

# The webinar will begin shortly...

All attendees will receive a copy of  
this PowerPoint presentation and a  
link to the recorded webinar.



# Interacting with Candidates

5 Approaches to Nonpartisan  
Candidate Engagement

Presented by



**Nonprofit** VOTE

# About Nonprofit VOTE

Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote.

We are a leading source of nonpartisan training, materials and other resources for nonprofits doing voter engagement work.

For more information, visit us online at  
[www.nonprofitvote.org](http://www.nonprofitvote.org)



# Agenda

- Why Engage Candidates?
- Staying Nonpartisan
- Five Ways to Engage
  - Host a forum
  - Appearances
  - Questionnaires
  - Share policy ideas
  - Attend events
- Q&A



With guest speaker  
**Cheryl Clyburn  
Crawford**  
MassVOTE

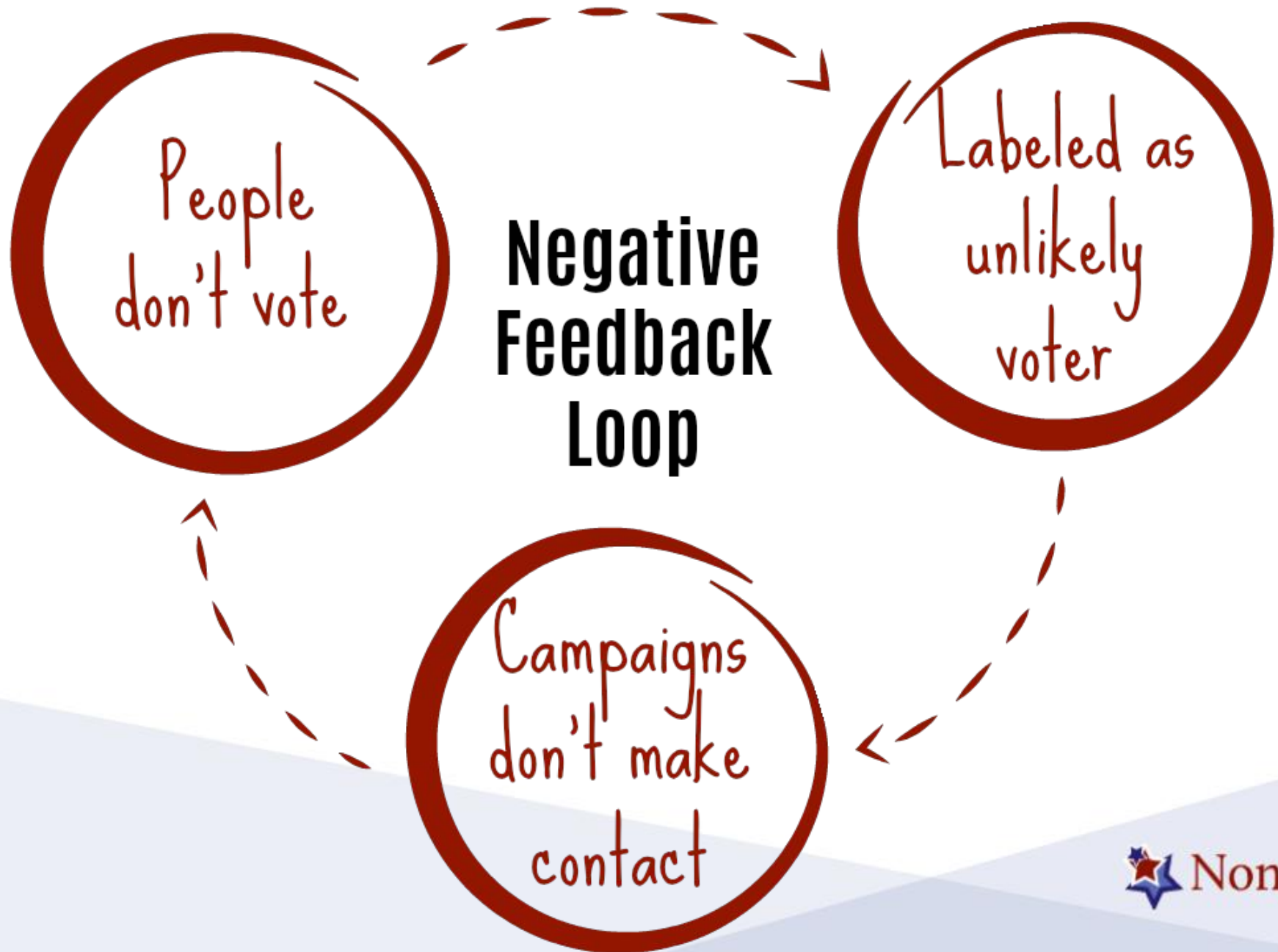


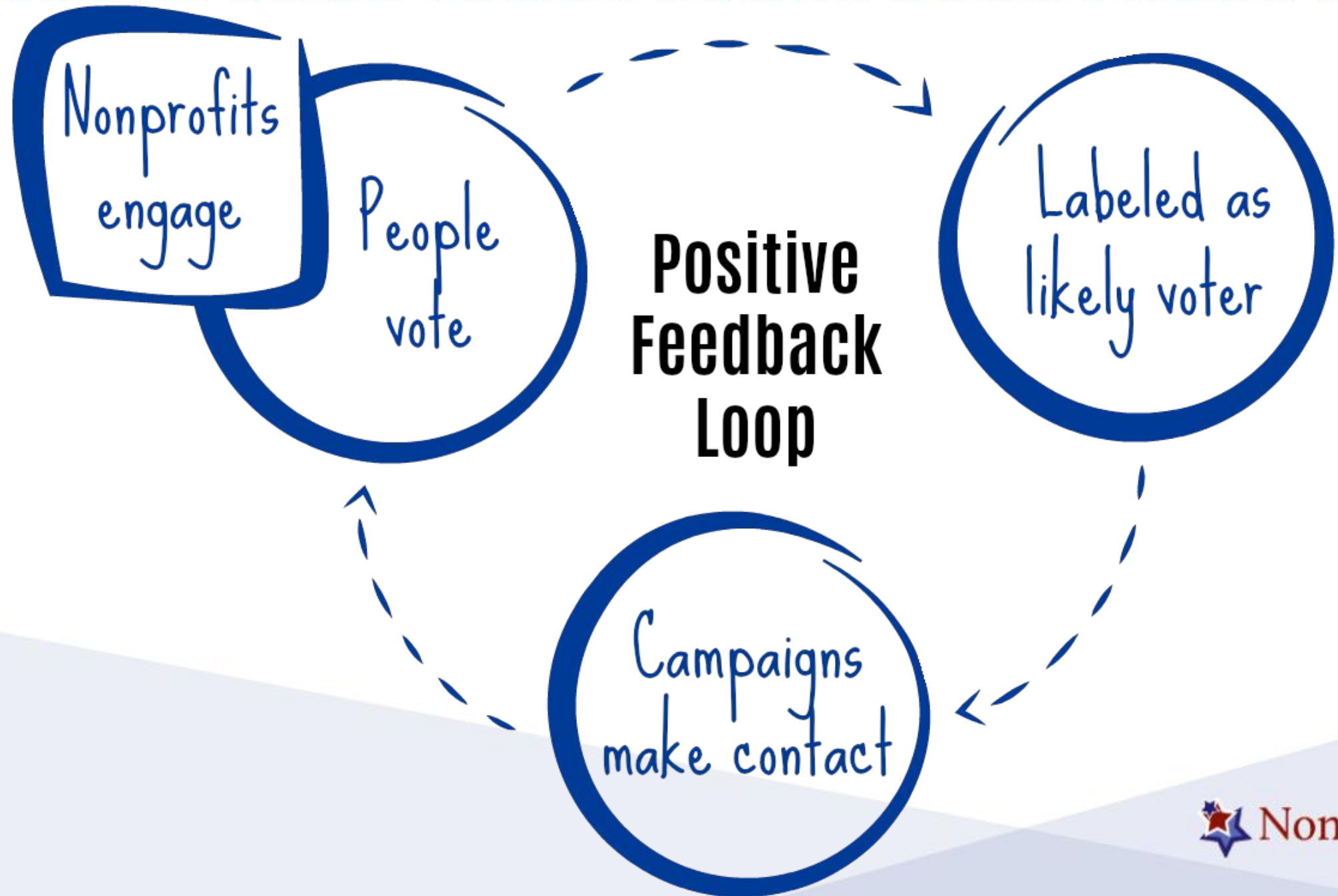
**Why engage with candidates?**

# Engagement is a strategy

- Engage your community around an upcoming election
- Build clout for your nonprofit and the issues that matter to your organization
- Learn more about the candidates and establish relationships









# Remaining Nonpartisan



# Nonpartisanship for nonprofits

- Can't endorse or oppose any candidate or party
- Can't rank or rate candidates
- Can't make financial or in-kind donations
- Can sponsor a candidate event
- Can educate candidates on issues

“Charities are allowed to conduct nonpartisan activities that **educate the public and help them participate in the electoral process** (such as) voter education, voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives and candidate forums.”

IRS office of Exempt Organizations



# Social Media FAQ's

- Can I retweet something a candidate posts if it's not related to the election?
- What do I do if a candidate follows our account?
- A candidate posted misinformation about my org or the community we serve. What can we do?
- Can I use my personal account to support candidates?

# Social Media FAQ's

- Can I retweet something a candidate posts if it's not related to the election? **No, don't tag, retweet, share posts, or engage with political campaigns**
- What do I do if a candidate follows our account? **Don't follow back unless you will follow them all**
- A candidate posted misinformation about my org or the community we serve. What can we do? **You CAN correct factually incorrect statements a candidate makes**
- Can I use my personal account to support candidates? **Yes, unless your account is regularly used as a communication vehicle for your nonprofit**

PETER  
**AMAN**  
MAYOR

KEISHA LANCE  
**BOTTOMS**  
MAYOR

JOHN  
**EAVES**  
FOR MAYOR

**KWANZA HALL**  
FOR  
**MAYOR**  
WWW.KWANZAHALL.COM

**M**  
**MARY**  
**NORWOOD**  
MAYOR FOR ALL ATLANTA

**MICHAEL**  
**STERLING**  
FOR MAYOR OF ATLANTA



# Engaging Candidates



# Candidate Forums: Best Practices

- Bring in partners
- Begin organizing early (~4 months out is best)
- Robust promotion and engage the media
- Give the candidates what they want:
  - A large audience
  - A guarantee of neutrality
  - Well known and respected sponsors and partners
  - Time at the forum to meet with the audience informally



# Nonpartisan non-negotiables

- Cover a broad range of issues
- Invitations to all viable candidates
- Each candidate should be given equal time to present their view on issues
- Candidates are not asked to agree with specific positions or platforms
- Moderator stays neutral and does not imply approval or disapproval of candidates

## Tip! Set the Tone

You can ask audience members to check their campaign/partisan materials at the door and to respectfully refrain from excessive exuberance for or against candidates.



# Planning Ahead



# Organizing the event

With four months to go:

- Bring in partners
- Choose your format
- Select a date and location

With three months to go:

- Invite candidates
- Initiate media contact

## Types of formats:

- Equal time Q&A with moderator or panelists – decide if follow up Q&A is allowed. (Most popular format)
- Prepared or spontaneous debate
- Discourse debate
- Town Meeting Q&A
- Unconventional candidate events



# Organizing the event

With two months to go:

- Volunteer recruitment
- Select a moderator
- Follow up with candidates
- Strategy for turnout

Get a confirmation in writing/email from each participating candidate. This will allow your organization to go forward with the forum even if a candidate cancels last minute.

With one month to go:

- (Re)Confirm location, volunteers, moderator, candidates
- Distribute promotional materials



# Organizing the event

With less than a month to go:

- Continue attendee recruitment
- Final media reminders and press release
- Select a timekeeper
- A/V and other advanced set up arranged

On the day of the event:

- Complete set-up at forum (A/V, seating, head table, sign in)
- Open the forum with a welcome and thank yous
- Review ground rules for forum for candidates and attendees
- Budget time for informal Q&A or mingling after

**Help!** One of the two candidates canceled at the last minute or refuses to participate in the forum.

**What do we do?**



# Candidate Appearances

A candidate appearance is a good alternative to a forum if:

- Your capacity to host or sponsor is limited due to another large event planned during election season
- You think the candidates would be more likely to attend
- A candidate backs out of the forum at the last minute.

Download the one pager:

<https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2012/06/candidate-appearances-at-your-nonprofit-event.pdf/>



# Candidate Appearances

Three types of candidate appearances:

- Inviting candidates in their capacity as a candidate to the same event
- Inviting candidates in their capacity as a candidate to different events
- Inviting candidates as a public figure

**Help!** A candidate showed up to our event without an invitation and wants to address the audience.

**What do we do?**

All the same rules apply: invite all and ensure equal time (if appearing as candidates), no politicking/fundraising, clarify that the appearance is nonpartisan



### MAYOR



Christopher Diaz, James Green, Patrick Shawn Jones, William "Bill" Mutz

### SOUTHEAST DISTRICT



Scott Franklin, Sandy Toledo

### SOUTHWEST DISTRICT



Michael Dunn, Larry Durrence, Jorge Fonseca, Pablo Sologaistoa

### AT LARGE - SEAT 1



Kathy Smith Barsotti, Stephanie Madden, Jim Malless (incumbent), Laurel Pullo, Ricky Shirah

Change the City Charter to create a "strong mayor"



Relocate the Confederate monument from Munn Park



See if private businesses want to buy Lakeland Electric



Create a city-owned Internet service provider



Reduce Florida Avenue to three lanes in Dixieland



# Candidate Questionnaire



# Best practices

- Get partners or form a coalition
- Cover a broad range of issues
- Ask open ended questions
- Keep it short & give ample time
- Be prepared to follow up
- Make responses available to the general public

## Pros:

- Can reach a broader audience than a one-time event
- No need to find or rent a venue

## Cons:

- Still need to do a lot of follow up with candidates to get answers
- No interaction with community members

Download the one pager:

[https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2016/04/candidate-questions-voter-guides.pdf/](https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2016/04/candidate-questions-voter-guides.pdf)



# Keeping it nonpartisan

- Questions should be neutral and not hint at a “correct” answer
- Distribute the questionnaire to all candidates running for the same office
- Don’t share one candidate’s answers with another candidate before publication
- Clarify meanings of questions, but don’t coach candidates on how to answer
- Do not rank or comment on candidates’ responses

**Help!** Only one candidate responded to the questionnaire.

**What do we do?**



**More ways to engage**



# Share your policy ideas

Elected officials can benefit from your ideas year-round.

Get your policy ideas in front of candidates by sharing research, opinion papers, platforms, etc.

- Consider doing this with partners or as part of a coalition
- Share materials with all candidates
- Don't conduct research or develop materials at the request of a candidate

**A note on ballot measures and policy advocacy:** Nonprofits can take positions on ballot measures. These can be included in voter guides or shared with candidates. This is not considered partisan activity.



# Ask a question at a candidate event

If your organization doesn't have the capacity to host a candidate event, consider attending an event to ask a question and bring your organization to the candidates' attention.

Make sure your approach is nonpartisan

- You pose the question to all candidates
- The question doesn't imply a correct answer

**A note on ballot measures and policy advocacy:** Nonprofits can take positions on ballot measures. These can be included in voter guides or shared with candidates. This is not considered partisan activity.

# Chat us your questions.

We're happy to answer your questions on the webinar. If you have requests for specific resources we will try to include those in the webinar round-up email with the recording and slides.



# Additional Questions?

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For resources on Candidate Engagement and other voter engagement topics,  
visit the Nonprofit VOTE resource library:

<https://www.nonprofitvote.org/resource-library/candidate-engagement-2/>