

Bird-Dogging Candidates and Incumbents

Bird-dogging is a way to elicit and publicize a candidate's views on particular issues. This process entails showing up at candidates' events repeatedly and asking them the questions they don't want to answer in order to get them on the record and to educate those present about the issues. (This method is also useful during non-campaign years, when the incumbent Representative or Senator is holding a local town meeting.) The most important thing is to show up at a meeting prepared to ask your questions.

Bird-dogging allows you not only to raise on your own terms the issues which you and your group or network want to highlight, but also helps strengthen your group or network by investing members in collective action. It also allows your group to take advantage of the opportunity presented by events/forums/town hall meetings and other events organized (and subsidized) by the candidates themselves. You only have to show up prepared. The organizing is done for you.

Following is a proposed model for a bird-dogging team or committee. Roles can be filled by one person or shared by teams of two or more.

The Bird-Dogging Team

Here's a formula for how five people can effectively hound candidates or incumbents about their positions on critical issues:

The **SCHEDULER** monitors local press reports, checks with campaign offices and Web sites, and calls other organizations to determine the candidates' schedule of public appearances. This work should be done as far ahead of time as possible. Generally a candidate's events are mapped out days if not weeks in advance.

The **PHONE TREE OR EMAIL COORDINATOR** keeps a list of your project's supporters and makes calls or sends out important information to alert them about a candidate's events in their area where questions about the key issues can be raised.

The **RESEARCHER** obtains as much relevant information on the various public stances a candidate has taken on your key issues as possible. The candidate's Web site will often have categorized where a candidate stands on the various issues. If the candidate is an incumbent, the researcher also obtains the candidate's voting records and monitors local press for statements on the issues you want addressed.

The **QUESTION WRITER** drafts questions, reviewed by the rest of the team, to be asked by bird-doggers. If several people will attend an event, determine beforehand who will be the primary question asker and make sure that they are prepared to answer questions themselves on your particular issues should the candidate or the press engage during or after the event. This person should be confident and know the issue well. Determine too which questions have priority.

The **TACTICAL PLANNER** finds out the format and layout of the event and the logistics of how to get there, the parking situation, and other essentials. This person also determines whether leafleting or a protest demo or a follow-up statement for the press might also be advisable.

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