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Campaigns

Group Seeks Youth Appeal Through Messaging Tools

by [Danielle Belopotosky](#)

As political campaigns heighten across the nation, a San Francisco-based organization hopes the use of interactive messaging technologies will boost turnout among young voters.

The nonpartisan and nonprofit group [Mobile Voter](#) intends to harness the power of the masses in an effort to register 18- to 29-year-old voters at concerts via mobile text messaging. Partnering with the Music for America Education Fund, Mobile Voter has set a goal to register 55,000 young voters this election season.

The organization is one of nine recipients selected by the [George Washington University](#) Graduate School of Political Management to receive a grant from [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#). Mobile Voter received a \$220,000 grant to implement its strategy.

Text messaging "allows voter participation to happen in any environment," said **Ben Rigby**, co-executive director of Mobile Voter. It enables young people to "weave [political participation] into the fabric of their everyday lives."

"Registration remains the biggest obstacle to voting," according to a Declare Yourself 2004 post-election study of youth voters. One-third of 18- to 29-year-olds were not registered in the 2004 presidential election. Roughly 20 million voters in that age group voted for president, according to Civic Youth data.

Mobile Voter has partnered with the Music for America fund, which in turn works with musicians who have pledged to encourage participatory politics at their shows. Over the past two years, the fund has established a network of 200 bands, according to its Web site.

Under Mobile Voter's plan, bands will increase their advocacy to urge concert-goers to register to vote by typing a keyword on their mobile phones. That message will be sent to Mobile Voter, which will send a pre-populated voter registration form via the postal service or e-mail. Rigby said encouraging political participation "at a concert can be a lot more compelling."

U2 lead singer **Bono** popularized the concept last July when he kicked off the One Campaign, a political call to action to cancel the debts of the world's poorest nations. Bono and musician **Bob Geldof** arranged the interactive media campaigns at concerts worldwide, capturing 26.4 million text messages in support of their mission.

Rigby said his organization selected text messaging as a way to reach voters because it is the "native tongue of youth." Studies indicate that young people use text messaging more than e-mail and are more likely to have access to a mobile phone than a computer.

An interactive messaging campaign also can be less expensive than typical get-out-the-vote campaigns. Traditional canvassing methods cost between \$7 and \$14 per registered voter, he said. Their goal is to see the cost dip to less than \$3 per registration.

Mobile Voter also plans to send text messages on Election Day to remind registrants to vote, Rigby said. And they hope to bring additional partners, such as Rock the Vote, to the table.

After the election, Mobile Voter will publish a report to measure the impact of the strategy of using text messaging versus door-to-door campaigns and fliers, he said.