PART THREE

DEVELOPING A MONITORING STRATEGY

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OVERALL PLAN

Before engaging in any voter registration monitoring exercise, political parties and civic organizations need to analyze the electoral process and determine what potential threats, if any, exist to the voter registration process. If there is concern that problems may arise or if there is a lack of confidence in voter registration relative to other parts of the election process, then serious consideration should be given to concentrating resources on registration monitoring. The first step in monitoring is to develop a clear plan of action.[4] Ideally, this should be done at least six months or more before voter registration is scheduled to commence if registration is done on a periodic basis, and a year or more before election day if registration is continuous.

In developing a plan, it is important to work in reverse-chronological order. First, determine the final goals of the monitoring effort, then create a timeline by working backward from key dates. Early on, if possible, a series of strategy sessions should be held to discuss the following issues:

☑ What concerns might arise during the voter registration process? What monitoring activities might be conducted to alleviate those concerns? How important are these concerns relative to possible problems in other parts of the election process?

☑ How do possible efforts to monitor the voter registration process relate to the political party's or civic organization's overall mission or goals?

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[4] For an overview of the process of organizing and conducting comprehensive election monitoring, see NDI's Handbook on *How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide* (NDI: Washington, DC; 1995).

☑ What expectations does the political party or civic organization have for monitoring the voter registration process? What are the public's expectations?

☑ What activities are planned for monitoring other phases of the election, and how do those relate to efforts to monitor the voter registration process?

☑ What voter education or "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) activities are also being considered, and how do those relate to efforts to monitor the voter registration process?

☑ What human and financial resources are required to conduct different monitoring activities? What resources are already available?

☑ What are possible sources for additional human and financial resources if more are required?

☑ What steps are required to ensure adequate participation in the effort by women and other traditionally underrepresented groups? What steps are required to ensure gender, ethnic, linguistic balance in the monitoring effort?

☑ If problems are identified, what are the steps that are likely to remedy the problems? Who should be approached to take these steps? How should they be approached?

☑ Who is likely to resist needed reforms or improvements in the process? How can such opposition be overcome?

☑ Who is likely to support reforms or improvements in the process, and how and when should they be approached in order to gain their support?

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☑ How will the public, the election authorities and other political parties or civic organizations be informed about the monitoring effort and about the findings and recommendations that emerge from the exercise?

☑ What is the detailed plan for how the monitoring activities will be conducted? Is there a clear work plan for who will do what and when? Is the work plan realistic? Does it provide adequate time to accomplish the necessary tasks?

☑ Will monitoring be done throughout the country, or only in particular locations? Is it feasible to monitor throughout the country? Is it politically viable to not monitor throughout the country?

☑ Are there other groups with whom a coalition can be formed to monitor the voter registration process? For political parties, are there other parties with which to form an election alliance for monitoring purposes? For civic organizations, are there other nonpartisan groups to include in a monitoring or observation effort?

☑ How should the news media be approached to publicize and help achieve the goals of the monitoring effort, and who will be responsible for media relations regarding the effort?

☑ What part, if any, might international organizations play in monitoring voter registration? What steps should be taken, if any, to inform representatives of the international community about the monitoring effort?

Beyond these larger issues, the strategic plan must address a variety of practical considerations. From planning sessions, specific proposals need to emerge that address each of the following issues:

Finances – How much money is needed for monitoring voter registration, and where will it come from?

Staff and Volunteers – How many people are needed to organize and implement monitoring activities?

Recruitment and Training – How will staff and volunteers be recruited and trained so that they are able to perform their assigned tasks efficiently and effectively?

Internal Communications and Transport – How will information be shared, and people moved, within the political party or civic organization?

Forms and Computers – How will monitoring information be collected and analyzed?

External Communications – How will information be disseminated to the public?

Reporting and Advocacy – How, in what format, and by whom will analysis be presented to various audiences?

Consolidating Organizational Gains – How will morale be promoted throughout the monitoring effort, information about the monitors be kept, and monitors be integrated into other organizational activities after the monitoring exercise?

FINANCES

E very effort to monitor voter registration monitoring must have a budget, as well as a plan for securing necessary financing. The type of monitoring activities, the number of staff and volunteers required, travel costs, supplies and equipment purchases, and the amount of time needed must be carefully considered in developing the financial plan. In general, computer tests are the least expensive type of exercise for monitoring the voter registration process because they require only a small staff and, typically, little time. However, they can become costly if computers must be purchased. Monitoring access to the voter registration process and conducting field tests, both list-to-people and people-to-list, can be expensive. However, careful planning can result in creative strategies to conduct effective monitoring with few financial resources. For example, costs can be curtailed by reducing the sample size of a field test of the voters list or by conducting spot checks at only randomly selected registration centers, rather than trying to deploy monitors to every center.

It is important to build safeguards into the monitoring effort in order to maximize limited financial resources while not overspending. The financial aspects of the monitoring exercise should be explained to all involved in the effort, from the project director down to volunteers at the grassroots level. Everyone should have a clear understanding of what financial resources, if any, are available to conduct the tasks assigned to them. Raising necessary funds for monitoring by parties and candidates must be part of a broader campaign finance plan. Civic organizations should consider a variety of possible sources to diversify funding, where possible, and should view reporting as part of gaining credibility and as a means for attracting future funding. Maintaining integrity in raising and expanding funds is integral to establishing credibility for both political parties and civic organizations.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Different monitoring activities have different staffing requirements, but all types of monitoring exercises require several key staff:

▶ A project director who guides the overall effort;

▶ A legal officer(s) who can seek legal recourse when problems are identified in the registration process;

▶ A financial officer to oversee the receipt and disbursement of funds;

▶ A field director(s) to oversee recruitment, training and reporting;

▶ A data processing team to provide analysis and support in drafting public reports;

▶ A leadership team to determine how to characterize findings, what improvements to seek and how to advocate for those improvements; and

▶ A public relations officer to coordinate external communications with the public, election authorities, the media, political parties, domestic observer groups and the international community.

Experience confirms the importance of a balance of men and women in these tasks to guarantee the effectiveness of monitoring efforts. Balance should also be sought between different ethic and linguistic groups for the same reason.

Efforts to assess the criteria for voting, as well as the voter registration framework, essentially require the participation of legal and election experts. These individuals can review the appropriate documents, meet with relevant individuals and institutions and draft a report on their findings and recommendations. An additional network of staff and volunteers is generally not needed for such activities. Similarly, reviewing materials developed for training registration officials and observing training sessions for officials would require relatively few well-trained monitors. Beyond this, staff will need to conduct follow-on activities after the exercise and maintain contact with those at the grassroots level for future monitoring and other efforts.

In contrast, monitoring access to the voter registration process and conducting field tests (list-to-people and people-to-list) require a significant number of staff and volunteers. For these types of monitoring activities, national, regional and local coordinators will need to be identified. These individuals will be responsible for organization, internal communications and management. They will recruit, train and deploy volunteer monitors, and they will establish internal communications and transport networks to distribute monitoring materials and forms, as well as to collect completed reports.

Scrutinizing activities at voter registration centers necessitates recruiting and training monitors. The number of registration centers that are to be observed, the amount of time monitors are to spend at each registration center and the amount of money available will determine how many monitors are required. Ideally, teams of two should spend the entire day at each selected registration center. These monitors will likely need to be paid a small stipend to cover food and, possibly, transport expenses. Often such exer-

cises involve thousands of monitors supported by a large number of national, regional and local coordinators.

Monitoring the enumeration of eligible voters also requires teams of two to observe selected enumeration teams. The number of monitors needed will depend upon the number of enumeration teams to be observed on a given day. Monitors may also be placed at offices from which enumerators are dispatched and to which they submit their reports.

A population's size, density and demographics, as well as the amount of time and money available to the party or organization, will determine the number of monitors that will be required to conduct either a list-to-people or people-to-list field test. In a small country where most of the people live in large cities and where travel is easy, each monitor can seek out several individuals sampled from the voters list. Therefore, field tests will require a relatively small staff. However, in a large country with important sub-populations, where most people live in rural areas and where travel is difficult, each monitor likely will be able to interview only a few individuals from the list. Thus, the exercise will require a larger staff.

If monitors must be paid, this can be done on a daily basis or per form completed. In some cases, the amount paid per form from rural areas should be higher than that paid for a form from an urban area because of the greater ease in collecting the necessary information in urban areas. In general, paying monitors per day is advisable in order to reduce incentives to artificially inflate the number of forms submitted and in order to decrease errors in data recorded due to haste.

In addition to coordinators and monitors, a statistician and/or a demographer may be needed to determine where to deploy and to analyze the data. If data collected are to be entered into a computer for analysis, a computer specialist will be needed to oversee data entry and tabulation. Clerks or typists will also be needed to perform the actual data entry.

Computer tests of the voter registry do not require national, regional or local coordinators or volunteer monitors. Beyond a project manager, legal counsel, financial officer, and public relations officer, computer tests only require computer specialists to design the software necessary to conduct the tests and a demographer to help interpret the data.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Once the specific monitoring tasks are planned (for example, analyzing legal criteria for voting, monitoring access of voters to the registration process, conducting computer tests of the voters list, mounting list-to-people and/or people-to-list checks, and monitoring claims and objections procedures), the numbers of people needed, as well as their range of skills, language needs and demographic characteristics should be identified.

It is important to consider the role of women in every aspect of the registration monitoring effort. Women should be included in leadership roles, as public spokespersons, and monitors at registration centers. Efforts should be made to ensure that voter education efforts reach female as well as male voters. Language, age and ethnic background should also be considered when recruiting staff and conducting activities.

First, the lead staff of the monitoring effort should be put in place. They usually come from within the party or civic organization or from experienced volunteers. The same is true of legal, statistical, computer and communications specialists. Monitors who watch registration centers during initial registration or during the claims and objections period, as well as monitors who conduct list-to-people and people-to-list checks, must be recruited more broadly. It is usually best to begin such broad recruitment within the party or civic organization if it has a broad membership or volunteer base. Next, it is best to consider places where people are already organized, such as trade unions, religious groups, women's organizations, student associations and other civil society groups. Recruitment may also be done through advertisements to the general public.

No matter where the recruitment activity is directed, it is necessary to present a short and clear message that

conveys the objectives of the monitoring effort and why it is important. The message must also outline the activities monitors will conduct and must make a specific request for the individuals to commit to joining the effort. Sign-up forms and information sheets about training times and locations should be presented. Recruitment exercises should always take specific steps during training sessions to ask monitors to recruit family members, friends and coworkers; once people understand what they are going to do and see its importance, they become natural recruiters.

Everyone involved in the monitoring effort requires an overview of what the project is, why it is being undertaken, what part they will play in the exercise and how the findings and recommendations will be used. In the case of monitoring access to the registration process and conducting field tests of the voters list, both of which require a large number of staff and volunteers, a "training of trainers" program is likely to be needed so that monitors at the grassroots level have a clear understanding of key information:

- ▶ Their role;

- ▶ The information they need to collect;

- ▶ How they are to gather that information; and

- ▶ How they are to report about what they have monitored.

Training materials will also need to be drafted, and interactive learning techniques, such as role-play simulation, will need to be developed.

In the case of monitoring access to the voter registration process, monitors need to know several pieces of information:

- ▶ Where the registration center(s) is located;

- ▶ When it is supposed to be open;

- ▶ What materials and equipment the center needs;

- ▶ What the criteria for eligibility to vote are;

- ▶ What documentation is required in order to demonstrate one's eligibility; and

- ▶ The specific procedures for registering to vote.

It is only by knowing what is supposed to happen that monitors will be able to know when something has gone wrong with the process.

It is not the role of monitors to interfere with the registration process. Rather, their responsibility is to be present, observe, document and report back. Political party monitors, however, may have the power to enter objections and seek corrections, depending on the law. Trainers should also discuss ways that prospective voters or political parties may seek remedies for problems in the registration process. In order to ensure that quality data are collected, observers should receive training on how to complete the monitoring forms and when to return them to headquarters for analysis.

For field tests, both list-to-people and people-to-list, monitors will require specific training on how to carry out their tasks. The methodology for collecting data needs to be explained so that all information is gathered in a consistent manner, and monitors need to be given several tools:

- ▶ Information on the area of the country for which they are responsible;

- ▶ Forms to complete for each person whom they attempt to find;

- ▶ Explanations of exactly how to complete the forms; and

- ▶ Instructions on how to send their completed forms to a central location for processing.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT

For efforts to monitor access to the registration process and for list-to-people and people-to-list field tests, a system is required for sending information to the monitors in the field, as well as for receiving completed forms back from them. This network will have to permit the quick

movement of information from a central location to all parts of the country and back again. It may require the use of fax machines, telephones, cell phones, satellite phones, and/or high frequency radios as well as bikes, motorcycles, cars, planes, boats and public transportation. Lines of communication need to be clearly defined and contingency plans in place in the event that the normal means of communication fail.

Systems will have to be developed for moving people as well as information. The monitoring project may require monitors to be deployed at specific registration centers or to interview people in a particular area. Provisions need to be made to move people around the country to meet monitoring requirements.

Often local, regional and national coordinators require some form of transport to be able to manage the monitoring exercise and to perform quality-control activities. These transport systems may rely on personal or public transportation.

It is also important that everyone within the political party or civic organization be informed about the registration monitoring exercise, its priority and how it fits into other organizational activities. This will increase internal cooperation and reduce the potential for confusion about why people, equipment and finances are being assigned to the effort. Such awareness can also assist recruitment efforts.

FORMS AND COMPUTERS

In the case of efforts to monitor access to the registration process, as well as field tests (list-to-people and people-to-list) of the voters list, forms should be designed to make the task of the monitors easy. Simple, easy-to-read forms will also make the job of data entry quicker and result in fewer data entry errors.

The forms should contain clear instructions. Instead of open-ended, fill-in-the-blank questions, monitors should be given a list of options from which to choose by simply checking a box. When possible yes/no questions should be used. Some space should be provided, however, so that monitors can report in detail any problems or unusual circumstances that they encounter.

When possible, forms should be pre-printed with information to help the monitor identify the correct registration center or individual. Thus, for list-to-people field tests, the forms ideally should be pre-printed with the name and other identifying information for each individual included in the sample. (The Appendices include sample forms for adaptation by political parties and civic organizations monitoring the voter registration process.)

Once completed and received from the field, the forms ideally need to be entered into a computer database or spreadsheet. A specialist should be hired to set up a system for this and to oversee data entry. Computers are required, at least on a rental or borrowed basis, as well as short-term clerks or typists for data entry. A training program should be conducted with simulation exercises for data entry personnel.

Depending on the length and design of the form, one clerk can enter approximately 30 forms per hour into a computer, for up to a total of eight hours a day with necessary rest periods. If, for example, 2000 individuals are included in the sample, it is likely that five clerks each using his or her own computer, could enter all of the data in two days. Ideally, each form should be entered into a computer twice to ensure that any data entry errors can be quickly caught and corrected. This will double the number of clerks and computers required. Data can be tabulated without computers, but this will take considerably longer and is more prone to human error.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Specific thought must be given to external communications. Lines of communication should be established with the election authorities, political parties, domestic monitoring groups and international organizations. A strategy for interacting with each of these groups (and subgroups) should be formulated. A public relations officer should be hired specifically to manage external communications for the monitoring effort.

Beyond this, every monitoring effort should have a media plan. Public confidence cannot be built, nor abuses exposed, if findings are not communicated to the public through the media.

The effort should be explained to the media in advance, in most instances. The methodology should be explained so that media understand the basis of findings when they are presented. Reports on the registration monitoring effort, along with findings and constructive recommendations, should be presented to the media as well as to electoral officials and others. This can help strengthen the role of the media as watchdogs of the electoral process and can attract public attention to the political party or civic organization that is conducting the monitoring project. The resulting publicity will likely help deter attempts to manipulate the process and may minimize mistakes as officials become conscious of the monitoring effort.

It is important to keep in mind that all monitoring reports should be intended to help advance the integrity of the election process. In general, communications should reinforce this message. (See "Reporting and Advocacy".) It is useful to treat all external communication, whether to the media, election officials, political parties, or domestic and international monitors as "on the record." Each group is likely to use information on registration monitoring in keeping with its perspective on the election process. Reports of findings, therefore, should always be impartial, factually accurate and verifiable. At the same time, public relations activities should be conducted professionally, in light of the goals and objectives of the monitoring initiative.

REPORTING AND ADVOCACY

A critical part of any monitoring effort is what is done with the information once it is collected. The sharing of findings and recommendations is the mechanism by which political parties and civic organizations can help reduce uncertainty about the electoral process, build confidence when the process is going well, make constructive suggestions about how the process can be improved when there are concerns, and expose irregularities and fraud when they occur. Thought needs to be given throughout any monitoring exercise to a strategy for reporting and to an advocacy plan for rectifying any problems uncovered.

Reporting should not be seen as a one-time event. Usually, periodic reporting on the many steps of the voter registration process is more useful. Reports should help advance the integrity of the registration process and the overall election. Reports should also be made early enough in the process so that election officials have time to take action to address any problems or concerns identified.

Before a monitoring exercise is conducted, consideration should be given to the range of possible findings. Brainstorming should be done well in advance to determine what action might be taken given different sets of findings. A variety of scenarios should be identified, along with the relative likelihood of each outcome. For each scenario, the steps to be taken and possible recommendations to be made should be discussed. The goal of any action should be to help ensure a credible and meaningful electoral process. By thinking about these issues at the very beginning of a monitoring exercise, and by periodically reviewing strategy and tactics along the way, political parties and civic organizations will be better prepared to effectively use the information they collect.

There are many different ways to report findings and recommendations from a monitoring initiative:

A Press Statement or Release is typically issued to briefly summarize the methodology, findings and recommendations of the exercise. Such documents can be useful in quickly informing a large number of people about the quality of the voter registration process.

A Longer Detailed Report is drafted, in some cases, to describe the monitoring effort. When there is little trust in the electoral system, and perhaps in the monitoring effort, a detailed report can add credibility to the findings and recommendations of the monitoring exercise. A longer report can also serve as documentation so that the activity can be replicated in future elections.

Verbal Reports permit political parties and civic organizations to deliver their findings and recommendations to election authorities and political leaders in a setting that allows an exchange of views, sometimes informally, about how improvements to the process can be achieved. This is sometimes done before or immediately after reports are made public.

Reporting and follow-on advocacy efforts should be designed to promote genuine and meaningful elections. Developing approaches to remedying problems in the voter registration process requires fostering constructive relationships with election officials and with other governmental authorities when possible. It is also necessary to consider developing allies to help achieve improvements or remedies. Allies can be found among other political parties, civic organizations, the international community and other sectors. Reporting, therefore, should be part of a broader monitoring strategy.

It is essential to target advocacy efforts to achieve specific, effective, remedies for particular problems identified in different aspects of the voter registration process. For example:

▶ Inappropriate discrimination in the definition of voter eligibility requires law reform activities, such as amending legislation, changing regulations, or obtaining court rulings;

▶ Omissions during the registration of women, of people who have recently attained voting age, or of those who speak a particular language require an extension of the registration exercise and/or an extensive claims and objections effort; and

▶ An Inflated voters list due to failure to remove deceased persons, those who have moved abroad, or fictitious or duplicate names requires purging the list and re-verification.

CONSOLIDATING ORGANIZATIONAL GAINS

Every effort at monitoring voter registration and other election and political processes entails developing specific knowledge and skills, as well as furthering organizational structures through recruitment, training and communications.

New leaders will emerge, as new party or civic activists are recruited to conduct monitoring. These people and their skills, as well as the monitoring structures built, can be employed to accomplish other goals and activities. For political parties, such activities may include campaigning, organizing a Get Out The Vote (GOTV) program and election day pollwatching. For civic organizations, these activities may include voter education, encouraging citizens to participate in the electoral process and conducting other monitoring, watchdog and advocacy efforts.

As with other campaigns, monitoring registration should include specific steps to maintain high morale throughout the effort and to reward new leaders, activists and volunteers by thanking them for their work; celebrating accomplishments; providing opportunities to share suggestions, lessons learned and ideas for future action; and asking these people to take on new responsibilities once their original task is complete.

Contact information for monitors should be maintained, along with the task they performed. Party or civic organization leaders should actively promote leaders that emerge through monitoring efforts. Parties and civic organizations must have a plan of action beyond the monitoring exercise and a process for integrating organizational gains from the monitoring into such plans.

Consolidation efforts should also include solidifying relationships with allies gained or reinforced through the monitoring effort, such as parties, civic organizations, the news media and the international community. Consolidation efforts should also include meeting with each of these sectors and mapping out future activities where there are common interests in advancing the democratic process. There is nothing that is more appreciated than saying thank you and recognizing a job well done to those who have helped and supported the monitoring effort.