

# Digital voter registration toolkit



Cabinet Office

**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families



A toolkit with suggestions for  
running an effective digital voter  
registration campaign.

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# 1. Introduction

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This digital voter registration toolkit has been developed by the Cabinet Office in partnership with Gingerbread, the national charity for single parent families. It gives some top tips for running a digital voter registration campaign, drawing upon Gingerbread's experience of communicating with single parents.

With audiences able to access information on the go through digital channels there are now even more opportunities to promote democratic engagement. The introduction of online registration makes the process of registering to vote more convenient than ever and the web link to online registration can be shared in just one click.

Using insight developed from existing social media activity, including democratic engagement messages, Gingerbread has helped to create this guide to support a digital voter registration campaign.

Therefore, this flexible resource is well placed to support digital voter registration campaigns aimed at a range of different groups. It can also complement existing democratic engagement activity or programmes.

The Democratic Engagement Team at the Cabinet Office is keen to hear about your experience using this resource. Please email us at: [DemocraticEngagement@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:DemocraticEngagement@cabinetoffice.gov.uk) or tweet us @signup2vote #RegisterToVote

## 2. Do your homework

Ask your target audience whether they are registered to vote.

If they are registered, why did they decide to register?

If they aren't registered, what's stopping them?

There are many reasons why it is important to register to vote. From being able to have your say on issues that affect you and influence the way services are run to increasing your chances of being accepted for personal credit. However, not everyone who is eligible is registered to vote.

Qualitative research by GfK<sup>1</sup> highlighted that some people may feel distanced from politics or not know they need to register to vote. Others may have concerns or questions about practical issues such as accessibility or confidentiality.

Whilst some people will only need the information about how to register to vote, others may want to have a more in depth conversation with you. Listening to your own audience should always be your number one step. It can help refine objectives, communications channels, the profile of your audience and the content of the messages.

Gingerbread asked its audience to complete online pop-up surveys on voting, and conducted face to face focus groups with a group of single parents to understand why they weren't registered to vote. Gingerbread also tested electoral registration messaging and identified what would encourage single parents to register.

Participants were drawn from Gingerbread's membership base, through training programmes and via existing online followers and targeted demographic marketing activity.



<sup>1</sup> Under-registered Groups and Individual Electoral Registration: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/62636/URG\\_Research\\_Report\\_25\\_07\\_12.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62636/URG_Research_Report_25_07_12.pdf)

# 3. Develop your messages

Based on the research you have conducted, develop messages that aim to address the reasons why some of your target group is not registered to vote.

From your research look at the reasons why some of your target audience registered to vote.

Why not develop FAQs or mythbusting information?

Now that you're learning about your audience and their attitudes towards registration, it's time to start devising content for your digital voter registration campaign. In the earlier research stage, you will have identified some of the reasons why some of your audience may not be registered to vote. This will help you to shape messages that address these issues.

Messages which make people feel passionate about democracy can be effective. These can be focused on historical struggles for democracy and the right to vote. Messages around the practical implications can also be effective and will focus on the here and now. For example, they could include highlighting the potential to improve a person's credit rating.

Develop a range of messages that are likely to be most relevant for your audience based on the research you conducted. Test these messages with some of your audience to assess how effective they are. This can then inform the type of content that you develop and share more widely.

**Gingerbread's research found that many single mothers found messaging around the suffragettes to be persuasive. So Gingerbread reflected this in its messaging.**



**Gingerbread found that concerns around data security, was a common reason for single parents not registering to vote, with some worrying that ex-partners may be able to use the electoral register to locate them. Gingerbread developed Frequently Asked Questions (that are included at the end of this pack) to address those concerns.**

**Developing your own documents or messages that directly address particular concerns your audience may have (in particular about registering to vote) is one way to help address the reasons why they aren't registered to vote.**

# 4. Develop your online presence

Create a go-to place online where your audience can find more information about voter registration. This might be a section on your website.

Develop the content based on your insight.

Refine your material as and when needed.

Creating your own online presence will enable you to ensure the content is directly relevant to your audience. Ensure the content is factually correct - Gov.uk and aboutmyvote.co.uk websites are useful places to get that information.

Once an online hub is published it can be useful to gather feedback from your audience on the content so it can be improved further. There are a number of tools that you can use to achieve this goal, for example, focus groups and surveys.

Gingerbread created an online hub which included infographics on how to register, case studies, video interviews, webchats and forums. Gingerbread promoted the hub using social media channels (including through paid-for advertising), their website and through targeted emails to their members.

Gingerbread held offline and online focus groups with single parents. These provided valuable insight and helped to shape content on the online hub further.

Following the focus groups Gingerbread was also able to then hone two key messages and four to five secondary messages.

The screenshot shows the Gingerbread website. The header includes the logo "Gingerbread" with the tagline "Single parents, equal families" and a navigation menu with links for "About", "Practitioners", "Media", "Forum", "Contact", "Jobs", and "Wales". Below the header is a secondary navigation bar with categories: "ADVICE & INFORMATION", "POLICY & CAMPAIGNING", "COMMUNITY", "TRAINING", and "SUPPORT US". The main content area features a quote: "The decisions they make today will affect our children's present and their future." Below the quote is a section titled "Sarah's story" with a photo of Sarah and her children. The sidebar on the left contains a list of links: "Stop cuts to Council Tax Support", "Let's Lose the Labels", "Who Benefits?", "Register to vote", "What single parents say", "Sarah's story", "Kate's view", "How is my data used?", "How to register", "You're Brilliant", "Stop CSA charges", "A guide to meeting your MP", and "Current issues".

# 5. Choose your social media channels

Think about where your target groups spend time online and which social media channels they use. Use these channels to communicate the messages you have developed.

If you can, use paid promotion on audience-appropriate platforms.

Tailor your tested material for different channels.

It is important to consider which are the best channels to use to reach your audience and which online spaces they inhabit.

Using visual and interactive content such as video and or photos can also bring the message content to life and help your audience relate to the point you are trying to make. Video messaging and channels such as YouTube can give you access to reach increasingly large audiences.

Gingerbread developed specific social media content to promote democratic engagement and electoral registration, tailoring their content and style, according to the type of media channel.

Gingerbread used the feedback from single mothers which showed that messaging about the suffragettes would encourage them to register. Gingerbread then tailored content for a Facebook advert and several tweets in July 2014 around the anniversary of the Equal Suffrage Act.



Other potential channels that have their own monitoring and targeting tools that you may want to use include Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and LinkedIn. Choose the channel(s) that are most appropriate for your audience and ensure you regularly monitor them and also post messages regularly.

Whichever channels you use make sure you promote online registration using the link: [www.gov.uk/register tovot e](http://www.gov.uk/register tovot e) so people know where they can register to vote.



# 6. Analyse your results

Look at engagement figures and survey your audience on whether the messages are working.

Use social media and website analytics to track clicks.

Keep honing your messages based on feedback.

With any communications channel, activity needs to be measured on a regular basis to ensure that it is effective and that objectives are being achieved. There are a number of ways to do this and each social media channel will have its own metrics.

Gingerbread used the built-in analytics packages provided by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to measure their social media engagement, including the number of clicks on campaign links.



Even though Facebook, Twitter and YouTube's analytics all report links clicked you can also create bit.ly links of your own. These can track click-throughs from your messages on social media to gov.uk or your own websites if you are hosting material. Bit.ly links give you the opportunity to analyse and understand your actively engaged audiences across all platforms and devices. To find out more about how to create a bit.ly link go to: <https://bitly.com/>

# 7. Top tips for running an effective campaign

Research suggests people are more likely to take action if motivated by emotional or personal factors, so think about what's most important to your target audience: Love? Health? Security?

Make sure every social media post or web page you create has a clear call to action. Likes, comments and shares are great, but if you want people to click a link it needs to be clear and prominent.

Paid social media promotion can get your posts seen, but a well-tested message with images or video will ensure people actually engage.

Think about the timing of messages you send out. Is there a historical event or a milestone relevant to your target audience coming up? What about an election? Keep an eye out for hashtags or trending topics you can use too.

Use your existing networks. If you find many of the people your organisation works with are already registered, ask them to spread the word to their friends.

Be prepared to have a conversation! Voting is a hot topic for many people, so be sure you've got FAQs and are ready to respond to questions and comments. You can find some at the back of this toolkit. More questions about registering to vote and voting can be found at: [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

The suggestions and tips in this guide are not exhaustive. Neither do they include all parts of a whole digital voter registration campaign. For further guidance you might want to look at other resources from organisations such as the Government Digital Service: <https://gdssocialmedia.blog.gov.uk/> or the Chartered Institute for Public Relations: <http://www.cipr.co.uk/content/social-media-guidance>

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# 8. Frequently asked questions

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It is useful to think about the questions your audience might ask and how you will answer them. Here are some of the FAQs about voter registration forms that Gingerbread created for its audience.

For more FAQs go to: [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

You can also email the Democratic Engagement Team at the Cabinet Office:  
[DemocraticEngagement@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:DemocraticEngagement@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

## 1. How is my data used?

The electoral register lists the names and addresses of everyone who is registered to vote in public elections.

The register is used for electoral purposes such as making sure only eligible people can vote. It is also used for other limited purposes specified in law, such as detecting crime (for example, fraud), calling people for jury service and checking credit applications.

Registers are managed locally by registration officers. Using information received from the public, registration officers keep two registers – the electoral register and the open register (also known as the edited register).

The open register is an extract of the electoral register, but is not used for elections. It can be bought by any person, company or organisation. For example, it is used by businesses and charities to confirm name and address details.

Your name and address will be included in the open register unless you ask for them to be removed. Removing your details from the open register does not affect your right to vote.

You can ask for them to be removed by contacting your local council's electoral registration staff. You can find their details by entering your postcode at:  
[www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

If you are registering online at: [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) you can click the checkbox if you do not want your name and address listed on the open register.

You can also change your opt-out preference at any time by making a request to local electoral registration staff with your full name, address and an indication of whether you wish to be included in or omitted from the open register.

## **2. Can my ex-partner use the register to find me?**

If you have opted out of the open register, the only way your ex-partner can find your details is by going in person to the British Library, National Library or local council where you are registered and viewing the full register under supervision. The full register lists electors by address, not name.

If you have concerns that being on the electoral register would put you or your children at risk, you can apply to register to vote anonymously. Further detail is available via [www.gov.uk/electoral-register/opt-out-of-the-open-register](http://www.gov.uk/electoral-register/opt-out-of-the-open-register). Anonymous registration means that your details will not appear on the open register or the electoral register.

You will need to provide evidence of the risk with a court order, injunction or an attestation from a qualifying officer (police officer or social services/social work officer).

Please note that you cannot apply for anonymous registration online at this time. You will need to fill out and send in a special postal form.

## **3. Why do I have to provide my National Insurance number?**

Under the new system (Individual Electoral Registration), people will need to provide a few more details about themselves in order to register to vote – these are your date of birth and National Insurance number. These details are checked against government records to verify the persons identity. This is intended to make the system of electoral registration more secure.

## **4. Can creditors/debt collectors find me if I register to vote?**

If you have opted out of the open register, the only way debt collectors can find your details is by going in person to the local council where you are registered and asking to see the electoral roll.

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# 8. Common myths about registering to vote

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From the About My Vote website

**Myth: If you pay council tax, you're automatically registered to vote**

Truth: Even if you pay council tax, you will not automatically be registered to vote, so you need to make sure you are. Why not register to vote right now?

**Myth: I won't be able to vote because I'll be at work when the polling station is open, or because of childcare issues**

Truth: Polling stations are open from 7am until 10pm for all UK elections, so everyone should have time to fit voting in. Plus you can now take your children with you when you go to vote. If you're unable to make it to the polling station you can apply for a postal vote or ask someone else to cast your vote for you (a proxy). It's always best to be registered, so if you change your mind you've got the option to vote if you want to.

**Myth: You can only register once a year during the canvass**

Truth: You can register at any time of year. The register is updated each month, so if you move house or change your name or citizenship you'll need to re-register. That way, if an election is called at short notice, you will be able to vote.

**Myth: You have to live at a fixed address to register**

Truth: People with no fixed address can register using a 'Register to vote' (no fixed or permanent address living in England or Wales). You should contact your local electoral registration office for more information. You can find their contact details by entering your postcode on the aboutmyvote website.

**Myth: When I register to vote, my details will be passed on to lots of marketing companies**

Truth: There are two versions of the electoral register – the full version and the edited version (also known as the open register). The full register is used only for elections, preventing and detecting crime and checking applications for financial credit. The edited register is available for general sale and can be used for commercial activities like marketing. When you register to vote, you can choose to tick a box to opt out of the edited register, which means your details will not be used in this way.

