ELECTION TRUST PROJECT

An initiative to build Americans' confidence and trust in our election process.

Powered by the National Conference on Citizenship

NCoC
National Conference on Citizenship & Election Trust Project

Messaging Guidelines

Guidance

Developed by the National Conference on Citizenship, these high-level guidelines, questions, and messages can be used to help shape how you might speak and engage around the election—before, during, and following the result.

For use: you are welcome to use the following guidance to inform relevant messaging. To sign on as a partner to receive updated content and information during this effort, click through to join at electiontrustproject.org or email jamie@ncoc.org and our team will be in touch with you.

Messengers should communicate clearly and consistently, anchor in shared narratives around democracy that connect rather than divide us, plan for uncertainty, and carefully respond to results (if contested) with clear and accountable local sources of information.

1. Make the process accessible and transparent.
   The COVID-19 public health crisis has necessitated some changes to the way we do elections, though most of these changes are built on existing systems like mail-in voting. It’s important to contextualize that the changes were made to ensure no voter has to choose between protecting their health and casting their ballot. Messaging should reassure voters they can vote safely and also can lay the groundwork for explaining some delays in vote counting. Uplift things like:
   - Expanded access to absentee ballots
   - Increasing numbers of eligible voters requesting absentee ballots
   - Expanded hours or locations for in-person early voting, and ballot drop boxes
   - Improved safeguards for Election Day, such as social distancing and masks at the polls, plexiglass, disinfecting pens and tablets between uses
   - New voting options such as curbside voting for high-risk voters

2. Localize concerns to build confidence.
   During early voting, the final stretch, and immediately after polls close, most people will be paying attention to how the election results (or lack thereof) impact themselves and their own communities.

   Before, during, and after, keep the message—and messengers—focused on the local level. Voters are generally more confident in election administration at the local level than at the federal (Pew, 2020). Grounding in the local is critical because it will help make sure voters feel like they still have agency in the process. If I have questions about the integrity of the election being run in Florida or Nevada, I have no agency to make a difference there; if I have questions about how it’s going in my hometown, I can do something about it.

3. Elevate positive messages to undermine negative ones.
   Our election systems are strong, and have adapted time and again throughout our nation’s history. And we are on track to see record, historic voter engagement in 2020.

   Record interest serves as social proof that the election is important and can also be used to explain why results will be slower or take more time (more ballots than ever, and more by mail, require more time to process):
   - Early voter turnout - Reference unprecedented early turnout
   - Requests for mail ballots - Reference the number of mail ballots requested
   - Questions to the office - If nothing else, emphasize something vague like emails and phone calls to election officials
   - Emphasize bipartisan cooperation - in most jurisdictions, Republican, Democrat & Unaffiliated election workers all staff polling places & ballot tabulation sites as a team.
Before You Share

As you communicate about the 2020 election, ensure messages are clear and encouraging to voters, and that you express calm and confidence in our democratic process. It is important to recognize the effects of a contested election can go far beyond the political—from mental health, psychological safety, and wellbeing, to challenging the social fabric of our communities.

Before you post or share, ask yourself these questions from the perspective of a voter:

- Will this message make anyone feel intimidated to vote and/or as if their vote won’t matter?
- Will this message make it seem as if the election results may not be valid?
- Will this message empower individual voters and ensure their vote will make a difference?
- Will this message make them feel invested in the election process and our democratic norms?
- Will this message overwhelm them?
- Will this message build confidence in our communities and local officials?
- Does this message have a credible and verifiable source of information and data, ideally nonpartisan in nature?
- Am I equipped to sustain, facilitate or support the potentially difficult conversations that might follow?
- Have we reviewed (and re-reviewed) this message to ensure it holds space for dialogue and their voice while deescalating the potential for unproductive argument?
Messaging Guidance

Below, we include specific creative talking points and messages that can be adapted for use to build greater confidence in the election process and connectivity among Americans during this time.

VOTING

Your vote counts. Your vote matters. You count.
Whenever and however you vote, your vote will be counted. Be a confident voter. Your vote will be counted.

We voted—now we wait. Being voters, and the experience of voting together, means trusting the process and result.
Being a voter means casting our vote and waiting for the process to come to a close—regardless of the results. And in voting, when we vote the process isn’t over—election officials are doing their job. So voting means not only acting however we (safely) can to cast our ballots, but accepting the full process and results, regardless of whether we like the outcome.

Celebrating our voters.
Voting is an American tradition - celebrate and feel your power as a voter.

Voting is an American tradition. Voting is what we do as Americans. It unites us.
Election season unites us. We are together as Americans, and this is deeply intertwined with our traditions as a nation. This history is something to see, and to be proud of. We have a democracy where everyone counts. Every vote will be counted. Regardless of the outcome, we’re all Americans sharing in this tradition.

It’s up to all of us. We all uphold elections as a core of our democracy.
Regardless of belief, identity, or party, we all want our votes to count. That means patience and trust in our country—both upholding our duty as voters, and trusting in the process and outcome, even if it takes longer than usual.

Celebrate strong turnout.
We have worked through this to turn out to vote this year. This is something to truly celebrate.

When we vote we also reinforce what it means to be good citizens.
Regardless of the results – your voice was heard. Your participation counted.
We are all citizens and all Americans. Good citizenship includes voting, but it doesn’t stop there. If the result wasn’t what you hoped, you’ll have many more chances to shape the future of our nation. It’s up to you.

NEW NORMS, NEW REALITY, COVID REALITY

Your neighborhood polling place might feel different this year. That’s okay.
We face new circumstances, and past election norms might not apply.
We’re all voting in a time of COVID-19, as safely as we can. This will feel different because we are facing and succeeding in new circumstances together. From the poll workers to your election officials, the process and count during this election season might take more time.

Remember: vote by November 3.
Your neighbors have been voting for weeks, if not months. This is election season, not election day. Remember the results and count will likely take beyond election day itself.

The U.S. has a history of voting through crisis. COVID can’t stop us.
The U.S. has successfully voted through many challenging periods in our history. We’re working through this, together.
Our system has held elections through the Civil War, the Great Depression, and World Wars I and II. Each time the process has proceeded, and the results have been validated. Every time our votes were essential. Nothing stops Americans’ commitment to voting, and upholding the outcome.
VOTING BY MAIL

In 2018, one in three Americans voted by mail, in 2016 one in four Americans voted by mail
Voting by mail is an American tradition—one used by members of our armed forces, and those away from home for over a century. This year, mail-in ballots can take more time to count—as we’re all living through a public health crisis together.

Americans vote by mail
Voting by mail is an American tradition—first started by soldiers during the Civil War. Our election officials know how to do this safely and securely. Voting by mail results in secure, inclusive, and accurate elections.

ELECTION OFFICIALS

Leaders are looking out for you.
Our local leaders are looking out for you and your interests.

Thank your local poll worker.
Election officials are our community.
Election officials are our neighbors.
Election officials are folks in your community, who are hard at work and doing their best to make the system work for voters.

Let’s hear it for our election officials.
Election officials are democracy’s essential workers. They are our democracy’s frontline. They are trusted and independent, and are/will be hard at work this election season.

Elections are local.
Elections are run at the local level. Your local officials work to ensure elections are run securely, transparently, and fairly. And they’ve handled a lot of elections. Look up your local election official for the most up-to-date election results and final count.

Trust the process.
Election officials have been through moments like these before. Our rules and systems have worked before, and they’ll be working again—for you.

THE SYSTEM, THE COUNT, THE RESULT

Patience is a virtue.
Remember what we learned in grade school: patience is a virtue. Be patient through the counting process, and any uncertainty we might experience together. Your vote will be counted, and trust in your election officials’ tally.

A strong system.
Though this election process may feel different, our system is resilient and strong,

Know who to con
There might be reports of irregularities as the election progresses. That does not mean they are widespread. If you notice an irregularity while voting—e.g., a machine not working—report it immediately to the Voter Protection Hotline at @866OURVOTE, or call (866) OUR-VOTE or (866) 687-8683.

Count on them.
Counting the vote fully might take more time this year. Your election official is your official source. Learn their contact details and information and follow them for news on your local election results.

Data might change as the results come in. This is normal. And expected in an election season like this one.
The candidate in the lead might change as the results come in. These changes are normal, Pay attention to the official results from your local election official.
Be patient. Wait for the count.
This election season might take longer for us to learn a final result. Make sure you’re prepared for where you can learn official information about your local voting count, and the result in your area. Find things to do for your community, as a citizen, as a way to engage as you are awaiting the results. Steps are being taken to verify and count people’s votes, even if this requires more time than usual due to the pandemic and record turnout.

Election officials are taking time to get this right.
The wait is a benefit – to maintain the integrity of this election, care is taken to count all votes. It’s more important for elections officials to get results right, rather than get them fast.

Vote by mail can be trusted.
Votes are verified and certified by nonpartisan officials. Voting by mail gives neither party an advantage. And voter fraud with vote by mail has been disproven.

It takes time to count ballots.
Most elections can take a few days to learn a result. Counting ballots takes time—and this year’s mail-in ballots might take a little longer to count. We may not know right away—and that’s okay. Your local election official is your source for this information.

The democratic process might take more time this year.
We may need to wait for results this year. A healthy democracy means ensuring every vote is counted, and processes are run right. Stay smart and safe by connecting to trusted nonpartisan election information.

Regardless of the outcome, we look to the future. There is always the next election.
The American idea endures, and our systems with it. We’ll do this again in 2 and 4 years. This is the next chapter. Our country and democracy are always evolving, and we are a part of it.