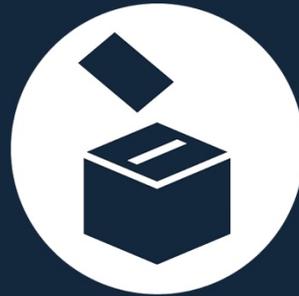


PLANNING YOUR GOTV MAIL PROGRAM



1. OVERVIEW



2. CRAFTING COMPELLING TURNOUT MESSAGES



THE
ARENA

OVERVIEW

Whether you are running for statewide office or state legislature, mail should be an important component of your efforts to turnout supporters. In the digital age, good old-fashioned mail is a reliable way to break through the noise and reach voters.

But, the world of direct mail is a confusing one. Vendors typically generate their revenue based on the volume of mail you send, and are not always up to date on the latest research in effective messaging. Also, the spectrum of quality mail is wide. There's a lot of bad mail out there—you know this, because you've received it and promptly tossed it into the recycling bin.

In this guide, we equip you with some basic best practices and key considerations for designing your GOTV mail plan.

HOW MANY PIECES OF MAIL SHOULD I SEND?

One of the most common mistakes campaigns make is that they send too many mail pieces. Research shows that while mail—with the right messaging and design—can have substantial effects on voter turnout, there are [no gains to be made beyond the fifth mail piece sent to a voter.](#)

WHO SHOULD I SEND MAIL TO?

Furthermore, voters respond most to messages about voting as opposed to messages about issues, which means that segmenting your voter universe is less necessary than it would be for persuasion mail.

As a general rule, it's a good idea to cast a wide net with your voter targeting and to send no more than 4-5 total mail pieces to that universe of voters.

WHAT KIND OF MESSAGING IS MOST EFFECTIVE?

There is a [significant body of behavioral science research](#) on the effects of different messaging on turnout. Because direct mail is one of the longest-standing campaign tactics, academics and practitioners have run hundreds of experiments, mostly in the form of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). There are few dominant themes in the research, from our perspective. We outline these below.

It is important to remember that these themes are specific to turnout mail, rather than persuasion mail. That means that we are using this mail to turnout voters who we know to be supportive or likely supportive, and we are now focused on activating them to go and actually cast a ballot for our candidate. Below we've described—in chronological order—the GOTV messages we recommend employing in the months of early vote and before Election Day.

PLEDGE TO VOTE

If you've been a somewhat active voter in the last few election cycles, chances are you have been asked to "[commit to vote](#)." Rock the Vote piloted use of [the pledge card in 1996](#), and [replicated it at scale in 2008](#). Experiments conducted as recently as 2016 suggest that [pledging to vote can increase turnout by as much as 5.6% for voters who had not previously voted](#), and up to 3.7% with voters overall. In these studies, pledge cards are collected from voters who have filled out their personal information and signed a [pledge to vote](#). The cards were then mailed back to voters two weeks prior to Election Day.

PLAN MAKING

Research has shown plan-making to have effects on all kinds of behaviors—from dieting to exercising to saving money to turning out to vote. The process of making a plan and covering the five W's (Who, What, When, Where, Why) actually [helps people to act on their intention of voting](#). This has slowly become a popularly employed intervention [in digital media](#), but it's also effective in direct mail when targeted at single family households.

We recommend sending a postcard (easy to stick on a fridge!) with a message from your candidate that provides voters with their polling location information and hours, ID requirements, and prompts them to go through a plan-making process to select when they'll vote, how they'll get there, and who will go with them.

SOCIAL PRESSURE & SOCIAL NORMS

First and foremost, the most effective messages appeal to voters as social, relational creatures. In other words, voters are human beings who want to belong and fit in. While the intuitive thing might be to send mail on the candidate or specific issues in the final weeks leading up to Election Day, the evidence shows time and again that [applying social pressure is most impactful](#).

Numerous studies have shown that [social norms are an effective driver of turnout](#), and campaigners have taken many creative approaches to weaving social norms language into GOTV scripts and mail. One important caveat is that there is a potential backlash to social pressure when it involves shaming the voter, but researchers have found [effective ways to apply "positive" social](#)

[pressure](#). Click the link below to see one example of a mail piece that draws on both social pressure and social norms language.

Voter Report Card

Here is why it's effective:

- Reminds the voter that their ballot is secret, but whether or not they voted is public record
- Compares their voting record to their neighbors' using a bar chart and star rating
- Appeals to sense of civic duty as a social norm ("all citizens should have a voice in their government")
- Thanks the individual for "being a voter"
- Emphasizes high turnout ("joined by millions of fellow citizens")
- Says they will follow up with report cards in advance of each election in the future