



Guide to Developing a Successful Get Out the Vote (GOTV) Program for 501(c)(3)s

Nonprofits are well positioned to leverage their trusted role in the community and their leadership, staff, volunteers, clients, and supporters to promote nonpartisan voting and related activities before and on election day. This guide offers step-by-step instructions for creating and implementing a successful Get Out the Vote (GOTV) effort, as well as a sample script for voter engagement and frequently asked voter questions.

A GOTV program is electoral advocacy. It is a coordinated effort of nonpartisan activities that seek to encourage your supporters to vote. These efforts must be nonpartisan and focused solely on promoting the importance of voting and how to register.

If your GOTV effort focuses on a specific ballot issue(s), it is a direct lobbying activity. Visit advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/ for more about electoral advocacy and lobbying.

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GOTV Rules for 501(c)(3) organizations

Generally, a 501(c)(3) organization may conduct nonpartisan voter registration and GOTV programs, but must follow the federal and state tax and campaign laws.

501(c)(3) organizations may conduct nonpartisan GOTV programs. The efforts must be focused solely on the importance of voting and how to register. There can be no evidence of bias for a particular candidate or political party.

The following are a few things you can and cannot do as part of your GOTV activities. For a complete listing please visit advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/.

Things you CAN do:

- ✓ Provide voters with election information (early and election day voting locations, hours, and identification materials they will need).
- ✓ Encourage voters to register to vote.
- ✓ Encourage voters to vote early or on Election Day.
- ✓ Encourage voters to research the candidates and ballot issues before casting their vote.

(Note: If you are registering people to vote or helping them vote, the Federal Election Commission requires you to post a sign or given written notice.)

Things you CANNOT do:

- ✗ Recommend, endorse, or suggest that one candidate is better than another.
- ✗ Tell voters which candidates support your issue.
- ✗ Tell voters which party to register under or for whom to vote.
- ✗ Plan activities with a candidate or their campaign or political party.
- ✗ Give money or volunteer time to a candidate.
- ✗ Allow a candidate to hand out materials about the campaign and his/her platform at events connected to your organization.





10 Steps to Organizing a Successful GOTV Program

This tool walks you through 10 key steps for planning your GOTV program. To use this tool, first review the instructions for each box. Then, fill in the blanks on the following page. For more details about the activities mentioned in each step, go to page [9](#).

To be most effective, complete these steps at least 6 weeks before Election Day:

1. Define Purpose

Your purpose should answer the question: Why is it important for supporters of your issue to vote during this election (candidates, ballot issues, elected/appointed agency positions, etc.)?

2. Determine Internal Capacity

- ▶ Who will lead the GOTV effort?
- ▶ How much time are they able to devote to this effort?
- ▶ What is the budget for the GOTV effort?



3. Finalize Messaging, Call to Action, and Content

- ▶ What message do you want to deliver? Your message can be about the importance of your issue and voting broadly or about ballot issues that will impact your issue and why it is important to vote.
- ▶ Determine a call to action in your message (e.g., volunteer to contact voters, vote early, vote on Election Day).
- ▶ Is there any additional content that you need to provide your audience with (e.g., “It is important that you vote today! You can learn more about what is on the ballot by visiting your Board of Election website”).

4. Identify Current Supporters

- ▶ Who do you know that already supports your issue broadly?
- ▶ Utilize contact information collected by your organization during other events, and contact these individuals.
- ▶ Use your audience to reach out to volunteers and/or participate in the GOTV effort.

5. Determine GOTV Effort Logistics

- ▶ What date(s) will you conduct GOTV?
- ▶ What outreach activities will you use during your GOTV efforts (door-to-door, mailings, voter registration event, phone banks, etc.)?
- ▶ Are there other organizations you can partner with?
- ▶ What resources do you have to support your GOTV outreach?

6. Recruit Volunteers

- ▶ Ask your internal staff, friends, and family members to volunteer in your GOTV activities.
- ▶ Conduct outreach and recruit volunteers from your supporter list to participate in GOTV activities (phone banking, door-to-door outreach, etc.).

Complete these steps at least 4 weeks before Election Day:

7. Finalize Materials

- ▶ Materials include items the volunteers will need to conduct the GOTV activities, as well as the materials that will be given to the audience. It is also helpful to have a frequently asked questions document for voters (see the end of this Guide).
- ▶ Get in touch with your local or state election office and ask for nonpartisan registration materials (flyers, buttons, booklets, website messages), as well as more information on conducting a GOTV program.

- ▶ Use links to important information on printed materials (e.g., Board of Elections, your organization’s website).
- ▶ Write scripts for any phone banking or door-to-door activities.
- ▶ Include the federal disclaimers on any materials you develop (see FAQ on page [14](#) for more information).

8. Identify New Supporters

- ▶ Determine your target audience(s) for your GOTV activities. Gear all your outreach toward this audience.
- ▶ Your target audience should be those who already support your issue or your organization’s mission, but can also be extended to include communities that are likely to support your issue. The purpose of your activities is to encourage this audience to vote.

Complete these steps starting at least 3 weeks before Election Day:

9. Conduct GOTV Outreach Activities Before Election Day

- ▶ Now that you have your target audience, messages, materials, and activities planned, it is time to conduct the activities to encourage registration and early or absentee voting (more and more states allow early voting, but there are specific deadlines so be sure to check with the local Board of Elections and/or Secretary of State for details).
- ▶ If you are holding an event, advertise this event through flyers, posters, web, and traditional and social media.

10. Continue Relevant GOTV Outreach Activities

- ▶ Using contact information collected before or during the drive, organize phone banking and/or door-to-door activities, social media, and texting programs to encourage voters to go to the polls on Election Day.



10 Steps Worksheet

1. **Define Purpose** _____

2. **Determine Internal Capacity**
Budget: _____
Staff: _____

Time: _____

3. **Finalize Messaging, Call to Action, and Content**
Message: _____

Call to Action: _____

Content: _____

4. Identify Current Supporters

Current supporters: _____

Organizational connections to those supporters: _____

5. Determine GOTV Drive Logistics

Date(s): _____

Activities: _____

Location(s): _____

Partner(s): _____

Resource(s): _____

6. Recruit Volunteers

Volunteers: _____

7. Create Materials

Existing materials: _____

Board of Elections materials: _____

Materials to develop: _____

8. Identify New Supporters

Target new supporters: _____

Connections to those supporters: _____

9. Conduct GOTV Outreach Activities in Advance of Election Day

Activities: _____

10. Continue Relevant GOTV Outreach Activities

Activities: _____

Planning GOTV Activities On and Before Election Day

GOTV Activities for Nonprofits	Before Election Day	On Election Day
Allow staff to engage in nonpartisan GOTV activities (like those on this list!).	✓	✓
Allow staff time off to vote.		✓
Encourage staff to sign up as poll workers or translators on Election Day.		✓
Provide rides to the polls or promote organizations that provide rides.		✓
Hold a GOTV party or event that outlines these activities and how people can get involved.	✓	
Determine what organizations are holding “phone banks” (where volunteers call registered voters and remind them to vote) and volunteer, or host your own phone bank.	✓	
Leverage your organization’s existing communication vehicles to remind people to vote via emails, newsletters, and social media.	✓	✓
Ask the local Board of Elections for a voter list for your community and cross check against your volunteer or membership lists, so you can understand who is not registered to vote.	✓	
Leverage your organization’s existing meetings to remind people to vote.	✓	
Create visibility about Election Day via posters in your offices.	✓	
Share telephone or website information for nonpartisan voter information (e.g., where do I vote, when do the polls open or close?).	✓	
Canvass neighborhoods and give out nonpartisan voter information about where, when, and how to vote.	✓	



Tips for Bringing Your Plan to Life

This section offers detailed tips to consider as you flesh out your GOTV plan. You may not be able to tackle all (or even half) of these activities—that's OK! It's fine to pick one and get started—something is better than nothing. Add activities over time as you're able.

Promote voting and GOTV activities through existing communication vehicles

Make a list of all the ways your organization will communicate to your members, volunteers, or staff between now and Election Day. Decide where you can add voter registration, GOTV, and other electoral information. It can be as simple as the following:

- ▶ Remember Election Day is XXXX; do not forget to vote.
- ▶ Are you registered to vote? Go to these websites to find out how [insert local board of elections information].
- ▶ Do you want to help Get Out the Vote on Election Day? Learn more about how to GOTV, including getting trained as a volunteer, phone banking, getting people to the polls and more [insert telephone number or website]!

Provide rides to the polls

Helping people get to the polls is the only way to ensure people vote. You can do this on your own or in conjunction with others. Here are things to keep in mind:

- ▶ Determine if your organization will lead the effort or work in conjunction with others.
- ▶ Establish how many cars, vans, and people will be involved/available.
- ▶ Train your volunteers to ensure they remain nonpartisan during their interaction with voters they transport (not asking them who they are going to vote for, etc.).
- ▶ Divide Election Day into two-hour blocks of time (or more depending on capacity).
- ▶ Assign each person/car to a block of time.
- ▶ In advance of Election Day communicate to your membership or supporter list that you will be offering rides to the polls on Election Day and require them to sign up for a ride.
- ▶ Although you may ask people to sign up in advance to let you know they need a ride, expect last-minute requests and changes especially if the weather conditions are poor.
- ▶ Have one person act as the “dispatcher” for all drivers and requests for rides to keep things coordinated.

Collect voter lists

Voter lists allow you to target a specific group of voters (most often by neighborhood). These lists tell you if these individuals are regular voters or not yet registered. So, depending on the voting status of the individuals, your nonpartisan activity will be either to provide information on registering to vote, or remind them that they can vote, when Election Day is, and where they can go to vote. You might also want to provide them with a simple list of resources where they can find more information, such as list of websites or telephone numbers for the local Board of Elections, League of Women Voters, etc.



Host a GOTV party

This should take place in advance of Election Day to gather your volunteers and train them on how to get out the vote. The volunteers can be your friends or colleagues, and/or supporters or employees of your organization. Bring people together for no more than two hours and walk through all the “do’s and don’ts” of GOTV. Provide each person with GOTV documents. If your organization has a broader GOTV strategy, you will want to offer an assignment to each person to help fulfill your overall strategy.

Conduct a phone bank

A phone bank can be with a few people using their own cell phones or many volunteers with multiple phones. Either way, here are the steps you need to follow:

- ▶ Choose a location (unless it is a virtual phone bank).
- ▶ Determine the number of phone lines and volunteers you will have.
- ▶ Assign a particular number of volunteers for each hour you have your location/ phones available. Give volunteers no more than 2–3 hours of call time in a row.
- ▶ Secure voter call lists and leave space on the printouts for volunteers to record the results of their conversations.
- ▶ Provide a script (see sample script below) for your volunteers to ensure they are nonpartisan and only reminds voters the date of the election, where they can register to vote, and where they can get more information (e.g., Board of Elections).
- ▶ Review the results of your calls and talk to volunteers to learn what worked well and what didn’t to improve outcomes in subsequent phone banks.

Create GOTV Materials

Here are some examples of materials you might provide:

- ▶ List of reasons why voting is important.
- ▶ Information on issues important to your issue.
- ▶ Information about your organization.
- ▶ Information on all candidates and issues on the upcoming ballot.
- ▶ Voter registration forms.
- ▶ Polling location and vote by mail information.

Keep in mind that the Federal Election Commission requires that you post a sign or give written notice to people you are registering or helping to vote. Use the following language on your materials and on signs at your event: “Our voter registration services are available without regard to the voter’s political preference. Information and other assistance regarding registering or voting, including transportation and other services offered, shall not be withheld or refused on the basis of support for or opposition to particular candidates or a particular party.”

Locations for GOTV Activities

If you are holding an event in conjunction with your GOTV drive or program, consider the following:

- ▶ **Large enough space for all attendees**
- ▶ **If needed, high-speed internet or phone lines**
- ▶ **Accessible**
- ▶ **High-traffic location to attract walk-in volunteers**

Register Voters

Some GOTV drives give people information on how to register instead of registering them directly, because the organization has either chosen not to register voters or state laws prohibit them from registering voters without becoming an official registrar.

If you are not going to register people to vote during your activity, you can still have an event and set up a table or booth at conferences or neighborhood fairs, and do other forms of outreach to inform members of your community of the voter registration dates, requirements, the importance of voting, and the locations where they can pick up a form and register. If you are registering people to vote, contact your Local Election Office for voter registration regulations in your state.

You can get copies of the voter registration form by contacting your Local Election Office, or you can use the National Voter Registration Form available on the Federal Election Commission website (www.fec.gov) and print as many copies as you need. If you are printing copies of the voter registration form, please check with your Local Election Office to make sure your state accepts forms printed on standard paper.

If you are providing registration forms, check with your local Board of Election office or the Secretary of State to determine how forms must be submitted. In some states you can collect the forms and mail them or drop them off in person, while in other states the individual who is registering may be required to submit the form themselves.

Canvass

Choose a neighborhood or community based on your organization's membership list, voter lists, or convenience. Knock on doors and remind people to register and show up to vote on Election Day. Adapt the script in this guide on page [13](#); remember that you cannot tell people for whom to vote. Your job when canvassing in advance of Election Day is to give information on where and how to vote or to register to vote. Canvassing on Election Day is about reminding people to get out and vote and tell them where to go.

Partner with Other Organizations

Collaborating with another well-known organization that has an interest in your issue can help increase awareness, increase the reach of informing your audience, and make planning much easier! Be sure that all information with your organization's name on it follows the rules of a 501(c)(3).

Measure Success

You can measure the outcomes of your GOTV drive in many ways. Use the chart below for some ideas.



Goal	Measurement
Increased Awareness	# of people reached during phone banks # of people registered to vote as a result of your efforts # of attendees at an event # of door-to-door connections made # of contacts collected
Increased Voter Participation	# of people your GOTV effort reached out to that actually voted (survey) # of people who confirmed they were voting during a phone bank on Election Day Comparison between last year's voter turnout and this year's voter turnout overall or for specific issues/candidates (only if you are running a very large GOTV drive)

Sample Script for Door-to-Door and Phone Banking Activities

The most effective voter contact is personal. Encourage your volunteers to use the following as a guide for the conversation that they customize.

“Hi! Is this [VOTER NAME]?”

My name is [CALLER NAME] and I’m calling/stopping by on behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME]. We are working to encourage our community members to cast their vote this [DATE OF ELECTION].

There are many important issues and candidates on the ballot this year and every vote counts. To be clear, [ORGANIZATION NAME] is not asking you to vote for a specific candidate or for or against a specific issue. We just want to convey the importance of voting, especially as it relates to [YOUR ISSUE]. Can we count on you to vote in this election?”

→ **TIP:** *If the voters asks the volunteer who to vote for at any point, the volunteer should say, “You can get information about the candidates and ballot issues at [Secretary of State website address].”*

→ *If the person says, “No,” say, “OK. If you change your mind, feel free to contact the local Board of Elections for more information” and end the conversation.*

→ *If the person says “Yes”:*

[If during early voting window] “Great! We also want to let you know that [state/county] offers convenient opportunities to vote early. Can I tell you a little more about how early voting works? [If yes, explain specific local options.] Thank you for committing to vote this year!”

[If early voting has closed] “Great! Do you need any information about how to vote on Election Day, like your polling location or what identification you need to bring? [If yes, share specific information]. Thank you for committing to vote this year!”

Answers to Common Voter Questions

Do I have to be able to read or write English to register or vote?

No. You can take someone who can assist you in the voting process, but they may not vote for you.

How do I know if I am registered to vote?

If you are not sure if you are registered to vote, you can call your county Board of Elections to find out. If you have access to the internet, you can visit your local Board of Elections website at [local Board of Election's web address].

When can I register?

You can use your state election page to find the deadlines for your state.

Does registration cost anything?

No. It is free.

Am I registered once I fill out and mail the registration form?

You must receive your voter registration card to be registered. If you have not received your card you can call your Registrar of Voters or City/County Elections Office and ask if you are registered.

Do I have to register every time I vote?

No. The only times you have to reregister are when you move, change your name, want to change your political party, or if you have completed all conditions of a felony charge.

If I didn't vote in the last election, do I need to register again?

If you registered but did not vote you are still registered and do not need to register again.

How do I know where to go vote?

If you are not sure of your polling location contact your local Board of Elections.

How do I vote if I am going to be out of town on Election Day?

If you are out of town on Election Day, you will either need to vote during early voting or by absentee ballot. You may request an absentee ballot by contacting your local, county, or city election official. Depending on your state, this individual may be the County Clerk, County Auditor, County Registrar or Supervisor of Elections, or the Board of Elections. Call your local Board of Elections office for more details on early voting.

What if I move before the election?

If you move before the deadline to register to vote, you will need to register to vote at your new address. If you move after the deadline to register to vote, you must vote at your former precinct in-person, early in-person, or by mail.

I have to work. How late are polls open on Election Day?

Most polling locations open early in the morning and stay open in the evening. Check the state polling location hours with your local Board of Elections.

Is my employer required to give me time off to vote?

Many states require that employers give employees time off to vote but it may be without pay. Check with your state election office and employer for state specific rules.

I'm a college student. Do I vote where I go to school or at home?

You must vote wherever you are registered. If you are a resident in the state where you are attending college, you can register to vote at your address in that state. If you are attending school in a state different from where you are a permanent resident, you can register to vote at your "home" address (usually a parent or family member's address in your hometown) and request an absentee ballot be sent to your address at school.

What candidates/issues are on the ballot this year?

You can get a complete list of candidates and ballot issues from your local Board of Elections.

