

Module 13



Adopt a Public Official

Choose one public official – an elections official, secretary of state, commissioner, county supervisor, or member of the Board of Elections. Provide encouragement and recognition if the official represents the citizenry well. Educate those who may be misinformed. If the official has been influenced by vendors, offer alternative points of view. Hold officials accountable if they are non-responsive and should know better.

Guide to Adopting a Public Official

Goals:

Develop a positive, open and mutually informative relationship with a local public official. This will involve getting to know them, learning about the challenges they face, finding out their priorities and opinions, or – for those who are non-responsive to the public will – holding them accountable.

Assume the official can be your ally

- Meet with the official to understand current procedures.
- Request information and copies of the procedures before the election. Here is a list of issues that you can address with public officials before the election:
 - Vote Count Auditing
 - Election Day Procedures
 - Ballot/DRE Security
 - Election Challenger Procedures
 - Voting Machine Allocation
 - Election Monitor Procedures
 - Voter Purging
 - Provisional Ballots
 - Voter Registration
 - Absentee Ballots
 - Recount Procedures

- Review procedures/documents for problems and compare with other counties
- Monitor elections on Election Day
- Participate in post-election reviews and audits to evaluate election process
- Advocate for improvements

Understand how local laws and regulations affect public officials

- Find out which rules your local officials cite to educate you about why they have made certain choices.
- If you see that a public official is not following the laws and/or regulations, help them become informed. For example, if you have a public official who withholds public records, provide a copy of the public records statute and recommend that they seek guidance from the county attorney. It is not unusual for a public official to be unaware of certain laws.

Understand and work to counteract the power of vendors

- Many elections officials have developed a co-dependent relationship with vendors.
- Elections officials are usually dependent on vendor to maintain, upgrade and lend technical support for voting systems.
- Citizens can take power back and weaken the vendor-dependence by:
 - Building a case using undeniable evidence, and taking that evidence to additional public officials in various divisions, and to the media.
 - Putting public pressure on the vendor through the press, other politicians and by increasing the number of citizens taking action. This provides support for elections officials who want to hold their vendors accountable.

How to achieve change

- Make your case with evidence: Video, audio recordings, public records, photographs, laws and regulations
- Provide officials with concise, well researched information.
- Provide other alternatives.
- Locate officials who are responsive to the citizenry and provide contact information to both parties, encouraging a conversation.
- Ask them what they would need from you to make the change you want
- Provide cost analyses and comparison charts to provide a fiduciary duty for the public official to take your concerns seriously

What to do when efforts to educate and lobby don't work

- If you find a public official who is obstructive and non-responsive despite efforts to educate and persuade, it is your responsibility to hold them accountable.

How to hold non-responsive public officials accountable

- Use "judo": The weight of your opponent against them. The "weight" of a public official is in the rules, regulations and laws that control them. Get leverage by locating rules and laws that have not been followed.
- Apply public pressure:
- Provide evidence to the media (public records, photos, videos, audio recordings, laws and regulations). For tips on how to get media coverage, see **Module 12: Be the Media**. (<http://www.blackboxvoting.org/toolkit-media.pdf>)
- Provide evidence to those who supervise the non-responsive official.
- Assemble a group and show up at public meetings to expose the problem.
- **Tips for applying pressure in a public meeting:**
 - Get at least 12 people involved
 - Identify yourselves by all carrying the same bright-colored notebook, wearing the same bright-colored large button.
 - If given the opportunity to ask questions, organize the questions ahead of time on note cards. If the public official evades a question, have an agreement with your group that the next questioner will ask the same question, until it is answered or the evasions become obvious.
 - Bring a press release and copies of your evidence to the meeting and talk to reporters.
- Do a background search on the official. (See **Module 14: Following the Money Trail** – <http://www.blackboxvoting.org/toolkit-money-trail>). Find out if the public official has been in trouble in the past. If so, publicize that information along with the new problems you have uncovered.
- If a non-responsive public official continues to violate the public trust, lobby for their dismissal.

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Your Own Additions to the Adopt a Public Official Module

You can share your ideas by sending to crew@blackboxvoting.org



What worked well?

What new ideas did you come up with?

Was there anything that didn't work very well?
