

Groups using popular 'Pokemon Go' app to register voters

July 14 2016, by Julie Carr Smyth

A political group in swing-state Ohio is using the game "Pokemon Go" for a purpose beyond catching cute Pikachu: registering voters.

NextGen Climate Ohio, a group drawing attention to climate change, says the rollout—coming days before the two political conventions get underway—is just one of the creative ways it's trying to engage millennial voters.

"One of the things we're trying to do is to really meet them where they are," said state director Joanne Pickrell. "This is where they seem to be. It's a very popular game."

The Democrat-backed NextGen is dropping "lures," which draw the cartoon monsters hunted by "Pokemon Go" [players](#), at game locations called Pokestops in parks and on campuses in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo, Pickrell said. Organizers will be on site at the locations to talk to players about the importance of voting and how to get registered.

Planned Ohio locations include the University of Toledo on Friday and, on Saturday, parks in Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus and Mirror Lake on the main campus of Ohio State University. The group's chapters in Iowa, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Illinois are also using a similar tactic to register voters. In New Hampshire, it's being used to secure commitments to [vote](#) in the fall.

Pickrell said outreach to youth voters in Ohio also includes being at music festivals, street fairs and college orientations.

Catching Pokemon Thursday at Columbus' Goodale Park, one of NextGen's planned outreach sites, players of the game were positive about the idea.

"Any way to spread the good teachings of knowing when to vote, how to vote, knowing to vote, to register, that your vote matters—any way you can get that, whether it's through 'Pokemon Go' or anything else that's popular at the time, if it can help the younger generation know what to prepare for it, then I'm all for it," said Jordan Grubb, 23.

Grubb's companion at the park, 20-year-old Haley Hamilton, agreed: "Voting's important. You need to get younger people's attention, because a lot of younger kids don't take it seriously."

Chris Thomas, 29, a doctoral student in education policy, said he loves the social aspect of the game but approaches "lures" with a note of caution.

"Using that to bring people to you is a really cool idea for registering people to vote, but I did find a story about people using it to lure people for purposes of robbing them, so there are pros and cons of that," he said.

Thomas said bumping into other "Pokemon Go" players while looking down at your phone to play the game has been a pleasant surprise of the [game](#) experience. Instead of being stereotypical detached smartphone users, players begin to talk and even work together.

"We're alone, together," he said. That's not unlike voters.

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