

Giving to Elect Democrats and Build Progressive Power in 2022

The 2022 elections will be challenging for Democrats. Midterms traditionally result in losses in the House and the Senate — as well as in down-ballot state races — for the party in control of the White House. But that historic pattern is not preordained. With the right strategies, Democrats can make gains while minimizing losses. This year’s elections also offer opportunities to expand investments in progressive infrastructure to build long-term power and lay the groundwork for future gains.

This brief offers a holistic giving strategy for small to medium donors in 2022. We recommend that donors prioritize grassroots organizing groups in eight key states. Donors should also give to individual campaigns, but selectively — focusing on state races where their money will have the most impact. Early donations are critical. We recommend donors give as much as they can, as early as possible. And we include a checklist for donors to avoid making common mistakes.

Goals

Donors should focus their giving in eight key states in 2022: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin. In many of these states, the stakes include a Senate seat, governorship, state legislative seats, and crucial elections for secretaries of state and attorneys general. All eight states are also likely to be closely contested in 2024—both at the polls and in battles over who sets the rules for voting and who certifies election results.

Winning races in these states in 2022 is essential for maintaining Democratic control of Congress, expanding progressive power in the states, and defending against Republican attacks on democracy. In addition, investments in infrastructure made during this election cycle will pay major dividends as the 2024 presidential election approaches, bolstering organizing capacity in places where margins of victory for either party have been razor thin in the recent past.

With so many important races happening this year, small and medium donors must be disciplined in their political giving. Prioritizing investments in grassroots organizing and in select races for key state offices is the best way to maximize impact, whether you are giving \$50, \$500, or \$5,000. We offer more detailed guidance on these points below.

Strategies and Where to Give

Multiple important races are happening this year in each of the eight key states. In Georgia, for example, voters will choose candidates in at least five closely contested races: governor and lieutenant governor, U.S. senator, secretary of state and attorney general. The stakes are similar in Arizona, where Democrats are defending a Senate seat and have a chance to pick up the governorship, as well as to take control of one or both chambers of a closely divided legislature. Democrats have a strong shot at picking up Senate seats in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and North Carolina—which are all states where other important offices are also on the ballot, including the governorships of Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Major donors have the resources to invest in key races across many states. Those with more limited resources must make strategic choices. We've broken down the best options for such donors into three categories:

State and Local Grassroots Organizing: Giving to organizing groups has a multiplier effect by supporting candidates up and down the ballot. For instance, successful organizing in Arizona could help flip the state's governorship and legislature and maintain Democratic control of the U.S. Senate at the same time. Even in the face of electoral defeat, organizing groups can lay the foundations for future political success by deepening their relationships with and trust among members of their communities while also shining a light on important issues. Examples of effective state grassroots groups include [Mijente](#) (in Arizona), [New Georgia Project](#), [Pennsylvania Stands Up](#), and [Texas Organizing Project](#). In the coming months, we'll be publishing briefs on each of the key states for 2022, including the most effective grassroots organizations to support.

National Intermediaries and Connectors: Along with directly supporting state and local organizers, donors can give to national organizations that work with and support grassroots groups. These intermediaries provide financial support, expertise and advice, as well as assisting in building and leading coalitions. Two groups falling into this category that Blue Tent recommends are [Movement Voter Project](#), a funding intermediary which supported over 600 grassroots groups in 2020, and the [Fairness Project](#), which supports progressive state and municipal ballot measures across the country. Other national organizations working to advance organizing efforts in multiple key states include the Center for Popular Democracy, Working Families Party, and Black Voters Matter Fund.

Candidates: While we advise donors to prioritize giving for grassroots organizing, Blue Tent is recommending a number of candidates in 2022, particularly those running for state-level offices that Democrats must hold to counter possible election subversion efforts in 2024. (See our list [here](#).) For help in making targeted donations to key races in the eight states, Blue Tent recommends [Swing Left](#) and [Sister District](#).

Why to Give Early

Now. Early. Those are the best times to give to campaigns and electoral groups. In the past, political experts assumed most voters were disengaged and didn't begin to pay attention to an election until the final few months of a campaign, leading candidates and outside groups to flood the airways with ads in the weeks before election day, and flooding all of our inboxes with appeals for cash to help turn the tide of the race.

Recent elections [have turned this assumption on its head](#). Voters are significantly more engaged and energized. To succeed, campaigns need to establish narratives and win over supporters much earlier in the process. And because during the pandemic, more Americans than ever voted by mail or via absentee ballot, and likely will continue to do so in 2022 and beyond. Late spending by campaigns means ad dollars are spent reaching many people who have already voted. Donors should give as early as possible, allowing campaigns to plan accordingly and spend heavily early on.

The Cheat Sheet: How to Avoid Throwing Away Money

Blue Tent is recommending a number of specific organizations and campaigns in 2022, but we won't be able to give a thumbs up or down to every single candidate or organization involved in the thousands of races taking place this November. Instead, here are some easy rules to keep in mind to guide giving, especially to candidates, as the elections get closer.

The race is important. Donors should prioritize races where the outcomes will be most consequential, including where control of legislative majorities or key statewide offices is at stake. The race is winnable, as indicated by aggregated polling and the ratings produced by such sources as Cook Political Report, Sabato Crystal Ball, and 538.

The candidate needs money. Donors should prioritize candidates who need to raise additional funds to compete and where small donors acting together can make an impact. (For more on these criteria, see our [candidate recommendation methodology](#).)

If you're still uncertain, avoid these mistakes:

Don't give based on misleading fundraising "deadlines" or other "last chance" appeals. These pleas for cash are essentially sales tricks and should be ignored, right along with the cherry-picked poll numbers showing a deep red incumbent "in serious trouble."

Don't give to most major super PACs or Democratic Party committees (with some exceptions). Most of these groups are wasteful or ineffective, and also lack transparency and accountability. But even the canniest of these groups are well-financed by wealthy donors; your money will be better spent elsewhere.

Don't give money to quixotic campaigns. While it's critically important for progressives to build power everywhere in the country, it's also important for donors to focus on races that Democrats can win. Resist the temptation to support challengers to notorious Republicans with safe seats—like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Madison Cawthorn.

Don't give to incumbents in solidly blue districts: Ignore fundraising appeals from star Democratic leaders like Reps. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Nancy Pelosi and Adam Schiff. They don't need your money.

Conclusion

The 2022 election cycle will be as challenging for Democrats as they are crucial to win. But major losses are not inevitable, and in fact, there are exciting opportunities to win key races and build power for the long haul. Donors should tune out defeatist narratives and stay focused on what is possible this year and beyond if resources are allocated to the right priorities.

You may also want to check out:

- [Movement Voter Project: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Swing Left: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Sister District Project: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [The Fairness Project: What Donors Need To Know](#)