

RELATIONAL ORGANIZING TO GET OUT THE VOTE

Relational organizing is a grass roots voter mobilization strategy that prioritizes trusted messengers over mass outreach techniques. It empowers people to reach out to others in their personal network of friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances. Compared to traditional campaign techniques of phone-banking, canvassing and texting, mail and email solicitation, it increases voter engagement and turn-out.

According to Jessica Jones, fundraising consultant and author of *Talking out the Vote: Organizing Within Your Own Network*:

- Phone-banking has a 12% contact rate. With relational outreach, the contact rate is over 70%.
- People are 22 times more likely to do something if asked by a friend or family member compared to someone they don't know at all.

In the largest and most rigorous study of relational voting strategy to date, Columbia University found that a single text message from a friend increased likelihood to vote by 8.3 percentage points – far exceeding traditional get out the vote methods.

And best of all, relational organizing starts with just talking to friends, family members, neighbors and acquaintances – something that you can do effectively all by yourself!

Outreach Methods

You can make contact in the way that feels most natural to you and the relationship -- phone call, facetime, text, email or in person conversations are all good. Depending on your relationship with the person and their level of engagement with the voting process, you may want to use one method to initiate contact and then follow-up with in-person conversation or assistance. Don't just put out a mass outreach by posting on social media with no follow-up. Platform algorithms will only direct your post to people posting similar stuff.

Prompts for Initiating Contacts:

The words you choose to initiate contact will depend on how well you know the person and how comfortable you are discussing politics. For close friends and associates or acquaintances that you know are politically savvy, your remarks may be quite direct and your interaction brief.

- *"Are you planning to vote this year?"*
- *"Will you be voting early?"*
- *"What drop box do you plan to use?"*
- *"Are you open to using your personal network of family, friends and neighbors to help get the vote out? Could I provide you with information that might help?"*

With other contacts, you may want to be more cautious and plan on more extensive interactions:

- *"Hey, I just wanted to check in on you during this crazy time. I'm also reaching out because I'm concerned about the election and want to make sure that everyone votes, since the stakes are so high this year."*
- *"I know this might be kind of awkward but I'm really concerned about our democracy so I'm talking to a lot of people about voting this year. Do you have a few minutes to talk about your voting plans?"*

- *"I know we haven't really talked about voting before, but it's really important this year and I was hoping you'd be willing to have a conversation about it."*
- *"I recently attended a session about voting in the mid-term election, and I got some good information about how to vote and make sure your vote is counted. I'd be happy to share. Would you be interested in getting together to chat about this?"*
- *"How are you feeling about this election? What concerns or questions do you have?"*
- *"What stands in the way of you making a plan to vote? Or carrying out your plan? How can I help?"*

Goals/Outcomes

The desired outcome of your relational voter contact is that they will be able to articulate and solidify their individual voting plan and that you will offer any information, support or assistance they may need to carry it out. Ideally, they will be prepared to vote as early as possible and deposit their ballot in the drop box. Studies show if someone says their voting plan out loud, the chance of them actually doing it increases sevenfold.

You may not make it all the way to the finish line with each person you contact. Other outcomes you may achieve are:

- Determining if your contact plans to vote
- Helping someone get registered to vote
- Supplying information and/or support to enable voting

The time to the last voting day (November 3) is short. Your goal should be to reach out to someone new once a day – or as often as you can.

Remember:

- Relational voter conversations are not usually focused on lobbying for specific candidates or issues.
- Ask questions and listen. Offer information, suggestion and support; don't tell them what to do.
- You don't have to be a total election expert. Use the resources in this *Election Activation Toolkit* to give people ideas and help point them in the right direction.
- Research shows that a small amount of social pressure paired with accurate information and encouragement improves voter turnout.
- Don't forget to ask people to reach out to their own network and pass it on.

MORE WAYS TO GET OUT THE VOTE

Relational organizing may be the most effective way, per minute of time invested, to encourage others to vote, but it does have the downside of only reaching your circle of friends (and hopefully their circle of friends). There are other activities that reach a broader population.

Usually, these efforts are partisan (organized by specific campaigns or PACs). That doesn't have to be the case, but usually it takes money to do them, and someone has to foot the bill.¹

One advantage these activities have is that they can affect elections **anywhere**. You can work on especially competitive elections, no matter where they are.

Postcarding

Postcarding involves sending handwritten postcards to potential voters. You join a postcarding group, either a local group or an online one, and select which campaign or campaigns you want to participate in.

The campaign determines the list of addresses to send postcards to, as well as the messages to write on the postcards. Sometimes some customization is allowed, but usually the campaign wants you to stick closely to the chosen message.

You write and address the postcards and apply the stamps. Usually the postcards are supplied, but you may need to purchase the stamps.

Phone Banking

Phone banking uses phone calls to reach potential voters. As with postcarding, the list of phone numbers to call and the talking points to use with everyone you reach are determined by the campaign.

You generally don't have to dial the phone yourself. Instead, autodialers are often used to dial for you, and you only deal with calls that actually reach someone.

¹With modern technology, you can do this from the comfort of your own home, using your own computer and phone.

Phone banking can be a great way to have an impact on elections outside your own area without having to travel.

Phone banking is probably the peak impact you can have on other elections without traveling.

Canvassing

The most time-honored technique is canvassing: going door-to-door to talk directly to voters. As with postcarding and phone banking, modern canvassing programs usually don't send you to every single door. Instead, you'll be given selected addresses to visit.

Canvassing gives you the opportunity to talk with voters face-to-face. It is often done locally, but there are opportunities for volunteers to travel to other locations as well.

Signs and Sign Waving

The simplest thing to do is put a sign in your yard or your window. They don't have to be partisan signs—feel free to make your own sign that expresses your own beliefs! Signs in individual yards and windows may also lead to conversations with neighbors and others in your community.

Sign waving just means standing in a public space holding a sign. It's a lot more fun to do with other people! You may be able to find sign-waving events in your community, or get a few friends together and organize one yourself.

Choose what works for you. Every conversation, call, postcard, sign, and doorstep is another way to encourage someone to vote.

¹ You probably won't be doing this, but you should know that if you try to manage one of these programs yourself, and it involves spending money, there are Campaign Finance laws you must adhere to. Seek experienced advice before you dive in.