

## Campaign ramps up to defeat Prop 8

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by Seth Hemmelgarn

Efforts are under way statewide to rally people around defeating Proposition 8, the anti-gay marriage amendment, and the field director for the campaign said the time to get involved is now.

**"A lot of folks have said, 'We'll come in the fall,'" after weddings and vacations, said Sarah E. Reece. But "we encourage people to think about getting involved right now ... If we wait until the fall, it may be too late."**



Equality for All's Sarah E. Reece. Photo: Jane Philomen Cleland

**Reece is a project director with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and is on loan full time as statewide field director for the Vote No on 8 – Equality for All campaign.**

"We've got to do voter contact as swiftly and effectively as possible," Reece said. "We can't be building our team and contacting the number of voters we'll need to reach if we wait until the fall."

Reece said the campaign's had "very, very positive responses" so far.

"Californians by and large are fair-minded, and they want to do the right thing on this issue," she said.

People are being asked not only to vow to vote no on Prop 8, the measure on the November ballot that would amend the state's constitution to ban same-sex marriage, but also to help make that happen by volunteering or making a donation. Volunteer duties include phone banking, data entry, and preparing materials.

The campaign has volunteer recruitment phone banks running two or three times a week, depending on the region of the state.

"There's a lot for people to do right now," Reece said.

Reece said the phone banks are meant to help identify supporters, educate people who haven't quite made up their minds yet, recruit volunteers, and raise money.

A Field Poll released July 18 indicated that statewide, only 7 percent of likely voters are undecided. [See story, page 1.]

"There are undecided and/or swing voters in every category," Reece said, whether it's age, race, ethnicity, or where people live.

"Our goal is to reach as many people as possible," she said.

This underscores the need for a bigger team of volunteers, Reece said. "Even though it looks like the smallest margin of undecided voters ... that still could equate to millions of voters we have to talk to" in the time before the November 4 election.

Reece encourages people to go to [www.equalityforall.com](http://www.equalityforall.com) and sign up as a supporter because that takes one more name off the list of people who need to be called.

Thousands of people have signed up to volunteer so far, Reece said. She said the campaign is doing in-person volunteer recruitment "anywhere LGBT people and our allies might congregate," such as the recent San Francisco AIDS Walk, bars, restaurants, clubs, and art festivals.

Volunteer efforts are focusing on person-to-person contact over the phone or face-to-face, delivering messages of equal protection under the law and that the freedom to marry is a fundamental right.

Efforts are focusing on "making sure voters who haven't yet made up their mind get to have that human interaction, and get a chance to vote with us because they understand this is a matter of fairness and a matter of opportunity," Reece said.

The Vote No on 8 campaign's main offices are in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Reece said that "based on volunteer capacity and enthusiasm" there could also be satellite offices outside of those regions.

Reece said the campaign is getting ready to move into its latest office space in San Francisco, on the second floor of the old Tower Records store at 2278 Market Street in the Castro. There will also be offices in Sacramento and San Jose, she said.

The campaign will soon start training volunteers in the Castro to help canvass the neighborhood. For more information check the No on 8 campaign's Web site or e-mail Hannah Johnson at [Hannah@eqca.org](mailto:Hannah@eqca.org).

Prop 8 needs a simple majority to win.

"Folks should make no mistake, this will be a razor-thin election," Reece said. "The side who wins will be the side who built a big enough team of volunteers that talked person-to-person with enough voters."

Jim Key, chief public affairs officer for the LA Gay and Lesbian Center, said people there started the Vote for Equality project more than four years ago to educate voters, identify those who will oppose the ballot initiative, and encourage people to vote.

Lorri Jean, the center's CEO, is on the campaign coalition's executive committee, and he said the center has also loaned staff to the campaign.

Key said contact information for tens of thousands of people who said they wouldn't vote for the initiative has been collected.

Marriage Equality USA, which has chapters throughout the state, has a button on its Web site – [www.marriageequality.org](http://www.marriageequality.org) – called Couples Across California. The group is part of the Equality for All coalition, which also includes organizations such as Equality California, the Human Rights Campaign, and the Task Force.

Molly McKay, media director for MEUSA, said the group has enlisted same-sex couples in almost every county, and they've been adding couples every day, with people sending in their photos and stories.

McKay said it makes a huge difference when people share their stories – and big weddings with lots of people are important, too, so that more people feel personally invested or connected to same-sex couples, and share that information with people they know.

Last week's Field Poll also indicated that 54 percent of people who know or work with someone gay or lesbian oppose Prop 8.

Stephanie Stolte has been working on faith outreach with the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry Action Network – another Equality for All member – and MEUSA.

Stolte said there are plenty of people in communities of faith who oppose Prop 8.

"Virtually every religious denomination has a component that's supportive of the LGBT community," even when the overall denomination isn't fully supportive, she said.

McKay said voters in California have "an awesome opportunity" to secure equality, and the effort could continue across the nation.

"The stakes couldn't be higher," McKay said, but "I am confident of our success if everyone does their part."