



# Voting and Local Elections: Why Nonprofits Should Engage

Off-cycle elections draw a fraction of the interest seen in presidential and midterm elections. There are fewer third-party voter engagement efforts and less media coverage. Yet the outcomes of local elections have an outsized impact on a community's quality of life when compared to the attention they attract. Important decisions about housing, public safety, and education made locally can shape a neighborhood or city for generations.

Research shows **only 1 in 5 voters participate in mayoral elections**. That number drops in races for town councils, school boards, and other local seats. There is a good chance the people your organization serves are not being represented at the polls or in local government. This low turnout presents added incentives for nonprofit organizations to get involved.

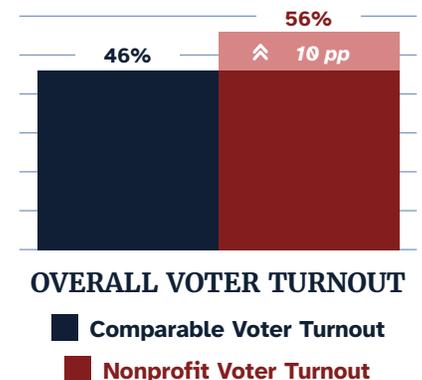
## CONSIDER:

- Nonprofits can engage without worry of saturation or being duplicative of other efforts – Our messages may be the only outreach people receive about the election.
- Local races are often won by a slim margin, so any increase in turnout can have an impact.
- Nonprofits that mobilize voters in local elections will gain clout and influence among elected officials, which can translate to increased attention to your issues and community, advocacy wins, and more public support.

## SMALL GAINS MAKE A BIG IMPACT

Research from the University of Chicago Center for Effective Government shows that only **1 in 5 voters** participate in mayoral elections. That number drops in races for town councils, school boards, and other local seats. There is a good chance the people your organization serves are not being represented at the polls or in local government. This low turnout presents added incentives for nonprofit organizations to get involved.

Relative to demographically comparable voters, voters reached by our nonprofits had a **10 percentage point turnout advantage**. The turnout advantage was even higher for voters of color (12 pp), for young voters ages 18-24 (14 pp) for those earning \$20-30K (15 pp)



## ADAPT YOUR APPROACH FOR A LOCAL ELECTION YEAR

Research suggests that lower turnout in local elections is frequently a result of a lack of awareness of the candidates and issues and a lack of understanding of the functions of local elected officials and their impacts on daily life. This is the case even for registered voters. To maximize your impact, look beyond voter registration and include voter education efforts that highlight:

- What races are taking place – mayor, school board, etc.
- Issues that are impacted – schools, police, transportation, etc.
- Key dates, options for voting, and polling locations  
GOTV and election reminders

**Resources:** [Nonprofit VOTE resource library](#), [Voting in Your State](#)