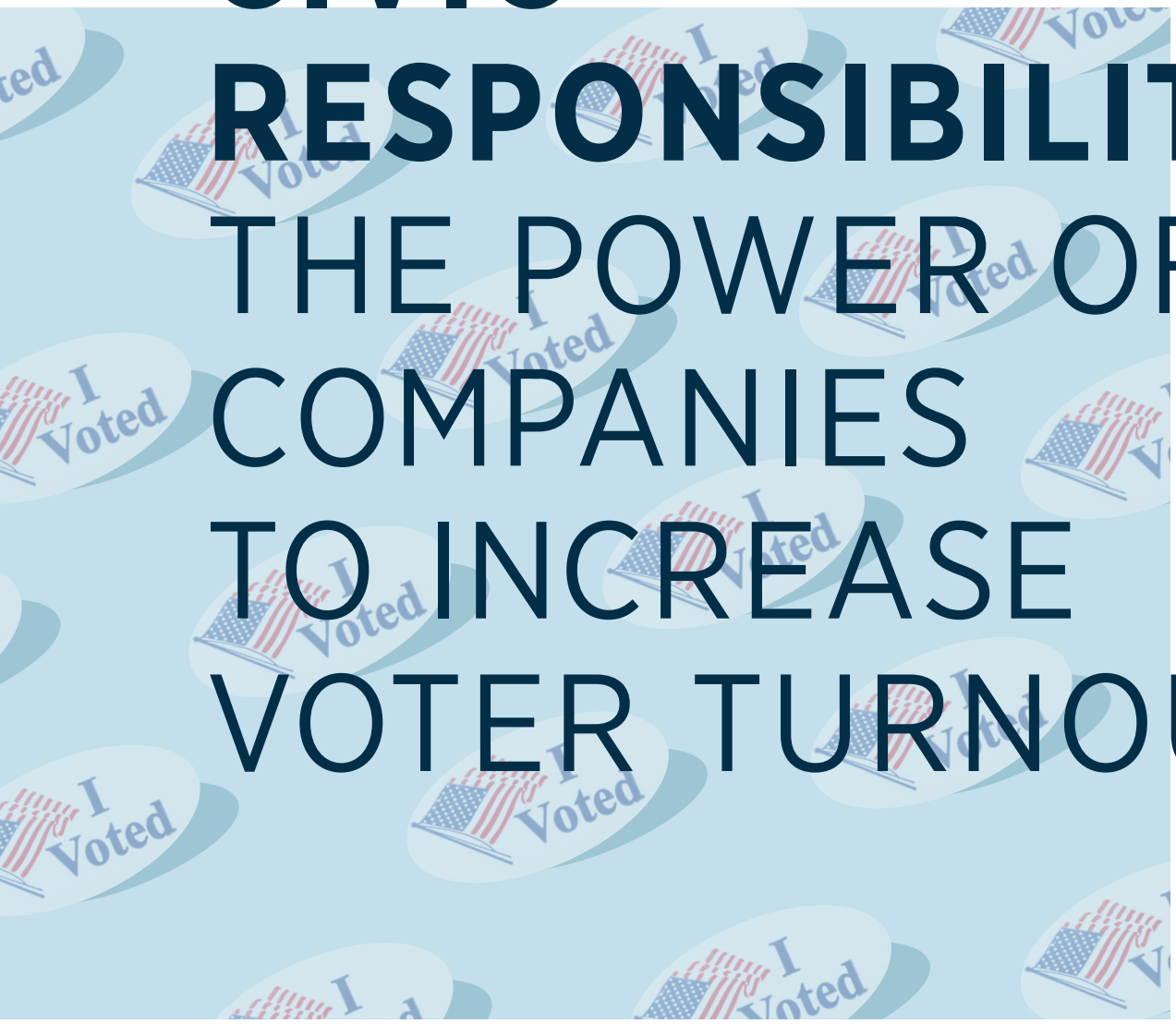
CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY: THE POWER OF COMPANIES TO INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT



A Case Study

SOFIA GROSS | ASHLEY SPILLANE

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for Democratic Governance
and Innovation

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Acknowledgments

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Second, we would like to thank the staff and leaders of the companies that participated in this case study. You were generous with your time, incredibly transparent about your efforts, and eager to share your learnings with others.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study provides an analysis and evaluation of the implementation of civic participation programs by companies aimed at increasing voter turnout. The United States consistently lags behind the majority of developed democratic nations in voter turnout, averaging less than half of the eligible voter population participating in midterm elections. The U.S. ranks 26th out of 32 developed democracies in percentage of eligible voters who participate in elections.[1] Today, many companies have dedicated resources for corporate social responsibility projects aimed at strengthening society and building goodwill among employees, consumers, and the public. Voter participation initiatives align with the goals of social responsibility projects, as they address a critical societal problem (lack of engagement), while building goodwill with key stakeholders.

So, what are corporations doing to promote voter participation?

Consumers want brands to take stands on political and social issues.

The companies analyzed — Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Endeavor, Gap Inc., Patagonia, Snap, Inc., Spotify, Target, and Twitter — vary in terms of sector, size, reach, and resources available for corporate social responsibility programming. All eight participating companies provided details on their initiatives, including an overview of the internal decision-making and planning process, details of the programs they carried out, and support garnered from third-party organizations. The data was then analyzed to help determine both the general efficacy of the initiatives in promoting voter participation and business, and the most successful strategies and tactics companies employed in achieving their goals.

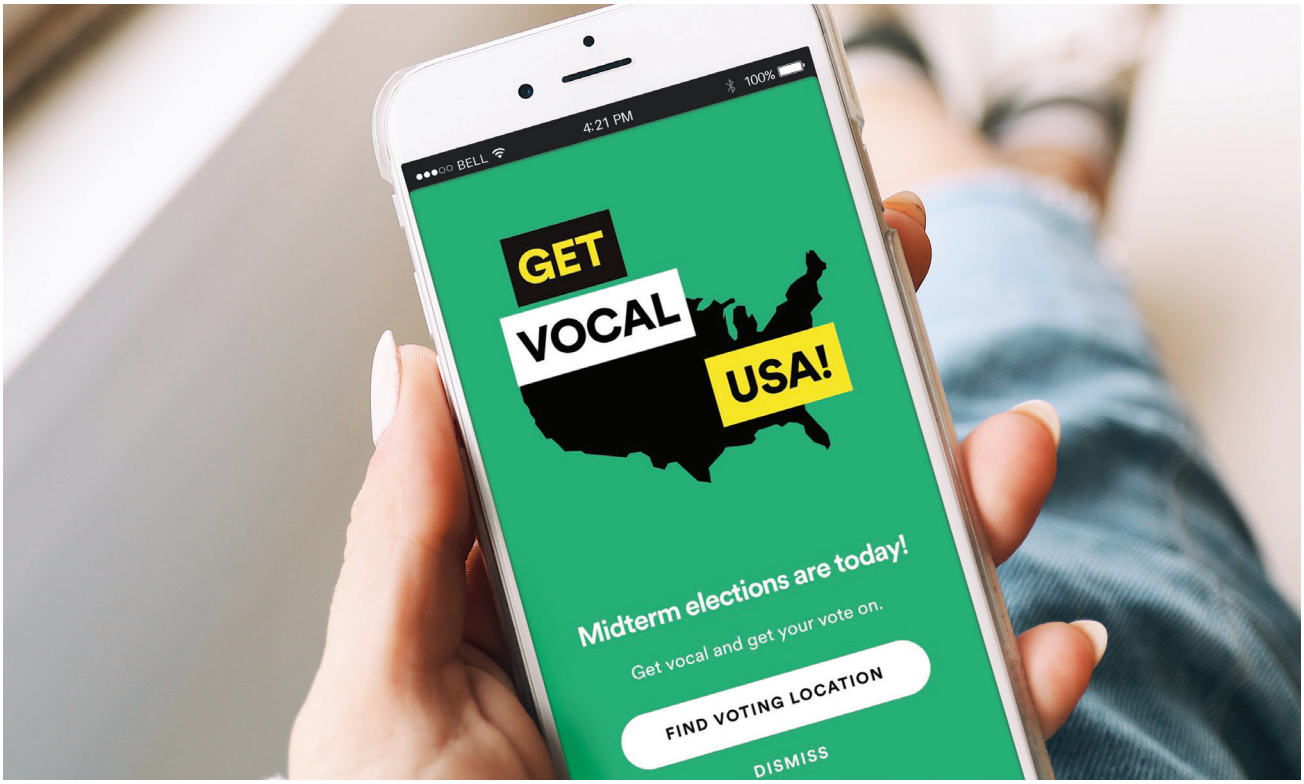
Based on the eight interviews conducted for this case study, we found that companies encouraging voter participation do so because senior leadership believes the effort is not only good for democracy, but also good for business. The business benefits described by case study participants included meeting consumer expectations for engagement in social and political issues, raising brand awareness with new audiences, and increasing employee satisfaction.

There is a growing body of evidence backing up what these companies reported.

First, a number of studies have shown consumers want brands to take stands on political and social issues. According to a 2019 report by Global Strategy Group, a majority of consumers expect companies to engage on political and social issues: 79% agree that companies should take action and 87% believe companies that do take action have the power to make a difference.[2] Edelman and Sprout Social reported similar findings in 2018, with two-thirds of consumers (66%) saying it's important for brands to take public stands on social and political issues.[3,4] Moreover, a full 81% of consumers say they would prefer to buy from companies that support democracy.[5]

Companies deployed two main categories of voter participation initiatives. Five of the eight companies (Patagonia, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Endeavor, Gap Inc., and Target) had employee-focused initiatives. The most publicized of these belonged to Patagonia, which closed for business on Election Day 2016 to provide employees paid time off to vote. After receiving significant positive feedback, the company repeated this practice in 2018. In addition, the company's CEO launched the Time to Vote initiative, receiving pledges from 411 CEOs across the country to undertake similar initiatives in order to facilitate adequate time for employees to vote on Election Day.[6]

We also studied less costly strategies for inspiring civic participation among employees. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, for example, has encouraged employee voter participation through their year-round *CitizenBlue* program for the past 18 years. *CitizenBlue* has a lead staff person, supported by an advisory team, who notifies



SPOTIFY MIDTERM ELECTION REMINDER

employees of all key dates and provides them with the information they needed in order to vote during election years. In addition, the program holds bipartisan candidate forums, provides information about the role of state elected officials, and maintains an intranet site where employees can look up key election information. Although the company's program is one of the most robust in the nation, they note that even sending short, timely emails with relevant election information goes a long way in encouraging employees to vote. Endeavor, Gap Inc., and Target engaged in employee-focused initiatives as well, relying on email reminders, links to voter registration information, and social media posts to promote voter participation. In addition, all three companies hosted in-person voter registration drives or voting celebrations at their headquarters.

While those companies focused on employee initiatives, Snap, Inc., Spotify, and Twitter used their technology platforms to encourage consumers and users to participate in elections. During the 2018 midterms, all three companies took advantage of improved data-sharing via APIs to scale their programs to expand beyond voter registration and include education and mobilization efforts. In interviews for this case study, representatives for Snap, Inc., Spotify, and Twitter stressed the importance of crafting civic engagement programs that were both unique to their platforms and consistent with what users come to their platforms to experience. Spotify used their music platform to embed a pop-up message reminding users about Election Day and simultaneously promoted curated playlists for each state that would excite voters about the election. Twitter similarly deployed in-app reminders to inform users of important dates and opportunities to engage.

BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF MINNESOTA

ENDEAVOR

GAP INC.

PATAGONIA

SNAP, INC.

SPOTIFY

TARGET

TWITTER

Twitter also concentrated on three categories: disseminating reliable election information, fostering conversation that encouraged action, and leveraging "influencer culture" — a form of marketing where individuals with significant digital following interact with consumers — to promote civic participation and online engagement. In addition, in order to help voters identify original sources and authentic information, Twitter partnered with Ballotpedia, a nonprofit that publishes nonpartisan candidate information, to identify Twitter users running for office and add labels to their account profiles. This verification appeared alongside each tweet over the course of the general election. Twitter also worked with secretaries of state across the country to share reports of issues experienced online.

Likewise, Snap, Inc. built civic products such as voter registration tools and a polling place lookup tool directly into their app. The company sent messages to all users age 18+ to notify them of key activations: a reminder to register to vote, a reminder to vote on Election Day, a link to help them find their polling place location, and a set of creative tools encouraging users to share “snaps" about voting with their close friends. Snap, Inc. also partnered with BallotReady, an app that allows a voter to “explore the background of every candidate and referendum on their local ballot.”[7]

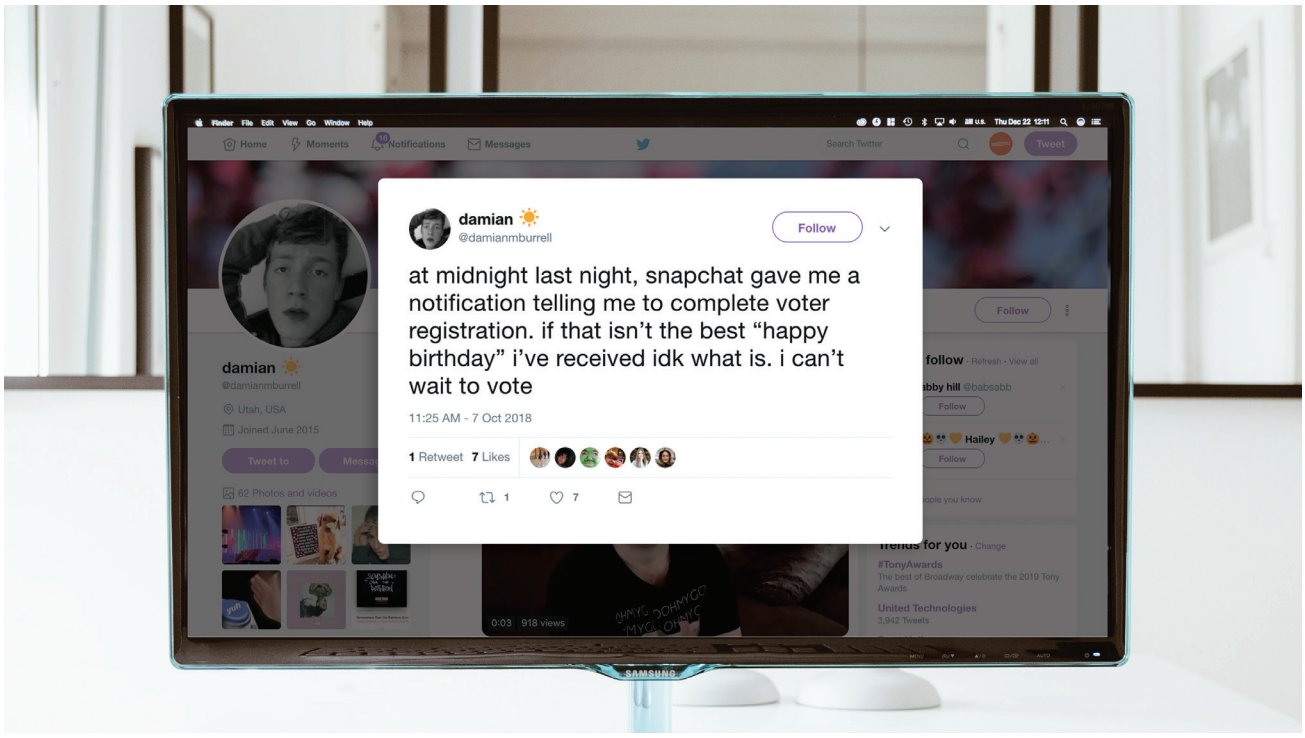
When analyzing tactics used by all eight companies, we found several patterns. First, these companies see civic responsibility programs as being good for business. Although none of the initiatives reviewed in this case study were established with the explicit goal of producing a financial benefit, all of the representatives interviewed believed civic engagement to be beneficial to their brand. Two participants cited civic programming as an opportunity to build a pro-social brand with consumers; another pointed to the benefit of elevating the company with elected officials; and almost all believed these programs helped the company build stronger relationships with employees.

Second, CEO and staff support are critical while money is not. All of the companies interviewed reported needing modest additional resources in order to run a successful voter participation program, mainly relying instead on existing full-time staff and small budget initiatives such as company-wide emails and meetings. There are costs associated with having existing staff work on these initiatives, but some of the participating companies spent very little in addition. One company had a budget of $5,000 to host voter registration drives for employees and another spent approximately $25,000 on educational resources and events. It was clear companies can do a lot with a little and that a civic engagement program can scale based on available resources.

Third, early planning makes implementation much easier. As none of the companies included in the study had a staffer dedicated to these initiatives full-time, planning well in advance of the primaries and early voting dates was paramount in implementing a successful initiative.

Fourth, some effort is better than no effort, as long as it is “on-brand” — or relevant to consumers and consistent with the company’s overall look, feel, message, and voice. All eight companies noted that the key to success with a voter engagement program, regardless of the scope and scale, is staying on brand and knowing what resonates with their target audience.

Lastly, the representatives we interviewed stressed the importance of working with peers and civic engagement experts to support their company’s efforts. While the representatives interviewed acknowledged that it’s rare for companies to share notes on government relations efforts or social



TWEET ABOUT VOTER REGISTRATION | PHOTO CREDIT: ANGELO PANTAZIS

responsibility campaigns, they noted that civic responsibility programs are different. Many of the companies involved in the study had previously reached out to others in the same sector, with the technology companies regularly meeting at a roundtable to discuss ways to solve the low voter participation problem through their platforms and tools. In addition, they noted it was important both to leverage nonprofit organizations for messaging advice or nonpartisan validation, as well as to stay nonpartisan when encouraging people to vote.

In conclusion, large, high-profile companies are energetically engaging in civic responsibility programs — and for good reason. They not only provide much-needed energy for increasing voter participation both in the workforce and consumer base of a company, but they also boost brand awareness and reputation. One survey assessed consumer's emotional reactions to brands taking a stand on political or social issues and found that, "the chances of encouraging someone toward purchase are higher than pushing him or her away."[8] In addition, they are extremely cost effective, requiring no additional staff, limited time commitments, and relatively small budgets. America is best served when companies get involved and play a role in driving increased voter turnout.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility is not a new concept. The practice dates as far back as 1889, when Andrew Carnegie argued in The Gospel of Wealth that the business leaders had a responsibility to solve social problems that the government could not or would not address. Half a century later, changes in the tax code incentivized businesses — not just wealthy shareholders — to engage in public charity. And in 1943, Johnson & Johnson began what is widely acknowledged as the earliest form of corporate social responsibility programming with the adoption of the company's credo, which emphasizes serving the employees and community, in addition to the shareholders.[9]

Several decades later, Sandra L. Holmes, a management professor at the University of Texas - San Antonio, examined the burgeoning field of corporate social responsibility. She conducted a survey on corporate philanthropy in 1976, in which she found there were five key considerations for businesses in deciding whether to support a cause.[10] These included:

1. A company's ability to support the cause;
2. The severity of need;
3. C-Suite interest;
4. Potential publicity from support;
5. Government influence.

In almost every election, regardless of the candidate or the country's current situation, 40-60% of adults do not participate.

Today, many companies engage in corporate social responsibility. Companies engage in a variety of initiatives aimed at strengthening society and building goodwill among employees, consumers, and the public. Some focus on engaging employees, others on engaging consumers directly. While the causes a business supports depend greatly on the company's sector, employee and shareholder demand, and the community the company serves, there are a growing number of businesses interested in increasing democratic participation in the United States.

Given the persistent problem of low voter turnout and the high need for engagement, companies have a clear opportunity to make promoting voting and civic participation a vital part of their portfolio of CSR initiatives. In our assessment, the eight companies whose efforts we reviewed truly believe that corporate initiatives aimed at increasing civic participation are not only the right thing to do for our democracy, but are also helpful for business. The positive coverage they have received for their efforts bolsters these points.

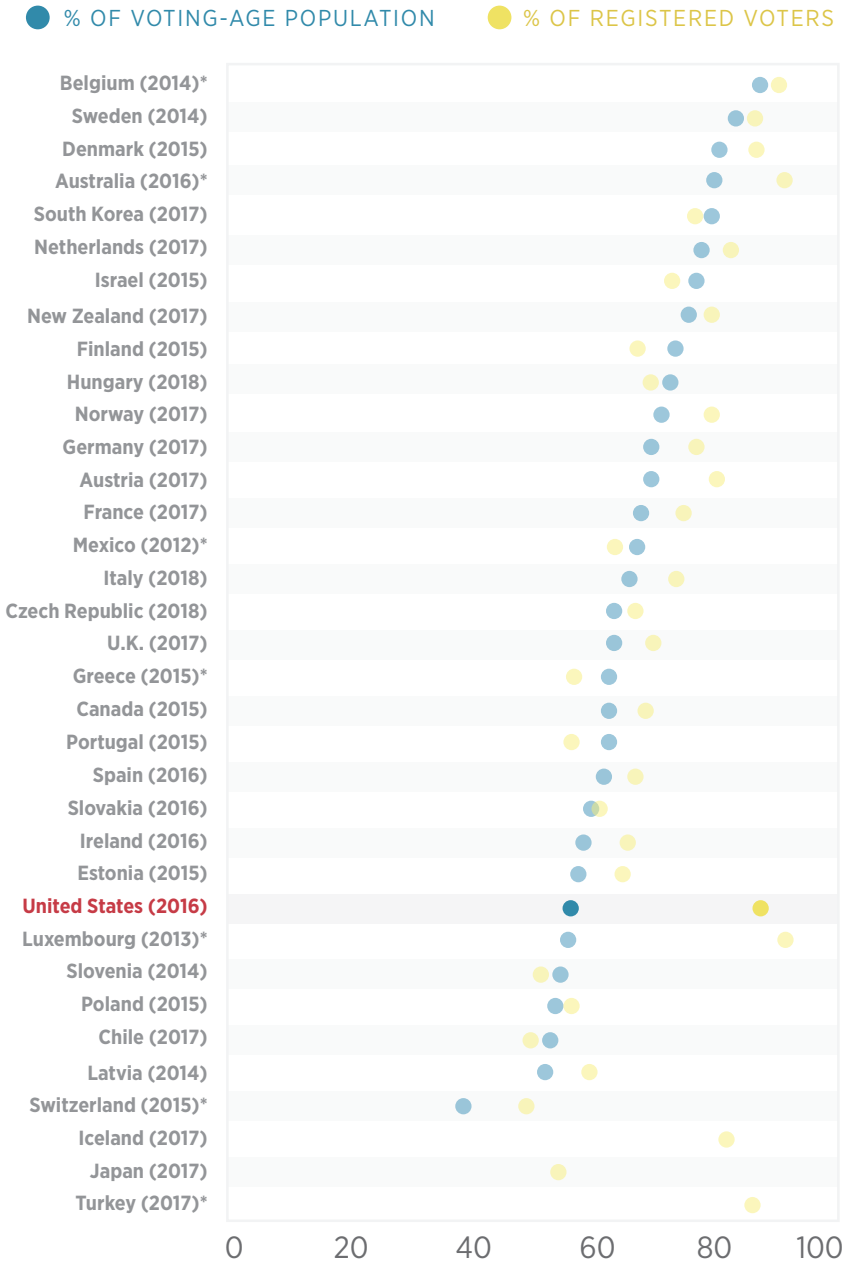
The Low Voter Turnout Problem

Voter participation rates in the United States are alarmingly low. According to a Pew Research Center study, the U.S. lags behind most other highly developed democratic states.[11] This figure is calculated based on the voting age population, or the number of people in the United States over the age of 18. Turnout rates among the voting eligible population — those over 18 minus the estimated number of non-citizens and ineligible felons — are slightly higher.

Despite voter turnout hitting a 100-year midterm election high, still just 50% of the voting eligible population cast a ballot in the 2018 election. Nearly half the country stayed home, and it was still the highest turnout for a midterm since 1914. Presidential year voter turnout isn't much better. 60% of the voting eligible population cast a ballot in the hotly contested 2016 presidential race.

BY INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS, U.S. VOTER TURNOUT IS LOW

Votes cast in most recent national election as a...



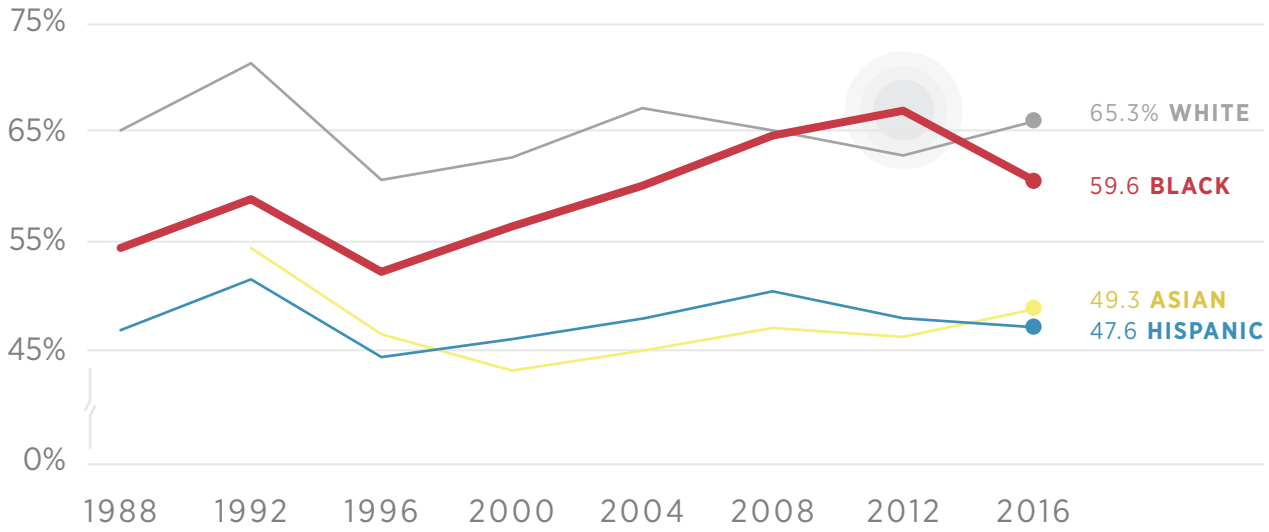
Note: Voting-age population (VAP) turnout is derived from estimates of each country's VAP by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Registered-voter (RV) turnout derived from each country's reported registration data. Because of methodology differences, in some countries estimated VAP is lower than reported RV. Current voting-age population estimates for Iceland, Japan and Turkey unavailable.

*National law makes voting compulsory. In addition, one Swiss canton has compulsory voting.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

VOTER TURNOUT RATES BY RACE:

% of eligible voters who say they voted



Note: Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Data for non-Hispanic Asians were not available in 1988.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Regardless of how the rates are calculated, voter participation in the United States has consistently hovered between 50-60% of the voting age (or eligible) population for presidential elections, and 35-50% for midterm elections. In almost every election, regardless of the candidate or the country's current situation, 40-60% of adults do not participate.[12]

Even more alarming, voter participation rates are even lower among those from traditionally underrepresented communities: young, Black, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and American Indian citizens vote at significantly lower rates than non-Hispanic white voters. Youth turnout lags 20 points behind the national turnout average in almost every election.[13]

Causes of Low Turnout

Citizens face several barriers to participating in our democratic process. Research shows that most commonly cited reasons for not voting include:

01 **Voter registration requirements:** Unlike other developed countries, the United States does not automatically register citizens to vote when they turn 18. In 31 states, voters must register before the election to be eligible to participate.[14] Studies have shown that as many as 90% of registered voters do show up to cast a ballot in presidential elections.

02 **Complex voting rules:** The rules around voter registration, ID requirements, deadlines, early voting, absentee voting, and language access vary from state to state. It can be challenging for voters to find the information they need given the variances in state laws.

03 **No time to vote**: In 2014, 35% of those who did not vote said that scheduling conflicts with work or school kept them from getting to the polls.

04 **Low information:** According to CIRCLE, an initiative at Tufts University that studies youth civic and political participation, young people lack knowledge about how the government works and don't understand why their vote matters. A 2012 survey showed that 20% of the working-class youth surveyed feel they don't think they know enough to be able to vote.[15]

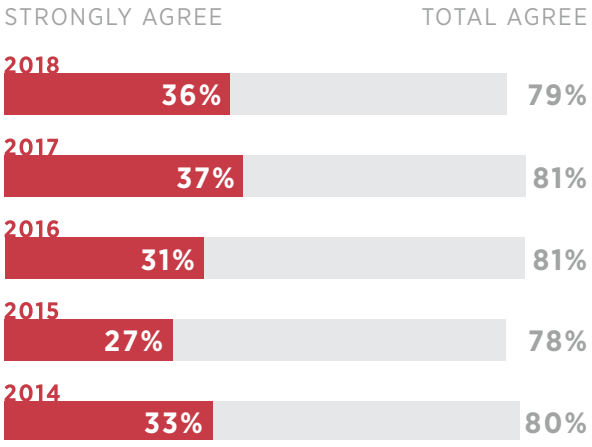
How Corporations Can Help

Solving the low civic participation problem does not fall entirely to the business community. National, state, and local governments have a role to play in helping boost civic participation rates in the United States, as do our education system, the nonprofit sector, and philanthropy. But, as many business leaders are beginning to acknowledge, corporations do have a role to play in boosting voter turnout by encouraging employees and consumers to vote.

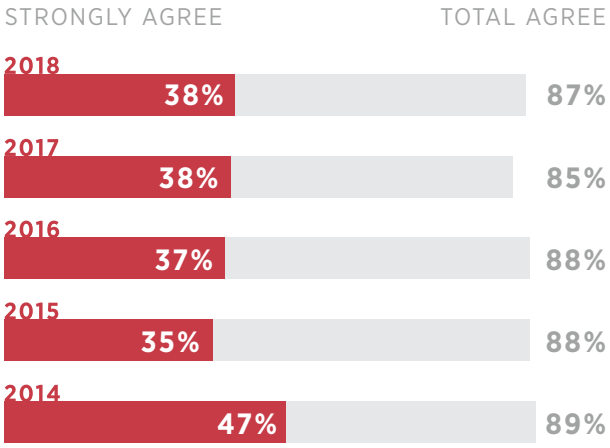
In 2018, over 400 US corporations encouraged their consumers and/or employees to engage in the midterm elections.[16] In addition to the companies in this case study, other large, high-profile companies engaged in promoting voter participation include Estée Lauder, Facebook, Levi's, Lyft, Tyson Foods, Starbucks, and Walmart. While tactics varied from company to company, this new form of corporate social responsibility — the responsibility to foster civic engagement — is quickly becoming the new norm.

INACTION COMES WITH RISK

Consumers continue to believe that **companies should take action...**



...and that companies have the **power to influence change.**



GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP'S ANNUAL BUSINESS AND POLITICS REPORT

The Case for Engaging

Civic engagement rose significantly after the 2016 election, with an uptick in political activity on the streets, political conversation on social media, and voting in midterm elections.[17,18] This trend led to historic turnout in 2018, which marked the highest rate of voter participation in a century.[19]

According to Global Strategy Group's 2019 Annual Business and Politics Report, companies are engaging on political and social issues "in more ways than ever before and on a wider range of issues" against this backdrop.[20] Why? Because consumers want it. A full 79% of those surveyed agree companies should take action and 87% believe they have the power to make a difference. In a different survey, Global Strategy Group found that 81% of Americans are [more] likely to buy from companies that have encouraged people "to participate in our democracy by providing information about issues in their community and resources to help them register and vote."[21]

The data illustrates that there is a potential reward for taking a stance, but also a clear risk for not taking action. Survey respondents described companies who took a position on a political or social issue as "trustworthy," "mission-driven," and "bold;" whereas companies that never took a position were described as "out-of-touch," "selfish," and "unpatriotic."[22] An Edelman Earned Brand report issued in October 2018 showed that 64% of Americans think CEOs should take the lead on change rather than waiting for the government to impose it.[23]

> ***For years, companies got credit for doing good, but there was no consequence for inaction. Today's consumers not only believe strongly that companies should take positions on social and political issues, but they are actively seeking out information on where companies stand. As a result, those companies that choose to step out on issues stand to be rewarded, while those that choose to sit on the sidelines may have a price to pay.[24]***
>
> —JULIE HOOTKIN, PARTNER, GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP

In this study, we will examine the growing practice of corporate civic responsibility. It is our aim to provide a detailed overview of the different tactics businesses used — and the varying levels of impact they made — in 2018 in order for others to better understand whether and how to craft their own civic responsibility programs moving forward.

We analyzed the efforts of eight companies to increase voter participation rates among consumers and/or employees. We selected a diverse set of participants based on our desire to understand how companies of different sizes and missions, with civic participation programs at different stages of development, tackled this work in 2018. These companies are not representative of every way a company can encourage civic participation, but they do demonstrate a wide range of activities that can be undertaken.

These eight companies graciously shared the details of their work with us:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

Endeavor

Gap Inc.

Patagonia

Snap, Inc.

Spotify

Target

Twitter

Based on our analysis of these companies, which vary in terms of sector, size, reach, and resources, we have determined that corporate programs promoting civic participation are not only good for democracy, but also good for business.

CASE STUDY COMPANY STATISTICS

Company	Sector	Number of Employees	Target Program Audience
Twitter	Social Media/Tech	~4,000[25]	Consumers
Target	Retail	345,000[26]	Employees
Spotify	Social Media/Tech	4,165[27]	Consumers
Snap, Inc	Social Media/Tech	2,884[28]	Consumers
Patagonia	Retail	1,200 U.S.[29]	Employees & Consumers
Gap	Retail	135,000 globally (in 2,370 U.S. stores)[30]	Employees
Endeavor	Media/Entertainment	5,469 U.S.[31]	Employees
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota	Insurance	3,900[32]	Employees

Structure of Findings

Our interviews focused on three aspects of companies' voter participation initiatives: details of the target audience for their initiatives; an overview of the internal decision-making and planning process for their initiatives; and details of the programs they carried out, including what it took to implement them in terms of staff, resources, and support from third-party organizations.

All of the companies had to decide whether they wanted to engage employees, consumers, or both. They also had to determine what would be the focus of their work: voter registration, voter education, and/or voter participation. We found in our interviews that C-suite involvement, prior employee or consumer engagement, and PR risks were determinative factors in which buckets of work a company pursued.

We synthesized the successful strategies and tactics companies used to achieve their civic responsibility goals below.

We also summarized our top learnings and hope they serve to inform other companies' efforts as they tackle this important work during elections to come. We found that, despite the variations in these companies' audiences, tactics, and resources, there were common themes about what works and what doesn't work when promoting voter participation. For example, all case study participants reported taking part in collaborations between corporations and third-party entities including government officials, nonprofits, celebrities, and peer corporations; they unanimously agreed that these collaborations enhanced their efforts.

THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

There are a wide range of activities that can be undertaken by companies looking to promote voter participation. The following represents a sample of potential activities, but is not exhaustive.

LADDER OF ENGAGEMENT

DIFFICULTY	ACTIVITY	PLATFORM
01 **One-time activation on digital platforms**	• Promoting National Voter Registration Day. • Promoting Election Day.	COMPANY SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS
02 **One-time in-person activation**	• Hosting in-office voter registration drive on National Voter Registration Day. • Hosting an Election Day party.	COMPANY HQ
03 **Multi-pronged election promotion**	• Establishing a calendar to promote voter registration, absentee and early voting, and Election Day polling place locations/hours. • Hosting informational voting event(s) with elected officials, candidates, or nonprofit partners.	COMPANY-WIDE EMAIL(S) COMPANY WEBSITE COMPANY HQ
04 **Creating a culture of voting**	• Commitment by C-suite executives to prioritize a civic engagement initiative. • Dedicating staff and resources to manage the initiative. • Sharing "I Voted" sticker selfies. • Providing the opportunity for employees to share their plans to vote with one another. • Giving employees time off to vote, opening late, closing early, having a "no meeting" day, carving out time for early voting, or offering Election Day off as a holiday.	COMPANY INTRANET COMPANY SPOKESPERSON SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS
05 **Becoming a civic leader**	• Emphasizing work and sharing best practices publicly to advance more widespread adoption of civic engagement initiatives. • Recruiting others to run similar initiatives. • Integrating calls-to-action in consumer-facing products and platforms. • Sponsoring a party at a local polling location. • Writing a blog post about your efforts, showing leadership registering to vote, voting early/absentee, or going to the polls. • Encouraging employees and consumers to volunteer as a poll worker on Election Day.	PR CHANNELS C-SUITE PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS C-SUITE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS COMPANY PRODUCTS OR PLATFORMS

The New York Times

Make Time To Vote

A CEO Challenge to Support Democracy

In recent years voter turnout has been as low as 36 percent, often because of life and work obligations. That's why we're joining forces as business leaders, in a nonpartisan effort to increase participation by helping ensure our employees have time to vote.

Join Us

Abercrombie & Fitch Co.
Fran Horowitz

Askov Finlayson
Eric Dayton

Bandwidth
David Morken

Beautycounter
Gregg Renfrew

Deckers Brands
Dave Powers

DICK'S Sporting Goods
Ed Stack

EILEEN FISHER, Inc.
Eileen Fisher

Experian North America
Craig Boundy

First Lite
Kenton Carruth

FleishmanHillard
John Saunders

Gap Inc.
Art Peck

Great Outdoor Provision Co.
Chuck Millsaps

hint
Kara Goldin

Kaiser Permanente
Bernard J. Tyson

KIND Healthy Snacks
Daniel Lubetzky

La Colombe
Todd Carmichael

Levi Strauss & Co.
Chip Bergh

Lyft
Logan Green & John Zimmer

MiiR
Bryan Papé

New Belgium Brewing
Steve Fechheimer

Patagonia
Rose Marcario

PayPal
Dan Schulman

Sonos
Patrick Spence

sweetgreen
Jonathan Neman

The North Face
Arne Arens

VF Corporation
Steve Rendle

Walmart, Inc.
Doug McMillon

ADVERTISEMENT IN
THE NEW YORK TIMES
09/23/2018

Engagement Approach 1:
EMPLOYEE-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

Each of the eight companies featured in this case study approached their programming differently. Five companies designed their programs around employee engagement. The most publicized employee engagement initiative belonged to the outdoor retailer Patagonia, which closed for business on Election Day to provide employees paid time off to vote. Patagonia previously did the same on Election Day in 2016.

Corley Kenna, Director of Global Communications and Public Relations for Patagonia, said that the feedback they received after closing the headquarters, retail stores, and distribution and customer service centers was so positive, it inspired chief executive Rose Marcario to do it again. "[Rose] got so many emails, notes, and calls from people saying, 'Had we not shut down, I might not have been able to vote,' or, 'Thank you for shutting us down. It allowed me to vote with my family' that we knew we had to do it in 2018."[33]

Marcario penned an op-ed announcing the decision to close on Election Day in June 2018, writing: "And this time, we're actively encouraging other companies to join us. Because no American should have to choose between a paycheck and fulfilling his or her duty as a citizen."[34] The call to action garnered attention from other CEOs, which prompted Patagonia to set up Time to Vote, a way for CEOs to make a public commitment to supporting employee voter participation. Sample language included: "I want to make sure you have a work schedule that allows you to vote. Voting is important, and you should go vote."[35] Many of the companies we interviewed participated in the Time to Vote initiative.

CITIZENBLUE BUTTON

Thanks to Time to Vote, 411 CEOs pledged to ensure employees could vote before the 2018 midterm election. While Patagonia gave companies advice and helped connect them with nonprofit civic engagement organizations, they did not specifically track what each company did (or did not do); measuring the impact of this kind of effort is difficult to do. But there is no question that Patagonia created momentum in the corporate sector and earned significant press attention on the issue.

For myriad reasons, not every company can give employees the day off to vote, but they can still use other tactics to motivate them to do so. As Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota has found from running its *CitizenBlue* program for the last 18 years, creating a strong civic culture requires ongoing, year-round employee engagement.

CitizenBlue has a staff person, Lisa Wagor, steering the program, but it constitutes only 20% of her workload within the government affairs department, where she works as the company's Public Affairs Manager. *CitizenBlue* also has an advisory team made up of employees from different parts of the company that provides input on programming. Wagor says this helps her see how to make the initiatives more relevant.

In an election year, the *CitizenBlue* programming begins in January and ramps up before Election Day. In 2018, the campaign was called "All Aboard." Each employee received a magnet for their cubicle noting key dates leading up to the election, including party caucuses, primary elections, and Election Day. There were bipartisan candidate forums during lunch on campus, materials to explain what different state officers do, and an intranet site where employees could look up key election information. Additionally, *CitizenBlue* offers employees tours of the Minnesota State Capitol and even hosts a Flag Day ceremony on its campus.

CITIZENBLUE 2018 CANDIDATE ROSTER

> ***Target is in a unique position with our wide customer base and many employees to impact corporate civic engagement, and we'll continue to look for innovative ways to do that.***
>
> —JEFF JUUL, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST - GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS FOR TARGET.

According to Wagor, there are so many opportunities for employees to participate in *CitizenBlue* programming because the demand is there: "We're really close to the employees and sensed they wanted to be a part of the entire process."[36] She added that other companies shouldn't be intimidated by how robust Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota's programming is, as they have been doing it for 18 years. She said they started small and built it slowly over time, frequently leaning on the employee advisory team to lead the way.

Starting small and focusing on sending timely, informative emails to employees has been the key for companies like Endeavor, Gap Inc., and Target. Each of these companies has thousands of employees across the country. For Gap Inc. and Target, there are the additional tens of thousands of retail and distribution center employees to consider. These three companies made clear the challenges of working across multiple states: each state has a different voter registration deadline, a different absentee/early voting window, and requires different forms of identification to vote. Communicating clear, accurate information with employees requires a level of research and expertise in election law that most companies don't have. As such, companies with a distributed and diverse employee base opt for more broad, simple, and generalized civic engagement programs.

Endeavor, Gap Inc., and Target reach out to employees via email with reminders to register to vote and links to find important voting information. In addition to providing employees with a reminder about their paid time off to vote, Endeavor's HR department goes so far as to send out state-specific emails to employees reminding them to take advantage of paid time off to vote in primary elections.

CITIZENBLUE 2018 MATERIALS FOR EMPLOYEES

Each of these three companies also hosted in-person voter registration drives or voting celebrations at headquarters locations. One Endeavor company, the talent agency WME, hosted a "party at the polls" concert at its Nashville headquarters. Musicians like Sheryl Crow, Jason Isbell, and Billy Ray Cyrus performed and encouraged employees and community members to head down the street to the early voting location to cast their ballot.[37]

Corporate social media accounts with mass audiences were also flagged as an important tool for formally communicating with employees about key dates and sharing inspiring messages about civic participation.

IGNITE National
@IGNITE_National

Follow

IGNITE teamed up with @gapinc to register voters for the Midterm Elections in CA, OH & NY! We're one week from Election Day and can't wait to turn out the vote!

1:15 PM - 30 Oct 2018

Gap Inc.
@GapInc

Follow

It's Election Day. It's your voice, your vote, your country. Get out there and vote. #TimeToVOTE

9:52 AM - 6 Nov 2018

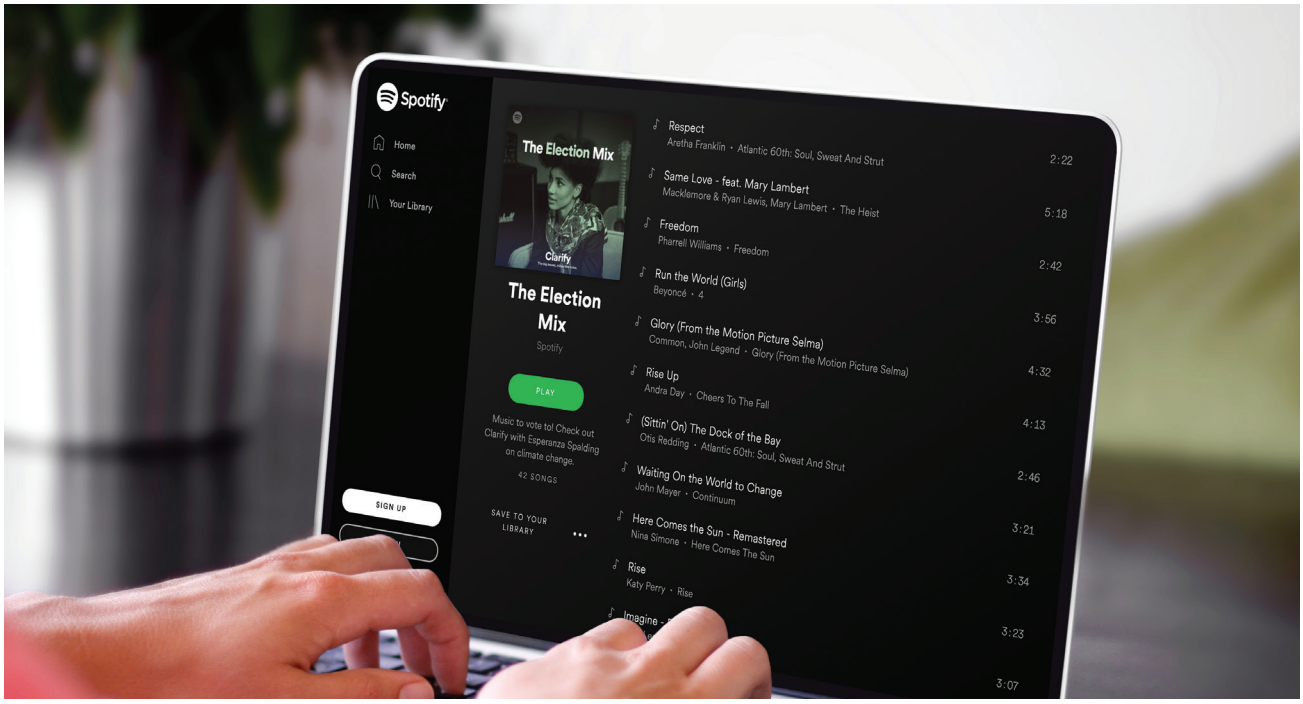
Engagement Approach 2:
CONSUMER-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

There are many ways companies can encourage consumers to vote. Some of the participating companies focused on registering voters, others focused on reminding people to vote, and a few focused on helping to change the culture around voting, using events and social recognition to help establish voting as a norm.

Snap, Inc., Spotify, and Twitter also participated in our case study, detailing their consumer-facing civic engagement. Each of these three technology platforms had engaged during previous elections, particularly around promoting voter registration. In 2018, thanks at least in part to improvements in data-sharing via APIs, these companies were able to scale their programs to expand beyond voter registration and include education and mobilization efforts.

During interviews for this case study, representatives for Snap, Inc., Spotify, and Twitter stressed the importance of crafting civic engagement programs that were unique to their platforms and resonated with what users come to their platforms to experience. Spotify, for example, organized their activations around music. They embedded a pop-up message reminding users about Election Day within their music platform while simultaneously promoting curated playlists for each state that would excite voters about the election. This strategy was informed by Spotify's motto that "music [is] the key to everything" and research that shows making voting a fun experience can produce higher voter participation rates.[38,39]

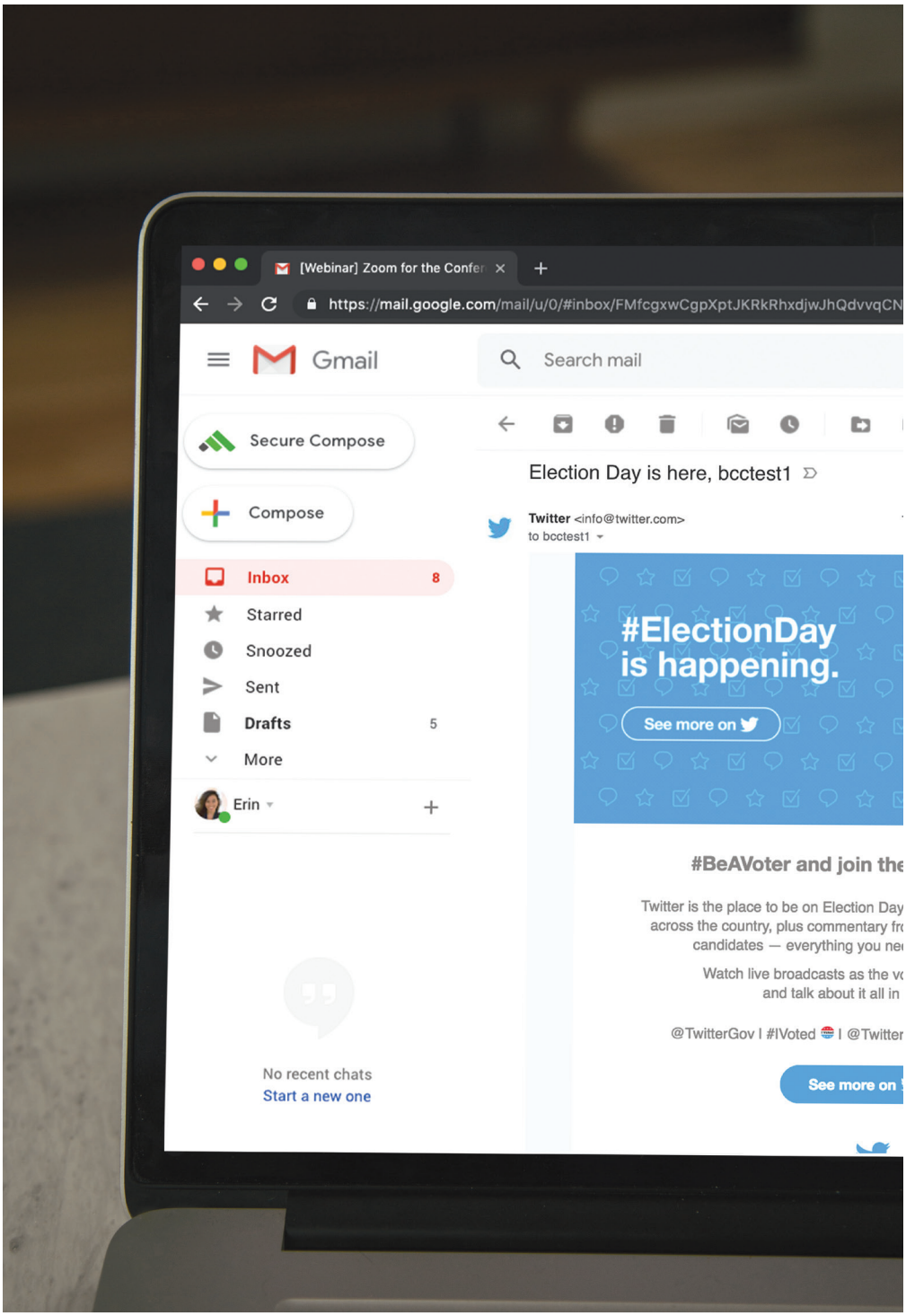
Twitter expanded upon past efforts to educate their users about democracy and the importance of participation. Twitter's work was concentrated in three categories: disseminating reliable election information, fostering conversation that encouraged action, and leveraging influencer culture to promote engagement. They crafted a program around a singular understanding: "Politics is pop culture. Giving people who [are] already having these discussions a place to go and turn their conversation into action just seems like a natural segue."[40] To that end, Twitter partnered with Ballotpedia to create "verified user" labels that validated content coming from those running for office. Twitter's election labels were adopted by 95% of candidates running for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, or governor. Candidates with these verified labels received approximately 100 million impressions per day, appearing in 13% of U.S. election conversations.[41]



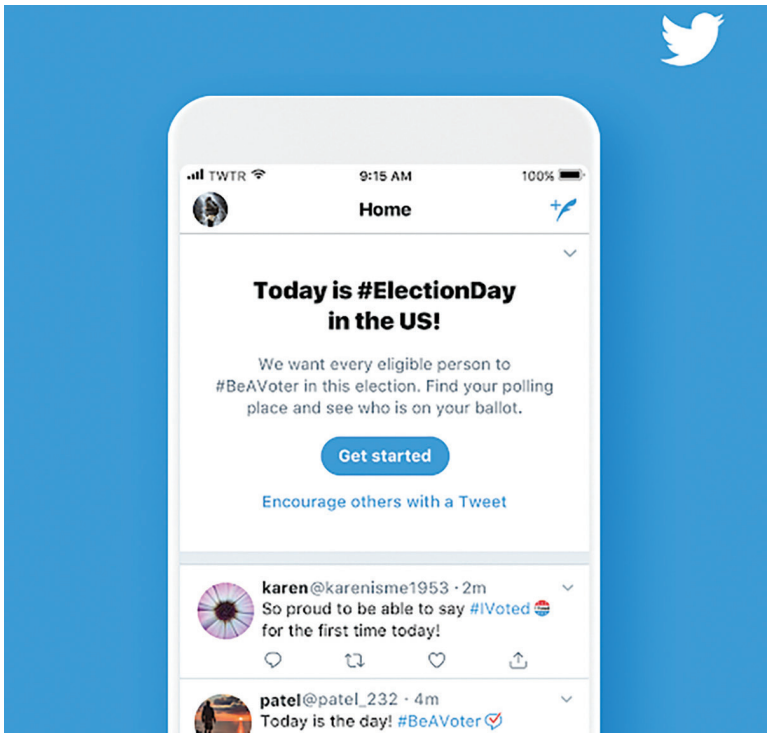
SPOTIFY ELECTION MIX PLAYLIST | PHOTO CREDIT: SIMON HATTINGA VERSCHURE

TWEETS ABOUT 2018 ELECTION | PHOTO CREDIT: TINH KHUONG

Twitter also worked with secretaries of state across the country to share reports of citizens' issues registering or voting. Through product activations like in-app reminders to vote at the top of users' home timelines, Twitter delivered information about key dates and instructions about how to participate in the election. Emojis were generated for election-related hashtags allowed Twitter to elevate civic engagement conversations. From there, they were able to provide users with direct links to polling location lookup tools and voter registration resources through third-party partnerships with nonprofit organizations like TurboVote and GetToThePolls.com.



TWITTER EMAIL ABOUT 2018 ELECTION



TWITTER ELECTION DAY REMINDER

These civic engagement initiatives helped increase the number of people who joined conversations on topics like National Voter Registration Day and voting before and on Election Day. Twitter saw a 1.9x increase in the use of the hashtags #iVotedEarly, #iVoted and #yoVoté from 2016. The number of people who tweeted with hashtag #NationalVoterRegistrationDay or similar content doubled from 2016 and 2018, despite the fact that 2018 was a midterm rather than a presidential election.[42] This increase is significant given the historical attention gap paid to midterm elections, compared to presidential cycles. Moreover, the 2018 U.S. midterm elections were the most tweeted-about midterm election in history with more than 99 million tweets sent from the first primaries in March through Election Day.

Snap, Inc.'s demographic is traditionally hard to reach with campaigns; users skew younger and are typically first-time voters. The company's mission includes "contributing to human progress" while encouraging users to have fun and express themselves. Snap, Inc.'s Vice President of Public Policy, Jennifer Stout, made it clear that voting fits squarely within this mission, saying: "There is no more powerful form of self-expression than the ability to vote. The numbers we've seen have been fantastic and have shown us that our users have been some of the most engaged communities out there."[43]

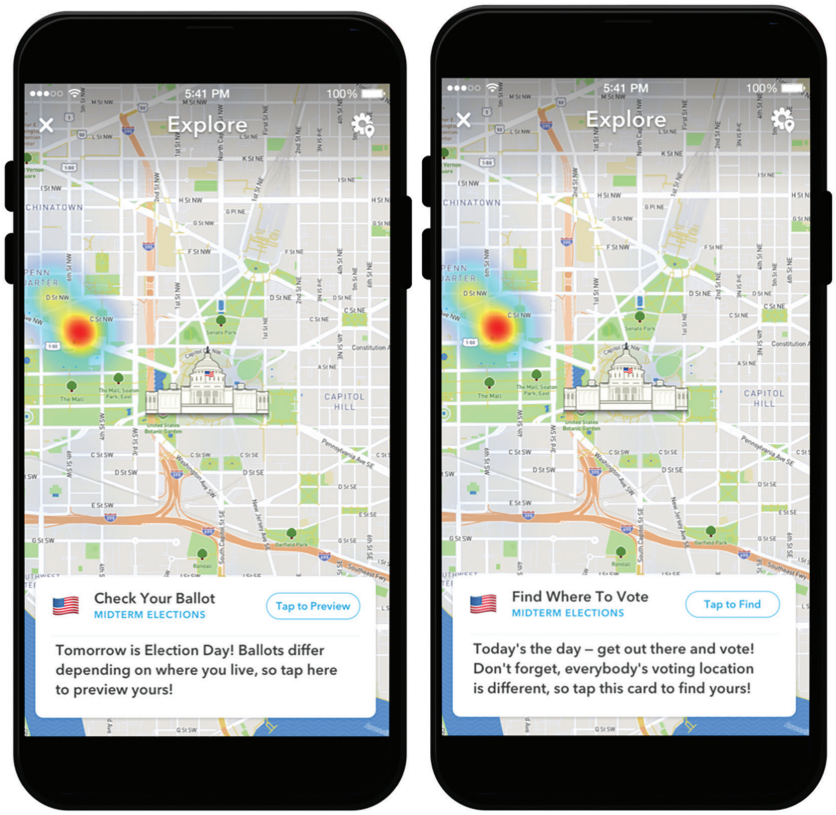
SNAP, INC. VOTER REGISTRATION REMINDER

To that end, Snap, Inc. built civic products like voter registration tools in the user profile and a polling place lookup tool in Snap Maps. They also sent messages to all users age 18+ to remind them to take key actions: registering to vote, finding their polling place, reviewing their sample ballots before Election Day, voting, and sharing "snaps" about voting with their close friends. Snap, Inc. also partnered with BallotReady, an app that allows a voter to "explore the background of every candidate and referendum on their local ballot."[44]

Ultimately, Snap, Inc. was able to generate over 400,000 voter registration applications through the app.[45] Of those, 57% were submitted by users between the ages of 18-24.[46] Additionally, the Election Day polling place lookup on Snap Map was used by over 1.4 million Snapchatters.[47]

All of the technology platform activations required longer planning time, given the development needed to code the program into the apps and websites. Public demands for technology platforms to play a role in civic education (or, more precisely, to combat fake news), combined with the fact that each company had previously implemented election activations, made devoting resources resources to providing voters with information around the 2018 midterm election a smart strategy for these technology companies.

While the election activations these companies created were tailored to their platforms, the representatives we spoke to echoed the sentiments of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota: these programs started small, incorporated lessons from previous years, did what they could with the resources available to them, and made sure the activations aligned with all other aspects of the user experience. And that's why they were all successful in their own ways.



POLLING PLACE LOCATOR WITHIN SNAP MAP

LESSONS LEARNED

The tactics used to engage employees and consumers varied greatly from company to company. But the representatives we spoke with mentioned a few themes. Given the wide variance in company size, sector, and election programming, these themes may apply to many companies that embark upon civic responsibility programs in 2020 or beyond.

Civic Responsibility IS Good for Business

First and foremost, all the representatives we spoke with believe there was a business case to be made for encouraging employees and consumers to vote. Across the board, people reported their election activations were well received by employees, consumers, and shareholders. In fact, one representative cited receiving dozens of emails from employees expressing gratitude that the company was running such a program. Though she knew it was what employees would want, when we asked about lessons learned, she described that proactive employee feedback as "the biggest surprise."[48] The business benefits cited by case study participants included meeting consumer expectations, raising brand awareness, and increasing employee satisfaction.

While none of the civic responsibility programs we reviewed were established explicitly to produce a financial benefit for the business, each company still cited tangible benefits like brand building with consumers, stronger relationships with employees, and elevating the company's reputation with elected officials. Lisa Wagor added that Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota has benefited from employees having a better understanding of how policy and government work. "It's been a hugely helpful edge in business. Legislators pay more attention because they know our employees are involved."[49]

Second, many of the participating companies found it helpful to see other companies doing this work in 2018. There was consensus that, while raising voter awareness was widely acknowledged as important, getting support from the C-suite was much easier when doing so seemed like a corporate cultural norm rather than a "political" activity. When more companies talk about voting, it makes it easier for others to get involved.

As one representative explained, being able to point to peer companies starting civic participation programs made it "safe" for their own company to create one. The more companies encourage people to vote, the harder it is for politicians or consumers to attack an individual company's efforts as disingenuous — or worse, partisan. These were the two biggest issues people raised in relation to the cost/benefit analysis of starting a civic participation program. But thanks to the high number of companies that engaged, they said their concerns were drastically mitigated.

Finally, many companies cited not participating as a growing risk to business. One of the study participants from Gap, Inc. explained that the decision about whether or not to get involved came down to one thing: "Our employees were already looking to us to speak up and it felt like a miss not to.... The employees come to expect a certain outreach. There was more risk in doing nothing and not having any communication about this election. We had an imperative to do something."[50]

> ***We had to ask ourselves, 'Are we taking a risk by not engaging? By not celebrating Election Day?' I do think doing nothing is the real business risk now.***
>
> —CASE STUDY PARTICIPANT

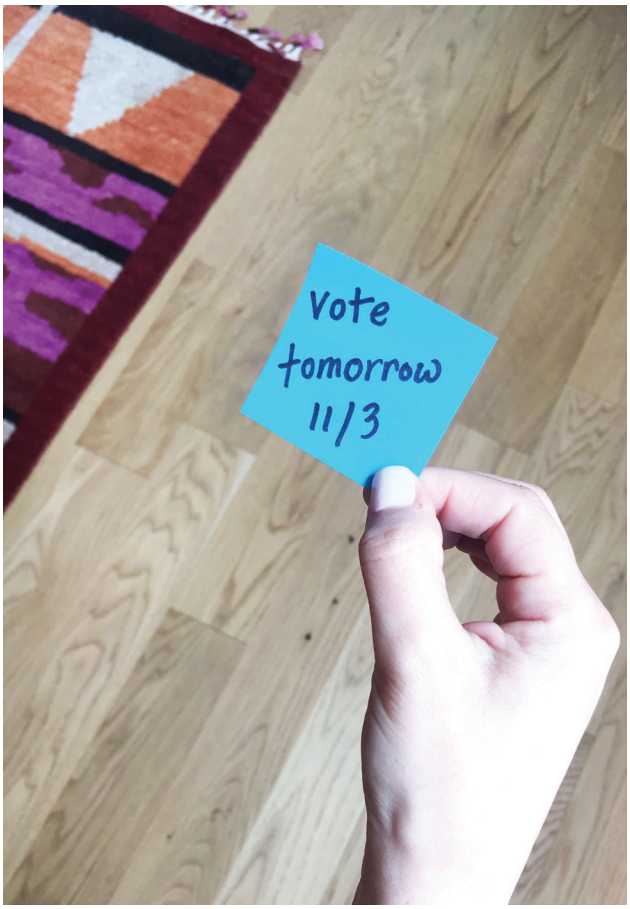
CEO and Staff Support Are Critical; Money Is Not

One of the most exciting findings of this research is that while the resources invested into each company's program varied, many companies reported needing very few explicitly allocated, additional resources to run a successful program. Instead, these initiatives were often priorities added to the responsibilities of existing business units and employees. At a minimum, identifying an employee within the company to drive the programming was critical. In some cases, this person was located in the government affairs department, others were on the communications or social responsibility team. In most cases, regardless of who was bottom-lining the program, there were members of all these teams, plus human resources, involved.

That said, none of the companies we interviewed required a full-time staff person dedicated to these initiatives. As mentioned above, even Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, which in our assessment runs one of the most robust, full-time civics programs we've seen, allocates just approximately 20% of a single staff person's time to this work. As one interviewee put it, you just need "someone whose responsibility it is to make it happen – and who can bring cohesiveness to it. You need someone accountable for it."[51]

In addition, having a small budget for "swag activations," like printing stickers, buttons, magnets, or shirts, was cited as incredibly helpful. For employee-focused initiatives, having resources for events was particularly useful. Most companies set aside a small budget for food, beverage, and promotion of its candidate forums. Otherwise, companies deployed resources at their discretion. For example, Patagonia placed a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* to reach other CEOs with potential interest in joining their Time to Vote initiative. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota set up a photo booth in their headquarters to encourage employees to post selfies wearing "I Plan to Vote" or "I Voted' stickers. Gap Inc. provided a small stipend to a nonprofit organization helping run its on-site registration drives. And Endeavor set aside money to host an early voting concert in Nashville.

The companies interviewed reported needing only modest additional resources to run their voter participation programs, relying on existing full-time staff and small budget initiatives such as company-wide emails and meetings. There are costs associated with having existing staff work on these initiatives, but some of the participating companies spent very little in addition. One company had a budget of $5,000 to host voter registration drives for employees and another spent approximately $25,000 on educational resources and events. It was clear companies can do a lot with a little and that a civic engagement program can scale based on available resources.



But staff time and resources mean nothing without CEO support. Across the board, the representatives we interviewed said that having executives who are excited about a voter engagement initiative and are willing to make it a priority makes the work much easier. This is particularly true since, in most cases, these initiatives span the communications, government affairs, and human resources departments. Cross-department participation and collaboration makes a huge difference in executing a successful program.

Setting clear, measurable goals for success and communicating progress-to-goals with leadership was also cited as important. Making and keeping these initiatives a priority requires ongoing maintenance. As one person said about their program, "We're constantly making sure we demonstrate its worth."

Early Planning Makes Implementation Easier

PHOTO CREDIT: NEON BRAND

Because none of the companies have a full-time staff person dedicated to running voter engagement initiatives, it's important for those involved to plan early. This helps align all the necessary partners and participants around what needs to be done and along what timeline.

In creating a plan for employee or consumer engagement, the first step is to determine which audience the effort will aim to reach. Then, setting goals for the work will help determine what tactics are employed. For example, if the goal is to register employees or consumers to vote, the timeline for activation must begin far earlier than if the goal is to remind them about an upcoming election. That's because most states have voter registration deadlines weeks prior to an election. In fact, voter registration deadlines begin to loom as early as the end of September.

Voter registration deadlines are not the only election dates companies plan initiatives around. Early voting windows and absentee ballot request and submission deadlines are also important to consider. The fact that election laws and key dates are different for all 50 states is a huge challenge in communicating effectively with employees and

consumers, as state-by-state communications are difficult to integrate into digital programs without interfering with other, scheduled corporate communications. Understanding the civic engagement calendar and how it lines up with the existing corporate schedule often informs what a company can do in terms of a civic engagement program.

Further, an early grasp on the calendar will clarify when marketing or product development support are needed to achieve the goals of a civic engagement program. The plan must be developed with enough lead time for successful implementation, including time built in to review plans for legal compliance takes time. As many employees we interviewed flagged, there are a lot of things companies can and cannot do when it comes to encouraging voter participation — and they're not all intuitive. For instance, do you want to give something away to people who have voted? That may be providing an illegal incentive to vote. If you run into legal challenges, you may need time to develop other, equally motivating approaches.

Early planning and implementation offers more opportunities to be helpful to employees and consumers who are having a hard time navigating the complex calendar and rules of voter engagement. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota launched their 2018 programming in January, providing employees with a guide for key election moments throughout the year. Lisa Wagor of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota shared that, "Anecdotally we heard employees are participating more in these [civic events] thanks to our early work."[52]

> ***It wasn't as heavy a lift as I thought it would be, so the next time will be even easier.***
>
> —CASE STUDY PARTICIPANT

Some Effort Is Better Than No Effort — If It's On-Brand

All of the companies we spoke with said the key to success in a voter engagement program, regardless of the scope and scale, was staying on brand. Knowing who is in the audience and what resonates is core to running a successful business. Those principles should be applied to voter engagement tactics as well. One person interviewed said they knew not to make the program about their company and industry, as their employees and consumers care about more than "just our stuff." Rather than focus on industry-specific issues, this company provided information about many issues employees would care about, like transportation and education.

Another key consideration from a brand perspective, as the Vice President of Government Relations for Endeavor, Amos Buhai put it, is "walking the walk — not just telling other people what to do when it comes to voting."[53] To ensure the success of the company's efforts, Buhai directed messaging at C-suite executives, management, talent, and employees to ensure they would be doing the very thing they were encouraging the public to do.

Many of the representatives we spoke to said their companies determine what kind of program to run by asking key questions like:

- How do we normally communicate with our employees or consumers? And who is our typical messenger for such communications? For example, would it be on-brand for employees to receive a communication from the company's CEO? Or to ask consumers to tag themselves in "I Voted" selfies?
- What policies does our company already have in place, like time off to vote, that we need to communicate to everyone?
- Who is the right messenger for employee-facing communications? Is the CEO the right way to communicate the importance of an action? Would a peer employee, fellow consumer, or celebrity spokesperson be the right fit?
- How do our employees and consumers typically engage with our social responsibility initiatives? What has generated the most success in the past, and what hasn't worked well?

The questions can also be purely practical. For instance:

- When retail employees don't have company email addresses, how do you reach them? And how often is too often to communicate with them?
- What does the rest of the corporate calendar look like? Are we competing with any other messages within the company? For example, the holiday season starts in the middle of election season, so brands must figure out how to integrate messages about Election Day with Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas promotions.
- What are our competitors doing?

While these considerations are second nature for many of the eight companies we studied in this report, it's important to remember that 2018 was not the first year most companies ran voter engagement initiatives. Even the experienced staffers expressed how intimidating and overwhelming it can be to create and run a civic engagement program at first. One manager, who has been running an employee-focused effort for over a decade, encouraged other companies to consider what they can do to start small, perhaps at the lowest rung on the ladder of engagement: "A lot of [what we do] does sound big and complex and hard, but starting small is so big. We haven't always done what we're doing now. It used to be sending out a couple of reminders or hosting a candidate forum or two. The more experience you have, the more you can do. Encouraging [employees] to vote is such a small thing."[54]

Although several companies had been planning election activations for months, one of the companies we interviewed had just three weeks to go from idea to execution. The manager involved said the team decided to pursue a program and simply did the best they could with the resources they had. Ultimately, what they were able to accomplish in three weeks was fairly substantial: They set up a customized voter registration link, emailed the link to the company's employees, sent reminders about voting, and hosted a few events. The effort was last-minute, lower budget, and lower on the possible ladder of engagement, yet management still received positive feedback from employees and consumers. Most importantly, this "pilot" helped establish an expectation within the company that the effort would continue to grow and improve for 2020 and beyond.

Lean on Peers and Civic Engagement Experts to Support Voter Engagement Efforts

The following nonprofits provided advice and support to many of the participating companies.

BALLOTPEDIA

BallotReady®

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY PROJECT

ELECTIONDAY.ORG

HeadCount
MUSIC ▸ DEMOCRACY ▸ ACTION

I am a voter.™

iGNiTE
POLITICAL POWER IN EVERY YOUNG WOMAN

NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION DAY

TurboVote CHALLENGE

VOTE.org

#VoteTogether

THE VOTING INFORMATION PROJECT

Most companies rarely swap notes about marketing strategies or government relations efforts with their competitors. That's true of many social responsibility campaigns as well. But the companies we interviewed acknowledged there is something different about civic responsibility. Many said they reached out to peers in the sector to find out what they were doing around the upcoming election and how they were doing it. The technology companies meet regularly at a roundtable to discuss ways to solve the low voter participation problem through their platforms and tools.

As one participant put it: "Seeing other companies do really cool things pushes you to want to do similar things in this space. You never want an employee to think that other companies are doing better and we're hanging back." At Gap Inc., the team leaned on peers at Levi's to understand the return on investment they were seeing with the voter registration effort. As one Gap Inc. representative described, "The team working on this had never done it before. We didn't know how to benchmark [our program] and they helped us understand how our program was having an impact."

In addition to peers in the corporate space, there are dozens of nonprofit organizations that lend advice, research, technology, tools, and staff to support a company's civic engagement efforts. The nonprofit sector is crowded and can be difficult to navigate, but as Amos Buhai of Endeavor put it, "We found different ways to leverage different groups who are better at different things. It took me getting deep into it to pinpoint exactly what those were. We used so many that were all so helpful and had great resources for us."

Nonprofit partners helped companies navigate planning and implementation challenges, including:

01 How to deal with different types of employees and engage in legally permissible activities. Nonprofits can't provide legal advice, but they can raise helpful flags for corporations thinking about this work for the first time.

02 How to communicate with different employees in different states. Nonprofits can help identify resources that are able to take the burden of responsibility off a corporation for producing state-specific guides to voter registration, early voting, absentee voting, and Election Day.

03 How to find volunteers to help make this happen in many different places. Nonprofits can provide volunteers or staff to help make events run more smoothly. Just remember, providing these services isn't at the core of what most nonprofits are set up to do. Philanthropy is catching up to the need for nonprofits to provide this kind of advice and support to companies, but setting aside a small amount of resources for engaging a nonprofit can go a long way.

One of the biggest concerns that companies have about encouraging people to vote is doing so in a way that is not partisan or political. To that end, companies leveraged nonprofit organizations for messaging advice or nonpartisan validation. One company focused on impact: "We made sure all of our messaging was just about elections mattering. We wanted employees to have the opportunity to participate in democracy. We didn't talk about issues, specific elections."

Amos Buhai of Endeavor found voting easy to message around: "With elections, whatever issue you want to get involved in, mostly anyone can get involved. [As a company,] we don't have to pick a side. We can just say that decisions impact you as an individual and us as a business, regardless of who you vote for. You just have to participate...Voting is one of the easier issues. Some people say it's more complicated, but it's just voter participation."

ENDEAVOR ELECTION DAY REMINDER TO EMPLOYEES | PHOTO CREDIT: PATRICK SCHNEIDER

Of course, in unique cases like Patagonia's, companies engage directly in elections by endorsing specific candidates and communicating that support to their employees and consumers. But the majority of companies we studied avoided that kind of engagement, instead focusing on encouraging individuals to vote and strengthen our democracy.

State and local election officials can also be valuable sources of support with any corporate voter engagement initiative. The two Minnesota-based companies we interviewed spoke effusively about how helpful the Minnesota Secretary of State's office is every year in supporting their work. The representatives at these companies really view the secretary and his team as partners in their efforts to increase civic participation. Not every secretary of state's office has the capacity to offer this kind of support to corporate partners. And it is, of course, harder for companies with employees spread around the country to build and maintain relationships with election officials in multiple states. But as our interviews proved, engaging election officials can both strengthen your program and serve as a nonpartisan validator to your efforts.

CONCLUSION

Those interviewed for this case study pointed to their corporate civic responsibility programs as a way to boost employee-employer relations, increase brand awareness, or elevate brand reputation with elected officials.

Based on the analysis of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Endeavor, Gap Inc., Patagonia, Snap, Inc., Spotify, Target, and Twitter, companies' use of civic responsibility initiatives are good not only for democracy, but also for business. First, programs that prioritize employee-focused initiatives have received overwhelming positive employee feedback. Patagonia led the way by closing for business on Election Day for the last two national election cycles, drawing huge praise from its employees. Although not all companies are able to close their doors on Election Day, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota demonstrated that measures such as notifying employees of all key dates and information needed in order to vote, holding bipartisan candidate forums, providing information on the state positions up for election, and maintaining an intranet site where employees can look up key election information can also have a significant impact on improving employee knowledge about upcoming elections and promoting voter turnout.

Consumer-focused programs have their benefits as well. Snap, Inc., Spotify, and Twitter used their technology platforms to deliver election information to their users and counteract misinformation, while partnering with nonpartisan third parties such as Ballotpedia and BallotReady to offer state-specific election and candidate information based on the user's location.

These efforts were not only effective — helping to increase midterm voter turnout in 2018 to its highest levels in over 100 years — but also cost effective. All of the companies interviewed reported needing very few resources in order to make some impact, mainly relying on existing full-time staff and small budget initiatives such as company-wide emails and meetings.

In addition to being cost effective, there is a growing body of evidence that civic engagement efforts can be good for business. As many recent surveys have shown, consumers and employees are coming to expect companies to engage on political and social issues.[55,56] Those interviewed for this case study pointed to their corporate civic responsibility programs as a way to boost employee-employer relations, increase brand awareness, or elevate brand reputation with elected officials.

While financial gain is not the primary goal of civic responsibility programs, it provides an added incentive for more corporations to participate. America has consistently lagged behind the majority of developed democratic nations, averaging less than 50% of the voting eligible population participating in midterm elections. While federal, state, and local governments play the primary role in encouraging voter participation in elections, American businesses also have an important role to play. The growing attention companies are paying to encourage participation in democracy is off to a great start, but there is still significant progress to be made. When more American businesses participate in promoting civic engagement, voter participation increases, strengthening our country's commitment to democratic principles.

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