



Campaigning During COVID-19

Campaigns are slowly learning how to navigate a new political landscape dominated by COVID-19. While it's important and necessary to address these realities, campaigns can't stop the election day clock. This time does offer campaigns the ability to really connect with voters, have meaningful conversations and ultimately build their lists. Below are some tips and resources for messaging, engaging, keeping volunteers motivated and fundraising during this time.

MESSAGING

Be civil, champion a cause and connect people to resources

Now, more than ever, people are looking for answers and resources. Campaigns can be this steady conduit of information. This means offering fact-based answers and connecting people with resources. This also means campaigns should avoid capitalizing on fear, instead focus on keeping everything informative and factual. Campaigns can also use this time to make more personal connections. This could mean a candidate calling a list of voters instead of doorbelling them and taking the time to hear how these voters are faring while connecting them to resources best suited for their concerns. This could also mean an issue campaign having their volunteer base do more network or peer-to-peer outreach by calling or emailing others.

- /// **Timing:** It's important to stay timely especially in regard to COVID-19. What was breaking news at breakfast can often feel like it was a lifetime ago by dinner. So, while you want to plan ahead, you also want to stay relevant and reassess before you post, print, or hit send.
- /// **Be a Champion:** Beyond connecting people with resources, campaigns can look to partner with a cause that is relevant to them. For example, if your campaign is education based, you could partner with an organization ensuring low income children have access to breakfast and lunch while not in school. Becoming a champion for this issue will help build awareness for these organizations while also introducing your campaign to a new audience of people who may not have been aware of you.
- /// **Engagement Ideas:** People are looking for ways to interact and have conversations. For a campaign this means always asking questions. Send out a survey (via email, text, or on your website) asking people to identify their most pressing concerns, then offer a follow up with information that addresses those concerns. Or host a live stream or webinar that offers ample time for voters to ask questions.
- /// **Creative:** As with most messaging, you don't want to flood anything with too much text. With COVID-19 related messages you also want the images you use to reflect our current realities and public health messaging. For example, don't use images that show large groups of people.



CHANNELS

Go new school...and old

Now is the time for campaigns to really build up their online footprint. This means turning your house party or fundraiser into an online event or consider starting a texting or email program. There's a plethora of digital tools available to campaigns, but they should be assessed based on who you are trying to reach and what action you're trying to get people to take.

// Digital

Virtual townhalls or webinars

What it is: Digital platforms like Zoom allow a handful, hundreds or even thousands of people to join a video call on their phone, tablet or computer. Campaigns can invite people to join by emailing or texting out a link or call-in number.

Best suited for: These platforms are better suited for longer events, anything over half an hour. These platforms also work well for campaigns that don't have a large number of followers on social media.

Live Streaming

What it is: Going live on a social media platform (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc).

Best suited for: These events are quick and easy to set up and require essentially just a social media profile. You'll want to keep these events on the short side because people will be watching on their phone. Also take note that while these platforms offer areas for viewers to pose comments or ask questions, these comments and questions can be hard to moderate. These platforms work great for campaigns that already have a large following, pick your platform with the most followers and go live.

Emails

The best use of an email program during this time is to convey information. Consider establishing a COVID-19 response newsletter where you offer updates on the virus in your community, links to resources and maybe even a little humor to lighten the mood.

Website

Add a COVID-19 response page that offers links to resources.

Social Channels

Take the opportunity to pin posts linking to COVID-19 resources on social media channels so those resources remain at the top of the page. Pinning posts would be specifically helpful if campaigns had their own COVID-19 resources on their website, and would help drive traffic to other sections of their site as well. You can also ask volunteers with time of their hands to create content that can be posted on a campaign's channel.

Posting frequency

Now is the time to increase a campaign's posting frequency, particularly first thing in the morning and late at night. That's when traffic spikes as people check the news right when they get up/right before they go to bed. Traffic is also up in general, so should the campaign's posting.

A note about commenting:

Engage with voters by replying to their comments. This needs to be moderated and not every comment needs a response. Direct engagement over Messenger and comment sections right now is a good way to connect and answer questions.

Social media resources:

<https://www.facebook.com/gpa/blog/facebook-live-for-government-officials>

<https://www.facebook.com/gpa/blog/tips-and-tools-for-public-service-announcements>



// **Traditional Tactics**

Teletownhall

What it is: Essentially a conference call, recipients are either given a call-in number or are called right before the event and asked if they'd like to join in. This platform also offers the ability to pre-screen questions before they are asked.

Best suited for: Areas or communities that lack internet access, also good to use in scenarios where you aren't looking for a lot of engagement from listeners. Teletownhalls are also a great way to keep your volunteer base engaged and motivated. If time allows, consider instituting a weekly call with volunteers.

Texting

What it is: Texting can take two forms, the first is mass texting, deployed through an auto dialer. This is good way to send out event invites or important community updates. The second form of texting is peer-to-peer where people actually send text messages to other people.

Best suited for: Quick bursts of information, either reminding people of a virtual event, or sending links to helpful information. Campaigns could also use text messages to gather information from people by asking for responses.

Mail

What it is: In this situation campaigns can use direct mail as another resource for connecting people with websites and phone numbers. You could even include a perforation on a piece so people can remove the part of the mailer with the phone numbers or urls and stick it somewhere for easy access. Additionally, in the same vein as peer-to-peer texting, campaign organizers or volunteers can use this time to send postcards or letters to their networks. They can also write GOTV postcards that can be used closer to election day.

Best suited for: Keeping volunteers engaged, lower budget campaigns.

FUNDRAISING

Undoubtedly campaigns will find it hard to fundraise under these circumstances. The hard ask will be harder to do now. But also, many donors will have extra time on their hands and might feel more engaged with a campaign if a candidate or surrogate has more time to talk. Many of the communication tactics above can be used for fundraising.

- Hold a closed or private live stream event. Donors can buy an e-ticket (essentially a link that can be emailed or texted out). Consider capping the number of attendees in each event and holding more events so you can build a more intimate setting.
- Extend the time and scope of call time. Let these conversations be more of a welfare check, allowing potential donors to have longer, more in depth conversations with campaigns.
- Send personal (hand written) letters. This time offers campaigns the ability to really connect with donors, and a hand written note can go a long way to feeling connected.

HOW TO KEEP VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

In the midst of this uncertainty, people are still looking for ways to keep themselves occupied. If this is the case for some of your volunteers, have them engage in some relational organizing. They can reach out to their less-engaged friends, family and networks and encourage these people to register to vote, sign up to vote by mail (if available in your state) or request an absentee ballot (if available in your state).

// **For more details or for help developing a COVID-19 plan that fits your campaign's unique needs,** please email the Campaigns Team at: campaigns@strategies360.com