

How AVR Helps Organizers

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August 30, 2022

Robust Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) policies provide numerous benefits to voters, taxpayers, and election officials. Voters benefit from lower hurdles to registration, election officials benefit from improved registration records, and taxpayers benefit from lower election administration costs. But one additional group benefits just as substantially from AVR, in ways that often go overlooked—organizations that do voter registration field work.

One of the biggest challenges that any voter registration or mobilization program faces is a lack of data on unregistered individuals. Simply put, because millions of individuals are not on the voter file or have changed address information since registration, successfully targeted voter registration campaigns take an incredible amount of time, money, and people resources—and may still not reach as many potential voters as possible. Organizers must nevertheless conduct the difficult and important work of registering these individuals and updating their registrations through voter registration drives.

Studies across the country estimate these voter registration costs at anywhere to \$20 to \$100 per registrant.¹ And those costs can add up over time as voters are removed from the voter file due to standard cleaning, lack of portability, or as new voters become eligible to be added to the voter file.

AVR can provide these registration benefits with greater efficiency and at substantially less cost than field registration work. AVR agencies like the DMV or Medicaid reach huge swaths of the population. Indeed, the DMV reaches upwards of 90% of eligible voters.² AVR ensures that individuals are registered based on routine interactions with these agencies, reducing the load on private registration drives. AVR also ensures accurate data going forward, as registered voters have any new address or name information updated through AVR.

With AVR, the overall one-time costs of registering voters drops dramatically. In Colorado, the investments in advocacy and lobbying as well as implementation for AVR cost approximately \$500,000.³ Since Colorado initially implemented AVR in 2018, roughly one million voters have

¹ Donald P. Green & Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout* 157-160 (2019).

² U.S. Dep't of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Office of Highway Policy Information, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2019/dl1c.cfm>.

³ Colo. Gen. Assembly, SB 19-235, Final Fiscal Note, https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2019A/bills/fn/2019a_sb235_f1.pdf. Lobbying costs are based on data from advocates who supported passage of Colorado's AVR bill.

been registered.⁴ This means that the cost per new registrant dropped from a potential high of \$100 per new registrant through field registration drives to \$0.50 through AVR.

AVR also smooths registration timelines, bringing voters onto the rolls throughout the year as customers conduct regular transactions with the DMV, rather than in a surge just before the election. This steady rate of registrations month-over-month contrasts with cyclical fluctuations in registrations that can exist based on registration drive activity in the run-up to elections.

These changes can provide substantial benefits for organizers, allowing them to focus their registration efforts particularly on communities who are less likely to interact with government agencies and be registered or updated through AVR. Similarly, with better data and higher registration rates through AVR, organizers can shift resources to educating newly registered voters on how they can cast their vote (including by mail), converting no party preference voters to a party registration, and into voter turnout efforts. The antecedent step of registering voters and ensuring accurate registration information has already been accomplished by AVR.

AVR will not lead to complete registration of the eligible population, and voter registration programs will still be incredibly important for ensuring full opportunities to participate. But robust AVR policies can significantly lower the costs of registration, allowing millions of dollars spent on registration drives each cycle to be shifted into other forms of civic engagement and voter education.

⁴ Totals based on data provided by the Colorado Secretary of State.