

Nonprofits Increase Voting

Findings from a Nonprofit Voter Mobilization Experiment

A first of its kind research experiment measured the impact of agency-based nonprofit voter outreach in the lead up to the 2010 midterm election. The study found that nonprofit voter engagement efforts are effective and that clients contacted about voting are both more likely to vote, as well as more likely to encourage their friends and family to vote.

BACKGROUND

Seven social services agencies in the Detroit Metro Area participated, including ACCESS - Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, Adult Well Being Services, the Advantage Health Center, Catholic Social Services of Wayne County, Matrix Human Services, Neighborhood Service Organization, and the Wayne Metro Community Action Agency.

When: The study was carried out during the 2010 November 2nd election for Governor and other statewide offices.

How: Each nonprofit made personal contact with selected clients about voting in the course of providing regular services at their agency—e.g. during classes, meetings, or other onsite activities. Nonprofit outreach efforts included registering clients to vote, distributing sample ballots, reminding clients to vote, or providing other election information. The organizations also identified a Control Group of clients that were not contacted about voting. After the election, the clients—both in the Control Group and those contacted—responded to a short survey that asked whether or not they had voted and collected demographic information.

Who Participated: 506 clients participated in the study, which included filling out the post-election survey. Each nonprofit tracked three different groups of clients:

- 1. Voter Registration Group** – Clients contacted only once about voter registration.
- 2. Multiple Contact Group** – Clients contacted once about voter registration and then an additional one to three times regarding voter education (being given a sample ballot) and getting out to vote (being reminded to vote).
- 3. Control Group** – Clients not contacted or exposed to the organization's election activities.

Participants were 61% female, 39% male. The median age was 38 and 63% reported a high school diploma or less as their highest level of education. African Americans comprised 68% of the sample, Caucasians 14%, Arab Americans 9%, Latinos 4%, Asians 2%, and 3% identified themselves as "other."

The study was conducted by Dr. Kelly LeRoux of the University of Illinois at Chicago. It was sponsored by Nonprofit VOTE and the Michigan Nonprofit Association who identified the participating agencies and provided training and resources. For more on the study visit www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofit-voter-engagement-research.html

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The findings demonstrate that when nonprofits discuss voting with their clients, they are more likely to vote and participate in other ways. The more contacts made, the greater the impact, but nevertheless it is clear that even one in-person contact makes a difference in whether or not an individual votes.

Finding 1: Clients contacted by the nonprofit about voting had a higher likelihood of voting than those in the Control Group who were not contacted.

Control Group	54% voted
<i>(not contacted about voting)</i>	
Voter Registration Group	66% voted
<i>(contacted about voter registration only)</i>	
Multiple Contact Group	71% voted
<i>(contacted 2-4 times about voter registration and voting)</i>	

The 17% difference between the Control Group and Multiple Contact Group is statistically significant—in other words it did not occur by chance. The difference between the Control Group and the Voter Registration Group is also statistically significant, but less dramatic.

Finding 2: The likelihood of clients voting increased proportionally for every additional contact made by the nonprofit.

A client's probability of voting increased by 9.3 percentage points with each additional voting contact from the nonprofit, even after controlling for other turnout factors, such as age and educational attainment. This indicates that the effort nonprofits invest in their voter engagement work is important and leads to a civic participation "return on investment."

Finding 3: Clients in the contacted groups were not only more likely to vote, but were also more likely to encourage their friends and family to vote.

After controlling for age, education, and gender, the probability of clients encouraging their family and friends to vote increased by roughly 4.8 percentage points with each additional contact from the nonprofit. This finding is important as it suggests that a nonprofit's voter engagement efforts may have a broader, community-wide impact.

Finding 4: Voter registration contacts and voting reminders made the biggest difference in increasing voter turnout from among the methods employed.

Voter assistance was offered in five categories: voter registration, sample ballots, information on a voting event or forum, answering a question about voting, or reminding a client to vote. Overall, voting reminders were the single most effective form of voter contact.

"A client's probability of voting increased with each additional voting-related contact from the nonprofit."