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**Appendix 3**

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**National Democratic Institute for International Affairs  
Political Party Program, Croatia**

**Cycle One  
New Approach to Direct Voter Contact  
The Use of Citizen Questionnaires**

*By Karen Gainer and Stephen Farry<sup>1</sup>*

**All the year round campaigning**

*Elections are not won or lost in the four weeks leading up to an election but in the work that a party does between elections. Political parties must learn how to campaign between elections on local issues that matter to people. Branch offices need to identify local issues and take actions on them. Simply put, a successful branch office must reach out to citizens and include them in the work of their political party all year round. Parties must work to become active members of their local community. In this way political parties will become relevant to ordinary citizens.*

Successful political parties are those which take the time to listen to their voters and involve people in their party activities. Membership is the lifeblood of any political party. Finding new members and continually involving current members should be the focus of the work of political parties. But how?

The following are some strategies which political parties from many countries have used to engage people in their political party. A substantial amount of material has been borrowed from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) in the United Kingdom and from the Liberal Party of Canada. In addition we have also relied on materials from the Labour Party and the Conservative Party of Great Britain and the Labour Party of Australia. While each of these parties may have

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diametrically opposed ideas on issues of social policy, monetary or taxation policy they all agree about the importance of local branch offices working in their communities to identify and solve local problems.

In Canada, the United Kingdom and even here in Croatia people are justifiably cynical about politicians who appear a couple weeks before an election, expecting their votes, then disappear again afterwards until the next election.

All year campaigning means just that- it means working in the community-taking action on issues that matter to voters-all year and not just before the election period.

This means:

1. **Finding local issues to campaign on:** The Citizen Questionnaire [Cycle 1]
2. **Reporting back on actions taken and information discovered:** Newsletters [Cycle 2]
3. **Taking actions on those issues:** Local action [Cycle 3]
4. **Building your team:** Training volunteers, the Manual [Cycle 4]

The following series of seminars designed by NDI will take you through each of these steps.

In cycle one, you will learn how to create and use a citizens' questionnaire. In cycle two you will learn how to report back on the information gathered in your citizen questionnaires through the use of a newsletter. In cycle three you will plan an event which is designed by your branch office to take action on one of the identified issues and to use the media to inform the public of your activities. Cycle four you will gather lessons learned to create a training manual for your new volunteers.

Organizing an effective political branch office is hard work. But it has many rewards in addition to winning elections. It is an opportunity to learn about your community, meet your neighbors and play an active part in the improvement of your community.

Many of you have attended NDI seminars in the past. The one consistent comment we heard from you in the evaluations was the desire on your part for more follow up. The project phase was designed with that in mind. The projects which you will do following each seminar will provide you with the opportunity to put in practice the techniques learned and more importantly to train other party activists in the same techniques. Our office will be available during the project phase for individual consultations on the work that you are doing. Please call us!!!

## Citizens' Questionnaires

(see samples attached)

Citizen questionnaires have become a regular feature of many political party outreach campaigns. A citizen questionnaire is a tool which allows parties to talk and listen to their voters. People like to be asked their opinion and your party will learn about the community by asking and listening.

Why use questionnaires? What benefits would be for the party?  
The benefits can be divided into two categories.

1. Those benefits which help the public image of the party;
2. Those benefits which provide information to the party.

A questionnaire conducted in the community door to door will undoubtedly raise the profile of the party and demonstrate to the voters that your party is a party that cares about them. It will clearly show that your party is interested in doing politics differently and is not afraid of talking directly to people. It will create the impression that your party is a hard working party that listens and is accountable to its voters.

Secondly, it is an organizing tool which will help find new supporters and new volunteers, which will ultimately help the party prepare for an election. It will also give experience to its volunteers and keep them involved.

A questionnaire will help the party identify issues that are relevant to the voters and test new policies that may become part of its program. Finally, it will allow the party to identify its supporters and develop voter files.

## Designing a Questionnaire

The following are points to remember when designing a questionnaire:

1. Identify the party clearly at the top of the page- use the party logo; make sure the party's address, telephone number is clearly set out at the top of the page. You may wish to raise the profile of individuals within the party. For instance, if the party wants to show that its councilors are working in the community it should place the councilors' names together with the party name and logo on the front. Or the party could choose to highlight party "team" members and identify individuals who may ultimately be candidates. This will give the team the opportunity to develop some name recognition in the community first before they become candidates.

2. The questionnaire should be limited to two sides of an A4 page. The layout should be simple and straightforward.
3. The front page should focus on questions on local issues. At the top of the front page you should have an introduction telling people what and why you are doing this questionnaire. An example of such an introduction is as follows:

*Your local Zašto Party is listening to YOU.  
Many politicians are not interested in what YOU think. We at the Zašto Party are interested in you and your opinions. That is why we are here at your door- to find out what is important to you so we can work better for YOU. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire so we can better understand what issues are important to you.*
4. Each question should have its own box and maybe a graphic to illustrate the issue. Ideally questionnaires should be designed on a computer but a typed or hand drawn can be equally as effective. Questions should have yes/no options or ask voters to rank issues in priority. Limit the front side to no more than six questions.
5. The backside can have one or two issues on national problems, and then include the more "political questions" such as "Which party do you normally support". Always include a box inviting people to "Join our team". Give them 4 options:
  - Do you want more information on the party?
  - Do you want to help the party?
  - Do you want to help during elections?
  - Do you want to join the party?
6. It is essential that you leave space for people to give their comments and thoughts. As well leave space for people to write their name, telephone number and address. This is essential for the party to start the process of identifying its support and to develop the voters' list.
7. References to party policies, election programs should be avoided. Your message is to find out what people think about local issues. If you start to preach to them about your party then people will see that you are not really interested in their views at all. Remember this is not the election campaign- this is work to be done between elections to identify supporters, position your party as one who cares and to find out which issues are of real concern to the voters. Hopefully once you have identified those local issues, you can devise a strategy to help solve the problem.

## **Conducting a questionnaire**

(see attached sample instructions)

There are three approaches that have proved particularly effective.

1. The first approach is **"On the Spot"**. You knock at the door and ask the voter to fill out the questionnaire while you wait. The questionnaire should be designed to be completed in a few minutes. This ensures that the party volunteer talks to the voter and takes away with them the necessary information. If the voter is too busy, you can offer to return later to pick up the questionnaire. (See option #2 below)
2. The **"Returning to the door"** collection: Call door to door delivering the questionnaire form telling people that you will come to collect it later, say in 30 minutes. The short time is used to inject a sense of immediacy into the process of completing the questionnaires. Respondents are asked if they want to be disturbed again or to leave the questionnaires in their letter-box/under their doormat. You should only deliver as many questionnaires in one evening as you can collect that same evening. Because people are asked to leave the questionnaire sticking out of their mailbox or on their door it is very quick to collect. But it is vital that you come on time you said you'd come and that you check to see if the address has been filled out. If not quickly complete it out of sight and before the next collection.
3. The third approach is slower and more labor intensive. We could call it **"Collection upon announcement"**. This has been designed to help volunteers overcome the fear of knocking doors. First you deliver the questionnaires in letterboxes announcing that you will return in a few days to collect it. After delivering the questionnaire you call back on the same houses two or three days later. You tell people that you are back to collect the survey (ensuring that you have a sample to show them). In theory this way produces more thought out responses and gives your party a second opportunity to talk with a voter. The key here if you tell people that you will be back in two days to pick up the questionnaire then you must ensure that happens.

**But in all three approaches you must go DOOR to DOOR!!!**

## **How to do a Door to Door Canvas**

### **1. Know your district/ divide the district into polls.**

You should know your district. From the last election you should be able to divide your district into polls. A poll would be comprised of the voters who would vote at any one polling station. If this information is not available, than divide your district into local neighborhoods along natural geographic boundaries. Ideally a party worker who lives in the poll should be responsible for their own poll. While voters' lists may not be available, going door to door allows you to start the process of developing a voter file. That is why it is important to document where you go and determine who lives where. If you can get the voter's telephone number that is very important for later contacts. If possible volunteers should door knock in their own neighborhoods where they will know people.

### **2. Training**

Anyone who is going door to door for your party needs to be trained. Before each door to door canvass organize training sessions for all the people who will be doing it. All canvassers, even experienced ones should attend. It is important for people to understand the purpose of the door to door canvass and have an opportunity to ask questions. There should be also be a role-play so people have a sense of what to expect. It is important that people go in teams of two and it is always preferable to team up experienced volunteers with new recruits.

### **3. Canvasser's kit**

Everyone going door to door should receive a canvassers kit. It should contain the following:

- a map of the area;
- written instructions and a suggested script;(see attached)
- a log to record: the doors called on; names; phone numbers and additional comments,
- questionnaires;
- volunteers and membership forms;
- nametag to identify caller and party

### **4. Pre-canvas preparation**

The best time to canvas is between 6PM and 9PM. Do not go later than 9PM. Ask your volunteer to come for 5:30 so they can review their kits and plan where it is they will go. It is always a good idea to take a few minutes to review the training with them. People should work in pairs, matching experienced canvassers with new volunteers. Since there is a fair bit of walking involved, everyone should wear comfortable shoes and if it is dark carry a flashlight so as to read and make notes on the log.

**5. At the doors**

As a general rule, canvassers should always go to the front of the house, and should avoid being drawn into long conversations or being enticed into prolonged visits. Use the side walk or driveway-never walk across the grass. Use the script that has been provided. Remember, always be courteous and concise. If no one is a home leave a questionnaire with "sorry I missed you" on it.

Remember always be polite even if the citizens are rude to you. If they do not want to talk with you or fill out the questionnaire, be polite and move on. If they're interested in your party, please remember to ask them if they will volunteer to help or would they like to join.

**6. Paperwork**

It is absolutely important that a record is kept of where you went. Addresses of all doors knocked on should be recorded, together with the names [check the door name plates] phone numbers if you can get it, and any other information about the voter's interest in issues or parties. See attached sample log.

**7. When to go door to door?**

Your party may want to set a specific day and time when you meet. Say every Tuesday at 5PM at the branch office. In this way new volunteers can show up, be trained and go door knocking. It is always good to have people return to the office after they have finished in order to see what was accomplished, share stories and thank volunteers. This has the advantage of everyone knowing when they can help and can be made part of a social occasion by retiring to the neighborhood cafe for a beer or coffee afterward s.

**8. What to say at doors?**

See instruction sheets attached.

**Remember to always thank your volunteers each time they return from going door to door.**



## Follow-up

Once your team has returned with completed the questionnaires, carefully go through each one. Any questionnaire which has been marked in "Join our team" box should immediately receive an information package which should contain the following:

- a letter from the local MP/councilor or party president thanking the person for filling out the questionnaire and for their interest in the party;
- a letter from the branch office president welcoming the new member to the party;
- a recent copy of a newsletter;
- an invitation to a small gathering of your party supporters to meet some of the party's elected officials

This package should be followed up by a phone call or visit within two week and a second phone call four days before the social gathering.

The next step is reporting back-using newsletters. That will be dealt with in the next training cycle.