

Increasing Voter Turnout Using Behavioural Insights

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Executive summary

New Zealand local government elections take place every three years by postal vote. Auckland Council is responsible for ensuring all eligible Aucklanders can participate in the city's elections. With a voter turnout of less than 40 per cent (38.5 per cent in the 2016 Auckland local body elections), the majority of Aucklanders are either not aware of the opportunity to vote, or chose not to participate. For a sustainable democracy, we need to increase voter participation.

This report is a guide for council staff who are tasked with increasing voter turnout. It draws lessons from behaviour change interventions internationally that have proven successful in increasing voter turnout.

Behavioural insights, or behaviour change research, is a field of research that draws upon the disciplines of psychology, economics, health, and marketing. It focuses on using knowledge of the social and environmental drivers of human behaviour to better develop communications campaigns, programmes and policies. In this report we review the behavioural insights literature to reveal a number of ways Auckland Council can increase voter turnout in the 2019 election. The report is structured to provide advice on:

- choosing the best communication channel(s)
- developing messages for maximum effectiveness, and
- encouraging completion of all steps of the local government postal voting process.

Choosing the best communication channel

Voter mobilisation campaigns have typically used a range of communication channels, including in-person canvassing, direct mail, phone calls, emails, Facebook, and text message.

Research shows these communication channels are not all equally effective.

On average, **in-person canvassing** has been found to be the most effective channel – increasing voter turnout by around seven percentage points.

Direct mail has been found to lead to smaller but relatively consistent impacts on turnout. Each piece of mail raises turnout, on average, by three-quarters of a percentage point.

Phone calls have been shown to have low or no impacts on voter turnout, although most studies have been done in an American context where (annoying) telemarketing calls are common. There are some indications that phone calls may be more effective outside America.

Large-scale studies on **email messages** have found them to be generally ineffective.

The impact of **Facebook advertising** has been found to be limited. Where social influence can be successfully harnessed, Facebook has the potential to have small but widespread effects on voter turnout. On the other hand, campaigns that used Facebook to publicise and remind electors of upcoming elections had no effect at all on voter turnout.

Text messages have not been widely studied. The New Zealand Electoral Commission conducted randomised control trials of text message reminders during the 2014 and 2017 elections: one study found an impact of around four percentage point increase in turnout from a reminder text, while the other found no reliable effect. Message content likely played a role in both.

Although there are relative differences between communication channels, the impact on electors is highly dependent on the content and delivery of the messages. For example, although a typical piece of direct mail raises turnout by three quarters of a percentage point per piece of mail, one study found a single postcard containing a potent social pressure message raised turnout by 8.1 percentage points.

Developing messages for maximum effectiveness

Message content is extremely important. Research shows that the following messages are most effective at raising voter turnout:

- **Social pressure** (e.g. social comparison with one's neighbours) and **social norm messages** (i.e. information on what other people are doing) have been found to be one of the most powerful ways of boosting voter turnout.
- Communications that talk about voting as an **identity-relevant behaviour** (e.g. 'importance of being a voter') increase turnout much more than those that talk about voting just as a behaviour people do (e.g. 'importance of voting').
- Messages that **express thanks and gratitude** create positive expectations and feelings of reciprocity, and have been found to significantly boost voter turnout.
- Messages that are framed in terms of **avoiding losses** may resonate more strongly with voters (e.g. "Don't miss out on having your say").

In addition to message content, studies suggest the following as important:

- **Messengers** who are liked and trusted are more likely to be listened to. Demographics are also important: messengers who match the demographic characteristics of electors tend to be more effective.
- Encouraging **public commitments** to vote can help people follow through on their intention to vote. Reminding people of their commitment at a later time has been found to amplify their effect.
- **Making a plan** for when and how to vote is another way of increasing follow through.
- Communications are more effective when their **timing** is matched to when people are most receptive to the message. The first few days after people receive their voting packs is likely a critical period.

Encouraging completion of all steps of the New Zealand postal voting process

In addition to communication channel and message content, there is good reason to believe voter turnout could be increased by tweaking the postal voting materials to make them simpler and easier to navigate.

Behavioural insights shows that stripping out unnecessary 'friction' and effort, and designing forms so they are easy to understand, can significantly boost completion of complex tasks.

The following techniques or tweaks are likely to help voters attend to voting documents and navigate the voting process:

- **Initial attention and interest** can be heightened by adding design features to voting documents, for example by:
 - Personalising forms as much as possible
 - Using handwritten notes to draw in attention
 - Using colour and other design features to direct attention
- Voting documents and candidate information sources should be re-evaluated with the intention of breaking the voting process down into basic steps, and **making each step as simple as possible** for voters.
- A number of nudges could be included in the voting pack to help people **remember to return their voting forms**.

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1.0 Introduction

Local government elections provide an important forum for people to participate in the democratic process and to have a say in how their communities are run. In New Zealand, there is significant scope to boost turnout in local authority elections. Local authority elections turnout has generally been on the decline over the last thirty years. In 2016, turnout appeared to stabilise at 43 per cent, up a percentage point from 2013¹.

Local government elections take place by postal mail every three years, and while eligible individuals are required by law to enrol to vote, voting is not compulsory. While enrolment is handled by the New Zealand Electoral Commission, local authorities are responsible for enabling all eligible voters to participate in elections. The ability of local authorities to enable and encourage eligible voters to vote is therefore critical to sustaining a democratically run local government. The primary way councils enable participation is by running non-partisan voter mobilisation campaigns to increase voter turnout.

This report draws on international best practice in behavioural insights to consider ways that Auckland Council, and other local councils, can increase voter turnout in the 2019 local body elections.

1.1 Local elections – the Auckland context

Voter turnout in Auckland was below the national average at 38.5 per cent in 2016. The profile of voters in Auckland's local elections was determined through survey work carried out prior and post the 2016 elections. This study found that those most likely to have reported that they voted in the 2016 Auckland elections were older (55+ years), male, European, residents of Rodney, North Shore or Orākei, had lived in Auckland for five years or more, had a history of voting generally and/or were ratepayers (homeowners)². Those least likely to have reported voting were younger voters (34 years and under), those who identified as Māori, Samoan and Other Pacific People, and those who had lived in Auckland for less than five years³. This suggests that further work needs to be done to increase the voting turnout amongst younger voters, amongst those that do not own homes and amongst ethnic groups other than European.

Postal voting was introduced in New Zealand as well as in some parts of the United Kingdom and the United States as a means to boost voter turnout⁴. Voting by post is meant to decrease 'transaction costs' for voters by making it more convenient to post a ballot, although, as will be discussed below, it requires voters to remember to return their ballot. While initially postal voting increased turnout in New Zealand, research suggests that more recently, it does not result in increased voting but helps slow down the trend of decline. However, there is some evidence to suggest that voting by mail promote middle class voting

and may have a detrimental effect on voter turnout on less educated voters and those from lower socioeconomic profiles⁵.

Determining effective means to promote voting turnout amongst Aucklanders from a range of ethnicities and countries of origin is particularly crucial in light of the increasing diversity of the cityⁱ. Very little research exists exploring what are effective means to promote migrant and ethnic minority voter turnout in New Zealand. One recent study investigating the relatively low voter turnout in national elections of migrants grouped under the category of 'Asian' explored the way in which migrants from India, China, Cambodia and South Korea perceived voting in elections⁶. The study found that most participants found it easy to enrol to vote and perceived the electoral system to be trustworthy. Furthermore, migrants were grateful to have the right to vote and also often felt motivated to do so out of a sense of duty. However, the study identified two main challenges faced by migrant voters from these countries. The first one was low level of understanding of New Zealand politics and the lack of familiarity with the candidates, the political parties and the electoral system more generally. This stemmed in part from language barriers, particularly for Chinese and South Korean participants, and even more frequently among older aged participants. Many of the study's participants were accessing their news through 'ethnic' press targeting their country or language group, and where there was limited information relevant to voting in New Zealand's elections. Length of residence in New Zealand was also a factor, as people reported that their first few years of settlement in the country were dedicated to practical matters of establishing themselves in their new home.

Dunedin-based research on student voting⁷ has identified a range factors that explain low turnout amongst students. Reasons include a perception that local government elections focus on unimportant issues; a feeling of being uninformed about candidates' stances; an absence of party politics to help with candidate selection; low profile of the election in media that students engaged with; and amongst out-of-town students, a lack of long-term connection with the city.

A thesis examining the political engagement of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand recommends an emphasis on publically funded civic education in schools to promote voting⁸. Generating a sense of civic duty and ensuring that young people are well informed and confident in their abilities to take part in elections through a school-based program would be effective in the author of this study's view, in light of the high proportion of young people amongst those identifying with a Pacific ethnicity in New Zealand.

ⁱ Overseas-born residents made up 39 per cent of the population at the 2013 census, of whom 43 per cent has been in New Zealand for less than 10 years. The largest overseas-born group was from England at 14 per cent, followed by China (13 per cent), India (8 per cent) and Fiji (8 per cent).

1.2 ‘Show your love for Auckland’ campaign

During the 2016 elections, Auckland Council attempted to increase voter turnout through the ‘Show your love for Auckland’ campaign. This involved a range of advertising and information resources (print, digital and radio), some physical ballot boxes and a painted van, dubbed the ‘love bus’. Survey research was carried out to assess the impact of this communications campaign and to explore residents’ attitudes towards voting in the local elections⁹. This study found a high level of awareness amongst residents that elections were taking place, finding 83 per cent of residents were aware of the elections prior to the communications campaign being launched. After the campaign and elections, this proportion raised to 93 per cent of all respondents.

Overall voter turnout in Auckland increased 3.7 percentage points from 34.9 per cent in 2013 to 38.5 per cent in 2016. Voter surveys at the 2016 election indicate this increase may have been higher for groups with traditionally low turnout, such as younger age groups (18-24 years), and Indian and Chinese voters¹⁰. In contrast, however, Māori voters and newer residents to the city reported that they were less likely to have voted as compared to during the 2013 elections. In the future, the success of campaigns such as these may be furthered through the considered application of findings from behavioural insights research.

1.3 What are ‘behavioural insights’?

Behavioural insights, or behaviour change research, is a field of research that draws upon the disciplines of cognitive, behavioural and experimental psychology as well as economics, health, and marketing. At its core, behavioural insights is focused on using knowledge of the social and environmental drivers of human behaviour to better develop communications campaigns, programmes and policies.

The improvements to communication campaigns and other interventions that are suggested by behavioural insights are often referred to as ‘nudges’ in behavioural studies¹¹. These nudges tend to focus on small, cost-effective changes to the way communications are worded or the way systems are designed, without restricting people’s choices or forcing them to behave in a certain way. These often small tweaks to wording and framing can, nevertheless, have significant impacts on behaviour.

Behavioural insights have been widely used by governments around the world, including in the United Kingdom, Europe, United States and Australia¹². In New Zealand, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet includes the concept in their Policy Methods Toolbox, and at least four major central government agencies have recently begun using behavioural insights to shape policy and programme delivery¹³.

1.4 Behavioural insights literature and ‘voter mobilisation’

While the field of behavioural insights covers a range of behaviour, this report focusses primarily on experimental studies that examined techniques to influence voter turnout. Most of what has been published dates to the past 10 years as the field is relatively young. The scope of the review includes primarily studies of non-partisan attempts to boost any level of government elections. Research on candidate campaigns is therefore excluded. When considered compelling and relevant, a small number of studies had been carried out on another topic have been included.

By and large, the studies reviewed are large-scale experiments that make use of random assignment of potential voters to different voter mobilisation messages. Due to the availability of public voting records in America, these studies are able to compare turnout across their different experimental groups. This means that we can be relatively confident in the estimates of changes in voter turnout the studies produce.

There are several limitations to this literature review. When possible, research carried out in the New Zealand context has been reviewed. However, most of the behaviour change research is from the United States and to some extent, the United Kingdom. In addition, the research considered in the report generally addresses ballot box voting while in the New Zealand context, voting is conducted by postal mail. There are relatively few published studies on the impact of various forms of social media such as twitter on voter turnout-platforms that may appeal to younger age groups – but when available, they have been included. Finally, there is little in the published studies that address ways to promote voting behaviours though behaviour insights in multicultural contexts and across a range of ethnic and linguistic groups. These limitations to the available evidence-base need be taken into consideration when translating the findings to the New Zealand context.

1.5 Report aim and structure

This report is a guide for council staff who are tasked with increasing voter turnout. It addresses two core questions:

1. What behaviour change interventions elsewhere have proven to boost voter turnout?
2. What other lessons can we extract from behavioural insights research to increase voter turnout in Auckland?

The main sections cover:

- Which communication channels have been shown to be most effective at increasing voter turnout.
- How messages can be developed for maximum effectiveness
- How Auckland Council’s voting materials can be tweaked and re-designed to encourage completion of all steps of the postal voting process.

2.0 Choosing the best contact channels

There are a range of means of communication, or communication channels, that Auckland Council could use to mobilise voters. This section addresses the available research on the following means of communication:

- face-to-face canvassing
- direct mail
- phone calls
- social media
- e-mail and texts.

Most voter mobilisation campaigns have used some combination of face-to-face canvassing, direct mail, and telephone calls using call centres to get in touch with eligible voters and encourage them to participate. In recent years, social media – such as Facebook – has also played an important role in connecting with potential voters.

A relatively large number of studies have tested the effectiveness of face-to-face, mail and telephone contact methods. The overall finding from these studies is that face-to-face canvassing is the most effective method for increasing voter turnout. One of the first robust studies on voter turnout, conducted in 1998 in the US,¹⁴ showed that face-to-face canvassing increased voter turnout by 8 percentage points, each direct mail letter increased turnout by half a percentage point, and telephone calls had a negligible effect on turnout.

These initial findings have generally been supported by subsequent studies, although more recent research has identified important factors that are likely to influence how effective a given message is.

2.1 Face-to-face canvassing

Following the 1998 study described above, the same authors tested the effect of non-partisan canvassing in six cities with historically low turnout (with rates between 8.2 per cent and 43.3 per cent).¹⁵ This was done by randomly assigning a group of registered voters to receive a face-to-face visit at their homes by a representative from a coalition of nonpartisan student and community organisations who encouraged them to vote. Voter turnout records were used to compare voter turnout of those who had received the visit from a control group who had not in order to determine the effect of canvassing. The average increase in turnout across the sites as a result of face-to-face canvassing was 7.1 percentage points¹⁶.

In 2001, Michelson¹⁷ organised Latino canvassers to mobilise low-turnout Latino farming communities. The canvassing increased turnout amongst Latino voters by 4.7 percentage

points, from 13.8 per cent to 18.5 per cent. The impact on non-Latinos was also positive, but lower, demonstrating the importance of selecting messengers to whom voters can relate and connect. Non-Latino turnout increased from 25.7 per cent to 28.2 per cent.

In 2008, Nickerson¹⁸ randomly assigned households to receive either a door-to-door appeal to vote in the 2008 US primary elections, or to recycle. The voting appeal increased turnout 8.6 percentage points, from 47.7 per cent to 56.3 per cent. Interestingly, the canvassing also had a 'social contagion' effect, leading to a 5.8 percentage point increase in turnout amongst housemates of those who engaged with the canvassing.

Similar effects were found in Sweden,¹⁹ where a partisan door-to-door canvassing campaign raised voter turnout by 3.6 percentage points, with notably larger effects for first-time and occasional voters.

Not all canvassing studies have shown large effects, however. For example, Bennion²⁰ found turnout to be slightly lower in the group that was canvassed (14.9 per cent) than the control (15.2 per cent). Similarly, a partisan canvassing effort for a local candidate reported by Barton and colleagues²¹ showed a negative effect.

Overall, non-partisan voter mobilisation appears to be effective at increasing turnout by up to 9 percentage points. Promisingly, it also appears to have a social contagion effect, increasing turnout amongst people connected to those who were canvassed.

An essential aspect of face-to-face canvassing is *how* the message to vote is delivered. We discuss important aspects of message content and delivery in Section 3.0.

2.2 Direct mail

A range of studies have tested the impact of voter mobilisation campaigns delivered via posted mail. While the effects have varied, a meta-analysis of 85 voter mobilisation studies²² showed that overall, each piece of mail produces an average increase in voter turnout of less than one percentage point.

Not all pieces of mail have the same impact, however, with a number of evaluated campaigns resulting in no appreciable increase in voter turnout. One important finding from this meta-analysis is that, as with in-person canvassing – message content is crucial.

Messages that highlight social pressure to vote – either through comparisons of an individual's past voting behaviour with neighbours, or through highlighting neighbourhood norms for voting – or express gratitude for voting and contributing to democracy, tend to produce stronger effects. A review of studies that tested social pressure or gratitude

messages in direct mail campaigns found they increased turnout on average by around 2.5 percentage points.²³

These and other important aspects of message content are discussed in more detail in Section 3.0.

2.3 Phone calls

The evidence from (mostly American) studies that have investigated the impact of calls from commercial call centres to eligible voters, mostly in their homes shows that phone calls are relatively ineffectual at raising voter turnout.

Arceneaux, Gerber and Green,²⁴ for instance, called 60,000 people encouraging them to vote. The result was an increase in turnout of less than half a percentage point amongst those called. Similarly low effects were found in two large non-partisan voter mobilisation studies conducted in 2004, which produced close to no increase in turnout.²⁵ A number of additional American studies have shown similar small effects.²⁶

A small number of studies in the UK, however, have shown larger effects of phone calls, perhaps due to a lower general level of telemarketing than in the US. John and Brannan,²⁷ for instance, found telephone contact increased voter turnout by 15.5 per cent compared to a control group. No studies that we are aware of have been conducted in New Zealand, but it is possible that New Zealand's relatively low level of telemarketing could result in greater effectiveness of this communication channel.

Despite the relatively low effectiveness of American phone canvassing overall, subsequent research has identified conditions under which phone calls might be more effective. These studies have found that the timing and content of the messages can be important. Overall:

- More chatty phone calls tend to be more effective
- Use of certain message content – such as expressions of gratitude, encouraging recipients to actively commit to vote, and highlighting others' pro-voting behaviour – can result in greater effectiveness.
- Phone calls that are placed closer to the election tend to be more effective, indicating timing is important.

These and other important aspects of message content are discussed in Section 3.0.

2.4 Social media

Social media refers to websites and digital applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Comparatively little research has investigated the impact of social media campaigns on voter turnout. This is likely because of the relative novelty of many social media platforms and because it is difficult to design research which will identify clear links between social media exposure with publically accessible voting records.

One study published in Nature randomly assigned 61 million Facebook users to one of three conditions at the top of their News Feed during the 2010 US congressional elections:

- Informational message: an informational message encouraging the user to vote, a link to finding local polling places, a clickable button reading 'I Voted', a counter indicating how many other Facebook users had previously reported voting;
- Social message: the same informational message described above as well as displaying up to six small randomly selected 'profile pictures' of the user's Facebook friends who had already clicked the I Voted button;
- or a control condition (no message).²⁸



Figure 1: Informational and social Facebook messages

The study found that, while the informational message had no impact on voter turnout, people who received the social message were:

- 0.39 per cent more likely to vote compared to the control and informational message groups.

- 2.08 per cent more likely to click “I voted” to the informational message group.
- 0.26 per cent more likely to click the polling-place information link to the informational message group.

The study also found that voting behaviour spread through people’s social networks. The researchers found, that for every close friend who saw the ‘social’ message, users were 0.22 per cent more likely to vote, 0.10 per cent more likely to click “I voted” and 0.01 per cent more likely to click the polling-place information link.

The authors acknowledge the overall percentages are small, but that the impact of even a small percentage change is significant in light of the extremely widespread use of Facebook, such that a small per cent translates into a large number of people.

The social message involving displaying pictures of the user’s Facebook friend who had previously reported voting involved custom programming and is unlikely to be easily replicated by non-Facebook researchers. Facebook ads are seen as a cost-effective way of reaching a wide range of people, however, and it is possible that the ‘like’ functionality might approximate the social condition in the study above (although two studies below which indicate the ‘like’ function is not as powerful).

Two large-scale studies²⁹ have found Facebook ads to be ineffective at influencing voter turnout. In the first, Facebook users were shown a countdown timer to the election along with names of friends who had liked the countdown. Voting records later revealed that turnout amongst those who received the ads was 56.5 per cent, exactly the same as the control group. In a follow-up study in the subsequent election, turnout among those who received the ads had turnout that was slightly lower than the control group.

The implication of these findings is that, as with other communication channels, information content is crucial. Pure information and reminders are unlikely to shift behaviour – messages need to appeal to and motivate voters.

2.5 Email and text message

Emails are widely used to encourage and remind people who have signed up to mailing lists to vote. A study consisting of thirteen field experiments on 232,716 subjects found that email campaigns were ineffective at improving voter registration and turnout³⁰.

The use of mobile text messages has been less studied. In New Zealand, a randomised control trial tested sending a ‘thanks and reminder’ text to people who had used a text service to enrol (see the effect of gratitude in Section 3.1.3).³¹ Those who received a message on the day of the 2008 general election had 4.7 percentage point turnout than

those who didn't receive a message (75.5 per cent vs 70.8 per cent, respectively). The reminders appeared to have stronger effects for those living in sparsely populated areas, those who had recently enrolled to vote, and for those living in areas with a high percentage of Māori residents.

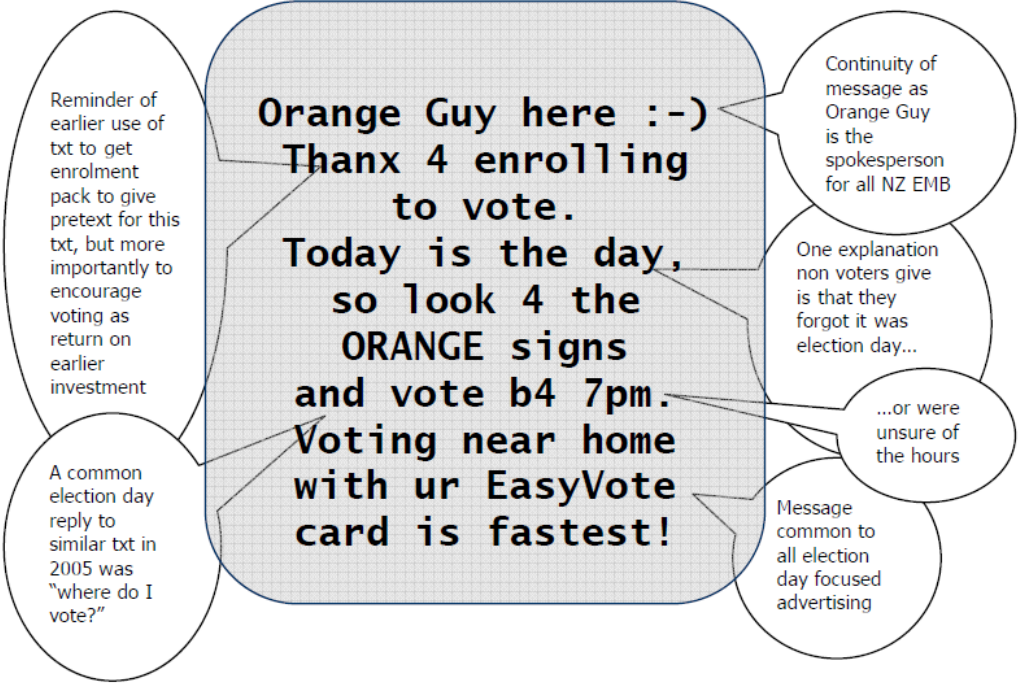


Figure 2. Electoral Commission reminder text wording, 2008.

Another New Zealand-based study tested the impact of sending young (< 21 years of age), newly enrolled voters up to three text messages around the 2005 general election.³² The study found, somewhat confusingly, that those who received one text had a 1.6 percentage point increase in turnout compared to the control group, but those who received all three had turnout that was 0.2 percentage points less than the control. It is possible that the message content did not connect with the target audience – the final, election-day message, for example was:

Tick tick... dingaling! It's election day! Polls R open NOW til 7. So head 2 a polling place & get voting! U'll be in & out in 2 ticks! :-) Orange Elections Guy

Another possibility is that the recipients felt that they were being harassed after receiving three text messages.

2.6 Discussion

The overall findings of the voter mobilisation research are clear: in-person canvassing is the most effective way of increasing voter turnout, with direct mail campaigns having smaller but notable impacts on turnout.

A number of studies have shown phone calls to be ineffective, indicating this is unlikely to be a cost-effective method of increasing voter turnout.

Much of this research is conducted in America, however, and it is unclear what relative impacts these methods are likely to have in relation to New Zealand local government elections.

Other technologies such as email, text messages and Facebook ads have been found to have variable effectiveness. Plain awareness-raising messages tend to have no measurable impact on voter turnout, although there is evidence that more sophisticated messaging may produce meaningful increases in turnout.

Key findings

- Focus primarily on face-to-face canvassing and direct mail.
- Other methods such as Facebook ads and text messages might be used to complement the core campaign, but the content of these messages is important.
- Consider the trade-offs between cost and scale. The relative balance of communication channels used will be driven by budget and other administrative considerations.
- For all channels used, message content and delivery is crucial. These are discussed in the following section.

3.0 Develop messages for maximum effectiveness

A number of the studies described in the previous section found that, in addition to communication channel, message content has a significant impact on voter turnout.

Most studies, for instance, have found that simple informational messages or election countdowns are ineffective at increasing voter turnout. Instead, messages need to make use of motivating and emotionally engaging content and delivery methods.

The following sections summarise ways to increase people's motivation to vote and how to help them follow through with their intentions.

The following types of messages have been shown to be particularly effective:

- messages that exert social influence;
- messages that communicate social norms;
- messages that highlight people's 'voter identity';
- messages that express gratitude; and
- messages that trigger a sense of loss aversion

These message types are discussed in more detail below.

3.1.1 Social influence

A large number of voter mobilisation studies have found that using social influence is a potent way to increase turnout.

It has already been shown that messages appearing on someone's Facebook feed only influence voting behaviour when they make use of explicitly social messages, and that the effect of door-to-door canvassing spreads to others living in the same household as those canvassed.

Other studies have focused on how direct mail and door-to-door canvassing messages can use social influence to boost voter turnout. These have tended to use either social pressure messages, or social norm messages.

One of these experiments tested sending people one of four types of postcards designed to increase the degree of social pressure to vote experienced by the individual receiving them by referring to voting as a 'civic duty':

- 'Civic Duty' – this baseline postcard simply told households to "Remember your rights and responsibilities as a citizen. Remember to vote.";

- ‘You are being studied’ postcard – this second version of the card had a similar message but added a mild form of social pressure by stating that the household’s voting behaviour was being monitored as part of an academic study;
- ‘Self’ postcard – this version of the card contained the messages printed on the first two versions as well as information on their and their household members’ voting record;
- ‘Neighbours’ postcard – this one contained all of the above and a voting record of others in their neighbourhood.³³

Compared to a control group, the postcard containing an appeal to civic duty raised voter turnout by 1.8 percentage points; the second containing a civic duty appeal and a note people were being monitored increased turnout by 2.5 percentage points; the third postcard containing the household’s voting record increased voter turnout by 4.9 percentage points; and the final postcard which compared the household members’ voting records to those of neighbours increased turnout by 8.1 percentage point. This final, most effective postcard is pictured below.

3 0 4 2 3 - 3 ||| ||| ||| |||
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Dear Registered Voter:

WHAT IF YOUR NEIGHBORS KNEW WHETHER YOU VOTED?

Why do so many people fail to vote? We’ve been talking about the problem for years, but it only seems to get worse. This year, we’re taking a new approach. We’re sending this mailing to you and your neighbors to publicize who does and does not vote.

The chart shows the names of some of your neighbors, showing which have voted in the past. After the August 8 election, we intend to mail an updated chart. You and your neighbors will all know who voted and who did not.

DO YOUR CIVIC DUTY — VOTE!

MAPLE DR	Aug 04	Nov 04	Aug 06
9995 JOSEPH JAMES SMITH	Voted	Voted	_____
9995 JENNIFER KAY SMITH		Voted	_____
9997 RICHARD B JACKSON		Voted	_____
9999 KATHY MARIE JACKSON		Voted	_____
9999 BRIAN JOSEPH JACKSON		Voted	_____
9991 JENNIFER KAY THOMPSON		Voted	_____
9991 BOB R THOMPSON		Voted	_____
9993 BILL S SMITH			_____
9989 WILLIAM LUKE CASPER		Voted	_____
9989 JENNIFER SUE CASPER		Voted	_____
9987 MARIA S JOHNSON	Voted	Voted	_____
9987 TOM JACK JOHNSON	Voted	Voted	_____
9987 RICHARD TOM JOHNSON		Voted	_____
9985 ROSEMARY S SUE		Voted	_____
9985 KATHRYN L SUE		Voted	_____
9985 HOWARD BEN SUE		Voted	_____
9983 NATHAN CHAD BERG		Voted	_____
9983 CARRIE ANN BERG		Voted	_____
9981 EARL JOEL SMITH			_____
9979 DEBORAH KAY WAYNE		Voted	_____
9979 JOEL R WAYNE		Voted	_____

Figure 3. Social pressure postcard

The authors of the study above noted, however, that some residents expressed outrage at their households' and neighbours' voting records being used in this way.

Subsequent studies have trialled different ways of inducing social pressure to vote while minimising negative reactions, often by positively framing social comparisons, such as developing 'honour rolls'. These studies have tended to support the finding that 'social' mailings increase turnout by around 5 percentage points.

Key findings

- Social pressure and social comparison is one of the most effective ways of increasing voter turnout.
- Auckland-specific ways of inducing social pressure to vote could be explored, including whether it is possible to trial reporting to voters whether they voted or not in past elections.
- Social pressure should be framed positively (e.g. honour rolls) to avoid negative reactions.

3.1.2 Social norms

One of the most important ways to influence behaviour is through social norms³⁴. A large number of non-voting studies have shown that highlighting that others perform a behaviour increases the likelihood that an individual will perform the behaviour too.³⁵

For example, a randomised natural field experiment conducted in the United States found that a letter to residential utility users that compared their electricity usage to that of their neighbours led to an overall two percentage decrease in consumption³⁶. The impact of the letter was particularly high for households in higher income deciles, (6.3 per cent decrease in consumption) compared to those in the lowest decile (0.3 per cent decrease)³⁷. The effect of norms is most potent when information is locally relevant and personalised to an individual's circumstances.

In the voting context this would involve highlighting positive collective behaviours around voting, such as turnout, enrolment, or general attitudes toward voting.

One challenge is that people are influenced by negative norms as well as positive – if a negative norm exists, such as low voter turnout, this should not be highlighted to voters.

If social norm messages about turnout are to be used to mobilise voters in the 2019 local government elections, Auckland Council may wish to highlight 2017 general election turnout statistics (e.g. "8 out of 10 people voted in the most recent 2017 election"), or to focus on enrolment rates (e.g. "9 out of 10 eligible voters in your suburb are enrolled and ready to vote").

Key findings

- Social norms can have a powerful impact on behaviour by setting up expectations of what behaviour is socially desired.
- Consider what positive social norms can be highlighted in relation to voting behaviour in Auckland (e.g. enrolment, attitudes toward voting, turnout in the most recent general election).
- Do not mention or highlight the relatively low turnout in local government elections.

3.1.3 Voting and personal identity

Psychological studies suggest that people like to view themselves in a positive light as moral, competent and contributing members of society and therefore as deserving of social approval. Voting is an example of ‘prosocial’ behaviour, that is, an activity that is widely viewed as positive for society but with a cost to the individual. As a result, voting is an opportunity for individuals to be a ‘good’ citizen and contribute to the functioning of democratic life³⁸.

Framing voting as an important and socially desirable expression of the self – rather than just another behaviour that people do – might increase people’s likelihood of voting.

Three studies conducted by Bryan and colleagues³⁹ showed exactly this. Members of the public were asked to complete one of two surveys, one where voting was referred to as a self-relevant behaviour (e.g. “How important is it to you to *be a voter* in the upcoming election?” [*our emphasis*]) or one where voting was referred to simply as a behaviour that the respondent could do (e.g. “How important is it to you to *vote* in the upcoming election?”).

The subtle difference in wording changed how people viewed voting. Compared to those who were asked whether they would vote, people who were asked about ‘being a voter’ expressed greater interest in registering to vote, and were more likely to actually vote in US statewide elections. The authors found, in two different elections, that asking how important ‘being a voter’ was on the morning of or day before an election increased actual voter turnout by 13.7 and 10.9 percentage points, respectively⁴⁰.

A New Zealand example of using identity is Otago University Students’ Association’s 2016 ‘Be a voter’ campaign designed to improve young people’s turnout for the Dunedin local government elections. This campaign encouraged students enrol to vote and to commit to ‘being a voter’.⁴¹ Although the organisers of the campaign were unable to track the causal impact on youth voter turnout, overall turnout across Dunedin increased from 47 per cent in 2007 to 53 per cent in 2010.

In addition to the effect of framing voting as an expression of the self, it is likely that completing the survey itself had some impact on voting by acting as a commitment device. There is research that shows that people are more likely to follow through on a behaviour after making a public commitment to complete it. See Section 3.2.1 for more information.

Key findings

- Consider framing voting as an important enactment of personal identity (e.g. “being a good voter”).
- Any in-person canvassing, direct mail or social media campaign should include an opportunity for recipients to think about and/or state how important it is to them to be a good voter or to make a commitment to being a good voter.

3.1.4 Express thanks

Social psychology research has found that people have a high need for reciprocity and tend to feel obligated to return a favour, especially when it is personalised and unexpected⁴². Feelings of reciprocity commonly arise in response to gifts or assistance from others, but can also be elicited in response to expressions of gratitude. A study based on three different voting experiments conducted in the United States drew the following conclusion: ‘voting may be viewed as a thankless job, but thanking voters evidently makes a surprisingly big difference’⁴³.

The field experiments tested the impact of contacting potential voters by post, thanking them either for participating in previous elections or making voting a priority, and reminding them of the date of the next election. The study found that both personalised and generic thank you mailer (quoted below) increased turnout by around the same amount – 3.1 percentage points in the case of the generic mailer. The magnitude of this impact is notably higher than other studies, which have shown one piece of direct mail typically increases turnout by under one percentage point (see Section 2.2).

THANK YOU!

Our democracy depends on people like you paying attention to politics and getting involved in the political process. We appreciate the fact that you make this a priority.

We also remind you that the primary elections in Georgia will take place on

Tuesday, July 20, 2010. *You are eligible to vote.*

Other, non-voting studies have explored how sweets or small gifts can encourage people’s innate sense of reciprocity. For example, one trial to encourage staff members to donate a day’s salary to charity found offering sweets at the same time as asking for a donation increased the percentage of staff who donated a day from 5 per cent to 11 per cent. When a personalised email was sent with the sweets, this proportion increased to 17 per cent.

While it would inappropriate for Auckland Council to provide tangible gifts in exchange for voting, small tokens of recognition of residents' civic behaviour might be appropriate (e.g. 'Thanks for being a voter' stickers).

Key findings

- Include an expression of gratitude in communications
- Where possible, connect this message of thanks to an earlier pledge to vote to enhance the pledges effectiveness.
- Consider how small tokens of appreciation can be used to thank people for their anticipated civic participation.

3.1.5 Loss aversion

According to 'Nudge' theorists Thaler and Sunstein, there is a general tendency toward "loss aversion" – people prefer to avoid losing something more than they prefer gaining the same thing.⁴⁴

Accordingly, messages that are framed in a way that emphasise avoiding potential losses tend to be more influential than messages that highlight potential gains. One study on Danish voters⁴⁵ suggests that mailed letters to prospective voters in European elections were slightly more effective when framed as duty-framed-as-loss was included in the message ("Do not let others decide your everyday – vote") in comparison to other messages. More broadly, non-voting behaviour examples include smoking cessation campaigns that emphasise the number of years of life *lost* to smoking reduce smoking more effectively than those that trumpet years *gained* by quitting⁴⁶. Also, fines are found to be more effective than financial rewards in changing how people behave⁴⁷.

Key findings

- Consider how messages can make use of loss-aversion, or fear of missing out, to motivate voters (e.g. "Don't miss out on having your say", "Make sure the right people represent you")

3.2 Ways to encourage follow-through

While most people intend to vote, many end up not following through on this intention. Research shows that there are ways to help people follow through and perform their desired behaviour. Two techniques are discussed here:

- making a commitment to vote, and
- making a plan.

3.2.1 Making a commitment

Available research shows that one way to help eligible voters to follow through on their intentions is by making a public commitment. Voluntary public commitments create accountability and act as a form of social pressure, and research shows they have a reliable positive impact on behaviour across a range of dimensions.⁴⁸

One New Zealand example of this approach is the strategy undertaken by RockEnrol, a non-partisan organisation which is modelled on the Rock the Vote organisation in the United States.⁴⁹ RockEnrol targeted younger voters by organising events and parties where entrance tickets were given to those who were enrolled to vote and who had made a pledge to vote in the 2014 general election. A pledge involved filling out an online or paper form with personal contact details and ticking a tick box that said, "I promise to vote in the 2014 general election". In the week leading up to the election, a RockEnrol volunteer would contact the young person to ensure they had the relevant details they needed to get to the polls and vote. According to RockEnrol, this resulted in an 11 per cent increase in youth turnout, although some young people did not understand the voting pledge and this strategy was dropped in the 2017 campaign.

Another example, already mentioned in Section 3.1.3, is the Otago University Students' Association 'Be a voter' campaign. This campaign encouraged students to make a written commitment to 'be a voter' and to vote in the upcoming Dunedin City Council elections.

The Environmental Voter Project in the United States involved face-to-face contact with people to encourage them to make a commitment to vote. Ten per cent of people canvassed agreed to sign a "pledge to vote" which was mailed back to them a week before the election. This method (along with accompanying personalised reminders) resulted in those who signed the pledge having 12.1 per cent higher turnout than comparable voters who didn't sign the pledge.⁵⁰

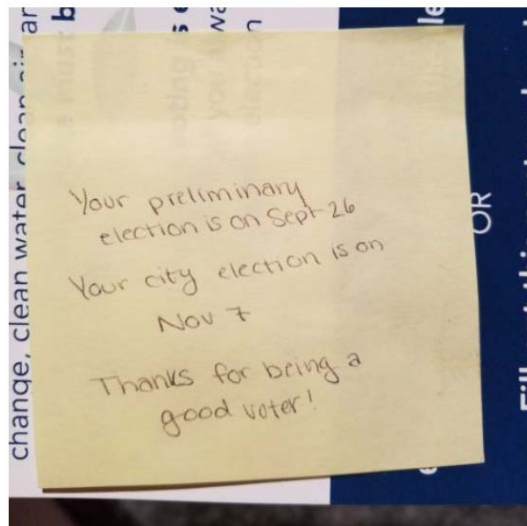
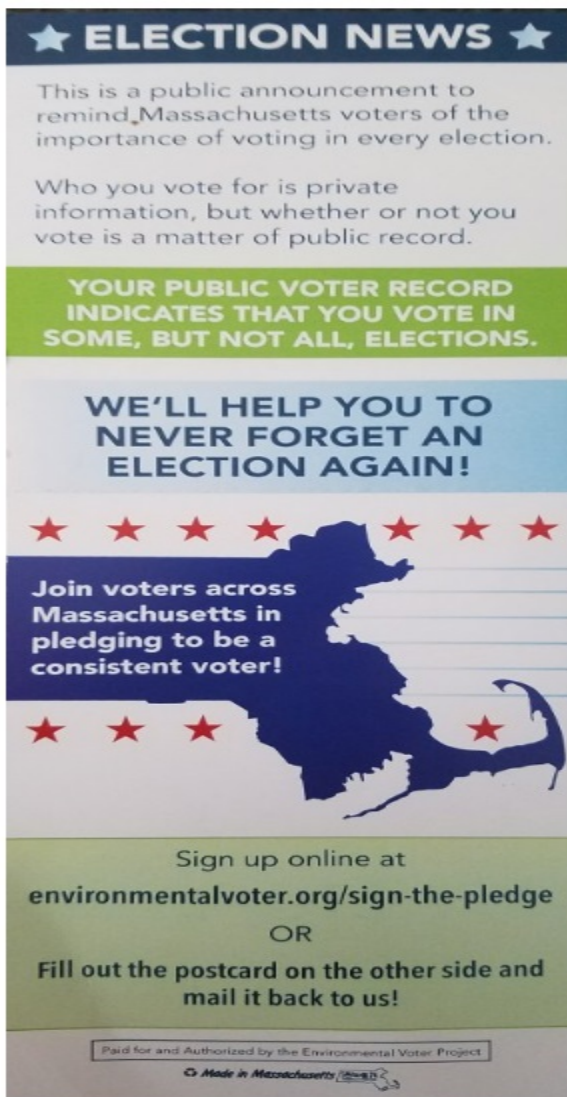


Figure 4: Pledge cards used in the Environmental Voter Project ⁵¹

Some commitments are more subtle. Voter surveys, for instance, often ask individuals if they intend to vote, and the majority of respondents say they will. Providing an affirmative answer to such a question – even on an innocuous survey – has actually been found to increase voter turnout. This finding has become known as the ‘self-prophecy’ effect (i.e. making a prophecy about one’s own future behaviour increases the likelihood of that behaviour occurring), and is likely driven by a psychological need to be consistent with previous statements. Studies suggest self-prophecy can create a small boost in voter turnout of around 1-2 percentage points.⁵²

Following up on commitments may strengthen their impact. For example, one American study found that although an initial phone call urging people to vote did not impact turnout on its own, voter turnout was increased when people who had previously said they would vote

were called back and asked if they could still be counted on to vote.⁵³ This is discussed more in Section 3.4 on the importance of timing reminders.

Key findings

- Consider how commitments or pledges – even subtle ones – can be incorporated into voter engagement activities. Where possible, design commitments to be social, public and voluntary. Public commitments are also likely to influence others in a person’s social network (see Section 3.1.1).
- Where possible, follow up and remind people of their commitments close to the election.

3.2.2 Making a plan

One way to strengthen the effect of commitment described in the previous section is to work with people to make a plan for how they will successfully complete a desired behaviour.

Research suggests getting people to visualise and plan their actions in advance helps them achieve their goals, particularly if the plan is concrete and specific.⁵⁴ The act of pre-planning can counteract the risk that people might forget, especially when the plan is linked to a tangible object that may jog somebody’s memory. It also helps people to visualise and overcome barriers in advance. As such, plan-making is a useful tool to encourage voting.

Plan-making has been used to successfully boost voter turnout in Pennsylvania. Eligible voters were phoned and asked if they intended to vote, and then were asked three questions to help them plan how and when they would do so (‘What time will you vote?’, ‘Where will you be coming from?’ and ‘What will you be doing beforehand?’). The questions boosted turnout by 4.1 per cent overall, with turnout increasing by 9.1 percentage points for people who lived in households with only one eligible voter.⁵⁵

This could assist turnout in Auckland as research indicates people without a partner are less likely to vote in Auckland Council elections.⁵⁶ Analysis of a representative sample of Auckland’s eligible voters from the 2013 General Social Survey revealed that those with a partner were 20 per cent more likely to vote than those without a partner⁵⁷. Plan-making could also assist other non-voters, for example the people who reported they simply missed the deadline, or were away from home over the voting period.⁵⁸

People may be assisted in planning how they will return their completed voting papers. People use postal mail with decreasing frequency and therefore may benefit from guidance in locating and remembering where their closest postal box is.

An example postcard from the Denver Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), encouraging people to renew their vehicle licence online shows how communication material can help people to plan:

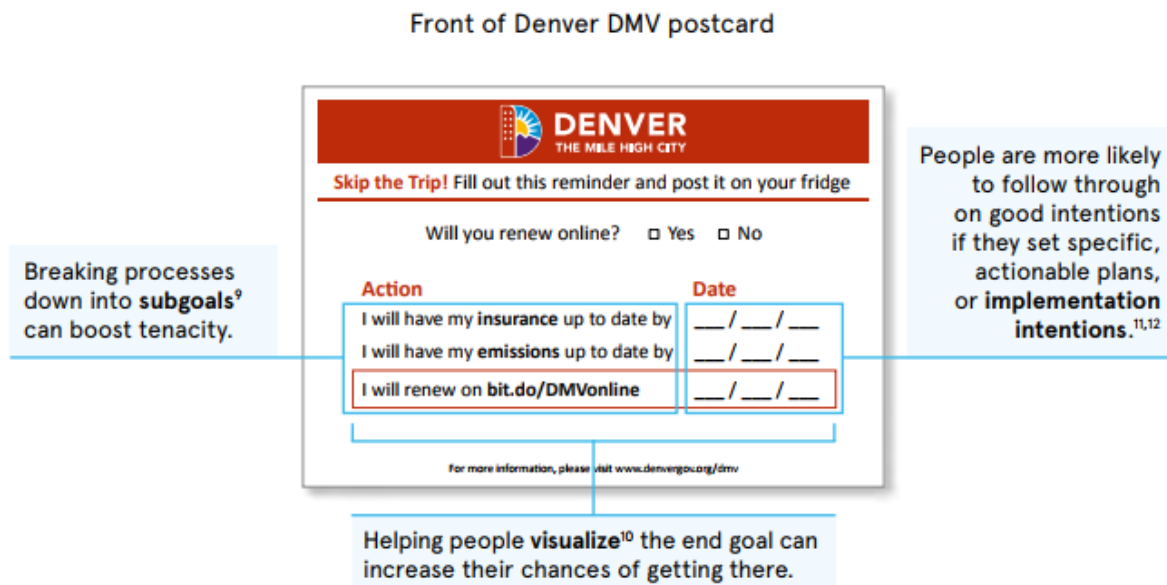


Figure 5. Example DMV online licensing plan making. Source: *Behavioural Insights for Cities*⁵⁹

Key findings

- Encourage people to make a specific plan of when and where they will vote, and how they will successfully post their voting paper.
- Help people plot their route to the nearest post-box or ballot box.
- Consider linking the plan to a physical object that can act as a reminder, such as a post-it note, to jog people's memories.
- Target people who are less likely to have made plans already or who are less likely to be reminded naturally by others.

3.3 Choose the right messenger

A range of studies have shown that messages are more powerful when they come from friends, flatmates, and family members. For example, in Section 2.4 we discussed a study testing different banners on Facebook that encouraged people to vote. One banner contained pictures of friends who had already clicked an "I voted" button on Facebook. The study found that the likelihood an individual would vote increased each time one of their close friends saw the banner in their own Facebook feed. Similarly, in Section 2.1 we reviewed a study that found significant increases in turnout amongst the housemates of people who were canvassed.

Messages from friends and people that are known to the recipient are very influential. In addition, individuals are more likely to be influenced by others if they perceive them to be similar to themselves. In America, studies show the impact of door-to-door canvassing is boosted when canvassers are like the people they are talking to (e.g. Latino canvassers for Latino voters).⁶⁰ This is consistent with other research that says interventions can be more effective when there are demographic similarities between messenger and recipient.⁶¹

Research also indicates that American voters responded better to letters in professional and 'less shiny' envelopes, and to emails and text messages with sombre-sounding 'from' fields, such as 'Election Centre'.⁶² This shows that credible messengers come in many forms.

In New Zealand, the Electoral Commission has attempted to make the 'Orange Guy' their broadly recognised and trusted mascot. The Electoral Commission has subsequently used the Orange Guy in voter mobilisation campaigns for general elections in an attempt to draw on this recognition.⁶³



Figure 6. Example of Orange Guy from Electoral Commission website

Key findings

- Ensure messengers are likable, credible, and respected.
- Where possible, use messengers with demographic similarities to the intended recipients.
- Design messages that can be spread to close friends and family over social media.

3.4 The importance of timing

Research shows that timing of messages matters – when someone receives information can have a big impact on whether they act on it. For instance, a range of studies have shown that people tend to be more receptive to changing their behaviour when going through certain life changes (e.g. marriage, moving house, starting a new job).⁶⁴ Depending on the behaviour, the time of the day or day of the week a message is delivered is often also important.

For example, one study found that online loan repayment reminders in Kenya tended to be more effective when they were sent in the evening⁶⁵. Similarly, the UK Financial Conduct Authority experimented with timing when encouraging consumers to switch to savings accounts with higher interest rates.⁶⁶ Other trials have been found to be more effective when coordinated with public events or holidays.⁶⁷

Auckland Council voter surveys suggest that the first three days after a person receives their voting paper are critical. In 2016, approximately two thirds of self-reported voters sent their voting papers back within this period.⁶⁸ Interventions aiming to increase voter turnout should therefore focus on the weeks immediately prior to the voting period and the first few days after receiving the voting packs.

Well timed election reminders might have a powerful effect. We have already discussed the impact of well-timed reminder text messages in Section 2.5, where the Electoral Commission sent text messages to selected voters between 10am and midday on election day, thanking them for enrolling and reminding them it was election day. The recipients had a 4.7 per cent higher turnout rate compared to people who did not receive the text message.⁶⁹

Not all reminders have been found to be as effective in encouraging voting, however. Gerber and Green⁷⁰ review multiple studies and find that plain informational reminders about the date of an upcoming election typically have no effect on voter turnout.

Timing should therefore be considered a way to enhance already effective messages (i.e. those that express thanks, that induce social pressure, that highlight voter identity etc.), rather than an effective technique in and of itself.

Key findings

- Deliver key messages as close to the election period as possible, particularly within the first three days of receiving voting packs.
- Consider whether certain times of the day or days of the week might be more effective for different communications.

4.0 Encourage completion of all steps of the postal voting process

Previous sections in this report have covered the most effective communication channels and how messages can be designed and delivered to maximise voter turnout.

Channel and message content are highly relevant for designing public voter mobilisation campaigns, however there are many other factors that are likely to influence whether someone votes in New Zealand local government elections. Many of these factors are related to the postal voting process and the requirements for eligible voters to open, read and return their postal vote.

Behavioural insights can potentially inform how the postal voting materials can be changed in order to effectively nudge people to successfully complete all voting steps.

Opening, reading and understanding local government voting documents requires sustained attention, an ability to read and proficiency in the English language. In this section we discuss how behavioural insights can help. We cover:

- how to attract enough initial attention and interest so people open envelopes and read the contents,
- the importance of designing voting documents increase ease, and
- how to encourage people to return their ballot paper.

4.1 Attract attention and interest

Before completing voting documents, people need to open the voting pack and pay attention to it. Behavioural insights studies have tested a number of different ways of attracting attention and interest. This research has found the following are effective ways of attracting attention:

- Personalisation
- Hand-written notes
- Colour.

4.1.1 Personalisation

One of the most effective ways to attract attention is through personalisation. People are more likely to pay attention to documents and messages that are personalised to them. Personalisation is about crafting a message so it feels like it is directly at someone personally. Most often this is achieved by including some personal information, such as someone's name, address, or reference to an meaningful group to which the person belongs.

Personalising messages to attract attention has been successfully used in a number of overseas interventions. For example, previous research has found sending people their own voting history with a letter urging them to vote boosted voter turnout by 4.9 percentage points (see Section 3.1.1 for more information on this study).

Images can also be used to personalise communication materials. For example, the British Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency sent letters to owners of untaxed cars, telling them they would lose their vehicles if they didn't pay the tax on their cars. The most effective letters included an image of the vehicle in question, which increased relicensing rates by nine per cent compared to the control.⁷¹

Key findings

- Personalise all communications where possible.
- Address people by name, or tailor the content to specific groups of people (e.g. by street, suburb or other group membership). Other ways include using images that are relevant to individuals.
- Including reference to people's voting history has been shown to have a powerful impact on subsequent turnout.

4.1.2 Hand-written notes

One common technique used to attract attention is to use handwritten notes in communications. We've already seen the use of handwritten post-it notes by the Environmental Voter Project, which along with eliciting a commitment to vote, increased voter turnout by 12.1 percentage points.

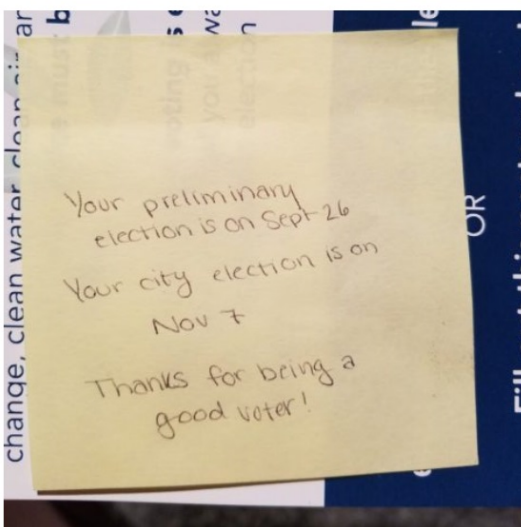


Figure 7. Handwritten note used by the Environmental Voter Project

Two additional examples show that placing handwritten notes on or inside envelopes can dramatically increase the likelihood of people opening and responding to their mail.

In one trial, the UK Behavioural Insights Team tested the effect of addressing a handwritten note on a city services bill: “John, you really need to read this.” They found that receiving a letter with a handwritten note on the outside increased the likelihood of a customer making a payment by 34.2 percentage points compared to a control group.⁷²

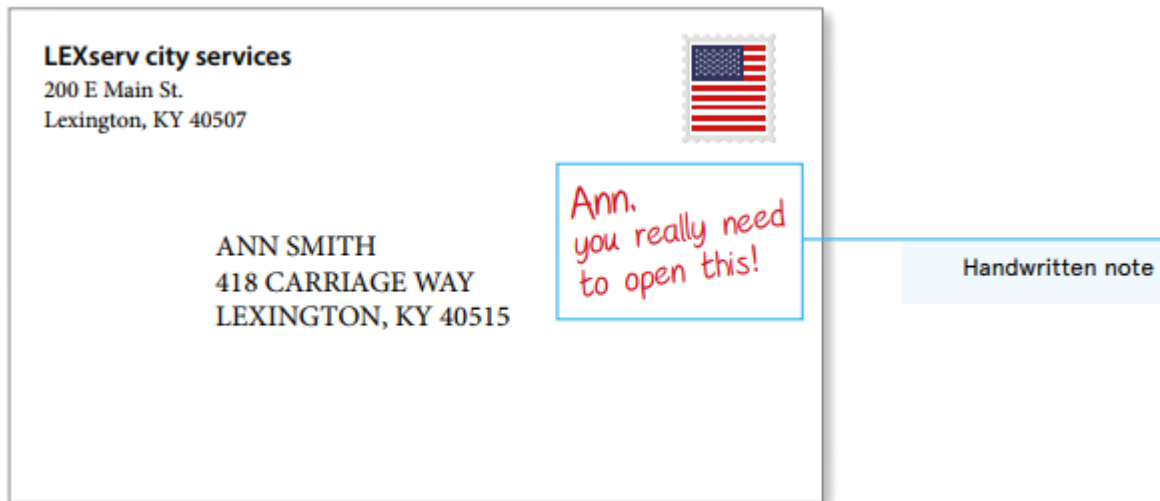


Figure 8. Handwritten note used written on Lexington city services bill envelope⁷³

The Irish Revenue Agency found a similar effect. Placing a handwritten note on a small and medium business survey almost doubled response rates: from 19.2 per cent to 36.0 per cent.⁷⁴

The researchers above found that one person could write on around 200 envelopes an hour. It may be possible to scale this technique by using a *printing font* that mimics a handwritten note.

Key finding

- Consider how hand-written notes can be placed on or in envelopes, encouraging people to open and pay attention to the contents.

4.1.3 Colour

Colour is an important design feature that can be used to direct people’s attention to important information. In a vehicle relicensing trial, the Ontario Government sent car owners a letter encouraging them to renew their vehicle licence online. They discovered that making the information about the web address more obvious (by displaying it against a blue background colour) increased re-licensing rates by 1.3 per cent. This increase was larger

when the colour effect was combined with other behavioural insights strategies such as framing letters around the potential losses of not renewing online (see Section 3.1.5 for a discussion of loss aversion).⁷⁵

Key finding

- Use colour and design to highlight key points and make communications more vivid.

4.2 Designing voting documents to make voting easier

The harder something is to do, the less likely people are to do it.⁷⁶

It takes effort, thought and consideration for an individual to select their preferred candidate(s). This effort will always exist as it is a necessary requirement to engage with the democratic system. In addition, however, electors are also likely to be experiencing some amount of *unnecessary* effort, or ‘friction’ associated with the design of the voting documents.

For some people, this additional friction of having to understand complicated documents will be enough to tip them over from being voters to non-voters.

Indeed, many non-voters in Auckland reported they didn’t vote in 2016 because it was “too much effort to select the candidate” (10 per cent) or because they couldn’t “work out who to vote for” (16 per cent). A large percentage faced issues accessing or understanding candidate information, with many saying they didn’t vote because they didn’t know anything about the candidates (25 per cent) or enough about their policies (22 per cent).⁷⁷ This shows many Aucklanders find the process too difficult and struggle to select potential representatives.

Providing clearer, more accessible and compelling voting forms and candidate information is likely to reduce the number of people who end up not voting due to the effort required.

Evidence suggests even small reductions in effort can have dramatic effects. For example, in working with the British revenue and customs agency, HMRC, the UK Behavioural Insights Team found that making the process of responding marginally easier – by directing people straight to a form rather than to a webpage that links to the form – increased response rates by 22 percentage points.⁷⁸

The *Show your Love* information website was a significant attempt in 2016 to provide clear information on the voting process and candidates. Auckland Council should build on the successes of the 2016 election by further developing clear, simple candidate information, and clearly integrating this information with other steps in the voting process.

Nudge⁷⁹ suggests a process of breaking down complex tasks into their more-simple constituent steps and considering how information is presented at each step to help people more easily understand what is required, and how each step can be seamlessly linked together.

In the case of Auckland local government elections, a user-centred design approach could be taken to re-evaluate all steps of the voting process and to reconsider how the process can be made easier at each step and how each step can be clearly linked for voters.

Key findings

- Consider simplifying language in voting documents
- Consider how content can be simplified and prioritised
 - Ensure the main message is clear, and quickly presented
 - Strip away unnecessary information
 - Use images and colour to communicate information
- Consider voting as a process of smaller steps and review how each step can be made easier
- Ensure that moving between steps in the voting process is easy and natural for voters
- Avoid overloading voters with information

4.3 Encourage people to return their ballot paper

The final step in a successful vote involves returning voting papers before the deadline, either by post or into a physical ballot box.

This section considers ways of helping people to complete the final step of the process, through reminders, anchoring and clearer information on postal sites.

4.3.1 Reminders

The 2016 Auckland Council post-voting survey indicated that a large number of non-voters did not cast their vote because they either forgot (18 per cent) or they missed the voting deadline (18 per cent).⁸⁰ Amongst those who went so far as completing their voting papers, 'not sending it off in time', 'forgetting to send it' and 'losing the voting forms' were dominant reasons for why they didn't follow through on their intentions to vote.

I did not choose not to vote I just missed the deadline... My mistake was to not go immediately to the post office and to the mailbox to put my voting papers in.

Well-timed reminders, such as the election-day text message reminders trialled by the Electoral Commission in previous general elections⁸¹ may be one way to remind people at a time when they are most responsive. Another way might be to provide electors with physical reminders (e.g. fridge magnets) or strategies that help them remember to complete and return their ballot papers (e.g. a hand-written post-it note on the return envelope suggesting they place it with their keys to remember to take it with them next time they leave the house).

Note, not all reminders have been found to be effective⁸². The reminder needs to make use of the techniques described in earlier sections (i.e. express thanks, induce social pressure, highlight voter identity etc.).

Key findings

- Provide well-timed and well-designed reminders in the week after electors receive their voting packs.
- Consider how physical reminders (e.g. fridge magnets) or memory strategies (e.g. “place me with your keys”) can be integrated into the voting packs.

4.3.2 Anchoring

Another way to encourage people to return their papers may be through “anchoring”. Anchoring bias is a form of cognitive bias that leads people to rely heavily on the first piece of information given to them in subsequent decisions and actions⁸³. This means that individuals often focus on the *first* numbers or dates shown to them, using this as a driver or anchor for their behaviour. In the case of voting return deadlines, specifying a date may focus people on the end deadline rather than the start of a return period.

It is possible then that highlighting an earlier anchor date and de-emphasising the deadline date might increase returns. The Denver Department of Motor Vehicles, used this principle when designing postcard reminders encouraging people to renew their license. The postcards provided information on the month that their license expired, rather than the last day it expired, to provide an early ‘anchor’ that might help people meet the deadline.⁸⁴

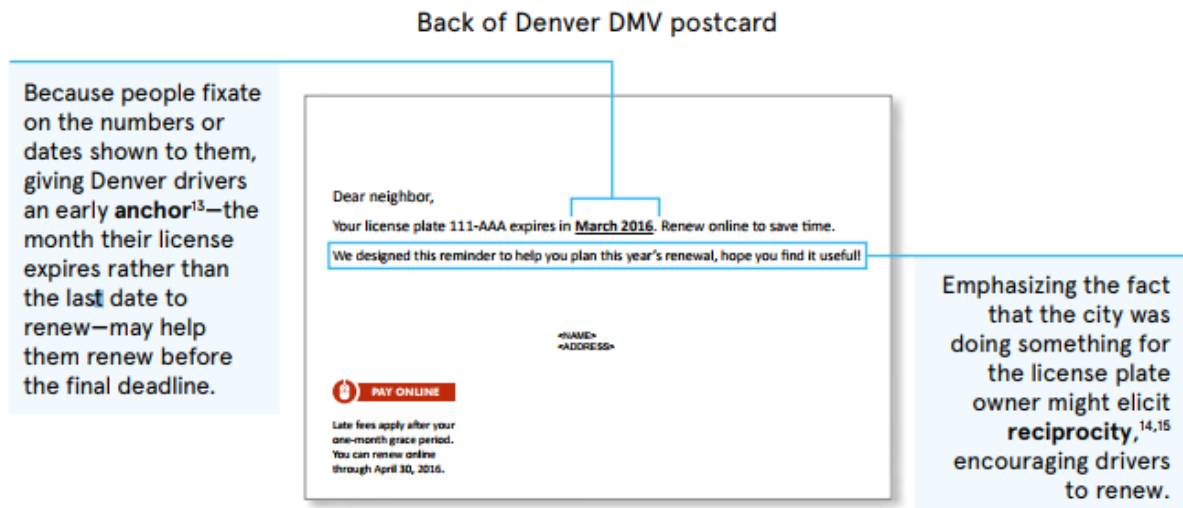


Figure 9. Using anchoring to increase online vehicle licensing. *Source: Behavioural Insights for Cities*⁸⁵

Anchoring could be used when sending information on the voting period, particularly if the deadline for receiving voting papers is towards the end of the month. The actual deadline needs to be made clear to electors, however the way the return dates are communicated may be able to use early anchoring to encourage early returns. For instance, early communications may focus on an early anchor (with the deadline provided in smaller text, but not highlighted), while latter communications might highlight the required urgency of the upcoming deadline in order to not miss out on having their vote count.

Key findings

- Highlight when voting opens in initial communications, to provide an early anchor.
- Include the deadline, but don't make it a focus until latter communications where it can be used to create a sense of urgency and fear of missing out.

4.3.3 Information on where to post

A small percentage (7 per cent) of non-voters reported not voting in previous Auckland Council elections because they did not know where or how to vote.⁸⁶

Voter turnout might therefore be increased by making clearer where and how people can return their ballot papers. For example, a personalised note with all postal boxes near an elector's house might boost turnout by reducing effort and increased personalisation.

Adding ballot boxes at other well-known locations (such as supermarkets) may also provide successful.

Key findings

- Provide clear guidelines on where to return the voting papers, that minimises the effort of having to manually search for post-box locations.
- Consider whether ballot boxes can be placed in well-known locations, such as supermarkets.

5.0 An opportunity for Auckland Council to lead New Zealand

Most of the research we have reviewed in this document – with the exception of some targeted text and direct mail trials by the New Zealand Electoral Commission – has been conducted in America. It is unclear how effective these behavioural insights techniques are in New Zealand.

There is an opportunity for Auckland Council to trial and test the effectiveness of different interventions in the Auckland context. This trial would require a partnership between Auckland Council's elections team, Auckland Council's Research and Evaluation Unit, and the Electoral Commission. Individual-level administrative data on voter turnout would be required in order to conduct such tests.

If testing is not possible or desired, it is recommended that Auckland Council makes use of as many of the suggested behavioural insights ideas as possible when designing the 2019 voter mobilisation campaign.

6.0 Conclusion: Designing the 2019 Auckland Council voter mobilisation campaign

Drawing from the research reviewed, this section offers suggestions for how to incorporate behavioural insights findings in the 2019 Auckland Council voter mobilisation campaign. All suggestions should be considered and complementary techniques should be combined where possible.

6.1 Choose the right channel

Most voter mobilisation activity should focus on face-to-face canvassing and direct mail.

In-person canvassing, on average, has notably higher impact than direct mail, however the latter is cheaper and able to be done on a large scale.

Other methods, such as Facebook and text messaging may also be considered, however research shows these methods are likely to be ineffective and a poor use of money unless the message content is designed in accordance with behavioural insights findings. Plain information messages or simple election reminders, in particular, are unlikely to impact voter turnout.

Where possible, a range of communication channels could be combined. For example, and in-person canvassing effort may involve collecting mobile phone numbers from people, which are in turn used to send well-timed and well-designed follow-up text messages.

6.2 Present messages effectively

The behavioural insights findings in Sections 3.0 and 4.0 suggest Auckland Council should consider incorporating a number of messages in their campaign, including:

- Use social influence to encourage voting and highlight positive social norms.
- Highlight voting as an important expression of identity.
- Express thanks and consider how messages might be designed to bring about feelings of reciprocity.
- Frame messages in terms of avoiding losses, if it can be done in a positive manner (e.g. “Don’t miss out on having your say”).

In addition to message content, studies suggest the following as helpful:

- Select messengers who are liked and trusted. Where possible, have messengers who match the demographic characteristics of electors.

- Encourage people to make a public commitment to vote, and follow up with them at a later time thanking them for their commitment.
- Encourage people to make a plan for when and how they are going to vote, including which postal box they are going to use to return their papers.
- Consider how the timing of messages can be optimised, especially in the first few days after people receive their voting packs.

6.3 Re-design voting documents with the voter in mind

Behavioural insights shows that stripping out unnecessary 'friction' can significantly boost take-up of a service or completion of a task.

Auckland Council post-election voter research indicates that significant improvements in voter turnout could be achieved by tweaking the design of voting papers and candidate information to reduce friction and make the process easier for voters. The following suggestions are provided:

- Attract attention and interest by adding design features to voting documents, particularly by:
 - Personalising forms as much as possible
 - Using handwritten notes to draw in attention
 - Using colour and other design features to direct attention
- Consider how the voting documents and candidate information sources can be re-designed, breaking the voting process down into simple steps, with clear connections between them.
- Include nudges to help people remember to return their voting forms.

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