Evidence-Based Practices for Voter Education

Research-Based Principles for Effective Voter Education Campaigns

Elizabeth A. Erkel, PhD

January 2019
Table of Contents

Preface  3
1. Understand voters  5
2. Make it conversational  10
3. Prioritize information  13
4. Coordinate use of communication tools  16
5. Keep it current  20
6. References  21

Jan 2019
Preface

Welcome!

• This tutorial will help you understand the principles behind effective voter education campaigns.
  – For what works, see *Tactics That Work for Voter Education*
  – For talking effectively with voters, see: *What to Say: Talking About Voter Registration*

• Each election, each potential voter, and each get-out-the-vote (GOTV) effort is unique.
  – Thus it is critical to tailor your message.
  – Regardless of the type of GOTV activity and your audience, your efforts will be more effective if guided by evidence-based practices.

• GOTV action involves vision, strategy, and tactics as depicted on the next page.

*https://my.lwv.org/texas/best-practices-gotv*
Encouraging informed and active participation in government by facilitating voter engagement.

Interactive & meaningful communication

GOTV tactics that work

Increased voter turnout in Texas

*Evidence-based practices

Jan 2019

GOTV Action Program adopted at LWV-TX 2016 State Convention
1. **UNDERSTAND YOUR VOTERS & PERSONALIZE PROVISION OF INFORMATION**

The effectiveness of voter education depends on the message resonating with the voter.

**Resonate** | craft visual stories that transform audiences

Craft a visual story that takes the audience on a journey from **WHAT** to **WHY** to **HOW**.

Nancy Duarte (as cited in Moore, 2010)

**Consider:**

- Learning styles of voters
- Cultural relevance of information to voters
- Availability of information
- Accessibility of information

Jan 2019

Learning styles

Different voters prefer learning by different ways —

- In person
- Print
- Website
- Social media
- TV
- Radio

Understand your voters
Personalize information
Understand your voters
Personalize information

Cultural relevance

Modify voter education approaches to accommodate the
• Geographic & cultural roots
• Values
• Traditions
of the target group.

Jankowski, 2011; U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2014, p. 3
Availability

When voters look for election and voting information, they want it

• in their favorite format
  – Print
  – Online
  – In person

• and in language they can understand.

Understand your voters
Personalize information
Understand your voters

Personalize information

Provide information where voters hang out —
  • Events
  • Places
  • Social media

Accessibility

Assign knowledgeable people to interact with voters —
  • In person
  • By telephone
  • Online
2. **Make voter education a conversation**

Be polite, personable, and positive in all methods of voter education.
Conversational
Choice of words

Diction

• A writer’s choice of words, particularly for clarity, effectiveness, and precision.
• Choosing the “right” word
• Example
  • “Three blind mice,/ See how they run.”
  • “Three rodents with defective vision, Observe their rate of motion.”

Use informal, everyday language that avoids election jargon and legalese –

• Simple words
• Short sentences & paragraphs
• Positive phrases
• Personal pronouns

E.g., “You can ask a poll worker for help in using a voting machine.”
Conversational Voice

• Communicate so that the voter performs the activity.
  – In instructions, the voter can be implied.
    I.e., think of the voter as ‘you.’
    E.g., “Find where to vote at....”
3. PRIORITIZE THE PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

But...

Don’t make it more complicated than it needs to be.

You have Questions We have Answers

Prioritize

Address voters’ most frequently asked questions before providing additional information.

Voters’ top questions:

- What’s on the ballot?
- When/where/how do I vote?
- How do I get a sample ballot?
- What happens at the polling place?
- Who do I contact if I have a problem?
- What are the deadlines for
  - Voter registration?
  - Absentee ballots?
Prioritize

Eliminate unnecessary details that make voting sound complicated.
4. **COORDINATE USE OF A VARIETY OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS**
Use different approaches for different audiences

- **Young voters**
  - Social media, texts, & mobile apps

- **Older voters**
  - Traditional media

- **Community organizations**
  - Presentations
Coordinate

Deliver the information in multiple formats, adjusting the level of detail.

- Provide your voter toolkit and voters guide both in print and online.
- Deliver reminders via email, Twitter, Facebook, and postal mail.
Coordinate

Make it easy for voters to navigate among various resources.

• Provide contacts for more information
  – Telephone numbers
  – Website addresses
  – Social media accounts

• Check accuracy of contact information each election cycle and update materials as needed.
5. **Keep information current**

Update voter education information early and often.
6. References


