


# A GUIDE TO INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT AND PARTICIPATION



Why your members aren't voting.

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 Survey & Ballot systems

## Here's why many members aren't voting in your critical elections and here are the actionable steps to get them to cast their ballots.

As a member organization, you know how important elections are to your structure and operations. If you're wondering how your voter turnout rate could be higher during elections and what you can do about it – we have some answers.

One of the top reasons member organizations reach out to Survey & Ballot Systems (SBS) is to increase participation in member elections. We find out why members may not be voting and put a proven plan into action to increase member engagement.

For 25 years, SBS has been providing the tools and resources for highly successful elections. We work with the world's top credit unions, associations, cooperatives and member-based organizations to plan and manage voting needs. We've seen the good, we've seen the bad and most importantly, we know what works.

We hope this information will provide you with plenty of ideas on how to identify the obstacles preventing your members from voting as well as tested tips on how to engage members, while boosting your election participation rates.

As election experts, it's our goal to share insider methods and know-how to benefit member organizations of all sizes.

We've conducted thousands of elections with millions of votes. In this eBook, we'll share our best tips for getting the word out, how to make voting more convenient and much more.

As always, you can contact us any time with questions. We're here to help.

Sincerely,

### **Survey & Ballot Systems**

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## A message from your members

Recently, we spoke with a member of a local credit union and co-op. We'll let her tell you, in her own words, why she's probably not voting in her next member elections:

"I love local member organizations. In fact, I'm a member of several. Thanks to a credit union, I recently bought my first-ever brand new car. Thanks to a food co-op, we're having paella for dinner.

As much as I enjoy the services provided by professional associations, cooperatives, credit unions and nonprofits, I (and thousands of members just like me) probably won't vote in many of their member elections. Here's why:

### **I don't know why it matters**

As a United States citizen, I understand the importance of participating in a democracy. I do not, however, understand why I should go out of my way to vote for candidates for the board of directors. Please tell me in simple, real terms (skip the jargon) why my effort to vote makes a difference to the organization so I'm motivated to take action.

### **I had no idea there was an election**

Look – I get sent a lot of stuff. I get promotions, newsletters, third party partner advertising and it doesn't take long for it all to become noise. When I get a ballot out of the blue, it just blends in. I set it aside with good intentions, but it gets buried under the other junk mail and recycled. Maybe if the election is promoted with the same intensity as other events and offers, I will take notice.



### **Voting is a pain**

Look at the calendar year -- I live on my laptop, I have a tablet device and I carry my smartphone everywhere I go. But some organizations limit the ways in which I can participate. It's time to improve the convenience for voting members like me and offer a variety of ways to vote – online, mobile, phone, in-person, etc. When you make it easy for me, I'm much more inclined to cast a ballot.

### **There's no competition**

The same guys get seats every year. I do not need to make an effort to vote if the outcome is predetermined. Perhaps if the election was contested, I'd have a reason to pay attention.

### **I don't know anything about the candidates**

Mailing me a ballot with the names of strangers isn't going to get me to start checking boxes. Who are these people? What are they proposing to do for the organization (and, by extension, me)? Why should I vote for them over another candidate? If that information isn't there, I'm not giving you my vote.

The time is now to get to work and make it easier and more compelling for your members to vote. We'll thank you and voter participation will rise."

That seems like a lot of issues to address with each election, we know. With some fresh strategies and tactics, your member organization can combat excuses and make voting in your election quick, simple and intuitive.



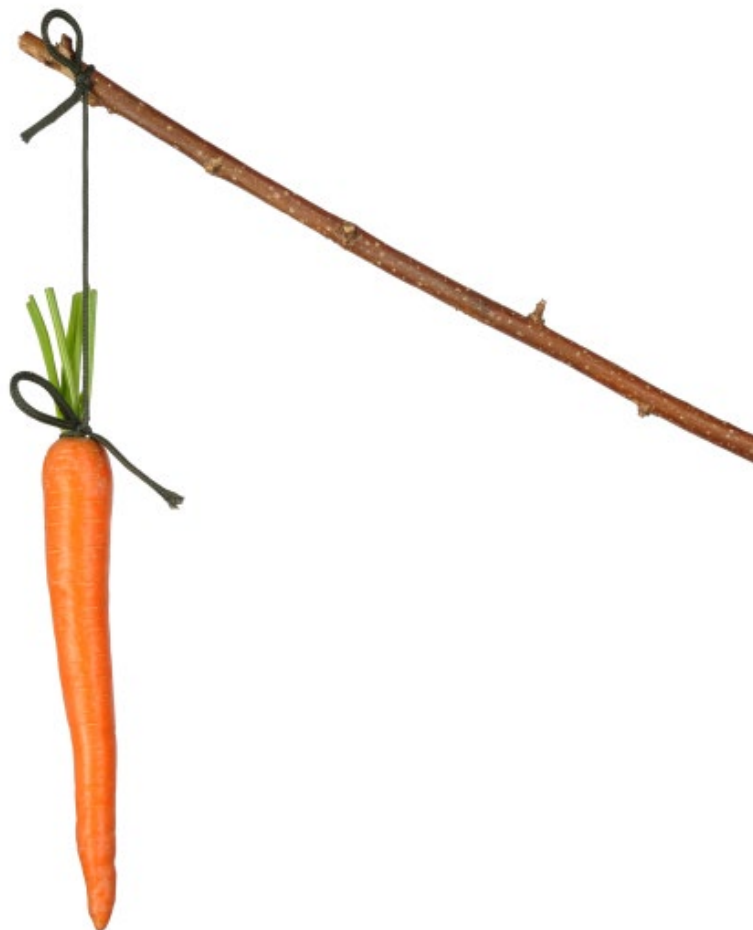
## Why does your election matter?

Sometimes the noble offer of participating in a democratic process is simply not enough to get members to vote. Be explicit about why the election is vitally important to the organization and specifically state why each ballot cast makes a tangible difference.

Offering members incentives to vote can also be an effective way to increase election participation.

Door prizes to encourage attendance, "\$X off" a monthly bill, raffles for gift cards or electronics, free membership dues, donations made to a charity of the member's choice – all can generate excitement and drive participation in an election.

Before implementing any of these, be sure to check with your policies and bylaws to ensure contests and drawings are permitted.



## Are you promoting your election?

If your organization is simply allowing your election to happen, a golden opportunity is being missed. When comprehensive, adaptable promotions plans for elections are implemented, the response rate can increase up to 10 percent.

### Some items you should add to your communications and promotion plan include:

- An overall election schedule, including key dates. You'll need them to create marketing materials for each pivotal point in the election cycle.
- An advertising strategy for your nominations process. Explain how it works, provide key dates and share qualifications for running.
- A plan to begin publicizing your election open and close dates 8-12 weeks prior to the open date.

### Make it next to impossible for members not to know there's an election.

- Promote in person at brick and mortar locations, through meetings and open houses and at any event your organization holds. Be sure all employees and volunteers know election details and encourage them to communicate these wherever and whenever they can. Distribute educational materials, display posters and host "Meet the Candidates" sessions.
- Promote in print. Send save the date postcards with educational messaging, produce marketing pieces specific to the election and add candidate bios to your newsletter to encourage members to get to know their candidates before the election begins. The more reminders you send about your upcoming election, the more likely members are to vote.
- Promote digitally across any channels on which you're active (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.). Utilize your email list to alert members and use the website to advertise an upcoming election. Even better – create an election-specific landing page so website visitors are sure to see that crucial information.

Remember, one powerful message delivered through multiple channels helps members anticipate an upcoming election.

## Are you making voting easy?

With member organizations, as with comedy, it's very important to know your audience. If paper ballots are working for you, don't cut them out entirely! Don't disenfranchise voters in the interest of instantly moving everything online. Do consider the increase in voter participation you're likely to see if you offer additional options that make casting a ballot quick and easy for everyone.

Consider your members and demographics. Research their preferred communication method(s). Onsite and mail-in elections will be most effective with some members, while online and mobile voting will be more popular with others. When you have a good idea of who you're serving and what space(s) they operate in, it's time to consider adding new technologies to your voting mix.

### Embedded Login Links

Consider how many times you've clicked the "Remind me of my user name and password" button on just about any website. Members who can't remember this information aren't going to vote.

Send your members an electronic invitation email with a customized embedded auto login link that securely logs members into your online system and authenticates them. Just one click and members can vote.

### QR Codes

Members simply scan a unique code with their mobile device for instant access to your election. It doesn't get much easier than that.



### Single Sign On (SSO)

SSO allows your organization to have online voting capabilities directly on your website. When members sign into your unique online portal, they can have direct access to the ballot to cast their vote.

Not only does SSO increase voting convenience and reduce member frustration, it turns your organization's website into an online election portal and drives site traffic.

### Mobile Technology

The majority of adults in the U.S. – 64 percent – own a smartphone of some kind and use it to access the Internet. In fact, 10 percent of Americans use their smartphone exclusively to access the Internet, according to the latest numbers from the Pew Research Center.

When voting is done via mobile device, it's important to make sure each member gets an optimal voting experience tailored to the device they're using.

- A mobile-friendly responsive website works on all devices.
- Larger font sizes, easily accessible and clickable calls to action and a simple design that doesn't take ages to load are all vitally important.
- Adding convenient voting options gives members the ability to access ballots anywhere, anytime in a cost effective, easy, accurate and secure manner.





## Where's the competition?

Humans enjoy and respond to competition. Watching one person run around a track alone is nowhere near as compelling as watching several people race toward a finish line. If your election is uncontested, it's just not going to attract much attention.

### Other competitive factors we see that can affect election turnout include:

- The more important the office or role, the more likely members will pay attention. Response rates typically increase during years when a top position like president is on the ballot.
- Candidates with similar views on issues don't inspire much of a response. When opposing candidates have differing opinions on organizational issues and policy, voters feel compelled to take sides. This, in turn, can drive up response rates.
- Geographic location of candidates can play a role in elections as well, particularly when those elections have a national focus.

If your organization is facing an uncontested election, it's time to actively seek new candidates – not just to drum up interest in the election, but for the good of the organization overall in the future as well.

Don't wait until you're facing a vacancy to start coming up with a list of candidates for a particular role, make it a goal to have a consistently evolving list of potential candidates. Diversity in background, experience and age are valuable assets to voters as well as to the organization.



### So, how do you find new candidates to keep elections competitive and voters engaged?

- Solicit recommendations from the current leaders and board members.
- Ask for petitions or nominations from members.
- Look to long-time members and champions of the organization. They may not be involved yet simply because no one has asked them to be.
- Keep expectations clear and have comprehensive job descriptions.
- Advertise the nominations process in any publications and across digital channels. Be clear with exactly what you're looking for in a candidate.
- Create a program to help develop and evaluate future talent.
- Be specific in what you're looking for. If, for example, you need a human resources expert to help round out your board, publicize that need. Members are more likely to respond when they can very clearly help fill a need.
- Have a preliminary group discussion, do your homework and "pre-qualify" candidates before asking them to run. This will help speed the process along. Candidates are more likely to be engaged if they can get to work right away.

Occasionally, organizations face the challenge of the same slate of candidates over and over again – no one is planning on leaving anytime soon. In that case, it's time to carefully encourage turnover.

Implementing term limits, using assessments and evaluations and making elections a critical part of the evolution of leadership can help encourage appropriate turnover.



## Who are your candidates?

If you're like most organizations, the majority of your members don't have extensive knowledge about the candidates running for any particular position or office. In a recent survey, members of a large medical organization were asked to share the primary reason they did not participate in their election – the top reason given was that they “did not know the candidates.” It's an important job to educate your members. How?

- In the lead-up to the election, create biography packets/booklets and include photos of and statements from each candidate.
- Publish interviews with each candidate in your newsletter and/or online.
- Produce videos about the candidates, post them on your website and share across social media.
- Be sure to create a large enough “voting window” to allow members sufficient time to learn about the candidates.
- Include candidate biographies within the ballot.

Consider the possibility of allowing candidates to educate voters about themselves as well. If your organization does not yet allow candidates to actively campaign, it might be time to come up with a campaigning policy.

Allowing candidates to campaign increases the awareness and education of candidate platforms, harnesses the energy and networks of the candidates and can improve overall election participation.

Even simple information from the candidates can encourage members to cast their ballots. When candidates are engaged and spreading the word as well, it magnifies the message and energizes members to be involved.



**If your organization does decide to allow campaigning, there are a few important issues to address:**

- Be sure the organization is providing equal treatment among each and every candidate and continuously monitor to ensure no one candidate has an unfair advantage.
- Create and equally enforce all rules around campaigning. Be certain campaigning is allowed by your bylaws and is carefully defined.
- Encourage respectful discussion and debate among all candidates.
- It is of the utmost importance to ensure all candidates have a positive experience, regardless of the outcome of the election.



## Conclusion

### Why go through all of this?

Elections are expensive. As you likely know, they require a substantial amount of money, energy and time to pull off. Return on that investment is often measured by how many members cast their ballot.

Response rates are also used to indicate the overall “health” of an organization. The more members are engaged and respond by casting their ballots, the greater member satisfaction with the organization is. And when more members participate in the election, the authority and legitimacy of the outcome is enhanced.

By creating a diverse candidate slate, encouraging a competitive election, making voting convenient, promoting widely, communicating clearly and providing a compelling reason to vote, your members will respond by enthusiastically casting their ballots.

## About Us

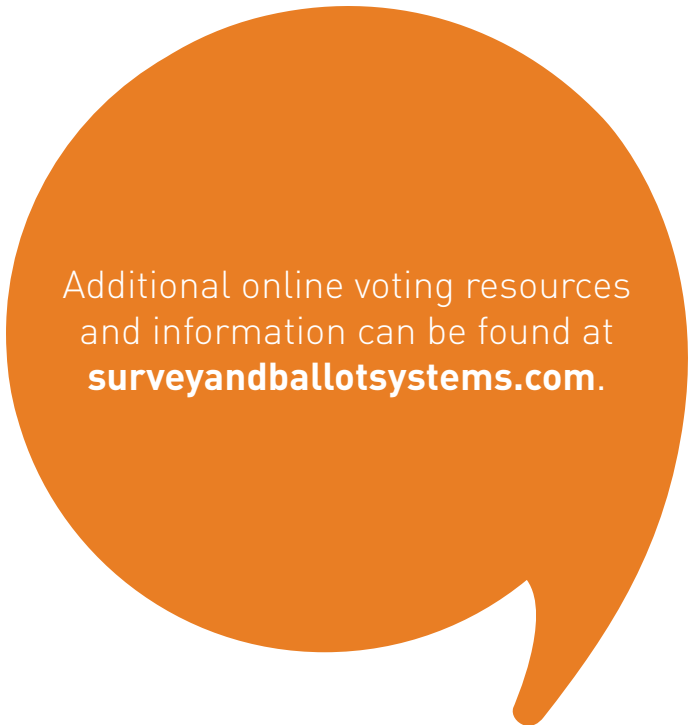
You run elections, we provide the tools and resources to make those elections highly successful. SBS works with the world's top associations, cooperatives and member-based organizations to plan and manage voting needs.

Whether you need traditional paper ballot elections, online voting, on-site voting, telephone voting or hybrid voting systems, we have the expertise to make it happen. We can be the third party to run your voting process or we can provide the resources and tools you need for a self-administered online election.

Our dedicated staff works with you to deliver the highest quality election services available. We pride ourselves on thorough communication, project management and an unwavering commitment to accuracy and superior customer service.

## Contact Us

Contact us any time at [surveyandballotssystems.com](https://surveyandballotssystems.com) or **1-800-974-8099**.



Additional online voting resources  
and information can be found at  
**[surveyandballotssystems.com](https://surveyandballotssystems.com)**.