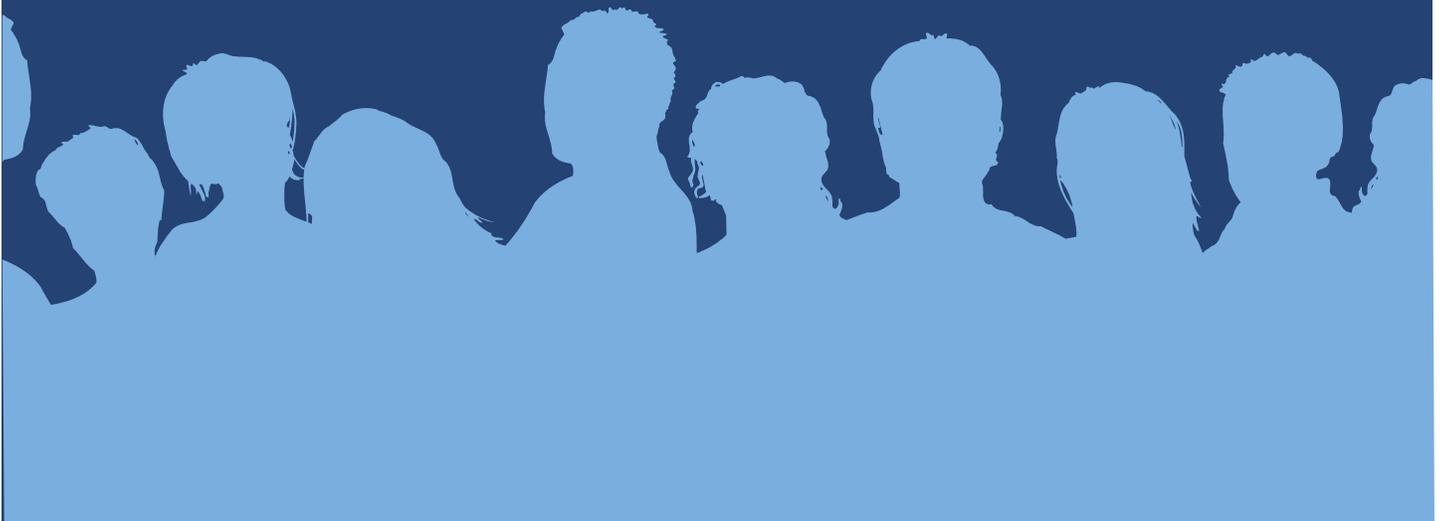# Montgomery County Democratic Party 2018 Elections Listening Sessions Summary

Organized and Led by the
Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee's
Voter Engagement Committee

January 2019

Dear fellow Democrats of Montgomery County,

We are pleased to present a summary of what we heard from you regarding your work with the Democratic Party during the 2018 elections in Montgomery County. We asked you to share your thoughts about what worked and what needed improvement. Our two in-person Listening Sessions, one up-county and one down-county, and our online feedback form, gave us more than 50 pages of notes with the thoughts of more than 70 activists from around the Montgomery County area who had participated in the last two elections. Members of the county Democratic Party leadership and the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee came to listen in person to your feedback. We have now summarized this feedback, and gathered frequently mentioned themes into 5 top recommendations and several other topic areas in the rest of the document that contain other important recommendations. We have carefully reviewed your thoughts and we are using the information to form our strategy and and build on everything we accomplished as we move forward into the next elections.

We appreciate all you do to build an inclusive and effective party, and to help get Democrats elected. Thank you for all of your work on the voter engagement efforts that are so critical to our success.

In solidarity,

Jazmin Moral, LCSW-C
Marie Mapes, Ph.D.
Co-Chairs, Montgomery County Democratic Party Voter Engagement Committee

Scott Goldberg, Esq.
Chair, Montgomery County Democratic Party

Top Recommendations:

1. **Outreach to diverse communities** Prioritize outreach to diverse communities, including diversity as defined by race, economic status, religion, age, gender identity and sexual orientation, and county geography. "Lead by listening", "Meet people where they are", and "Engage natural leaders from each community" (find the 'amplifiers'- those willing to share our message/information) are good guiding principles for this outreach.

2. **Useful and timely communications** Ensuring useful and timely Democratic Party communications is important, within the party volunteer base and to voters. One of these efforts could be voter education in the primary election targeting "low information" and unaffiliated voters.

3. **High quality events** Make Democratic Party volunteer and voter engagement activities higher quality: more fun, accessible, professional, efficient.

4. **Connection with grassroots group**s Grassroots groups are bringing needed energy to the Democratic Party, so work with them. People are encouraged when they see theParty coordinating with activist groups.

5. **Building the Party between elections** More consistent effort between elections would allow for better ramp-ups for campaigns. Focus on build ongoing relationships with volunteers, including training opportunities. Local Party engagement with public policy can be part of this ongoing effort.
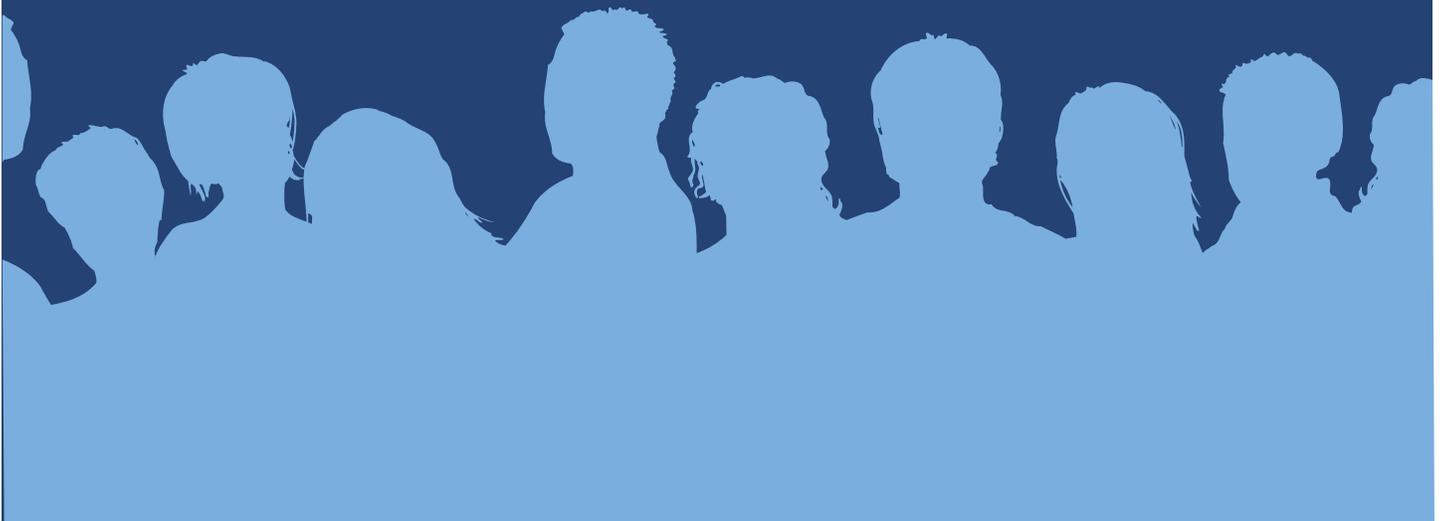
Summarized Notes from Listening Sessions

Listening Session basics

- Kensington Library 1/16/19: 40 Participants in 7 small groups + 10 Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee members
- Bohrer Park 1/26/19: 30 Participants in 6 small groups + 9 MCDCC members
- 45 pages of notes from pairs of facilitators/notetakers
- Online Listening Session forms collected 4 responses, which were included in this summary.

Community Outreach

- Many session participants emphasized that outreach to diverse communities needs to be a priority. This would include prioritizing logistics, communication, outreach of diverse communities with action steps, and being intentional about goals. There was concern that best practices for doing outreach to voters from different groups is not widely known.

  ### Suggestions:

  - More deep canvassing to listen to people door to door
  - Arrange listening sessions at local churches, arrange activities with faith based organizations
  - Consistent contact important to build trust and relationships
  - Outreach near community centers to have an easy and accessible place to meet
  - Connect with leaders in those communities
  - Offer "ladders of engagement"-- even if people don't have much time to volunteer, all of them can be amplifiers/influencers and help spread info about our events or opportunities
  - True inclusivity means walking the walk to make people be welcome, this is a way to combat the idea of "the establishment" not wanting new Democrats to participate and lead in the Party
  - Ensuring accessibility of events and arranging inclusive activities so that people with disabilities are able to participate equally is important

- Outreach to unengaged and unaffiliated voters was considered to be important.
  - Party should focus on not-super Dems because candidates will focus on them (don't duplicate effort)
  - Asian community needs more justification to be attached to a party
  - Outreach to extremely busy people with few resources, need to meet them where they are (bus stops, kid school pick up lines), potentially by using precinct officials to identify these locations within their precincts

- Strong support for Neighbor-to-Neighbor precinct door-to-door deep canvassing programs
  - But there are challenges: Many failures to communicate between the precinct organization, the MCDCC, and the grassroots groups
  - Canvassing neighborhoods has a lot of democratic benefits, people can remind folks about where their polling place, especially that they don't vote in the same place in Early Voting.

- There were many comments about people wanting to get to know each other. Fun activities for community building (previously successful: potlucks, postcard writing parties, picnics, park cleanups, not lectures) Family friendly and involving food is good.
- Importance of having youth lead was emphasized, approaches need to be adjusted to be able to reach youth
- Offering SSL hours is one method mentioned
- Arrange 1 hour time for ballot filling activity for independent living homes
- Upcounty voter participation should be of concern to everyone in county.
- MCDCC Listening Sessions were cited as an example of the right direction for the Democratic Party.
- Platform — comments mentioned that this is a method for engaging people in a more meaningful way. Some commenters thought that having an election every 2 years doesn't engage people as much as an issues-based agenda.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Fundraising

- There were many comments suggesting the Democratic Party broaden the base of outreach, make cheaper ticket events to be more inclusive (less exclusive).
- Ike Leggett Smoky Glen events were mentioned as a good example of casual and not corporate (unlike at Marriott) fundraising events.
- More transparency about MCDCC fundraising would help (incoming funds and expenditures).
- MCDCC Ball wasn't seen as a fun event, as no dancing and perceived as being for insiders

Communication

- Multiple mentions that MCDCC newsletter has really improved and is now a helpful source of aggregated timely information.
- MCDCC plays an important role in dispensing official Party statements and narrative and clearly communicating what the Party's values are.
- There were several comments about email communications. Some do want email communication but not too many emails, so recipients don't start to ignore them.
- There were several comments about how difficult it was to figure out how to get local Democratic Party on the phone, and a suggestion that there be a single phone number.
- Broaden the community outreach (multiple means: radio, marquees, newspaper, social media, virtual town halls) and try to reach unaffiliated voters and soft Republicans too.
- Gaithersburg puts up American flags on Election Day, it was suggested that this could this be a way to advertise election day countywide.
- Voter education for the primary is important because many of the candidate decisions are made in primary. Voters would also benefit from understanding their county and state government better. MCDCC could show leadership by educating unaffiliated voters about the benefit of voting in the primary, and also support an open primary.
- Messaging: advice to make the message appealing to all, conversely, there is also advice to make the messages targeted to particular groups
- Managing the big tent is difficult. Examples of

this issue were as follows: Young people are moving left. If Ds move to the center, young people will walk. Conversely, there was was concern about including business-friendly Democrats in the "tent".

MCDCC Management

- MCDCC efforts could be more strategic and change to be driven by data. There were questions about what was the best use of time and money raised, with the Agricultural Fair and Sample Ballot mentioned (in both positive and negative comments), and whether there was strategy behind the decisions.
- MCDCC members being more visible, attending community group meetings, cultural events, and helping connect people to elected officials would be useful
- MCDCC Ballot Question report was well done and helpful
- MCDCC finances could be more transparent
- One recommendation was that the MCDCC focus strategically on raising funds for the Party in non-election years (such as 2019!) so that the Party is not competing with candidates for donor dollars in election years, and so that the time and energy of the MCDCC in election years can be focused on get-out-the-vote efforts.
- MCDCC structure, connection with other parts of Democratic Party, and operations are not widely understood in Montgomery County.
- There were concerns from upcounty about MCDCC offices being located downcounty.

Electronic Infrastructure

- There were many mentions of VAN, especially that people mentioned that they valued being given training on the platform as a concrete way that the Democratic Party had supported them. There were also comments that VAN is difficult to use and get access to, and that those with access want more training, particularly in-person training.
- A joint calendar with all the Democratic clubs and progressive groups' events was supported by session participants.

- List of clubs and contacts on the MCDCC website is helpful
- Lack of voter emails and cell phone numbers makes voter contact more difficult and time intensive.
- Use of text messaging and other technologies for voter contact is worth evaluating now (for example Chinese language outreach on social media app- WeChat and other texting apps)

General Volunteer Needs
- Volunteer enthusiasm was strong for primary and for general elections
- Grassroots activist groups sprang up and were easy to volunteer with, but there was also concern about whether they were enhancing the Democratic Party or replacing it when the Democratic Party was not responsive.
- Volunteers need to feel a personal touch, structured mentoring, and have understanding of how their individual effort translates into the larger effort
- Volunteer training should include how to talk about the Democratic Party's policy platform, not just volunteer logistics or who the candidates are
- Multiple mentions of concerns that there is not sufficient follow up or record of people who have indicated they want to volunteer
- Commenters mentioned that there was a need to match volunteers with specific skills to communities and gatherings where that skill is most needed (Spanish language, Chinese language, LGBTQ, etc.)

Precinct Officials and Precinct Organization
- Precinct organization outreach has improved, training and programming for precinct officials is better. For new volunteers structured mentoring and for all precinct officials, a set and organized series of trainings would be helpful.
- Focus on voter engagement, mobilization, and turnout energized the precinct organization.
- There is a need to continue to target precincts without representation until all precincts are filled, with priority for chairs/vice chairs who live within the precinct. Suggestions to help dis-

seminate needs: Keep the map on the wall to visualize, share map with openings with advocacy groups so they can "be the Democratic Party".
- Precinct officials need a consistent and standard and simple process to getting funds for their activities (get postcards,and stamps, door-hangers, room rentals, and supplies for social events, etc.).
- Pre-election day: Give precinct officials other things to do besides canvassing. Message was that Coordinated Campaign was the focus, but this didn't capitalize on the precinct officials' skills, knowledge of their precincts, and in some cases, physical abilities.
- There was concern that precinct officials are not making sufficient efforts to contact the voters in their precincts, and also concern that precinct officials do not have sufficient support to be able to conduct a significant effort to contact voters. Precinct officials feel they need resources or help, or they stop being motivated. One suggestion for supporting this effort: precinct officials should get a list of newly registered voters in their precinct on a regular basis from the MCDCC.
- Comments reflected that previous precinct official application processes felt long and inefficient.
- Districts without clubs and only caucuses may contribute to feeling that Democratic Party is exclusive.
- There were several comments on the theme of poll sitting, candidate literature, and general election sample ballot
  - Campaign literature: comments were most approving of the pieces which were all candidates names and (in general election) when individual candidates literature included up and down tickets running, and United for Maryland anti-Hogan messaging. Critical comments mentioned the bag day candidate literature in binders on election day, and candidate literature also received critical comments (precinct officials found voters just wanted the sample ballots, not candidate literature).

- Multiple mentions that sample ballot was good because voters took the sample ballot at polling places. Sample ballot negative feedback included doubt about why this is the best use of MCDCC efforts, concern that it was slow to be organized this cycle, and that voters were confused by why there was no congressional representative on the sample ballot.
- Party should help guide precinct officials on what is the best use of their time on election day re: sitting at polls, going door to door, arranging block captains. There was concern that sitting at polls is not the best use of volunteer time. Relatedly, if poll sitting is the best thing precinct officials should do, they need guidance on what the standards are.
- General Election Master schedule among all the candidates to reduce duplicate poll sitting coverage would be helpful.
- Reporting turnout from precincts: There was confusion about why precinct officials were asked to do this at the primary but not at the general. If MCDCC knows some precincts don't have volunteers at polling places, but it is important to gather this information, someone should have the job of driving to unstaffed polling places to collect turnout.
- Voters on election day wanted guidance on the ballot questions. Good that MCDCC had provided at least some guidance. Other suggestions included giving voters a decision tree on each ballot question (e.g. "If X is important to you, you might want to vote yes. If Y is important to you, you might want to vote no.")

Coordinated Campaign
- Coordinated Campaign positives
  - There were many comments expressing strong feeling that 2018 was better than campaigns of 2016 or 2014.
  - There were many comments that praised Coordinated Campaign staff as responsive and energetic.

- Coordinated Campaign negatives
  - Comments on Jealous campaign: There was a high ratio of Hogan/Jealous signs, which some saw as a lack of voter engagement with Jealous. There was a lot of concern that Jealous' messaging was not disseminated and/or wasn't resonant with voters and potential volunteers. Jealous not being endorsed by Democratic leaders was a problem. Based on the election results, a new concern has arisen that the Democratic Party needs to not repeat the problem of turning out voters for Hogan or other Hogan-like Republicans in the future.
  - Comments on volunteering for rides: it was unclear who was the master organizer, and there was a recommendation to use local expertise. Also identified was a need for quicker action from the Coordinated Campaign on coordination and letting people know what the plan was.
  - Comments on field operations: There were some reports of unintentional double canvassing in same areas (Access to previous canvassers notes in Minivan would help coordinate). Some found it off-putting to be asked to volunteer to get yard signs. Some found it off-putting to be told a precinct they cared about was not a current priority. Conversely, it was also off-putting for active and responsive precinct officials to not be involved when the Coordinated Campaign decided their precinct was a priority. There was also concern that upcounty did not get canvassed as much as down county.
  - Comments about consistency of effort: A recommendation arose from several to have the Coordinated Campaign ramp up earlier after the primary. Many also noted, the effort seemed better this time compared to 2014 and 2016. Related to this recommendation was the advice that more consistent effort off-cycle would complement ramp ups for elections. This would allow for building ongoing relationships with volunteers, and

find ways to leverage knowledge and coordination (maybe with grassroots groups) to facilitate transitions and maximize resources.

• Comments on training of volunteers: There were many comments about the quality of the volunteer training and materials that the Coordinated Campaign and Central Committee provided. The quality of the door-knocking scripts (for example, the first scripts had 13 candidates, which was very difficult to use in the field), phonebanking scripts and software could be improved. This seems to be a significant area for improvement for MCDCC and the Maryland Democratic Party in future efforts.

• Comments on volunteer recruitment included a recommendation that it would have been easier if the Party had rapidly provided the most visible and accessible portal for volunteers to sign up. Grassroots groups used online and form signups through email, which was often easier for people to use.