

AMERICAN MUSLIM ALLIANCE

"From Strategic Thinking to Concrete Results"

AMA 2008 CIVIC EDUCATION TOOLKIT SERIES:



BEYOND THE A B C OF AMERICAN POLITICS

AMERICAN MUSLIM ALLIANCE

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Purpose

This training manual is customized to serve the political and social needs of the American Muslim community.

Manual Focus

This manual is designed to provide:

- Information and education
- Tools and Skills
- Contacts and Resources

Manual Objectives

After reading this training manual you will gain intimate knowledge about:

- Who provides ideas for new legislation?
- How bills are drafted and laws are made?
- What is direct democracy and how can it empower American Muslims?
- What is citizen activism and what strategies can be used to organize grassroots activism?
- How to research a political candidate or an issue?
- What is 'strategy mix' and what are some of the optimal ways to design optimal strategies?
- What are the philosophies, organizational structures and agendas of California political parties? And how to analyze their programs from an American Muslim perspective?
- What will be the key issues of national and state politics in 2008 and how American Muslims can enable themselves to play a significant role in these elections?

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Legislative Process and Citizen Activism

Quote of the day: Organizational complexity is the natural habitat of special interests, which lurk behind every tree and bush of the procedural jungle, ready to chop down any bill they don't like. Procedural complexity makes the legislature less responsive and more subservient to narrow interests. (Robert S. Lorch)

Learning Objectives:

- Who provides ideas for new legislation?
- How bills are drafted and laws are made?
- What are the key steps involved in the passage of a bill?

Learning Resources :(See resources on the next page)

Key Terms: bill, public bill, private bill, amendment, caucus, markup, log rolling, pork barrel, lobbying, veto, veto override, party organization, whip, majority leader, minority leader, standing committee, select committee, ad-hoc committee, floor debate, voice vote, roll call vote, division vote, teller vote.

Self Test:

1. Name 3 sources of ideas for new legislation

2. How do Members of Congress/State Legislature vote? Which of the following influence their voting behavior?

- a. Representational view – according to the wishes of the constituents
- b. Organizational view – in keeping with the party line
- c. Attitudinal view – based on personal values and preferences
- d. Log-rolling (you scratch my back, I will scratch yours)
- e. All of the above

3. Identify at least 2 steps in the legislative process where citizens can influence the process

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Overview of Legislative Process

The process of government by which bills are considered and laws enacted is commonly referred to as the Legislative Process. The California State Legislature is made up of two houses: the Senate and the Assembly. There are 40 Senators and 80 Assembly Members representing the people of the State of California. The Legislature has a legislative calendar containing important dates of activities during its two-year session.

Idea

All legislation begins as an idea or concept. Ideas and concepts can come from a variety of sources. The process begins when a Senator or Assembly Member decides to author a bill.

The Author

A Legislator sends the idea for the bill to the Legislative Counsel where it is drafted into the actual bill. The draft of the bill is returned to the Legislator for introduction. If the author is a Senator, the bill is introduced in the Senate. If the author is an Assembly Member, the bill is introduced in the Assembly.

First Reading/Introduction

A bill is introduced or read the first time when the bill number, the name of the author, and the descriptive title of the bill is read on the floor of the house. The bill is then sent to the Office of State Printing. No bill may be acted upon until 30 days has passed from the date of its introduction.

Committee Hearings

The bill then goes to the Rules Committee of the house of origin where it is assigned to the appropriate policy committee for its first hearing. Bills are assigned to policy committees according to subject area of the bill. For example, a Senate bill dealing with health care facilities would first be assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee for policy review. Bills that require the expenditure of funds must also be heard in the fiscal committees: Senate Appropriations or Assembly Appropriations. Each house has a number of policy committees and a fiscal committee. Each committee is made up of a specified number of Senators or Assembly Members.

During the committee hearing the author presents the bill to the committee and testimony can be heard in support of or opposition to the bill. The committee then votes by passing the bill, passing the bill as amended, or defeating the bill. Bills can be amended several times. Letters of support or opposition are important and should be mailed to the author and committee members before the bill is scheduled to be heard in committee. It takes a majority vote of the full committee membership for a bill to be passed by the committee.

Each house maintains a schedule of legislative committee hearings. Prior to a bill's hearing, a bill analysis is prepared that explains current law, what the bill is intended to do, and some background information. Typically the analysis also lists organizations that support or oppose the bill.

Second and Third Reading

Bills passed by committees are read a second time on the floor in the house of origin and then assigned to third reading. Bill analyses are also prepared prior to third reading. When a bill is read the third time it is explained by the author, discussed by the Members and voted on by a roll call vote. Bills that require an appropriation or that take effect immediately, generally require 27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly to be passed. Other bills generally require 21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly. If a bill is defeated, the Member may seek reconsideration and another vote.

Repeat Process in other House

Once the bill has been approved by the house of origin it proceeds to the other house where the procedure is repeated.

Resolution of Differences

If a bill is amended in the second house, it must go back to the house of origin for concurrence, which is agreement on the amendments. If agreement cannot be reached, the bill is referred to a two house conference committee to resolve differences. Three members of the committee are from the Senate and three are from the Assembly. If a compromise is reached, the bill is returned to both houses for a vote.

Governor

If both houses approve a bill, it then goes to the Governor. The Governor has three choices. The Governor can sign the bill into law, allow it to become law without his or her signature, or veto it. A governor's veto can be overridden by a two thirds vote in both houses. Most bills go into effect on the first day of January of the next year. Urgency measures take effect immediately after they are signed or allowed to become law without signature.

California Law

Bills that are passed by the Legislature and approved by the Governor are assigned a chapter number by the Secretary of State. These Chaptered Bills (also referred to as Statutes of the year they were enacted) then become part of the California Codes. The California Codes are a comprehensive collection of laws grouped by subject matter.

The California Constitution sets forth the fundamental laws by which the State of California is governed. All amendments to the Constitution come about as a result of constitutional amendments presented to the people for their approval.

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Election Process and Machinery

Learning Objectives: To learn the difference between

1. Primary and general elections
 2. Federal, state and local elections
 3. Prospective voting and retrospective voting
- Also,
4. Working in campaigns
 5. Organizing candidates forums

Learning Resources:

American Elections: 521,000 elected offices

According to political scientist James Q. Wilson "there are 521,000 elected offices in the United States, and that almost every week of the year there is an election going on somewhere in this country".

Types of Politics underlying elections:

1. Majoritarian politics
2. Special interest politics
3. Client politics
4. Entrepreneurial politics

You can participate in the electoral process in a number of ways, such as:

1. Voter
2. Supporter
3. Club member
4. Consultant
5. Advisor
6. Strategist
7. Specialist (media, computers, opposition research, etc.)

Key Terms: incumbent, political action committee, general election, primary election, closed primary, open primary, runoff primary, position issue, valence issue, term limit, electoral college.

Self Test:

1. When a voter votes for the candidate whom he or she considers more likely to do a better a job in office the voting is referred to as
 - a. Prospective voting
 - b. Retrospective voting

2. The _____ elections are important because during this election the range of candidates and issues is considerably narrowed and the primary choices are made by those who participate in this election.

- a. General
- b. Primary

3. Name at least 3 stages in the election process where you as a citizen can play a significant role.

4. List the various advantages of working in a campaign and holding a candidates forum.

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Youth Think Tank Political Research and Analysis

Learning Objectives:

1. Understanding basic concepts and theories of research
2. Mastering the basic steps involved in researching a candidate or an issue
3. Identifying sources and organizing resources for political research
4. State of the art techniques for cyberspace research

Learning Resources: See below the research assignment developed for the AMA Youth Think Tank.

Research Assignment

Objectives:

1. Learn at least 2 definitions and 2 theories about politics
2. Learn the methodology of political research with focus on researching political candidates
3. Conduct a complete research project about at least 1 person whose candidacy is important to the American Muslim community
4. Share the research results with your family, members of the AMA Youth Think Tank, and the community at large
5. Get your research results published in a community newspaper or magazine

AMA Youth Think Tank 'Critical Eye' Research Project:

Develop a criteria to choose a candidate

Using the above criteria identify a candidate for research

- Obtain candidate's
- resume
- manifesto
- voting record and record of public pronouncements
- Funding and endorsements – find out the names and the politics of main donors and supporters of the candidate

Obtain evaluation about the candidate from at least one of the following

- his or her opponents
- party professionals
- politically knowledgeable journalist

Describe the candidates position on the following

A. Domestic issues

- i. civil rights
- ii. education
- iii. crime
- iv. environment
- v. inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities in mainstream public affairs

B. International issues

- i. enforcement of international law as it relates the following:
Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya.
- ii. Debt relief and foreign aid for third world countries

Internet Research Resources:

www.Vote-smart.org
www.opensecrets.org
www.allpolitics.com
www.cnn.com

Key Terms: Research, Reliability, Sample, Universe, Debunking, Questionnaire Survey, Interviews, Participant Observation, Research Design, Hypothesis, Independent Variable, Dependent Variable, Content Analysis and Prediction.

Self Test: See the AMA Youth Think Tank assignment above.

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Strategy Building and Strategic Planning

Learning Objectives:

1. Understanding the meaning of strategy, strategy mix and power strategy mix.
2. Reflection on citizen activism and citizen strategies.
3. Review of various concepts to develop optimal means for organizing grassroots activism.
4. Gaining a clear understanding of the various ways in which groups and communities can plan their future.
5. Learn the preliminary concepts pertaining to strategic planning.

Learning Resources:

1. Strategy – Careful coordination of activities and methodical deployment of resources to achieve a desired goal. The task of the strategist is to discover or develop optimal means for the achievement of a particular end.
2. Strategy mix: Building blocks for any given strategy. It is the combination of elements that make up the entire process of achieving a goal.
3. Power Strategy Mix: Combining several strategies for the achievement of a single goal. Alternately, it also refers to classification of a given population into several types: i) supportive, ii) approachable, iii) skeptical, iv) critical, and v) hostile. And developing a separate but related strategy for each segment.
4. **Incumbent strategies:** Judith Trent and Robert Friedenberg have observed that “an incumbent has many more strategy options than challengers. These include: i) an official podium to speak from, ii) easier if not ready access to the media, iii) power of appointments to jobs to special committees, iv) greater ability to set the agenda, v) a claim of providing stability and continuity, and usually can refer to a track record of achievements to invoke retrospective voting. Most incumbents seek to limit public debate with their opponents and routinely ignore and exclude third party candidates. The higher the office, the greater the ability to ignore and exclude.
5. **Challenger strategies:** while incumbents usually call for continuity, the challengers most of the time call for a change – a change in direction and leadership. For this they heavily rely on public polls, political advertising, altering the existing agenda by reframing the key issues or introducing new issues and by seeking to change the ‘direction of conflict’ in the community, from a racial division to a class division, for example.
6. **Citizens strategies:** These strategies are aimed at self-education and self-empowerment and include a wide variety of steps ranging from voter registration to ballot education and from public debates to online suggestions for community development.

Involving Citizens in Shaping Their Community's Future: Redmond's innovative community involvement program is designed to encourage participation from a broader spectrum of the community than traditionally participates at public hearings. The ongoing program provides an opportunity to discuss issues facing the community. Citizens are organized in small groups (8 to 12 people) who meet at their convenience over a three week period, three or four times a year. The meetings are often held in homes, classrooms or less intimidating settings than typical for public hearings.

Washington State's growth management plan requirement stimulated a number of innovative local government efforts to encourage earlier and more representative citizen involvement. Many communities began the process by working with citizens toward developing a vision of what the community should be like in the future. The resulting vision statements were then used to guide plan development. Port Townsend used small group "coffee hour" discussion of basic questions such as why do people move or leave Port Townsend? What do you like, dislike about the community? What needs improvement? with questions and comments.

Other city / state-initiated strategies include: Involving Citizens in Community Improvement, Supporting Neighborhoods as Incubators for Active Citizenship, Improving Access to Local Government, Language Resource Guide, Using Technology to Inform and Foster Interaction such as 'Online Opportunity for Citizen Comment, Physical Design to Facilitate Social Interaction

Key Terms: issues and troubles, agenda setting, policy, objectives, strategies, strategy mix, tactics, information, misinformation, disinformation, , messages, impression management, conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution, solidarity, coalition building, interest aggregation, mobilization.

Self Test:

1. What is a strategy?

2. Can communities like corporations plan their future?

3. Can communities like corporations set goals, standards and deadlines for themselves?

4. What goals will you set for your own community?

5. What strategies will you use to achieve the above goals.

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Policymaking

Quotation of the Day: "No law is valid unless the Members of Congress voting for it have read it." (Irving Younger)

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn the meaning and purpose of policy.
2. Learn the policy making process.
3. Find out how you as a citizen can play a role in the policy making process.
4. Find out how you can create a common cause with other like minded citizens.

Learning Resources: (will be provided by the speaker).

Key Terms: Policy, Policy Objectives, Indicators, Fiscal Policy, Budget Process, Revenue Policy, Regulation, Incrementalism, Uncertainty, Deregulation, National Security, Civil Rights, Treaties, Political Culture, Public Opinion, Bureaucracy, Decentralization,

Self Test:

1. Name at least two theories of policy making.
-

2. What role does the mainstream media play in setting the national agenda?
-

3. Politicians are most likely to support programs whose costs are
 - a. Accurately estimated
 - b. Small
 - c. Immediate
 - d. Borne by everybody
4. Interest group politics must involve
 - a. Benefits to small groups, cost to large groups
 - b. Cost to small groups, benefits to large groups
 - c. Two or more small, identifiable groups
 - d. Widespread costs and benefits

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Key Steps In Running For A Public Office

Learning Objectives: Learn About

The rise of the American electorate

1. History and patterns of voter turnout
2. Election Process and Machinery
3. Key steps in running for a public office

Learning Resources:

Senator Fred Riser:

1. Get involved at any level that is comfortable for you
2. Find an issue that interests you and start providing leadership
3. Discover and build on your own unique blend of strengths
4. Knowledge is power. Take time to learn about the American political system. Also learn how to research candidates
5. Do your homework and research officials before you approach them. Make your initial contact through a personal letter
6. There is strength in numbers. Get your community organized
7. Organization is key to success: organize files on candidates and issues
8. Put yourself in the position of the legislators. Ask yourself: "what will influence me?"
9. Start forming coalitions. When the labor and management get on the same side, it is a very powerful coalition. Learn from how wealth and medical groups have formed coalitions with environmentalist groups to get anti-tobacco legislation passed
10. Learn how to deal with the government. Even working in a charity you learn how to deal with government

Lieutenant Governor Scott McCullum:

1. Learn about issues, particularly the local issues
2. Money is important in politics but it is not the only thing that's important. People play an important role. The test of leadership is to get people involved. "Three terms ago, I became the Lt. Governor because I was able to get a lot of people involved
3. An active, educated and organized minority can get a disproportionate amount of power in our system
4. For Muslim Americans, family values can serve as bridge with the population at large
5. Elected officials pay attention to groups in proportion to their level of organization, support, value and interest compatibility and personal friendship

Congressman Underheim spoke about running campaigns. If you want to run, he said, you must find out who are your friends and who are your opponents. Having done that:

1. Focus more time on those who are undecided
2. Start your campaign early. Start working at least a year before the elections
3. Identify issues that will help you apply and publicize your skills and strengths
4. Develop a mission statement that precisely conveys your message to your audience. It should be less than a hundred words
5. Don't be discouraged by initial difficulties and failures. Be prepared to run at least twice before you make it.
6. Build a team of friends and volunteers
7. Learn to raise funds.

Key Terms: demographics, the 14th amendment, voter registration, mandate, caucuses, conventions, endorsements, referendum and initiatives, recall elections,

Self Test:

1. What are the key qualifications to run for a public office?

2. What are the key steps in running for a public office?

3. What are the key resources required to run for a public office?

4. Name 3 things you can do to qualify yourself to run for public office

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Key Steps In Running For A Public Office

(Additional Resources)

Summary of Qualifications and Requirements for
PARTISAN NOMINATION for the Offices of
State Senator
and / or
Member of the State Assembly
(As stipulated by California Secretary of State)

I. QUALIFICATIONS

A candidate shall:

- A. Be a U.S. citizen.¹ Cal. Const. Art. IV, §2(c)
- B. Be a registered voter and otherwise qualified to vote for that office at the time that nomination papers are issued to the person. §201²
- C. Satisfy the following registration requirements:
 1. Be registered with the political party whose nomination he or she is seeking for not less than three months immediately prior to the time the declaration of candidacy is presented to the county elections official or, if eligible to register for less than three months, for as long as he or she has been eligible to register to vote in California.
 2. Not have been registered as affiliated with any other qualified political party within twelve months immediately prior to the filing of the declaration of candidacy. §8001
- D. Not have served two terms in the State Senate since November 6, 1990, if a candidate for State Senate; not have served three terms in the State Assembly since November 6, 1990 if a candidate for State Assembly. Cal. Const. Art. IV, §2(a)

II. REQUIREMENTS

A. CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE FILINGS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Any individual who intends to be a candidate for an elective office shall:

1. **Statement of Intention:** File with the Secretary of State Political Reform Division a statement of intention to be a candidate for a specific office (Form 501). This statement shall be signed under penalty of perjury and filed prior to the solicitation or receipt of any contribution or loan, including personal funds used for campaign purposes. Gov. Code §85200
2. **Campaign Contribution Account:** Establish one campaign contribution account at an office of a financial institution located in California upon filing the statement of intention.
 - a. All contributions or loans made to the candidate, to a person on behalf of the candidate, or to the candidate's controlled committee shall be deposited in the account.
 - b. Any personal funds, which will be used to promote the election of the candidate, shall be deposited in the account prior to expenditure.

c. All campaign expenditures shall be made from the account.

Gov. Code §§85200 & 85201

3. **Exceptions:** Not listed here. See Secretary of State's Website: www.ss.ca.gov

B. DECLARATION OF INTENTION

Between [the dates specified by the Secretary of State], a candidate must file a declaration of intention with the Secretary of State or the elections official of the county in which the candidate resides. §8082. If the incumbent officeholder has not filed a declaration of intention to succeed to the same office, then any person, other than the incumbent, may file such a declaration during the extension period [specified by the Secretary of State] §8082. This extension will not apply if the incumbent failed to file a declaration of intention because of the term limits set forth in the California Constitution. §8082 Cal. Const., Art. IV, §2(a)

C. FILING FEE OR SIGNATURES IN LIEU

Filing Fee: Pay a filing fee equal to 1% of the first year's salary. Currently, the filing fee for State Senator and Member of the Assembly is \$990. The filing fee must be paid at the time the candidate files the Declaration of Intention.

§§8103 & 8105 [For C 1 through 6, see Secretary of State's Website: www.ss.ca.gov]

D. NOMINATION DOCUMENTS

1. Between [the dates specified by the Secretary of State], obtain nomination documents from the county elections official. Nomination documents include a set of nomination papers for collecting signatures and a declaration of candidacy that must be executed by the candidate.

§§333 & 8080 [For D, subsection a through d, see Secretary of State's Website: www.ss.ca.gov]

2. Nomination Signatures:

Secure between 40 and 60 signatures on the nomination paper prior to filing. §8062 [For 2, subsection a through c, see Secretary of State's Website: www.ss.ca.gov]

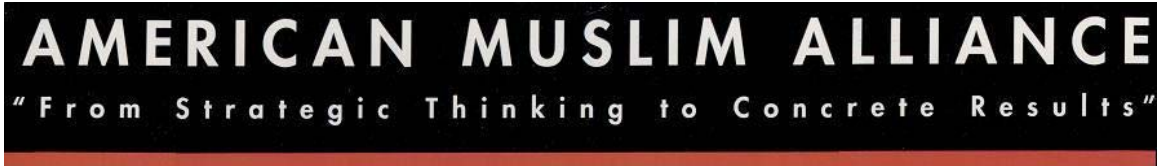
E. STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Each candidate must file a Statement of Economic Interests with the county elections official disclosing investments, interests in real property, and any income received during the immediately preceding 12 months pursuant to the requirements of the Political Reform Act of 1974, As Amended.

Gov. Code §87201 This statement is to be filed between [the dates specified by the Secretary of State]. It is not required if the candidate has filed such statements within the past sixty days for the same jurisdiction.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

This Information Sheet of Qualifications and Requirements is for general information only and does not have the force and effect of law, regulation or rule. In case of conflict, the law, regulation or rule will apply. The candidate should obtain the most up-to-date information available because of possible changes in law or procedure since the publication of this information.



What Criteria is Used by Public Officials For Hiring Their Staff?

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify skills and competencies required for the successful operation of a legislature?
2. Learn the institutional definition of a good staffer
3. Familiarize yourself with the criteria and selection process
4. Learn the existing demographic – age, race, gender, education, specialization - breakdown of the legislative staff
5. Review and discuss future trends and projections about legislative hiring

Learning Resources: (will be identified by the speaker)

Key Terms: skills and competences, demographics, psychographics, equal opportunities, civil rights act of 1964, equal rights amendments

Self Test:

1. Identify 3 skills that are in the highest demand at the state legislature

2. What kind of an education can best qualify you for employment at the state capitol?

5. List the key steps in the application process

4. List the key elements of the selection criteria as identified by today’s speaker

Legislative Internship and Training

Learning Objectives:

1. Learn about opportunities for internship, training, and appointment to various committees and commissions
2. Learn the criteria and qualifications for each internship program
3. Learn the application process
4. Familiarize yourself with the list of committees and commissions to which citizens can be appointed
5. Learn to use internet resources

Learning Resources: (resources will be provided during the session)

Key Terms: internship, application process

Self Test:

1. Name 3 committees / commissions that you will like to be appointed to

2. List 3 factors that account for empowerment of citizens through appointments to committees and commissions

3. What is internship and how does it help the youth?

4. List the key steps in seeking legislative appointment to a state commission

5. List the key steps in applying for internship

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Developing and Delivering a Winning Message

By Ali Ahmad

American Muslim Alliance

No matter the political affiliation, the strategies in forming winning and effective campaigns usually revolve around the same essential ingredients of: polls, strategy, advertising, organization, fundraising and message. Packaging and marketing a candidate's message succinctly to one's electorate is critical to success. Hence, for those interested in running for political office, having a strong and effective message that resonates with voters is paramount to garnering votes, creating a responsive public persona, and ultimately securing a seat in public office.

Candidates from any political party must develop a sound message that catches the attention of voters and the media. This means staying consistent with specific policy proposals and how that ties with your message, values and, reasons for running for office.

Developing the Message

A message, in this instance, is "a set of symbols that contains a theme or a big idea, and ties a problem to a solution, a community to a cause, and a candidate to desirable goals and outcomes." (Saeed, 2005).

Part of an overall strategy involves defining the right message(s) to be communicated to specific target groups, or the electorate as a whole. Whatever the message, it should be clear and easily understood by everyone.

In formulating a message the first and most important question a candidate must ask is 'what do I stand for'? It requires the candidate to understand his values, illustrate to voters why he is running and demonstrate to them how he will do a better job if elected. If you can't articulate in 25 words or less why you are running, then nothing else matters; your race will be over before it begins. According to Ronald Faucheux, author of *Winning Elections*, a "campaign message may be based on a candidate's personal virtues and flaws (i.e. experience, competence, independence, integrity, compassion, stability, preparation, etc.); or (b) ideological and partisan differences (liberal vs. conservative, moderate vs. extreme, inconsistent vs. consistent, pragmatic vs. purist, etc. or (c) the situational context (change vs. status quo, right track vs. wrong track, reform vs. the old way, etc.; or (d) a combination of any of the above."

The campaign's message is what is said to voters to position one's candidacy; it's the reason you give voters as to why they should elect you over the opposition. A campaign message isn't merely an empty slogan or catchy sound bite. It isn't meaningless rhetoric or a generic theme. A campaign message is about substance, it is about real things that matter to real voters.

Mr. Faucheux recommends constructing a "message box" to illustrate the campaign message. A simple diagram divided into four quadrants, explaining a) what your campaign will say about your candidacy, b) what your campaign will say about the opposition, c) what do you expect the opposition to say about themselves, and d) what you expect the opposition to say about you.

To develop a message, which resonates with one's constituents, a candidate must determine the district makeup of his constituents. For instance, if a Muslim American were to run for a local city

council seat in his district, he/she should intimately know the issues that face the whole community. If advantageous, he/she could gain positive notoriety by developing policy proposals to help bridge the understanding between immigrant communities and the American public at large. A prospective candidate can also utilize his/her community involvement combined with his/her understanding of many cultures as a way to illustrate his leadership skills. Immigrants who wish to run for office can utilize a variety of examples in order to hone their message by evaluating election cycles and view how candidates work with their media operatives to help in their campaigns and ultimately win elections. Even in the post-9/11 world, we Americans are looking for candidates that have answers to the problems we face not only abroad but in our local city, district or state.

ROLLING A MESSAGE FORWARD

In his remarks at a recent DNC conference, Toby Chaudhuri, Communications Director for the Campaign for America's Future, noted that it is important for candidates and their campaigns to understand a message and how to move it forward.

The essence of political strategy is to concentrate your greatest strength against the point of your opponent's greatest weakness. This is done through positioning- which is, in effect the development and delivery of messages that present voters with a choice based on candidate differences that are clear, believable and connected to reality.

Most Muslim candidates who are running for office are challengers running against established incumbents who have more money, experience, and established social and political networks. With this in mind, Muslim candidates must understand that while this may be a disadvantage, they can take advantage of certain strategies that will help perform effectively on the campaign trail. The challenger in most races generally calls for a change in direction and leadership, while the incumbent asks for continuity. For a Muslim American running for a school board seat, for example, and against an established incumbent, one way to gain attention and a positive message is to contrast themselves with their opponent, and demonstrate why they would be the better choice. The importance in developing goals and a plan to help market the candidate through "contrast messaging", contrasting himself from his opponents---this does not mean resorting to negative tactics to win elections---although negativity has proven to keep the attention of voters and ultimately decide elections---voters are capable of remembering candidates if they have a unique message that keeps getting repeated.

OFFENSE OR DEFENSE?

Many campaigns according to Mr. Faucheux like to start positive but wait until the opposition throws the first punch. But other campaigns prefer to frame the choice right out of the box, explaining from day one the differences between your side and the other side.

The saying 'Defense may win football games but staying on the offense wins wars and political campaigns' to bring home the magnitude of adopting an offensive strategy. "Keeping one's opponent at bay" (in this case by keeping them on the defense) allows one to more easily define the issues, oneself, and one's opponent, rather than being defined by them.

This requires analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent. What did they accomplish while in office? What were there difficult times in relation to formulating policies and gauging support among their constituents and colleagues?

A candidate must also be careful not to diffuse his/her message(s). It is better for a candidate to concentrate on a few strong messages than offer a laundry list of 12 or 15 messages. If your opponent has a tarnished record, then 'character' may be a powerful message- but if he happens to be a person of impeccable credentials then 'character' wouldn't be appropriate.

"Messages," says Mr. Foucheux, may be used to de-emphasize candidate qualities and to highlight issues or, inversely, to de-emphasize issues and highlight candidate qualities. The bottom line is that you want to frame voter's choice around those factions that are most favorable to your candidacy and most unfavorable to your opposition."

**American
Muslim
Taskforce**

**American Muslims
In The American Mainstream**



(AMA IS A PROUD MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN MUSLIM TASKFORCE)

2008 ELECTION PLAN

'A CIVIL RIGHTS PLUS AGENDA'

AMT defines objectives, issues, strategies; sets forth a bottom-up, community-based decision-making process

The American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections (AMT), an umbrella organization representing American Muslim Alliance (AMA), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Muslim Alliance of North America (MANA), Muslim American Society (MAS), Muslim Student Association – National (MSA-N), Project Islamic Hope (PIH), and United Muslims of America (UMA) has issued the following Election Plan for the empowerment of the American Muslim community and for the protection of its rights and liberties.

AMT Election Plan The AMT Election Plan consists of seven (7) key elements: 1) objectives, 2) issues, 3) strategy, 4) community education and mobilization, 5) criteria-based feedback from the community 6) community-based decision-making process, and 7) tasks for individuals and organizations.

Objectives

Our four main objectives are to: 1) become full partners in the defense, development and prosperity of our homeland, the United States, 2) defend civil and human rights of all, 3) mainstream the American Muslim community, and 4) develop alliances with like-minded fellow Americans on a wide variety of social, political, economic and moral issues.

Issues

Election efforts will focus on a "Civil Rights Plus" agenda. By this we mean that 'the civil rights for all' is the main issue but not the only issue. We remain equally committed to education, homelessness, economic recovery, environmental and ecological safety, electoral reform, crime, and global peace and justice. Our 'civil rights plus agenda' is broadly organized under three categories: a) civil and human rights, b) domestic issues of public good and general welfare, c) global peace with justice, prevention of war, and US relations with the Muslim world.

Strategy

Our overall strategy is premised on the belief that “Our vote is the best guarantee of our civil rights and the best expression of our citizenship”. The AMT will organize strategic mobilization of the American Muslim voters at local, state and federal levels, with primary focus on key states and key races.

Voter Registration and Voter Education

Viewing elections as an opportunity for both self-empowerment and direct participation in discussions about all issues including America’s sense of direction and destiny, the AMT shall expend its maximum energy in educating, organizing and mobilizing the American Muslim voters.

Criteria-based feedback from the Community

The AMT has set up a system to get the American Muslim voters to provide feedback about candidates on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Position on Civil Rights and other key issues detailed above
2. Performance Record
3. Inclusiveness

Community-Based Decision Making Process

1. **Community Input** - Each participating organization will be obliged to make a good faith effort to reach out to its own members to ensure their participation in the decision making process. Organizations will be free to seek such participation and policy input through opinion polls, questionnaires, community forums, town hall meetings, e-groups and other similar means. Each organization shall make a good faith effort to enable each of its members to have an equal say in the decision making process.
2. **Organizational Input** - The Taskforce shall make good faith effort to ensure that each member organization will receive equal consideration during the decision-making process.
3. **AMT Questionnaire for Federal Candidates:** The AMT will send a questionnaire to all presidential candidates to ascertain their position on issues of importance to Muslim Americans. The AMT will also ask each candidate for an exclusive meeting.
4. **Candidate Research and Scorecard:** In addition to the above questionnaire the AMT shall research presidential candidates and issue a scorecard to enable community members to make informed judgments about various candidates.

Tasks for individuals and organizations

We ask all community members and organizations to fulfill their obligations as informed voters and responsible citizens during this election year. Here is a list of tasks that you may want to perform individually and / or collectively:

1. Register to vote

2. Work in an election campaign of your choice – inform the campaign about your community’s concerns; inform the community about the campaign.
Attend town hall meetings—engage the candidate in a meaningful discussion of the Civil Rights Plus Agenda.
5. Set up a civic education program to educate your community about the American Political System.
6. Organize a candidates’ forum and enable your community to have a direct dialogue with the candidate. (Identify and engage at least one elected official in issue to concern to yourself and your community.)
7. Organize absentee ballots for the least likely-to-vote sections of the community.
8. Research and compare candidates from your district and issue scorecards for the convenience of your community.
9. Organize a get-out-to-vote team in your district / neighborhood.
10. Inform community members of important meetings and events.
11. Build local coalitions with like-minded individuals and organizations to promote the ‘Civil Rights Plus Agenda’.
12. Maintain effective and visible presence in all local forums.

Regular Updates and Action Advisory:

Hereafter, the AMT will be issuing regular updates, scorecards and action advisories which will be posted on its website <http://www.americanmuslimvoter.net/> as well as those of the member organizations.

The American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections (AMT)

39675 Cedar Boulevard, Suite 220E, Newark, CA 94560

Phone: 1-510-252-9858, Fax: 1-510-252-9863

Email: aghaksaheed@yahoo.com, Website: <http://www.americanmuslimvoter.net/>

