

Getting Out the Vote While Social Distancing: Then and Now

With the onset of COVID-19, a lot of standard Get Out the Vote (GOTV) advice has gone out the window. Here's a look at what's changed:

1. Then: GOTV efforts were concentrated in the two weeks before Election Day.

Now: GOTV efforts have to start a lot earlier.

Make GOTV efforts a core part of your campaign as soon as possible. Make sure your voters know the voter registration deadline, the early voting period, the deadline to request an absentee ballot, and the postmark deadline for those ballots. The election date itself is far less important, because if a voter misses any one of these deadlines, they won't be able to vote.

2. Then: Campaigns needed only one GOTV plan.

Now: Campaigns need several GOTV plans for each deadline, and need to be able to adapt to last-minute legal decisions or mandates.

Getting people to request an absentee ballot looks a lot different than getting them to show up to a polling place, especially given that campaigns can no longer knock on people's doors. Consider hosting an Instagram Live Q&A about the new election process, putting together a YouTube tutorial on how to properly fill out an absentee ballot, or hosting a ballot filling-out party on Zoom. And if your state is still holding an in-person election, bring snacks, water, and hand sanitizer to keep people in line at the polls.

3. Then: Election dates and deadlines were static.

Now: Election dates and deadlines can change at a moment's notice.

Many states are postponing their elections with the onset of coronavirus. But moving the election date may not mean that, for example, the voter registration deadline has changed. Any voting rule can change at a moment's notice, too. Make it part of your campaign's routine to regularly check in on the voting rules, and have a plan to quickly and accurately communicate those changes to voters. Be the trusted experts your voters need right now.

4. Then: Turnout was focused on likely voters.

Now: Push for equity. Focus your efforts on the voters who will be most disadvantaged by these changes.

If your state has reduced the number of polling places, some voters may now live prohibitively far from the nearest polling site. People who live alone may have difficulty finding a witness to verify their ballot. Others may have health or mobility issues that make it hard to participate in any election, let alone this one. Some people may not be able to afford the postage required to request an absentee ballot, while others may not have a permanent address from which to request that ballot in the first place. Your campaign should tailor each of your GOTV plans to make sure that *everyone* in your community is able to vote (and to have their vote counted) in this democratic process.

5. Don't be discouraged. You were made for these times.