

Organizer's Edge ▶

Greetings!

How Biden Won Wisconsin by Mary Ochs



*“It was **organizing and mobilizing** the relationships that people had already that really made the difference.”*

During the 2020 election Wisconsin got a lot of attention. The Trump campaign saw WI as a “must win.” His campaign was all over the state for the past 4 years. Every town of any consequence had a Trump Office with a huge sign on their “Main Street.” The Trump campaign was heavily resourced & they ran a good operation especially in rural areas & small towns. They integrated with local police, Chambers of Commerce and the local Republicans. They had lots of rallies, events, car caravans. They were more visible in many parts of the state. If yard signs could vote, Trump would have won WI again.

But it’s people and relationships that vote. [Voces de La Frontera Action’s \(VDLFA\)](#), (the 501 (c)4 arm of Voces de l Frontera) strategy was to turn out 23,000 voters –and it was based on relationships. That was the number Trump beat Hillary Clinton by, and that was a stretch but doable. VDLFA, a known, beloved and trusted messenger for many focused on infrequent or first- time voters, especially in the Latinx

community and multi- racial youth. VDLFA has Black and Latino youth groups on many high school and college campuses as well as chapters of Latinx workers throughout the state.

Voces de la Frontera Action got over 20,000 people to vote. They had it down to a science.

To get out the vote this year, volunteer leaders called “Voceros” built lists (well in advance of the primary and general election) of people they had relationships with who could be registered. They contacted their lists to check in with people as well as to make sure they got registered, knew where, when and how to when vote, and provided them with information on where Biden stood on issues that their friends and family members cared about.

The leaders building lists were called “Voceros.” Some were “Super Voceros” who took on additional responsibilities. Super Voceros were checking in with 5 to 10 Voceros. They started 5 or 6 months before the election and invited them to come to training, and join actions mainly on Zoom.

Election Protection

Voces de la Frontera also had a big election protection program, much larger than other years. They were taking no chances as in the past we witnessed and interrupted many attempts at voter intimidation and harassment. This year Voces had 93 leaders doing election protection at key polling sites in 4 cities/regions.

Entrapment Attempt

This year one group said they were making a movie about women’s suffrage, and were interviewing people in WI, pretending to make this movie. They were asking leading questions about voting in hopes of getting some to say things they could take out of context to make it seem that they were engaged in voter fraud. VDLFA folks were immediately suspicious. They’ve dealt with entrapment attempts and serious attack before. VDLFA and allies quickly put forth a communications strategy to discredit the entrappers and discredit their tactics. No doubt, this was part of what Trump had hoped would be his “evidence” of massive voter fraud.

Money and Timing

I have been helping groups build electoral muscle for 16 plus

years and it seemed like money always came late in the game. It has been a common complaint that most of the funding came a month or two before the election, but that was not the case this year, at least in this case. Some donors are catching on that it takes time to build a strong program and its strongest when we engage voters year-round. It's important to do what we call a "touch back," following up with contacts after the election to engage them in issue campaigns. VDLF was able to keep some of its expanded staff to continue to build upon the voter base. This is a key area to continue to educate donors about. Building a base and serious power is a long-game.

COVID-19 and Organizing

A major challenge was COVID-19. VDLFA did some in-person work, very carefully. This was necessary because Trump's folks were out there all the time, often without masks or distancing. VDLFA had some Zoom rallies, and had a paid canvas. VDLFA also had caravans thru neighborhoods, with some music, and then people would get out and canvas door-to-door. We did this in Green Bay, Madison, Waukesha, Racine, and Milwaukee -- in mostly Latinx and racially mixed, working-class neighborhoods.

Building Support for Biden

Many of the VDLFA leaders did not know Biden well. Some were more inclined toward Bernie. They had not seen or heard much from Biden. They'd ask: Why should we work hard for this guy? VDLFA had to put pressure to have Biden or Harris meet with a small group of VDLFA. Leaders needed to feel like they knew who they were asking people to vote for. Eventually Harris had a meeting with some Super Voceros, and they could say: "We met her, she understands our issues and is very good on immigration." "We needed the personal connection and commitment to get enthusiastic, explains a VDLFA leader. "We needed to feel heard."

Solidarity with GA

Finally, VDLFA chapters voted to send 2 staff and a leader to help with voter registration and turn out with Latinx voters in Georgia. Two of the 3 had previously lived in GA and one had pastored a church there for 9 years. They went for 3 weeks. VDLFA leaders understood how important this was. This was a small but strategically important contribution to the GA senate

wins.

Mary Ochs has worked as a community organizer and founder/executive director of numerous grass roots, social justice organizations. She worked in the field for over 35 years. She first became involved with community organizing when she volunteered on a campaign to organize welfare recipients. In the recent past, Mary worked as a Field Organizer and as Organizing Director for the Center for Community Change (CCC) and currently is a consultant strengthening social change organizations.

Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

Caesar McDowell of MIT,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,

David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,

Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky

Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,

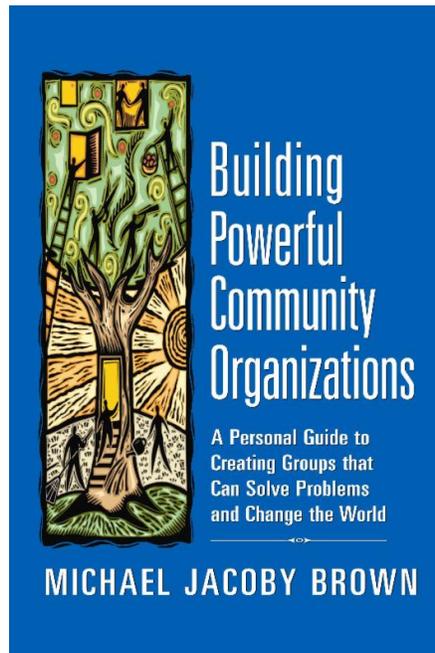
Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,
Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,
Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,
Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles
and others, hopefully, including YOU

Other Useful Links

[http://michaeljacobybrown.com/
Visions-Inc](http://michaeljacobybrown.com/Visions-Inc)



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Michael Jacoby Brown Training and Coaching | mjbrown246@gmail.com | <http://www.michaeljacobybrown.com>
10 Brattle Terrace | Arlington, MA 02474