NONPROFIT POWER
Engaging Voters for a More Inclusive Democracy
Introduction

This report is dedicated to the nonprofit leaders, staff, and volunteers committed to a more robust and equitable American electorate.

Voter turnout gaps along the lines of race, age, income, and education level distort our democracy at every level and the resulting policy debates. By bringing these missing voices to the table, nonprofits ensure a more inclusive society. They are particularly well-positioned to leverage their relationships with the communities they serve to not only repair the breaks in our political process, but also to deepen the trust these relationships are built on.

Amid a historic election year and a global health crisis, nonprofits once again demonstrated their civic power. As this report shows, they reliably reach groups often underrepresented at the polls. Furthermore, the nonpartisan voter engagement work our partner organizations conducted boosts turnout among these target groups.

The organizations we worked with in 2020 faced budgetary, staffing, and service delivery challenges throughout the pandemic, yet they still stepped up to make sure that the communities they serve are represented at the polls. We partnered with 180 organizations—mostly service providers, food pantries, housing groups, and other community-based nonprofits—to engage more than 70,000 voters. These groups illustrate the power of civically-engaged nonprofits to change the status quo, and, in doing so, should serve as a model for others.
Program Background

Nonprofit VOTE’s multi-state field program partners with anchors across the nation who in turn active smaller, local sites to run nonpartisan voter engagement efforts in their communities, leveraging the community trust, long-term relations, and cultural competency these organizations bring to the table. Voters engaged in the program include anyone who registered to vote, signed a pledge-to-vote card, or completed an absentee ballot request form (or digital equivalent of one) at the participating sites. Contact information from these individuals was matched to their state’s voter rolls via our data partner to assess demographics reached and turnout. Additionally, we conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups to understand how these nonprofits made a difference.
180 nonprofit organizations

Snapshot of Nonprofit Sites

- 22% were doing voter engagement for the first time
- 67% had annual budgets under $1 million
- 77% reduced in-person services due to COVID-19
- 25% of sites only did digital voter engagement

Sites provided a variety of services including:
- Education (61%)
- Food Pantries (39%)
- Client Advocacy (34%)
Over **25,000** voter contacts were analyzed, including:

- **9,600** + registrations
- **13,600**+ pledge-to-vote cards
- **1,360** + vote by mail applications

36% of these voters hadn’t voted in the 2018 midterm or 2016 presidential election

Over **70,000** voters were reached

Visit nonprofitvote.org/nonprofitpower to find the full suite of resources and supplements, including methodology, in-depth case studies, practitioner findings, and shareable assets.
As public health guidelines shift, it’s imperative that nonprofits renew in-person voter engagement work whenever possible to ensure the most marginalized are not left behind.

See next page for more.

Voters Engaged at Nonprofits

Voters engaged at nonprofits are more likely to be communities historically underrepresented in our democracy, including people of color, low-income earners, and young voters than registered voters in the same states.

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See next page for more.

Voters engaged by nonprofits were
2.4x
more likely to be voters of color
53% Share of nonprofit voters
22% Share of registered voters

Voters engaged by nonprofits were
2.1x
more likely to have less than $50K in annual income
40% Share of nonprofit voters
20% Share of registered voters

Voters engaged by nonprofits were
1.6x
more likely to be 18-24 years old
16% Share of nonprofit voters
10% Share of registered voters

Numbers are rounded

Photo: A Better Chance A Better Community (ABC2)
In-Person vs. Online Strategies

Many nonprofits shifted to online strategies while others continued in-person activations with social distancing, PPE, and other COVID-safe measures. Comparing the reach of these two methods provides valuable lessons for the work of engaging voters.

In-person engagement was more effective at reaching low-income and voters of color.

Voters who filled out paper registration forms, pledge-to-vote cards, and ballot request forms were engaged in-person. Voters who completed these forms digitally were primarily engaged online without face-to-face contact. A small portion of voters engaged digitally were done in-person through tablets. 50% of analyzed contacts came from paper forms vs. 44% from digital resources. 75% of surveyed sites conducted at least some in-person voter engagement.

### Share of Low-income Voters Engaged by Method

Voters engaged in-person by nonprofits were 1.7x more likely to have incomes less than $30K compared to voters engaged digitally.

- **In-person**: 51% low-income voters
- **Digital**: 30% low-income voters

### Share of Voters of Color Engaged by Method

Voters engaged in-person by nonprofits were 1.4x more likely to be voters of color compared to voters engaged digitally.

- **In-person**: 60% voters of color
- **Digital**: 43% voters of color

### Share of Young Voters Engaged by Method

Voters engaged digitally by nonprofits were 1.3x more likely to be 18-24 year olds compared to voters engaged in-person.

- **In-person**: 14% young voters
- **Digital**: 18% young voters

Numbers are rounded.
Turnout Boost

With election enthusiasm and interest at peak levels, people voted at rates not seen in over 100 years! This highly saturated environment meant that any one group’s efforts would have a smaller relative impact than in other years. Nonetheless, the voters engaged by nonprofits showed a measurable turnout boost of 3 percentage points (p.p.) over comparable voters (75% vs. 72%).

**Low-income voters** engaged by nonprofits saw a **7 p.p.** boost in turnout over comparable low-income voters (under $30K / year).

**Young voters** engaged by nonprofits saw a **5 p.p.** boost in turnout over comparable young voters (aged 18-24).

**Non-college voters** engaged by nonprofits saw a **4 p.p.** boost in turnout over comparable likely non-college voters.

From an equity standpoint, the turnout boost was higher among voters currently underrepresented at the polls, including low-income earners, people of color, and young voters.
While White voters only had a turnout boost of 1 p.p., voters of color met or exceeded the overall turnout boost of 3 p.p. The biggest boosts were among Hispanic and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters, while Black voters saw a 3 p.p. turnout boost. Those least likely to vote otherwise benefit the most from being contacted. If your organization serves members of this community, your programming has the chance to really make their voices heard on a local and national level.

Comparable voters were matched by characteristics like age, race, sex, marital status, income, propensity, education, and county.

Hispanic voters engaged by nonprofits saw a 5 p.p. boost in turnout over comparable Hispanic voters.

Black voters engaged by nonprofits saw a 3 p.p. boost in turnout over comparable Black voters.

AAPI voters engaged by nonprofits saw a 6 p.p. boost in turnout over comparable AAPI voters.

p.p. = percentage point
The turnout boost experienced by nonprofit engaged voters was often even higher when examining overlapping demographic groups, in some cases even closing the gaps.

Low Propensity Voters = High Potential Voters

Voter files used by campaigns include propensity scores of 0 to 100 as a predictor of an individual’s likelihood of voting, with 100 being most likely. The scores are based on voting history and other factors. Campaigns typically only target voters with mid-to-high propensity scores because they are trying to win elections with limited resources. For nonprofits, voters with a low propensity score aren’t non-voters—they are high potential voters who stand to benefit the most from being contacted.

Low-propensity Black voters engaged by nonprofits were 11 p.p. more likely to vote than comparable low-propensity Black voters (≤5 propensity score).

This closed the voting gap with the broader population of low-propensity registered White voters.

Low-income Hispanic voters engaged by nonprofits were 10 p.p. more likely to vote than comparable low-income Hispanic voters (under $30K / year).

This closed the voting gap with the broader population of low-income registered White voters.

Likely non-college Asian voters engaged by nonprofits were 7 p.p. more likely to vote than comparable non-college Asian voters.

This narrowed the voting gap with the broader population of likely college Asian voters.
Case Studies
“Often we don’t have our voices heard by elected officials, so by saying we are registered voters gives us more sway and gets people more engaged in the advocacy and political process.”

Aubrey Hasvold, Advocacy Program Director, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Community Resource Center creates opportunities, tools, and strategies to develop nonprofits and community groups to strengthen Colorado. The Participation Project, founded in 2010 and adopted as a program by CRC in 2015, trains and manages a cohort of organizers that support on-site voter engagement work as needed. They work with each site—food pantries, community health clinics, homeless shelters, and others—to develop effective and realistic action plans for civic engagement.

29 Sites

People do want to vote once they understand the power of our vote and that they have a voice. But those barriers are there."

Justice Served NC, Inc. on addressing barriers (like obtaining Voter ID and feeling like their vote doesn't matter) with the formerly incarcerated individuals they serve.

For over 25 years, Democracy North Carolina has used research, organizing, and advocacy to increase voter participation. Their mission is to strengthen democratic structures, build power among disenfranchised communities, and inspire confidence in a transformed political process that works for all. Their focus on community-based leadership is reflected in their training approach and choice of sites for nonprofit voter engagement work.

North Carolina: Over 8,382 voters reached

70% of voters these nonprofits engaged were Black

38 Sites

Ohio: Over 19,186 voters reached

“Who could better gain the trust of the community other than those who come from the same community since Smart Development is also composed of refugee, immigrant, and Arab-identifying individuals?”

Melaak Rashid, Director of Development, Smart Development, Inc.

As a statewide coalition of hundreds of housing organizations and homeless service providers, COHHIO promotes a range of housing assistance services, public policy advocacy, and provides training and technical assistance. Ohio VOTES is COHHIO’s year-round, statewide, nonpartisan initiative to build civic engagement in Ohio’s low-income communities. Ohio VOTES works with housing providers, health centers, community centers, food pantries, homeless programs, and other nonprofits.

Greater Collinwood Development Corporation

Ohio VOTES

Engaged the most low propensity voters out of all 2021 anchors

47 Sites

Access Center for Independent Living, Akron Votes, AxessPointe Community Health Centers, Bexley Library, Church 4 All People, Care Alliance Health Clinic, Cleveland Votes, Community Action Against Addiction, Dayton Food Pantry, Dayton Metro Library, Dayton Peace Museum, DCR, The Devil Strip, Dorothy Day House, Downtown Cleveland Alliance, Eta Tau Lambda Alpha Phi Alpha, First Grace United Church of Christ, First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, Food Bank Mobile, Greater Cleveland Alumnae Chapter Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Greater Collinwood Development Corporation, Hardesty Park, Horvitz YouthAbility of JFSA Cleveland, Hosack Baptist Church, House of the Lords, King Ave UMC, League of Women Voters of Akron, Greater Cleveland, Columbus, Greater Dayton, Greater Youngstown, LifeCare Alliance, Mahoning Youngstown, Montgomery County Job Center, NEOCH, NSI Food Pantry, NOVA, OCCHA, OSU Hospital, Reeb Center - Southside Thrive, River Valley Organizing Project, Sigma Kappa - University of Dayton, Smart Development, St Paul United Methodist Church, Summit Lake Community Center, Trinity Baptist Church, Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, YMCA Shelter, and Young Latino Network.
Pennsylvania: Over 4,673 voters reached

“\textit{We always look for opportunities to center our community and make the voices of the LGBTQ people in our region heard.}”

\textbf{Katie Suppes,} Director of Programs, Research, & Evaluation, Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center on the importance of engaging clients receiving services as voters.

The Housing Alliance is a statewide coalition working to provide leadership and a common voice for policies, practices, and resources to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those with low incomes, have access to safe, decent, and affordable homes. As a new anchor organization, the Alliance was able to boost advocacy efforts and engage many of their members in voter engagement for the first time through their PA Votes campaign.

\textbf{19 Sites}

Abilities in Motion, Alleghenies United Cerebral Palsy, Allentown Housing Authority, Anthracite Region Center for Independent Living (ARCIL), Arab-American Development Corp, Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center, Center for Independent Living of South Central PA, HACE CDC, Hunger Free PA - PA Food Banks, League of Women Voters Erie County Chapter, League of Women Voters of Philadelphia, Mental Health Association of NWPA, PHAN, Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network, Rankin/Mon Valley/Pittsburgh Section of the National Council of Negro Women, Self Advocates United as 1, Third Street Alliance, Uptown Partners, and Voices for Independence
“The community was pleasantly surprised that our organization was engaging in voter registration work and was delighted to have the opportunity to sign up alongside some of our other great initiatives.”

Amanda Ciofu, Grants & Evaluation Manager, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids

The Michigan Nonprofit Association is a statewide membership organization that achieves its mission through advocacy, training, technology services, and civic engagement. The goal of their community engagement programs is to enhance participation in the “civic engagement cycle” of historically underrepresented groups. Efforts include getting constituents counted in the Census, to vote, and to participate in the redistricting process. Every site that responded to the follow-up survey indicated they would partner with MNA to do voter engagement in the future.

81% of voters engaged were unlikely to have had a college education

Chaldean Community Foundation

Michigan: Over 22,180 voters reached

16 Sites

211, ABISA, ACCESS, African Bureau of Immigration and Social Affairs, APIA Vote Michigan, Arab and Chaldean Council, Busy Bee Here to Help, Capital Area United Way, Chaldean Community Foundation, Delta Sigma Theta, Detroit Branch NAACP, Links - Great Lakes Chapter, LWV Grand Rapids, United Way of Southwest Michigan, University of Michigan – Dearborn, and YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids
Engaged the most 18 to 24 year–old voters 1,100+

“Voter engagement benefits BakerRipley by affording us another opportunity to grow our base and to continue raising awareness in the community about our organization and programs. By helping to increase voter participation, we, in turn, help the community empower itself.”

Bolivar “Bo” Fraga, Sr. Community Engagement Developer at BakerRipley

For over 100 years, BakerRipley has transformed communities in Houston, TX by connecting low-income families and individuals to opportunities so they can achieve the lives they’ve imagined. For years, they have found new and creative ways to get out the vote among the communities they serve. 2020 was no different; they focused their efforts on phone banking and food distribution to meet the human and voter engagement needs of Houstonians during the pandemic.
“Through our food bank operations and follow-up outreach, we have reached more than 5,000 voters and engaged more than 60 volunteers. At our food bank, we ID participants on specific issue areas, and we do follow-ups through texts and calls.”

Yadira Sanchez, Co-Executive Director

Poder Latinx is a civic and social justice organization taking on an innovative approach to comprehensive civic engagement, breaking down Latinx cultural and generational identities to better conduct engagement. By March 2020, they had laid a foundation in Arizona for an ambitious event and canvassing-based, voter outreach program called Votar es Poder, but the pandemic forced them to pivot to remote work and phone banking. Recognizing their communities needed extra assistance, they launched a weekly food bank, which provided another opportunity to engage voters and help them register.
Engaging the people we serve does more than boost voter turnout—it impacts the culture and capacity of our organizations.

Nonprofits that did voter engagement work reported benefits such as better community relationships and building skills among their staff; 96% of participating organizations expressed interest in conducting voter engagement activities in the future.

Nonprofit VOTE is dedicated to uncovering best practices and expanding the number of nonprofits that engage voters. This simple intervention will lead to better outcomes for our clients, our organizations, and our country.

Visit nonprofitvote.org/nonprofit-power to find shareable graphics, practitioner findings, methodology, and the full Nonprofit VOTE resource library.
About Nonprofit VOTE

We help nonprofits engage the people they serve in voting and elections. We are the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

Nonprofit VOTE can provide your organization with the technical assistance and training your staff and affiliates need. We also work with membership-based organizations, coalitions, and foundations to build civic engagement programs to engage their respective networks.

Learn more about the benefits of voter engagement, sign up for our newsletter, and download free resources at nonprofitvote.org.

To make a tax-deductible donation, visit our website or email us at info@nonprofitvote.org

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