

# *Supercharging Your Information Analysis, Making Voter Data Work for You*

## The Importance of Voter Data (Overview)

1. For starters...
  - a. Allows you to get a better understanding of the demographics and behavior of your local electorate
  - b. Allows you to visualize:
    - i. Party enrollment
    - ii. Turnout
    - iii. Geographic distribution
    - iv. Effects of candidate types/issues on turnout
  - c. Provide you with a centralized and organized tool for elections, fundraising & volunteering efforts
2. During the next election...
  - a. Identify vote goals
  - b. Identify those voters likely to come out and support your candidate
  - c. Identify those likely to come out for the opponent
  - d. Maximize the efficiency in the use of your time & resources
3. Moving forward...
  - a. The more you use a voter data system, and the more you maintain and update it with additional information, the better and more useful it will become
  - b. Everyone in your organization can be a part of making it a more comprehensive source of information

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## Step One: Get the data...

1. **Local & State Board of Elections:** Both of these should be able to provide you with voter data in electronic format that will give you some basics like names, addresses, phone (the State data does not include phones), affiliation, registration dates, voting districts and voter history. You can request a CD from the State BoE by going to <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/Nysboe/Forms/FoilRequestPublicRecords.html> and filling out the form. You should receive the disc within a week.
2. **Voter Activation Network (V.A.N.):** Provided by the State Committee, access to this web-based tool requires a fee. It provides users with an easy-to-use interface to run various searches on the voter data for your area, and allows you to export that information in various formats, whether it be raw text files, walk lists or phone lists.

## Step Two: Manipulate the data...

The data you get from the BoE or out of the V.A.N. can be brought into a spreadsheet program for quick and basic parsing of data, or a database program for more complex queries. Microsoft Office's Excel & Access are an option if you have the software. Otherwise, OpenOffice.org offers their free software Calc & Base, which can also do the trick. Other software options exist as well, including CRM (Customer Relationship Manager) programs which can be repurposed into a VRM (Voter Relationship Manager), and although this route also includes both paid and free programs, it also requires a certain level of technical knowledge to both get the information in, and also to customize the software to suit your purposes. Just be sure to choose a solution that you or someone in your organization is comfortable with in order to get the most out of it.

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## *Understand the voting environment...*

First thing you should do once you get the data into a program is to start looking at it for answers to some basic questions about your voters. Some of the basic questions to ask include:

1. What's the breakdown of my voting population by party?
2. What has the turnout been in the last election?
  - a. Also break it down into turnout in the last
    - i. Town/Village Election
    - ii. County Election
    - iii. Federal
    - iv. Presidential

Since the turnout % often varies for the different types of elections, this needs to be kept in mind when they sometimes overlap

3. What will turnout be next time? Graph turnout over time in order to give yourself a general forecast of future turnout.
4. Is the enrollment changing? You can graph enrollment changes by looking at affiliation and registration dates. It isn't 100% accurate but it should suffice in order to allow you to see what shade of blue or red your area may be turning.

## *Figuring out the numbers you need...*

By looking at the trends in voter turnout as stated previously, you should be able to get a rough idea of what to expect as far as voter turnout in your next election and therefore the vote goal you need to win.

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## *Identify your base...*

The easiest way to find likely Democratic voters is to look for those Dems who come out every election. However, be sure not to overlook those Democratic voters who have are more recently registered, and have been consistent in coming out, even if they only have a handful of elections under their belts. Additionally, finding registered Democrats who come out to vote in primary elections also marks them as people likely to turn out.

## *Identify their base...*

Use the same logic as above but in reverse to make a list of those Republican voters who are likely to turn out and vote Republican. Removing these people from your mailings, door-to-door or other outreach efforts will help you save on time & money.

## *Identify potential targets...*

The easiest place to start to find potential voters is to see if you can find voters who vote consistently in specific types of elections. For instance, there are usually quite a few voters who only come out every four years for the Presidential elections, but stay at home for the local elections. These are prime candidates for GOTV efforts in non-Presidential elections.

You might be surprised at how many voters are registered but rarely (if ever) get out and vote. Although this certainly is a potential source of additional votes, it may require more work than a Presidential voter. Outreach to this group should be more personal and it should be stressed how important each vote is, especially in local elections. Also, look for young &/or newly registered voters. Young voters tend to have more Democratic leanings and new voters may also be new to the area, and a personal outreach to this group may net you a voter-for-life.

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## *Absentee ballots are where it's at...*

As we've seen in many recent close races, elections can be decided by Absentee Ballots. Additionally, recently proposed legislation (currently on the Governor's desk) will likely increase the amount of voting done by Absentee Ballot. A good voter data system will not only allow you to track those voters who vote by Absentee Ballot, but can also be a great tool for identifying potential voters who don't currently vote by Absentee but for whom it may be a viable option.

Start by looking at older voters, particularly those who may have previously had a consistent voting history, but seemed to have been missing more recent ones, and inquire if absentee voting is a good fit. Their drop off may be caused by a lack of mobility, disability or illness, and they may not be aware of their option to vote by Absentee. Conversely, those younger, newly registered voters may be going away at school and if the local election is "out of site" then it's probably "out of mind" for them as well. Utilize your voter data system to track the entire process, from application for Absentee Ballot to following up to ensure the ballots are submitted in a timely manner.

## *Maximize the efficient use of your resources...*

By identifying those voters who may be responsive to your candidate(s) as well as those who won't be, you can target your outreach efforts (direct mail, phonebanking, door-to-door, etc.). By doing this, you can avoid wasting your time and money on those voters who likely won't support your candidate(s) anyway, and maximize the amount of time and effort you spend on those who are most likely to help you emerge victorious on Election Day.

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## Moving forward with your voter data system...

Although you can certainly get plenty of use “out of the box” with the initial data, what you get out of your voter data system in the future will depend on what you put into it. Every tidbit of information that you gather from each election will make your data more valuable for the next. Knowing what phone numbers are wrong, which people care about what issues and more will prove invaluable in helping to avoid wasting time & resources on fruitless efforts. You can also tweak the way you look at and extrapolate data if you review how your assumptions played out in reality.

In addition, what is nice about a good voter data system is that even though not everyone needs to know how to use it or get technical in doing the statistical analyses, everyone in your organization, young and old, tech-savvy or not, can play an important role in adding information to your data. Recalling conversations and passing along information, or looking at Letters to the Editor and identifying individuals’ stances on issues can be done by anyone and will just continue to increase the value of the data that you have for your area.