

Organizational Capacity Building and the Mobilization of Young Voters: Results from the Power California Partner Survey



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Power California is a nonprofit organization that coordinates and offers technical assistance to a network of youth organizing and civic engagement groups committed to increasing the representation of young voters of color in low-income communities. Originally called YVote, a project initiated in 2016 by the Movement Strategy Center and Mobilize the Immigrant Vote with support from the Irvine Foundation, Power California became its own 501(c)3 organization in the spring of 2018. Power California and its partner organizations played an important role in increasing turnout among young voters during the 2018 November election.¹ These gains in young voter engagement can in part be attributed to investments in civic infrastructure that supports training and coordination among groups. This report documents Power California partners' growing capacity to engage young voters in government elections. Overall, it demonstrates that partners gained important experience across a range of indicators related to engaging young voters in government elections, and it suggests that Power California's technical assistance and coordination efforts played a role in the network's success.

This report draws on survey data collected from partner organizations in August 2017 as the network was beginning to train and plan for the 2018 election season. A follow-up survey was conducted just after the November 2018 general election. The first part of the report summarizes findings from panel survey data collected from a cohort of 13 organizations that were part of both the planning and implementation phases of campaign efforts targeting future 16- and 17-year-old voters, as well as 18- to 34-year-olds who were eligible to vote. It offers

¹ Terriquez, Veronica, Jiayi Xu, Randy Villegas, and Jennifer Soto. 2019. "Youth Power at the Ballot Box: How Youth-Led Voter Engagement Efforts Increased Turnout Among Young Voters in California's 2018 Midterm Election." Los Angeles: USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Available at: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/ResearchSummary2018election.UCSC.pdf>.

insights into partner organizations' growth during this time period, focusing on each organization's level of experience with (a) voter registration; (b) voter education and outreach; (c) voter mobilization; and (d) voter tracking and data management. The second part of the report shares survey results from November 2018, evaluating the extent to which 20 partner agencies found Power California's technical assistance helpful in advancing their organization's efforts to reach young voters. In the conclusion, we summarize findings and emphasize the importance of funded networks that aim to increase the informed participation of young voters in elections.

GAINS IN PARTNERS' EXPERIENCE

The Power California network included 13 partner organizations that participated in planning and training sessions in the late summer of 2017 and who remained involved leading up to the November 2018 election season. These organizations included ACT for Women and Girls (based in Tulare, CA); Californians for Justice (offices in Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, and Long Beach); Community Coalition (based in South Central Los Angeles); Future Leaders of America (based in Oxnard); Inland Congregations United for Change (based in San Bernardino); InnerCity Struggle (based in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles); Khmer Girls in Action (based in Long Beach); Korean Resource Center (based in Los Angeles and La Habra); Mi Familia Vota (offices in Fresno, Modesto, and Riverside); Oakland Rising; Resilience OC (based in Santa Ana); RYSE (based in Richmond); and San Francisco Rising. In August 2017 and November 2018, campaign leads in partner organizations were asked to fill out a web survey asking them to report on whether their organization had "no experience," "a little experience," "significant experience," or were "very experienced and can train others" with respect to engaging young voters. Below we summarize changes over this 15-month period in the percentage of organizations that reported "significant experience" or said that they were "very experienced and can train others." Overall, findings suggest that partners expanded their capacities to engage young voters during the course of the election cycle.

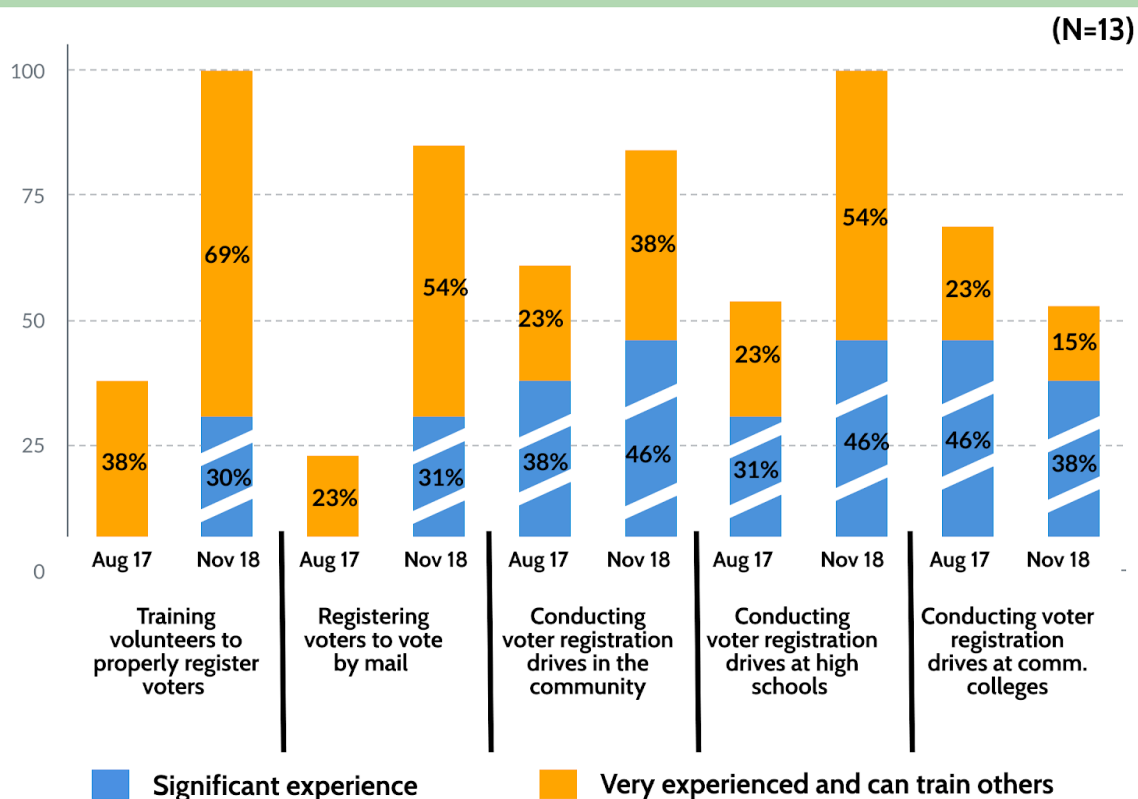
Voter Registration

Power California partners drew on varying levels of funding and other resources to register young voters leading up to the 2018 election season. Some of these partner organizations have taken advantage of California's Senate Bill 113, which was passed in 2014 and allows individuals as young as 16 to preregister to vote, and Assembly Bill 1817, which was passed in 2014 and designated the last two weeks of April and September as High School Voter Education Weeks.

While California law facilitated voter registration targeting future and new voters in high schools, efforts to register young voters were also likely boosted by the contentious political climate under the Trump Administration and by nationwide campaigns in spring 2018 to raise awareness of gun violence and increase youth presence at the ballot box. Most groups in the network had very little prior experience registering voters, but as a network, Power California partner agencies were poised to respond to opportunities to register young voters. As shown in Figure 1, in August 2017, 38% of groups reported that they were "very experienced and can train others" in training volunteers to properly register voters, while none of the remaining groups reported significant experience. By November 2018, though, all groups in the network

claimed either “significant experience” or reported that they were “very experienced and can train others.” Power California partners also indicated notable gains in experience in registering youth to vote by mail, with the number who reported the ability to train others rising from 23% to 54% during this period. Additionally, another 31% of groups reported “significant experience” by November 2018. There was also an increase in groups reporting experience in conducting voter registration drives within their community and at high schools. However, during this period, groups also reported a decrease in their experience in conducting voter registration drives at community colleges. In August 2017, 69% of organizations claimed “significant experience” or “can train others” in conducting voter registration drives at community colleges, but by November 2018, only 53% reported that this was the case.

Figure 1. Partners’ Experience with Voter Registration



Voter Education and Outreach

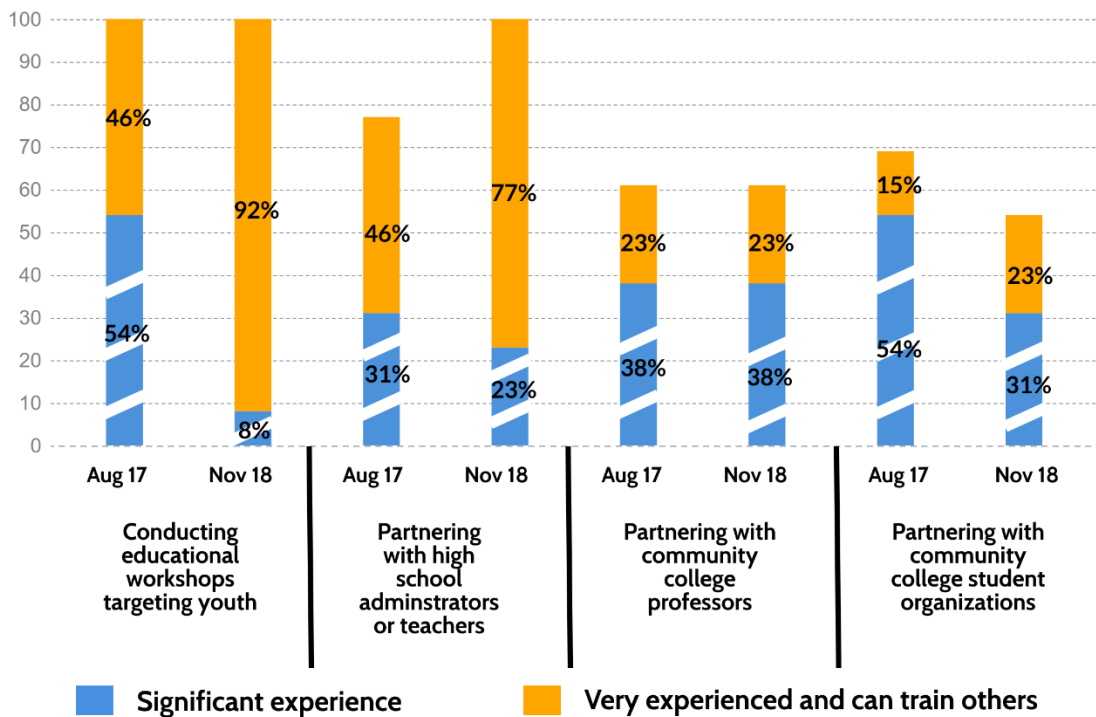
Partner organizations devoted significant time to voter education and outreach through workshops and educational events. As shown in Figure 2, in line with the above findings, Power California partner organizations generally reported increased experience in conducting

outreach to young voters, particularly among high school youth. However, they did not report gains in conducting outreach at community colleges.

While all partner organizations reported significant experience in conducting educational workshops targeting youth in August 2017, the percentage who said they were very experienced and can train others doubled from 46% to 92% during the 15-month period. The percentage who said they were very experienced and could train others on partnering with high school administrators or teachers also jumped from 46% to 77% during this period. However, groups reported no growth in their ability to partner with community college professors, and their experience in partnering with community college student organizations actually declined.

Figure 2. Partners' Experience with Voter Education

(N=13)



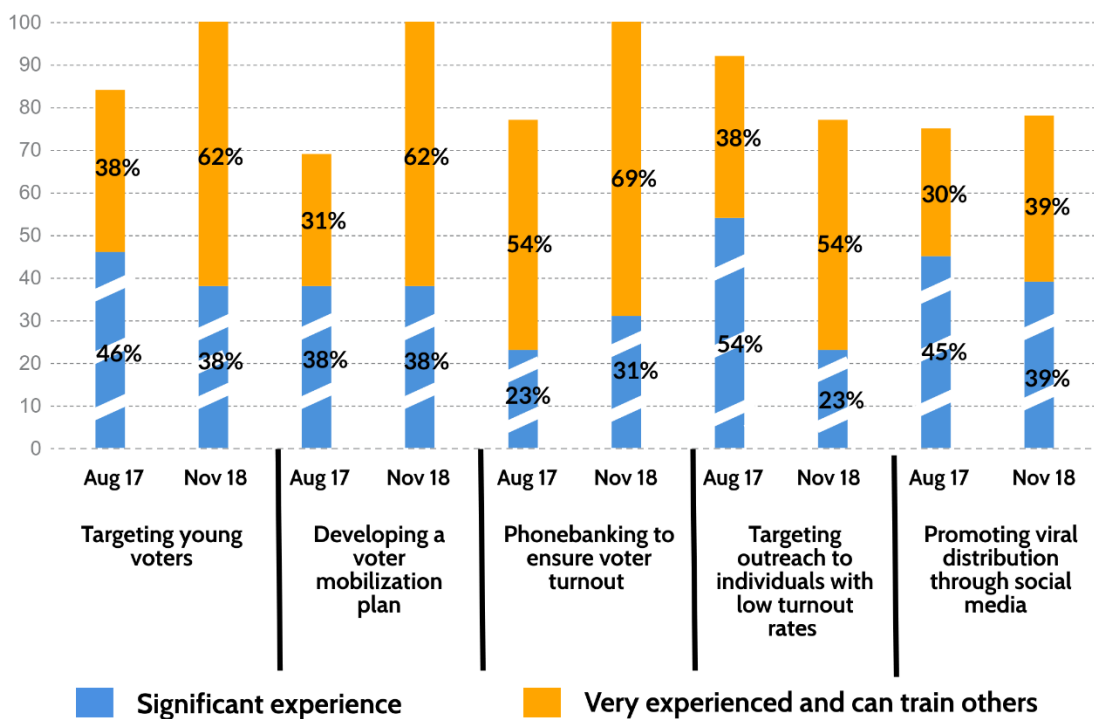
Voter Mobilization

During the 2018 election season, Power California coordinated an intensive effort to increase the turnout of young voters at the polls. As such, it is not surprising that partner groups reported increased experience in most voter mobilization activities, as shown in Figure 3. In August 2017, 84% of organizations reported “significant experience” or “can train others” in targeting young voters. By November 2018, 100% of organizations reported having such

experience, with those claiming they could train others doubling from 31% to 62%. Partner groups also reported increased experience in developing a voter mobilization plan and running phone banks to ensure voter turnout by the end of the 2018 election season, with all groups saying they had significant experience or the ability to train others. Meanwhile, partner organizations reported a decrease in targeting outreach to individuals with low turnout rates; in August 2017, 92% of organizations reported “significant experience” or “can train others,” but by November 2018, only 77% of organizations did. Additionally, there was little change in partners’ experience promoting viral social media content.

Figure 3. Partners' Experience with Voter Mobilization

(N=13)



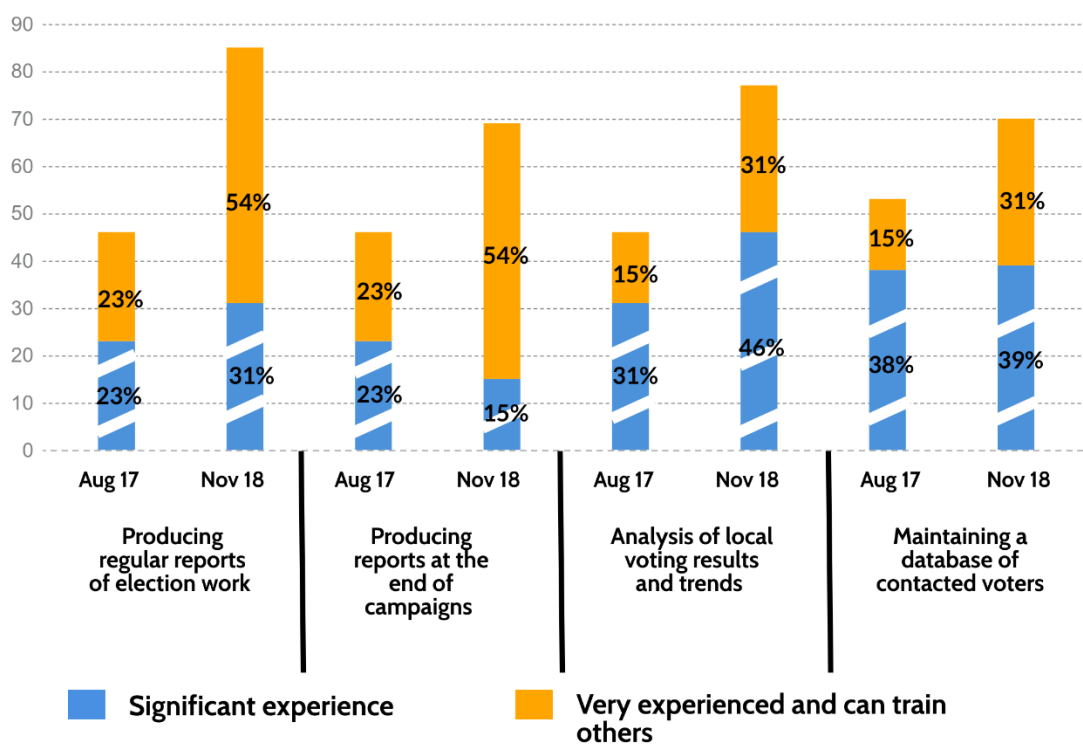
Voter Tracking and Data Management

Power California organizations sought to track the progress they were making in reaching young voters. To this end, they implemented data collection and management systems to hold themselves and each other accountable for reaching campaign targets. Figure 4 shows that organizations reported increased experience in campaign reporting, analysis, and data collection. In August 2017, 46% of organizations reported “significant experience” or “can train others” in producing regular reports of election work. By November 2018, 85% of organizations reported this was the case. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the evaluation period, less than half

of the organizations (46%) reported that they had “significant experience” or “can train others” in producing post-campaign reports. After the election, 69% of organizations reported having such experience. When it came to experience analyzing local voting results and trends, organizations reported an increase from 46% to 77%. Groups also reported increased experience with maintaining a database of contacted voters.

Figure 4. Partners' Experience with Data Management

(N=13)



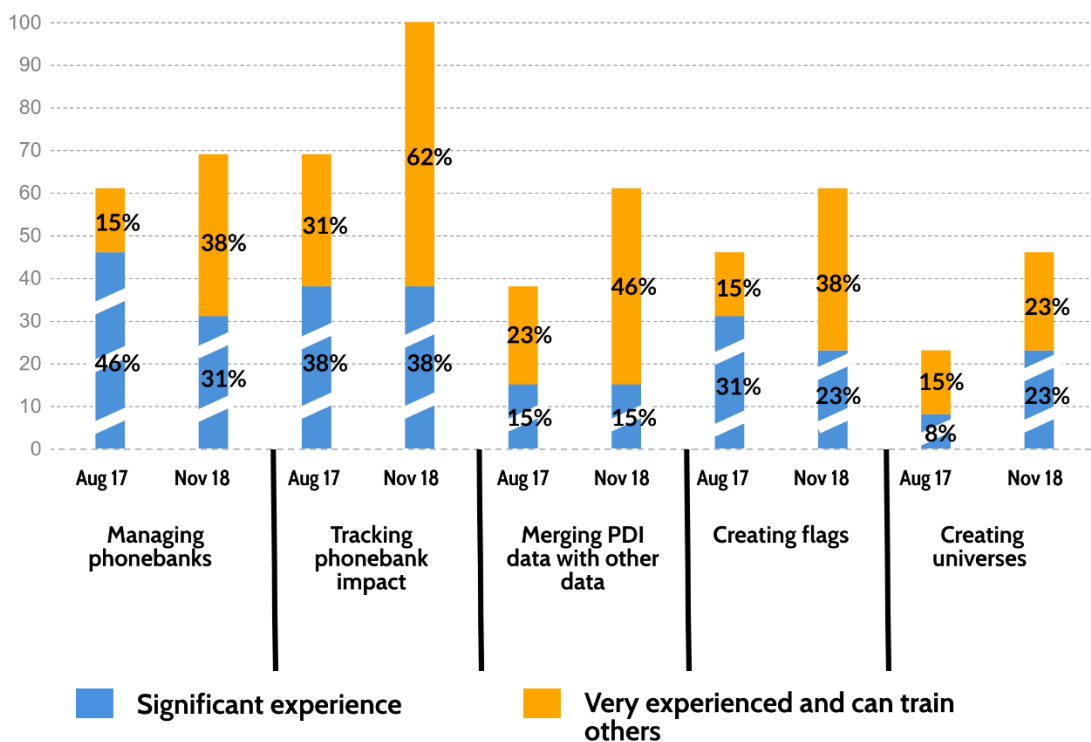
PDI Management

The Power California network utilizes the online platform Political Data Incorporated (PDI) to identify their constituents and record their voter outreach efforts. As shown in Figure 5, partner organizations reported increased experience in all measures relating to the PDI platform. In August 2017, 61% of organizations reported “significant experience” or “can train others” in managing phone banks in PDI, a figure that rose to 69% by November 2018. During the same time period, the percentage who reported “significant experience” or “can train others” in using PDI to track the impact of phone banking increased from 69% to 100%, while the percentage of those reporting such experience in merging PDI data with other data increased from 38% to 61%. The percentage of groups indicating that they learned how to add original data to PDI—known as “creating flags”—also increased from 46% to 61%. There was also a

modest increase with regard to “creating universes,” meaning that groups learned to use PDI to identify subpopulations of voters for targeted outreach.

Figure 5. Partners' Experience with PDI

(N=13)



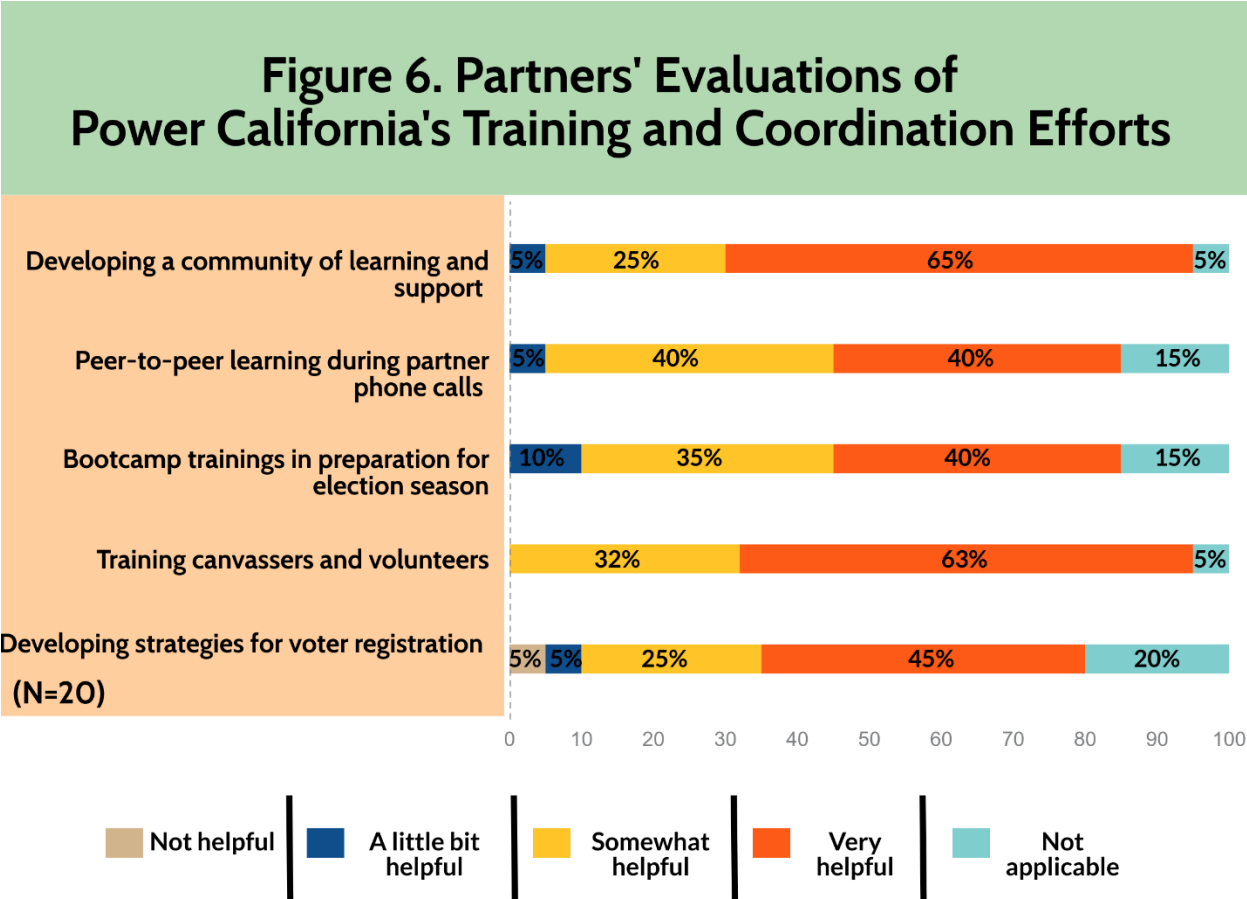
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Power California staff have offered training, coordination, and direct support to partner organizations. Their work has increased the capacity of partner organizations to execute a coordinated campaign. Below, we summarize partners’ evaluations of the various forms of support that Power California staff offered during the 2018 election season. Responses came from the 13 organizations that participated in the panel survey mentioned earlier, as well as an additional seven organizations that joined the network as the 2018 plans were being implemented. These organizations include California Native Vote Project (based in Pasadena); Communities for a Better Environment (based in Southeast Los Angeles); Filipino Advocates for Justice (based in Oakland); North Bay Organizing Project (based in Sonoma County); MPower

Change (based in Irvine); PANA (based in San Diego); and Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (based in San Jose and Fresno).

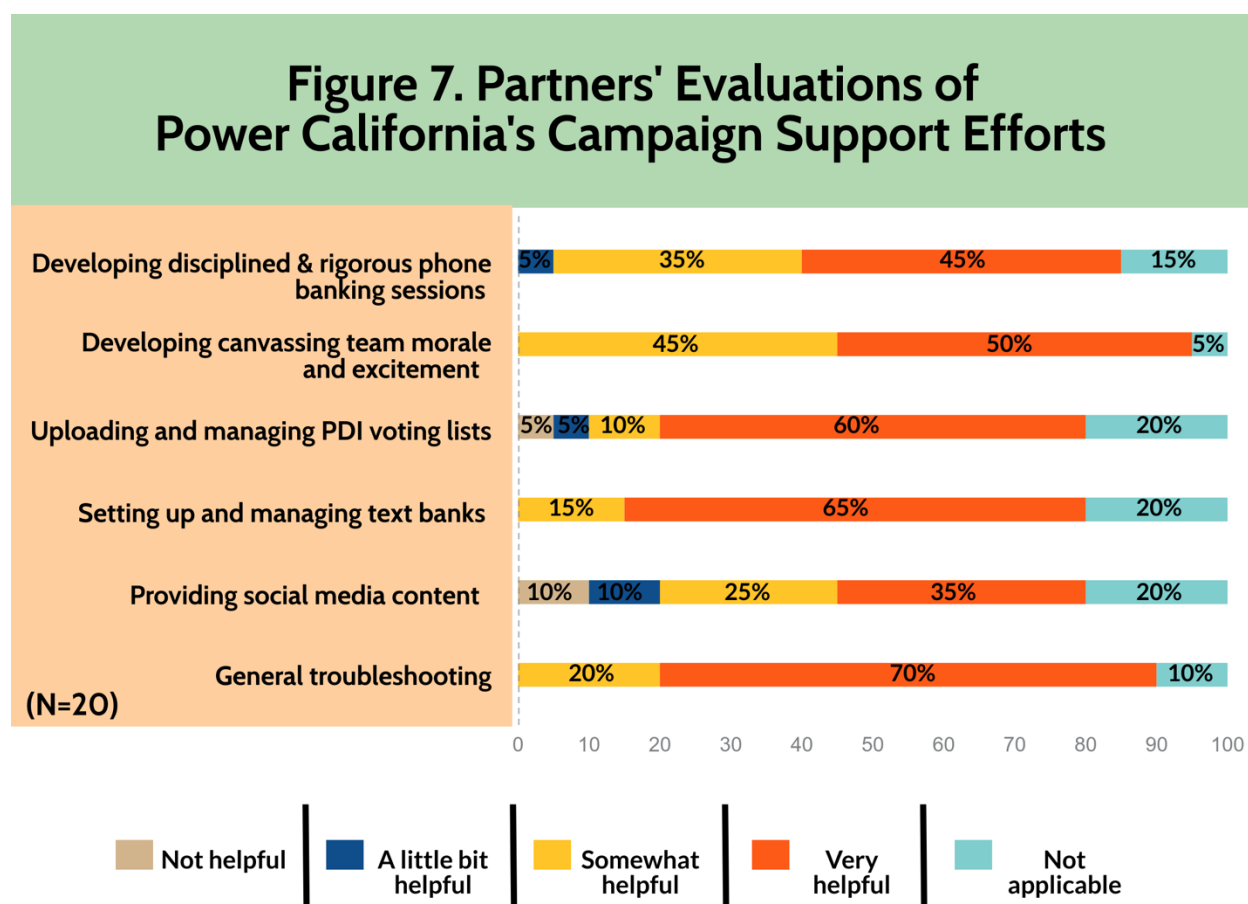
Training and Coordination

Power California sought to build a learning community in which staff, partners, and outside consultants shared important information and lessons learned regarding their young voter outreach efforts. To this end, they coordinated trainings, video conferences, team-building activities, and various forms of electronic communication to facilitate shared learning. As shown in Figure 6, this work seemed to be particularly valuable, as partner organizations overwhelmingly reported that Power California’s efforts to develop a community of learning were somewhat helpful (25%) or very helpful (65%). This community-building work included regular phone calls among participating agencies; partner organizations generally found these somewhat helpful (40%) or very helpful (40%). Partners also overwhelmingly judged other aspects helpful or somewhat helpful: the training Power California staff provided to campaign leaders in pre-election season bootcamps, which aimed to help them run campaigns, as well as the training program Power California developed for canvassers and volunteers.



Campaign Implementation

Power California provided a range of technical assistance with campaign implementation, and partners generally found these efforts helpful. As shown in Figure 7, almost all partner organizations (80%) reported that the training to conduct phone banking sessions with discipline and rigor was somewhat or very helpful, while 95% said the same about developing canvassing team morale and excitement. Meanwhile, 70% said that Power California’s assistance in uploading voter lists to PDI was somewhat or very helpful. Groups found the support in setting up texting outreach somewhat or very helpful (80%), while fewer groups reported the same about Power California’s efforts to provide them with social media content (60%). Power California’s work in troubleshooting issues during the course of the campaign was particularly appreciated, with 20% reporting that this support was somewhat helpful and 70% reporting that it was very helpful.



CONCLUSION

The Contributions of Networks and Youth Organizations to an Informed and Active Electorate

Young voters in California turned out to vote during the 2018 midterm elections at a higher rate than they had in any recent midterm election. Their increased investment in voting can be seen in part as a response to the national political climate and concerns about issues affecting their

lives. At the same time, community organizations played a role in making sure that young people were informed about the voting process, submitted their mail-in ballots on time, and showed up to the polls. This report demonstrated that during the course of preparing for this election, Power California-affiliated organizations gained important experience in various activities related to registering young voters, conducting young voter education and outreach, mobilizing young voters to go the polls, performing campaign reporting and analysis, and managing voter outreach campaign data. Moreover, the technical assistance provided by Power California provided partner organizations with valuable training, coordination, and support in implementing voter outreach campaigns. As such, these joint efforts contributed to higher turnout among voters targeted by Power California-affiliated groups versus a comparison group of voters.

This research demonstrates the importance of developing and sustaining a civic infrastructure with expertise in reaching young voters. As perhaps the first statewide network that focuses on young voters of color in low-income communities, Power California and its affiliated organizations have grown their expertise in non-partisan, youth-led voter outreach campaigns, thus helping ensure that greater numbers of racially diverse young people are registered, informed, and motivated to vote. Over the course of upcoming elections, Power California-affiliated organizations have the potential to build on their impressive track record as they continue to refine their young voter engagement strategies.

While Power California can claim great success since the inception of the YVote project in 2016, there is still much work to be done. Young adults continue to vote at much lower rates than their elders, with fewer than 40% of the eligible population of voters aged 18-34 showing up to the polls.² Moreover, voting rates remain disproportionately low for Latinx and Asian-American youth. Given the underrepresentation of young voters of color at the ballot box, the work of Power California, its affiliated organizations, and other youth-focused efforts remain critical to holding local, state, and federal government institutions accountable to the interests and needs of a large, diverse, and young population.

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² California Civic Engagement Project. 2019. "California's Youth Vote: November 2018 General Election." USC Price: Los Angeles.