



2014 GOTV RECOMMENDATIONS

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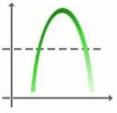
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The “best practices” below are recommendations the Analyst Institute can make based on a preponderance of evidence: multiple experiments conducted over multiple election cycles, all proving effective at getting more people to vote. The “promising tactics” are a step below best practices. They have either been tested with mixed results, or haven’t been tested enough for us to recommend them without reservation.

Randomized controlled experiments are the best way we have to test assumptions and evaluate tactical effectiveness. But experimental research is one tool among many when planning campaigns. Please use these best practices to inform and guide your planning, not to take its place. Every election, every race, every campaign is unique, and there is no magic pill for GOTV.



BEST PRACTICES

These are the foundational principles you can confidently use to build your GOTV program. Every piece of evidence we have — and there is lots — tells us you will get more people to vote using these tools.

A. The most important number is one.

We're often asked what the magic number of contacts is for each GOTV target. There's no magic, but research is showing that within a mode of contact (mail, phones, etc.), multiple contacts have diminishing returns. That means if you have a budget for 100 pieces of mail, you will mobilize more voters if you send one piece to 100 people, instead of sending 4 pieces each to 25 people.

When planning GOTV, first make sure you have one contact per target taken care of. Start your budget planning with one piece of mail, one phone call, and one door knock to each target, and make sure you are building the capacity, contact information and budget to get that done. Then think about where it makes sense to add contacts.

B. Increase social pressure.

Field testing shows that social pressure mail is the single most reliable GOTV strategy at our disposal. Much work is being done figuring out how to maximize effectiveness and minimize negative reactions. Some of the tactics being tested are voter report cards, where voters can see their scores relative to the neighborhood, and variable phone scripts that remind voters which elections they voted in and which they missed.

- Remind people that voting records are public.
- Tell people about their own voting history.
- Mention that you may get in touch after the election.

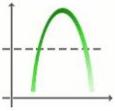
C. Talk about voting, not issues. Use neutral, informative language.

Over the past few years most evidence has shown that while persuasion language can be effective at persuading, it has had no effect (or tiny effects) on whether or not someone will vote. Focus your communications on one behavior at a time. Limit your GOTV materials to talking only about voting.

- If the Secretary of State or other voting official could sign off on your GOTV communications, you're doing it right. Think official-looking, educational and informational.
- To reiterate, language like "make sure you vote on Tuesday to protect women's rights" is persuasive language and is not the best way to increase turnout.

D. Make it easier to vote.

If it makes sense in your state, stretch the GOTV time frame:



- Mail voter registration forms to target populations. Just mailing a registration form can be the most cost-effective way to increase turnout.
- Get people to vote by mail. In states that require an application for vote-by-mail, recruiting people to vote by mail increases overall turnout.
- Push people to vote early in person. Research suggests that it can increase turnout overall.
- Research suggests that focusing on different segments of your target universe for each phase of voting may be most effective. Use past voting history of each target to decide which behavior to focus on in your outreach. For example, if someone is in your vote-by-mail universe, she is probably not in your early vote universe and you may decide to exclude her from your Election Day universe.

E. Only target people within nudging distance of voting on this election.

GOTV is about changing one behavior — whether or not someone votes. Target people for whom that behavior is a possibility, but who need a little nudge to make it happen.

- Consider an experiment to inform your GOTV targeting. If your GOTV budget is over \$100,000, you should think about a [GOTV EIP](#) (experiment-informed program) to create a mobilization score for each voter and help you prioritize.
- Use a turnout model but know that it doesn't take environmental information into effect (what's on the ballot, etc.).

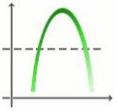
F. Have high-value, high-quality conversations.

The most effective GOTV tactics are those that maximize human interaction and foster a sense of community. These tactics are also the costliest to deploy, so it's important to consider these recommendations only in the context of your budget, your team's capacity and your goals.

- Whether face-to-face or on the phone, have conversations, ask questions, connect, and share stories. Remember to focus on the act of voting – stories could include the first time you voted, or going to vote with your parents as a kid.
- Canvasser quality matters: ideally canvassers are well-trained and they knock on doors in their own neighborhoods.

G. Budget wisely.

- Choose the widest target universe possible, and when it's time to cut, cut pieces, not people. Your program is most cost-effective when it is wide and shallow rather than narrow and deep.
- Your GOTV work can have a spillover effect on folks who live in the same household, so make sure you include households with more than one target in your most effective and expensive outreach (e.g., canvass).
- During a canvass, leave some literature at doors when no one answers.



PROMISING TACTICS: Fold these in

The below list of promising tactics includes the next tier of tools. They are not repeatedly proven, but we think they are all useful nonetheless. Please help us test these tactics.

a. Use your time wisely

Some GOTV tactics need advance work to make them effective. Importantly, when it comes to the “right” timing of GOTV communications, results vary. There is no magic timing formula that applies to all GOTV efforts.

- Talk to voters at a time that makes sense for them to be thinking about voting -- that generally means close to Election Day for most people. Adjust your timing accordingly if you're talking about vote-by-mail or early voting.
- Be aware that contact rates over the phone tend to drop as the election approaches, so it will take more volunteer and staff capacity to reach the same number of voters.
- The earliest GOTV activities can include collecting pledge cards or textable cell phone numbers, or lining up volunteer capacity for last few weeks before the election.

b. Help voters make a commitment.

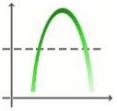
Making a commitment is the first step to keeping a commitment. Pledges and reminders have been most successful when collected in high-value, high-quality conversations.

- Ask for a commitment in a way that increases accountability: “Can I count on you to vote this year?” “After the election, we’ll call you and others who pledged to vote so we can hear how it went this year.”
- Remind people of their pledges in any future communications. “Thanks for your pledge to vote this year no matter what.”

c. Help voters make a plan.

Coaching people to make a plan about voting can help mobilize, but it has not always shown effectiveness in experiments. We recommend it because it never has a detrimental effect, and it’s a natural way to interact with GOTV targets.

- Ask people to think through the logistics of voting: “By mail, early or on Election Day?” “What time will you go?” “Where will you be coming from?” “How will you get there?” “Do you have stamps on hand?”



d. First-time voters are special.

- Target first-time voters, and remind them about ballot secrecy: “Whether you vote is public record, but who you vote for is completely secret. Only you will know who you voted for.”
- Movers and recent registrants are good targets for building habits early but their low or non-existent turnout scores may exclude them from your GOTV universe. Think about whether it makes sense to fold them in.

e. Be local.

It is easier to feel socially accountable to a smaller community. When possible, remind voters that the people who care about whether or not they vote this year are right here in their neighborhoods.

- If you have the opportunity, narrow the name of your organization on the mail return address, (e.g., Arapahoe County Voter Project versus American Voter Project).
- As much as possible have volunteers and staff work in their own neighborhoods.
- Make sure phonebanks are pronouncing everything correctly. Don’t assume they know the basics. Nothing says “I’m not from here” like someone who says “Nev-AW-da.”

TOSSUPS: Sometimes worth it, sometimes not, sometimes we’re not sure

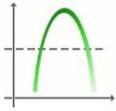
Proven effectiveness in an experiment and wise use on a campaign are two separate concepts. This “Tossups” category exists to tell you about interesting findings that may influence the way you think about these tools.

a. GOTV text messages

They have worked every time they’ve been tested. But the work and expense of collecting a universe of textable phone numbers may mean it’s not worth it, and now that text messaging is nearly ubiquitous, reminder messages may not have the impact on turnout they once did. Our recommendation: if you are already doing activities that make it easy to collect cell phone numbers (pledge-to-vote cards, a big rally), collect those numbers early, and send text message reminders the day before Election Day.

b. Robocalls

Our recommendation used to be that you should skip robocalls altogether as part of GOTV. We still don’t expect them to have an effect, but now we suggest that if you are going to do GOTV robocalls, you should incorporate as many best practices as possible in the content. And think about running an experiment — if we can find ways to make robocalls even marginally more effective, the progressive movement will be well-served.



BACKGROUND

Field testing

Randomized controlled experiments are the scientific standard for proving knowledge. Randomizing a universe into different groups of people ensures that every group of people is demographically and behaviorally identical to the other groups, and to the universe as a whole. Holding out a control group, which doesn't get exposed to the material being tested, lets us know what would happen in the absence of a program.

What is GOTV and should you do it?

The best practices we present here **ONLY** apply to Get Out The Vote, or GOTV, programs, so it's really important that we're all on the same page about what GOTV is and isn't. GOTV is a strategy to make sure supportive, or targeted people vote. It is not changing minds about your issue or your candidate. It is only targeted at people who are already supportive.

In any GOTV program, you will be well-served if you start early to build capacity and data quality. The best GOTV script does no good if you have no canvassers or if all of your phone numbers are bad. Building capacity can help you maximize the number of conversations you have, and investing in high-quality data will let you reach the maximum number of voters.

Confidentiality and thanks

Compiling best practices in a way that is scientifically rigorous and helpful to campaigns is an involved and timely process. Thanks to the many people on whose research these recommendations are based, and special thanks to those in the academic community who weighed in on this document.

As with all Analyst Institute work, this document is intended for circulation only among Democratic and progressive campaigns and organizations and is confidential.