

Deep Dive: GOTV Radio

Introduction

Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) radio is one of few remaining scaleable investment opportunities for those looking to cost-effectively generate Democratic votes in November. With a shift to digital tactics over the last few Presidential cycles, few national voter turnout organizations are planning a significant radio presence as part of their GOTV programming this year. Radio has historically served as a trusted source of information, with many stations reaching defined subsets of Americans across the country. Even during the current public health crisis, radio continues to reach hundreds of millions of listeners every month.¹

The recommended radio program is run by [Vote.org](https://www.vote.org), a 501(c)(3) national voter registration and turnout organization focused on increasing representation of people of color and young people in the electorate. Visitors to Vote.org's website can learn about how to register, request a mail-in ballot, and understand the mechanics of voting. Already this year, Vote.org digital tools have recorded 1.2 million voter registrations, over 1 million vote-by-mail requests, and 2.4 million voter verifications. In addition to digital tools and advocacy, Vote.org is also executing a multi-layered GOTV program to directly contact low propensity voters with well-tested messages to encourage them to vote in November. The radio program is one part of this GOTV plan. *Based on existing research, investments in Vote.org's GOTV radio program may have up to 14x the impact of a contribution made directly to the Presidential campaign.*

Recommended Program

The recommended program is a \$4-5 million radio buy across key geographies on radio stations with listenership by majority Black, Latinx, Native American, and young audiences. The radio advertisements themselves follow best practices for GOTV messaging developed over two decades of testing and experimentation. The messaging will include key details about the election, options for voting in the state, and other behavioral nudges to encourage listeners to vote.

Targeting

The radio ads target competitive geographies for both the Senate and the Presidency and focus on media markets and radio stations where our independent analysis indicates listenership is at least 65% Democratic. Media markets across the country differ in both size and demographics. This program focuses on those with either greater than 50% listeners of color or primarily young audiences (under 35). The states of focus are listed below along with the media markets where radio ads will potentially run. In order to execute a rigorous experiment within this program, more than 20% of the media markets will be held out of the treatment group and there will be a presence in

¹Radio is "Comfort Food" as Media Consumption Rises Amid COVID-19 Pandemic



several media markets outside of these states to help reach a minimum threshold at which measuring impact is possible.

State	Media Markets
AK	Anchorage, Fairbanks
AL	Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile Pensacola, Montgomery
AZ	Phoenix, Tucson
FL	Jacksonville, Brunswick, West Palm Beach/Ft. Pierce, Tampa/St. Pete, Sarasota, Gainesville, Orlando/Daytona Beach/Melbourne, Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Panama City, Tallahassee, Thomasville
GA	Atlanta, Albany, Columbus, Macon, Savannah
IA	Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Des Moines, Des Moines / Waterloo / Cedar Falls, Sioux City
KS	Wichita, Kansas City, Topeka
ME	Portland, Augusta / Waterville, Bangor
MI	Detroit, Flint Saginaw Bay City, Grand Rapids/Kalamazoo
MN	Minneapolis / Rochester, Minneapolis
MS	Biloxi/Gulfport, Hattiesburg/Laurel, Jackson
MT	Billings
NC	Charlotte, Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem, Greenville/New Bern/Washington, Raleigh/Durham, Wilmington
NE	Omaha
NH	Manchester, Portsmouth
NM	Awaiting radio availability
NV	Awaiting radio availability
OH	Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus Tupelo West Point, Toledo
PA	Harrisburg/Lancaster/Lebanon/York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Wilkes Barre/Scranton
SC	Charleston, Columbia, Florence Myrtle Beach, Greenville/Spartanburg
TX	Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas
VA	Norfolk/Portsmouth/ Newport, Norfolk-Virginia Beach, Richmond/Petersburg, Richmond
WI	Madison, Milwaukee

Testing

Because few radio programs have been rigorously tested to measure impact, it is critically important that this large-scale program include testing to measure its effectiveness in turning out voters across the country. The [Analyst Institute](#), the premier research and program evaluation entity in the Democratic ecosystem, is designing an experiment that will help turn this program into an opportunity to inform future work in this area for decades to come.



Experimental Evidence

A few key pieces of research form the foundation of the GOTV radio recommendation. Recent 2019 research on [Public Service Announcements \(PSAs\)](#) shows that, generally, PSAs on the radio can have a significant impact as a call to action. The existing research specifically measuring the effects on turnout of GOTV radio campaigns is compelling, albeit a bit dated. The most recent tests found significant effects through ads on [Native radio in Alaska in 2008 and 2010](#) and on [non-partisan Spanish-language radio GOTV advertisements](#). An [independent meta-analysis](#) of the existing radio studies indicates an average impact per impression of about 0.03pp.

The independent meta-analysis along with a review of current media market costs for late-cycle radio reservations indicate that radio is a uniquely low-cost communication method. The cost for a radio impression is a fraction of the cost on television, with radio costing about a half a cent per impression. If the effect size cited above holds, this would lead to an extremely low cost per net new Democratic vote compared to alternative investments. Our analysis indicates that investments in this radio program may be up to 14 times more cost effective than giving directly to the Presidential campaign, before tax deductions are factored in. We anticipate that the true effect in a well-powered, large-scale effort will be smaller than that found in earlier studies, but still many multiples of an average investment at this point in the cycle.

With embedded testing, Vote.org's scaled radio program will contribute immensely to our collective understanding of the effects of GOTV radio in a noisy, Presidential environment and will leave the greater Democratic ecosystem equipped to properly prioritize radio spending in future elections.

Areas of Uncertainty

No Large-Scale Presidential Testing: Several encouraging RCTs form the evidentiary basis for this recommendation but no large-scale tests have been run in a Presidential cycle. The largest test available focused on contested congressional races in 2006. A smaller test, from 2008, was during a Presidential campaign but focused on Alaska, which was only a marginally competitive state.

Turnout: There is massive, unprecedented uncertainty about how high turnout will be in this election. The answer matters because it will affect the impact of all get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts. Higher spontaneous turnout frequently depresses the impact of incremental GOTV efforts. Very high turnout in the 2018 midterms and the early 2020 primaries would normally suggest substantially higher turnout in the 2020 general election than in 2016, but COVID-19 raises the very real possibility of markedly lower turnout. All GOTV efforts are laboring under this uncertainty.

Conclusion

Few highly efficient, evidence-backed options remain for those looking to invest in the Presidential election. The Vote.org 501(c)(3) GOTV radio program is a promising evidence-backed opportunity that can still scale in advance of the election. The program will cost effectively reach voters of color and young voters through an under-utilized medium, while also contributing to our understanding of how radio tactics can be leveraged in future elections. The electoral footprint on radio is sparse in 2020, so the opportunity for marginal impact is substantial. Mind the Gap is recommending immediate contributions to Vote.org to ensure that this program can run at scale and reach



hundreds of thousands of Democratic voters with low-cost turnout messaging before November 3rd.

We urge you to contribute generously to Vote.org [online](#) or through a Donor Advised Fund by September 25th. Please reach out to us at info@mtg2020.org with any questions.