

How to Include a Vote-by-Mail Program into Your Campaign

So many people are voting by mail these days that planning a program to contact this important group of voters has become a critical part of every successful campaign. In fact, your strategy should include two parts: A Vote-by-Mail campaign and a traditional campaign.

It is possible for a candidate to lose every precinct in their race but win the absentee votes to take the election. Some candidates who declare victory on election night, end up losing after the final absentee votes are counted.

In many races these days, Voting-by-Mail (VBM) accounts for 60% or more of the votes cast. Some communities and states (like Oregon) are already using 100% Vote-by-Mail balloting! Learning how absentee voting works and executing a plan better than your opponents can give you the votes needed to win.

The basic Vote-by-Mail process is simple:

- 1) You create and mail a piece with an application to Vote-by-Mail attached. (Please contact us at (877) 880-0455 if you would like us to send you a sample.)
- 2) The voter fills out the application, tears off the self-mailer and mails it back to your campaign headquarters.
- 3) Your campaign staff copies the application and delivers the original to the city or county clerk—usually required to be done within 24 to 36 hours after you receive it.
- 4) The city or county clerk process the application and mail a ballot to the voter. The voter opens his ballot, votes, and mails it back to the clerk.

Now, here are the steps, options, and techniques to consider as you plan a successful VBM (Vote-by-Mail) program. Some of these steps are optional, depending on your budget and staff, but some are vital.

1. Pick a trusted and competent volunteer or staff member to become your expert on VBM. They should learn all the local VBM election laws, customs and other details about VBM in your particular race.
2. It is **very important** to be the first to send your VBM piece, before any other candidate and before the city or county clerk mails the sample ballot which includes a VBM application. You will gain a huge advantage if the voters see your application first. Find out when the clerk is going to mail the sample ballots and get yours in the mail about a week before, which usually means about 40 days before the election.
3. If possible, have the VBM applications returned to your campaign headquarters. Plan a system to copy each application as they are received and deliver the original

applications to the clerk the next day. Each voter should be added to a VBM database so that you can easily mail to them later.

4. Often you can also go to the clerk (sometimes everyday) and request an excel file or printout of everyone who has applied to Vote-by-Mail. Again, each voter should be added to your VBM database.
5. As soon as possible, send a campaign piece and/or letter to everyone who mails in an application. If sending a letter, you might consider thanking the voter for doing his civic duty by voting then state what you stand for and why they should vote for you. You might also let them know that if they need help voting by mail, your campaign staff can answer their questions.
6. A good option to increase your VBM response rate is to pay the postage for returning the applications. The clerk and most other candidates do not do this so it will give you another edge. You will need to set up and purchase a "Business Reply" permit from the post office and print that permit on your VBM piece, but that is a very inexpensive way to identify and be the first to contact these important voters.
7. If your budget allows, it is best to have the application filled out with the voters name and address so all they have to do is sign it and drop it in the mail. This is done by personalizing each piece as it is printed which will raise your cost by 10% to 50%, depending on the quantity.
8. Follow up by mailing a second campaign piece to your VBM list about 2 weeks before the election. You do not know when these voters will actually return their ballots but most do it within the final two weeks of the election cycle.

Seaside Political has helped many candidates create a VBM program so please contact us if you have any questions or would like to receive a few samples. We can help you plan, create, print and mail your VBM mailers or any other campaign literature that you need.

Contact us at (877) 880-0455 or (562) 437-8330. Or visit our website, www.politicalcampaigns.com for more information and to send us an email.