

Who Are These People?

You'll be meeting a lot of folks now that you are active. Just who are you likely to meet?

Progressive Organizations

In progressive activist organizations you'll be meeting staffers, leadership and, of course, other volunteers. Local organizations or local branches of national organizations are usually small and/or have few levels so you'll likely end up knowing everyone.

Party Organizations

Party organizations, on the other hand are huge, complex, multilayer and more structured than most progressive action groups. The roles people play in volunteering and decision making will be somewhat more formalized allowing for a greater amount of inclusion and fairness. The good news is that you'll have more options for the role you'll choose.

Staff

The first person you'll likely meet is the young campaign or organization staffer who hands you a worksheet and points you out the door to talk to voters. Staffers and interns are young people hired because they'll work 18 hour days, seven days a week, living on potato chips and Pepsi for little or no pay. They are often college students interested in political science or law. If they seem brusque or distracted it is because they are given difficult goals to meet and they are driven like recalcitrant mules. They are the backbone of campaign logistics and we could not win elections without them.

Because they are here for a short while, they may not be representative of the larger more permanent community of local volunteers. Before making judgements about the party be sure to meet the people who are around from year to year.

Volunteers

You'll be working side by side with other volunteers. Many, you will find, are your neighbors. Like you, they have families, jobs and responsibilities and again, like you, they've dedicated a chunk of their time to change things for the better. And many will become the friends you admire most.

There are never anywhere close to enough volunteers to accomplish everything that ought to be done and finding consistent quality leadership is difficult. If you think things are not running as well as they should, you're probably right. Step up and help make things work. Rest assured that your work is valued.

Most experienced volunteers are more than willing to answer questions. Believe me, they love people who are driven and engaged. They can also help you navigate the byzantine rules and obscure terminology. You may want to find a mentor -this can really speed your way into meaningful work. Experienced volunteers will help you; just don't be afraid to ask them!

Party Leaders

Party leaders are not professionals -they're volunteers who stepped up to be leaders, often because no one else would. They have usually worked a few elections and know how things run. Get to know these people. Tell them you want to be useful, let them know of your unique skills. Old timers love to help and if you also wish to take on a leadership position they'll help you along.

One more thing; since party leaders are volunteers and not pros, your path will depend a lot on how proactive you are. Leaders cannot always devote the time and resources to make sure everyone is contacted and given direction. Step up anyway, ask what can be done. Take on a project and become a leader yourself!

Keep in mind that few leaders in your state party and almost none at any level below that are paid full time employees.

Candidates

Because so few people volunteer it's rather easy to meet and get to know candidates at all levels. You may not meet the Presidential candidate (then again you might!) but you'll likely meet US Senators, the Governor, state legislators and all manner of local officials. You'll quickly see that most are real people who, like you, care passionately about making a difference.

Candidates are extremely busy and often on very tight schedules. In fact most candidates don't even make their own schedules; they are led around by campaign staff from one event to another. Their day consists of meeting people, raising money, giving speeches, raising money, going to bean feeds, raising money and raising money. Then they go back to the office and raise money. The higher the office, the busier they are and the more money-raising they do. Their conversations with volunteers will necessarily be short. Don't take it personally if they don't always remember your name; remember, they're meeting new people all day, every day! Rest assured that the candidates truly appreciate what you are doing.

Many volunteers come to volunteering for a specific candidate, but your work will almost always crossover to other candidates and issues -especially close to Election Day. And there is also important work to be done *between* elections!

And, finally, the other people you'll meet will be voters! (We'll get to them later.)

How will I fit in?

In an election year you and most other volunteers will be involved in voter contact: phone calling and door knocking to be specific. Drudgery, perhaps, but necessary. But, in a way, the hard work is done outside of that time -in the space *between* elections. This is when party building is done and, if things are *really* going right, a more strategic form of voter contact is taking place.

Be sure to let leaders know what your skills are. They'll never know unless you tell them! Remind them if they forget -and they will, because they're volunteers too. The reality is that there are more things needed than you might think. We often find people who propose great ideas we never thought of and these tend to be the most successful. We need event planners, precinct leaders, cooks, public speakers, drivers, letter to the editor writers, blog and web writers, handout and PowerPoint-ers; we need folks conversant in social media, web design, databases, graphic design, computer hardware, and e-mail blasting. We need drivers, lawn sign planters, techies, furniture movers-and more. And there are many party offices that need filling.

Many people are active in progressive organizations between elections. Most of these are concerned with specific issues. Ask around, see what others are doing, find something that fits you. Above all, start building your network – get to know everyone!

And if you've often wondered why the party or advocacy organization doesn't do this or that -now you know! Hardly anyone is a pro and there aren't enough people to do it all. Maybe you are the one who will make things happen!