

Getting the most

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Special elections, because of their unique structure, usually strain all operating centers of a campaign.

In most cases, after a special election is called to fill a seat (congressional, legislative or senatorial), a campaign has only eight weeks until election day. Each method of reaching the voter, be it mail, television or field organization, must be efficient and well-targeted.

Britt vs. Pelosi

This past May, there was a special election to fill the seat of the late Congresswoman Sala Burton. Nancy Pelosi, a former chair of the state Democratic party and finance chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, was endorsed by nearly every Democratic officeholder. Among those who endorsed her were Senator Alan Cranston, Lt. Governor Leo McCarthy and Mayor Dianne Feinstein. Her campaign would have the greatest amount of resources for the sprint to election day.

Harry Britt, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the only openly gay officeholder in the city, would provide Pelosi's strongest opposition.

Reduced universes

The Harry Britt for Congress campaign called upon Voter Contact Services to create lists of voters in three targeted voter categories, using the nine years of reduced universes in the VCS data base. These reduced universes were targeted for field organization of different intensities. Because Britt was going to be outspent 3-to-1 by Pelosi, the eventual winner, the limited resources of the campaign had to be put to their greatest use.

Britt had run and won city-wide twice in races for Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco. In their initial targeting, the managers of the campaign looked at areas of the city where Britt had run well in the past. After studying the voting pattern, they merged the information with that

provided by their polling. Three groups of voters were targeted for field organization:

1. **Britt's Base**—since Britt is the city's only openly gay elected official, he has a strong base of support in the gay community. Britt also has a strong base of support among straight progressive voters. The voters targeted lived in predominantly gay precincts, or precincts with a history of voting heavily for Britt in the past.

2. **Liberals**—those voters who lived in precincts with a particularly liberal voting pattern. However, these voters were not members of Britt's traditional base. Voters who were targeted for the field organization either voted in three of the last eight elections, or voted in the 1986 Democratic primary and the 1986 general election.

3. **Special Voters**—Using poll and demographic data, the Britt campaign identified a voter who was very likely to vote for their candidate. Voters in this category were neither traditional liberals nor members of Britt's base. This voter tended to be a younger renter who had either voted in five of the last eight elections, or voted in two, three or four of the last eight elections with two of the votes cast in the 1986 Democratic primary and the 1986 general election.

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Efforts for each of the three groups were quite different.

The object of the field effort among the first group of voters, Britt's base, was to increase turnout in certain precincts. Here, the campaign used an intense precinct captain operation. This operation involved literature drops, and constant walking and phoning. In the targeted precincts, the organization increased turnout a considerable percentage.

Among the second group, Liberals, the Britt campaign conducted a walking and phoning program; however, there were no precinct captains.

The third group, Special Voters, was phoned by volunteers from the headquarters.

Throughout the campaign, polls showed that Britt was behind Pelosi by as much as two-to-one. Many in the Pelosi campaign were talking publicly about win-

ning with more than 50% of the vote. In California, a candidate can avoid a partisan runoff by winning a majority of votes in the primary election. Although Britt lost the race by two percentage points, 34% to 32%, he is in a good position for a future run for office.

Voter Contact Services gave the Britt campaign the ability to organize the field campaign as it would construct a persuasion mail program. Only a complete data base, such as VCS, would be able to produce the reduced universe voter lists necessary to conduct the efficient field campaign.

In low turnout, or special elections, where resources are few and timing is critical, a campaign has to get the most out of each operating center. One simply does not have the time to reach every voter with the field organization; yet it is necessary to supplement your mail and media. Merging voter history, voter profile and survey research data to produce the VCS voter lists will help you manage a successful campaign.

