



VOTERS AS DONORS

HOW PAST TURNOUT IS A VALUABLE CUE FOR CONTRIBUTION

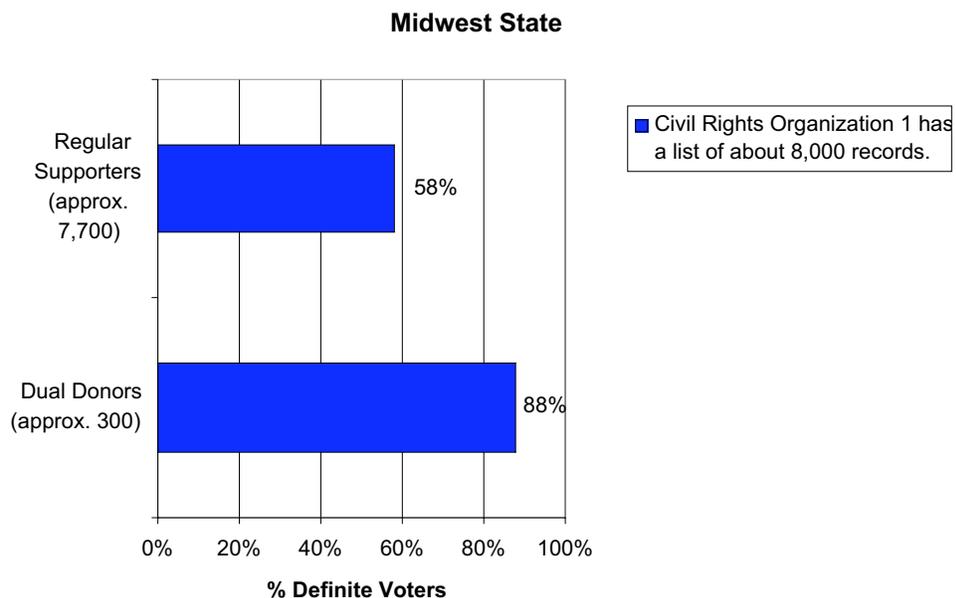
Organizations most often use information about the voting behavior of their members in nonpartisan advocacy. It's quite useful for this purpose. Statistics about supporters' past turnout in elections, for instance, can flag the most responsive grassroots advocates. Policy-makers and their staff tune in closely when advocates of a cause identify how many and how often supporters of an organization or coalition cast ballots in primary and general elections.

Some organizations also apply such data to their fund-raising. Knowing for sure which supporters vote and how often they do so can be quite valuable facts for cultivating and targeting donors. Organizations that gain voter data about their supporters from a list enhancement and tap into it for nonpartisan advocacy can also use it for deepening or expanding their base of supporters. The voices and votes of charities' supporters are often the most powerful resources that organizations have for meeting their goals and advancing their mission. New and continued contributions of supporters allow an organization to survive and pursue its mission strategically. Empirical evidence and anecdotes bear out a strong correlation in the two behaviors so vital to nonprofits: voting and giving.

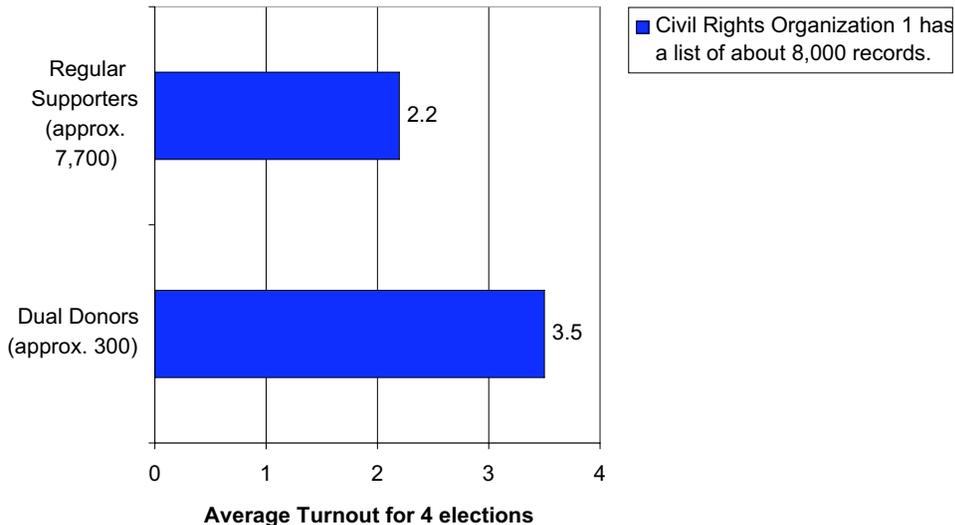
EVIDENCE:

In a Midwest state, two organizations advocating for civil rights had about 8,000 and 44,000 supporters, respectively.

The smaller organization knew that 4 percent of its supporters were also donors to state-level candidates and campaigns. Of these 300 highly engaged "dual donors," 88 percent were definite voters. For every 4 elections, their average rate of turnout was just above 3.5. And their average dollar amount of gifts increased with the number of votes cast: from about \$300 for those with just one of four votes cast to more than \$800 for those with four of four votes cast. Among those who weren't dual donors, the level of definite voters was only 58 percent (a nearly 30 percent difference). And for every 4 elections, these voters only turned out an average of 2.20, or just over half the time.



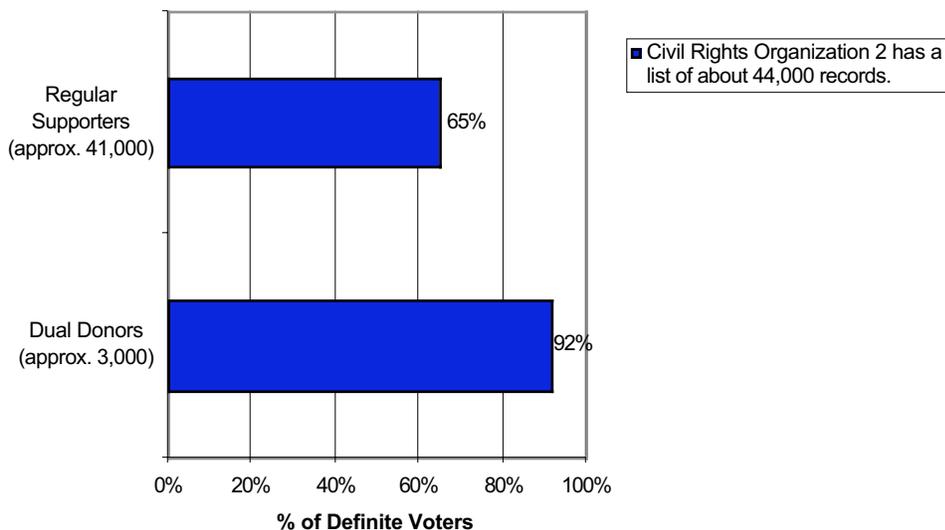
Midwest State



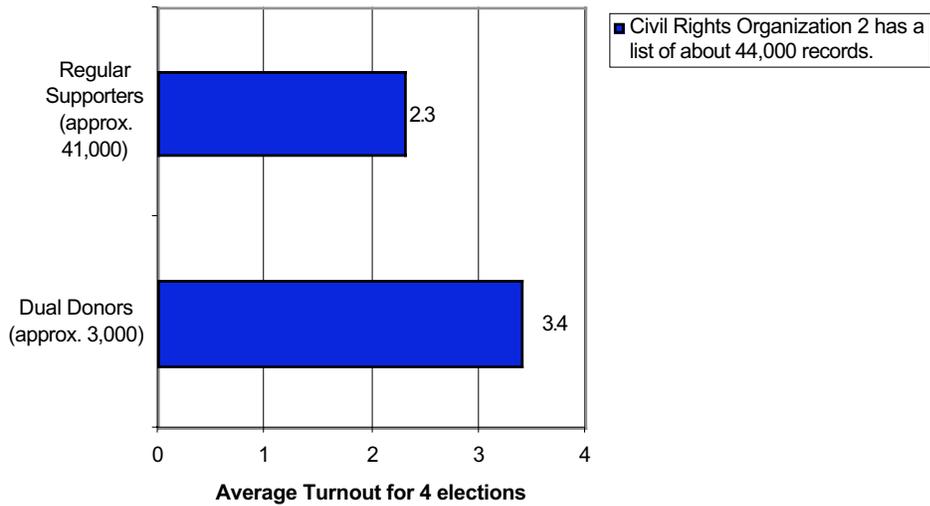
For the larger statewide organization in the same Midwest state, a similar pattern held. Almost 8 percent, or more than 3,000 of its donors, were highly active "dual donors," also giving to state candidates and campaigns. Of these, 92 percent were definite voters. And for every 4 elections, these supporters managed to turn out an average of 3.4 times. The average dollar amount of their gifts increased with number of votes cast: from about \$300 for just one of four votes cast to more than \$600 at four of four votes cast.

For supporters who weren't "dual donors," only giving to the organization, the level of definite voters was only 65 percent. For every 4 elections, such supporters managed to cast ballots an average of only 2.3 times.

Midwest State

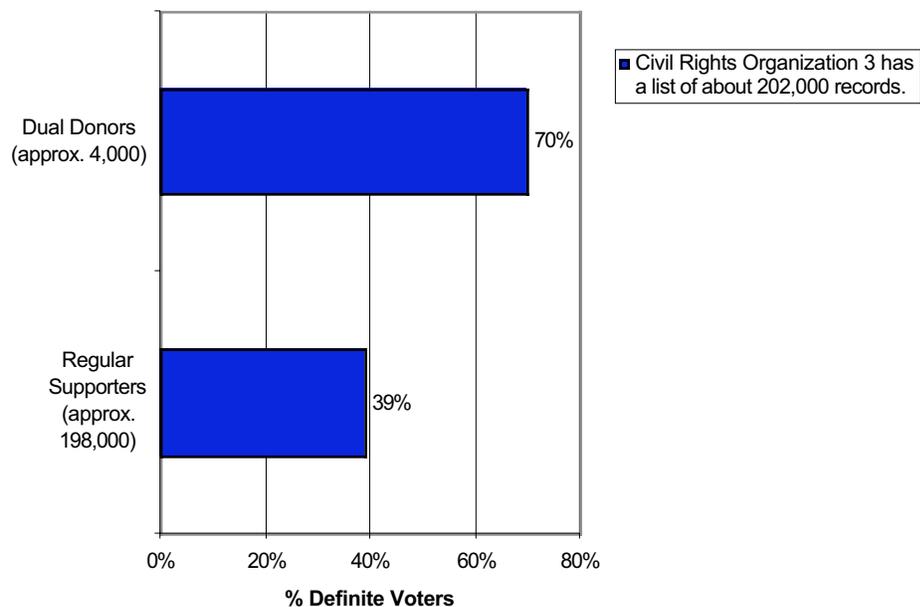


Midwest State

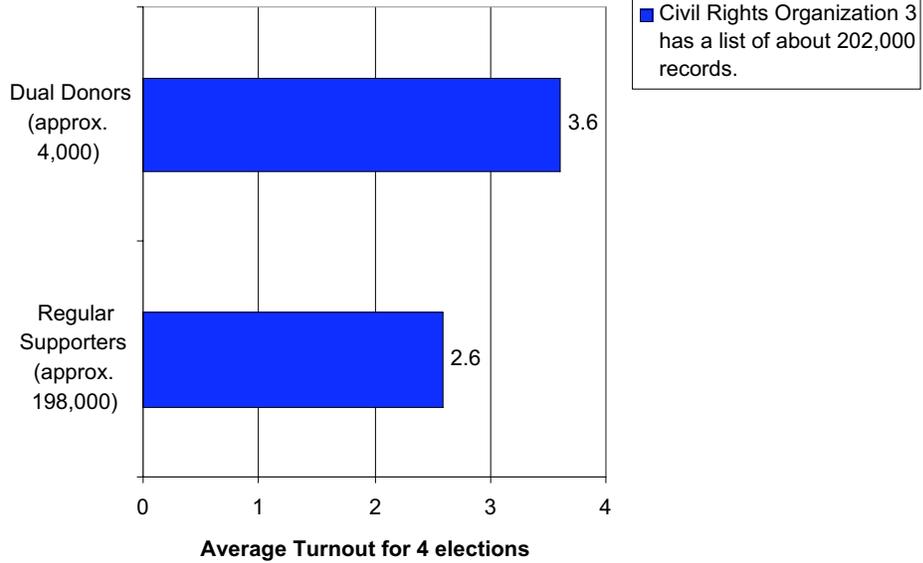


In a Pacific Coast state, an organization advocating for civil rights had at least 200,000 members and knew that 2 percent of its supporters gave to state-level candidates and campaigns as well. Of these more than 4,000 "dual donors," 70 percent were definite voters. And they turned out an average of 3.6 times for every 4 elections. Supporters who weren't "dual donors" were definite voters just 39 percent of the time (again, a difference of more than 30 percent) and had an average turnout rate for elections of just 2.6 out of 4. For the highly engaged "dual donors," the average dollar amount of their gifts increased with frequency of voting, from \$600 at turnout of just one of four elections to more than \$1,100 at turnout of four of four elections.

Pacific Coast State

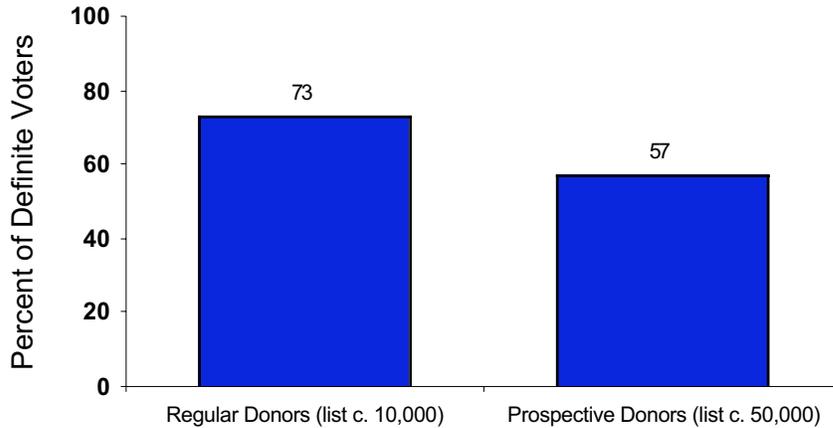


Pacific Coast State



In a Great Plains state, an organization providing health education and services had a regular donor list of nearly 10,000. It also had a prospective donor list more than 5 times as big that it kept up-to-date and to which it still sent information. The average age of people on both lists was identical. Among the non-donor prospects, just over 57 percent were definite voters. But on the donor list, over 73 percent, or nearly three quarters, were definite voters.

Great Plains State



EXPERIENCE:

We had a fund-raising challenge in early 2005. We needed to raise \$5,000 from our members in 30 days to complete funding for a new position we were committed to hiring, an older adult outreach coordinator. We had about 900 people who were high-frequency voters and more than 60 years old. We put together a solicitation. More than 100 donors responded. We raised more than \$5,130. It was the most productive mailing we ever sent.

—Development officer at a community center, Detroit

We recently did our annual fund-raising mailing and selected multi-time voters to add to our donor list. To date, the return response has been excellent.

—Fund-raiser for a choral arts group, Denver

[L]ist enhancement was a major decision for our nonprofit. But it was an investment that really paid off, and continues to do so. Our board members saw who our voters are, and we made personalized appeals to them. That's how we met the majority of our 5-figure challenge donation. We used the service to revive an out-of-date list of 600, whom we contacted and gained 50 new members.

—Director of a bike and pedestrian advocacy group, St. Louis

Viewed together, evidence and experience indicate that voting behavior has a positive linkage with giving behavior. The strength of the correlation and an organization's ability to leverage it may depend on the circumstances of its constituency, such as discretionary income and capacity to vote. The foremost factors are age and eligibility to vote, including immigration status, of the organization supporters themselves. Barriers to voting and economic status of the constituency are additional major factors. Geography and jurisdiction may also influence voting, since the combination of laws, persistent inequality, and political culture influence participation within a state.

Still, the diverse set of states cited in examples here and the internally consistent standards of measurement and comparison bear out a pervasive pattern. Nonprofit organizations are now writing their own chapters in exploring the voter-donor linkage. Their efforts are likely to chart new courses for colleagues and pay dividends for their own goals and bottom lines.

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