



GET OUT THE VOTE

**GOTV**

The United States Junior Chamber's FIRST national project, adopted in 1923

## Introduction

The right of the American citizen to vote in free elections is considered to be one of the most sacred of all freedoms in the United States. The U.S. Constitution was built around that single precept. The fundamental importance of the vote—government by the people—has been reaffirmed time and again. Almost half of all amendments to the Constitution since the Bill of Rights have dealt with the right to vote. Yet, today more citizens of voting age will stay home on Election Day than will exercise their voting privileges in many of our elections.

In 2008, fewer than 62 percent of eligible Americans of voting age voted for President. **Almost 82 million did not vote!** In 2010, only 40 percent of eligible Americans of voting age voted for a Congressional Representative. **Over 130 million did not vote!**<sup>1</sup> In local elections in major metropolitan areas that are not tied to national elections, **participation rates can be as low as two percent!**<sup>2</sup>

In 2012, there will be about 223 million Americans eligible to vote. Even if the turnout improves a little over the last two presidential elections, at least one third of eligible American voters will not participate. Half of that turnout, plus one, will elect the next President. **That amounts to only one-third of the total electorate!**

While voter turnout for presidential elections has increased since just fewer than 53% of eligible Americans voted in 1996<sup>3</sup> (lowest presidential election turnout since the 1920s<sup>4</sup>), the U.S. still lags behind many advanced democracies in voter participation. Reasons for this are varied but include voter registration problems, a perceived lack of time and lack of understanding of the issues and candidates, and a loss of faith

in the electoral process leading to a feeling that a person’s vote doesn’t really matter.

Declining voter turnout following the end of World War I was part of the motivation for the start of the U.S. Junior Chamber’s first national program, the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign established in 1923. In this handbook you will learn about projects designed to get people to the polls on Election Day, focused around three main phases:

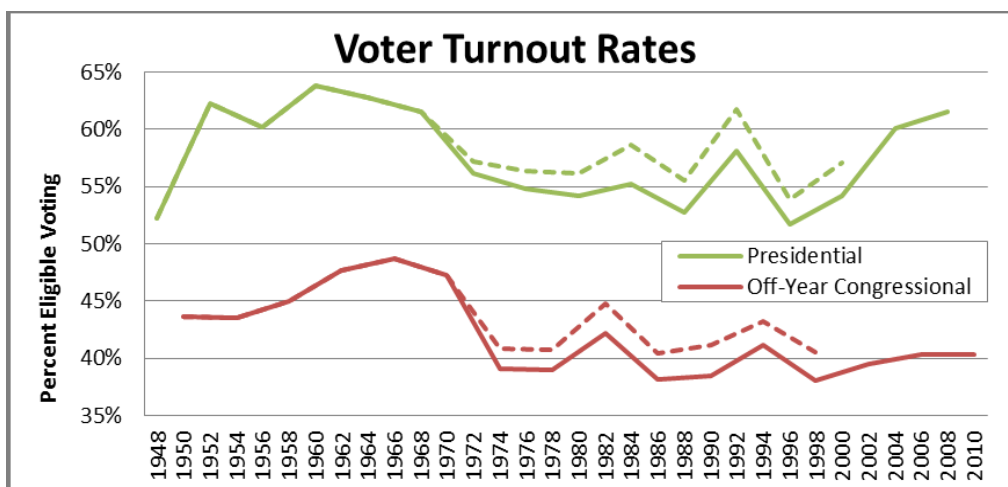
1. Voter registration
2. Voter education
3. Voter activation

It is important that as many Americans as possible go to the polls and express their opinions about the direction of their government. This handbook gives you the tools necessary to encourage eligible citizens in your community to register and vote.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce  
2012

## Contents

- [Principles of GOTV](#)
- [Organizing and managing a GOTV campaign](#)
- [Phase 1: Voter registration](#)
- [Phase 2: Voter education](#)
- [Phase 3: Voter activation](#)
- [Promoting your chapter’s GOTV campaign](#)
- [The GOTV campaign](#)
- [Summary](#)
- [Additional Resources](#)



Eligible Voter Turnout Rates, 1948-2010. Compiled from McDonald (2001) and McDonald (2010). Note that the voting age changed from 21+ to 18+ for the 1972 elections, which explains some—but not all—of the drop. The dotted lines indicate the 21+ participation rates for the next several elections after the voting age change.

## Principles of GOTV

From this point on, we will use the term “GOTV” for “Get Out the Vote.” We will not use the phrase “Election Day Activity”, because GOTV is not simply a one-day affair. One of the problems of increasing turnout has been that past campaigns have neglected it until Election Day, when it is too late. The **payoff** is Election Day, but the preparation must begin at least four to six weeks before.

There are two general principles of GOTV to be considered:

### Campaigning on a one-to-one basis

Of all campaign activities, GOTV is the most dependent on one-to-one techniques: telephoning, direct mail, and personal visits. **Selective** advertising can sometimes be used to supplement these activities, as we’ll discuss later in this handbook. However, the point is that GOTV depends on **organizational, one-to-one** contacts – not just on the media.

### Voter services

For our GOTV campaign to be successful, we must deliver a positive message encouraging citizens to vote, and we must provide very basic assistance. The way to get a voter to the polls is to provide the voter with the services he or she needs to get there.

Voter services fall into three categories:

1. **Transportation.** If we can take someone to the polls who otherwise couldn’t get there, we can increase turnout.
2. **Babysitting.** If we can provide temporary child care so a stay-at-home parent can vote, we can increase turnout.
3. **Information.** Where does the voter vote? How long are the polls open? How does absentee voting work? If we can answer these questions, we can increase turnout.

Additionally, informing the voter can include identification and discussion of issues and candidates, actual voting procedures, and much, much more.

## Organizing and managing a GOTV campaign

Your chapter may decide to conduct projects covering all three phases of a Get Out the Vote campaign, or may focus on only one or two of them. Depending on the needs and resources of your chapter, below are some tips on organization and management of your GOTV campaign:

- Start with a nucleus – the campaign director or project chair and a management team. Assign basic responsibilities at the beginning – research, volunteers, programs, media, fundraising and overall management.
- Depending on the scope of your campaign, you may need committee members to cover some or all of the following roles:
  - **Campaign director**—supervises and coordinates the entire effort, guided by the Plan of Action as established in this project’s Chairman’s Planning Guide (CPG) and the timetable set up at the first committee meeting.
  - **Secretary**—(may be the chapter’s secretary) record minutes of all committee meetings, sends notices and maintains files of all activities—including clippings, pictures, progress reports, etc., for later inclusion in the CPG and reports; also may supervise and handle fundraising drive if one is conducted, including a budget. Note: if the fundraising drive is to be extensive, a separate chair should be appointed.
  - **Research chair**—charged with gathering facts and assembling lists so that your efforts can be directed at groups most in need of them. Attempt to determine what class of people—stay-at-home parents, farmers, retired persons, minority residents, businessmen, etc.—failed to vote in the last election; collect facts on what percentage of the eligible voters registered for the last election.
  - **Canvassing chair**—responsible for manpower to contact citizens door-to-door, by phone, or by mail, and getting the message across. This will take many volunteers. Be sure to obtain signed pledges from citizens that they will register...and vote!
  - **Speakers chair**—schedules committee members and other community leaders and celebrities to appear before civic and other groups on behalf of the GOTV campaign.
  - **Transportation chair**—sets up transportation pools to carry citizens to and from the voter registration place. Include babysitting service if necessary.
  - **Legal chair**—study the legal registration and voting requirements of your community. Investigate federal, state and local election laws, initiating ordinances if necessary, to make registration easier for all citizens.
  - **Promotion chair**—responsible for new releases, spot announcements and promotion of the project in newspapers, on radio and TV outlets, and on the

Web; in general getting the objectives and activities mentioned in all news media. Also develops gimmicks and promotions to get the attention of citizens and make them “registration conscious” through use of parades, contests, lapel buttons, bumper signs, etc.

- Identify prospective volunteers—**individuals** known to the committee and **groups**—volunteer, civic, ethnic and other minority, youth and business groups which might contain volunteers—and ask them to join the campaign.
- Set up a steering committee to give each group a voice in overall planning and to allow you to make specific fundraising assignments. Keep allies informed with regular reports.
- Develop a specific **recruitment message**—what you’re doing, when it will be done, what the job is and how long it will take. Then, **ask people**. It isn’t superfluous to state what seems so obvious. Most volunteer recruitment efforts actually ask very few people to help.
- In managing, leave generalities out and put specifics in. Give volunteers exact assignments, precise instructions and fixed deadlines. Leave no room for doubt. Conduct training sessions, prepare volunteer kits, check with volunteers regularly by phone and e-mail, and recognize good performance with certificates, pins and thank-you letters. You really can’t pay too much attention to the psychological needs of your volunteers.

<u>Timing</u>	<u>Activity</u>
60 days	Appoint GOTV director
55 days	Study election laws
50 days	Begin planning specific programs
45 days	Conduct targeting process
40 days	Appoint absentee voting director*
30 days	Begin absentee program*
28 days	Select area headquarters
26 days	Begin preparing materials
20 days	Begin preparing mailing
16 days	Assign personnel
10 days	Send mailing
7 days	Conduct training session
5 days	Begin phone campaign
Election Day	Election Day activities
*If such a program is used in your campaign	

An example timetable incorporating the various elements of a GOTV campaign is displayed on this page. It is intended only as a guide to help give you a sense of timing and priority and should be adapted to fit the GOTV programs you intend to run.

## Phase 1: Voter registration

The same cynicism and distrust that causes citizens to avoid voting also affects voter registration. That said, many Americans want to vote, but may need that extra nudge which encourages them to take the time to register. More than 70 percent of those people who are registered actually vote. Logically, then, the first step toward a successful turnout on Election Day is registration.

When organizing a voter registration drive, you must first determine what the needs of your community are. Find out what other voter registration efforts are being organized by other community organizations, and then decide what need Jaycees can fulfill.

Your voter registration effort can take many forms, including any one or a combination of the following which will be explained in detail in subsequent sections of this handbook.

1. A specific, concentrated effort within your chapter to encourage all Jaycees to register...and vote. Make certain all committee members are registered first.
2. An all-out, Jaycee-conducted effort to get qualified citizens properly registered to vote before the deadline.
3. A joint venture with various civic organizations (Lions, Kiwanis, League of Women Voters, etc.) to ensure the greatest possible community effort. Obtain cooperation of these groups by giving them a personal pitch at one of their meetings. Be brief, but enthusiastic, in your presentation. Know what your organization is going to do, and tell them how they can assist.
4. Investigate registration rules.

### Timetable

One of the first steps in your overall campaign is to design a timetable for all the activities that will be part of your campaign. The best way to do this is to plan backward from both Election Day and the voter registration deadline, if any, establishing a total timeline of at least 60 days. Envision where you want to be on those days, then think back through the steps to get you there.

Keep in mind that the most effective campaign is one geared specifically to your own community; one that appeals to your neighbors; one that will make them **want** to register...and vote.

## When to start

Your voter registration program should peak during the final week or two prior to the registration deadline. Start your planning **at least 45 days before** this date and 60 days before Election Day.

## Registration laws and procedures

At the start of the registration campaign, learn the laws and procedures for your state. This can be accomplished by doing two things: studying state election laws and visiting the local registration authority to determine how the law is administered locally. Although voter registration is required in all states except North Dakota, registration restrictions and accessibility differ dramatically by state.

The election laws, obtainable from the Secretary of State, will specify which of the following five registration systems is used in your state and how much flexibility, if any, local officials have in implementing those systems. Many communities use a combination of systems. It is imperative you know which one(s) are used in your state in order to develop a proper plan of action. [Project Vote](#) has several state guides on voter registration drives to help with this process.

The five systems are:

1. **Centralized registration.** Under this system, new registrants must travel to one location—usually the county courthouse, city hall, or Department of Motor Vehicles—and they usually must do so during business hours. In those states that allow only this system, a voter registration program is more complicated since it involves persuading the potential voter to make the effort to leave work or home and go to the registrar’s office to register. Transportation or babysitting services may be needed to make it easier for voters to register.
2. **Deputy registration.** Under this system, deputized registrars may sign up new voters during specified periods prior to the registration deadline. Some states require deputies to work in pairs—one Democrat and one Republican—and some allow them to work singly. Some allow almost anyone to become a deputy registrar, and others prescribe rigid qualifications. Some restrict the movement of deputies, and others allow them to work door-to-door. In some areas, you may have to arrange for existing deputy registrars to assist with your program.

3. **Branch registration.** Of the states which allow appointments of deputy registrars, some limit the deputies to conducting registration at advertised satellite locations during specified times prior to the deadline. In some states these are fixed locations; in others, they are mobile units.
4. **Registration by mail.** This system allows voters to register by mail, bypassing the traditional requirement of in-person registration. If your state allows registration by mail—and many do—take advantage of it. This is by far the easiest and least expensive way to register voters. All you have to do is obtain a supply of cards from the appropriate government office in your county, make them available to non-registered citizens and return them to the registrar’s office once they are filled out.
5. **Election by registration.** Voters are allowed to both register and vote on Election Day.

In addition to learning which system or combination of systems are allowed in your state, check the law to determine:

- State, local and precinct **residency requirements.**
- The **deadline** for registration, and the periods of time during the year when the books are closed.
- **The purging requirement**—when, how and for what reasons local officials may purge the registration lists. Purging is the process of cancelling registrations for failure to vote during a certain time period and removing people who have died or moved.
- **Election dates**—when the primary, run-off and general elections will be held.

## Goals of a registration campaign

We have mentioned the need to set realistic and reasonable goals. Here’s how to do that for your area:

- Determine, from Census data ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), especially [www.factfinder.census.gov](http://www.factfinder.census.gov)), the 18-and-over population for your area. Remember, as of this writing the 18-and-over figures are based on the 2000 Census, though more recent estimates may be available depending on the area. If your area has experienced considerable growth since then, look for more recent estimates elsewhere on the Web (e.g., [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com)). Also check with state and local planning agencies and the local Chamber of Commerce.
- Obtain the most recent registration total from the local registration clerk (usually the county clerk).



- Subtract the registration total from the 18-and-over figure. The result is the approximate number of unregistered voters in your area.
- Set a reasonable, realistic goal. A rough rule of thumb is to multiply the unregistered total by 20 percent, but there's no magic in that figure.
- Set special goals for special areas. If you're concentrating on campuses or on precincts with significant minority populations, another rule of thumb is to try to raise existing registration in such areas by 10 percent.

## Planning a registration campaign

Here are the planning considerations you need to deal with:

- Decide whether your campaign will have a residential focus, a "high-traffic" focus, or both. The point is to decide whether you will contact people where they **live** or where they **work** and **shop**. This decision will determine the kind of volunteer programs you'll need to plan.
- Estimate your resources—volunteers, money and in-kind donations—and plan within these limitations.
- Plan publicity and volunteer activities to correspond precisely with the opportunity to register. Regardless of which of the five registration methods—or combination of methods—you use, it is imperative that you heavily publicize your voter registration drive in your target area.
- Set everything down on a timetable (using the example earlier in this handbook as a starting point)—planning backwards from the registration deadline.
- Decide whether you can accomplish one or two contacts with unregistered voters—that is, whether you will be able to follow up after an initial contact. If you can handle only one, make sure it's the strongest possible—for example, canvassing on the **day** of branch registration, not before.
- If you have branch registration, think in terms of a **cycle** of activities for each area, ending with registration day. For example:
  - Five days before—grass-roots media
  - Two days before—pamphlets and flyers, free media
  - Registration day—canvassing, sound trucks

Regardless of what level of involvement you decide to take in your efforts, **always** make sure the drive is designed so that the public understands it is a **nonpartisan** effort.

## Target areas and activities

The list of possible target areas and/or groups for your voter registration campaign is really as limitless as your imagination. One good way to develop such a list is to have a "brainstorming"

session with your chapter. Factors that enter into your thought process might include whether a deputy registrar can be used and/or if registration-by-mail allowed in your state. Either of these make your options much more flexible.

A word of caution: when "brainstorming", don't discount any idea and don't take time to analyze ideas until you are through listing them. What may at first seem to be an unworkable idea may be modified to fit your state's guidelines and available resources.

The following is a sample list of "target" areas and groups that you might consider:

- Jaycee members, families, friends and business associates
- Highly concentrated residential areas, e.g., apartment complexes, senior citizen communities and condominium developments
- "Mobile areas" of your community, including new housing developments. You may want to work with the local Realtors Association in establishing your list.
- Newcomer groups
- High traffic business areas including shopping malls, large department stores, major grocery stores, banks, and large office complexes. Concentrate on both shoppers and workers. When considering business areas, be sure to obtain permission well in advance.
- Major plants or large employers. Be sure to obtain permission in advance. Work out a schedule that does not include after work. People on their way home tend not to take time to stop and register.
- Special assistance programs for nursing homes, facilities for the disabled, inner-city residents, the elderly, blind, deaf or otherwise physically challenged citizens
- First-time voters, including not only newcomers but also high school seniors who are or will become of legal voting age
- College campuses
- High school and college sporting events
- Welfare and employment offices
- Libraries
- Churches, PTAs, and other civic groups and organizations

## Smaller scale efforts

If you're short of funds but long on enthusiastic volunteers—or are looking for additional avenues for your GOTV voter registration campaign—you might also consider these ideas:

- **A phone campaign:** solicit voters to register. This should be designed to include a follow-up phone call or postcard.

- **Jaycee Family Night promotion:** set aside a special event—perhaps a social—where Jaycee family members and friends may come to register. Publicize it in chapter mailings and e-mails and include a phone campaign. Use this event to kick off the campaign or solicit help for other events.
  - **Registration sundae:** contact a local fast food chain or similar establishment and make arrangements to conduct a voter registration drive at their location on a set day. Voters registering receive a free sundae or soft drink, compliments of the restaurant.
  - **Door-to-door canvassing:** target large numbers of unregistered people that live in certain neighborhoods. You might also go office-to-office or factory-to-factory talking to people, leaving fliers or registration-by-mail cards (if allowed in your state).
  - **Booths or tables in public places:** spread out your manpower and catch people at work or at leisure in shopping malls, apartment complexes, factories, banks, department stores, grocery stores and libraries. If your state law permits, attempt to register voters on the spot. If this is not possible, pass out materials that inform them how to register.
  - **Other organization’s meetings:** ask for five-to-ten minutes to promote GOTV. Have voter registration materials with you. Any type of meeting is a possibility.
  - **Gimmicks:** conduct a go-register-yourself rally with a “bus-in” to the board of elections. Give a slogan button to newly registered high school and college students. Invite the first 50 people who show up on the first day of registration to a coffee-and-doughnuts celebration. Transform a car, van or truck into a “votemobile” and drive it in parades, around the city, to sporting events, shopping centers, factories or schools.
- Also consider a “town forum” meeting for review of every aspect of the upcoming election: issues, candidates, voting procedures and general election information.

## Candidates night

This project is easy to put together and gets your chapter a ton of publicity. You pick the race that you want to highlight. Only pick one; this way you can focus the issues. Keep in mind, if you live in an area that is heavily weighted to one party or the other, the real race may be the primary. Contact the candidates and find a date that works for as many as possible. Do this early; their calendars fill up fast. You also want to make sure you are not too close to another organization’s candidates night.

Find a good location to hold the event. A possibility is your city hall, which usually has a large meeting space—plus everybody knows where it is. If that is not an option, ask hotels, YMCA clubs, churches and municipal governments to lend you space, including chairs for the audience and a podium for speakers. Also arrange to obtain any special equipment which may be needed, such as paper and pencils (if there are to be questions from the floor), a projector, laptop computer and screen (if pictures or a presentation will be shown), etc.

Next, find a moderator—preferably someone who is neutral and high profile. A local media personality makes a good choice. They are comfortable being in front of large crowds and should know the issues being discussed.

Write your questions ahead of time. Make sure they are appropriate to the race (i.e., do not ask candidates for state representative about most national issues). If you are not sure, ask for assistance. Possible resources for developing questions are other elected officials, the city manager, or a newspaper editor.

Send out news releases and put it on local cable access. Do not let the audience ask unscreened questions. If you must take questions from the audience, have them write them on note cards and turn them in to you to decide if they are appropriate.

## General membership meeting speakers

Ask your local elected officials to come in and speak to your chapter, and open up attendance to the public. You can probably invite local and state officials one to two months in advance. For federal officials, you should probably invite them closer to six months in advance. Work with their staff on news releases and media interviews.

Libraries, state and local bar associations, and American Legion Committees—to mention a few—can be a big help in furnishing

## Phase 2: Voter education

This section of the handbook contains projects to inform your members—and the public at large—about candidates who are running for office, ballot initiatives, and the actual voting process.

### Voting process

Set up nonpartisan discussion groups and classes for first-time voters and newly naturalized citizens. At these meetings, discuss candidates and issues, and teach the mechanics of voting: how to vote, how to mark a paper ballot without spoiling it, what to do if a ballot is spoiled, how to use a voting machine, how to vote a straight ticket, how to get an absentee ballot, etc.

not only information and materials, but also speakers. Your chapter can provide Jaycee speakers or secure speakers from other sources to promote your GOTV effort, identify issues and stimulate discussion of them, identify candidates and their records for discussion, and to generate community-wide interest in GOTV and quite possibly enlist volunteers. The establishment of a knowledgeable, vigorous speaker's program can be one of your GOTV program's biggest assets. Not only will it spread the word of GOTV, but—depending on the notoriety of your speakers—may gain you significant publicity. “Big name” speakers will attract media attention.

### **Campaign volunteers**

Provide a list of campaign volunteer opportunities to your members—making sure you provide information for all parties and all candidates. You can also provide your members with information about local candidates, political parties, and issues campaigns.

### **Voting machines and local elections clerk**

Ask your local clerk to bring a voting machine to your general membership meeting. The clerk can walk your members through the process once they enter the polling site. The purpose is to make people feel more comfortable with the voting process. Also, your clerk can use the machine to tabulate the totals of your local chapter elections.

### **Sample ballots**

Acquire some sample ballots from your local city clerk and pass them out to your members at the general membership meeting before the election. They can take them home, decide whom they are going to vote for and mark the sample ballot. On Election Day, they can take their sample ballot with them to the poll to assist them in marking the official ballot.

## **Phase 3: Voter activation**

This section of the handbook contains projects to encourage registered voters to go to the polls. Some of these are designed to promote awareness of the importance of voting, while others are projects run through Election Day to encourage citizens to vote or to make it easier for voters to get to the polls.

### **Sponsor an essay contest**

Get permission from local schools to involve the students in writing an essay on the importance of voting. Your chapter can provide a prize to the winner(s). Good ideas include: a gift certificate to a local restaurant, small gifts from local retailers, savings bonds, or tickets to an amusement park. Ask an elected official to announce the winner and remember to invite the

press! You may also want to place an ad in your local newspaper to make the announcement and to thank the prize donors. If you run this project prior to Election Day, use the ad to promote going to the polls.

### **Business signs**

Encourage local businesses to change their signs in front of their businesses to a GOTV message.

### **First time voters only party**

Provide a social with a band and munchies for all 18- to 20-year-olds who can prove that they voted that day. Promote the event at your local college or university through the school's newspaper and radio stations. Additional promotion can be made by speaking to campus organizations such as fraternities and sororities. Not only will this encourage younger voters to turn out on Election Day, but it will also provide a prime vehicle for your chapter to meet potential members.

### **Promote the election**

- Put reminder notes in your newsletter, on your chapter's Web site, through e-mails, etc. Include the election date and where they can find information on where to vote (the city clerk).
- Write articles or letters to the editor of the local newspaper about the upcoming election and the importance of every vote.
- Request the telephone company add a voting reminder to the time and weather information lines.
- Request local newspapers print ads urging people to vote. If cost is a consideration, approach merchant associations and other groups to see if they will underwrite the cost.
- Urge community officials to “play up” an upcoming election (signs on city hall, parking meters and/or street light decorations, reminders or printed notices about city activities, schedules, municipal calendars and so on).
- Send out postcards to your membership a week before the election.
- Pass out eye-catching tokens on Election Day to people who have voted. Give a flower to the first 100 female voters. Give a button reading “I Voted” to voters as they leave the polls. The idea is to encourage others to vote that day.
- Conduct a chapter “voter registration raffle.” Design a voter verification form. Reproduce the form in the chapter newsletter or send a special mailing to your membership. When a club or chapter member goes to vote, request the “Ward Clerk” or “Poll Checklist Personnel” to verify that he or she voted by signing the form. The member then brings



or sends his or her form to the next chapter meeting. All forms are put in a box and a winner is drawn for a grand prize.

- Put out signs encouraging people to vote.

### Sponsor a “take your kid to the polls” event

Produce postcards to give out at the local schools. Work with your local clerk to find out voter turnout at the different polling locations. This project shows children the importance of voting, decreases the scariness of it all, and now you have the children reminding their parents to vote.

### Babysitting

Provide babysitting at a nearby location to allow parents to vote without the distraction of keeping track of their kids. You can promote this at local elementary schools, preschools and daycare facilities.

### Chapter fundraiser

Many areas pay their poll workers. These are the people who check your identification, help with the machines and report the vote totals at the end of the day. If you have members who have flexible schedules and can give you a day, they can donate their “paycheck” for the day to the chapter.

## Promoting your chapter’s GOTV campaign

Publicity and politics go hand in hand. Publicity is vital to a GOTV campaign. Newspapers and radio and television stations will more than likely want to help a volunteer effort in the public interest.

### What is news?

Everything you do—parades, rallies, meetings, parties, benefits, essay contests for students—no matter what it is, has news potential because of the nature of your program. Inform the appropriate media representatives of events you are planning and publicize them at every opportunity.

You will quickly discover the level of success you achieve with media representatives will be determined by your approach to them. Be prepared. Don’t be pushy. Prepare a “fact sheet” summarizing the main facts about your campaign. Include names, addresses and phone numbers of your officers, chairpersons, headquarters and publicity chairs. See that the news operations have this fact sheet on file and hand copies of it to every news reporter and photographer at every one of your events.

## Planning your public relations campaign

Nationally, the U.S. Junior Chamber promotes the month of September as “Voter Registration Month” during election years. Plan your major public relations efforts during this month. However, you can and should do something prior to September.

If your chapter’s efforts are to be successful, it will require good communication. People need to be aware of your projects and events in order to participate. They should also be aware of the importance of registering. This is accomplished through a strong public relations campaign. Think about publicity and ways to reach your audience effectively from the very start of the planning process.

The who, what, where, when, why and how of registration are crucial. To help make voters aware, consider using promotional items such as fliers, stuffers, postcards, posters, fact sheets, news releases, meetings, radio and television spots, newspaper ads, editorials, phone calls, door-to-door canvassing, booths, mobile vans, merchant signs, and/or billboards.

Don’t assume anything. Potential registrants may need the most basic registration information. Be sure your promotional materials provide it. Not every flier or five-second TV spot can contain all the relevant information. Use a variety of different media to get the message across.

If you have money available or can obtain donations, some possibilities might include:

- Devise newspaper attention-grabbers with the minimum essentials (dates, times, places) and where-to-call numbers in large boldface type. Maybe implement a “countdown” approach that illustrates the message, such as, “Only 10, 9, 8 ... more days to register—or you lose your voice.”
- Keep radio and TV spots short and snappy, with just the essentials. Check the possibilities of using free public service announcement (PSA) time for these spots. Ask about appearing on a community affairs program to promote your GOTV efforts.
- Place posters and fliers on community bulletin boards, buses, in office buildings, high schools and colleges. Nursing homes or other institutions can be targets for in-house registration to increase your success. Fliers can be distributed anywhere people congregate.

### The news release

News releases are the best way to keep the media in a community informed about your chapter’s activities. Releases also establish the organization’s credibility as a news source.

## Sample news release

Note: this is a sample news release that can be adapted to fit your local media. Please transfer this to your chapter's letterhead.

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: (Name), (Title), (Organization), (Phone Number), (E-mail)**

#### **GET OUT THE VOTE CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY**

(Sampletown, USA) - The Sampletown Junior Chamber (Jaycees) are joining forces to help the citizens of the Sampletown community "Get Out the Vote." This nonpartisan campaign is designed to increase voter participation in this year's elections.

Jaycees will arrange for various voter registration sites around the city. The goal of the program is to encourage citizens to participate in the election process.

*Add a few lines of details of where and when voter registration booths will be set up. If the release is to announce voter services provided on Election Day, list all services and how individuals can get in touch with GOTV volunteers.*

The Jaycees have asked the Mayor to proclaim September as "Register to Vote Month" in Sampletown.

The United States Junior Chamber (Jaycees) gives young people between the ages of 18 and 41 the tools they need to build the bridges of success for themselves in the areas of business development, management skills, individual training, community service, and international connections.

-###-

Before sending out any news releases, develop a media list of all newspapers and radio and television stations in your community. Also find out who the appropriate contact person is to send the news release to.

There are a number of general rules to follow when writing news releases. First, try to put all of the most pertinent information in the first few sentences. Answer the questions, “Who, what, where, when, why and how” in the first paragraph.

Other information should be included in the next few paragraphs while the least important information should be used in the last paragraph. The reasoning behind this is if an editor or newsperson has to cut a story short, the important information included in the first few paragraphs will not be lost.

Some other basic tips include:

- News releases should be brief, accurate, and complete. Keep them to two pages, though one page is preferred. Check for any spelling errors or typing mistakes.
- Type and double-space the release on a sheet of letterhead, leaving ample margins and using only one side of the paper.
- Include the release date, your name, title, organization, Web site address, telephone number and e-mail address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.
- If the release is longer than one page, type “-more-” at the bottom of the first page.
- If you are submitting your news release electronically, send it as plain text or Rich Text Format (RTF). Microsoft Word is generally acceptable, but if you are using a newer version of it, make sure you save it as a “Word 97-2003 Document (\*.doc)”, not the newer “.docx” format.
- At the end of the release, type “-30-” or “-###-” to signify the end.
- Submit your release well in advance of the event. Follow up with a polite reminder of when your event is taking place and ask if the newspaper or station has assigned someone to cover the story.

## Public service announcements

Many television and radio stations, as well as cable and public television stations, have set aside a part of their broadcasting day for public affairs or public service programming. This is an effort by the stations to help nonprofit organizations get their message to citizens. Utilize PSAs to more effectively promote your GOTV campaign. It is an opportunity to use the stations’ resources to get a message to the public.

Preparing PSAs takes some time and effort. To get an idea of what a local television or radio station looks for in a PSA, visit with the station’s public service director. Here are a few questions to ask:

- Does the station prefer written PSAs or will they write them from a fact sheet that you can provide?
- What is the preferred length of the PSA (10, 20, 30 or 60 seconds)?
- What is the deadline for delivering the PSA script or fact sheet for use by the station?
- Can you produce your own PSA? If the station produces the PSA, what are the costs involved?
- What are the restrictions to follow when submitting a PSA?

When preparing a PSA for radio, keep in mind that it is written for the “ear.” Use descriptive words and active verbs to give the PSA life. A radio PSA usually consists of a fact sheet or a 10-, 15-, 20-, 30- or 60-second script.

Television PSAs are slightly more complex to prepare and the amount of people asking for airtime with local stations is larger. To produce the PSA, the station may need to be provided with visuals or slides to be used with your script.

## Guidelines for writing PSAs

- Include as much information as possible in the script or on the fact sheet. If this is not possible, be sure to include a name and phone number where more information can be obtained.
- For radio PSAs, two to two-and-a-half lines of written copy (25 words) equals 10 seconds. Thirty seconds of copy is eight lines (75 words) and 60 seconds of copy is 16 lines (150 words).
- Generally, television PSA copy should contain fewer lines or words. Ten seconds of written copy contains 20 words, 30 seconds is 60 words, and 60 seconds equals 120 words.
- Be sure to include the place, name, organization, contact, title and phone number in the upper-left-hand corner.
- Put the PSA topic and the dates the PSA should be used in the upper-right-hand corner.
- For television PSAs, place the audio script on the right side of the page and a description of the slide or visual to be used on the left.
- Before taking the PSA to the station, time it to make sure it is the correct length.

## Sample PSAs

Here are a few sample PSAs that can be adapted to fit your local media.

### Ten seconds

In the voting booth, “X” marks the spot. Register to vote this weekend at the Sampletown Shopping Mall. For more information, contact the Sampletown Jaycees at 999-9999.

### Twenty seconds

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Register to vote in the next election. The Sampletown Jaycees will help you register at the community center during the month of September. For more information, call 999-9999.

### Thirty seconds

When you pull down a lever in a voting booth, you are exercising your right to vote. Unfortunately, some feel that voting isn’t necessary. One vote—your vote—can make a difference. The Sampletown Jaycees want to help you get involved in the election process. During the month of September, you can register to vote at City Hall or at the Sampletown Shopping Mall. For more information, call the Sampletown Jaycees at 999-9999.

### Sixty seconds

Being able to vote in elections is both right and a privilege—one that is very important. However, before you can vote, you must be registered. If you have turned 18, changed your address, or changed your name since the last election, you must register to vote. You can make a difference in the next election. The Sampletown Jaycees want to help you become more involved in the election process. They are hosting a voter registration booth at the Sampletown Shopping Mall the entire month of September. Or you can register at City Hall. For more information, call 999-9999. Exercise your right to vote. Make sure you’re registered for the next election.

## Additional public relations avenues

Here are a few ideas that will help you increase your chapter’s exposure:

- Go to the local utility company, bank or any other business that sends out monthly statements. Ask to place fliers in the envelope with their next billing statement.
- Ask a store manager about placing fliers in bags at the grocery store. Put up a display near the checkout stands where everyone needs to pass. Utilize the store’s message board.
- Use posters, billboards, bumper stickers, lapel buttons, window stickers and other means to publicize your GOTV activities to the residents of your community.

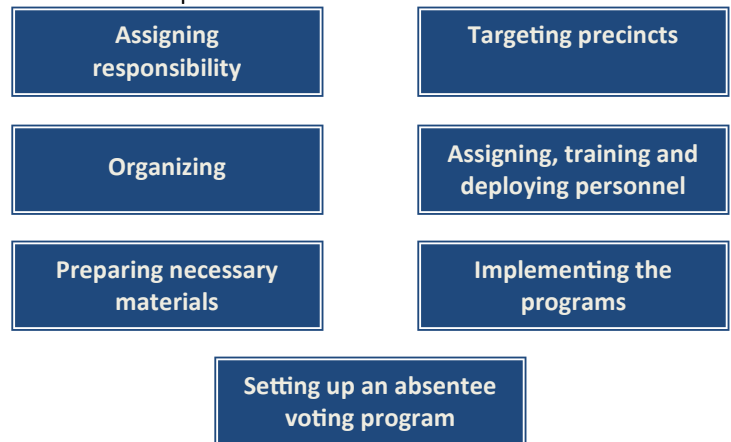
An important point to remember is that not all of the people in your community can be reached via one medium. Use several

public relations tactics to inform them to become involved and to register to vote.

## The GOTV campaign

In this section, we will discuss the components of an example GOTV campaign covering all three phases, broken down into seven functional categories. The system we are about to describe is a **voter-service system** geared to providing the services we have already mentioned. Combine elements of each to form the GOTV program which is best suited for your community...in other words, that which is most realistic.

The seven components are:



### Assigning responsibility

Someone must be in charge. A GOTV director should be appointed at least 30 days (and preferably 60 days) before Election Day. He or she should have **no other assignments**; GOTV is enough. In addition, two part-time volunteers should be assigned to the GOTV director.

### Targeting precincts

**Target precincts** can be identified by a process of analyzing past election returns. Basically, the process identifies lower turnout precincts.

Once the GOTV precincts have been identified and ranked in priority order, obtain a precinct map from the local election authority and color in the top-priority precinct groups. Then you’ll be able to get a geographical picture of where your GOTV potential lies. Note: if the regular political party organization is strong enough in certain districts to deliver the vote, you should downgrade these precincts in your priority listing. But, be careful about this decision and take plenty of soundings among experienced politicians. Many precinct captains claim a capacity they really don’t have.

The targeting process enables the GOTV director to be selective—and selective in the right places. Remember, we

cannot turnout everyone, and we're not trying to. We're trying to turn out voters who are least likely to vote. Targeting pinpoints them.

## Organizing

The first organizational steps have been completed. The next step is to accomplish **partial decentralization**. We need to decentralize because GOTV activities—one-to-one activities, as mentioned earlier—must be brought close to the scene of the action. The scene of the action is the precinct and the polling place. It is a **partial** decentralization because campaign headquarters will also play an important role, as we shall see later.

There are three basic steps to follow:

1. **Select GOTV areas.** Using the color-coded precinct map, divide the constituency into GOTV **areas**. These areas should be logical subdivisions of the county or city, and should contain **roughly** equal numbers of target precincts. Each area will need a minimum of five workers on Election Day so do not select more areas than you can staff. Consult the volunteer chair to see how many workers will be available on Election Day. If additional recruitment is necessary, it should begin now.

The function of each area will be to provide transportation and babysitting services to voters who need them. The most important factors in selecting the areas are **geography** and **numbers of voters**. Think about traffic conditions as you study the map, and avoid selecting overly large areas which will give the drivers too much ground to cover. Make sure the total number of target voters in each area is reasonable. This is a judgment call because there is no exact rule as to how many voters will request rides and babysitting. Generally, areas with concentrations of lower-income people and elderly people will be major areas where people need services in order to vote.

2. **Select area headquarters.** Select an Election Day headquarters for each area. It should be geographically located near the area's center. It can be someone's home or office, and it must have room from which to operate and have a telephone (or cell phone) that can be left open for incoming calls for the entire day. The phone is vital. Don't select a headquarters where someone must use the only available phone during the day. The homes of volunteers can usually be used as area headquarters.

3. **Organize central headquarters for GOTV.** The central headquarters must be organized for GOTV. Central headquarters is responsible for processing the GOTV mailing, for telephoning target voters to deliver them a GOTV message and for determining which services—if any—the voter needs: information, transportation, and/or babysitting. If it's information only, the person manning the telephone provides it. If it's transportation or babysitting, the request is relayed to the appropriate area headquarters for handling.

Central headquarters might include the following:

- A bank of phones or cell phones for outgoing calls
- Two private lines for communicating with area headquarters and for general internal communications, and
- One incoming line whose number can be publicized to enable voters to call in with service requests.

Note: if your campaign has not installed a telephone bank or does not have multiple cell phones available—and it's impractical to do so for GOTV—try to borrow an office with several lines for Election Day. You may need two such locations in order to make enough contacts.

## Personnel

A pre-Election Day training session should be conducted by the GOTV director for all personnel. One purpose of the training session is to explain the entire voter-service operation for Election Day—why you're working only in selected areas, how requests will be received and transmitted to area headquarters, etc.

A second purpose of the training session is to deliver a pep talk. Election Day is a long working day and it's the last opportunity to get the job done. Everything in the campaign has been building toward this day, and there will be no second chance. Try to get everyone in a positive frame of mind. Make sure your workers are prepared and understand the importance of what they're doing.

## Preparing necessary materials

The following materials may be helpful to your GOTV campaign:

- Voter's lists with phone numbers
- Service slips (see next page)
- Locator chart matching precinct numbers with area headquarters, including phone numbers of all area headquarters



## Service Slip

Service time \_\_\_\_\_ AM / PM (circle one)

Precinct no. \_\_\_\_\_

Area \_\_\_\_\_

(circle one) Miss / Mrs. / Ms. / Mr. \_\_\_\_\_

Last name only

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Taken by \_\_\_\_\_

Special instructions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Service(s) requested:



Note: The service slip above is the basic form used in processing requests for Election Day services. It allows central headquarters personnel to record the voter's name, address and phone number; the specific time the voter wants the service; whether babysitting and/or transportation are needed (circle baby, car or both); the voter's precinct number; and any special instructions.

The central headquarters dispatcher should fill in the appropriate area number in the upper-right corner of the

service slip. Then, the information can be relayed by phone or e-mail, or the slip itself hand-delivered to the appropriate area headquarters.

The person at central headquarters who took the call should fill in his or her name on the designated line in case questions arise later.

- List of all polling places
- Area map showing precincts and polling places
- Precinct maps showing polling places
- Sample ballots
- Voter badge. This can be a sticker, identifying the worker as a volunteer. It is a good psychological device to sustain the volunteer's confidence.

## Implementing the programs

We have discussed the fundamentals of organizing GOTV and the materials necessary to carry it out. Now let's look at three operational programs which should be included in a complete GOTV operation. They are: mailing, phoning, and Election Day activities.

### GOTV mailing

The mailing has four basic purposes:

- To remind the voter of his or her polling place and the hours the polls are open. Note: if your state has a "time-off for voting" law, mention that fact in the GOTV mailing.
- To deliver a brief, positive message encouraging the voter to vote and emphasizing the importance of citizen participation
- To give the voter a sample ballot
- To provide a central headquarters phone number which the voter can call for transportation, babysitting or questions about voting

The most difficult part of the GOTV mailing is polling place information. Obviously, this information is different for each precinct. It requires basic computer skills and great attention to detail, but it can be done. The GOTV mailing loses most of its value when this information is not included.

The simplest method is this: print a one-page flyer listing all polling places beside their precinct numbers. You may need three or four of these in areas with a large number of precincts. The top of the page should say, "Your precinct is no. \_\_\_\_." The clerical team can then fill in the voter's precinct number from the registration list and the voter can then find the appropriate polling place in the information listed below on the flyer. This may also be done using a simple database and mail merge. In any case, **don't** send the flyer without the individual precinct number. Most people don't know theirs.

The GOTV mailing should be timed to arrive on the Friday before Election Day. Check with the Postal Service to get an estimate of delivery time and add at least one day to it.

### Telephoning

GOTV telephoning is a follow-up to the mailing and should accomplish these things:

- Provide basic voting information
- Encourage the voter to vote by emphasizing the importance of turnout
- Offer transportation and babysitting service

Note the last point. Most campaigns provide these services only if the voter requests them. Consequently, very few are provided, because the system is passive instead of active. The best way is to ask the voter if he or she needs either service. Many people who do need these services will say yes, and these "orders" can be taken **before**, as well as **on**, Election Day. The idea is to get as many advance appointments as possible—and route them to the appropriate headquarters for handling.

In the complete GOTV system, this is the second contact with the target voter. Because we're dealing with the people who are least likely to vote, we need to make both the mail and phone contacts. Timing: GOTV phoning should begin on the Saturday before Election Day. Call second-priority target precincts on Saturday and Sunday, and first-priority target precincts on Monday and Election Day.

### Election Day activities

These activities are designed to help the voter get to the polls. The activities themselves are simple; they only require execution.

Central headquarters telephoners will accept requests for rides and/or babysitting. Prior to Election Day, these requests (in the form of filled-out service slips) will be delivered to the appropriate area headquarters. On Election Day itself, the requests will be relayed over the phone, e-mailed or hand-delivered by runners when the volume is heavy.

The area captain should dispatch drivers according to the specific time requested for pick-up, making sure that each driver has the smallest possible geographical area to cover.

There are several ways to deploy babysitters. The most obvious is for the babysitter to stay behind at the voter's home while the driver takes the voter to the polls. However, many parents will be reluctant to allow strangers to remain in their homes while they are away. Alternative procedures are:

- The babysitter rides with the family in the voter's car, staying with the children while their mother or father

votes. This can be used when the voter requests babysitting only.

- The driver and babysitter go with the entire family in the driver's car. Sometimes the driver can handle this alone.
- A babysitter is already stationed at each polling place. This obviously requires a large number of babysitters per area.
- An area day-care center is set up so that children can be left there while the parents vote.

## Setting up an absentee voting program

Setting up an adequate absentee voting program does not require much money, but it does require people and time.

Appoint an absentee voting director; a person capable of learning the specifics of the absentee voting laws and procedures.

Within your constituency, hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the elderly and other obvious places should be singled out as the places at which the program will be directed.

Official applications for absentee ballots must be obtained and distributed. Help the voters fill them out. Arrange to have applications notarized if the law requires it. Also arrange to come back later to pick up the ballots and mail them.

If you conduct a canvassing program during the campaign—either by phone or door-to-door—make sure your canvassers know the mechanics of absentee voting. That way, when they identify invalids or people who will be out of town on Election Day, they can supply the absentee ballot applications.

## Decentralized GOTV telephoning

In the system we described earlier, phoning was carried out by a central headquarters. With enough people and money, the **entire** GOTV system can be decentralized, including phoning. Each area headquarters then becomes a complete GOTV operation of its own, eliminating the relay step between central headquarters and the field. Doing this usually requires the installation of additional phones at area headquarters (or more available cell phones). It is potentially a more costly way of handling GOTV, but it brings the thrust of the program one step closer to where the action is.

## Summary

The purpose behind the techniques and procedures outlined on the preceding pages is among the most important Jaycees will see in their lifetimes. The most important and most precious right of each adult United States citizen is the right to vote. It is fundamental to our political and governmental system. America has seen many monumental governmental and political upheavals in its young life, but it has never seen—and quite likely could not survive—a crisis stemming from the wholesale abandonment of the polling place.

Bernard Shaw said, “Democracy is a device that ensures that we shall be governed no better than we deserve.” Barely 40% of the eligible adult population elected one-third of the Senate and the 435 members of the House of Representatives in 2010. The elimination of such apathetic voting practices among the nation's electorate is the first step toward the elimination of unresponsive, insulated elected officials at all levels.

## Additional resources

- [www.democrats.org](http://www.democrats.org)—The Democratic Party
- [www.gop.com](http://www.gop.com)—The Republican Party
- [www.lp.org](http://www.lp.org)—The Libertarian Party
- [www.gp.org](http://www.gp.org)—The Green Party of the United States
- [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)—The League of Women Voters
- [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)—The Federal Election Commission
- [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)—The U.S. Census
- [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com)
- [www.projectvote.org](http://www.projectvote.org)—Project Vote
- [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)—Project Vote Smart
- [www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org)—Rock the Vote

<sup>1</sup>Michael P. McDonald, *Presidential Voter Turnout Rates, 1980-2010*, United States Election Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_1980-2010.xls](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_1980-2010.xls) (November 17, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>Neal Caren, “Big City, Big Turnout? Electoral Participation in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 70:1 (2007), 31.

<sup>3</sup>Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, “The Myth of the Vanishing Voter,” *American Political Science Review* 95 (December 2001), 966.

<sup>4</sup>John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections*, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php> (October 24, 2010).