

Targeted Enumeration and Voter Registration

VOTER REGISTRATION - A NEW APPROACH

Elections BC attempts to maintain a current and accurate provincial voters list while remaining fiscally responsible. Given British Columbia's extremely mobile population, maintaining a voters list of good quality is a challenge using traditional registration techniques such as door-to-door enumerations and voter-submitted paper registration forms.

To more efficiently update voter information, Elections BC implemented a strategy to modify internal data processes to take advantage of existing data sources, such as the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and the Vital Statistics branch of the Ministry of Health. As well, a new partnership agreement with Elections Canada (made possible by changes to the *Election Act*) presented efficiencies through sharing voter list information, reducing costs by minimizing redundant processes, and by developing new processes that are used by both organizations.

A new opportunity for the public to register, as well as take an on-going active role in the maintenance of their voter record, was also implemented. On September 14, 2004, Elections BC launched North America's first fully integrated online voter registration service. This tool allows eligible provincial voters to submit a registration form from the comfort of their own home 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via the internet. The ability to provide quality voter registrations, updates and confirmations in a cost-effective and timely fashion has made this a highly successful innovation.

These strategies, in conjunction with targeted in-person and mail-based enumeration, helped to produce a voters list for the 2005 General Election that included over 93% of the eligible voters of British Columbia. This level of coverage has not occurred for a number of decades. The currency of the voter data, although not meeting the desired goal of 87% by General Voting Day, showed marked improvement. Voter data that failed to meet currency standards will undergo extensive analysis to identify methods to improve future data currency.

By improving methodologies and through the use of technological innovation, Elections BC will strive to maintain a high quality provincial voters list for use in future electoral events.

TARGETED ENUMERATION 2004 TO 2005

Elections BC conducted an intensive province-wide targeted enumeration preceding the May 2005 General Election. A targeted enumeration is distinguished from traditional enumeration approaches (door-to-door or other “blanket” approaches) because it focuses on well-defined targets where there is reason to believe that voters are either not on the list, or their voter registration records are not current.

The targeted enumeration was organized into a portfolio of projects, delivered in three distinct phases, with the ultimate objective of delivering a high quality voters list prior to the provincial general election. Elections BC defined high quality to mean voter list coverage by the end of the enumeration of 90% and voter list currency of 85%. Coverage is defined as the percentage of registered voters on the list compared to the total B.C. population of eligible voters, and currency is defined as the percentage of voters on the list at the correct residential and mailing addresses.

A complete and current voters list is important for a number of reasons.

- Statistics show that people who are registered to vote are more likely to vote.
- The efficiency of voting administration is enhanced when voters pre-register. This translates into shorter waiting times for voters at voting places.
- The voters list is used by political parties, candidates and MLAs to communicate with voters.
- The voters list is used to establish campaign spending limits.
- Use of a voters list reduces the opportunity for voter fraud.

The targeted enumeration commenced in spring 2004, and concluded on April 26, 2005. The targeted enumeration cost approximately \$3.4 million over fiscal years 2004/05 to 2005/06, and added 646,559 voters to the voters list. The cost per registered voter was \$1.24.¹

THE THREE PHASES OF THE TARGETED ENUMERATION

The targeted enumeration was organized into three successive phases prior to the issuance of the writs for the 38th provincial general election.

Phase I – National Register of Electors (NRoE) Merger and Preparations

Phase I commenced March 1, 2004, and concluded January 6, 2005. It consisted of merging the National Register of Electors (NRoE) with the provincial voters list, and other key preparatory work including the development and implementation of an online voter registration system, changes to the Electoral Information System to enhance reporting capabilities, and District Electoral Officer training. This phase greatly increased the coverage of the B.C. voters list by adding 594,335 new voters from the NRoE, increasing the list from 2.1 million voters to 2.6 million. Provincial voters list coverage increased from 70.4% to 88.9% during this phase. Phase I costs were approximately \$1.21 million.

¹ The cost per registered voter during the 1999 mail-based provincial enumeration was approximately \$2.00.

Phase II – Voter Outreach

In Phase II, from January 1, 2005 to March 31, 2005, Elections BC began a comprehensive outreach program consisting of integrated communications and mail-outs to eligible B.C. voters. The voter outreach phase of the enumeration employed a householder information flyer, targeted direct mail, multi-media advertising, news releases, and community liaison officers to reach voters with the message to either register to vote, or update or confirm their registration prior to the election. The main events during voter outreach included the following:

- mailing 1.67 million householder information flyers, with an enclosed voter registration form, to B.C. residential addresses between February 17 and March 4, 2005;
- mailing 40,538 letters on March 29, 2005 to selected voters that Elections BC had targeted for voter record updates; and
- mailing 181,418 letters to valid B.C. residential addresses where Elections BC did not have any voters registered as of March 29, 2005.

The objective was to improve the quality of the voters list by confirming or updating the registration information of existing voters, and by encouraging those not on the list to register to vote. Access to registration and updating opportunities were extensive, and voters had three accessible channels to contact Elections BC: online voter registration, through the 1-800 information centre, and via pre-paid postage mail or toll-free fax. During this phase, Elections BC targeted non-current and non-registered voters who could be reached through mail and communications media. During Phase II, over 76,000 new voters were added to the provincial voters list, 30,741 voters confirmed their voter registration, and 129,374 voters updated their registration. List coverage increased to 89.5% during this phase, while list currency increased from 68.4% to 72.6%. Phase II cost \$1.56 million.

Phase III – Field Outreach

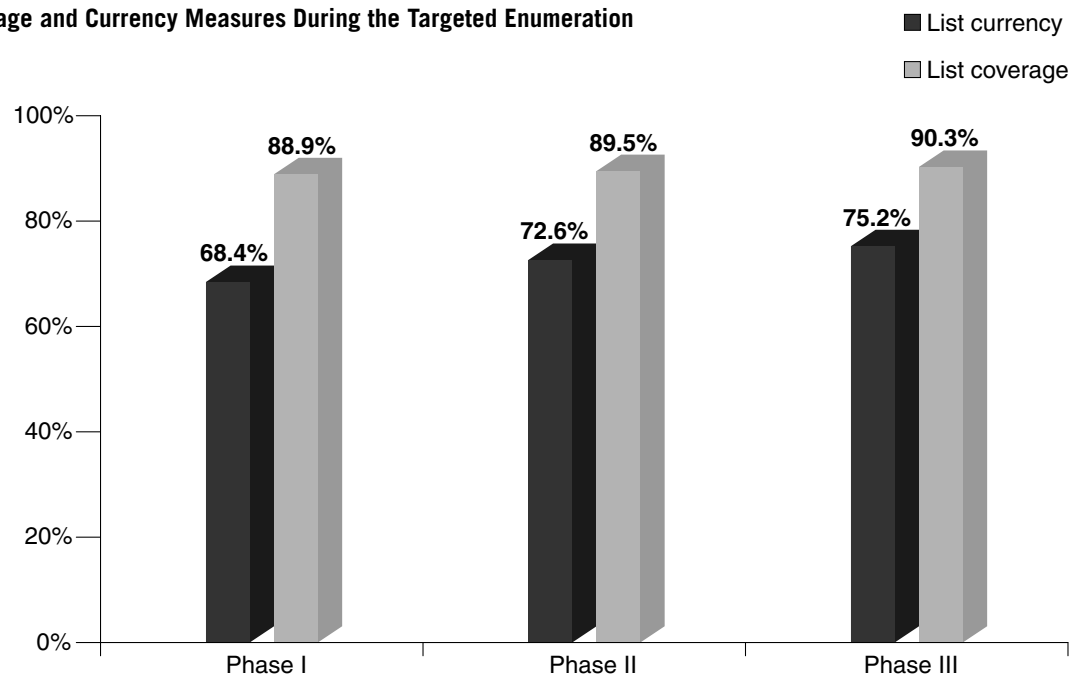
Phase III, commencing April 1, 2005 and ending on April 26, 2005, was the final component of the targeted enumeration event. The primary focus of Phase III was to improve the quality of the list by targeting two specific groups: the residents of long-term care facilities and the homeless/street population (53,000 voters in total). This was an on-the-ground, in-person field enumeration where enumerators visited 125 shelters and social service agencies² and 469 long-term care facilities. During Phase III, all voters were able to register to vote or update their voter record using the three primary communication channels from Phase II: online voter registration, the 1-800 information centre, and via pre-paid postage mail or toll-free fax. Voters also had the option of registering or updating their record in person at Elections BC headquarters in Victoria, district electoral offices across the province, and at all Service BC – Government Agent offices in B.C. Phase III also involved community outreach by District Electoral Officers, whereby voter registration was encouraged during the first three weeks of April through community presentations and by distributing voter registration material. During Phase III, 19,687 new voters were added to the list, 19,187 voters confirmed their voter registration record, and 53,487 voters updated their registration. List coverage increased to 90.3%, meeting the target established for the enumeration, while list currency increased to 75.2%. Phase III cost \$201,000³.

² Legislation now allows homeless persons to register to vote using a social service agency as their residence. This 2004 amendment provides increased access to voter registration for this group.

³ This cost includes only enumerator wages and associated expenses. It does not include costs related to the opening and staffing of district electoral offices, which provided support and a base for enumerators.

The targeted enumeration also required the implementation of several infrastructure projects that were critical to the overall success of the event. They included staffing the event team, measuring the quality of the voters list at key points during the event⁴, and event performance management. These projects cost approximately \$453,000.

Voters List Coverage and Currency Measures During the Targeted Enumeration



LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The following legislative changes were passed by the Legislative Assembly prior to the delivery of the province-wide targeted enumeration.

Bill 90 – 2003

Section 42 – General enumerations

The Chief Electoral Officer is no longer required to conduct a province-wide enumeration in the third calendar year after a general election.

Bill 54 – 2004

Section 32(5) and (6) – Residency requirements

Individuals who have no dwelling place may register as a voter on the basis that their place of residence is a shelter, hostel or similar institution that provides food, lodging or other social services.

Section 35(1) – Signature requirement for voter registration

The Act was amended to remove the requirement for a voter's signature at the time of registration, permitting innovations such as online voter registration.

Section 39.1 – National Register of Electors (NRoE)

This new section of the Act permits Elections BC to use the federal voters list to update and add voters to the provincial voters list.

⁴ List quality was measured by Stats BC prior to the NRoE merger (benchmark), and following Phases I, II, and III.

Analysis

RESULTS

The targeted enumeration proved to be an extremely effective approach to increasing the quality of the voters list prior to the 2005 General Election and 2005 Referendum on Electoral Reform. Elections BC added more voters to the list, and processed more voter registration transactions during the event than at any other time since voters list computerization. Further, the targeted enumeration was more cost-effective than previous enumeration events, even without allowing for cost-of-living increases.

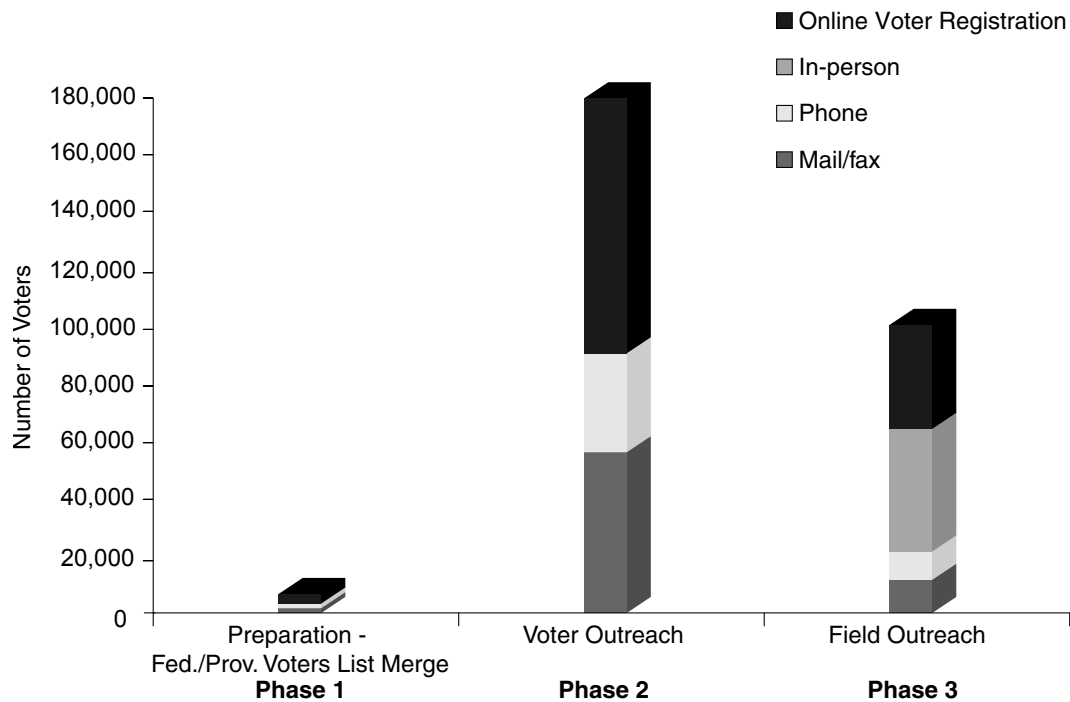
Event	Total Voters Added	Total Registration Transactions	Cost	Cost Per Added Voter	Cost Per Transaction
1989 Door-to-Door Enumeration	44,306	1,524,186	\$5,876,996 (1989 \$)	\$132.65	\$3.86
1999 Mail-based Enumeration	28,690	1,001,426	\$4,005,703 (1999 \$)	\$139.62	\$4.00
2004/05 Targeted Enumeration	646,559 ⁵	3,601,706	\$3,244,918 (2005 \$)	\$5.02	\$0.90

While the targeted enumeration was successful, and exceeded the voters list coverage goal of having 90% of the province's eligible voters registered on the list, the end results did not ultimately meet Elections BC's enumeration currency target of 85%, falling short by 9.8%. British Columbia has high population mobility, with over 46% of the population having moved between the last two census measures. On an annual basis, over 16% of B.C.'s residents move. Unless voters are motivated to take action to update their voter records with new address information, the voters list degrades by a significant factor each year. This proved to be the primary barrier to achieving Election BC's voters list currency target during the enumeration period. The targeted enumeration nevertheless proved that an integrated, multi-channel approach to targeting and communicating with voters is very effective.

⁵ Refer to page 14 for breakdown of voters added.

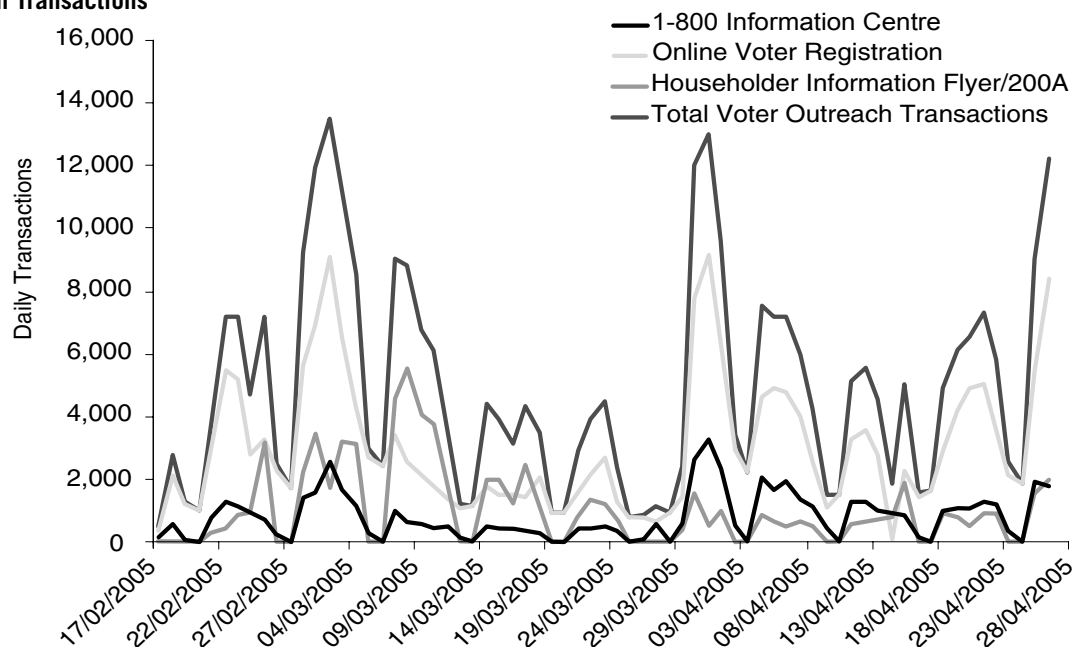
Voter registration activity during the enumeration phases was constant, with online voter registration being the preferred channel of contact for voters. The effectiveness of each voter outreach activity can not be accurately assessed if viewed in isolation. For example, it is misleading to simply analyze voter response to the householder information flyer solely in terms of the number of completed householder voter registration forms returned by mail. Rather, as illustrated in the following chart, activity in all communication channels increased as voters responded to the outreach activities using the response channel of their choice.

Voter Response by Phase and Channel



Peak activity levels were on March 2 during the householder information flyer mailout (13,470 transactions), on March 31 when voters received targeted mail (12,989 transactions), and on April 26 at the close of the voter registration period (12,209 transactions), as illustrated on the following page.

Daily Enumeration Transactions



COST EFFECTIVENESS

To identify the efficiency of each of the targeted enumeration channels that were used to either add voters to the list, confirm their registration, or update their voter registration record, a cost-effectiveness analysis was performed. Costs included an allocation of related overhead and advertising costs where possible. The results are displayed in the table below.

Registration Channel	Cost	Voter Transactions	Cost Per Transaction
NRoE Data Merge	\$365,460	1,745,523	\$0.21
Online Voter Registration	\$693,209	207,522	\$3.34
Mail / Fax	\$525,092	68,778	\$7.63
1-800 (Phone)	\$596,760	55,656	\$10.72
In-person	\$1,015,956 ⁶	31,611	\$32.14

Clearly, using the federal voters list to add new voters or update voter registration information on the provincial voters list proved to be extremely efficient. Costs per transaction for online voter registration should decline dramatically during the next business cycle, as one-time development costs will be removed from the equation⁷. In terms of both effectiveness and efficiency, a targeted enumeration approach was significantly better than previously employed methods of voter enumeration.

⁶ To accurately estimate support costs for the in-person enumeration conducted during the field outreach phase of the targeted enumeration, a portion of district electoral office and staff costs (which have been fully charged to the provincial general election) were included in the estimate. Thus total costs indicated in this table will not equal enumeration total costs indicated on page 53.

⁷ Elections BC anticipates ongoing online voter registration costs will be between 15¢ to 20¢ per transaction.