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Memo: Participatory Voting

According to the NYC Campaign Finance Board (NYCCFB), only 4% of eligible voters under the age of 30 voted in the 2009 general election for Mayor.¹ [CIRCLE \(The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement\)](#) has suggested that over 50% of voters (under 30) self-reported that they did not vote in the 2010 midterm elections because they were “too busy/conflicting work” and/or “not interested/felt my vote would not count.”² Unfortunately, this is not a new problem. However, Rock the Vote is in a unique position to address the issue of low voter turnout in local elections. Consider, participatory voting.

There are number of local organizations that are working to address voter engagement through the use of websites, mobile applications and social campaigns. Two of the most compelling are, TurboVote, which provides voter registration and Election Day assistance, and NYC Votes, a voter guide and app for NYC elections. However, Rock the Vote is the only organization that engages and builds political power for young people in the United States. Basically, it’s the first organization to enlist the “coolness factor” for voting.

So the question is, why not build on Rock the Vote’s success at the national level and use music, pop culture, new technologies and grassroots organizing to create the incentives for voting at the local level? The concept for a Pilot Program is to build a social campaign to increase voter engagement through team competition whereby teams compete to achieve the highest % of voters for their group through an interactive mobile application that allows teams to

pledge money, recruit friends and engage with sites like instagram, facebook, twitter and tumblr. Rock the Vote would sponsor the program; utilizing its infrastructure, name recognition, proven success, access to musicians and other celebrities to launch the program. Most of all, there must be a compelling incentive for the program to be successful. The proposal is that team member will pledge \$10 of dollars to participate. The team that registers the most votes receives the “Community Incentive,” the opportunity to decide how the money raised is spent on their local community; and an “Individual Incentive,” tickets to a concert in NYC for a Rock the Vote musician. (Some artists include, The Black Keys, Christina Aguilera, N*E*R*D and Sheryl Crow.)

The ultimate goal is to prove the power of demonstrated action to persuade more engaged voters in local elections. We already know that young people enjoy participating in team activities, especially when it’s for a cause (ie. cycle for survival, trivia nights, city year charity days, etc.). Additionally, there is a surge in neighborhood peer-to-peer activities like airbnb and snapgoods that target collaborative consumption. The growing success of this idea further supports the idea that young people are interested in engaging with their local peers. Building on these ideas, why couldn’t participatory voting be successful?

¹ NYC Campaign Finance Board. http://www.nycfb.info/PDF/issue_reports/WhoVotes.pdf

² The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. <http://www.civicyouth.org>