

The Nonprofit Sector's Impact on Client Voting Behavior *"Detroit, Michigan - Voter Mobilization Experiment"*

Since the early 2000s Detroit, Michigan has been in struggling through a severe economic recession. During this recession it has seen an increase in nonprofit activity statewide, which has helped to support and start revitalizing the city. From 1997-2010 over 10,000 new nonprofit organizations have been incorporated in Michigan (25% increase). Additionally, in this same time period the sector has provided 125,000 jobs (40% increase; 10% MI workforce). This translates to over \$133 billion in revenue each year (85% increase from 2003).

Because of Michigan's expanding nonprofit sector and abundance of low income clients, the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network asked the Michigan Nonprofit Association to participate in a study seeking to document the impact nonprofits have when they talk to their clients and constituents about voting during the 2010 midterm elections.

The Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network seeks to increase voter participation in low income and disadvantaged communities. The organization believes that the best way to do this is through the already established human service organizations in the nonprofit sector. The reasoning is that existing nonprofits easily provide built in contact with underrepresented communities. Further, they are established and trusted messengers in the community. Most importantly, they have the ability to integrate voter participation into ongoing services and activities; rather than waste resources creating new organizations.

The experiment enlisted seven organizations covering a variety of services and purposes (senior service, community health, community action, disability services, and multi purpose community centers). Each organization was assigned a Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network representative who educated staff on how to perform nonpartisan voter engagement activities, where to submit completed voter registration forms, and other logistical details. The organizations chosen all had varying past experience with voter education and mobilization projects.

Each organization was broken up into three groups of clients: (1) control group of 20 clients who received no contact whatsoever about voting; (2) voter registration group of 20 clients that were provided with one contact concerning voter registration assistance; (3) multi contact group of 30 clients who were contacted once about voter registration and then an additional one to three times regarding voter education. These multiple contacts included helping to find polling locations, being given a sample ballot, notification of candidate forums, or being contacted with a reminder to vote. When making any contact each nonprofit integrated the contact into their normal service delivery activities within the organization. At the end of the

election cycle each organization conducted a post election survey with their clients in order to determine whether or not they voted in the elections.

The research resulted in four key findings. First, when a nonprofit made contact with a client concerning voting, the client was more likely to vote. Clients in the control group voted 54% of the time. Clients in the first treatment group who were only provided with voter registration assistance had a 66% vote rate. Clients who received both voter registration assistance and extra voter education contacts had a voter turnout rate of 71%.

Second, the likelihood of voter turnout by nonprofit clients increases at a proportional rate in relation with the nonprofit's level of voter education and registration efforts. A client's probability of voting increased by 9.3% with each additional voting contact from the nonprofit. Increased voter engagement provided by a nonprofit organization correlates with an increasingly higher rate of voter turnout.

Third, the study found that clients were more likely to encourage their family and friends to vote when they were contacted regarding voter education and registration. The rate of clients encouraging their family and friends to vote increased by 4.8% with every extra contact.

Fourth, the two most effective ways to increase voter turnout were new voter registrations (17% more likely) and voting reminders (13% more likely).

For more information regarding this study please see:

<http://www.nonprofitvote.org/research.html>

<http://www.mnaonline.org/factsheetmichigansnonprofitsector.aspx>

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