

Democracy in the Park: Complete Instructions and Timeline

Thank you for helping to organize Democracy in the Park. Together, a few of us in parks around the country can have a real effect on this election—using only our cell phones and a dose of determination, we can chat with voters in the states that matter in this election, those few “swing states” that are still up for grabs. The park coordinator is central to that effort; your job is to make sure things run smoothly, these important calls get made, and everyone has a good time in the process. These are the detailed instructions for how to run Democracy in the Park, though of course some things change for every location—you’ll have to improvise often, but you’re doing so in the service of democracy, and remember: if you sound confident, no one realizes you’re making it up. The instructions:

First Things First

List your event by signing up at www.democracyinthepark.org/start.htm. If you are reading these instructions, it means you’ve already done that. You are posted on our web site, which means you can refer people in your neighborhood to our site for more information.

Spread the word! E-mail your friends and like-minded folks around town. Write a snappy advertisement, post it to various e-mail lists and ask your friends to forward it on. Print out the make-it-yourself flyer from www.democracyinthepark.org and pass it around. And remember: flyers help, but the only reliable way to get people to come is to ask them personally, and to ask them specifically to bring others as well.

Ask others to help. It’s always easier to organize an event with the help of a friend or two. If you have a friend might be interested, ask him or her to help out. Friends can help with printing, publicity and running the event—there’s no reason for you to be out flyering alone if you can con some buddies into doing it too.

Estimate Your Crowd (Wednesday before the event)

How many people are coming? Estimate the crowd, even if you don’t know for sure, and send that number to john@democracyinthepark.org. We need to know how many you expect, so we know how many telephone numbers to make available to you. Once you send in your estimate, we will get back to you by Thursday night with the specific information about the calls you are making. (You can add to your estimate later—we can always assign you more telephone numbers if you find out closer to the weekend that you’ll have more volunteers than you expected.)

Where do I find my phone numbers and scripts? The phone numbers and the scripts will both be posted on our web site by the Thursday night before your event, and we will send you the link you need to access them. They will be in the form of Microsoft Word files or PDF files, which can be read using the free Adobe Acrobat reader. If the reader is not already installed on your computer, you can download it at www.adobe.com.

Getting Ready (one or two days before the event)

Print the materials. After you receive your instructions in an e-mail, you will need to print the following: phone lists, scripts (with instructions for the callers attached) and the sign-in sheet. Be sure to leave enough time for something to go wrong in the printing; if you’re expecting a crowd, it could add up to a lot of pages, and you need to be sure you can have the materials ready before your event. If you need to spend money for the printing, consider asking participants for donations to reimburse you—many people would be happy to chip in to cover the costs of the event.

Gather the supplies for the park. In addition to the papers (the phone lists, enough copies of the script for everyone, instructions and sign-in sheets), you’ll need some basic supplies: extra pens for everyone, a clipboard for the sign-in sheets and water and a sandwich for yourself!

In the Park (the event itself)

Make sure everyone signs in. We're going to ask you to relay the sign-in information back to headquarters, to make sure we can tell everyone who came to our events what good work we did together. People are much more likely to come back if they know the overall effect our work is having, so make sure you get their contact information before you leave. You can use the sign-in forms posted in the "for organizers" section of our web site.

Welcome the volunteers. This is your moment in the spotlight. Share in your own words why you think the work you're doing is important. Wax poetic about the importance of individual volunteers like us talking personally with voters—replicated many times over, these are the conversations that win the election. If your group is relatively small, ask everyone to introduce themselves and say one sentence about why they're there; if you have a larger group, they can split up later and do that.

Read the instructions to the volunteers. Explain what we're doing, how to make the calls, how to fill out the forms. Go over the instructions and answer any questions that come up. Remind the volunteers that most people won't be home and a few will be hostile; that's okay, and it's expected. If just one of ten calls for each volunteer is a success, your group can still talk to hundreds of people in the course of an afternoon. Remember, last time around Bush "won" Florida by just 537 votes!

Pass out the materials: one sheet of calling instructions and script for everyone, and about 50 telephone numbers for each person to start with; that may be one or several pages, depending on how the numbers are laid out. Remind people that they can come back to get more numbers from you at any time.

Ask volunteers to practice on each other. Before attempting to talk to strangers, each person should practice one call on someone sitting there with them, and practice receiving a call.

Collect all the phone sheets. As people finish up, collect the sheets they've been using. Keep those together, because you'll need to count the total and mail them in when you're all done.

Thank the volunteers, and ask them to bring a friend next time. If people finish at the same time, gather them together to talk for a few minutes about how it went. Ask each person to share their favorite experience. Estimate how many calls were made this afternoon—people always appreciate knowing what a difference their efforts are making. Tell them you'll send them an overall update later, and ask them to come back next time...and bring a few friends with them!

After the Park

Tell us how it went! Send an e-mail to john@democracyinthepark.org sharing 1) the number of calls you dialed (including people who weren't home), 2) the number of voters you actually talked with, and 3) a short description of how your event went, including the best moment you had and one thing you think should work differently.

Mail in your completed lists. Mail the filled-out forms to the address included in your instructions e-mail. Hold onto the lists you didn't get to; we may use them next week, or we may tell you to recycle them and start with new ones if a new priority comes up and we use new lists.

E-mail us your sign-in information. That way we can tell everyone who came how we did in parks around the country. Just send us each attendee's name and e-mail address, and keep the sheets for yourself.

Set a goal for next week! Can you get the same number of calls made next week? More? Every little bit helps in this close election, and you're doing more than just a little bit! Just send us your estimate by Wednesday...