ENGAGING NEW VOTERS

If Nonprofits Don't, Who Will?

![Nonprofit VOTE logo]

Engaging New Voters:
If Nonprofits Don't, Who Will?

The job of candidates and political campaigns is not to promote equity in voting and democratic participation. It is to win elections.

It is up to us, as nonprofits, to promote equity in our democracy.

It is up to us to ensure the communities we serve are actively participating and voting.

This report is dedicated to that journey.

Nonprofit VOTE

Introduction

Our Democracy Is Distorted by Gaps in Voter Participation

Our democracy is diminished and policy debates are distorted when large segments of the public are left out of the political process. Yet it is a well-known fact that low-income communities, young voters, those without college degrees, and communities of color have historically voted at lower rates. As a result, issues that concern these low-turnout communities don't get raised on the campaign trail and get short shrift once candidates are elected.

We Cannot Rely on Political Actors to Ensure a Representative Democracy

With limited resources and a win-or-lose election, candidates and political campaigns focus their outreach on voters that are likely to show up at the polls and support their candidate. As a result, voters who don't have a history of voting get little or no contact. Without being contacted, they don't vote and the cycle repeats itself. This dynamic reflects the fact that the campaign's job is not to bring equity to democracy, but rather to win elections.

Voter-Friendly Policies Are Good, but Not Enough

Voter-friendly policies can reduce existing barriers to participation, but do not directly increase the *motivation* of a new, potential voter to participate. Policies are not a substitute for face-to-face voter contact. Policies can make voting possible, but it's voter contact that makes voting probable, especially for voters who are new to the process.

It's Up to Nonprofits to Take the Mantle of Equity in Our Democracy

As nonprofits, we regularly interact with those who have been left out of the democratic process. By leveraging our deep roots and trust with the communities we serve, we can foster higher levels of voter engagement, helping to ensure their engagement, helping to ensure the issues of concern to the community are addressed.
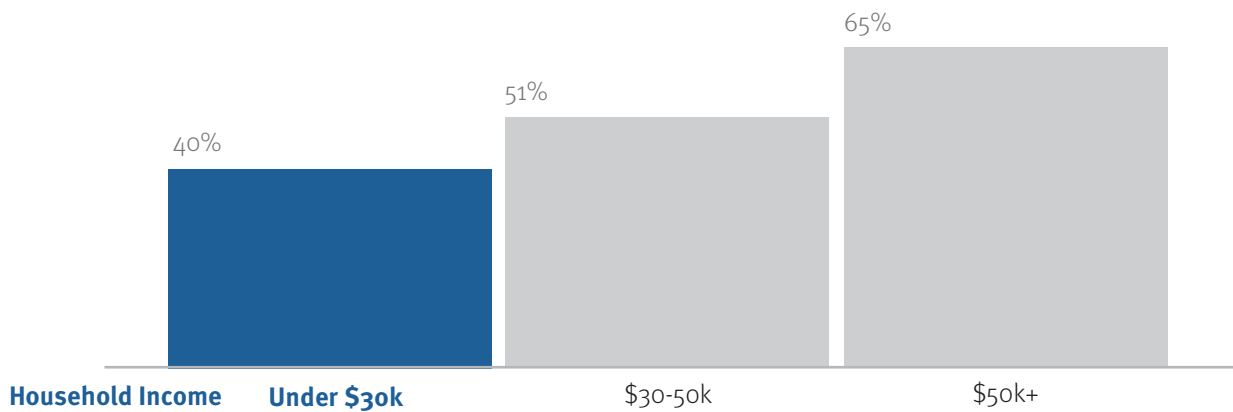
The Problem: Gaps in Voter Turnout

National voter turnout data from the Census shows that young adults, low-income, Hispanic, and Asian communities are underrepresented at the polls.

Young Voters Had the Lowest Rate of Voter Turnout

Age	18-24	25-34	35-54	55+
	32%	42%	54%	64%
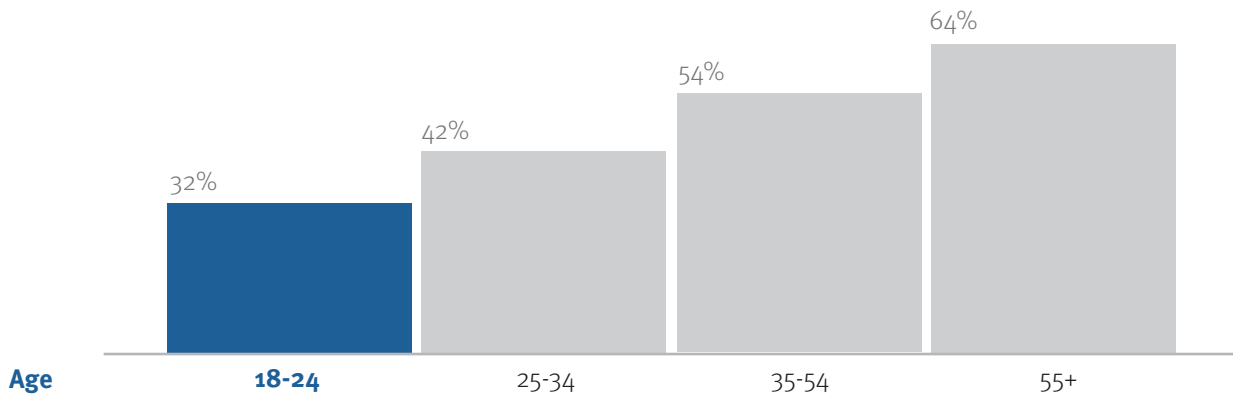
Low-Income Voters Had the Lowest Rate of Voter Turnout

Household Income	Under $30k	$30-50k	$50k+
	40%	51%	65%

Hispanics and Asians Had the Lowest Rate of Voter Turnout

Race	Hispanic	Asian	White	Black
	41%	51%	55%	57%
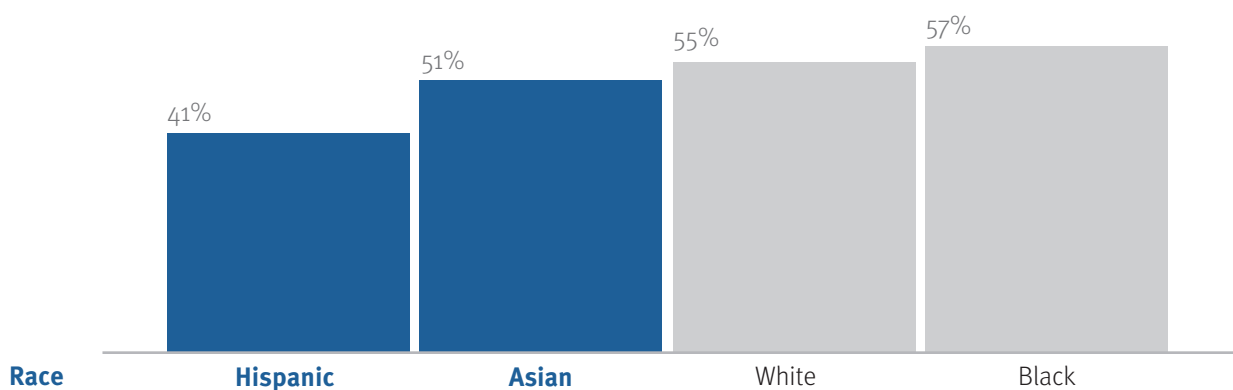
National voter turnout based on Citizen Voting Age Population
Source: Census 2018 CPS Voting and Registration Data

Lack of Voter Contact Fuels the Gaps

Voters who don't show up at the polls are labeled as "unlikely voters," and as such, are not contacted by campaigns about voting. Without that critical voter contact, they don't vote, fueling a negative feedback loop as the cycle repeats itself.

In 2018, more than half of Latino voters said they were not contacted about voting (57 percent) according to NALEO and Latino Decisions. But Latino voters who reported being contacted by a campaign or candidate were nearly twice as likely to state they had voted early compared to their non-contacted counterparts.

"No one had talked to them. It was like there was zero messaging to this pool of people who need to be voting."

– Liz Gautner,
  South Euclid Church of Christ

"In a lot of these lower-income, hard to reach populations, we found that most of them were never even asked to register before."

– Kathy Cefus,
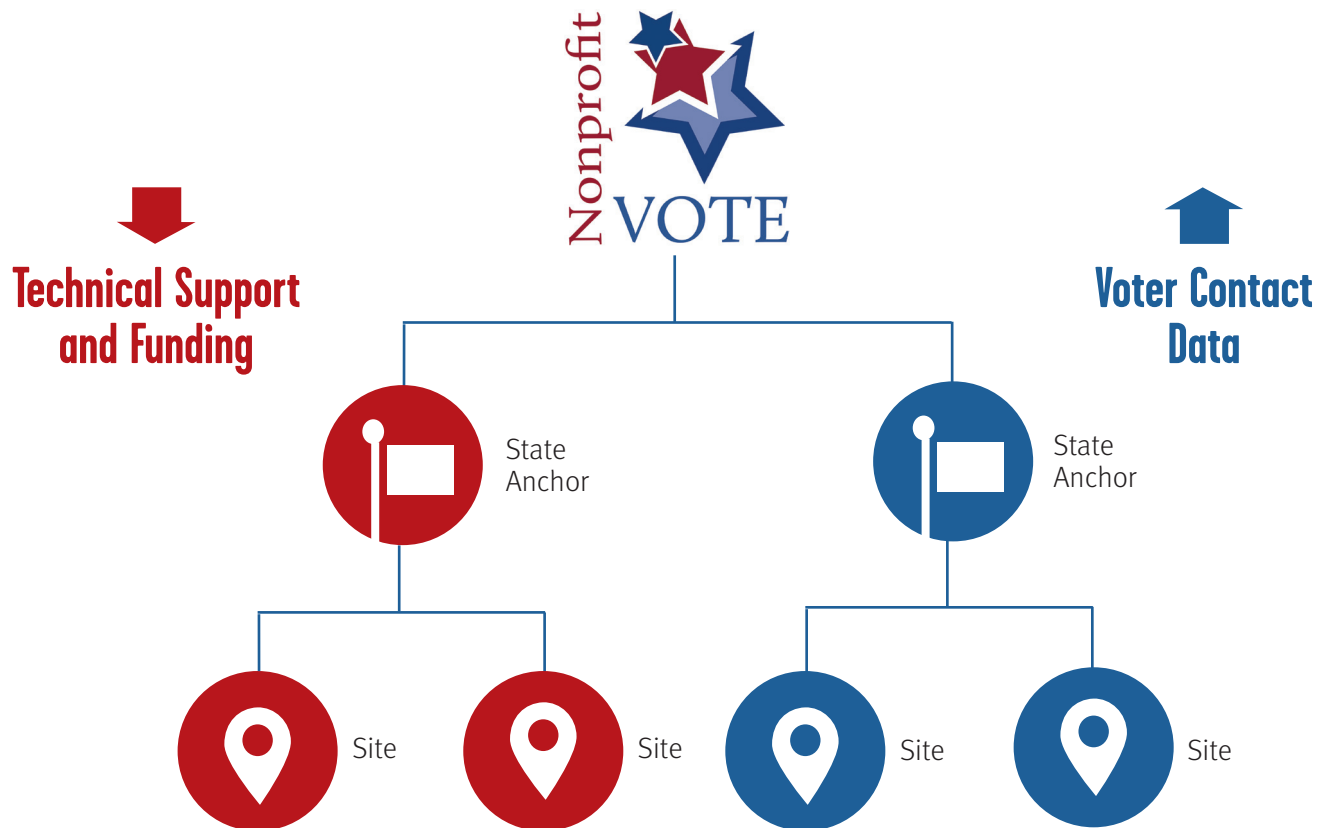 Community Partnership Family Resource Center
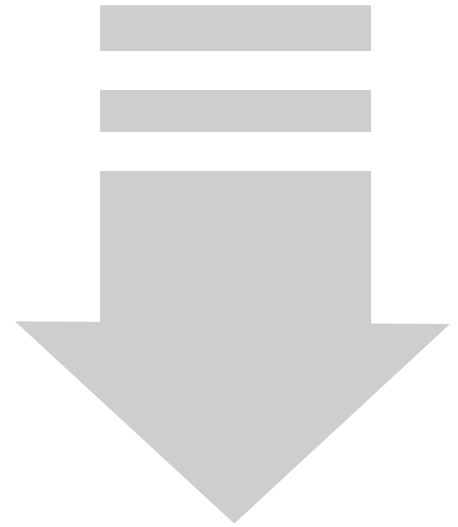
If Nonprofits Don't, Who Will?

It's up to us as nonprofits to step in and ensure the communities we serve are participating and voting.

Engaging New Voters Program

We partner with and support state-based anchors, such as state nonprofit associations and civic engagement initiatives, who in turn recruit and support nonprofits in their state to do voter engagement work. The sites are primarily human service nonprofits such as community health centers, food pantries, housing coalitions, and mutual aid associations. Each site receives training and regular check-ins as they engage the communities they serve. If a client is already registered to vote, they are asked to sign a pledge-to-vote card or equivalent. The data from these voter contacts form the backbone of this report.

Nonprofit
VOTE

Technical Support and Funding

Voter Contact Data

State Anchor

State Anchor

Site

Site

Site

Site

For purposes of analysis, we included data from three data partners whose programs sufficiently mirrored the Engaging New Voters Program of working with human service nonprofits and community-based organizations.

The 2018 Engaging New Voters Program

PROTECTING ARIZONA'S FAMILY COALITION

CRC COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

STATE VOICES

ForefrOnt Engaging for impact

ASIA ASIAN SERVICES IN ACTION

CLEVELAND VOTES

COHHIO

democracy NORTH CAROLINA Of, by and for the people

COMMUNITY *Votes*

- - - Data Partners
——— Civic Engagement Anchors

6
State Anchors

64
Nonprofit Sites
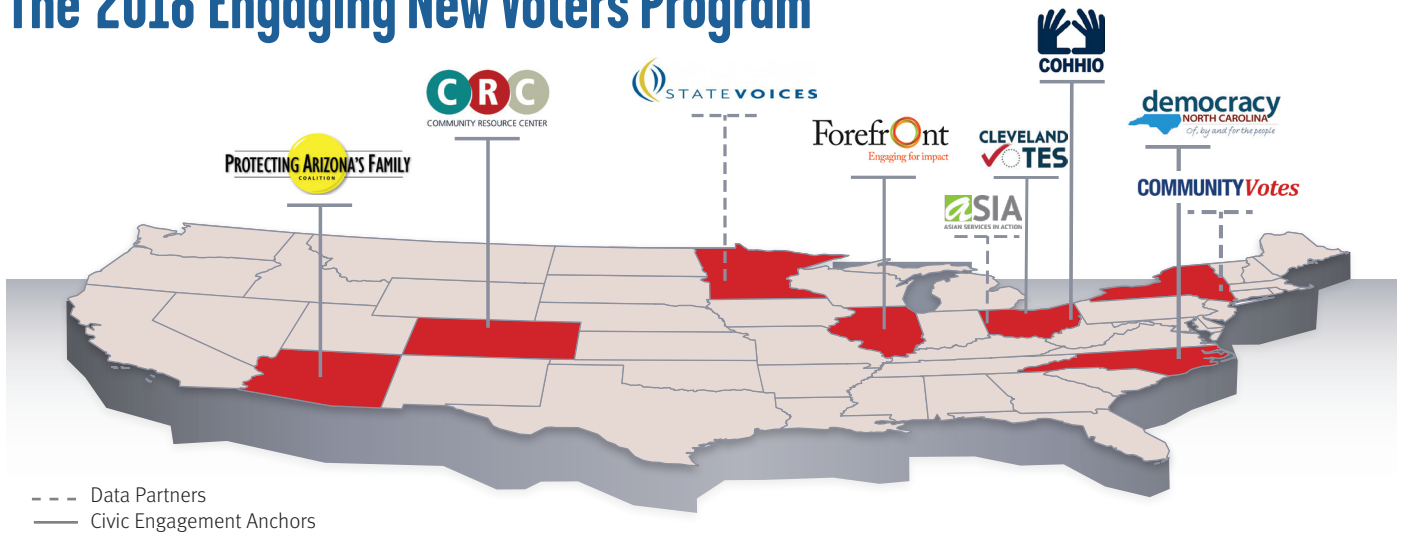
3
Data Partners

Voters Engaged

22,500+
Engaged

14,000+
Pledged to vote

8,000+
Registered

19,000+
Matched to voter file

Multi-Touch Get Out the Vote Campaign
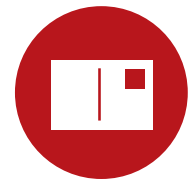
Postcards to 8,000 voter contacts

Two rounds of **text messaging** to 6,000 and 8,000 contacts

10,000 live **phone calls**

Note: Data partners often ran their own GOTV programs, the metrics of which are not included above.

Who Nonprofits Reach

Nonprofit Voters engaged in the program were more likely to be non-white, young, and low-income than registered voters in the study states.

2.3
TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE NON-WHITE

Non-White Registered Voters — 23%
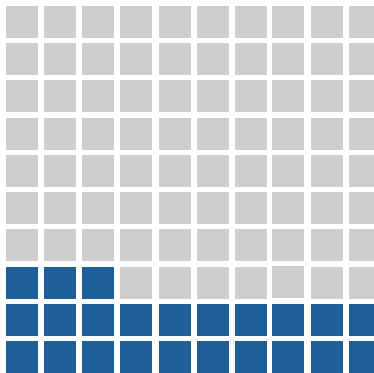
Non-White Nonprofit Voters — 53%
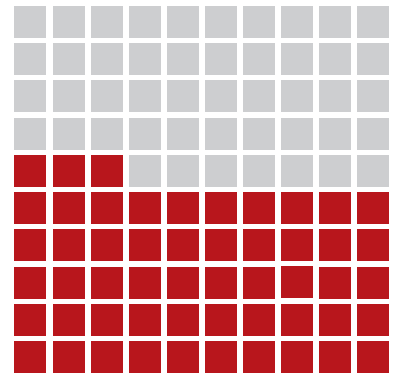
2.6
TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE UNDER 25 YEARS OLD

Under 25 Registered Voters — 9%

Under 25 Nonprofit Voters — 24%

1.9
TIMES MORE LIKELY TO HAVE LESS THAN $30,000 IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Under $30,000 Registered Voters — 19%

Under $30,000 Nonprofit Voters — 37%
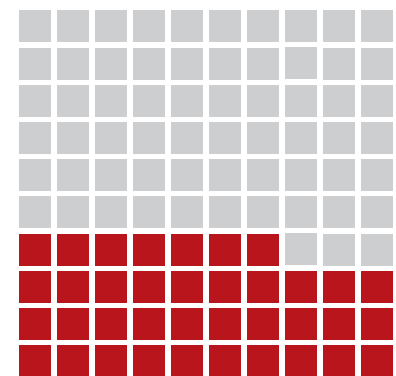
See additional detail in Appendix.

Nonprofit Impact on Voter Turnout

Nonprofit Voters Turned Out at Rates 11 Percentage Points Higher Than Comparable Voters

Based on demographically-matched registered voters (see box below).

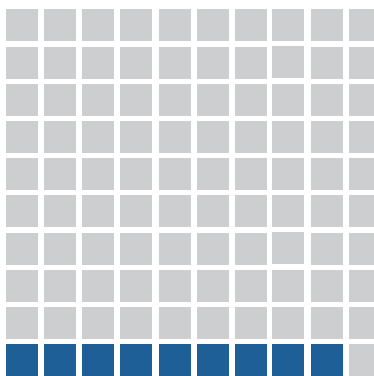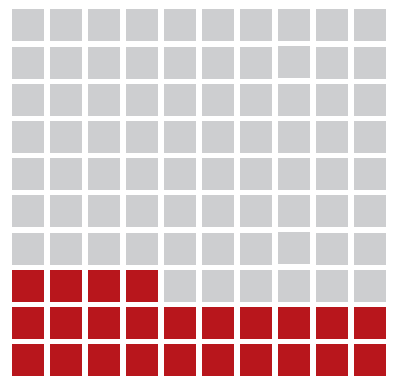**Overall Turnout**

66%

11 POINTS HIGHER

C

55%

Comparable Voters

B

Nonprofit Voters

A
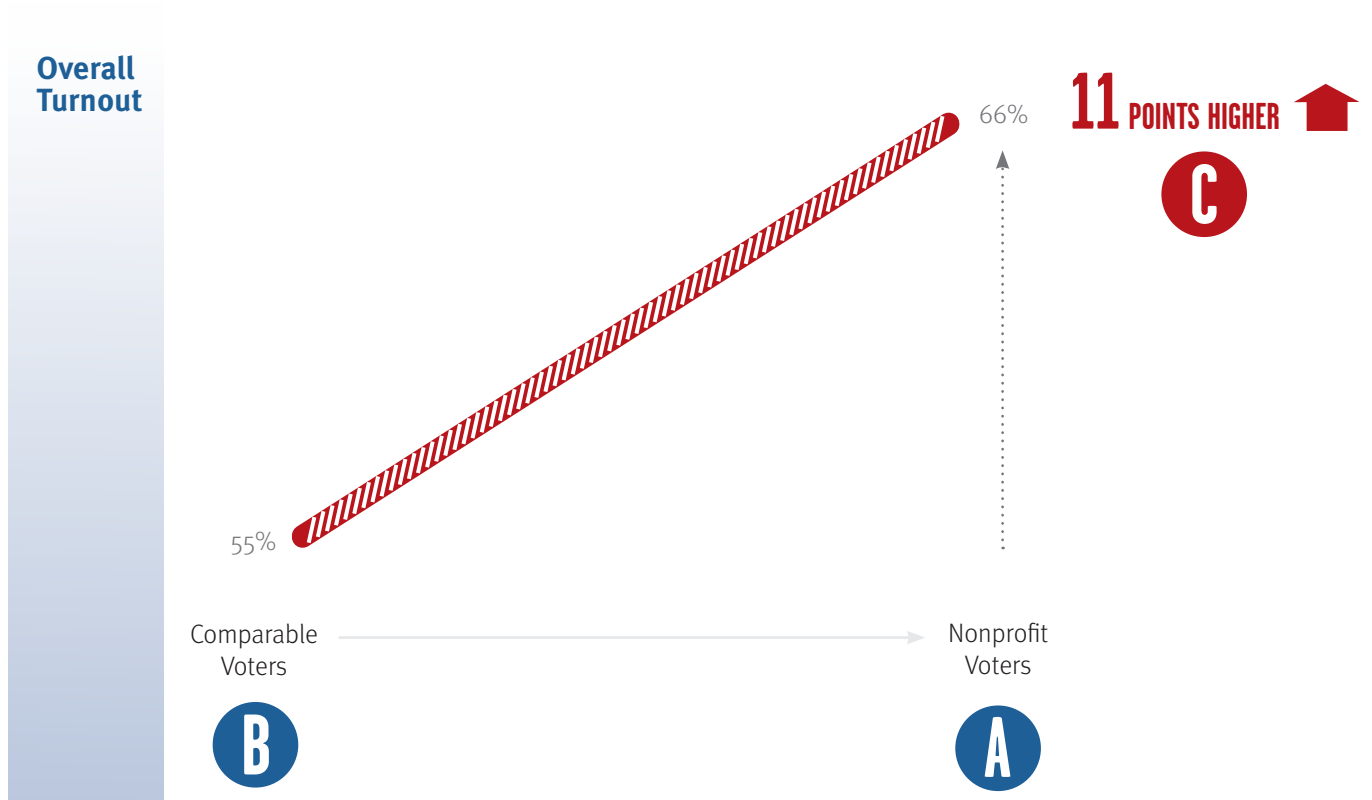
How to Understand This Number

Nonprofit Voters: Actual turnout of voters engaged at one of the participating nonprofit sites or data partners. The highest Nonprofit Voter turnout was among those who signed a pledge-to-vote card (72%), followed by vote-by-mail applications (64%), and then registration forms (58%).

A

Comparable Voters: We assume that each voter contacted through our program would have, absent our contact, voted at the same rate as a demographically-matched set of registered voters within the same county. As such, we factored in state, county, sex, race, age, and marital status in calculating their 2018 turnout. See methodology on p. 16 for additional detail.

B

Assessing Impact: We look at the difference in percentage points between the Comparable Voter turnout and the Nonprofit Voter turnout. All numbers are rounded to the nearest whole. See data tables on p. 19 for detail.

C

Non-whites Had the Largest Turnout Advantage

Turnout by Race

White
63% — 72%

Asian
55% — 71%

Black
51% — 64%

Hispanic
43% — 56%

8 POINTS HIGHER

16 POINTS HIGHER

13 POINTS HIGHER

13 POINTS HIGHER

Comparable Voters → Nonprofit Voters
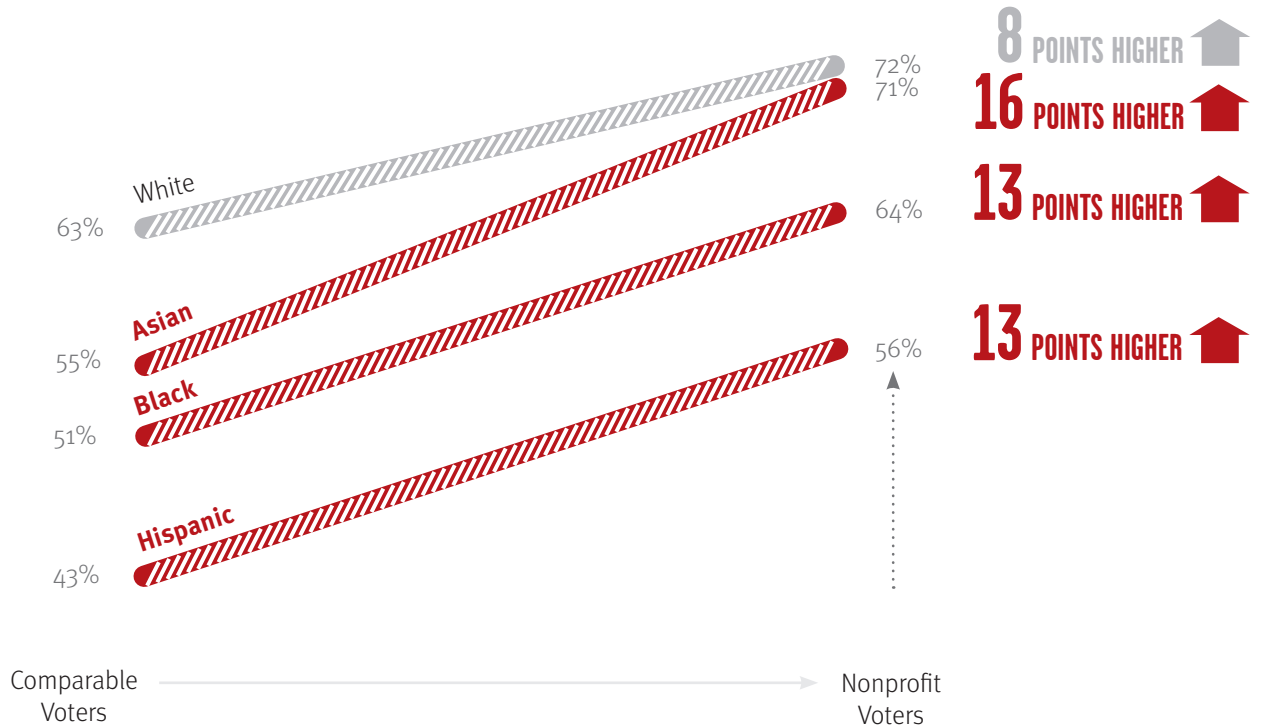
Younger Voters Had the Largest Turnout Advantage

Turnout by Age

55+
68% — 72%

35-54
58% — 66%

25-34
48% — 64%

18-24
44% — 63%

4 POINTS HIGHER

8 POINTS HIGHER

20 POINTS HIGHER

15 POINTS HIGHER

Comparable Voters → Nonprofit Voters
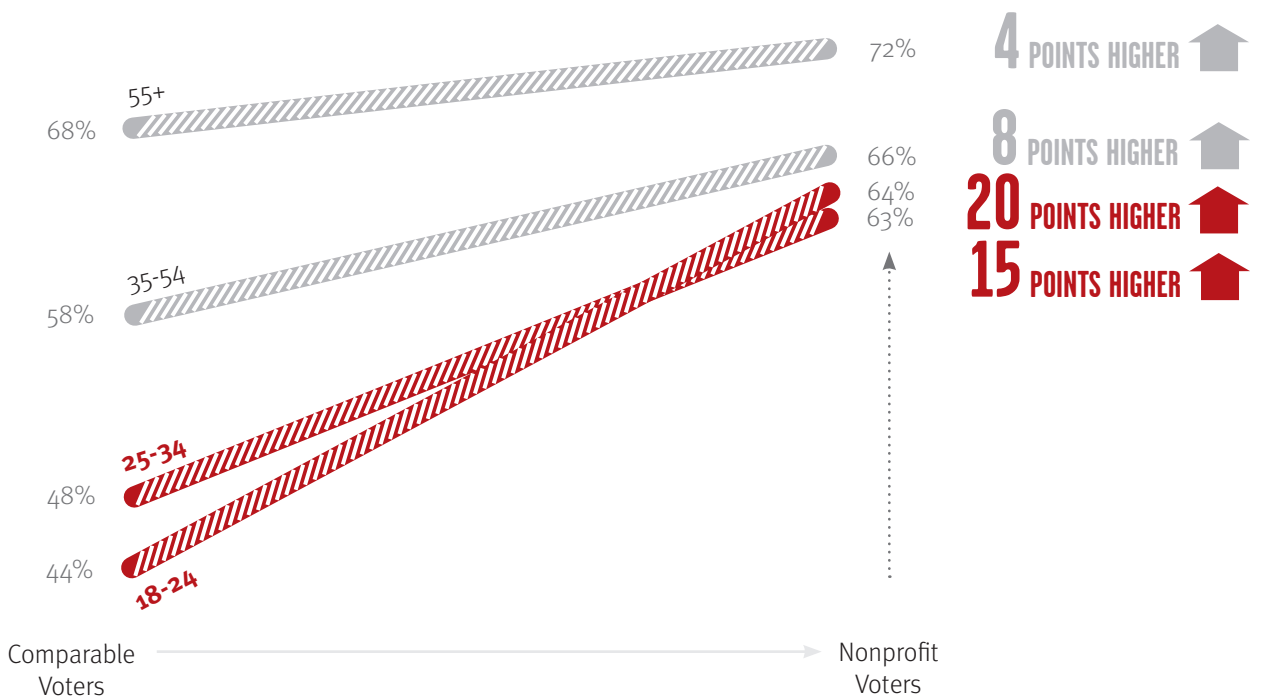
Lower-Income Voters Had the Largest Turnout Advantage

Turnout by Income

Over $75k
80% ////////////////// 85%   **5** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

78%   **12** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

$50-75k
66% ////////////////// 71%   **14** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

$30-50k
57% //////////////////

52%   **14** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

Under $30k
38% //////////////////

Comparable Voters → Nonprofit Voters
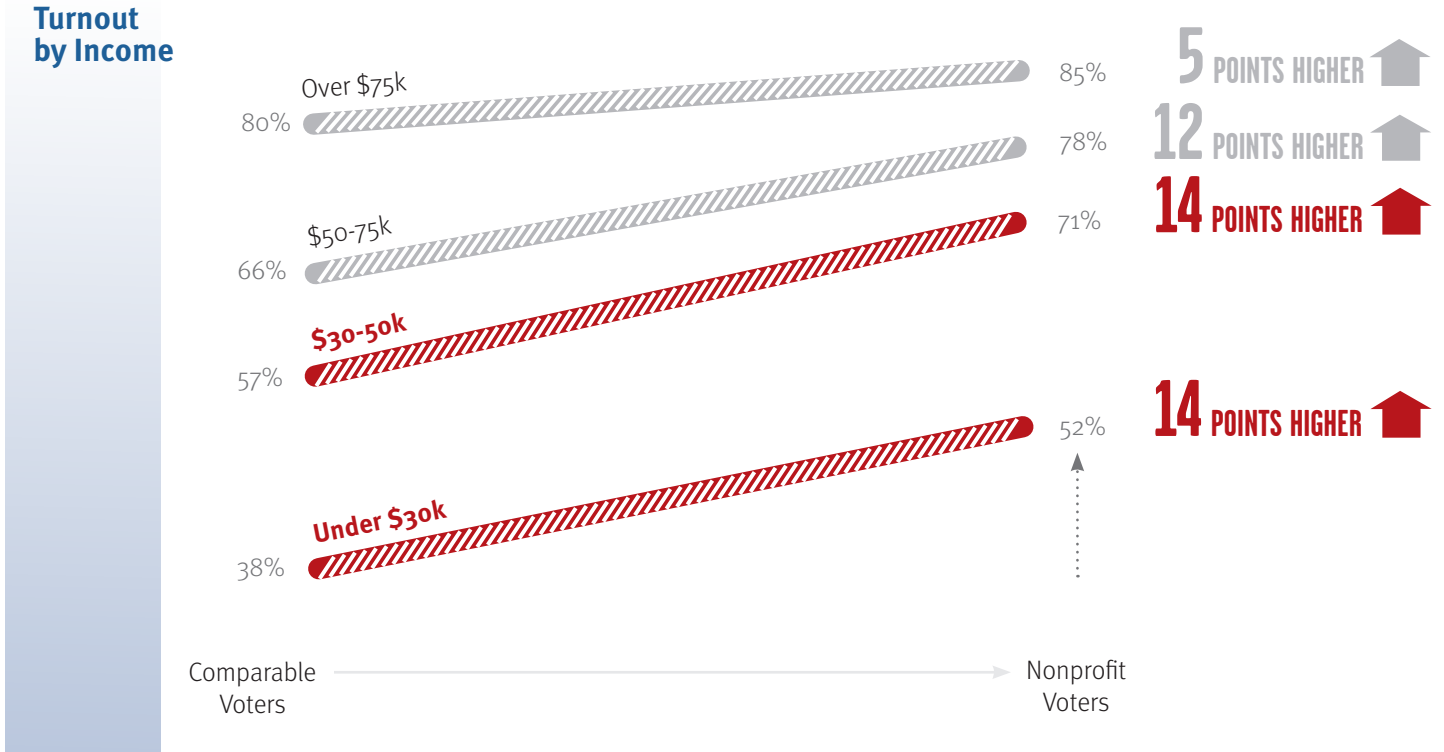
Those Without College Degrees Had the Largest Turnout Advantage

Turnout by Education

77%   **8** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

Likely College
69% //////////////////

Likely Non-College

64%   **12** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

51% //////////////////

Comparable Voters → Nonprofit Voters
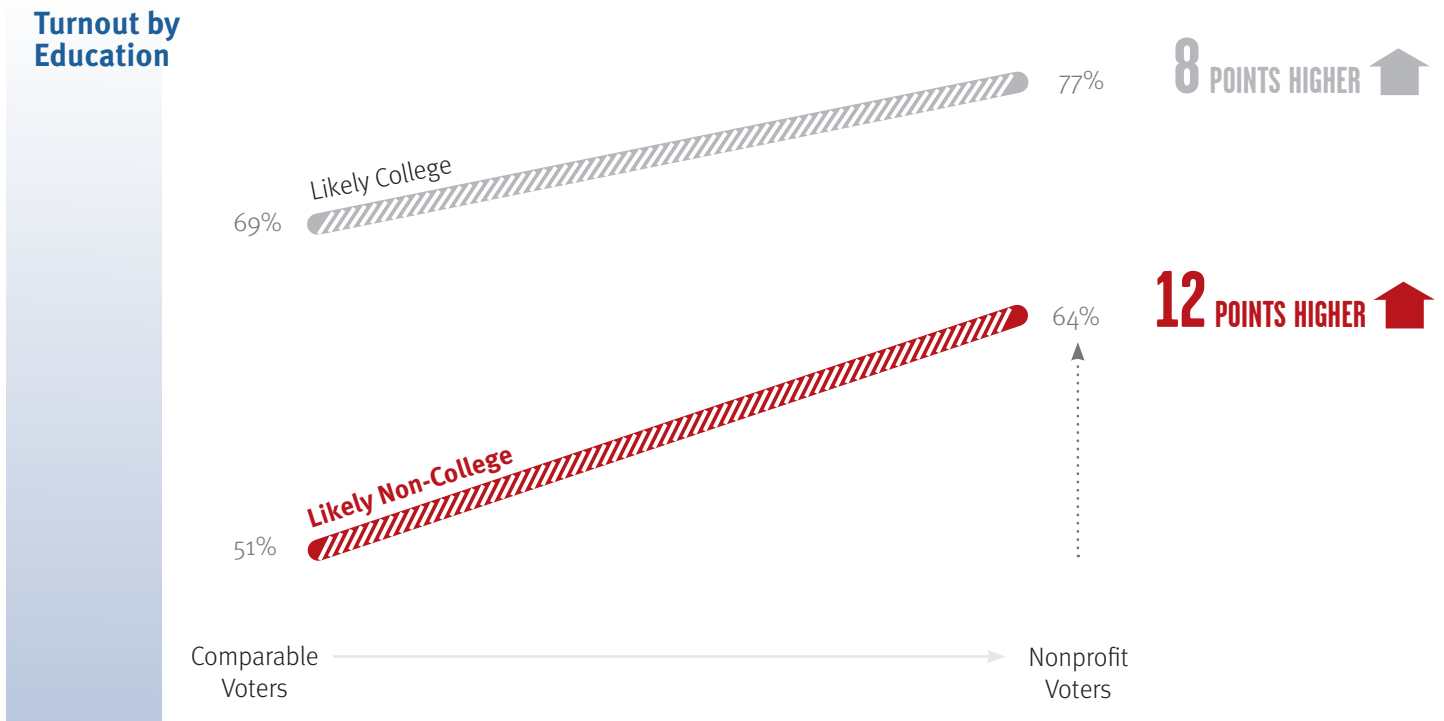
Lowest Propensity Voters Had the Largest Turnout Advantage

Turnout by Propensity

81-100, High Propensity Voter

95% ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 94%   **1** POINT LOWER ⬇

51-80

77% ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 81%   **3** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

26-50

61% ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 68%   **7** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

0-25, Low Propensity Voter

28% ▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨▨ 46%   **18** POINTS HIGHER ⬆

Comparable Voters ——————→ Nonprofit Voters
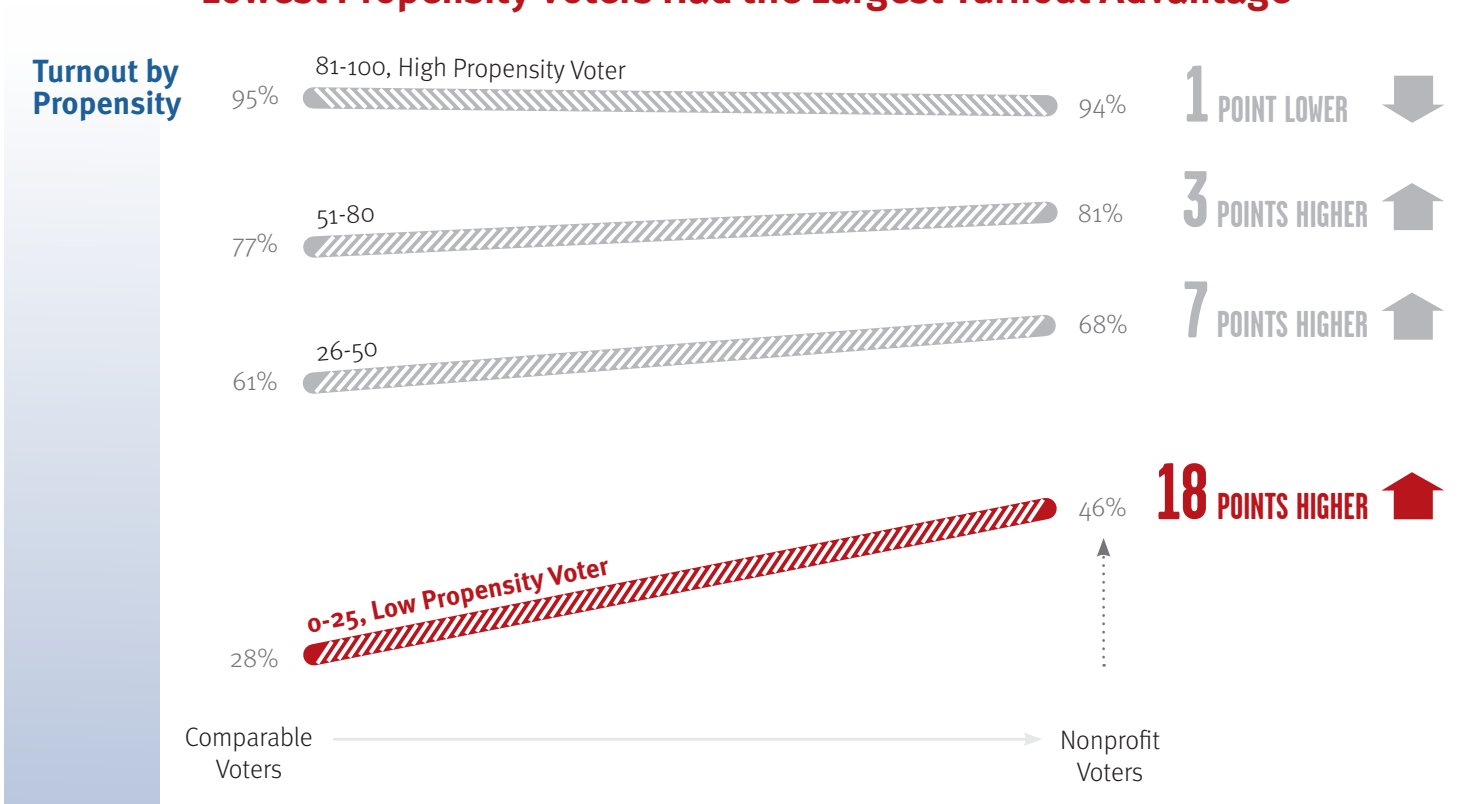
Note: "Propensity" is an industry metric for the likelihood to vote – 100 being most likely – based on prior vote history and other factors. See methodology for more.

Key Learnings

How Nonprofits Make It Work

Right after the election, we surveyed the participating nonprofits to gain a better understanding of who they are, what they did, and what challenges they encountered during the program. 48 of 64 sites responded to the survey and follow up interviews were conducted with staff at 11 nonprofits. We found some interesting commonalities across most nonprofits regardless of performance, and surfaced a few key strategies that correlated with greater success and higher numbers of voter contacts.

See the Qualitative Methodology section on pages 16-17 for more details and the full list of nonprofits surveyed.

Motivation

Building buy-in, particularly among leadership, is a major indicator of an organization's success. Pinpointing why voter engagement is aligned with your nonprofit's mission and generating enthusiasm among frontline staff who will implement the voter engagement strategies is the foundation of a strong program. Here are some lessons that can be drawn from the 2018 analysis.

Tie It to Client Empowerment

The majority of nonprofits surveyed (73%) were motivated to empower their clients through voter engagement work.

Align with Your Mission

Of the nonprofits that engaged more voters (above the median in registrations and pledges collected), 79% responded that advancing their organization's mission was a motivating factor, compared to 48% of nonprofits who made fewer voter contacts.

> "This was very consistent with our mission and vision. We're always interested in becoming more inclusive and making sure that decision making and stakeholders include citizens and working families."

— Jerome Seder,
  Housing Action Illinois

Highlight Visibility

On average, nonprofits who were motivated by visibility for their organization reached 100 more voters than those who did not.

Engage Stakeholders

Nonprofits who reported key stakeholder support from clients collected 20% more contacts, compared to nonprofits who did not list clients among key stakeholders.

Motivate and Inspire Your Staff

Nonprofits that said motivated staff were key to their success engaged on average 50 more contacts than those that did not.

Implementation

There are many effective strategies for reaching voters. Registration and pledge-to-vote drives are the perfect place to start, but make sure you set your nonprofit up for success during the planning process.

Designate a Point Person

All nonprofits surveyed had a lead staff coordinator to facilitate the work and ensure that registration forms were properly handled.

Make It Personal

88% of nonprofits surveyed cited face-to-face interactions as key to getting voters to register or pledge.

Rely on Your Existing Services

90% of nonprofits surveyed said they integrated voter engagement into existing services and activities, such as waiting rooms, intake, classes, or meetings. Leverage these interactions and make voting a consistent part of your organization's culture.

> "It gets the staff engaged because it's a continuous reminder of the importance of our job, not just part of the routine, but that there's a reason for it. Then that becomes part of the routine, too."
>
> – Cindy Smith,
>   Sunrise Community Health

Use Active Tabling to Boost Results

83% of the most successful nonprofits used tabling compared to only 68% of nonprofits that reached fewer voters. Be pro-active by standing up, getting out from behind the table, and greeting people. When you're talking to somebody, start to put the pen and clipboard in their hand. You'll be surprised at how many people will automatically start filling it out.

> "Move away from the table. Until you start doing it, it feels silly. But the conversations, whether you register them or not, have an impact. When you remind them to vote, they think about it. Even if not today, maybe next time."
>
> – Andrew Kohn,
> Northeastern Ohio Voter Advocates (NOVA)

Partner Up

Nonprofits that partnered with their local election board engaged 20% more contacts on average than those who did not. When partnering with other nonprofits, get buy-in from leadership of the organization so they can support the staff that will be implementing voter engagement efforts.

Don't Leave out Staff

Groups that registered and pledged their staff had 25% more contacts than those who did not. Use your normal internal communications as well as staff meetings or events to reach staff.

Challenges

Challenges come up for many nonprofits, but planning ahead to address these common stumbling blocks can help nonprofit staff stay focused, positive, and reach new voters.

Ask the Right Question

"Already registered to vote" was tied for the most-cited challenge for nonprofits. However, many voters are unaware that their registration may need to be updated, especially if they have moved, changed their name, or several elections have passed since they last voted. Instead of asking "Are you registered to vote?," try asking "Have you moved since you last voted?" or "Are you registered to vote at your current address?"
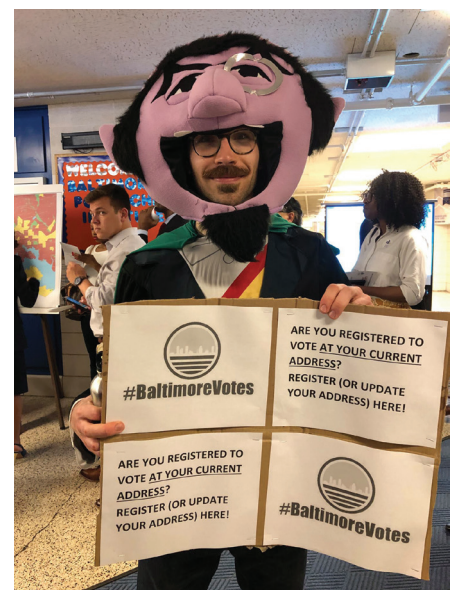
Set Realistic Goals and Have a Second Ask

Of nonprofits that were less successful, 76% cited voters being registered already as a challenge. According to Census data, about 70% of eligible voters nationally are already registered, though that number will be lower for the groups nonprofits engage. Be realistic with goals and cast a wide net for outreach, but also have a "second ask" for those that are already registered, such as pledge-to-vote cards or mail-in ballot applications.

Connect Voting with Their Daily Lives

The other most-cited organizing challenge was voter apathy. Shine a light on how offices and measures on the ballot will have an impact on the voters you serve.

> "When dealing with people that have immediate needs, food insecurity, housing stability issues, it's hard to get them to understand the process and see how this matters to them… Doing this gave us an outlet to have the conversations that previously we never really had with folks."

– Susan Gordon,
  Slavic Village Development

Leverage Volunteers and Partners

Nonprofits that reported "too busy staff" as a challenge engaged 50 less contacts than those who did not. Leaning on volunteers to assist with tabling and outreach can take the load off staff, as can finding a partner to team up with to reach the wider community.

> "These relationships and community connections built bridges for our church and now connects us to other organizations. And now I'm connected to people who are passionate about changing things."

– Liz Gautner,
  South Euclid Church of Christ

Closing: Why Encourage Voting?

To Empower Your Community

Candidates Listen
Candidates seek out and engage with communities that have higher voter turnout rates.

Personal Agency
Registered voters will be more likely to contact legislators and advocate for themselves and their families.

"The only way we can have communities do better is if we educate them about the responsibility and power of voting. Then they can control the people they elect, and put resources back in their community."
– Victor Leandry,
    El Centro de Servicios Sociales, Inc.

Healthy Communities
Voting has been tied to more social connectedness, better health outcomes, reduced unemployment, and reduced recidivism rates.

To Supercharge Your Organization

Attention to Issues
Candidates are more likely to address issues of concern to nonprofits that do voter engagement.

Build Community Trust
By encouraging voting, nonprofits show respect for the communities served, building trust and deepening relations.

"Doing this is another way we can strengthen our presence in our community and our partnerships."
– Kathy Cefus,
    Community Partnerships Family Resource Center

Mission Fulfillment
Empowering people, fostering healthy communities, and social uplift is deeply intertwined with the mission of many nonprofits.

Methodology

Quantitative Analysis

Nonprofit Voters and Turnout: Individual voter information was collected through voter registrations, pledge-to-vote cards, and absentee ballot request forms at the nonprofits that were part of the Engaging New Voters program and by other data partners in the study states (AZ, CO, IL, MN, NY, NC. and OH). This was entered and matched to the state VAN to check voting history and core demographic characteristics of each respective voter. This was supplemented with income, education, and vote propensity from the Catalist and L2 voter files. This constitutes our Nonprofit Voters with related demographic and turnout data.

Comparable Voters: For every state and county our Nonprofit Voters were in, we used Catalist data files for the total count of persons who registered and voted for every combination of county, sex, race, age, and marital status. We then assigned each of our voters an expected turnout based on the turnout of the their registered counterparts of the same county, sex, race, age, and marital status composition. **Example:** In "We Vote County," 700 out of 1,000 registered Female, Black, Single, 18-24 year olds turned out to vote. Therefore each Nonprofit Voter of that same demographic within "We Vote County" has an **expected turnout of 70%.** Comparable Voters are thus our voters with the expected turnout based on their demographically-matched counterparts.

Comparing Turnout Rates: Once each record in our data set has both an actual turnout and an expected turnout, we were able to compare Nonprofit Voter turnout to Comparable Voter turnout it total and by race, age, income, education, propensity, and so forth. All turnout numbers for subsets of age, income, race, and so forth reported in the narrative of this report are based on data from at least 1,900 contacts. See data tables on following pages for additional details.

Additional Notes: Likely college vs likely non-college was provided by Catalist modeling on a scale of 0 to 100 where 0 to 50 is likely non-college and 50 to 100 is likely college. Propensity is a likelihood of voting score modeled by Catalist. Its' use is popular among campaigns to target high-likelihood voters. 0 to 50 are lower likelihood where 51 to 100 are higher likelihood. This is based on prior vote history and other factors. References to Latino and Hispanic are left in the original terminology used by the source quoted.

Qualitative Analysis

We worked directly with six state anchors that partnered with a total of 64 nonprofit sites. Each site had a resulting number of registrations and pledges that they submitted to us. After the registration and pledge collection process was complete, we sent a survey to all sites, of which 48 responded for a 75% response rate. Special measures were taken for Federally Qualified Health Centers to ensure confidentiality of data as required by HIPAA.

We relied on three different metrics to shed light on the data and draw out meaningful findings. First, we compared the average engagements of sites who answered a particular question one way to those who answered otherwise. Secondly, we observed the responses to key questions of sites who submitted contacts, including registrations, pledge-to-vote cards, and vote-by-mail applications, above the median of the 64 sites to those who submitted total contacts below the median. Finally, we looked at the overall percentage of sites that responded one way or the other to a particular question to observe if any experiences were widely shared.

In addition to our online survey, we conducted 11 follow-up phone interviews with the lead coordinators of the site's 2018 voter engagement. These follow-ups went deeper into their survey responses, providing context and examples of patterns already observed in the online survey and analysis. We also learned strategies and gained new insights for engaging particular communities that will be included in our follow-up guide for sites participating in our program. These sites also provided the quotes and photos seen in this report.

Surveyed Sites

Downtown Cleveland Alliance

Slavic Village Development

League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland

Equality Ohio

El Centro de Servicios Sociales, Inc.

Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization

CPO Impact

Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio

Community Housing Network

Buckeye Community Hope Foundation

Working In Neighborhoods

Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging

Association for Community Living

Nederland Food Pantry

Community Partnership Family Resource Center

Mi Casa Resource Center

Enlace Chicago

South Asian American Policy & Research Institute

Housing Action Illinois

Erie Neighborhood House

Chinese Mutual Aid Association

CHANGE Illinois

Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

Ability360

VoteNow

Helping to Heal Testing and Resource Mobile

NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio Foundation

NEOCH (Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless)

Hispanic Alliance

St. Clair Superior Development Corporation

Alpha Omega Foundation

Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc.

South Euclid United Church of Christ

NOVA

UMDC (Union Miles)

Sunrise Community Health

Peak Vista Community Health Center

Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

Sister Carmen Community Center

Metro Caring

CWEE (Center for Work Education and Employment)

HANA Center

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

ICIRR (Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee)

Faith Coalition for the Common Good

ONE Northside

Gads Hill center

Opportunities Industrialization Center, Inc.

Elder Law Clinic of Wake Forest University School of Law

Data Tables

Demographic Comparison Table

	Nonprofit Voter Count	Share of Total	
		Nonprofit Voters	Registered Voters
By Age			
18-24	4,535	24%	9%
25-34	3,982	21%	18%
35-54	5,288	28%	32%
55+	5,245	27%	41%
By Income			
Less than $30k	6,995	37%	19%
$30,000 - $50,000	7,213	38%	31%
$50,000 - $75,000	2,890	15%	24%
Greater than $75,000	1,976	10%	26%
By Race			
Asian	2,196	12%	3%
Black	4,758	25%	12%
White	8,133	43%	75%
Hispanic	3,148	17%	8%
Others/Unknown	839	4%	2%

Voter Turnout Comparison Table

		Share of Total		
	Nonprofit Voter Count	Comparable Turnout	Nonprofit Turnout	Point Difference
Calculated Fields				
OVERALL	19,074	55.3%	66.4%	11.1
By Education Level				
Likely college	4075	68.9%	76.7%	7.8
Likely non-college	14,999	51.2%	63.6%	12.4
By Age				
18-24	4,535	44.1%	63.9%	19.8
25-34	3,982	48.2%	63.2%	15.0
35-54	5,288	58.3%	66.0%	7.7
55+	5,245	67.7%	71.7%	4.1
By Propensity Score				
0-25	8,380	27.7%	46.1%	18.4
26-50	3,078	60.6%	67.6%	7.1
51-80	3,255	77.2%	80.6%	3.4
81-100	4,361	95.0%	93.9%	-1.1
By Income				
Less than $30,000	6,995	38.0%	52.0%	14.0
$30,000 - $50,000	7,213	56.5%	70.9%	14.4
$50,000 - $75,000	2,890	66.0%	77.6%	11.6
Greater than $75,000	1,976	79.9%	84.6%	4.6
By Race				
Asian	2,196	55.4%	70.9%	15.5
Black	4,758	50.8%	63.6%	12.8
White	8,133	63.2%	71.5%	8.3
Hispanic	3,148	43.0%	56.2%	13.3

For further data inquiry, reach out to info@nonprofitvote.org.

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