



## **Why Grassroots Engagement?**

For **grassroots solutions**, the term “grassroots” describes a distinctive approach to engaging people and building relationships. Grassroots organizing is about providing the means for people to engage directly and personally with one another on something that matters to them—whether that is a community concern, an election, or a policy issue. Time and again, data has shown that there is no substitute for the power of a recommendation from a friend, neighbor, family member, or colleague when you want to persuade someone to take an action. This is true whether the word-of-mouth effect is experienced online or offline.

Some of the benefits of a grassroots engagement approach include:

- ✓ **Personal**: Grassroots engagement strategies rely on people who can put a human face on an issue, problem, or solution, or personalize a policy prescription. This creates a personal connection that inspires trust, leading to a personal willingness to take an action and/or recommend that action to others.
- ✓ **Local**: Grassroots engagement is an intrinsically local strategy that offers limitless possibilities for targeting and customized communications and outreach to truly connect with people where they live.
- ✓ **Interactive**: Grassroots engagement is by nature conversational and creates a two-way relationship. This gives you a direct line into the communities you serve. You get to hear first-hand about the interests and concerns of community members, and your listening to them may make them feel more like stakeholders in your campaign.
- ✓ **Sustainable**: Grassroots strategies center around building relationships that can be maintained and strengthened over time, so the prospects for sustained loyalty to your campaign and issue are high. When you invest in infrastructure to support grassroots relationship-building on the front end of your campaign, the longer-term returns on your initial investment will be positive.

- ✓ Energizing: The combined impact of a personal, interactive approach that is maintained consistently over time almost always creates a palpable sense of energy. This energy helps attract new people and is also highly motivating for volunteers who are directly engaged and witnessing firsthand the impact of the grassroots approach.
  
- ✓ Scalable: A grassroots approach can expand over time yet still remain highly customized. Once you have successfully piloted a solid grassroots strategy, it is fairly easy to test ways of scaling up your grassroots strategies to new geographies.
  
- ✓ Affordable: The cost of grassroots strategies pales in comparison to advertising or other public education approaches. The major investment is up-front, to develop the strategy, training and support; this investment pays ongoing dividends over time.

It's important to realize that grassroots engagement is a labor-intensive effort that requires a significant investment of time, human resources, and organizational support. Many organizations that seek to work at the grassroots level focus on periodic, one-way mass communications. Others put all of their energies into an intensive phase of grassroots mobilization to meet a specific goal. These non-engaging, transactional approaches tend more often to burn out constituents rather than engage them.

For clients new to grassroots organizing programs, **grassroots solutions** often utilizes the framework of an "Engagement Cycle" that emphasizes relationship-building and community engagement as ongoing, cyclical endeavor, rather than a one-time activity. We find that the Engagement Cycle framework helps participants understand the continuous nature of their grassroots engagement responsibilities—by mapping out clear, actionable steps or phases of grassroots work, and by showing how each phase builds upon another to maximize impact, and by pointing to the benefits of sustained effort. Cycles of engagement should include built-in checkpoint for evaluating the incremental results of grassroots engagement (because many results are indeed incremental!), making adjustments, and celebrating positive outcomes.

Recruitment and relationship building, engagement and leadership development, celebration, re-engagement ... the most effective grassroots efforts put supporters and volunteers squarely at the center of a long-term, interactive relationship.