Evidence-Based Practices for Voter Mobilization

Research-Based Principles for Effective Get-Out-the-Vote Activities

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Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The dos &amp; don’ts of voter mobilization</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mobilizing voters is not...</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To mobilize voters...</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Voter mobilization resources</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. References</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Welcome!

• This tutorial will help you understand the principles behind effective GOTV campaigns.
  – For what works, see *Tactics That Work for Voter Mobilization*
  – For talking effectively with voters, see: *What to Say: Effective GOTV Conversations*

• 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
GOTV Action Program

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

Adopted by LWVTX Convention 2016
1. The dos & don’ts of voter mobilization

- Focus on voting
- Connect with the voter
- Use gentle social pressure
- Help make a plan for voting
- Advocate for issues or candidates
- Discuss that people aren’t voting
- Rely on impersonal emails, display ads, or robo-calls
Focus on voting

• The goal is to transform nonvoters into voters
  – *not* to change minds about an issue or a candidate.

• Advocating for issues may diminish your influence on voter turnout.

• The League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties.
Connect with the voter

- Emphasize that you are local, e.g.:
  - A neighbor
  - From a local organization
- Acknowledge a commonality between you and your contact.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Ask questions.
- Share a voting story of your own.

Messengers with something in common with the community are more effective than outsiders.

Angone, 2015; British Council, n.d.; Nickerson & Rogers, 2010; Yale University, n.d.
Connect with the voter

Timing

• Use different periods of the election season to greatest effect.

• Focus messaging on a specific topic within the 2 weeks before its deadline:
  – Voter registration
  – Vote-by-mail applications
  – Early voting
  – Election Day

Green & Gerber, 2015, p.33; Nonprofit Vote, n.d.
Connect with the voter

How often?

- Aim to make one contact with each targeted voter
  - through multiple attempts if needed.
- One successful contact with lots of voters is more effective than multiple contacts with fewer voters.
- Multiple contacts are most effective with occasional voters but require substantial resources.

Cendejas & Guerra, 2014
Connect with the voter

Targeting the electorate

Target those who need a little encouragement to vote, especially:

- First-time voters
- Young people
- Ethnic/racial minorities
- People with a low income

Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2009; Gerber & Rogers, 2009, pp. 6 & 13
Green & Gerber, 2015, pp. 47, 82, & 94
Use gentle social pressure

We are social creatures and want to fit in.

Let potential voters know that someone is paying attention to whether or not they participate in the election.

- Tell them that others like themselves have committed to being voters.
- Remind them of their past voting history (it’s public record).
- Promise to follow-up with them after the election (and do so!).

Gerber, Green, & Larimer, 2008; Green & Gerber, 2015, p. 144-151
Help make a plan for voting

Getting potential voters to think through the steps they need to take makes them more likely to act on their intent to vote.

Planning to be a voter

- Logistics
  - Assess difficulty
    - How
    - When
    - Where
  - Special plans
- Readiness

What to Take to the Polls

- Voter registration card
- One of the acceptable voter IDs
- List of who/what to vote for

Nonpartisan Resources

- Voter information websites
  - VOTE411.org, VoteTexas.gov
  - County elections website
  - my.LWV.org/Texas
  - local League website
- League voters guides

Find voter ID information at https://my.lwv.org/texas/voter-id

Nickerson & Rogers, 2010
Help make a plan for voting
Assist voter in getting ready to vote.

LWV-TX social media business card available at https://my.lwv.org/texas/get-out-vote-0

Bookmarks individualized for each local League available at https://my.LWV.org/Texas/vote-it-counts
Don’t talk about …

• how people aren’t voting
• low voter turnout

• Hearing that others are voting encourages voting among infrequent and occasional voters.
  – Your [classmates, neighbors, etc.] have been telling me that they are definitely voting in this election. Do you plan on being a voter?
  – We’re expecting a high turnout this election.
  – More and more people are voting.

• Telling people that others are not voting can suppress voter turnout.

Schwartz & Rogers, 2010
Don’t advocate voting for...

- Issues or
- Candidates

- The single most important element of voter mobilization is urging the person to be a voter.
  - How important is it for you to be a voter in this upcoming election?
  - Can I count on you being a voter in this election?

- Persuasion messages have no effect on whether or not a person will vote!
  - An issue-focused message is unlikely to increase voter turnout.
  - The League does not endorse or oppose any candidate or political party.

Green & Gerber, 2015, pp. 34 & 156-157
Impersonal mass communication is ineffective in increasing voter turnout.

But friend-to-friend personalized communication that encourages voting through a series of chatty posts is about as effective as face-to-face canvassing.

Brooks, 2017; Green & Gerber, 47, 82, 94, & 126-127
Focus on voting

Use gentle social pressure

Help make a voting plan

Don’t advocate for issues or candidates

Don’t rely on impersonal communication
2. **Mobilizing Voters is Not...**

“... merely a matter of reminding them that Election Day is near.

... just a matter of putting election-related information in front of them.

... telling people why they should vote for a particular candidate or cause....”

Green & Gerber, 2015, p. 156
3. **To mobilize voters...**

- Make them feel wanted at the polls. In-person invitations convey the most warmth and work best. Next best are personalized telephone calls or personalized chatty posts on social media.

- Build on voters’ preexisting level of motivation to vote.

- Let them know that their vote is a matter of public record.

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Green & Gerber, 2015, pp. 156-157
4. **Voter Mobilization Resources**

- Tactics That Work
- What to Say
- Engaging Target Populations
  - Asian and Pacific Islanders
  - Latinos
  - Millennials
  - Generation Z
  - Youth

https://my.lwv.org/texas/best-practices-gotv
5. References


Nonprofit Vote. (n.d.). Seven tips on getting out the vote. Retrieved from https://tinyurl.com/ydg7geo9
