



UK Democracy Fund How To Guide: Digital Voter Registration

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Digital Voter Registration

British elections are becoming ever more digital with each election, and 2024 was no exception. With the calling of a snap general election, digital became the tool of choice to rapidly reach wide swathes of the UK – to engage, to motivate and ultimately to register the next generation of voters.

However, for organisations with limited resources, launching an effective digital campaign can be daunting. This guide draws lessons from campaigns funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's UK Democracy Fund during the 2024 general election to help organisations throughout the democracy ecosystem create impact through voter registration, no matter their size.

These two campaigns, delivered by [My Life My Say](#) and [Shout Out UK](#), used digital advertising and achieved results well beyond their goals, leading to hundreds of thousands of young people clicking through to the voter registration site. As part of their work supported by the [UK Democracy Fund](#), they generously shared what they'd learnt over the course of their campaigns, for which both the author and the Fund would like to extend their thanks and appreciation.

How to use this guide

This guide is organised into two parts:

- 1 **Planning your campaign:** introducing digital voter registration and deciding whether it's a good fit for your organisation
- 2 **Making it work:** practical guidance and examples on implementing it

We also include key considerations about regulations and compliance throughout, and provide recommendations on how to think about resourcing this strand of work.



1

Planning your campaign

Getting started

The goal in a nutshell is to get as many people as possible to the end of gov.uk's Register to Vote site. This might sound straightforward – but there's complexity hidden within that, a journey that each person needs to take.

For example, when someone sees a campaign message on Facebook:

- 1 **First**, they need to notice it and choose to engage with it – *after spending, on average, just 1.7 seconds with it* ^[1]
- 2 **Then**, they need to feel motivated to click through to the gov.uk site – *likely on their phone, as 81.5% of Facebook users exclusively access the site by mobile app*
- 3 **Next**, they need to complete the registration form – *this takes about 3-5 minutes, and they'll need to know their national insurance number*
- 4 **Finally**, if they're not already registered, they become a new registrant – *numbers vary over time but just this is 35-55% of people completing the registration form, with the remaining already registered, ineligible, or with errors in their application.* ^[2]

Some of that complexity is out of our control, like the vagaries of the gov.uk site: but not all of it! So let's step through that journey.



Tip#1 Understand your audience

Getting your audience right is the foundation of successful voter registration. Your organisation has a unique insight and connection to a specific part of the electorate – take advantage of it:

- Who are you best placed to speak to?
- Who can you persuade and motivate?

[1] Per a Facebook study, the average time spent with a piece of content on mobile is 1.7 seconds and 2.5s on desktop: www.facebook.com/business/news/insights/capturing-attention-feed-video-creative

[2] [2023 Electoral Commission Local Elections Report](#), [2024 Electoral Commission General Election Report](#)

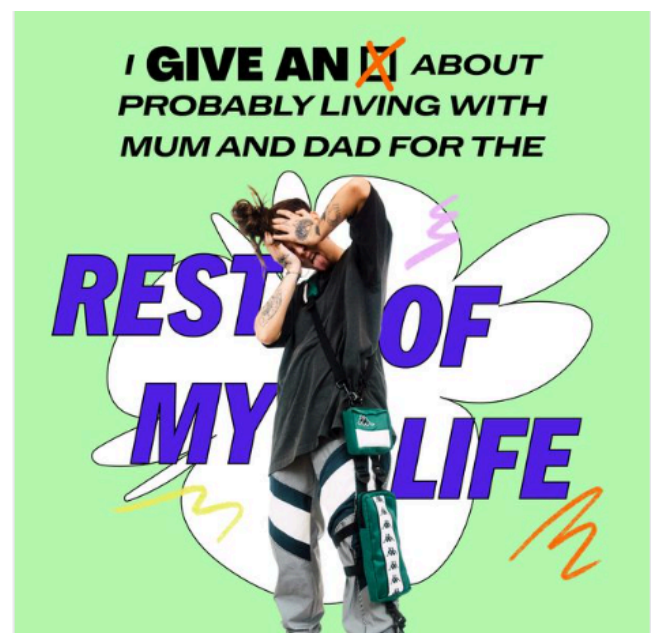
The reason why this matters so much is twofold: first, your target audience is more likely to engage with a convincing message ... and second, platforms like Facebook want to encourage people to spend as much time as possible on their app, so they are more likely to promote content that people engage with. This virtuous cycle can play in your favour!

Take the below two examples – both reference the cost of living – but the second example brings it to life in a way that connects with the audience’s lived experience.

Example 1^[3]



Example 2



The latter example’s framing came from conversations with a facilitated focus group, but you don't need a big budget to understand your audience. Consider:

- ✓ Having regular conversations with your target community
- ✓ Creating a small advisory group from your community that meets regularly
- ✓ Testing your ideas with your audience before spending money
- ✓ Asking what they think matters, and listening specifically to *how* they talk about it

[3] Sample advert created for the purposes of this report



Tip#2 Organic posts vs. advertised posts

Most platforms let you reach people in two ways: through organic (unpaid) sharing, like posting on a Facebook page or Instagram account, and paid advertising. It's crucial to be strategic about how you divide your efforts between these two.

For example, **organic** sharing might seem free, but it can require significant time investment over months and years to be effective. On platforms like Facebook and Instagram, if your following is below 5,000, then, given your reach, a good rule of thumb is that regular posting is unlikely to drive registrations and – even if your follower count increases – engagement usually drops as followers grow.

What work well organically is making the most of your existing networks: use WhatsApp groups and other community channels where your audience already naturally gathers.

You can also consider **partnerships**, where you work with another brand/organisation who may have a larger or different audience to you to share content. One example of this in 2024 was [My Life My Say's partnership](#) with Lime bikes – offering free 15-minute rides to the polls. Local and regional partnerships can also be incredibly effective too – the key thing is working with organisations with an engaged audience you can tap into.

The only exception to this rule is TikTok, where even with relatively few followers, the algorithm can boost fresh, engaging content to many thousands or millions of people in hours or days. However, the content has to be the right kind. TikTok heavily amplifies content that follows trends on the platform, prioritising regular posting, ideally from the same creator, unpolished, informal and direct-to-camera.

Guidance on making the most of TikTok is outside the focus of this guide, but may well be worth investigating if your organisation has the resources, personnel, or volunteers who are familiar with its formats, trends and speed. An example of a brand that's made a successful transition to TikTok is [the Washington Post](#). To give you a sense of how they've translated their output to the new format, [this post](#), though a bit dated, offers a helpfully concise round-up of common engagement techniques.

The final option is **paid advertising**, where you pay social media platforms directly to have your ad placed in front of an audience you can define, based on a range of demographic (e.g. age), geographic (e.g. living in Hull) or behavioural factors (e.g. following brand X's page). A good rule of thumb here is that it's cheaper when you target a wider audience or have engaging content well-suited to your target audience. More about how to make the most of this in the next section.



Tip#3: Planning your resources – how much? When?

Direct campaign experience from the 2024 general election shows that digital voter registration can have a big impact – but needs to be resourced commensurately. As an example, this guide draws its lessons from two campaigns that each spent sums in the low six-figures over the course of the campaign. Both had experienced staff and worked with digital agencies to deliver their campaigns. Not all campaigns can afford to do this, so how does that look on a smaller scale?

Paid digital advertising is worth considering if you can commit:

- Minimum ad budget of £2,500 for a campaign, ideally £5,000
- At least 10 hours to onboard and get up to speed initially, then at least 30 minutes daily for 6 weeks to monitor and manage content
- Staff capacity to create simple content and manage basic partnerships with local/regional companies, brands or charities

If your ad budget is below that threshold, consider focusing entirely on partnerships and existing networks rather than paid advertising.

For a £2,500 budget:

- 1 Start at a minimum of 8-12 weeks before registration deadline
 - First 2 weeks: Setup and prep work with any partners
 - Allows focus without spreading too thin
 - Incorporate focus groups/co-creation with your target audience
- 2 £750 for a testing phase (2 weeks):
 - 7-8 different message tests
 - £100 per test
 - Multiple audience segments, different creative formats
- 3 Main campaign (6 weeks):
 - £30-50 per day consistent spending, adjusted based on performance
- 4 Final push (last 7-10 days):
 - Up to £250 per day for key deadlines (eg postal votes, close of registration)
 - Competitive budget during peak period

Remember costs typically increase 35-40% during election periods, so adjust these numbers up accordingly during these times.

With a £2,500 budget, this could realistically achieve 5,000-11,000 click-throughs. According to UK Democracy Fund analysis, this could then amount to between 3,000 and 7,000 new registrations after accounting for those already registered, incorrect details, and so on.

One last note: if your budget extends to working with an agency specialised in digital advertising, even for a short period of time, having an expert look over your plans and approach can be enormously helpful when starting out with digital advertising. Many will often also offer training to help you get your head around the powerful but complex ad management dashboards provided by the platforms.



Tip#4: Sticking to the law on digital campaigning

First of all, it's important to say that this isn't formal legal advice, but rather a short round-up of Electoral Commission guidelines at the time of writing; these guidelines can and do change. To find the latest guidance, visit the Electoral Commission's [website](#).

Since 2022, certain kinds of digital content have been required to have imprints, in order to make clear which organisations are publishing political material. Imprints usually take the form of a single sentence that states who is responsible for publishing the material (and, if doing so in a partisan context, on whose behalf). In the context of non-partisan electoral registration, this would usually take the form of 'Promoted by [your organisation's name] at [your organisation's address]'.

The law makes a distinction between organic and paid material, as well as whether content is 'political'. Though the guidance around this provided by the Electoral Commission is not enormously clear^[4], it's actually relatively straightforward to comply with this new regulation.

If you are registered as a charity and follow the relevant guidelines for charities, it's very unlikely that you will need to have an imprint. That's because only 'political material' requires an imprint, which the Electoral Commission defines as material intended to influence voters to vote for or against specific parties or candidates^[5] – which is prohibited for charities already.

[4] An example: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/statutory-guidance-digital-imprints/what-sort-material-requires-imprint

[5] More on this here: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/statutory-guidance-digital-imprints/what-sort-material-requires-imprint/political-material

If you're not a charity, the next question is whether you're registered as a non-party campaigner with the Electoral Commission. You are required to register as a non-party campaigner if you intend to spend more than £10,000 within a rolling 365-day window before a general election. More on this [here](#).

If you are registered with the Electoral Commission, for organic content, while on a case-by-case basis you may not be required to, the safest and most straightforward thing to do is to have a digital imprint^[6].

Where this goes varies from platform to platform, but the guidance is that it should be one click from a post with political material in. The easiest thing to do is put it in your bio on X/Twitter/Instagram and 'Intro' section on Facebook. This should take the form 'Promoted by [your organisation's name] at [your organisation's address]'.

For paid content, you are unlikely to need an imprint unless the advert is political material. If it is, then you'll need to include the imprint on the creative (the image, video or audio) itself.



[6] <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/statutory-guidance-digital-imprints/what-sort-material-requires-imprint/non-party-campaigners/organic-material-non-party-campaigners>

Making it work

Now you've decided to embark on a digital voter registration campaign, it's worth thinking about the different channels you have to do that, whether that's organic, paid or through partnerships. This part includes some practical advice on how to pursue each, combining all of it into a cheatsheet at the end for easy reference.

Remember: the most successful campaigns combine these elements, adapting them to their specific audience and context. Start small, test thoroughly, and scale up when you find something that works.

Based on the 2024 general election, we recommend that the goal of your digital campaign should always be linking directly to the gov.uk Register To Vote website. While you can link to your own website and then onto the gov.uk website, a large proportion of visitors are likely to drop off before they click on, reducing your campaign's "bang for buck".

Creating content that works

As discussed above, not all advert copy and images are made equal. Let's look at some practical examples to help you come up with ideas on how you could apply best practice on your own campaign.

When planning out your message, our research suggests you should generally focus on practical "how-to" messages, rather than explaining the bigger, abstract reasons why someone should do something.

A study commissioned by the UK Democracy Fund found these messages work better when people already want to do something (like register to vote) and don't need to be convinced it's important.

However, we found that messages explaining abstract policies can work well too when presented in certain ways, check out the examples on the next pages.



Tip#1 Induced urgency

Content that creates urgency to act can help build momentum and drive action as a deadline approaches. In the 2024 general election, this technique was used very successfully by Shout Out UK to drive action, being served to 100,000s of people in their target audience and driving 1,000s of clicks.

The examples #1 and #2 below use the practical, or 'non-cognitive', messaging mentioned above.

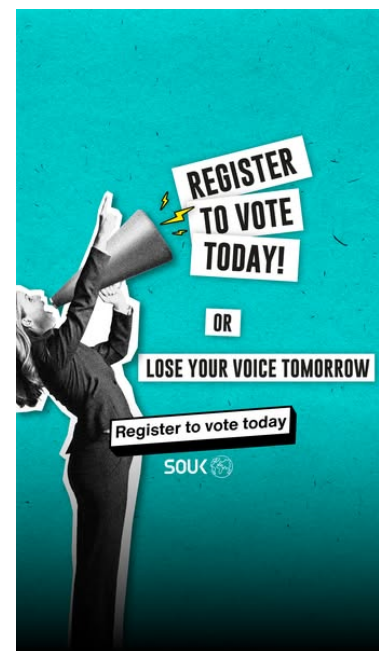
Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



What unites this content is a clear and consistent visual language, which clearly highlights the message that time is running out and the viewer needs to take action as soon as possible. Motifs like the clock and calendar were referenced in the ad copy, e.g. "Can you hear that? It's the clock ticking." to ramp up tension.

How to create similar content

- ✓ Use countdown formats
- ✓ Highlight the specific deadline in the creative and copy, making the action that needs to be taken clear
- ✓ Show what people might lose or miss out on if they don't take action
- ✓ Increase frequency near deadlines – don't be afraid to spend budget on high-performing content in this vein!



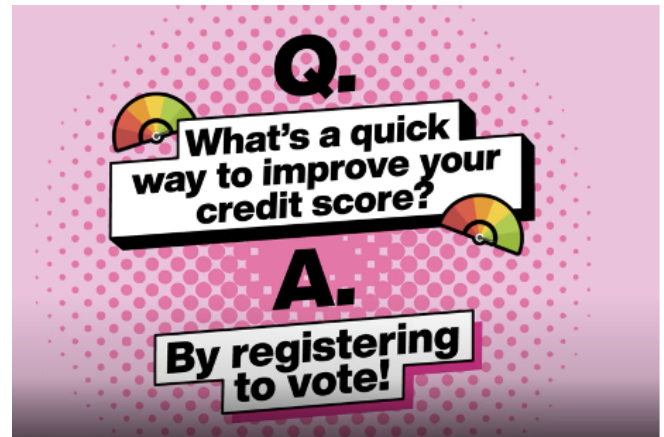
Tip#2 Practical information

In a similar vein to deadlines – practical information about registering to vote can also be persuasive. The below two examples were the first and third best-performing assets of Shout Out UK.

Example 1



Example 2



The former is practical and informative – given the election was called for early July, many voters were likely to be on holiday and therefore worried about not being able to vote in-person. Providing them information about how to vote by post resulted in Shout Out UK's best-performing piece of content, reaching nearly 1.3m people and resulting in nearly 200k clicks.

The latter had a narrower target audience – those who were more likely to be interested in financial self-help content. Highlighting a benefit of registering to vote that was more relevant to this audience's interests, led to the highest click-through rate of any of Shout Out UK's ads at 2.2%.

How to create similar content

- ✓ Identify potential barriers to registration and/or voting in your target audience
- ✓ Offer a simple solution, clearly explained
- ✓ Use 'if x, then y' format
- ✓ Focus on immediate benefits

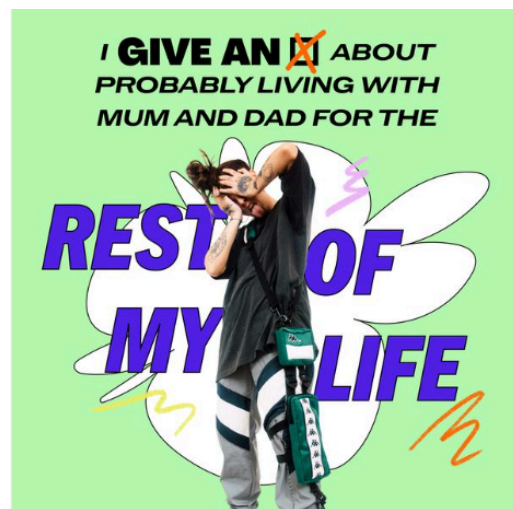


Tip#3 Issue-based messages

Finally, content can also be more abstract or issue-based – this is typically what most people will think of when it comes to voter registration messaging! There's quite a variance in how this messaging performs, and it comes back down to how it resonates (and if it does) with your target audience, as discussed above.

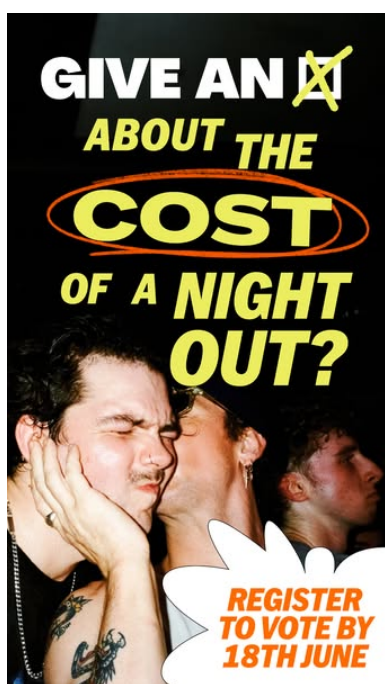
To return to this example ad (right) – this was a real ad used in the 2024 general election. Compared to other ads around the cost of living, this ad performed up to 4x better in terms of cost-per-click – something that can be understood by the way it's tailored to emotionally connect with its audience.

Example 1



8p per click

Example 2



Example 3



Finally, the last two examples give some ideas of the radically different directions that you can take this kind of content. Example #3, from Shout Out UK, played into the exceptional circumstance that so many different democracies around the world were holding elections in 2024. That paid off, with this ad being their second highest performing piece of content. Example #2, on the other hand, took a different approach, using bold photography to illustrate an everyday activity their audience might think about.

Day-to-day campaign management

As mentioned in part #1, any kind of digital campaign will require a fair amount of staff time. This doesn't necessarily mean that it needs to be a full-time member of staff, but there will be a ramp-up period and staff will need to dedicate a chunk of time each day to ensure the success of the campaign.

Here are some tips to help with thinking about budgeting time to manage your campaign:



Tip#1 Sample daily checklist

- ✓ Check performance metrics from previous day, pausing low-performing ads
- ✓ Monitor spend vs. budget and update this into a management spreadsheet^[7]
- ✓ Plan and review upcoming content based what's performing well, and work with your wider team to develop this content
- ✓ Respond to comments/questions from within the team, and get sign-off on any new content to go out that day
- ✓ Adjust targeting if needed, for example if you're spending money too quickly

Some optimisation tips

As part of your daily check-in, make sure you're rigorous with looking at what's working and what isn't. That means pausing underperforming content quickly, as soon as it's clear that it isn't working, and pushing up the daily budget on your best-performing content.

When you see content that's working, keep iterating on the idea and testing new versions of it: if you're successfully running a '7 days left' ad, then consider turning it into a short video or trying out a few different wordings to see what works best.

Finally, maintain consistent visual style and structure while varying your message and content to keep audience interest. For example, using the same overall art choices (fonts, colours, visual language), but changing headlines, images, and specific calls to action based on timing and performance.

[7] At its most simple, this can be a spreadsheet with four columns (date, impressions, clicks, budget spent) which you fill in a new row for each day. You can also use more powerful/complex templates that are filled out automatically for you, as in this [tutorial video](#) using SuperMetrics (paid) or this [template spreadsheet](#) using Adveronix (free)

Another (more advanced) option to consider would be identifying and targeting your audience well ahead of an election period, and signing them up to your mailing list or similar. This enables you to build a relationship with them over time, so that they're 'primed' come the voter registration period. This also means you can stay in touch afterwards for getting out the vote, as well as your other campaigns and services.

In this case, where (unlike the gov.uk voter registration site) you control the landing page, it's highly recommended to set up conversion tracking using the [Meta Pixel](#) or similar. This helps 'steer' the platforms' algorithms towards finding people who are more likely to complete an action, meaning better results.



Tip#2 Budget management

- ✓ Aim to spend a third of budget on testing
- ✓ Then switch to a daily budget of 1-2% of your overall budget
- ✓ Backload your budget towards the deadline – both of the digital ad campaigns funded by the UK Democracy Fund in the 2024 general election found that their target audiences tended to only 'tune in' as the election heated up and the deadline approached
- ✓ Be quick to increase the budget for well-performing content, and quick to cut the budget for poor performers
- ✓ Ensure you set an overall lifetime budget to ensure that you don't accidentally overspend
- ✓ Keep around 10-20% of your budget in reserve for key moments or surprises during the election campaign





Tip#3 Use a content calendar

Across your 8-12 week window, use a content calendar^[8] shared within your organisation to build awareness of the work you're doing and help plan in the time you'll need to carry it out.

1

Week 1-2: Testing phase

- Test different messages and formats
- Be prepared with different ideas to trial, and be objective on how they perform
- Plan in time for analysis before moving to the main phase

2

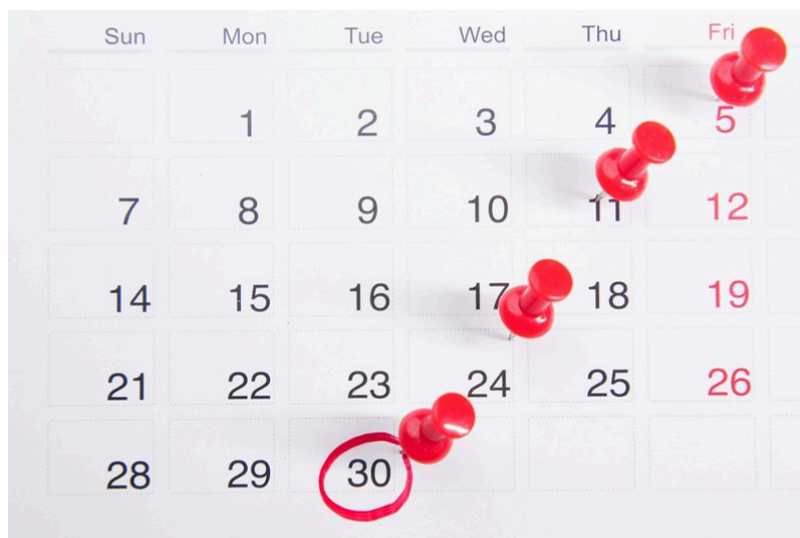
Week 4-9: Main/short campaign

- Roll out best performers from the testing phase and iterate on them further
- Rotate in fresh content to capitalise on trends or moments within the election campaign
- Continue monitoring, optimising and checking budget utilisation

3

Final week:

- Move to urgency-based message
- Spend more on deadline content
- Aim to spend the rest of your budget



[8] Here's an example content calendar which uses conditional formatting to visualise what's coming up for managing work and sharing across your organisation: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1F8m1-aAEG2_ZOn25HGKjZlgm-T2lsXOJWmD35F8r3Ag/template/preview

Measuring success

Particularly when you're running a paid campaign, it's important to understand your performance and what it means. We recommend you log into the ad management dashboard for the platforms you're using every day and check three metrics:

- Reach (the number of people who've seen your content)
- Cost per click (the number of clicks divided by the total amount spent)
- Click-through rate (the proportion of people who click on your ad)

To help, we've come up with the following benchmark ranges. Note that these will tend to the higher end of the range if you're targeting a highly specific audience.

- Cost per click: aim for between 25-35p
- Click-through rate: 1-1.5%+ is good, over 2.5% is great

(We don't provide a benchmark for reach, as this is mainly affected by your budget)

Both of these benchmarks apply across your whole campaign, including the testing phase. Individual pieces of content may perform better – hone in on these.

What's left to learn?

One major area still left for exploration is YouTube, used regularly by 90% of UK 16–24-year-olds, according to Ofcom research. Experience from other campaigns suggests that videos tend to be more persuasive – though costly to produce. In a similar vein, the increasing popularity of live streaming platforms like Twitch is an area to watch closely, with their disproportionately male (and therefore less likely to be registered to vote) viewership.

Finally, it's highly likely that the same things that register voters could also drive them to turn out and vote on the day itself. While we didn't have research from the 2024 cycle in the UK, [major studies in the US](#) indicated that it is effective among certain demographics.

More resources

More research and guidance on registering low-propensity voters can be found on [the UK Democracy Fund's resource page](#).

Good Luck!



Cheat Sheet: Content and partnership strategies



Organic content

Focus on existing networks and channels where you already have presence:

- WhatsApp groups
- Community forums
- Email lists
- Local networks

During the campaign, don't waste time building new social media followings from scratch – do this in the months and years ahead of a campaign.

Key tips from successful campaigns:

- ✓ Use your strongest existing channels rather than trying to be everywhere
- ✓ Share through trusted community voices rather than institutional accounts
- ✓ Keep content simple and shareable. Match format to platform (eg vertical video for Stories)
- ✓ Time posts^[9] for when your audience is most active – this is usually weekdays in the afternoon
- ✓ Make it easy for others to share your content

Paid content

Start with Instagram Stories – this format delivered 90% of click-throughs in recent campaigns.

Test with small budgets (about 3% of your budget per test, min. £100) before scaling.

Aim to spend:

- 30% on your testing phase
- 25% over the main campaign
- 30% in the final week
- Keep 15% in reserve

Key tips from successful campaigns:

- ✓ Target broad audiences initially to keep costs down
- ✓ Use urgency messaging near deadlines
- ✓ Test personal impact/values vs practical information
- ✓ Focus budget on your best performing content
- ✓ Save significant budget for final push.
- ✓ Monitor daily and adjust quickly
- ✓ Aim for under 30p per click and over 1.5% click-through rate

Partnerships

Start with a simple offer:

- Ready-to-share social media content
- Template emails or presentations
- QR codes for physical spaces
- Clear messaging guidelines

Key tips from successful campaigns:

- ✓ Create a "menu" of partnership options for organisations to choose from
- ✓ Start small – even sharing one message can build into bigger collaborations
- ✓ Be realistic about how much you can achieve with your staff/volunteer time
- ✓ Be mindful that some partners will have quite time-consuming sign-off processes and plan accordingly
- ✓ Focus on a few strong partnerships rather than many weak ones
- ✓ Make it relevant: link voter registration to partners' own community goals
- ✓ Keep communication simple, eg a WhatsApp group or weekly email
- ✓ Trust partners to adapt content (within the rules!) – they know their audiences

[9] You can check this yourself in the Meta Business Suite, or use these guides provided by Buffer for [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

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