Evidence-Based Practices for Voter Mobilization

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

Elizabeth A. Erkel, PhD

May 2017
# Table of Contents

1. Preface
2. The dos & don’ts of voter mobilization
3. Mobilizing voters is not...
4. To mobilize voters...
5. Voter mobilization resources
6. References
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.
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

5% from 2012 to 2020

May 2017 GOTV Action Program adopted at LWV-TX 2016 State Convention
1. THE DOS & DON’TS OF VOTER MOBILIZATION

Dos:
- 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

Don’ts:
- 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.
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
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.
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
Use gentle social pressure

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!).
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

Readiness

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

Assess difficulty
- How
- When
- Where
- Special plans

Deadlines
- Registration
- Vote-by-mail
- Voting dates
- Polling places

Nonpartisan Resources
- Voter information websites: VOTE411.org, VoteTexas.gov
- County elections website: LWVTexas.org
- League voters guides

Find voter ID information at www.lwvtexas.org/ID.html

LWV

May 2017

Analyst Institute, 2016a,b
Help make a plan for voting
Assist voter in getting ready to vote.

LWV-TX social media business card available at www.lwvtexas.org/Media.html

Bookmarks individualized for each local League available at www.lwvtexas.org/Vote_it_counts.html

May 2017
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.
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.
Rely on impersonal
Robocalls
Mass emails
Display ads

• 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.
Use gentle social pressure

Help make a voting plan

Don’t advocate for issues or candidates

Don’t rely on impersonal communication

Focus on voting

Let’s Recap

THE DOS AND DONT’S

EVENOEY*’S DOING IT

CONNECT WITH THE VOTER

May 2017
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....”

May 2017

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.

May 2017

Green & Gerber, 2015, pp. 99 & 156-157
4. **VOTER MOBILIZATION RESOURCES**

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

www.lwvtexas.org/Best_Practices_GOTV.html
5. References


