

The Precinct Captain

The Precinct Captain serves as the main communication source between the Florida Democratic Party and current and future Democrats in his or her precinct. The precinct captain is charged with connecting the people in the precinct to the Democratic Party, and the Party to the People.

The Precinct Captain is responsible for filling the roles that follow, keeping in mind that it is okay to begin slowly; filling one or two at the start. Your county chair is always available to provide support and answer questions. Remember, you are providing a wonderful service to the Party and to your community. Have fun!

REGULAR DUTIES

1 Obtain the precinct map and walking lists for your precinct and familiarize yourself with the demographics and geography of the precinct.

2 Get to know your Democratic and Independent neighbors and get as many email addresses as possible for our newsletters.

For example: Host a house party and invite your neighbors to talk about politics and issues concerning your precinct. Let them know “they are not alone,” that there are Democrats and others in the area who agree with them. Invite them to Democratic Club meetings.

Canvass the precinct using the walking list or call list. Keep track of changes in voter data on your lists (change of address or phone, candidate preferences, etc.), update the VAN with the new data, and make sure all eligible voters in the house are registered.

3 Welcome new neighbors who have registered as Democrats.

4 Participate in County Democratic Party meetings, events, and activities including providing assistance to your local Democratic Party by staffing registration drives and tables, by supporting local candidates, and by taking part in local fundraising efforts.

5 Be a visibly proud Florida Democrat – display yard signs, window signs, campaign buttons, bumper stickers.

6 Recruit new volunteers and other volunteers in your Precinct and communicate with them regularly. Adding volunteers means you can divide the Precinct for more personal contact with the voters. It also means providing additional support and backup for each other and for your candidates. Develop winning strategies by utilizing the group’s collective skills, contacts, and energy to get the job done!

CAMPAIGN DUTIES

- 1 Reach out to all who want to volunteer within your precinct and get them active.
- 2 Obtain petition signatures for Democratic candidates to qualify them for the ballot.
- 3 Distribute Party and candidate literature through door-to-door canvassing.
- 4 Help identify where independent voters stand on our Democratic candidates.
- 5 Hold house parties for Democratic candidates.
- 6 Promote absentee ballots and in-person Early Voting among Democratic supporters.
- 7 Help the Party to “chase” early ballots to ensure they are returned.
- 8 Help ensure a strong and effective Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) effort, the Party will design the GOTV Plan; you will help implement it.
- 9 Recommend Democrats within your precinct to work as Poll Workers on Election Day – our front line of defense in voter protection.

KNOW YOUR PRECINCT

Know the boundaries, the number of houses and apartment complexes, the religious centers, schools, and businesses. Obtain a map of the area and study it.

PRECINCT INFORMATION

Describing your voting area

- 1 What is your Precinct number?
- 2 Who and what are your US Congressional District and Representative?
- 3 Who and what are your State Senate District and Representative?
- 4 Who and what are your State House District and Representative?
- 5 Who are your County Commission District and Representative?

Understand the Demographics in your precinct: the economic and cultural makeup, number of union members, veterans, students of voting age, total Democratic population, Independents, etc. You will obtain this information by canvassing your precinct and by using the VAN (the Florida Democratic Party’s voter database) through your County Party organization.

Know your neighbors. Get acquainted with the Democrats in your precinct; meet their families and learn their interests and concerns. Get to know them on a personal level as much as possible and make sure they know you are a resource for them. (Give them your phone number.) Make sure that in households with at least one registered Democrat, you ask all the other adults if they too would like to register Democratic. Most importantly, focus on relationships; build trust.

Know your local election laws. Know the deadlines for registering for the Primary and General Elections. Know the facts about state and city elections, school board elections, and bond elections. Don’t fret! You will learn all this information and more by simply attending your monthly County Democratic Party meetings.

Know the issues. Read your local newspapers to learn about the major concerns affecting your city, county, and the state. Know the prevalent issues in your community and how people in your precinct feel about them. Stay informed by visiting the local Democratic Party website (www.leondems.com) or the Florida Democratic Party website (www.fladems.com). Sign up on www.fladems.com for their weekly email

newsletters. Learn about important state issues and Democratic Party positions. Know the party organization. Get acquainted with your County Officers, State Party Officers, and elected Democratic officials. Keep up to date on Party activities. Support activities of your District and County organizations and the Florida Democratic Party. Try to attend training sessions, conferences and conventions

CANVASSING DEFINITION

A canvass is walking door-to-door or calling and getting to know the people in your precinct.

EFFECTIVE CANVASSING

As a Precinct Captain, you know your constituency best. You are the precinct “opinion maker.” This means your neighbors come to rely on you for information, advice, and help in solving public problems.

Your canvass will prove invaluable in your role as an elected or appointed precinct captain. You will learn about the economic make-up of your precinct, what issues are important, what messages people are receiving from our candidates, and how the voters feel about the Party.

WHY IS CANVASSING IMPORTANT?

- Field and telephone canvassing is a valuable means of outreach, education, and fundraising, for advocacy and non-profit organizations. Incorporating a canvass and effective database management support allows an organization to build a real grassroots membership and funding base.
- Canvassing is a valuable method for mobilizing members and creating visibility for legislative and issue campaigns.
- Canvassing gives you the chance to identify voters’ requests for help and provide service for them. Make sure you follow through on all requests. If you don’t know the answers to questions, say, “I don’t know, but I will find out and get back to you.”
- While you are canvassing, you will meet people who want to participate in the Democratic Party or one of the local clubs. Have interested volunteers fill out a Volunteer Card, and give all your completed Volunteer Cards to your County Chair.
- This is a good time to find neighborhood captains who can assist you in organizing the precinct. These captains are responsible for the two or three square block area surrounding their homes. They will assist you in voter registration when new people move into the neighborhood. They can also circulate petitions, and work on Get-Out The-Vote campaigns.

BE PREPARED WHEN YOU CANVASS WITH:

- 1 Precinct map
- 2 Walking list
- 3 Pencils and pens
- 4 Informational literature (party, candidate, or clubs)
- 5 Voter registration forms
- 6 Location of polling place
- 7 Democratic button, T-shirt, sticker, or other identification
- 8 Something to carry your materials in
- 9 Water

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU CANVASS:

- Work in pairs when possible for safety, support, and fun
- Determine optimal time of day to visit
- Be prepared with a script, usually provided by the party
- NEVER try to convince someone you are right and they are wrong.
- If someone is very negative toward Democrats, don't waste your time by getting drawn into a discussion. Smile, say thank you for your time, and move on.

WALKING

Your walking list contains house-by-house information in terms of registered voters, party affiliation, and whether or not they have voted lately.

Look for insight into the voter, and make notes to enter later into the voter list.

You can get some idea about a person's preferences by looking at the following:

- 1 Bumper stickers, license plates or window decals: What issues are brought up? Do they indicate issue preferences? Do they indicate particular values? Look for customized license plates that may indicate an important issue to that voter.
- 2 Religious items: Do they have any religious items in view? What can you tell by the nature of their religious display?
- 3 Family: What type of family do they have? For example, if they have small children, child care, education, and the future of our economy may be important to them. If they are an older couple, health care issues may be important, etc.
- 4 Job: What does the person do for a living? For example, if they are a teacher, what might that indicate about their values and daily concerns? What about a tradesman or laborer?
- 5 Telephone calls: When you call people, you can also use your walking list because your walking list contains phone numbers. Calling is a great way to break the ice, mobilize Democrats, and get the Democratic message out.
- 6 House parties: Invite Democrats in your precinct to your home to meet other like-minded neighbors. At your House Party, you can have your fellow Democrats meet candidates and learn about issues. House parties do not have to be elaborate – punch and cookies is fine – and they help build your Democratic community.

CAMPAIGNING

One of a precinct captain's most important jobs is to campaign on behalf of candidates. This is where the true grass roots efforts by precinct captains will make the greatest difference. The assistance you provide is critical to a candidate's campaign.

Qualifying: A candidate first must qualify for the ballot by obtaining the requisite number of signatures. To be a valid signatory, an individual must be registered to vote within the area in which the candidate is running, and in partisan elections, be a member of the candidate's party.

Once candidates have filed statements of candidacy, you may obtain signatures for them. Visit the neighbors you have been in contact with as a precinct captain; keep petitions in your car for when you see people you know. Candidates usually try to get about 50% more signatures than actually required by law to ensure they have the minimum number of valid signatures.

Campaigning: Simply put, candidates cannot do everything that needs to get done to win an election. This is where they rely on volunteers to be their surrogates in terms of walking, calling, e-mailing, and more. This is where the time you took as a precinct captain to canvass your neighborhood in non-election times pays off for our candidates. Also realize most voters will be aware of the major candidates, such as President, U.S. Senator, or Governor, but may be less informed about the "down ticket" candidates, those running for offices such as state legislature, city council, or school board. When people don't have any information about these races, they tend not to vote in them at all. But you can change that!

FINDING VOLUNTEERS

Many precinct captain tasks, especially during an election cycle, become more manageable if you recruit additional volunteers. Keep in mind these volunteers also may be future leaders of the precinct, the region, and the Party. When you're getting volunteers, be sure you know exactly what people like to do. Think about the work to be done and the skills of the volunteers you recruit, and try and match them as much as possible.

The number one way to get others active is to call through the people in your precinct who have signed up in the past to volunteer with the Party and invite them to take part in a precinct-based activity. Your County Chair and the VAN has up-to-date lists of who these people are. Another method of recruiting volunteers is to call the "Super Democrats" (i.e., Democrats who vote consistently) in your precinct. From your lists of former volunteers and of actively voting Democrats in your precinct you will likely identify several individuals who might help.

You can also identify activists already living in the precinct, e.g. union members, teachers, conservationists, social issues interest groups, retired citizens, and other core groups usually aligned with Democratic Party positions. You can ask past candidates for their lists of volunteers.

An important thing to remember is to ask for people to be involved. People like to be asked, and unless they are self-directed, they usually will wait until they are asked before they get involved.

When calling volunteers from previous years, be sure to thank them for their past service to the Party before asking them to volunteer again.

Make sure your volunteers are acknowledged for their work – show your appreciation and that of the candidates and the Party. Make sure you listen to volunteers' suggestions to improve how the job gets done.