

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NOVA (NORTHEAST OHIO VOTER ADVOCATES) VOTER REGISTRATION AND VOTE-BY-MAIL CAMPAIGN IN 2016, CUYAHOGA COUNTY: SUMMARY<sup>1</sup> (6/27/2017)

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Vote-by-mail (VBM) is underutilized by low-income voters. For instance, in the 2016 general election, 23% of City of Cleveland voters used VBM compared to 34% used by voters in the rest of Cuyahoga County. In a pilot study in the 2015 General Election<sup>2</sup>, NOVA promotion of VBM application appeared to increase turnout by low-income voters. Therefore in 2016, all voters serviced by NOVA volunteers received either registration alone or VBM with or without registration, and all received at least one motivational postcard and one phone call or text message (if they had provided phone numbers). In order to assess outcomes, turnout at each site was (with one exception) compared to that of the weighted average of turnout of the home precincts of the same voters (For another approach, see below). The four “low-income” sites, all in Cleveland, included the Ohio Dept. of Jobs & Family Services (ODJFS), food pantries, the RTA Windermere train-stop, and the Justice Center (including the Marion Building). Other sites were Cleveland State University (CSU), a mixed group of neighborhood meetings and a super market (referred to as “Community”), and two suburban libraries.

### Major results mostly comparing turnout at NOVA sites to that of voter precincts (Fig. 1):

- Voter turnout by African Americans at NOVA sites was similar to that of whites
- At ODJFS and food pantries, VBM significantly increased women’s turnout by 16-23% percentage points, whereas registration alone did not increase turnout, when older voter age was factored in.
- Reminder phone calls to VBM voters who had not yet returned their ballots may have increased turnout in low-income populations from 59 to 77%.
- At ODJFS, VBM signups after the registration deadline did not result in increased turnout.
- At CSU, neither registration nor VBM by male students significantly increased turnout over that expected based on turnout (78%) of registered CSU students in 2012. However, the turnout of women who used VBM (90%) significantly exceeded that from men, from women voters who registered without VBM, and from all CSU students who voted in 2012.
- At “community” sites and suburban libraries, turnout from both registration and VBM was greater than that of the voters’ precincts, but older age and higher income probably accounted for this.
- Turnout of 535 Cuyahoga County jail inmates (a mixture of registrations and VBM, not shown in Fig. 1) was 9% greater than that of their respective precincts.

**Comparison of NOVA low-income voters to all Cleveland voters as a function of age.** Using precinct turnout as the sole reference point leaves out the very significant influence of age on voter turnout. Therefore, the entire Cleveland population was used as a surrogate for low-income majority African-American voters, comparable to our “low-income” sites, and the 1176 matched NOVA registrations and 566 VBM’s at low-income sites were pooled together and analyzed for significant differences in 10-year age cohorts (Fig. 2). This revealed that registration alone increased turnout in 18-49 year olds, but not in older age groups. In contrast, VBM increased turnout in 30-39 and 60-89 year olds.

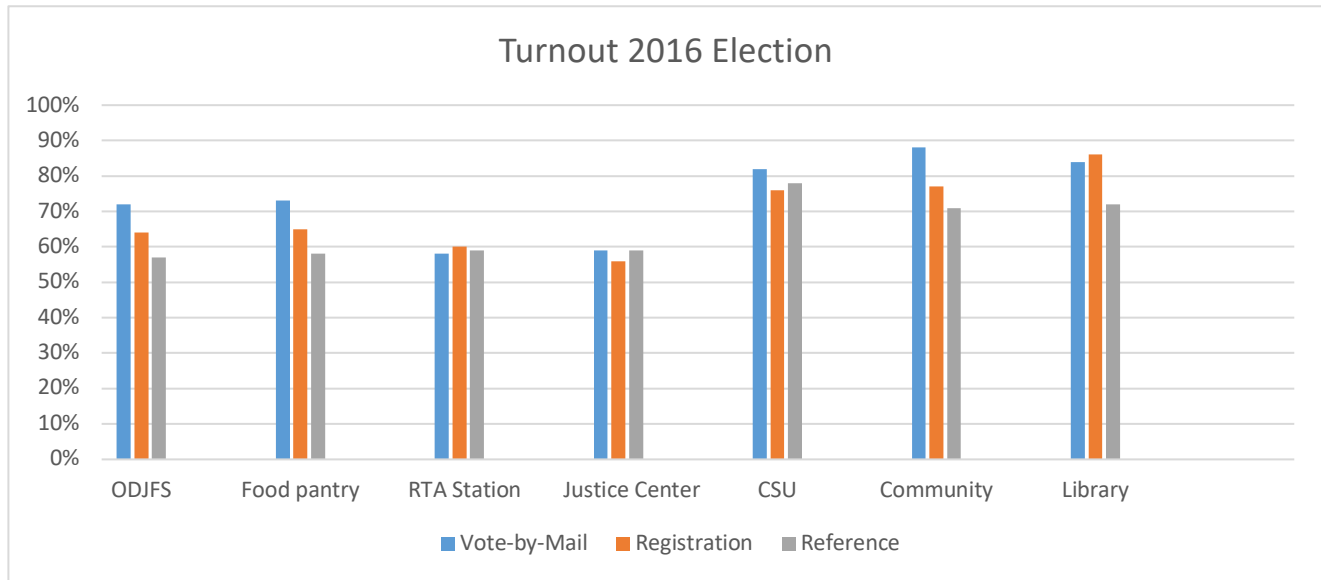
**CONCLUSIONS:** Contact with NOVA volunteers and registration alone significantly increased voter turnout in low-income youths as well as (tentatively) at Cleveland State University. Signup for VBM increased turnout by both young and older low-income voters (especially women) -- amongst voters who typically underutilize VBM -- as well as by women at CSU. Therefore, to increase turnout, VBM should be offered in future registration campaigns directed to low-income and college groups, especially women. Combined registration and VBM signups also produced higher turnout at the County Jail, than in the voters’ precincts. Typical demographic voting patterns

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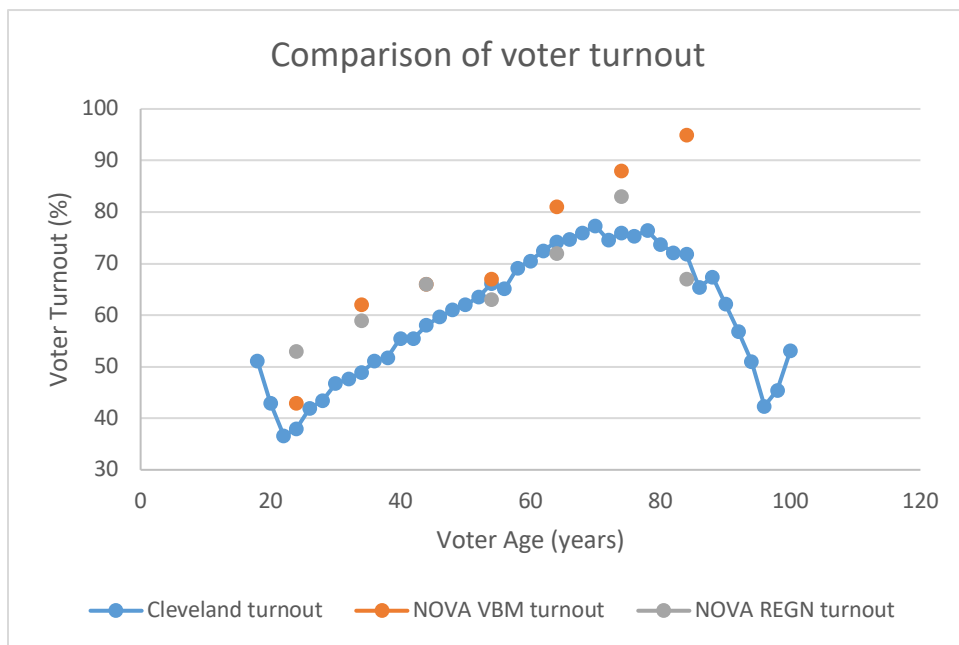
<sup>1</sup> For more detail, see full report, “Lessons learned...” for more detailed results and methods, on Research page of [www.NOVA-OHIO.org](http://www.NOVA-OHIO.org).

<sup>2</sup> “New research from Cuyahoga County: Providing vote by mail increased turnout of low-income voters in 2015 by about 25%.” See Research page at [www.NOVA-OHIO.org](http://www.NOVA-OHIO.org).

appeared to account for relatively high turnout at suburban and/or higher-income locations. **In general, personal contact with voters by NOVA volunteers (and their explanation and promotion of VBM) may account for these results.**



**Fig. 1. Turnout of voters (registered only, or signed up for VBM with or without registration) at major NOVA sites prior to the 2016 general election. For CSU, reference turnout value is from campus-wide CSU in 2012.**



**Fig. 2. Turnout, all City of Cleveland residents vs. NOVA contacts in low-income locations, 2016 General Election.** Voter turnout as a function of voter age for the City of Cleveland (blue dots) are compared to 10-year age cohort results from NOVA’s four low-income sites -- those registered only (grey dots) and those provided with VBM applications (orange dots). In all cases but one, when turnout of NOVA voters was a few percent or more above that of Cleveland voters, the differences were statistically significant.