

Voter's Choice Act Research Brief Series

Best Practices: Conducting Voter Outreach and Education

This best practices summary is a companion to the research brief [California Voter's Choice Act Implementation Process: Voter Outreach and Education](#), based on an extensive study of the five counties that adopted the Voter's Choice Act in 2018.



Voters Need to Know How to Vote

The California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) changes the election experience for voters. VCA counties give voters the choice of mailing in their ballots, returning them at a ballot drop box, or dropping off or casting ballots in person at a vote center. Vote centers offer accessible voting options, language assistance, and conditional voter registration up to ten days before Election Day. To ensure that voters understand the voting options and available services in their county's voting system, counties that implement the VCA must conduct voter outreach and education.

Best Practices for Conducting Voter Outreach and Education

Election officials and advocates in existing VCA counties emphasize the importance of intensive, ongoing voter outreach and education to the success of VCA implementation. The following recommendations are based on the experiences of election officials and community advocates interviewed as part of the study.

- **Recruit broad community assistance.** VCA election officials agree that robust engagement with community groups and other stakeholders aids voter education and outreach by helping to spread the word about how voting works under the VCA. Specifically, they advise that county elections offices connect with a wide variety of community groups early in the implementation process to ensure they are aware of the county's adoption of the VCA and are prepared to participate in voter outreach efforts. With a diverse set of organizations engaged, voter outreach will more likely reach underrepresented communities. In the process of recruiting community assistance, election officials recommend encouraging the formation of a VCA community coalition to help build a strong, coordinated voter outreach effort. In existing VCA counties, such coalitions have benefitted from tapping into expertise from the Future of California Elections (FoCE), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that has supported VCA implementation statewide.
- **Work with community groups to tailor materials and strategies to reach various audiences.** Community organizations and advocates bring the expertise and deep familiarity needed to know what messages and outreach strategies will connect with the populations they serve.

About the Voter's Choice Act

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) provides California counties the choice of adopting a new voting model that includes replacing neighborhood polling places with vote centers and mailing Vote-By-Mail ballots to all registered voters (Los Angeles County is not required to automatically send all registered voters VBM ballots until 2024). New vote centers will offer a variety of services including in-person voting, accessible voting options, language assistance, mailed ballot drop-off and conditional voter registration. They will be distributed throughout the county and available to all voters up to ten days before Election Day. Five counties implemented the VCA model for the 2018 election cycle, and fifteen counties will be conducting elections under the VCA in 2020—approximately half of the state's current registered voter population.

“The counties heavily relied on CBOs, Community-Based Organizations, to get the word out. The counties don't have the amount of outreach staff that would be needed to do it on our own.”

- VCA county election official

For additional recommendations on voter education and outreach, see FoCE's [Voter's Choice California report, Strategies for Voter Education and Outreach Under the Voter's Choice Act](#)

Their input can strengthen the effectiveness of county voter education materials and translate them into different languages. In existing VCA counties, community coalition members, in collaboration with county elections offices, helped improve existing county outreach materials to better meet local needs. They also translated county materials and designed their own pamphlets or social media messages to reach voters, often from historically underrepresented groups. Community groups reported that targeted, one-on-one contact with voters (for example via door knocking or phone banking) was a successful outreach strategy in addition to the use of media.

- **Focus on communicating a small number of key messages.**

Implementing the VCA involves complexities for county elections offices, but messages to voters must be simple and consistent in order to stick—and to avoid discouraging voters from voting. Some VCA counties in 2018 struggled to pare down key information into effective messages. After their mixed experience with voter communications, particularly around early voting, some suggest focusing on a simple catch phrase to be repeated on all materials and messaging countywide. One oft-cited example is the *More Days, More Ways* slogan that several statewide and VCA coalitions developed, capturing the idea that voters have more ways to cast a ballot and more days to do so.

- **Apply lessons from existing VCA counties to address challenges.**

Difficulties experienced by VCA counties have led to ideas on how to mitigate them:

“Traditionally underrepresented voters often need more support in getting that information and the mechanisms for that outreach varied. I think the most effective was the knock on the door and the personal conversations.”

- VCA community advocate

Funding Sources for Voter Outreach in the 2020 Election Cycle

In the 2020 election cycle, VCA county elections offices will have outreach-related funding available from two external sources:

- Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds provided by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) for various purposes, including county efforts to implement the Voter's Choice Act (VCA). These funds may be used by counties for voter outreach efforts and the purchase of voting equipment.
- California Assembly Bill 74 (budget bill) provides \$3 million (\$1.5 million for the next two years) to counties as reimbursements specifically for voter outreach purposes.

Outreach & Education Challenges

Voter outreach requires substantial resources and commitment.

- *Effective voter outreach demands a new level of sustained engagement for county elections offices.*
- *Little funding has been available from the state or private funders to support outreach.*

Reaching everyone takes multiple strategies.

- *To educate voters countywide, election officials need appropriate strategies to reach different geographic areas and voter groups, including communities of color, people with disabilities, youth, low-income communities, and even voters with high past participation.*

Boosting early voting is not easy.

- *Although the VCA opens new opportunities for early voting, shifting a substantial portion of the electorate to vote earlier is a challenge.*
- *Avoiding a rush of ballots on Election Day can positively impact wait time for in-person voters.*

Tips from Existing VCA Counties

Prepare for robust outreach efforts.

- *Embrace openness to stronger engagement with communities on voter education.*
- *Budget for ample staff time for outreach, including collaborative efforts with community organizations to plan and implement voter education.*
- *Alert community groups of any funding to support voter outreach.*

Match outreach strategies to voter groups.

- *Identify voter groups in the county by geography and demographics.*
- *Tap into the expertise of community advocates to learn how best to reach each voter group.*
- *Tailor message content and method of delivery to reach voter groups effectively.*

Persist and share solutions.

- *Emphasize the message to vote early on all outreach materials and with community partners.*
- *Keep checking with statewide advocates and other counties for new strategies to encourage early voting.*