

Module 20



Election Actions for High Net Worth Individuals

Black Box Voting developed its effective presence on the U.S. election reform scene almost entirely through small donations from individual citizens. In our first two years, we raised over \$1 million, with tens of thousands of citizens giving an average of \$59 each. It wasn't easy, but it worked: Un beholden to any vested interest, we were free to tackle election issues straight-on. Now that we have established the importance of *having* an elections watchdog group, we are transitioning to more traditional methods of grant writing and gifts from small family foundations.

What began as a single individual grew to a tiny nonprofit with two full time employees, and has now grown into an organization with a small office, computers, a business manager and the infrastructure to support permanent election oversight actions.

This is a nice success story, but neither *Black Box Voting* nor *any other national organization* can do this alone. If we want truly independent ongoing citizen oversight, we have to nurture the extraordinary independent citizens who undertake elections oversight using a less formal structure.

If you are a high net worth individual, of course you are familiar with development drives. In this module you will find organizations worthy of your gifts and grants. But we encourage you to invest also in informal citizen actions. While the top-down model (national organization with chapters in each community) is often favored by philanthropists, we encourage you to "think outside the Black Box" and take a different approach. It's time to provide necessary support for truly independent citizens who do the legwork day in and day out. This module provides practical tips for how to do that.

Guide to Election Integrity Philanthropy

Goals:

Bring philanthropy into citizen elections oversight – not just with tax deductible donations and grants to 501c(3) nonprofits, but by providing the support that's needed to effective individuals working independently. Let's start bypassing the red tape to take small amounts of needed support directly to the people.

Regardless of how much money you pour into election oversight, the real work will always be done by local citizens, who juggle full time jobs with extraordinary commitment to civic duty. These citizens, who attend meetings, read up on laws and regulations, request public records, feed information to the media, and hold public officials accountable are the very backbone of our republic.

Let's keep it that way!

While it may be appealing to seek out the most established election reform groups, the front-line work is mostly being done by unaffiliated citizens and tiny local groups you've never heard of. What do these citizens need, and how can you find them?

How to empower citizens as an Elections Angel

Become a Tool Kit Angel

The "Citizen's Tool Kit" is the most comprehensive training guide for citizen's election oversight available. It's available free on the Internet, but *making copies costs money*. Citizens need copies of the whole Tool Kit to distribute at town meetings, house parties, public speaking engagements and conferences. Many of the best and most dynamic citizens are bootstrapping their own elections watchdog expenses and can't afford to make the copies.

Find out how many copies your local citizen's group needs. Download the latest version of the Tool Kit (<http://www.blackboxvoting.org/toolkit.pdf>). We constantly take citizen input and it is frequently updated and improved, so get the latest before making copies. Have someone take it to the copy shop. Box them up and have them delivered to the event.

Become a DVD Angel

The most powerful tool to mobilize and motivate citizens is visual media. Citizens educate and empower each other by having meetings and showing election-related films. New films are coming out all the time – each better and more powerful than the last. E-mail us for recommendations on the latest, best, and most accurate election films. As of this edition of the Tool Kit: Don't miss "American Blackout." This fall, we hear that other hard-hitting films will be released.

Get copies of the most effective DVD documentary. Provide copies to citizens and ask them how many more they need to provide for public officials, local candidates and campaigns, party observers, and public interest groups.

Become a Public Records Angel

Citizens absolutely **MUST** get hold of public records to oversee elections, and not just during election season. Expenditures, contracts, procedures, costs analyses and procurement activities often take place during "off years" for elections. Public records cost money. In some states, costs are as little as three cents per page, but in other states labor fees of \$20 per hour or more are tacked on, or fees are as high as \$1 per page. Citizens need help paying the public records fees, and also need simple tools like scanners which can convert the files to pdf format, so they can distribute copies of the records as needed.

If you can underwrite costs for batches of public records, and/or underwrite purchase of a scanner with the appropriate software (usually about \$300), you can expedite citizen's efforts tremendously.

Become a Gadget Angel

Citizens doing elections oversight quickly learn that if they can't get their proof on video, audio, a photo or a public record, no change will occur.

Gadgets citizens need to oversee elections:

- A good digital camera with web-quality video capability and a disk to quickly transfer images to laptops – and therefore the Web – can be had for about \$350. That may seem like a small amount to you, but it's not affordable for many citizens doing the hardest work of all.
- Small pocket digital audio recorders
- Hidden cameras (a \$300 attachment available at "The Spy Store")
- Binoculars, to see computer screens which are typically placed in difficult to see locations
- Small portable scanners, to take on-site copies of election results and records.
- Laptop computers

***Very Much Needed:* Travel Angels**

- One of the most frequent needs for citizens doing elections oversight is travel donations, including air miles. Citizens are often called upon to drive hundreds of

miles to appear at state legislative hearings, and frequently need to bring experts in from out of state to testify at local hearings.

One philanthropist we know made things much easier for citizens. After getting to know a few citizens who are effective, she allows them to call her for travel expenses when they must travel somewhere to testify or attend a meeting.

One reason citizen's interests are not well represented is that – unlike paid lobbyists and "experts" with a vested interest – they are not paid to be there. In fact, they must not only be out there in the field, attend public meetings, meet with local officials, but they are expected to dig into their own pockets to travel across the country in order to be represented at important meetings where decisions are made.

Become an Event Angel:

- Help local citizens by sponsoring costs for town meetings they organize. This can involve renting a hall, copy costs for handouts, and sometimes travel expenses for a speaker.
- Donate a public theatre for a night to show election issue films to the public
- Contribute funds for local advertisements or a publicist to help get the word out

Become a Project Angel:

- Consider providing a small, one-time stipend to help a particularly effective individual complete a project. This can expedite the project's completion. Some of the most effective citizens make their "real world" living as consultants or independent contractors. This enables them to have the schedule flexibility to attend Board of Elections meetings (usually held during the day) and take days off around elections time. The down side is that when very significant problems arise, everyone leans on a small number of effective citizens to get things done, and those citizens take a real hit financially.

If you can't get out there in the field to do the work yourself, consider making it easier for someone who's already proved they have the commitment and ability to do effective work on this issue. Investing in effective people directly is money well spent.

An easy way to choose your Election Angel projects:

Angel's E-mail List

- The Election Angels e-mail list introduces high net worth individuals to extraordinary citizens. Each occasional e-mail contains simple information describing the citizen and how a modest one-time donation from you will translate into direct action. You will not be bombarded with e-mails, but you will receive e-mails when we come

across a citizen who has already proved commitment and effectiveness, who needs short term support for something specific.

- We forward the information to you on the **BBV Election Angel's List**, and it is up to you whether to make contact with the citizen and provide your support.
- To join the BBV Elections Angel List, just e-mail angels@blackboxvoting.org.
- We don't accept citizen solicitations for this list. We hand pick citizens based on what they've proven they can do already, using their own initiative and their own dime. We send out Angels e-mails only on an as-needed basis.

Black Box Voting is committed to building more citizen leaders. This provides an easy way for you to help out as more and more citizens prove their effectiveness.

- Your name is never provided to the citizen unless you do so yourself. We will provide you with the name, e-mail, and contact information if you see someone you'd like to help.
- You choose whether to reach out – and you can be certain that you will make a difference!

The BBV Angel's List is simply a way to introduce high net worth individuals to extraordinary citizens who have short-term situations that can be expedited with a modest donation from an angel like you.

The Black Box Voting "Eagles"

Since 2002, Black Box Voting has been in touch with extraordinary citizens who seem to do six impossible things before breakfast every day. They don't work for us and we don't tell them what to do. They are effective and independent and they usually attract others who follow their example. We call them Eagles.

After the 2004 general election, we realized that we need local citizens who can be counted on for acts of leadership. We need these self-directed, creative people more than we need followers to march in line. The truth is, you can't really oversee your government by pushing "send" on an e-mail that someone tells you to write. Citizens make a difference when they get up out of their chair and go into public settings to take small, meaningful actions, especially when they think of the actions themselves.

We set out to identify and help American citizens who could be counted on to take effective action on their own. We traveled throughout the U.S. to mentor, train, and meet with local citizens, and kept ongoing communications with those who are consistent, creative and effective. We provided evidence for them to use, places for them to share and collaborate, and this Tool Kit with actions to take.

*"Doves, sparrows and other low-flying birds flock together in bunches.
But eagles soar alone, and must be gathered one at a time."*

We are continually amazed at the creative genius of our citizenry. Hundreds of citizens have now made the BBV Eagles List. Due to privacy concerns, we no longer release the list to the public, but if you would like to provide support to an "Eagle" we can help match you up with the right person.

Watch the Eagles Soar:

It's a beautiful sight.

Some work alone, like Jody Holder, who has collected formidable evidence documenting breakdowns in California public policy regarding voting machines. Holder does impeccable research. Holder is currently taking on the California Secretary of State in court.

Some citizens begin alone, but later develop a local group of equally committed citizens. Art Cassel, together with Jeremiah Akin and Tom Courbat, have energized the elections oversight scene in Riverside California. Cassel had been a long-time government oversight guy, regularly popping up at town meetings about land development and other issues. Cassel, Akin, Courbat and other interested citizens in Riverside organized 70 local citizens and conducted an in-depth citizen's audit of the June 6, 2006 primary election, identifying significant problems and recommending solutions.

Melissa Urda is a citizen in DuPage County, Illinois. She discovered hidden information about a wireless device being used to transmit voter data back and forth during elections. While researching this, Urda and the small band of citizens she began to work with learned that \$30,000 was being spent by the elections division on a highly partisan political consultant. These DuPage citizens got that story into the local newspaper and started checking all the other expenditures. When they learned that the DuPage elections division was throwing away federal election records well before the allowed time period (while failing to provide copies to citizens in response to public records requests) they submitted the matter to the U.S. Attorney.

How much is it worth to you to have citizens out there watching the store?

Don't force local citizens to become 501c(3) nonprofit entities, which saddles them with infrastructure, making them to divert time into administration and fund raising. Help citizens do what they do best: *Direct action*.

Skip the middleman. Give your donations directly to effective citizens.

No need to go through Black Box Voting to find these "Eagles."

You can find many of them by doing a media search. Local citizens who are effective have a knack for getting reporters to cover them. You can use Lexis-Nexis or Factiva search to look up articles about election problems, and contact the citizens interviewed by the reporters. **Focus on *local* citizens and small *local* groups.**

You can also call reporters to ask them for the names of citizens and small local groups doing the work in your location.

If you'd like to take a shortcut, we'll provide individual consultation to help you identify the most effective citizens and small groups in your area. Call Black Box Voting (425-793-1030) or e-mail (crew@blackboxvoting.org)

Traditional philanthropy: Grants and support for nonprofit 501c(3) organizations:

Some of our favorite elections-related nonprofit groups:

Black Box Voting, Inc – 425-793-1030; crew@blackboxvoting.org
330 SW 43rd St Suite K
PMB 547
Renton WA 98055

Voter Action (Does election reform-related litigation)
<http://www.voteraction.org>

Florida Fair Elections Coalition
386-804-3131 susan@floridafairelections.org

Your Own Additions to the Be the High Net Worth Action 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?
