



Black Voices, Black Votes 2020

Summary

In today's two-party system, the Black vote is often taken for granted, due to a belief that Black voters will consistently and overwhelmingly favor one party. In fact, when researchers compared government spending priorities with voters' policy preferences, they found that Black voters had less influence than any other racial group. Black workers cannot afford to wait for others to take up their causes. The National Black Worker Center Project's Black Votes, Black Voices 2020 (BVBV 2020) campaign will give forum and opportunity to Black workers and voters to define a common economic agenda; understand the platforms of elected officials and weigh them against their own interests; and hold politicians accountable to their campaign promises. Recent races at the state and local level demonstrate that Black voters have the potential to be a deciding force in elections. Consider the victory of Atlanta Mayor Keesha Lance Bottoms, by a margin of several hundred votes, or the resounding defeat of Roy Moore in Alabama—Black voters led these efforts. With midterm elections occurring in 2018 and all 435 seats up for grabs in 2020, we have to ensure that the needs of Black workers are front and center.

BVBV 2020 will begin with a pilot period, over an estimated 84 weeks, in Raleigh, NC. The purpose of this pilot period is to demonstrate that, by investing in organizing and leadership development at the local level, Black communities can be influential in key districts for the 2020 elections.

Strategy Overview

NBWCP rejects the practice of campaigns and groups that engage Black voters in the weeks leading up to election day and ignore them in between election cycles. NBWCP's approach is based on the understanding that building political and economic power for Black workers requires well-resourced institutions that can drive sustained community engagement. We believe that a Black Workers Center is the precise vehicle to serve this function.

In Raleigh, NC, NBWCP-affiliated organizers will engage Black workers at community spaces, primarily barber and beauty shops, to understand their pressing economic priorities and define a Black Workers Economic Agenda. Next, organizers will build a core committee of leaders who can mobilize the community around this agenda. Under the direction of this committee, campaign organizers will lead direct advocacy efforts targeting local elected officials— from the Mayor's Office, City Council, County Commissioners & State Legislators, to relevant commissions. The campaign will also hold public forums, or "Speak Outs," for community members to educate elected officials about their economic priorities, testify to their experiences as Black workers, and compare their priorities to official's 2018 campaign promises. At the culmination of the campaign, community leaders will pivot to educating Black workers in the lead up to the 2020 elections.

Raleigh's Black workers are in crisis. While the city's Black community struggles with disproportionately with high unemployment, lack of access to affordable housing, low wages, and police violence, the leaders elected to represent us fail to prioritize our needs. Black workers are organizing for our piece of the economic pie and a voice in the policy issues that matter the most to us.

The 2019 city election presents an opportunity to elect political leaders who will support Black voter issues and/or present a case that current elected officials cannot overlook.

This initiative seeks to engage Black workers in the electoral process, while simultaneously building the capacity for a Raleigh Black Workers Center. We do this by:

- ***Introducing a Compelling Campaign***- We achieve this through an economic agenda that is authentic to the local economic landscape and setting activists' sights on accessible goals.
- ***Strengthening Organizational Leadership***- A Coordinating Committee, made up of representatives from key local partner organizations, will be at the heart of the campaign. This committee will make strategic decisions about the direction of the campaign, lend credibility to the campaign, and engage their own members throughout. At the end of the campaign period, it is our hope that this committee will continue their objective of holding elected officials accountable to Black voters by reforming as an advisory committee of the Raleigh Black Workers Center.
- ***Deepen Strategic Partnerships***- In addition to local groups, the campaign will engage national civil rights and labor organizations. Partners will help resource the campaign, provide strategic guidance, and lend a national profile to local organizing.
- ***Lead Organizer***- One central goal of the BVBV 2020 campaign is to build leadership from the ground up, giving community activists opportunities to develop crucial organizing skills and political acuity. An indicator of success in this aim is for community activists to emerge as skilled organizers who can potentially staff the Raleigh Black Worker Center.

For additional research gathering we will be using the Voter File (VAN), as well as texting technology to further target Black voters at the precinct level. Based on preliminary assumptions, target areas will have high proportions of African-American residents and low voter turnout.

Pilot Period Goals

Below are the goals and key activities of the pilot period of the Black Voices, Black Votes Initiative.

Goal 1: Create an avenue for Black workers to educate elected officials on a Black workers economic agenda.

- **Indicator 1:** To capture the economic priorities of Black workers in the target city;
 - Street Heat team secures 25 barber and beauty shops as partners by Week 18.
 - Street Heat team surveys 1920 Black workers in target city by Week 18.
 - Raleigh online survey of Black workers receives 1580 responses by Week 18.
 - National online survey of Black workers receives 1500 responses by Week 18.
 - Release Black Workers Economic Agenda (survey report) through national and local media.

- Indicator 2: Local activists form a campaign Coordinating Committee, to drive outreach to elected officials.
 - Coordinating Committee formed by Week 18, made up of decision-makers from local civil rights and worker organizations, small business partners, and faith institutions.
 - Coordinating Committee Develops an Action Agenda, based on the Black workers economic agenda, that identifies specific policy demands and elected officials to target.
 - Local activists/Coordinating Committee completes visits with 10-15 elected officials by Week 60.
 - Local activists/Coordinating Committee garner public commitments from 10 local elected officials to adhere to the Black workers economic agenda, by Week 60.
- Indicator 3: Black workers economic agenda promoted by all official community and national supporters (unions, elected official, local business, churches, etc.).

Goal 2: Organize a base of community members that can create a Black Worker Center hold elected officials accountable to Black workers.

- Indicator 1: Members of the BVBV 2020 campaign Coordinating Committee reform as an advisory committee to the Raleigh Black Worker Center.
- Indicator 2: Community members attend Black Worker Expo (September 2019).
- Indicator 3: Community members move up the ladder of engagement, from survey respondents to active members of the Raleigh Black Workers Center. At least one campaign activist, volunteer, or paid canvasser will emerge as a suitable candidate to join the Raleigh Black Worker Center organizing staff.
- Indicator 4: Candidate questionnaires for 2020 incorporate the Black workers economic agenda. Top 5 most prominent unions, as well as local AFL-CIO, incorporate Black workers economic agenda into candidate questionnaires. Where applicable, leading local civil rights and/or progressive advocacy organizations incorporate Black workers agenda into voter education materials.

Goal 3: Challenge the dominant discourse about Black workers and Black voters within the local political and economic discourse.

- Indicator 1: Visibility in local press outlets and new media, as measured by the total number of published LTEs and blogs from campaign-affiliated activists; radio and public television appearances; local print publications and community news letters; and social media reach.
- Indicator 2: Four (4) Speak Out forums garner 100 attendees each from the targeted community, including at least 3 elected officials and candidates who have endorsed the Black workers economic agenda.

Opportunities and Challenges

The issues affecting Black workers in Raleigh include high unemployment, lack of access to affordable housing, low wages, and police violence. The leaders elected to represent them fail to prioritize their needs. Black workers deserve their piece of the economic pie and a voice in the policy issues that matter the most. There is great potential to build political power for Black workers in Raleigh, NC. Research shows that Mayor Nancy McFarlane has little focus on the economic and social wellbeing of the Black community. City Councilor Corey D. Branch is the only black individual on the City Council; holds the seat for District C, a predominately black district; and could be a promising ally in the city government. The 2019 city election presents an opportunity to elect political leaders who will support Black voter issues and/or present a case that current elected officials cannot overlook.

Furthermore, the city features a robust networks of potential campaign partners, including community organizations serving Black workers, foundations, unions and universities. Though hosting the BVBV 2020 pilot in Raleigh would create an opportunity to bolster the organization's growth, it is currently challenged by its small staff. The National Black Worker Center Project does not face opposition from other community organizations doing similar work.

About the National Black Workers Center Project

Black workers nationwide are experiencing a dual jobs crisis characterized by disproportionately high levels of unemployment and low-wage work. Explanations for this persistent inequity, such as education, industry and occupation, only explain part of it. More difficult to measure are factors stemming from racial discrimination, including differences in school quality, career opportunities, and likelihood of incarceration, which contribute to the ever-widening gap.

The National Black Worker Center Project is a national network of eight Black worker centers in Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL; New Orleans, LA; Baltimore, MD; Raleigh-Rocky Mount, NC; Greenville, MS; Washington, D.C.; and Oakland, CA. In many of these areas, the Black jobs crisis is magnified, since most of them feature majority Black populations, or are in states that contain the highest number of Black residents in the country, including Washington, D.C., Mississippi, Maryland and Louisiana.

NBWCP seeks to address the Black jobs crisis by: supporting and incubating Black worker centers that empower Black workers and improve the quality of jobs in key employment sectors; providing education about the impacts of low-wage work and unemployment on Black communities; and preventing racial discrimination in hiring and other employment practices and policies.