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Romero Institute is a nonprofit public policy center which works to combines public education, grassroots organizing, policy initiation, and high-impact litigation to expose the sources of injustice and implement life-sustaining solutions. In 2005 they started the Lakota People's Law Project in partnership with tribal leaders in North and South Dakota to win justice for the Lakota people on a range of issues including child welfare, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and legal defense for water protectors.
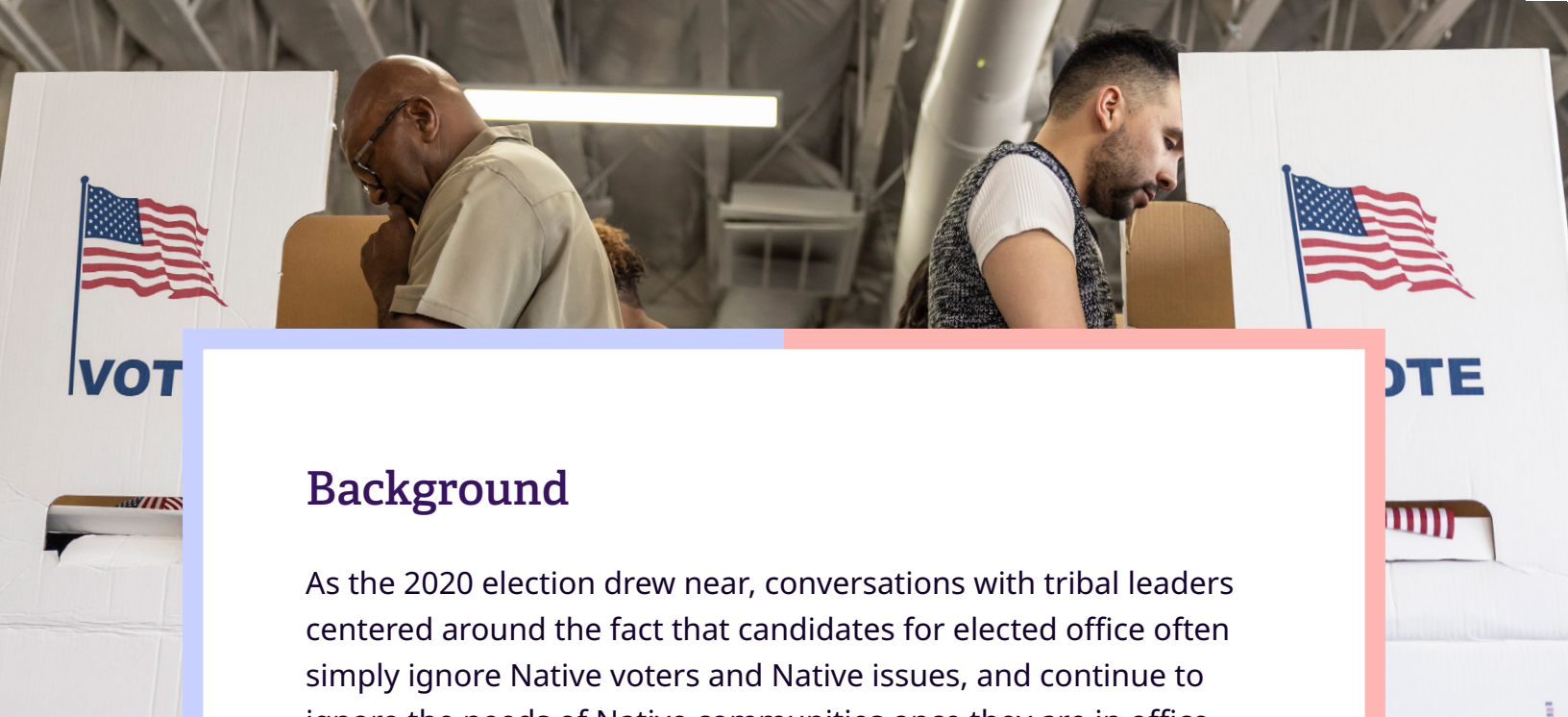
Background

As the 2020 election drew near, conversations with tribal leaders centered around the fact that candidates for elected office often simply ignore Native voters and Native issues, and continue to ignore the needs of Native communities once they are in office. One likely reason for this: Native Americans have historically voted in lower numbers than the general population. They decided that it was time to change this, through a massive Native voter turnout program that would ensure the voice of Native Americans would be heard and respected during the 2020 election cycle.

Objectives

Their goal was ambitious: **increase Native voter turnout in key swing states in order to assert the importance of the Native voice in politics and increase accountability for those seeking or holding elected office**. Romero Institute coordinated with tribal leaders to build a campaign that would connect Native voters from Standing Rock to Native voters in targeted swing states, in order to have persuasive conversations about the importance of voting and issues important to Native Americans such as the protection of sacred land and water.

In order to achieve this goal, the campaign would need to contact large numbers of voters, including many who could not be reached by a predictive dialer, particularly small communities and those who rely primarily on cellphones rather than landlines (a majority of voters on reservations). In order to increase the efficiency of contacting these voters, the campaign utilized a brand-new phone banking technology: VPB (Virtual Phone Bank) Connect.

VPB CONNECT

Learn more

The technology

VPB Connect is a phone banking tool built to increase the efficiency of manual phone calling by dialing contacts with the click of a button, from any device. VPB Connect is able to dial cell phones, and can employ commercial phone numbers so that the caller ID will be the name of the organization, rather than potentially being tagged as "spam" or "unknown." It is built to support fully distributed or remote phone bank teams, and enables the campaign to easily designate a support contact within the tool so that phone bankers can easily reach out to the right organizer for assistance.

The campaign

Romero Institute worked with the Standing Rock tribe to hire 30 tribal members and train them as phone bank organizers. They began a social distanced call center in an old high school gym (with callers spaced 6 feet apart and air purifiers in use), with one group of callers using a predictive dialer and another using VPB Connect to make calls to cell phone lists and reservation communities too small to be contacted with the dialer.

Standing Rock Phone Bank round #2...

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When someone associated with the campaign tested positive for COVID, the phonebank team opted to take extra precautions and make calls from home. Callers were able to use the VPB connect software on campaign-provided iPads and continue phone banking remotely for the last few weeks of the campaign. After the presidential race was decided, Romero Institute and Standing Rock extended their phone banking efforts in order to get out the vote for the historic Georgia Senate run-offs as well. Using the remote capabilities of VPB Connect, Standing Rock members recruited an additional 21 volunteers who called Georgia voters from their homes.

Outcome

Over a **QUARTER OF A MILLION PHONE CALLS** made for the general election.

Over **11,000 CONVERSATIONS** with voters in North Carolina, Florida, Arizona, and on the Standing Rock Reservation.

Over **42,000 CALLS** and **2,000 CONVERSATIONS** with Georgia voters ahead of the January run-off elections.

The votes of Native Americans across the country played a key role in the election of President Joe Biden: Arizona went blue for the first time since 1996, and only the second time in 70 years—a historic feat cinched by Diné voters' 97% turnout for Biden. Beyond the presidential race, voters made history in 2020 by electing a record six Native American representatives to the House of Representatives.

In addition to electoral wins, phone bankers reported outstanding experiences and Romero Institute and Standing Rock are committed to replicating their campaign in the future. The fight to make the Native American voice heard in politics has only begun.

"Thank you, Lakota People's Law Project, for assisting us in being a part of history, helping us get out the Native vote in 2020. So many times, we feel like the kid looking into the window from outside—feeling like what happens in this country has nothing to do with us. Thank you, my friends, for allowing us to participate."

— Janet Thomas | Former executive director of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

"Lakota Law is welcomed here at Standing Rock with open arms. We understand that you're not here to be the typical 'white savior.' By partnering with us to mobilize Native voters, you're providing the tools necessary for us to take an active approach toward saving ourselves from being forgotten."

— Honorata Defender | Standing Rock Sioux tribe member and phone banker

Engaging more supporters across more channels with more programs shouldn't require more work. Bonterra's unified CRM solution is purpose built with powerful tools like VPB Connect, empowering you to optimize and personalize your programs across all channels, so that you can maximize impact and advance your mission.

See our solutions

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