



Overview of Mind the Gap

A. Summary.

Mind the Gap (MTG) was formed in mid-2018 with the goal of directing private political contributions where they would have the greatest marginal impact on flipping the House in the midterm election. In three and a half months, from July to mid-October of last year, we built a donor network of over 800 individuals from scratch. Our members contributed a total of \$20 million: \$11 million in hard-money contributions to 20 undervalued and underfunded House races, and \$9 million to get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts in the 100 most competitive House races.

In 2019-2020, we will anchor our efforts on the Presidential race, with priority given to counties and zip codes within battleground Presidential states that have multiple strategically important and contested down-ballot races. The reason for this strategy is that roughly 98 percent of voters who turn out to vote for President will vote straight down the ballot along party lines. Thus, in areas with nested critical races, each additional Democratic vote will help elect Democrats in two or more critical races for the price of one. How far we can extend our reach beyond these hot spots depends solely on how much money we can raise.

Our recommendations are all data driven, relying on meta-analyses of hundreds of randomized, controlled experiments produced by academics and the [Analyst Institute](#), and private polling and modeling supplied by [Civis Analytics](#). We do not act as an intermediary for political contributions or make them ourselves. All contributions are made directly by the donor to the organizations and candidates we recommend. We in effect operate as pro bono donor advisers to a growing network of donors who are willing to give significant amounts to Democratic politics, but only if they have confidence in the efficacy of their investments.

In this cycle, unlike 2018, the single most effective tactic for ensuring Democratic victories—501(c)(3) voter registration focused on underrepresented groups in the electorate—will also address an independent moral imperative: to increase the justness and representativeness of our democracy. If fully funded, these efforts will be the largest voter registration drive in US history, with most of the gains realized by communities of color. Those gains will have a lasting and profound impact on the fairness and robustness of our democratic form of government.

B. Who we are.

There are three principals involved with MTG. **Barbara Fried**, William W. and Gertrude H. Saunders Professor of Law, Stanford University, is the founder and President. **Paul Brest**, former President of the Hewlett Foundation and former Dean and Professor of Law Emeritus (active) at Stanford Law School, is Chair of the Board of Directors. **Graham Gottlieb**, Behavioral Research Fellow at Stanford University and former political appointee in the Obama White House and USAID, is the Executive Director.¹

¹ Titles are for identification purposes only. Stanford University and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation have no affiliation with Mind the Gap.

C. Recap of our 2018 effort.

There were two prongs to our efforts in 2018.

First, we directed about \$11.5 million in hard money contributions to 20 House candidates whom our analysis identified as the most underfunded, *measured by the probability that incremental funding would affect the outcome of the race*. We asked our donors to max out to at least 10 of our 20 candidates—so a minimum ask of \$27,000.

According to our polling and analytics, the Democratic candidates we recommended had between a 46% and a 51% projected vote share at the time we recommended them and win probabilities between 14% and 63%. Most win probabilities were considerably below 50%. Most of the public ratings agencies were more pessimistic about our races, and many of them were rated as ‘lean’ or ‘likely R’ at the time we made our recommendations.

Second, we directed approximately \$9 million in larger donations to four independent expenditure GOTV efforts that targeted the 100 most competitive House races, including our 20. All of these tactics had been subject to randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in previous cycles. The results of those RCTs showed them to be far more effective (measured by cost per additional Democratic vote) than standard GOTV and persuasion tactics. The efforts we funded this cycle were also subject to RCTs, which will provide critical additional information about the efficacy of different strategies going into the 2020 cycle.

Civis Analytics projected that the most likely outcome without our intervention was that Democrats would win 7 of our 20 races. We therefore set the initial benchmark for success at winning 8. In the event, we won 10.

We have commissioned outside evaluations of all facets of our 2018 operations. We have just received the last of the independent, quantitative evaluations of our 2018 efforts and hope to have a full report to our donors, including the results of the outside evaluations, by the end of the month. Preliminary assessments indicate our donors likely played a critical role in flipping several of these races. In addition, seven of the ten we lost were very close; the closest four were decided by between a 0.2% and 0.8% vote margin. That strong showing set the stage for a rematch in 2020, and seven of the ten losing candidates have announced they are running again. In each case, our donors’ investments in their 2018 races will allow the candidates to enter the 2020 cycle with significant name recognition and political credibility.

Finally, our success rate in identifying races, in some cases as much as five months before the election, that would be much closer than public raters predicted—a prerequisite to our strategy working—is independently an important proof of concept. Twelve of our races were within a 5% vote margin, and seven were within a 2% vote margin. To look at it from another vantage point, of the ten closest House races, *five were ours*. By way of comparison, on the morning of election day, Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight correctly identified only two of these ten closest races.

We took an unconventional tack with potential donors. Our sole goal was to flip the House. To that end, a seat flipped was a seat flipped. We did not screen candidates based on geography, demographics, likeability, or policy positions. Given the large number of seats projected to be within the margin of error and per-candidate spending limits on hard money, we concluded that the most rational investment strategy was a broad portfolio approach. This entailed asking our donors to invest in a large number of reach races that they had never heard of, in places they did not have strong emotional ties to, with an expectation that we would—and should—lose a significant number of those races in order to generate unexpected marginal wins to increase our chances of taking the House. All of this is contrary to the conventional wisdom that donors are motivated purely by emotional attachment to identifiable individuals and the prospect of winning each race they invest in, rather than a more abstract, rational decision-making processes.

Based on preliminary donor feedback, we expect that many if not most of our members will remain actively engaged in the 2019-2020 cycle and plan to rely on MTG recommendations to direct a significant part of their political giving. Many have indicated to us that they are eager to help power a more extended outreach effort this cycle.

D. MTG's Strategy for 2019-2020

Our guiding principle remains the same: to direct money where we believe it will have the greatest marginal impact on election results. Both our goals and the most effective tactics to achieve them are different, because of the very different dynamics in play in Presidential years, and in particular this one.

1. Goals. In 2018, we had one goal: to flip the House. We are facing a much more complex political landscape in 2020. There is, first and foremost, the Presidential race. In addition, many of the newly-elected Democrats in the House will be vulnerable, and there will be some challengers (including the seven MTG candidates who are running again) with a credible chance of winning. Flipping the Senate is not clearly out of reach and limiting losses or picking up even one seat will put us in a much more favorable position in 2022. Finally, 2020 will be our last chance to flip state legislative seats critical to block severe Republican gerrymanders when Congressional redistricting is done in 2021.

Our efforts will target all four levels of races, with the greatest weight given to the Presidency. Hence, we are prioritizing Presidential battleground states, and in particular the five most likely tipping point states: Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Arizona. Within the battleground states, we are prioritizing geographic areas in which an additional Democratic vote for President will also have the greatest leverage in critical, down-ballot races. Our sister 501(c)(4) organization, MTG Research, Inc., has spent the past eight months working with an A-list group of data and analytics consultants to develop a 'heat map' identifying these highest-value zip codes and counties. MTG Research is sharing its analysis with other civic engagement organizations.

2. Tactics.

Here too we face a very different landscape from 2018. The tactics that work best in midterm elections are less effective in Presidential years, and vice versa. We are recommending three different tactics, to be funded sequentially over the next 12 months:

voter registration, get-out-the-vote (GOTV), and direct funding of select House and state legislative races. By far the largest effort will be directed at voter registration.

(a) Voter registration. The most effective tactic in a Presidential year by a wide margin is nonpartisan voter registration focused on underrepresented groups in our electoral process. *Provided that such efforts are well-designed and executed, on a pre-tax basis* they are 2 to 5 times more cost-effective at netting additional Democratic votes than the tactics that campaigns will invest in (chiefly, broadcast media and digital buys). Because 90 percent of the contributions we are recommending for voter registration and GOTV efforts will go to 501(c)(3) organizations and hence are tax deductible, on an after-tax basis such programs are closer to 4 to 10 times more cost-effective than the next best alternative. They are also eligible recipients of donations from donor-advised funds and private foundations.

We will be recommending three organizations for voter registration work: the Voter Participation Center (VPC) and the Center for Voter Information (CVI), both mail-based programs, and Everybody Votes, a site-based program. Everybody Votes is a national organization that funds and trains a consortium of 50+ local community groups across the country that do the actual registration work. It also checks at the back end that every form was filled out in accordance with state requirements, and that every new registrant actually ends up on the voter rolls in advance of election day—two key steps to counter voter suppression efforts. We partnered with VPC and CVI last cycle. All three organizations have stellar track records, backed up by multiple RCTs.

We are starting by targeting zip codes within Presidential battleground states in which there are nested state legislature and House races that are in play and, in the case of the state legislature, such races are must-wins to block a Republican gerrymander in the 2021 Congressional redistricting process. Because more than 98% of people who vote in the Presidential race also vote in all partisan down-ballot races along party lines, every dollar invested in those districts will have a multiplicative effect up- and down-ballot.

(b) GOTV efforts. Unlike high-quality voter registration, we expect an enormous amount of money will be poured into GOTV efforts by multiple players in the Democratic ecosphere. Nevertheless, we expect that some critical gaps will remain, although it will not be possible to identify them, or the precise amount of money required to fully fund them, for a few more months.

(c) Direct funding of orphan races. In late spring of 2020, we will assess the political landscape to identify critically underfunded races ('orphan' races), using the same data-driven analysis we used in 2018 to pick our 20 House races, and recommend hard-money contributions to the campaigns. We do not anticipate recommending direct campaign contributions to the Presidential or Senatorial races, for the simple reason that we expect them to be saturated with money without MTG's help. The way our donors' dollars can meaningfully influence the outcomes of those races is through voter registration and GOTV efforts. Based on record-breaking 2019 Q1 fundraising numbers, we expect the same will be

true for many of our new, vulnerable House incumbents, and likely for most competitive House challengers (including the ones MTG supported in 2018). If that turns out to be the case, once again, the most effective means our donors will have to influence the outcome of those races will be through our voter registration and GOTV efforts. Thus, we expect that most of the orphan races we will recommend will be state-level races critical to blocking severe gerrymanders in 2021.

3. Fundraising goals.

Our goal is to fully fund all three efforts, by which we mean fund them up to the point where they are no longer clearly the most cost-effective investments to increase net Democratic votes in critical races. For the voter registration efforts, we currently estimate that will require \$70 million, although the number could go as high as \$100 million, depending on the results of experiments looking at the optimal scale of mail-based voter registration. More than 90% of the total will go to 501(c)(3) tax-deductible entities. To date, we have raised \$35 million, and are working hard to bring partner organizations on board with the effort. The cash contributions to date have funded the first large-scale site-based voter registration programs in Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, which, incredibly, had no such programs on the boards until MTG members funded them over the summer, and have paid for the first, massive wave of mail-based voter registration efforts, which were sent out in September.

Our estimates for the funding required for GOTV and orphan races are more speculative at this point, but we are pegging them around at \$30 million for GOTV efforts and less than \$10 million for direct funding of orphan races.

We are currently recommending that MTG-directed contributions be allocated roughly 60% to voter registration, 25% to GOTV, and 15% to direct funding of orphan races.

4. Timing for contributions

- June 2019 — Dec 2019: Voter Registration programs. The most cost-effective voter registration strategy to increase turnout in the 2020 elections will happen in two stages: in advance of the Presidential primaries in each state, and in advance of the general election. Many of the programs need significant lead time to launch, requiring money in hand before the end of 2019, in some cases two to three months earlier. We will therefore be devoting all our efforts from now until the end of 2019 to fully funding voter registration. A portion of that total has a more exigent deadline. Everybody Votes has to have commitments of \$16.5 million by mid-November to give its community partners the go-ahead to scale up to optimal levels. We have an \$8 million matching grant in place, *leaving another \$8.5 million to raise by mid-November.*

- January 2020 — June 2020: GOTV efforts. As of now, we expect to have more lead time to fund critical underfunded efforts, because we expect that most of those efforts will be directed at the general election rather than the primaries. We will turn to them after we have completed funding the voter registration efforts.

- **June 2020 — October 2020.** We will be identifying orphan state legislative and House races to recommend for direct campaign contributions. We expect to make most of those recommendations by the end of August. By mid-October, our work will be done.

6. Suggested individual contribution levels.

In 2018, we sought to maintain a high degree of stealth, to limit the chances that Republicans would respond with early funding to counteract MTG investments in other otherwise off-the-radar races. Given FEC spending limits, to remain below the Republican radar while reaching our funding goal of \$500,000 per candidate, we needed to build a tight network where most donors would agree to max out to at least 10 of our candidates. Many in our 2018 did, and some maxed out to all 20.

The situation is different this time, because individual contributions to independent voter registration and GOTV efforts are not capped. At the same time, our fundraising goals are much higher, and reaching them will require the generous participation of all MTG donors.

In the end, of course, it is your private decision how much to give and where to direct it, and anything you can give will be an important contribution to the effort. For those who participated in the 2018 effort, the minimum contribution we suggested then—\$27,000—for most individual donors is roughly equivalent to a \$40,000 contribution this cycle on an after-tax basis, and we are pegging the minimum suggested contribution at that number. But this time around, we will never get to our goal without substantially greater contributions from those who are in a position to make them.

But whatever you are able to give and wherever you choose to direct it, we encourage you to be both strategic and generous. This is the most important election of our lifetimes, with grave and in some cases irreversible implications for the country and the planet if we don't win. The responsibility on each of us is concomitantly large. None of us wants to wake up on November 4, 2020, and think, for the second time in four years, if only we had done more.

E. Next Steps.

All the information you need in order to contribute now to the three voter registration programs we are recommending is posted on Digify. We encourage you to contribute now if you can, to reduce the uncertainty for donee organizations in planning the next few months. If you have questions, please ask. You can email us at admin@mtg2020.org and we'll get back to you as soon as we can. And if you know of others who would be potentially interested in coming on board, if you connect us to them we will follow up.

F. Discretion

In 2018, we managed to stay out of the news and as far as we know out of Republicans' sightlines through the entire cycle, notwithstanding that we ended up being one of the top

two fundraisers for House races. We do not expect to be so lucky this cycle. But some information about our efforts is more sensitive than others. It will come as no surprise to Republicans—and be of little interest—that yet another organization is trying to fund voter registration in battleground states. But the magnitude of our efforts, the details of targeting, and the names of the organizations we are recommending, would be of great interest to them. If that information becomes public, it would make MTG and the donee organizations targets for Republicans and enable them to ramp up voter suppression efforts and other tactics at their disposal.

We are therefore keeping this document along with others that contain sensitive information on close hold. They are encrypted, and available only through Digify, our encrypted site. We will give access to those who are seriously considering coming on board. We ask you all to honor that restriction, and not circulate any of the highly sensitive information. Below, you will find a blurb on the MTG effort that you are free to circulate widely.

We look forward to your partnership in the long push ahead to November 2020. And thank you for all you are doing.

Onward!

Barbara, Paul, Graham, and the rest of the MTG team

Recommendations that can be circulated widely:

The most effective investment that Democrats can make in the 2020 elections is in early voter registration targeting minorities and other underrepresented groups in the ‘rising American electorate.’ If well-designed and well-executed, such efforts are three to four times more effective than the next best available tactic for increasing net Democratic votes in November 2020. Two sister organizations stand out for their efficacy, as established by hundreds of independent, randomized controlled trials (the gold standard of causal proof). They are the Voter Participation Center (a 501(c)(3) tax deductible charity) and the Center for Voter Information (nonpartisan but not tax deductible). The money donated to both organizations through these links will target minority populations in geographic areas crucial to victory in the Presidential election and key down-ballot races.

Voter Participation Center—501(c)(3), tax deductible

Contribution Link: <https://www.voterparticipation.org/support-our-work/donate-to-vpc/mtg-donate-to-vpc> (Contribution Link password: MTGVPC)

Center for Voter Information—501(c)(4), not tax deductible

Contribution Link: <https://www.centerforvoterinformation.org/about-us/93-2/> (Contribution Link password: MTGCVI)