted me to answer. Finding student volunteers seems to be a difficulty that most campaigns have, but students **are** interested in working in their community. Many students are unaware of the opportunities available within campaigns. So, here are the best ways to reach teenagers and bridge the gap between interested students and campaigns who need the manpower only youthful energy can provide.

Social Media:



This might seem obvious to some and a foreign concept to others, but the best way to reach students is to have a broad and accessible presence on the internet.



Create a campaign Facebook page and Instagram account and keep online calendar events up to date, coordinating between these two platforms and the website. Make sure the *contact us* communication tool of all these platforms is checked regularly. If students are looking for opportunities having up-to-date schedules, easy to locate events and coordinated social media improves the sense of legitimacy of the campaign. From a student's perspective it is intimidating entering an unknown atmosphere without prompting. Having reliable sources of information will improve the likelihood that students will reach out to volunteer.



Job Portals and University Forums:

A good number of college students look for internship and volunteer opportunities on job portals such as Handshake and ZipRecruiter. These are great places to post jobs and find more committed interns especially if you wanted paid interns to work on the campaign. University forums at local colleges where students look for work can be a great place to post recruitment information. This method of recruitment however, may not yield the volume of results that you may want so if you need large numbers of volunteers, this is not as sustainable.

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Extra-Curricular Involvements:

Every high school and local college have clubs and activities that promote civic engagement to some capacity, and one of the best ways to find politically active students is to go out and talk to these organizations. Whether it is the candidate themselves, campaign manager or field organizer, taking out the time to come speak to students during their meetings or in their government classes goes a long way. This is a great recruitment tool, since you get time to explain what you do and how they can help and allows the students to feel like they know a familiar face if they decide to volunteer with you. Some examples of high school organizations that are politically engaged are the Junior State of America, Model United Nations, Mock Trial, YMCA's Youth and Government, Speech and Debate, and many more. These clubs want to be able to give the students within them activism opportunities so providing them with an option is something that they would be more than excited to promote.

Tips for clubs or classroom visits:

1. Be short and to the point. Tell an anecdote or two that explain your passion for politics but don't drag on for a long time. Students get disengaged quickly.
2. Leave some time for questions for them to ask you. A lot of them have never worked on a local campaign before, so they will likely have an array of questions.
3. Create a signup sheet that you bring to these events and leave it with whoever is leading the room. Ask them to send you the final list so that other people have an opportunity to process your pitch and sign up.
4. Leave a couple business cards for the room so students can reach out to you. It's always easier for students to reach out when they feel like they already know someone there.

Teen Campaign Interest Meeting:

Having a designated teen interest meeting when the campaign is still taking off is a great way to encourage youth involvement. In March and April campaigns are generally still starting up, do not have as much work going on and have generally manageable schedules. This is a great time to advertise a teen campaign meeting advertised via the previous two methods hosted at your campaign office or a library. This is a good way to encourage groups of teens since

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students are more likely to come in groups with their friends to a teen-designated event and allows you to have a more casual relationship with them or set the tone for the rest of the year.

What to include at a teen interest meeting:

1. [Icebreakers](#) will often break the tension between the people in the group since it's a new group of people who don't know each other. Some general icebreakers include having people introduce themselves with an interesting fact, playing a name game, two truths and a lie, etc. (Google is a great resource for quirky and more interesting icebreakers.)
2. [The candidate](#) (if possible)! What's nice about a meeting like this is the intimacy that it provides and ensuring that the candidate the students are working with comes in to talk to them and make an effort can go a long way in retaining students that come to an interest meeting. This also is a great way for students to understand the values that the candidate holds, what their priorities are, and how that aligns with what the students are interested in.
3. [Gauge people's interests](#). When people are doing work, they're interested in they are more likely to come back. Take the time to understand what different students would like to be working on and capitalize on their skills. Ex: If one of them is a videographer get them to work on a campaign video, if someone enjoys writing ask them to work on an article or letter to the editor.
4. [Food](#) may seem like a less important detail, but the saying goes the way to people's hearts is through their stomachs. Make sure to have snacks and food for people to munch on. It makes the atmosphere much more amicable and energetic.
5. [Leadership](#) makes a campaign like this sustainable. Finding students who want to be leaders and take up positions. These students can take on projects like running events and training other students. This not only improves the quality of the campaign; these leaders will often recruit their friends and other people they know to grow the size of the student campaign.
6. Collect their [contact information](#). You can't rely on other people's memory and their will to come to the office. Students are busy, and they need reminders. Collect phone numbers and emails so that you can contact them and give them campaign updates.

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2. STRUCTURING STUDENTS WITHIN CAMPAIGNS

For a sustainable student campaign, having a defined structure is always helpful. It helps students feel like they belong to a team or group and ensures that they keep coming back to work more. The goal is for students to **want** to spend as much time helping the campaign as possible.

Interns

One of the best ways to foster this environment is to formally title students who intend on consistently working on the campaign as interns. Depending on the type of campaign there can be different requirements for youth volunteers who acquire the title *intern* such as conducting interviews for them, having weekly schedules or a minimum number of hours they need to work, and giving them accounts that access data sources (more confidential information).

Differentiating between interns, who have some level of responsibility and trust with the campaign and student volunteers can make sure that students who are reliable and have good quality work get a small level of recognition that shows their work is being noticed. This also makes it easier to distribute tasks that may be more challenging and give them unique opportunities such as canvassing with the candidate and attending fundraisers.

Enter the time you expect to be at the office	June Schedule *Starred Days are Event Days*							
	6/1	6/2	6/3	6/4*	6/5	6/6	6/7	6/8*
Name	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
Nina Hill		4-6pm		8am -6pm			4-6pm	
Hellen Michaels	12-5pm				12-5pm	12-5pm		
George Adams		5-7pm		12-6pm				2-5pm
Elina Tirina			1-6pm			2-4pm		
Mihir Desai		4-6pm		8am -6pm			4-6pm	
Ryan Chor	12-5pm				12-5pm	12-5pm		
Nikita Soreno		5-7pm		12-6pm				2-5pm
Neav Sun			4-6pm			3-7pm		

This is a sample spreadsheet that can be shared with students when they become interns so that you are aware of how often they are planning on working on the campaign. If you would like to use this template it is accessible through this link: <https://tinyurl.com/y24k9as8>

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Student Leadership

Especially in small campaigns, finding students that can step up as leaders is incredibly important. The type of leadership can range from planning an event to youth field organizing. These tasks that require leadership allow for campaign managers or field organizers to understand the capabilities of the students they are working with and have more time to focus on other tasks since they have a wide range of responsibilities.

Do's

- ✓ Give enthusiastic students responsibilities - start with small tasks and increase the load based on their previous performance
- ✓ Ask interns what they are interested in working on - if they have a passion for design give them tasks that correlate to that
- ✓ Check in with them - ask them for periodical updates on the work they're doing and if they need any help

Don'ts

- ✗ Micromanage them - giving them some flexibility will show that you trust them
- ✗ Disengage from the teens on the campaign - it is easy to compartmentalize and leave the students to do busy work for a long period of time, but that will often lead them to be less interested in doing work

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3. SUSTAINING YOUTH INTEREST

A large problem with having students on a campaign is retention. Often students will have a lot more free time during the summer months and therefore campaigns attract many teens leading up to the primaries. However, as the general election approaches, with the start of school, sports and other extra curriculars, the engagement level drops. Here are some great ways to keep students involved in the campaign for longer!

Bring teens to events - Forums and fundraisers are a great way for students to hear the candidate they're working for in a public environment. Not only do these events give students a better understanding of the policies and message the candidate wants to send but having a group of teenagers at these events is always great for publicity.

Friendly office competition - Having some games and competitions can keep student morale high and make the longer days still be fun and interesting. Some ideas for fun competitions can include:

Monthly Canvassing Leaderboard - have a leaderboard for the number of houses that the top ten canvassers for your candidate have hit to incentivize students to go out. This will also help motivate volunteers when the weather is not ideal.

Phone Banking/Text Banking Bingo - When there are bigger phone banks create a bingo with prizes so that they can have fun and play along, especially since phone banking can get very repetitive or tiresome quickly. You can find this phone banking Bingo here: <https://tinyurl.com/y3b5fmpw>

Phonebanking Bingo

B I N G O				
Does not speak english	You have the same name as the voter	Busy Signal	Don't know how to pronounce name	"I don't vote"
Asks you to repeat yourself	Disconnected Number	They want to volunteer!	They have met your candidate.	"I hate politics"
They support the opponent.	Voicemail	Free space!	Wrong Number	They ask when the election is.
They hang up when you speak.	Finished the call list	Young child answers	Donated Money!	Already been contacted
5 responses in a row	Make 70 phone calls	"How did you get my number?"	"My vote is private"	Moved out of state.

Give students opportunities they are interested in - If there are students who express interest in a type of work, and there are tasks that need to be done in that field reach out to them. Whether it's a student who loves filming and video editing or one that enjoys planning events, the quality of work you receive and their enthusiasm for the campaign will increase.

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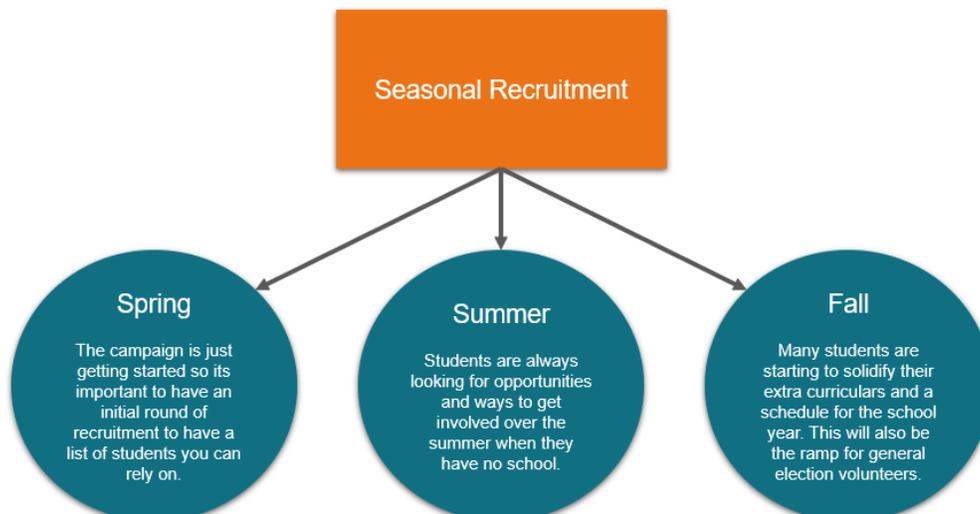
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Develop strong relationships with the teens - This may be the piece of advice that requires the most or least conscious involvement depending on your personality. It is incredibly important that there is a good relationship between the students and whoever they work with. Make sure to remember their names, involve them in fun activities or breaks, grab food with them if they're hanging out with you during meal times, and overall put in effort to be friendly with them.

Weekly Updates - Having a way to check in with the group of students you are working with is especially important for students who have taken on a project or leadership role. The expectation to check in with them every week gives students a sense of continuity. You can find a weekly update template here: <https://tinyurl.com/y65swpxh>

References, letters of recommendation and community service hours - Lots of students require community service hours for clubs or as a graduation requirement. Campaigns are a great way to obtain these hours so offer and advertise your ability to give them out. Letters of recommendation and references are often needed by students for other programs, college applications and opportunities post the campaign. This can be a great incentive for students who will commit to being interns for the duration of the campaign.

Seasonal Recruitment - Recognizing that no matter what there will be students that drop off after different seasons or parts of the year is the first step to sustaining a teen campaign. With this awareness plan to have multiple large volunteer recruitment pushes specifically targeted towards teens. Specifically having teen field organizers or students with a primary role in outreach and attracting volunteers can be helpful for recruitment season since students have better access to the clubs and students their age.



4. WHAT WORK TO AND NOT TO GIVE STUDENTS

A question I have often received by campaign managers regarding student involvement is a question of what work do students like to do on campaigns. There is a perception that students will get bored and feel unimportant by the day to day and tedious work that campaigns have. Majority of the time this is not the case, students tend to be flexible and willing to do a variety of different tasks. While it is important to strike a balance between the more menial tasks present on campaigns and the work that is more substantial, such as writing letters to the editor, attending special events, cutting and managing turf, and much more.

What work students should receive:	What work NOT to give them:
<p><u>New Volunteers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure that students that come in for the first time work alongside other people on the campaign. That way they can be helpful and work on a project while learning the ropes.• Canvassing with a group of experienced students can be a great way to ease newcomers into the campaign environment.• Entering or filtering data sets is interesting to look at and not a difficult task for new volunteers• Putting up or delivering yard signs is a good task for new student volunteers who can drive or go out with someone else.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In general, asking students, especially under the age of 18, to canvass alone is not advised. It generally isn't enjoyable to canvass alone and can be unsafe for students to go alone. Make sure that they have a buddy system!• Regardless of experience level, unpaid students should not deal with finances on a campaign. Given the repercussions with campaign finance laws, having youth volunteers directly involved in this is not ideal.• Communication with the press is a delicate art, and since this world revolves around flashy headlines, asking students to do interviews or talk to the press <u>without supervision</u> can lead to misconstrued statements. This is especially important when the race is being followed keenly by the press.

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Veteran Volunteers:

- Event planning is a great task for returning volunteers or interns because it occupies a certain amount of time and ensures that they are staying involved and have an integral role - this can include meetings with local organizations, forums or fundraisers.
 - Tasks that require login information for a database such as entering canvassing data, cutting turf and volunteer recruitment calls are better tasks for regular volunteers.
 - Organizing and reaching out to teens, clubs and activism organizations is an incredibly important task throughout the campaign and is most effective when done by consistent students
 - Running social media and consistently uploading approved content to keep followers engaged is a great for students interested in the field of communications and media.
- Speaking on behalf of the candidate, whether via social media or live is something that should be left to paid campaign staff. Students can be caught off guard or not know the appropriate responses for certain questions.
 - Discussions with lobbyists and lobby groups are fascinating for students to listen in on, however, these meetings should not be taken primarily by students. Groups will often correlate a student running the meeting as them not being taken seriously and given that youth volunteers have no ability to make decisions or actions on behalf of the campaign, it would not be ideal to have them represent the campaign in these discussions.

5. BEYOND THE CAMPAIGN

At the end of the campaign, it is easy for students to drop off from campaigns and political work and return to the routine of school and home life. Similarly, operatives working on campaigns often part ways at the end of the season. It is incredibly important, however, to ensure that there is a path for these students to build upon their interest. Whether it includes work that can be done within government, work with legislative district parties, or even other campaigns in the area forwarding to them the opportunities that present themselves can go a long way. A short “Hey take a look at this opportunity!” email or message can go a long way to help these students find their future endeavors and continue their growth and learning in politics beyond the campaign itself.