

**Volunteer Engagement Results:
Recruiting Volunteers to Come To Events - Personal Contact Works**

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Background: This blog post describes the results of a study that focused on determining which methods led to the most event RSVPs and the highest event attendance rate for teams recruiting volunteers to come to an event.

Why This Study Matters to an Organizer: When you go to the trouble of organizing an event, it's important to be able to have an accurate headcount and to get as many people as possible in the door. This study is the first of its kind to explore the best ways to get volunteers to RSVP, and then attend, an event.

Specifics: In the Fall of 2018, SDAN partnered with Dr. Katherine Haenschen, a communications professor at Virginia Tech, to design the study. SDAN then partnered with 3 large Sister District teams to perform it. These teams recruited their volunteers to attend a total of 7 different events. This resulted in a total sample of 1,220 volunteers.

First, all volunteers with known phone numbers and email addresses were emailed to invite them to an upcoming event. Then, those same volunteers were randomly assigned to one of four conditions:

- 1) a control condition (these volunteers received no additional personal contact);
- 2) a call + voicemail condition (these volunteers were called and left a voicemail if they didn't answer);
- 3) a call + text condition (these volunteers were called and sent a text message if they didn't answer); and
- 4) a text condition (these volunteers were sent a text message).

After volunteers received the contact corresponding to their assigned condition, we tracked how many people in each condition RSVP'd to, and then actually attended, the team's event.

Takeaways:

- **Personal Recruitment Works.** This study substantiates common wisdom that personal recruitment produces more participation than just emailing your list to ask them to come to an event. It shows that, in aggregate, any type of personal contact is better than just emailing.
- **Getting Volunteers to RSVP or Attend (Aggregate Results):**
 - When we pooled all the data, we found that all of the personal contact conditions produced more RSVPs *and* more event attendees than the control condition. (In other words, doing *anything* personal is better than just emailing your list to invite folks to an event.)
 - How much better was personal contact than just emailing? When we combined all 3 personal contact conditions, we found that, in aggregate, personal contact

resulted in 2.7 times the amount of RSVPs and 2.9 times the amount of attendees than just sending folks an email alone.

- **Getting Volunteers to RSVP**. When we broke out the statistical findings to just look at ways to increase the number of RSVPs, we found that two conditions produced significantly more RSVPs than emails only: the call + voicemail condition, and the text condition.
- **Getting Volunteers to Actually Show Up**. It's all well and good to get folks to RSVP - but what about getting them to actually show up? When we broke out the statistical findings to just look at ways to increase the number of volunteers who show up, we found that only the text condition produced significantly more event attendees than the control condition out of the four conditions tested.
- **How Much Return on Investment for Personal Contact Did We See?**
 - Each of the personal contact conditions produced more than twice the amount of RSVPs and attendees.

| Method | No. of contacts for 1 RSVP | No. of contacts for 1 attendee |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Email only (control) | 52 | 78 |
| Call + VM | 19* | 31 |
| Call + text | 22 | 31 |
| Text | 19* | 23* |

*statistically significant result

- **Caveats**: This study specifically recruited Sister District volunteers and cannot be generalized outside of that population. This was also our first investigation into event recruitment and it was underpowered (see below), and as such, we'll need to replicate the study (run it again) to see whether the results are reliable. We plan to replicate this or very similar studies in 2019.

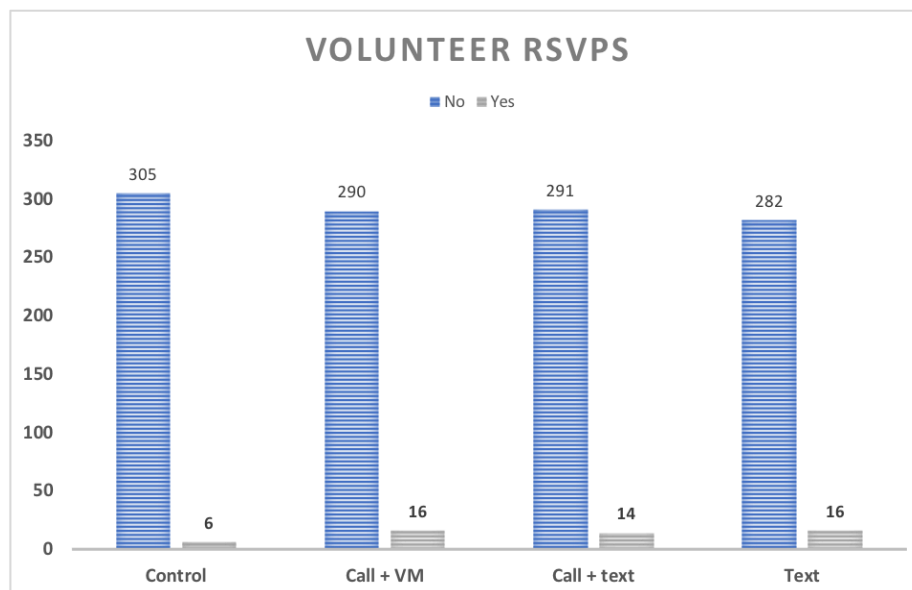
Next Steps for Your Team:

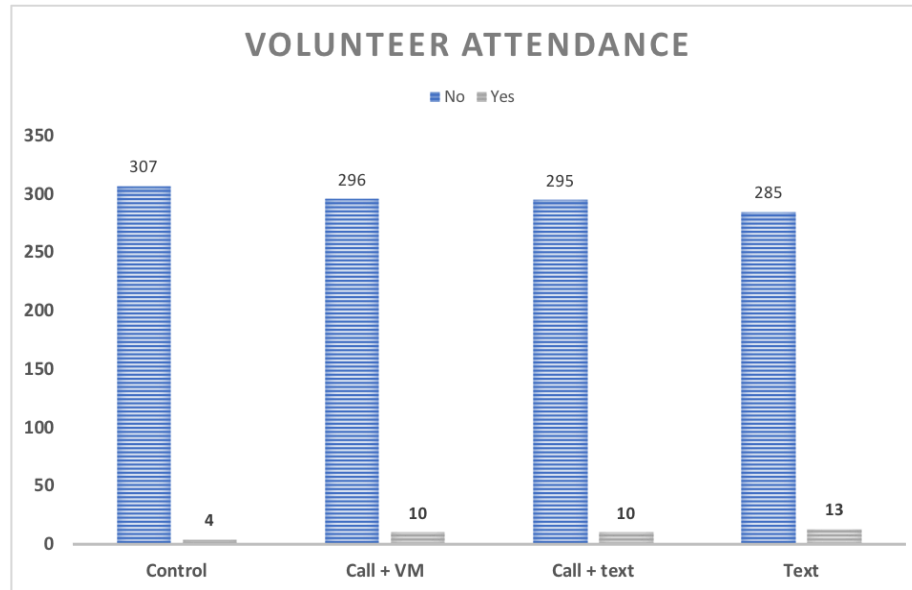
- **For increasing RSVPs**: This study indicates calling and leaving voicemails or sending text messages to recruit volunteer RSVPs to an event produces more RSVPs than sending emails, and that calling and sending text messages produces marginally more RSVPs than sending emails.
- **For increasing attendance**: ***This study indicates that personal contact is better in producing more actual event attendees than emailing alone.*** Additionally, texting folks was most effective, compared to email alone, resulting in the most event attendees.

For those interested in more detail about our methodology and findings, read on...

Key Findings in More Detail:

- **Getting Volunteers to RSVP or Attend (Aggregate):** Looking at all of the conditions combined into a single personal contact condition confirms traditional wisdom that active personal recruitment for events is significantly more effective than passive recruitment techniques like emailing ($p = 0.048$).
- **Getting Volunteers to RSVP:** Among the 3 personal contact conditions, both **the call+voicemail and the text interventions significantly increased RSVP rates over just receiving recruitment emails** (the control condition). In addition, a call+text message marginally increased attendance rates over the control condition ($p = 0.071$). After controlling for team, people who were called and left a voicemail were 2.81 times more likely to RSVP than people who just received an email ($p = 0.034$). People who were texted were 2.86 times more likely to RSVP than people who just received an email ($p = 0.031$).
- **Getting Volunteers to Actually Show Up: Only the text condition significantly increased event attendance over the control condition.** This indicates that sending text messages to recruit for events is significantly more effective in turning out volunteers to the event than just emails ($p = 0.032$). People who received text messages were 3.47 times more likely to attend the event than people who just received an email. Interestingly, traditional calling did not significantly increase turnout over emails alone ($p = 0.113$).





Effect size:

- RSVPs per thousand contacts
 - In order to determine the relative return for each contact method, we multiplied the relative RSVP rate by 1,000 to determine how many RSVPs we would expect in each condition if we appealed to 1,000 people. If the same response rates held, we would expect to get...
 - ~19 RSVPs in the control condition
 - ~52 RSVPs in the call + voicemail condition
 - ~46 RSVPs in the call + text condition
 - ~54 RSVPs in the text condition
- Attendance per thousand contacts
 - We performed the same analysis for attendance rate. If the same attendance rates held, we would expect to get...
 - ~13 attendees in the control condition
 - ~33 attendees in the call + voicemail condition
 - ~33 attendees in the call + text condition
 - ~44 attendees in the text condition

Additional Analyses:

- **Observed power:** Two proportions power tests revealed that there was inadequate statistical power to test between the control condition and each of the individual personal contact conditions. The generally accepted threshold for adequate statistical power is 0.8 and the comparison between the control condition and the call and voicemail condition, for instance, yields an observed power level of 0.28. The fact that power is inadequate indicates that these results need to be replicated with a larger sample in order for us to gain confidence in these findings.

What does it mean?

- “*P values*” indicate that an effect is statistically significant in the sense that the outcomes observed in the experimental group are statistically different than the outcomes observed in the comparison group (usually the control group).
- *Effect size* is an indicator of the magnitude of the effect. It indicates how large of an impact you should expect from an intervention. Both odds ratios and the RSVPs/attendance per 1,000 contacts are expressions of effect size.
- *Statistical power* is the likelihood that an effect will be found if there is an effect to find. Low statistical power (being “underpowered”) means you may be missing a significant effect.

Limitations and Future Directions:

- This study used participants from Sister District teams with large active volunteer bases. This limits our ability to generalize results. Also, the study combines several different events happening at different times and in different locations, and it is statistically underpowered.
- We plan to replicate these results in the future in order to provide further evidence of the effect of various kinds of personal recruitment contact.

A more detailed report of these findings can be found [here](#).

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*SDAN's commitment: It is SDAN's intention to provide as much context as possible to allow for the nuanced interpretation of our data. SDAN's convention is to contextualize effects by reporting *p values*, confidence intervals, and standardized/contextualized effect sizes for all models tested (see the linked report if these metrics are missing from the blog). Additionally, SDAN always differentiates between planned and exploratory analyses and a priori and post hoc tests, and reports the results of all planned analyses regardless of statistical significance. These findings were peer reviewed by a subset of the Sister District Data and Research team composed of senior-level statisticians called the Quantitative Advisory Committee. If you are interested in joining the Quantitative Advisory Committee please email [Mallory](#).*