

TOPLINE LESSONS

1. Some IPOs are operating at large scale and capacity in their electoral programs, equal to mainstream labor unions and political parties. Many are smaller, but some IPOs have grown to be the key, or one of the key players in their state. The perception that community-based organizations are not savvy, effective, or large enough to conduct decisive voter persuasion or GOTV, is outdated.



In the 2016 election cycle alone, the groups we surveyed made 8 million contact attempts and completed 2.5 million conversations.

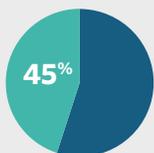
2. IPOs are experimenting with ways to build their volunteer power, in order to scale up without massive infusions of funds. Increasingly, IPOs are expanding their organizing capacity by utilizing new technologies, plugging in more volunteers from their base and working more closely with distributed activist operations. Paid field teams are still crucial to large-scale voter operations and professional organizers are central to year-round engagement. But many IPOs understand the need to expand beyond the scale that this paid model allows, and we can learn important lessons from those that are having success recruiting hundreds and thousands of volunteers over the course of an election cycle. In further analysis, we will explore the correlation between the size of the volunteer operations and the success in voter contact work and other metrics of IPO strength.



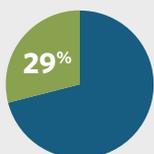
The top 10 organizations filled 20,000 volunteer shifts in the last election cycle.

3. IPOs are fiercely independent. Many of the organizations we surveyed see the Democratic Party as something to influence, as a site for contestation, rather than something to take direction or leadership from. Groups responded with nuanced answers to their approach to Democratic Party candidates and leadership, underscoring the extent to which local and state IPOs are more dedicated to representing the interests of their constituencies, than winning approval from the established political apparatus.

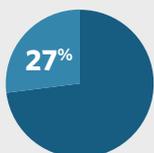
In this moment of political realignment inside and outside of the major parties, it is important to bring together IPOs to understand their motivations, political priorities and ability to impact state and national elections independently.



We asked respondents how they would describe their relationship to political parties and saw interesting responses:



45%: We actively challenge the Democratic Party from the outside by primarying 'Bad Democrats.'



29%: We are working on both the outside and inside to challenge the current Democratic Party and take it over by electing our own leaders into leadership of local party structures such as district committees, county and state convention delegates.

27%: We relate to both a third party and the Democratic Party.



"We are working on both the outside and inside to challenge the current Democratic Party and take it over by moving our policy platforms within local structures."

4. IPOs have more ideological and political clarity than the average community organization or electoral vendor. The IPOs we surveyed have clear values around racial and economic justice and an increasingly intersectional understanding of their base, enabling them to develop long-term political strategy aimed at movement and power-building, not just individual elections. It is important to acknowledge this trait of IPOs, especially during a time when many are critical of the consultant-heavy, and transactional forms of electoral contact work dominating the Democratic Party approach. *IPOs seek to distinguish themselves from purely voter mobilization vehicles, even as they assert their ability to mobilize voters. Their political values and approach are part of what distinguishes them.*



5. IPOs are struggling to raise independent funds:

Overall, many IPOs suffer from the same reliance on foundation support as the rest of the non-profit sector. On average, respondents list 42% support coming from foundations, substantially less than the average for non-profits but still the main funding source. In examining correlations, we observed that organizations who received less than 25% of their income from foundations ranked themselves more effective at successfully running candidate campaigns. Our research will help to uncover some of the most successful income strategies IPOs practice. For example, most of the IPOs that had majority individual, grassroots support, reported running year-round canvassing operations.

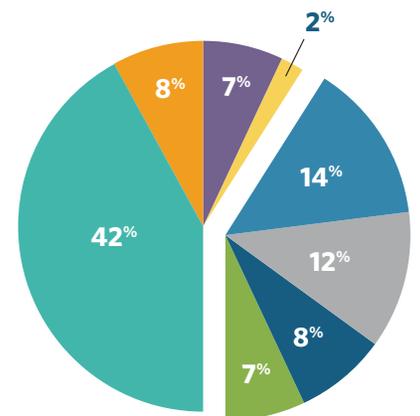
IPO INCOME SOURCES

C3 Funding

- Foundation Grants
- Grants from a 501c3
- Charitable Donations (tax-deductible)
- Government Grants

C4 Funding

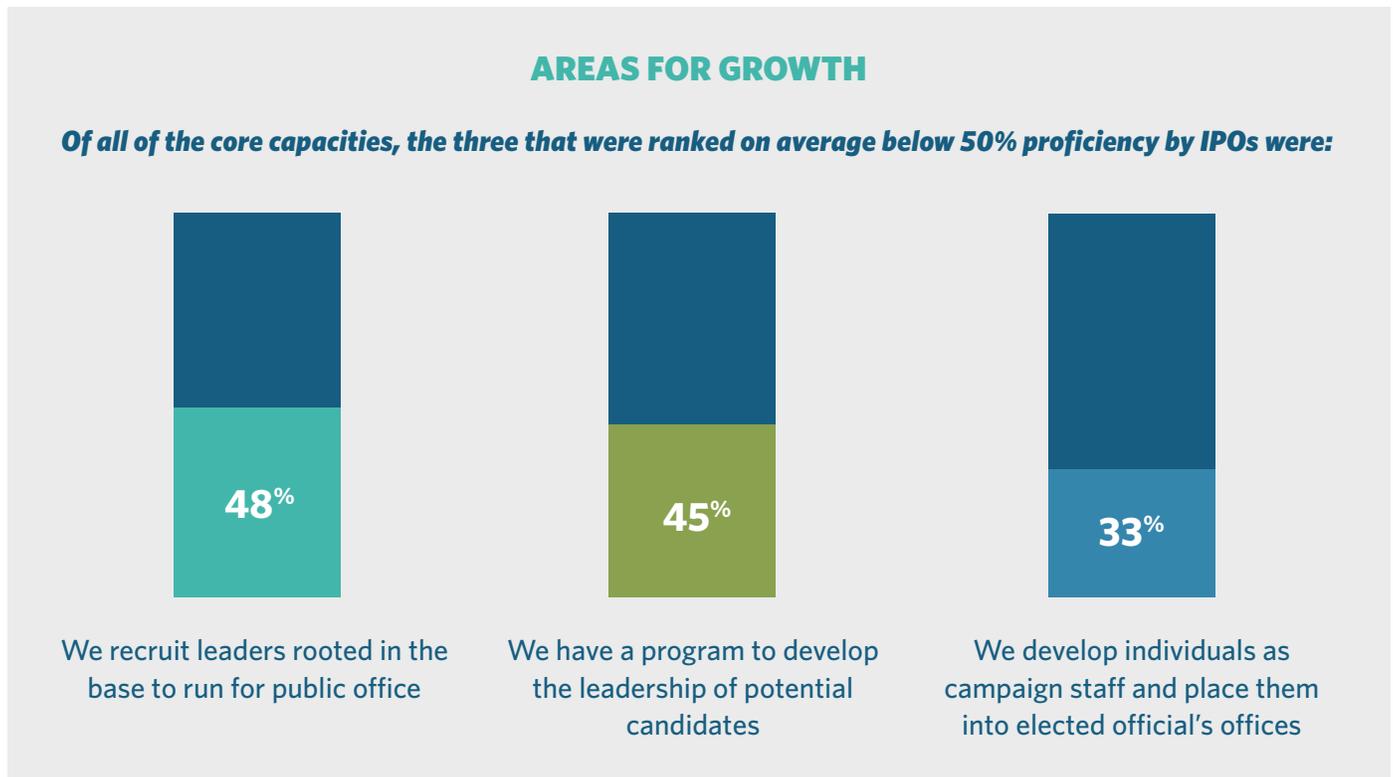
- Membership dues
- Political donations (non tax-deductible)
- Fees for service/sales/contracts
- Union donations or grants





“We are working with elected officials who we have elected and/or are progressive but have not yet gotten to the place where we can organize them into power within the party.”

6. Biggest challenge for IPOs is capacity for recruiting, developing and supporting candidates. We surveyed respondents on thirteen core capacities of IPOs. While the majority feel confident in their field operations and political program, they rate themselves lower at recruiting, developing and supporting candidates for local and state office.



These candidate-related capacities may be the next area of focus for IPOs who are hoping to expand their reach and power into more parts of local and state government. As we finalize our research, we will talk with respondents about what specific resources and types of support may help them increase their capacity in these areas.

NEXT STEPS

Our team will develop a more detailed analysis of these initial findings in the coming months. We will combine this analysis with a series of interviews to gather further qualitative information and develop a full report, with recommendations. Our hope is that the field can benefit from our scan of the IPO sector, both by attracting more resources to the crucial work, and by highlighting important areas for further development of the sector's political capacities.

This survey and its findings were commissioned by the See Forward Fund. Adam Gold, Center for Popular Democracy Action and Ryan Greenwood, People's Action, conducted the survey, developed the findings and will co-author the forthcoming report.

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