

00:02 [Elizabeth Finn] So thank you everyone for joining us tonight, this is our fourth workshop of our Activism

00:08 in Action series. I'm Elizabeth, she/her pronouns and Syeeda has been helping me

00:17 plan these. We're so happy to have Lizzie Rutberg here tonight. She's an organizer I

00:24 met this summer when I was actually working on a campaign with her and I learnt a lot

00:28 with organizing with her. So, I'm very excited and I'll let her take it away.

00:38 [Lizzie Rutberg] Hi everyone, my name's Lizzie. I am really excited to be here tonight.

00:51 I've been organizing professionally since summer 2018 where I got my first job on the 'Yes on

01:00 3' campaign for transgender equality. I've been bumping around Massachusetts politics ever since

01:09 and spent last year working with Lizzie on the campaign to reelect our boy senator Ed Markey.

01:19 So really excited to bring what I've learned from organizing

01:26 into this space and I hope that you find it fun and interesting.

01:37 So yeah, tonight's agenda, I'm going to introduce a case study that I'm going to be using throughout

01:43 this presentation which is the Massachusetts 2018 Yes on 3 campaign for transgender equality

01:51 where I got my start and learnt how to organize. We're going to talk about the personal story a

01:57 little bit and how important that is to this work. We're going to talk about relational organizing,

02:06 why we do it, how to do it, having one on one meetings with your friends and then a little bit

02:16 over about phone-banking canvassing conversations. We're going to end having practiced the hard task.

02:25 So yeah, introducing the Yes on 3 campaign, this to me is kind of the gold standard of

02:34 field organizing. It was really incredible. This is where I learned how to organize and where I

02:44 came up. So, the issue of this, this was a statewide ballot question, like repair or

02:54 ran choice was last cycle. The issue was whether to uphold or to repeal

03:00 a 2016 law granting transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming people legal protections

03:08 against harassment and discrimination in public spaces. Which includes public restrooms but also

03:14 libraries, public transportation, grocery stores, hospitals, everything pretty much.

03:24 I joined this campaign in fall 2017, I got street canvassed in Davis Square. Someone was like hey,

03:31 your human rights are going to be up for a statewide vote in 14 months, I was like,

03:36 "Oh, shit, I better do something about that one." And the field strategy of this campaign

03:44 was rooted in deep canvassing. What this is is having long meaningful conversations with

03:52 others where we dig in to their values, their experiences, their feelings around trans people,

04:00 build a real relationship empathy with everyone we talk to and use that empathy

04:06 to try to move people towards a more accepting position of trans people.

04:16 The reason we decided to do it this way with that deep canvassing

04:22 is we looked at the Hero Initiative in Houston, Texas, this was a citywide ballot campaign about

04:33 protections in public spaces for all kinds of minority groups and not just transgender people.

04:43 That issue had been pooling at around 60% and then opposition managed to boil it down to like,

04:54 this will put trans women or men and they're going to go in women's bathrooms and attack your kids

05:01 and then support for the issue plunged 20 points in two weeks, and then we lost.

05:06 So we needed to inoculate enough voters against this messaging by having deep canvassing

05:15 conversations with them where we would actively introduce this messaging in the conversation and

05:22 ask them how they felt about it, how they reacted and then work through those complicated feelings.

05:28 We needed to have enough of these conversations and inoculate enough voters to create a buffer

05:36 against the effect of that negative advertising which inevitably would be used here as well.

05:44 We needed to have 100,000 deep canvassing conversations with voters and their persuadable

05:52 middle of Massachusetts voter block, and we did it. So

05:59 that's the campaign that I'm going to be talking about throughout the rest of this presentation.

06:08 So, to start with, why we organize. The thing that undergirds all effective organizing,

06:18 the thing that you need to do to be an effective organizer is to know yourself and to know why

06:24 you're doing what you're doing. What does this issue or this candidate mean to you and what

06:33 is it going to mean to the people around you that you're going to be asking for help?
Organizing

06:43 is about asking people to join your cause, take an action with you. People take actions because

06:53 they want to, because they feel that it's in their enlightened self-interest to do that.

07:01 So it's up to you to build an emotional connection with someone and use that connection

07:11 to make them feel like they want to join you.

07:15 To do that, you have to know why you're in it yourself and you need to be able to communicate

07:26 why you're in this fight. You can do that with your own personal story.

07:34 So a story that I like to tell about Yes on 3 is the reason that campaign felt so important to me,

07:43 besides the fact that I'm a trans woman myself, is I think about a friend of mine from high school

07:55 who's trans. She still goes by her birth name because she's closeted, but she once told me that

08:03 if she had a choice she would go by Lindsay. So, Lindsay told me just before we all graduated

08:13 that she was trans and she was really scared about that because her family didn't accept her.

08:27 This is central Massachusetts, 2015. So, it's a pretty hostile social context for trans people.

08:39 We got pretty close in those last couple of weeks before graduating.

08:47 At one point in some grad party, she was opening up to us and telling us that

08:57 she was having a hard time literally making it from one day to the next,

09:04 because she had to stay in the closet. So, what this campaign was about was making Massachusetts

09:15 a place where she could feel safe being herself and living the way that she needed to live.

09:25 If we won, it would bring her one step closer to being able to do that. And if we lost,

09:36 she would go her whole life knowing that her state doesn't want her to be safe in public.

09:46 That's why I did all the things that I did on that campaign.

09:53 I heard countless similar stories from volunteers who were trans themselves or their partner was,

09:58 or their child or their best friend and we were able to build powerful working relationships

10:05 with each other around our shared love for the trans people in our lives.

10:18 Not to be corny, but that love is literally what

10:23 powered our field team to do all of the insanely difficult things that we did.

10:33 So anyone else here who can tell a story about a specific point or event in your life,

10:40 which made you want to start organizing, or which drew you to this work? A specific thing that

10:49 happened to you or someone you love that makes you want to do this and like throw down for justice?

11:01 [Finn] I can share a quick little personal story. So, in my local town, there's a school committee race

11:10 coming up and I'm not really involved in local politics or any of that, but someone I know

11:17 who's a pretty progressive candidate, who really supports safe free opening for schools in my town

11:25 has this whole thing about, we have a logo that's really outdated and really offensive.

11:31 It's an Indian head. It's just really racist and it's not appropriate to have as a school

11:37 mascot. There's this whole town wide debate. And there's a string of candidates running against him

11:48 trying to keep this head while he's trying to remove it. It's not that of a personal thing,

11:53 but for me, it's like, this is the town I grew up in. This is the school I went to.

12:00 I really care about it and I want it to be a strong foot forward and I want it to be

12:06 a good welcoming town and not to have these values that don't match what the people think.

12:12 So I really didn't want to join this campaign, but I kind of felt morally called to do it and

12:21 that I need to stick up and join this campaign and help him win so that we can move my town forward.

12:31 [Rutberg] Yeah, absolutely. That's your home, right? You don't want your home to be

12:39 like a shitty racist place to people. That's important. I mean, it's important on a personal

12:52 level. That's kind of how that self-interest works. Anyone else have like a quick story?

13:05 [Syeeda Rahman] I could share one too. I think just a little bit of background of that. I'm an immigrant,

13:10 like I'm a BOC person and I always kind of thought, like I didn't really experience racism or

13:15 it was so slight that I didn't want to admit it. But when I was doing my college interviews with

13:20 Stanford and Yale and some of the comments I got from those, you're not like other Asians or

13:29 the Asians that I've talked to before are quite different from,

13:37 you have a personality and it was like backhanded compliments, you know?

13:41 So that summer before freshman year of college, I ended up running like a workshop to teach young

13:50 girls about the type of racism that they could experience and how to deal with it and what

13:55 different sectors they could experience it in. Because I think I hid from myself for so long

14:00 that I was like, other people should realize that this is very common and it's okay to let it out.

14:06 [Rutberg] Yeah. That's sort of a way that you were able to help other younger people protect

14:15 themselves. Well, that's, that's really cool. So yeah, in organizing, your story and sharing things

14:32 that can be honestly personal and vulnerable, is one of your greatest tools as you talk to voters

14:41 and would be volunteers on the campaign. So, encourage you all to think about

14:50 what are those events for you? What are the things in your head, heart and gut,

14:56 which drive you to do this kind of work and how to communicate that?

15:06 So now a little bit about relational organizing. Starting with people you know,

15:17 is the best way to organize. This is a pillar of what made our field program on

15:27 the Markey campaign so strong. It was our most effective recruitment tactic during Yes on 3

15:38 and especially in non-electoral forms of organizing, this is really central. So

15:47 what do you think are some of the advantages of starting by reaching out to people that you know?

16:02 [Rahman] I think one thing you're just really comfortable with them, so you talk to them about anything,

16:08 why not talk about an issue that you really care about with them?

16:13 [Rutberg] Yeah. It's a way to expand, to deepen your relationship with them.

16:23 There are people you care about, who care about you, people who

16:28 probably have the same values as you, hopefully. So, people who are already kind of predisposed

16:36 to care about the same kind of issues that you care about. Anything else come to mind?

16:55 [Finn] I mean, they're more likely to listen to what you have

16:57 to say than just some random person on the street.

17:02 [Rutberg] Yeah, 100%. They trust you. And also, if you spent two hours calling your friends versus

17:13 two hours calling strangers, your friends are way more likely to actually pick up the phone

17:21 and even talk to you to begin with. So, it's more conversations, it's better conversations

17:28 and a lot more organizing potential. During Yes on 3,

17:39 I relational organized my hometown of Holliston in central Mass for the campaign. I brought together

17:47 my mom who is the mother of a trans person, so that's why she cared about this. And another

17:58 band mom named Leslie who also is a mom of trans kid. Our band teacher, Sean, who's a trans man

18:05 himself and Lisa our sort of local democratic committee champion. Got together, just shared our

18:16 feelings and frustrations and fears for a little while and then made a plan to act and stuck to it.

18:25 They hosted weekly phone banks for probably like the least six or seven

18:32 and then collected postcards and had a big visual presence at our fall annual celebrate Holliston

18:40 parade/booth thing in the park and it got us a lot of identified supporters. It

18:58 showed that visible presence of Holliston for Yes on 3. And then we won Holliston by a

19:06 significantly larger margin than we did statewide. They did that because I knew them and I was able

19:14 to just call them up and be like, "Hey mom, hey Leslie, hey Sean." And it was great.

19:21 So just to stick with the theme of trans rights campaign, who in your life can you think of

19:28 who would want to be part of a campaign for trans rights? If you were an organizer for Yes On 3,

19:36 who in your life, would you think of to recap to?

19:47 [Rahman] I would reach out to my work team most likely because I work in an organization that's

19:54 filled with a lot of people from the LGBTQ+ community. And they're all working in activism

20:03 and organizing. So, I know they would do something or at least helping me find people who could help.

20:11 [Rutberg] Yeah. That sounds like a great crew. Anyone else just like a specific individual in

20:19 your life that you would want to reach out to, if you were on this kind of campaign?

20:34 [Finn] I have a friend who's non-binary, so they would really feel passionate about this

20:42 issue and I know they really care about it. So, I would definitely recruit them.

20:50 [Rutberg] Yeah. Real good choice. So, you've got your list of, of people in your life that you

21:01 would want to recruit for this. You'd think about, do they have the ability to help out?

21:06 Do they have the belief in your same sense of values and do you have their contact info?

21:14 Then once you have your list, you reach out to them and you ask them for help.

21:20 This could look like a few things. It could look like you might ask for their vote.

21:28 You might ask them to take on a volunteer shift with the campaign,

21:36 or you might want to plan something more in-depth with them. If you wanted to get like

21:43 a Suffolk for Yes on 3 team off the ground, for instance.

21:51 If you have something more in-depth in mind, you'll want to have a one-on-one with them.
It's

21:58 in the title of the slide, a one-on-one is one of the fundamental tools of all kinds of organizing.

22:09 Not just about for all campaigns labor campaigns, union, whatever you're putting together,

22:18 you're probably having one on months. What this is is two people make a specific

22:29 time to intentionally sit down together, talk about a campaign. You build an emotional

22:37 connection from another specific issue. Once that connection is made, you make a plan,

22:46 you make commitments to each other to do something about this thing you care about,

22:51 and then you commit to following up with each other to make sure it happens.

22:56 More on how this goes right in the middle. So yeah, this diagram is a sort of a map of roughly

23:08 how a one-on-one goes. They typically last around 40 to 60 minutes.

23:17 I like long one-on-ones. I like to take my time with them and really vibe with the person.

23:26 You reach out to them like, Hey, I'm on this campaign, I would really love your help with it.

23:34 Can we find a time to sit down together and talk about it? You get there, you sit down.

23:45 The first 50% or so roughly, you spend getting to know them better.

23:56 Why do they care about this? What experiences have they had in life

24:02 that has fed into that feeling for them? What kind of organizing have they done before, what are

24:09 their expectations? What are their hopes, doubts questions and their personal story behind what

24:23 makes this something they want to do?

24:28 This is also a place where you want to be vulnerable yourself. What's your story?

24:40 What feelings are driving you to do this? Then after you've shared a little bit with each other,

24:54 the rest of the conversation goes by way easier. So, don't skip this.

25:04 [Adam Westbrook] Can I ask a question, Lizzie?

25:06 [Rutberg] Sure.

25:09 [Westbrook] So one-on-ones, some people might say they're very time-intensive,

25:15 there's a lot that you have to invest.

25:19 What's the advantage to doing a one-on-one if the trick is to try to get as many people voting for

25:25 whatever it is you're trying to get them to vote for? This seems like kind of a more drawn out.

25:30 I'm being a little provocative in the way that I'm asking the question, but that seems a little

25:33 bit more of a drawn out process. So, what's the advantage? What do we gain by doing one-on-one?

25:41 [Rutberg] Great question. You could get an organizing partner. Say it's February,

25:51 election's in November, you're putting together a Suffolk for Yes on 3 organization.

26:02 If you try to do it yourself, you're going to burn out in three weeks and not get anywhere.

26:08 So, you need someone, you need comrades. It's hard to have a relationship with someone

26:24 where you can trust each other and rely on each other and be accountable to each other,

26:33 without doing this kind of intensive, intentional relationship building.

26:42 So yeah, if you just needed to get someone to vote for something,

26:47 you might not want to have a one-on-one with them. But if you are

26:58 working on a project that feels big, bigger than you can handle

27:05 and you need friends to help you with it, this is what you do. Great question.

27:12 [Westbrook] Awesome, thanks.

27:16 [Rutberg] So the 30 to 45-minute mark are sort of roughly the campaign overview. What's going on,

27:26 what's the context of the campaign, what's the fields and what's the strategy so far?

27:34 What's the goals, what's the challenges. What is the specific thing that you need help with?

27:45 Then the last 15 minutes, you're making a plan for action. This is where you lean on that connection

27:58 you've established, to make commitments to each other, to do something, to take action

28:07 and make a specific plan to follow up with each other afterwards. Whether that's

28:18 let's check in again same time next week or something like that.

28:32 There's definitely more to it, but this is the shorter version of how a one-on-one goes.

28:45 So all of that was a little more, I don't know, abstract conceptual, more high level

28:53 thinking. Here is something more straightforward. This is the phone banking, the canvassing, the

29:02 voter outreach, whatever conversation. It means are you in a campaign by having

29:09 a shit ton of these? No matter what kind of campaign you're on, you are reaching out to people

29:18 and asking them for something. You want to know what you're going to ask them

29:23 for before you call them or knock their door, whatever. So, what are some things

29:29 that a campaign needs that you might be asking for when you reach out to random voters or friends?

29:40 [Finn] Volunteers.

29:41 [Rutberg] Yes, campaigns need volunteer shifts. You might be asked for public here shifts.

29:46 What are some other things campaigns need?

29:52 [Rahman] I would say like maybe social media support, which is a little easier to gain.

29:59 [Rutberg] Mm-hmm. That's something you might find yourself asking for as well.

30:04 What else do campaigns need? Something in the chat. Money,

30:11 campaigns need money. They need lots of money. And what's something else that they need?

30:25 Something else that campaigns need? They need votes. Yeah, so volunteer shifts, money and votes

30:34 are probably the big three things you will probably be asking people for when you call them.

30:50 I've done like a little bit of asking for money. I've done a lot more asking for votes and

30:54 volunteer shifts. So yeah, and during Yes on 3, we had that this deep canvassing conversation, right?

31:04 Where the ask is a little less straightforward. The ask is,

31:12 will you dig into your own feelings and do the emotional work that you need to do

31:19 in order to support trans people enough to vote yes on question three? If that makes sense.

31:26 Then we would also call people and ask them for volunteer shifts over and over again.

31:36 No matter what you're asked for though, the basic conversation or emotional

31:43 arc or logic of the conversation is the same. You want to build an emotional connection

31:51 with the person you're talking to, around the issue you're working around

31:56 with curiosity, with vulnerability. You apply urgency to the situation

32:05 by you need their help. Then you make a hard ask, which we're going to get into very shortly.

32:16 But first, why do we want to be curious

32:20 with people? Why do we want to be curious and vulnerable when we ask someone for help?

32:36 [Rahman] To connect with them? Because I think

32:40 without kind of having your story out there, they might not even want to listen to you or understand

32:46 where you're coming from or why it's important that you listen or act on this thing.

32:54 [Rutberg] Yeah. You want to open up space for them to share about themselves. I've definitely

33:06 heard a lot of powerful, surprising stories when I ask people why people why during Yes on 3.

33:19 And definitely connected with people by telling them what was in it for me.

33:28 Then for the urgency, what are some things that you could do like ramp up the urgency in a call

33:36 and may someone really feel like they needed to do the thing that you're going to ask them to do?

33:48 In the chat Mark says, tell them the story. Absolutely. Lizzie, did you have something too?

33:58 [Finn] I was going to say put a deadline on it and make it time sensitive,

34:02 that it needs to happen within this much time, so they feel pressure to actually do it.

34:08 [Rutberg] Absolutely. And elections are great for that.

34:12 You can be like, hey election's in six days, when can you phonebank citing,

34:24 polls that suggest that you're tight or in a tight race. Even if you have to massage the

34:34 truth a little tiny bit. In Yes on 3, it would be whoop, sorry. Yes on 3, it would be like,

34:50 our opponents are going to put out this messaging and our support is really going to drop

34:54 unless we have enough of these conversations. Can you have these conversations with us?
Or

35:00 like it's in two weeks, can you join us? Move them from like,

35:07 I care about this issue to, I want to take a specific action.

35:14 Then we're going to talk about the qualities of hard ask right now. A hard ask is specific.

35:22 It is uncompromising, unapologetic. It is tied to someone's core values and motivations.

35:36 So we're going to dig a little more into the hard ask and we're going to start

35:41 with an example of a very weak ask. Here is an example of a very weak ask. (Music)

36:00 So, "Hey, I just met you and this is crazy, but here's my number, so call me maybe."

36:09 From the iconic song "Call Me Maybe" by probably Carly Rae Jepsen. What makes that such a weak ask?

36:25 [Finn] For starters it says call me maybe. It's not like a definite,

36:29 no you're going to call me, it's Oh, well, maybe.

36:33 [Rutberg] Right. It's like call me maybe?

36:38 That's weak as hell. Yeah, it's not assertive enough. Anything else you can identify?

36:47 [Rahman] It also starts off with all of this stuff about, Oh, this is totally crazy for me to ask you

36:53 and saying that makes it sound like it's good to say no to it.

36:58 [Rutberg] Right. She's literally giving out excuses

37:02 and reasons to say no. Not even making a person come up with their own excuses.

37:12 Then also she puts like the impetus on the other person to follow up.

37:18 It's not like, can I count on you to come to the shift? And like, I'll send you all the

37:25 information you need to know. It's like, here's my number, if you want to call me.

37:35 When you put the impetus on the other person to have to actively follow up like that,

37:40 they're much less likely to do the thing. So, a good hard ask

37:50 is kind of the opposite of that. It's specific. It sounds roughly like, can I count on you to come

37:58 to our public education phonebank at the old South church on Monday, June 18th at 6:00 PM?

38:10 What made that better?

38:15 [Finn] You gave a date and a time.

38:20 [Rutberg] And the location. Easy to forget locations,

38:22 because we've been organizing largely without them. But locations are important too. What else?

38:31 [Rahman] You asked them a straight up yes or no question. So, they know the exact answer.

38:38 [Rutberg] Yeah. Yeah. It's not like you think you might be interested or if you have time,

38:44 do you think you might, or would you maybe want to? It's,

38:48 are you going to be there or are you not going to be there?

38:55 What did you notice me do with my voice?

39:04 [Finn] It was very assertive. It wasn't like the kind of high pitched maybe, will you come?

39:11 Yeah. And the specific vocal trick you can use to make your asks stronger, is to end on a down

39:20 tone. To compare, can I count on you to come to our voter contact phone bank at

39:24 the old South church on Monday, June 18th at 6:00 PM? Versus that I count on you to

39:31 come to our voter contact phone bank at the old South church on Monday, June 18th at 6:00 PM?

39:42 That low vocal trick will make you sound a lot more authoritative,

39:48 even if you don't actually feel authoritative. Then after you ask them,

39:57 it's the golden silence. You don't say anything. You put all the impetus on them

40:07 to make the decision around what their boundaries are and what they feel like they can do?

40:15 Anything you say after that ask, will just weaken your ask.

40:23 All right, I'm about to shift into a section where we make you rehearse stuff.

40:30 But first before I do, any questions about any of this stuff so far?

40:47 Awesome. I must be a good presenter. All right. So now, you try. It's time for activity.

41:04 We're going to split you randomly into breakout rooms of two. I'm not ready, but on my word.

41:18 You're going to practice hard asking each other for a volunteer shift. I'm going to put

41:26 the exact information and language of what you're going to ask people for in the chat.

41:47 Cool, yeah. Just take a few minutes to debrief how that went. What was it like

41:58 getting yourself to use that strong ask language and all that inflection, what was it like

42:07 to make yourself do that?

42:15 [Rahman] For me, I think it, I'm not someone that loves inconveniencing people, so that's something that

42:25 I definitely had to learn. Especially the past year. So, James and I were definitely talking

42:30 about that and how uncomfortable it feels to say something like that and ask something like that,

42:36 of someone knowing that they have other things going on. But I think we got there at the end.

42:43 [Rutberg] Awesome. Yeah, the hard ask is very outside of our natural way of how we were socialized to be

42:54 and it takes a lot of unpacking to get to a point where we're able to do it. So, I'm

43:00 glad you were able to work through together. Anyone else have something they want to share?

43:09 [Westbrook] I'll share. One of the things, I was linked up with Mark and we actually never got to the hard

43:16 ask because we were kind of on the connecting phase. 10 minutes is a short period of time of

43:22 course, and I know this is a workshop to practice but it kind of occurred to me how much easier the

43:28 hard ask would probably be if we had more rapport that was built up over some time.

43:37 Even though we didn't get to the hard ask, I think that this experience kind of highlighted

43:42 for me how important that connection piece is and not to jump too fast to the hard ask. Right.

43:48 [Rutberg] Yeah. 10,000%. Having that, even if it's just like a couple sentences from each side, having

44:00 the chance to build even a little bit of relationship

44:04 with the other person makes it feel so much easier if we'd ask them to do stuff.

44:13 Any time for one last share and then we probably got to go?

44:22 [Finn] It was good to practice because I know I phone banked before and you get very nervous when

44:29 you're asking someone and then your immediate gut reaction is to be like, Oh, well it's fine if you

44:33 don't. So actually, taking the time to walk through it and be like, all right, if this was real,

44:39 this is how I would do it. This is how I would kind of stick to my gun and be like,

44:46 can you come? And really work on being that assertiveness, because I think when you're

44:52 thrown really into it, you're a lot more nervous and you tend to be a lot more timid.

44:58 [Rutberg] Yeah. Yeah. It helps to just literally just drill it over and over again.

45:07 Cool, yeah. So, that's what I got. That's the presentation. Hope you liked it

45:15 is now 8:00 PM, so you've got to go, I won't be keeping you anymore.

45:22 [Finn] Thank you so much, Lizzie for coming and leading with us.

45:25 We really appreciate it. Again, thank you for everyone who came. So, we have, I think left

45:34 James and Mark. So, we will be in touch about a gift card to see who will win that. So, thank

45:43 you so much for joining us. And then two weeks from now, we have our fifth event on

45:53 March 31st at seven. It's all about how to contact your local officials. So

46:00 we hope you guys can join us for that one. So, thank you again and everyone have a great night.

46:05 [Westbrook] Thanks everybody.

46:07 [Rahman] Thank you.

46:07 [Finn] Thank you.

46:10 Thank you.