

Do Bond Election Strategies Change if States Move to



ALL-MAIL ELECTIONS?

Given the COVID-19 Coronavirus, many states are considering pursuing all-mail elections. Under the all-mail election, every elector in active status gets a ballot mailed to them—whether they requested it or not. It's as if every voter is treated as an absentee voter.

If states are moving to an all-mail election, what does that mean for the citizen-led campaign committees advocating for school district bond measures and other referenda? How can these committees leverage this new approach to voting? Do all-mail elections provide advantages to districts seeking additional funding?

Election day is not on election day

For campaign committees advocating for school district referenda, it's critical that the timelines for direct mailers, canvassing, phone banking, honk-and-wave, print ads and other strategies take into consideration the day that the mail ballots arrive. In fact, campaigns may want to time one of their direct mailers with the arrival of the mail ballots. Phone banking on or around the day ballots arrive, with a special focus on likely supporters and swing voters, is another common strategy.

All-mail elections are somewhat easier to manage

Every state offers some form of absentee voting. And almost every state offers some form of early voting. In fact, in Wyoming early voting starts 40 days in advance of election day. So, in states where absentee, early voting and election day voting are in play, campaigns must develop strategies focused on

three separate timelines. In contrast, with mail-in elections, voter targeting efforts are less daunting since the focus is on a single timeline.

It's like riding a wave for 18 to 22 days

Many of the states looking to implement all-mail elections are looking to Colorado for guidance. In the Centennial State, ballots are mailed 18 to 22 days in advance of Election Day. This means that campaigns are required to keep the momentum going for more than three weeks. For example, campaign committees in Colorado will organize honk-and-wave efforts along high-traffic areas throughout the 22-day period, with a special focus on Friday afternoon drive-times. Why Friday? Because a large percentage of voters vote on the weekends when mail-in ballots are in play.

Tracking tools help stretch a campaign's budget

A bar code is assigned to each mail-in ballot. This allows county

clerks to identify who has voted and who has not. Some clerks make this information publicly available, usually at a modest cost. This information can be used by campaign committees to purge mailing, canvassing and phone banking lists and consequently reduce costs. There's no sense in targeting a voter who has already cast their vote.

No, your referendum is not suddenly a slam dunk

There is no clear evidence that mail-in ballots increase the likelihood of voter approval of school bond proposals or other tax-related referenda. Certain studies have shown an increase in voter turnout with mail-in elections, especially among low-propensity voters. However, this does not guarantee that the uptick in turnout will turn the tide in your referendum's favor. Campaigns advocating for new taxes still need to be running on all cylinders.

by Paul Hanley
Managing Director
Beyond Your Base
phanley@beyondbase.com

