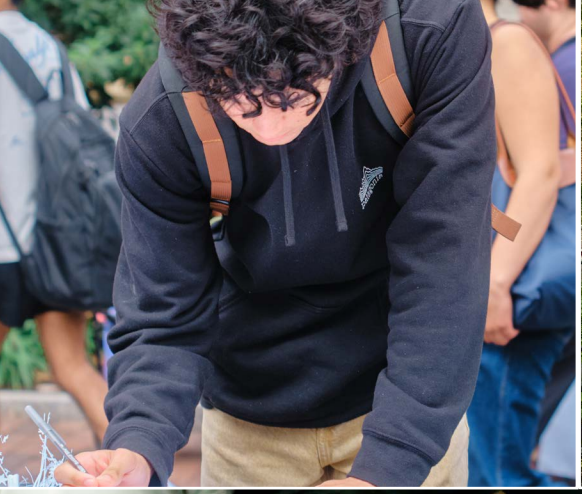












Voter Engagement Guide

NonprofitVOTE



Acknowledgments

Nonprofit VOTE is a nonpartisan organization that provides resources and training to 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofits on how to conduct nonpartisan voter and civic engagement activities.

The word "Nonprofit"

The term "nonprofit" means different things to many different people. It's a commonly used word, but often without a common understanding. People can use "nonprofit" and "tax exempt" interchangeably. Congress has created almost three dozen types of tax-exempt organizations in different sections of the tax code. Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code refers to "public charities" (also known as charitable nonprofits) and "private foundations." The tax code considers "churches and religious organizations" (which the Internal Revenue Service defines to include mosques, synagogues, temples, and other houses of worship) to be "public charities." This Voter Engagement Guide uses the terms "charitable nonprofits" or simply "nonprofits" as shorthand for "501(c)(3) tax exempt organizations other than private foundations" unless expressly saying otherwise.

Disclaimer

The content provided in this Voter Engagement Guide is provided in good faith for informational purposes only and is neither intended to be nor should be construed as legal or tax advice. Please consult an attorney for the latest and most accurate information. Nonprofit VOTE makes no representations or warranties as to the accuracy or timeliness of the information contained herein.

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Dear Nonprofit Leaders,

Nonprofits can help foster a healthy and inclusive democracy. Nonprofits are trusted messengers, immersed in the lives of those we serve, and well-positioned to encourage civic participation. Voting is one of the most fundamental rights in our democracy, yet many eligible voters—including those served by nonprofits—face barriers, including lack of contact, that prevent them from making their voices heard.

Nonprofits can help. Research shows that when nonprofits engage voters—on a strictly nonpartisan basis—voter turnout increases significantly. Whether by hosting voter registration drives, providing voting information, or encouraging staff and constituents to make a voting plan, our actions make a tangible difference. This is not just about fulfilling civic duty; it's about empowering communities to shape the policies that directly impact their lives.

Nonprofit VOTE is proud to offer our Voter Engagement Guide, a roadmap designed to help nonprofits engage their communities in elections while staying nonpartisan. This guide provides clear guidance, examples, and tools on how to remain nonpartisan while maximizing your voter outreach efforts. From candidate forums to voter education and Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) activities, there are many ways to foster civic engagement within your organization and community.

Your nonprofit has the power to ensure more voices are heard this and every other election season. When we engage, more people vote, and in turn, our communities become stronger and more representative. Together, we can ensure a brighter, more inclusive democracy where all voices are heard.



In partnership,

Brian Miller
Executive Director
Nonprofit VOTE



Why should nonprofits engage voters?

Voting is a fundamental right. Every eligible voter should have a say in their own future. Active voter participation builds healthier communities. People who vote are more likely to volunteer, advocate, or be civically active in other ways. Elected officials are more likely to respond to the needs and concerns of neighborhoods that turn out on Election Day, and they are more responsive to organizations that promote voting.

Voting is something we can't take for granted. Voters need guidance on many of the following:

- finding their polling location
- locating a number to call for assistance
- learning about their voting options (early, by mail, in person, etc.)
- understanding what's on the ballot
- seeing the connection between what's on the ballot and the impact on the issues they care about

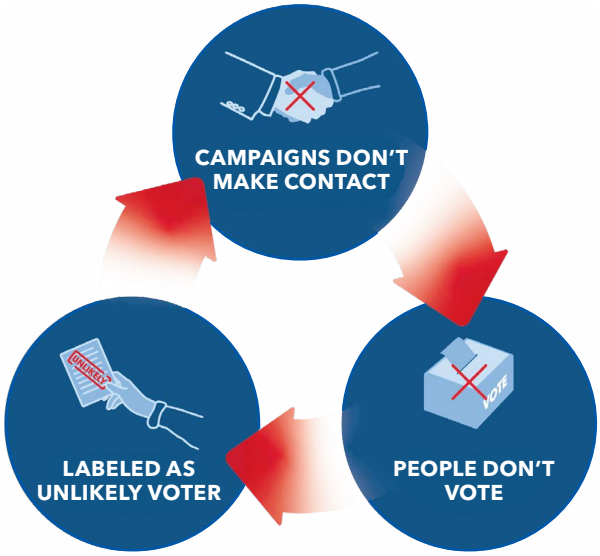
Nonprofit organizations like ours have a critical role to play in promoting voting as a safe and accessible activity to strengthen our communities.

Key Takeaways

Elected officials are more likely to respond to the needs and concerns of neighborhoods that turn out on Election Day, and they are more responsive to organizations that promote voting.



Partisan candidate campaigns only invest in outreach to prospective voters who have a high probability of voting in an upcoming election. **People in communities who have been historically marginalized from the election process are less likely to have long voting histories so campaigns don't see value in reaching them.** Nonprofits active in those marginalized communities can break the negative feedback loop by registering and turning out new voters so that more of the community is heard by the elected leaders. Through these nonpartisan actions by charitable organizations, the parties and candidates take notice and truly represent them.



Our access and trust make us great messengers

Nonprofits are among America's most trusted community institutions, and as familiar service providers and advocates, we have personal relationships with communities that have been traditionally underrepresented in elections and public policy advocacy. Our regular contact during points of service (any interaction between nonprofits and community members) allows us to weave voter engagement into existing programs and services. We have the opportunity to use our trusted roles to become a powerful nonpartisan voice for voter participation and the issues that matter to our communities.

Learn more this and read the Nonprofit Power Report here:
https://www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofit-power-report/

Key Takeaways

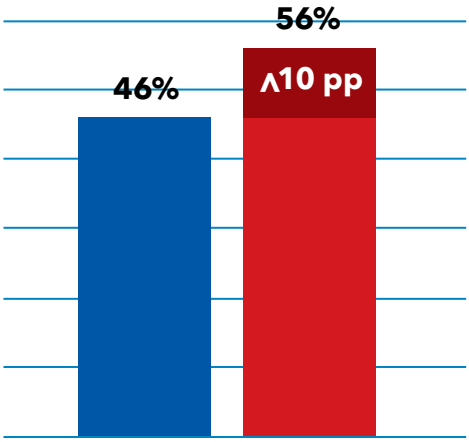
Nonprofits active in those marginalized communities can break the negative feedback loop by registering and turning out new voters so that more of the community is heard by the elected leaders.



Voter engagement works

According to the 2024 Nonprofit Power report, nonprofit voter engagement disrupts cycles of disengagement and helps close long-standing gaps in turnout. In an analysis of over 7,000 prospective voters in 8 states who were contacted before the 2022 elections by nonprofits and social service agencies, Nonprofit VOTE found that prospective voters who were contacted were 10 percentage points more likely to vote than demographically similar registered voters (56% vs. 46%). Those percentage points increased even more when focusing on underrepresented populations like low-income households, persons of color, and young people. When nonprofits engage prospective voters, we all benefit from a more inclusive and representative democracy.

Learn more about the 2024 Nonprofit Power report at nonprofitvote.org.

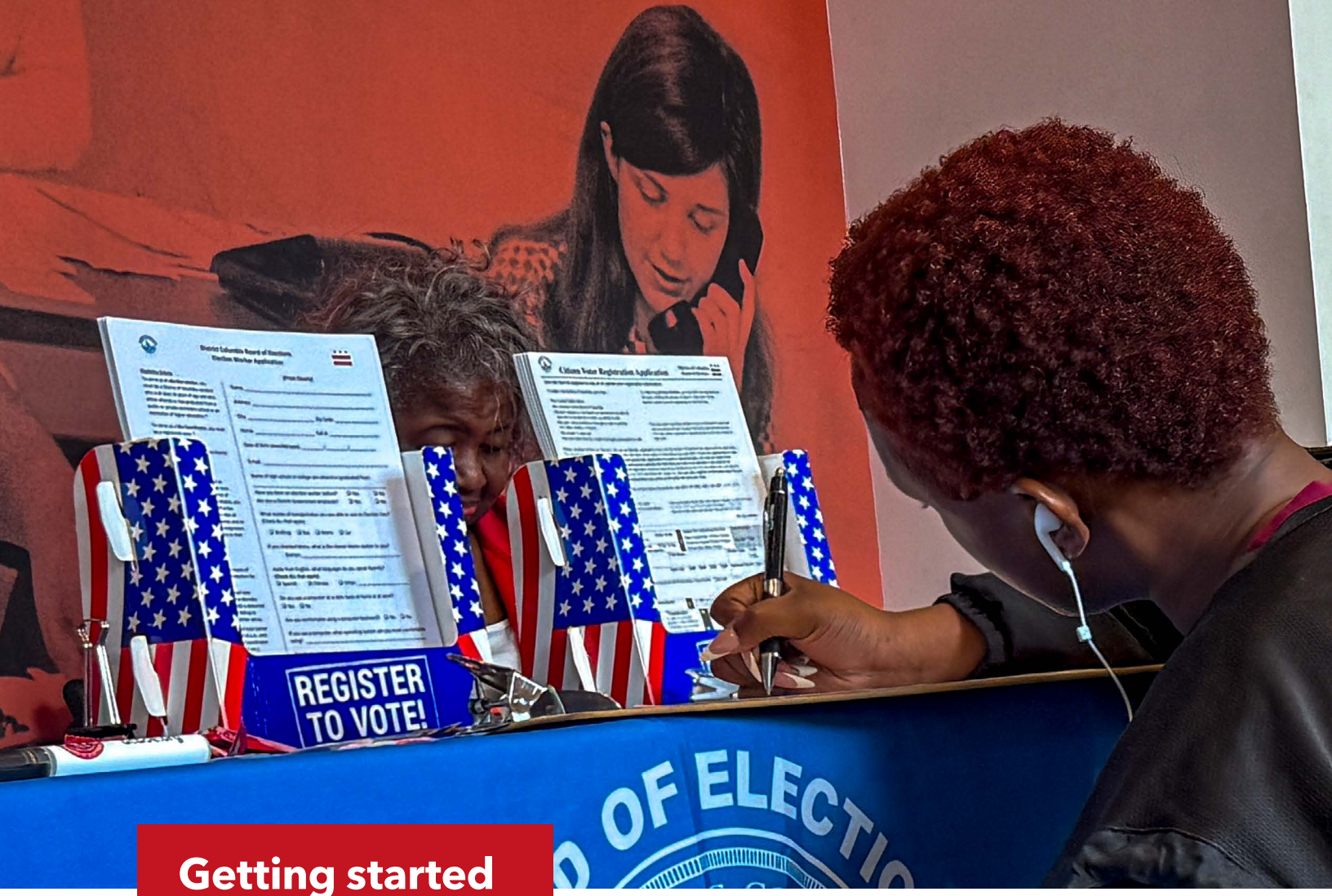


Overall Voter Turnout

- Comparable Voter Turnout
- Nonprofit Voter Turnout
- Nonprofit Impact

Key Takeaways

Your nonprofit organization is well-suited to helping people become more active citizens by encouraging voter participation.



Getting started

Whether it is your first time engaging potential voters or you are trying to deepen your existing work, this Voter Engagement Guide can support your way to a successful voter engagement initiative.

Before, during, and after: Build buy-in

A successful voter engagement plan depends on buy-in from your organization's leadership. Key staff and volunteers are often the point people for designing and executing the plan, but the activities are more likely to be carried out organization-wide with clear and strong support from your nonprofit's leadership.

- Plan a time to discuss your voter engagement activities with your executive director and ensure you have support from the board.
- Bring this Voter Engagement Guide to your meeting and describe the activities you think are a good fit for your organization—make sure to specify key points of contact for engagement with your constituents.
- Highlight why this work is important for both your clients and organization.



What's next in this Voter Engagement Guide

Section 1: Learn the rules

Make sure your efforts are nonpartisan. That means that none of your communications or activities attempt or even appear to support or oppose any candidate or political party. In addition, make sure you find out about dates and deadlines, eligibility requirements, and the process of voting in your state. It's usually best to go directly to the state or local elections office to get the most accurate and up-to-date information.

Section 2: Make a plan

Mapping out a clear plan for your voter engagement activities can help ensure your efforts are successful. Every organization is different, so it's up to you to decide which activities fit most naturally into your existing programs. **Activities generally fall into three categories: voter registration, voter education, and candidate engagement.** You can mix and match for maximum impact and effectiveness.

Section 3: Talk to potential voters

Above all, potential voters want a reason to vote. Research demonstrates that people are much more likely to vote when they sense something is at stake. These potential voters not only believe that their vote will make a difference, but they also believe that the votes of their peers and community will have an impact as well. **Help your staff and constituents make a connection to what's on the ballot and how it can impact their lives.** You can go to your city council, state legislature, or other elected legislative body's website to learn more about policies that are being voted on by the people we elect.

Section 4: Additional topics

There are so many ways to engage in nonpartisan voter engagement activities. Find one that matches your interest, capacity, and resources.



Section 1:

Rules of Nonpartisanship



A nonprofit's guide to nonpartisanship

In 1954 Congress added a provision to the Internal Revenue Code commonly known as the "Johnson Amendment" requiring 501(c)(3) organizations – charitable nonprofits, private foundations, and religious congregations – to remain nonpartisan regarding elections for public office. They did it to protect charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations – and the donating public – from partisan election-related activity.

Federal law directs that charitable organizations may not "participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office."

Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code

The power of being nonpartisan flows from more than this statute:

1. Nonpartisanship respects the diversity of political opinions among your staff, board, volunteers, donors, and the people you serve. Charitable nonprofits should be focused on advancing our missions, not diverted by partisan politics in these and other ways:
   - Staff discussions and board meetings devolving into contentious debates about which candidates up and down the ballot to support, and how to allocate staff time and resources
   - Powerful donors demanding that a certain percentage of their donations be redirected as a political contribution to a particular candidate
   - The donating public reducing or stopping their contributions out of concern that nonprofits might turn around and give the donor's contribution to a political candidate the donor may oppose
2. Nonpartisanship strengthens your ability to advocate across and without regard to partisan lines and have access to diverse community leaders and funding sources. There is a place for a more partisan approach. That's why Congress created 501(c)(4) social welfare advocacy organizations (and other partisan vehicles), which can do a certain amount of partisan election-related activity, but whose donors don't get a tax deduction.
3. Nonpartisanship reinforces the role of charitable nonprofits as trusted messengers who can engage marginalized populations that campaigns and candidates often miss. Our nonpartisan approach is one reason charitable nonprofits have proven effective at reaching youth, new voters, rural residents, and increasing voting rates across all demographics.

A 501(c)(3) organization may NOT conduct partisan activities to support or oppose any candidate for public office, including:

- Endorsing a candidate or expressing support or opposition for any candidate or party (even for nonpartisan offices).
- Making a contribution to, or expenditure for, a candidate.
- Rating candidates on who is most favorable to your issue(s) or sharing messages or materials that rate or rank candidates.
- Letting candidates use the organization's facilities or resources, unless those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value.

Nonpartisan activities 501(c)(3) nonprofits may do to encourage voter participation and promote voter education include:

- Promoting or conducting nonpartisan voter registration in alignment with state law.
- Educating registered voters on a nonpartisan basis on the where, when, and how of voting.
- Encouraging and reminding people to vote.
- Distributing nonpartisan sample ballots, candidate questionnaires, or voter engagement guides.
- Hosting or co-sponsoring a candidate forum in nonpartisan ways.
- Hosting or co-sponsoring events so people learn about ballot measures (e.g. propositions, referenda, bonds) they will be asked to decide by voting and how the outcomes can affect their lives.
- Educating community members in nonpartisan ways on who the candidates are and what the offices do.
- Encouraging staff to serve on Election Day as poll workers, translators, or other nonpartisan volunteers.
- Continuing issue advocacy during an election.
- Supporting or opposing ballot measures.

Key Takeaways

While your organization is not allowed to directly or indirectly support any candidate or party for office, there are many nonpartisan activities you can undertake to help people vote.



Digital communications and nonpartisanship

Your organization may already be using social media to communicate with supporters and the public, attract new members, mobilize public opinion, mobilize your communities, and promote civic engagement. The prohibition on nonprofits participating in partisan election-related activities is the same for social media as it is for any other type of communication. You may encourage people to register and vote on a nonpartisan basis, but you may not use social media to indicate support for, or opposition to, candidates for public office.

Can a staff member use their personal account to support candidates?

Individuals have a right to express preferences for or against candidates, as long as they are doing so on their own time and using their individual resources. This applies to their personal social media accounts. The exception would be if that account is primarily used by the individual or others as a communication vehicle for the nonprofit.

What about the Executive Director or CEO?

The chief executive officer of the nonprofit has the same rights of free expression as any other staff member, when not officially representing the organization. However, to the extent they are seen by stakeholders and constituents as representing the nonprofit, a CEO should exercise extra restraint in what they say on the internet to avoid any appearance of partisanship. CEOs should clarify when they are speaking in their own capacity and not as a representative for the organization.

What are guidelines for engaging online?

Don't use organizational accounts to tag, repost, like, or share posts with political campaigns or partisan organizations that have endorsed candidates.

How about sharing content posted by a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization or other non-campaign organization whose primary purpose is other than electing candidates?

You may share content if the content shared is educational in nature and clearly nonpartisan. It is always safer to share content, for example, from a state or local government elections office, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, educational source, or public media outlet not affiliated with a partisan political campaign.

Is my nonprofit responsible for how our posts are shared?

No. You are not responsible for how and with whom others share your posts.

What about content posted by other users to our social media platforms?

While you can't control how other people engage with your nonprofit through social media, you can make a general disclaimer on your social media site that you're not responsible for opinions posted by people not employed by your organization.

Finding your state and local election information

After learning what it means to stay nonpartisan while engaging voters as a 501(c)(3) organization, researching state and local election information is the next step. Every state sets the legal framework for its own elections, so rules and dates will vary. Always confirm your information with a reputable source, like a local election office. If you're unsure if a website is from an actual governmental office, look for websites that end in ".gov".

While not everything on the list below will be applicable in every state, gather the following relevant information before engaging potential voters:

When to vote:

- The date on which voter registration closes and whether same-day registration is available
- Election date (including primaries and special elections as applicable)
- Polling location hours (may vary between locations and dates)
- Early voting period (starting and ending date)
- When mail-in ballot requests are due and whether they must be postmarked or received by election day
- See your State Guide for more information on state-specific laws and requirements.

Where to cast a ballot:

- Polling places (may vary during early voting)
- Early voting locations (often fewer locations)
- Election Day voting locations (more locations that are often spread around in community locations like schools, community centers, and sometimes nonprofit and faith-based spaces)
- Dropbox locations for mail-in/absentee ballots
- See your State Guide for more information on state-specific laws and requirements.

How to participate:

- Voter registration processes, including online and in-person options
- How to vote absentee/by mail
- Type of ID needed, especially for first time voters or states with stricter requirements
- Whether the ballot is paper or electronic. If the ballot is electronic, you could ask if your elections office will run a demo for your organization. Some local Boards of Election will bring a voting machine to your community so community members can become more familiar with the process
- Whether your state requires employers to provide time off to vote
- See your State Guide for more information on state-specific laws and requirements.

If you plan to offer help with registering to vote, find out whether training is required to assist voters with registration in your state.

Find more information for your state's regulations on third party voter registration drives at nonprofitvote.org/voting-in-your-state/.



Section 2:

Make a Plan



Your options for voter engagement activities

Voter registration

Every year, thousands of potential voters are disenfranchised simply because they miss the registration deadline or don't remember to update their registration when they move. Whether you focus your efforts on National Voter Registration Day, or the months leading up to the election, registration is (almost) always the first step for someone to be a voter.

Publicize and promote

Promote voter registration deadlines and how-to's in the weeks before the election.

- Assign a staff member to plan and direct voter registration activities. Train staff on how to conduct voter registration in compliance with state laws.
- Include a link to your state's voter portal if online registration is allowed.
- Make announcements on your digital communication channels.
- Put up posters or offer flyers with voter registration information to clients in person.
- Sign up as a National Voter Registration Day community partner for free posters and stickers at National Voter Registration Day.
- Talk about registering to vote at a staff or board meeting. Encourage all of your staff and volunteers to register to vote.

Conduct on-site registration

Incorporate voter registration into your ongoing activities and constituent interactions. Ensure staff interacting with constituents are trained on how to remain nonpartisan when conducting voter registration. Assign a staff member to plan and direct voter registration activities. Train staff on how to conduct voter registration in compliance with state laws.

- Make voter registration forms widely available and offer new clients the opportunity to register during intake.
- Designate a staff person to promptly return forms to your local elections office in person once a week, if permitted. See your State Guide for more information on state-specific laws and requirements at nonprofitvote.org/voting-in-your-state/.

Mobilize and partner

If you have the time and resources, extend your registration efforts outside your nonprofit to the community you serve.

- Identify partners in your neighborhood or service area – like other nonprofits, libraries, schools, or small businesses – and encourage them to register voters.
- Have staff or volunteers set up a voter registration table at community events or highly trafficked areas. Good locations are where likely voters from the neighborhood congregate – supermarkets, stores, school events, places of worship, transit stops, etc. Check with the desired site first to make sure you have their permission to set up a table.

Voter education

Use the same strategies for voter registration, but add information about when, where, and how to cast a ballot.

Include the relevant election protection hotline numbers for different languages:

- 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)
- 888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682) for Spanish
- 888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683) for Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese
- 844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287) for Arabic

Display or distribute sample ballots or nonpartisan voter engagement guides

Political parties sometimes publish sample ballots marking their candidates as the "correct" answers. A nonpartisan sample ballot listing the candidates and ballot questions as presented on the official ballot without designating which people and issues are favored help potential voters make up their own minds and reinforce the nonpartisanship of your organization.

Include lessons about voting

Does your nonprofit have classes or training? Consider holding a mock election or hosting a discussion about the principles of a fair democracy or fair election. Be sure to discuss the election with community members who are not able to vote and develop ways they can participate as volunteers.

Make calls or send texts to potential voters

If you have phone numbers for clients, consider sending them an informational text with election reminders or organize a phone bank to call (and leave messages) for registered voters. Be careful to send the messages out broadly; don't pick and choose among your contacts in ways that could give the impression of partisan bias.

Promote poll worker opportunities

Share information on how to become a poll worker. In many states these are paid volunteer positions that any registered voter can be trained for, but they will need to be on-site the entire day.

Learn more about poll worker recruitment at powerthepolls.org.



Engaging candidates for office

Elections offer numerous opportunities to interact with candidates for elected office. As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, you cannot support, endorse, or oppose candidates for public office. However, you can still use their campaign status to get your issues in front of the candidates, build relationships with future elected officials, share your policy ideas, and influence future debates and decisions. Just make sure you are offering information and invitations to all candidates for that office on a fair and equal basis.

Share your policy ideas

Although elected officials can benefit from your ideas and research year-round, elections provide a focused opportunity to build clout while demonstrating your organization's expertise.

Have a candidate attend an event

Invite candidates to visit your nonprofit or attend an event, as the invitation alone gets your organization's name and mission in front of the candidates. Hosting candidates at an event also allows your constituents and stakeholders to ask questions and familiarize themselves with their choices. You must invite all candidates, but you don't have to have them appear at the same time and not all must accept your invitation. Be sure to inform your audiences that all candidates have been invited and reiterate your organization's nonpartisanship.

Host or co-sponsor a candidate forum or questionnaire

Candidate forums not only connect your organization with candidates, but they also give your constituents and community members a chance to meet and interact with future officials. If there are already forums planned that your organization will not participate in, consider a questionnaire. Be sure to ask fair and impartial questions. Invite all the candidates in a particular race to respond to a set of questions which you share with your community audience to better inform them of candidate positions and values.

Key Takeaways

As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, you cannot support, endorse, or oppose candidates for public office. However, you can still use their campaign status to get your issues in front of the candidates.



Selecting the best activities

Who's your audience?

Consider the various audiences for your voter participation activities and communications. The activities, messages, and format of the communications you choose may change depending on your audience, including:

- Your members, service population, or other constituents
- Your staff, board members, and volunteers
- Your neighborhood or local community

What do they need?

Most people benefit from reminders about upcoming elections and information about who and what is on the ballot. Some voters have additional needs. Identify the barriers your audience may face when trying to vote to anticipate the information or assistance needed to successfully cast a ballot. Examples include:

- Eligibility and registration because they are a new or returning citizen, an out-of-state student, experiencing homelessness, or anyone lacking a current state ID for any reason
- Accessibility and accommodations due to disability or language barriers
- Getting time off from work to vote or transportation to and from the polls

Who's involved?

Determine who should be involved, such as staff, volunteers, constituents, and partner organizations. These people will need some training to effectively engage prospective voters. Consider:

- Front office staff who do intake or manage materials and signage in the lobby
- Volunteers or interns who can take on a voter participation activity as a special project
- Program staff who can weave voting into ongoing program activities
- Communications team that creates assets and runs your website and social media
- Partner organizations, coalitions, or local elections boards that can expand your reach

What are your communication vehicles?

Plan with the people in charge of your communications and website to include messages and announcements about registration and voting in the weeks leading up to the election. Depending on how you reach your audience, some of these may be more effective than others:

- Signage, posters, and handouts in your lobby or service areas
- Phone calls or texts
- Digital channels (website, social media, newsletters, paid advertising)
- Staff meetings or emails

How are you tracking and celebrating efforts?

If you are taking the time to run a voter engagement campaign, take the time to track, celebrate, and share your success! The documentation you do during the campaign can be used for fundraising, developing partnerships, and raising your profile. Keep track of:

- **Stories:** Take pictures of engagement activities and collect quotes from staff, volunteers, and potential voters.
- **Metrics:** Track the number of voter registrations collected as well as events, discussions, and other voter interactions. Include digital voter outreach, such as social media posts and newsletter mentions.
- **Post-election:** Collect photos and stories from people your nonprofit helped to vote. Consider ways to use them soon after the election to demonstrate your community engagement work and save them to inspire people before the next election.

Key Takeaways

There are many options for voter engagement activities.
It's okay to start small and grow your efforts as you build capacity.
You can start with staff, board, and/or volunteers.



Partnering for success: Local elections office and beyond

Partnering with another local nonprofit organization can be a mutually beneficial relationship, fostering community engagement, social impact, and often, increased visibility for both parties. Here are some tips to make the most out of such partnerships:

Identify potential partners

There are three types of partnerships your organization can benefit from when conducting voter engagement:

- **Local and State Election Offices:** Having a contact at an election office is invaluable when questions or needs come up. Election officials appreciate when organizations reach out, utilize their resources, and provide voters with accurate information.
- **Voter Outreach Organizations:** Look for organizations that provide quality, nonpartisan voter engagement resources and are operating locally. These organizations may be able to provide additional insight, tools, resources, or volunteers.
- **Existing Partners with Shared Goals:** Look to your current nonprofit partners whose mission aligns with your values and goals – including your complete commitment to remaining nonpartisan – or whose service population overlaps with your own. You may be able to share resources or team up to better integrate voter messaging and activities.

How to develop a lasting partnership

Open Communication: Initiate a dialogue with the organization's leadership team to discuss potential partnership opportunities and be transparent about your objectives, resources, and limitations. Emphasize that your goal is to provide accurate, nonpartisan information to eligible voters so they will have an easier time getting to the polls and casting a ballot.

Define Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly outline each party's roles and responsibilities within the partnership. Establishing expectations upfront helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that both parties are committed to achieving common goals.

Collaborative Projects: Brainstorm collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of both organizations. Whether it's hosting joint events, conducting community outreach, or launching fundraising campaigns, collaboration can amplify the impact of your efforts.

Promote Each Other: Use your respective platforms to promote each other's initiatives and events and celebrate successes along the way. Recognize the achievements of both organizations and the positive impact of your partnership on the community.



Section 3:

Talking to Potential Voters



Tips for successfully engaging potential voters

One of the reasons nonprofits are great resources for voter engagement is because of the relationship we have with our communities. An organization can use all the digital tools or fancy talking points, but at the end of the day, voter engagement is a year-round initiative focused on talking directly with potential voters, building trust through relationship and honest communication.

When engaging potential voters at festivals or events, use large signage to attract attention. Banners, posters, balloons, and other decorations can make your information table visible. You can bring snacks, or other freebies to encourage people to visit your table; however, legally, you must give these out regardless of whether someone registers or not.

Be proactive! Stand up, get out from behind the table, and greet people. When you're talking to somebody, offer them a pen and clipboard to fill out their information. Once they see how easy the form is, they're more likely to follow through with registration.

Keep it strictly nonpartisan

Staff working for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations should be nonpartisan when representing their nonprofit on site, at events, or doing voter engagement activities. Nonprofits and staff cannot suggest which candidate to vote for or political party to support. This includes not wearing buttons, hats, or t-shirts for a candidate.

Prepare for the conversation you will get to have, including with people who are hesitant to participate. Here are some common responses to keep in your back pocket:

"I don't have time."

"I understand. It only takes a couple minutes and doing it now will save you time later. I can answer any of your questions and ensure it gets turned in according to state law."

"I don't want to register" or "I don't care about voting."

Respect their hesitancy. You can't convince everyone, but you'll get better at trying.

- "Candidates pay more attention to communities where everyone's registered. They won't always do what we want, but they're more likely to pay attention if we register to vote."
- Cite an important issue in the upcoming election. Give an example of what the city council, state legislature, or Congress might be voting on next year, being careful to remain strictly nonpartisan.
- Remind them that they won't be voting alone – they're voting with and for their families, neighbors, and community.

"I don't know any of the candidates."

Suggest that they look up a voter guide on Vote411.org or BallotReady, or talk to family and friends. They might be able to find someone who can bring them up to speed.



Can I say anything about specific candidates?

You can only answer simple facts like what party they are in, if they are an incumbent or challenger, or where they live. Remember you need to remain strictly nonpartisan. Do not state your preferences.

What do I say when asked about the difference between Republicans and Democrats?

There is no good answer or any accurate source that doesn't have a bias. You could mention the names of the current nominees and their party, but go no further. Suggest they ask a trusted friend or go to the political parties' or candidates' official websites.

What if I'm asked about a ballot measure?

Ballot measures are about enacting laws not electing candidates. You may discuss the pros and cons of a ballot measure unless it is your organization's policy not to. You can also tell them if your nonprofit has an official position on one or more ballot questions and, if it does, why.

Key Takeaways

An organization can use all the digital tools or fancy talking points but at the end of the day, voter engagement is a year-round initiative focused on talking directly with potential voters, building trust through relationship, and honest communication.



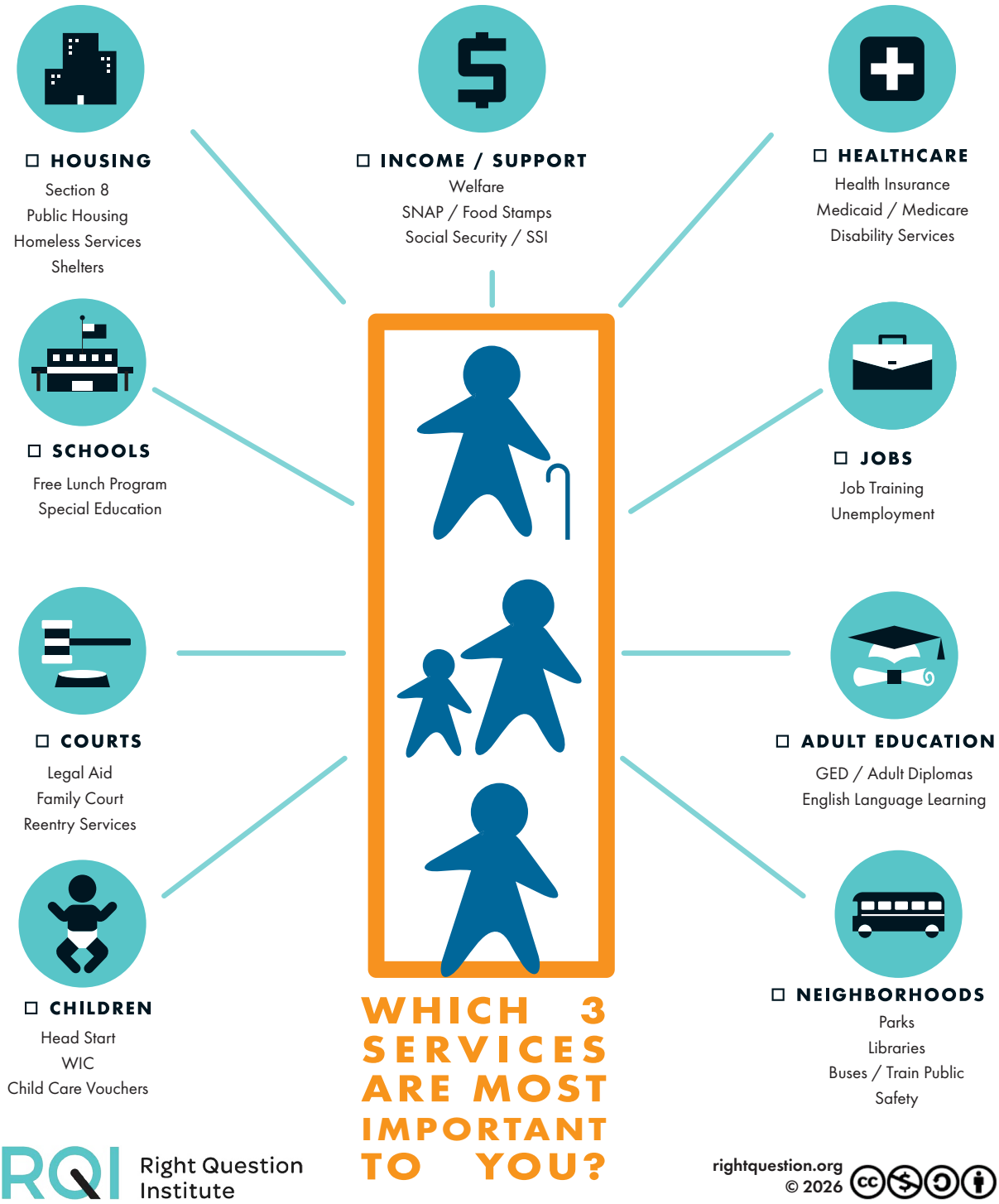
The Why Vote Tool

The Right Question Institute's nonpartisan 'Why Vote?' Tool and accompanying resources focus on having people discover for themselves the value of voting. The tool helps people see the connection between services they need –such as food assistance, income support, and childcare – and decisions that elected officials make. Direct service providers, educators, community organizers, and others use the tool for voter engagement, outreach, mobilization, and education.

Use this resource to engage potential new voters. It's a way for people to think about connections between services they receive and decisions elected officials make and to see for themselves the value of voting. You can use this resource with clients, adult learners, students, neighbors, and anyone else you would like to engage to vote. Invite them to think about the value of voting by asking them to choose three services that are important to them. On the back of the resource, there are spaces for users to reflect and come up with their own questions about voting. There's also space to customize this tool by leaving your agency's contact information or local voting information.

The Why Vote Tool

EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES



RQI Right Question Institute

rightquestion.org
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The Why Vote Tool

YOUR VOTE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Elected officials make decisions that affect all these services.

By voting, you can have a say in who makes those decisions.

Why would YOU want to vote and have a say in who is making decisions about those services?

What questions do you have about being able to vote in the next election?
Ask as many questions as you can.

What did you learn?

For more information about voting, visit: vote.gov
You can also find where to vote by searching online "find my polling place."

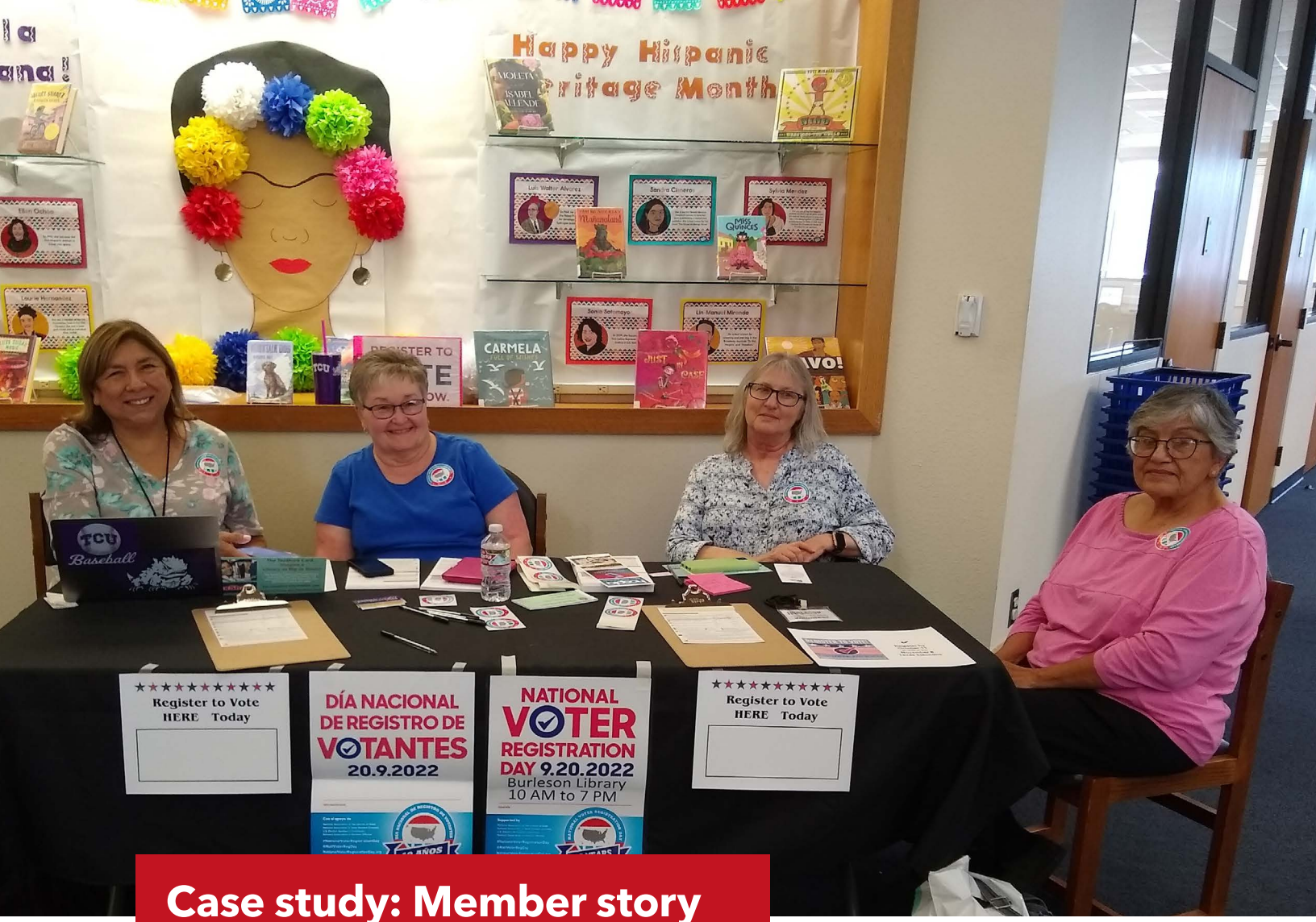
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RQI Right Question Institute

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Case study: Member story

United Way for Southeastern Michigan

United Way for Southeastern Michigan registers voters at community events hosted by United Way, partner organizations, and community leaders throughout their tri-county service area. This photo was taken at a Meet Up and Eat Up community block party. Staff and volunteers help voters check their registration, assist with registering to vote or updating voter information, and ask voters to share why voting matters to them. They provide information about upcoming elections with a focus on the importance of local elections. They also share information about voting with the children who visit their table, with the goal of inspiring each of them to be a future voter.



Section 4:

Allowable and Restricted Nonprofit Activities



Federal funds and nonprofits

All 501(c)(3) organizations, including charitable nonprofits and houses of worship, must follow the same IRS rule barring these organizations from conducting partisan political activities to support or oppose candidates for elected office. The IRS rule, however, allows nonprofits to conduct voter engagement and election activities on a strictly nonpartisan basis. Nonprofits that receive different types of federal funding may have additional requirements that either require or prohibit engagement in voter registration or other activities.

Federal Funds with Requirements to Do Voter Registration

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993 requires several types of federally supported agencies – such as those that offer public assistance or state-funded programs for people with disabilities – to proactively offer the people they serve the opportunity to register to vote. This includes nonprofit agencies like community health centers or food pantries that sign people up to receive Medicaid, WIC, food stamps and other programs otherwise covered by the NVRA.

See our factsheet on the National Voter Registration Act for more information.

Federal Funds with Limits on Voter Registration and Related Activities

In a few special cases, Congress has added stipulations on the use of certain federal funds to restrict voter registration and rides to the polls. As of this writing, these limitations only apply to the programs described below.

While the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is proposing a rule to bar use of federal funds for voter registration activities, that rule would not impact voter registration activities done with non-federal funds, will be subject to litigation, and would not likely impact the 2026 election cycle even if enacted. What follows is current law as of 2026.

Federal Funds with Voter Registration Restrictions

Community Services Block Grants (CSBG)

Nonprofits who receive Community Services Block Grant funding, like Community Action Agencies:

CANNOT

- Use CSBG funds to pay for staff or materials to conduct voter registration.
- Use CSBG funds to provide rides to the polls.
- Associate CSBG funding with a particular candidate or political party.

CAN

- Use non-CSBG funds to do voter registration such as having staff or others not paid by CSBG funds help register voters, so long as it's not identified as a service of the agency. In this case, voter registration should be done outside of service delivery, for example, at a table or local event.
- Use CSBG or other funds to do any other kinds of nonpartisan voter engagement activities to promote voter education and voter participation such as reminding staff and clients about an upcoming election. However, it is recommended that CSBG funds used for nonpartisan election activity be limited and not done in a way to give public perception of the agency as being in any way involved in partisan politics.

Head Start

Head Start has similar restrictions to that of CSBG recipients, except Head Start had language added in 2007 to amend the Head Start Act to affirm a Head Start program's right to have outside groups do nonpartisan voter registration drives at their sites. A Head Start program:

CANNOT

- Use Head Start funds to conduct or have employees conduct voter registration activities.
- Use Head Start funds to provide rides to the polls.

CAN

- Have a nonpartisan organization or non-Head Start personnel do voter registration at Head Start facilities during all hours of operation.
- Do any other type of nonpartisan voter education, such as keeping parents and others informed about how, when, and where to vote.

Do Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds Have Similar Restrictions?

- No. Unlike with Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds, there are no restrictions on doing voter registration or any type of nonpartisan activity. A nonprofit with CDBG funds should follow the same rules that apply to any 501(c)(3) organization barring partisan, political activity to support or oppose candidates for elected office.

AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

AmeriCorps members and other recipients of CNCS funding are subject to the standard 501(c)(3) prohibition on partisan political activities to oppose or support candidates for elected office. Additionally, while charging time to the AmeriCorps program or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program, CNCS supported personnel or service volunteers:

CANNOT

- Do voter registration during work hours or while performing work for the host organization.
- Make voter registration forms and information available on the premises for clients.

CAN

- Conduct any other type of nonpartisan voter education as undertaken by the organization where they are doing service.
- Do political activities in personal time outside of work and when not representing the organization they are assigned to.

Legal Services

Legal Service organizations are generally prohibited by the Legal Services Act (LSA) and related policies from using funds received from the Legal Services Corporation to conduct any kind of nonpartisan or partisan political activity or issue advocacy.

Resources

- CAPLAW, Election Year Refresher for Nonprofit Community Action Agencies—updated 2024, https://caplaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CAPLAW_2022_election_year_refresher_for_nonprofit_CAAs.pdf
- Legal Information Institute, Prohibited uses of CDBG Funds, https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/24/570.207
- Corporation for National and Community Service, Prohibited Activities, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XXV/part-2520/section-2520.65
- Legal Services Corporation, Regulations CFR 45 Part 1608, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XVI/part-1608
- Nonprofit VOTE, National Voter Registration Act Factsheet, https://www.nonprofitvote.org/resource/national-voter-registration-act/
- Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) FAQ, https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra

HIPAA and civic engagement at health centers

What is HIPAA?

HIPAA is the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. The primary goal of the law is to make it easier for people to keep health insurance and protect the confidentiality and security of healthcare information. For health centers, protecting patient health information is also a legal requirement under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

What does the Privacy Rule protect?

The HIPAA Privacy Rule protects the confidentiality of identifiable health information, including personal and demographic data, that relates to:

- the individual's past, present or future physical or mental health or condition,
- the provision of health care to the individual, or
- the past, present, or future payment for the provision of health care to the individual, and that identifies the individual or could be reasonably used to identify the individual and their personal information.

What are the HIPAA issues when doing voter registration?

Voter registration cards and information are not subject to HIPAA regulations. A center's ability to capture or copy voter registration data is a matter of local election law.

How does HIPAA affect collecting advocacy or pledge to vote cards?

Voter and civic engagement is a voluntary, opt-in activity. Patients voluntarily provide contact information for this purpose. It is okay for health centers to ask patients to fill out a pledge to vote or advocacy card and to track the data for follow up and program evaluation. It's a good policy to restrict which staff have access to the list. Please see "answer 2B" below regarding sharing of the list with a civic engagement partner.

How do we avoid violating the HIPAA privacy rule?

1. HIPAA prohibits the use of your EHR or other patient database for activity related to your civic engagement program. Do not use patient data from the patient's record to fill out voter registration forms or for any other purpose. Only use information you received directly from the patient for this purpose or have them complete the card.
2. Do not include anything in your civic engagement database that would conclusively identify the individual as a patient. This means you should:

   A. Target civic engagement to a broader population. Make sure your civic engagement efforts and database include others who are not patients – family members, staff, community members and the like.

   B. Share your data with others ONLY if your list is a broader civic engagement list including both non-patients and patients and the data you share does not contain your center's name.

Ballot measures

What is a ballot measure?

Ballot measures ask voters to vote on laws, bonding issues, or constitutional amendments. If the vote is on a proposed law, it's called a "ballot initiative." If the vote is on a law already passed by the legislature, it's called a "referendum."

Can a nonprofit take a position for or against a ballot measure?

Generally, yes. Activity supporting or opposing ballot measures is considered lobbying – not electioneering for or against a candidate – and as a result a charitable organization will not be considered engaging in partisan, election-related activities. Charitable 501(c)(3) nonprofits may advocate to pass or defeat a ballot measure as a lobbying activity, subject to normal limits on lobbying.

What are common activities for nonprofits on ballot measures?

Organizations can engage in a range of activities related to ballot measures such as– collecting signatures to put an issue on the ballot, endorsing or opposing the measure, communicating your position to influence the public, organizing volunteers to work on passage or defeat of a ballot measure, or hosting an educational forum or event. You can also distribute neutral educational materials designed to inform the public about both sides of the question.

How much can a 501(c)(3) nonprofit spend on lobbying?

Your spending limits depend on which test your nonprofit chooses to measure lobbying.

1. Unless your charitable nonprofit has filed the simple and easy 501(h) form, then it automatically falls under Section 501(c)(3)'s unclear limitation on lobbying: "no substantial part of the [charity's] activities" can be "attempting to influence legislation." Neither Congress nor the IRS has clarified what constitutes "substantial" or "insubstantial" lobbying activities or where the dividing line is drawn. Importantly, this default standard in Section 501(c)(3) looks at the organization's full "activities," and not at the amount of dollars spent.
2. To avoid uncertainty, many charitable nonprofits instead choose to take the 501(h) election, which sets clear, objective guidance by comparing how much they spent on lobbying in a given year to the organization's total expenditures. To take the 501(h) election, nonprofits will spend less than five minutes filling in a few simple items on IRS Form 5768. Learn more at https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy/taking-501h-election.

Are there any spending limits for ballot measure advocacy?

There are no limits on spending on ballot measures, beyond the limits on lobbying discussed above. Some states require you to file an expenditure report if you devote substantial funds to ballot measure advocacy as, for example, a primary sponsor of a ballot measure, an active partner, or as a financial contributor for a particular advertisement. Contact your state's campaign finance office for more information.



Post-Election Advocacy Planning Tool

With the ideas and tips in this tool, you can help your nonprofit and its mission be more visible to elected officials, make connections between constituents and their elected leaders about issues that impact your community, and build a stronger democracy for all. The content provided in this tool is provided in good faith for informational purposes only and is neither intended to be nor should be construed as legal or tax advice. First, a quick distinction:

Advocacy is raising awareness and mobilizing public support for an issue or set of values, such as supporting education access, ending hunger, expanding affordable housing, and so on. Nonprofits can generally engage in non-lobbying advocacy without limit.

Lobbying involves asking policy makers, either directly or indirectly (by encouraging others to do so), to vote for or against a specific piece of legislation or policy. Nonprofits that take the 501(h) election have more leeway and clear guidelines when lobbying.

Whether your organization engages in advocacy, lobbying, or both, there are strategies you should think about to ensure success:

1. Identify Which Officials Make Decisions Related to Your Organization's Priorities.

a. Be clear about what your organization is trying to accomplish or change. Identify which governmental officials have authority over those policies.
b. Check government websites or a nonpartisan resource like Ballotpedia to find position descriptions.
c. What region do they cover (national, state, local, city council ward…etc)?
d. What branch of government are they in (legislative, judicial, executive)?
e. Is the position full-time or part-time?
f. Are there certain qualifications required for the position (ex, Law director must be an attorney…etc.)
g. Are they part of a larger body that needs a majority to pass legislation (city council or state legislative body), or are there actions they can take independently (mayor, governor, etc.)?
h. Do they have influence over budgets?
i. What is the timeline for their term?

2. Educate Yourself and Your Team on Those Elected Leaders, Their Position, Their Experience with Your Issues, and Their Priorities in Order to Have a Productive Conversation.

a. Check government websites (check for .gov to be sure you're on a government and not a campaign website) for lists of elected and appointed positions.

b. Has this person been elected to this position before? To another related position (Ex. State House to State Senate or City Council Member to Mayor)?

c. What is their experience, professional or otherwise and what organizations are they associated with (ex. nonprofit boards, professional associations, political parties, do they volunteer or donate to particular organizations)

d. What are the causes they care about and why?

e. How have they voted on the issues your organization cares about?

f. Remember to look for state, county, city, township, district, ward, borough, school district, and any other areas of government that might have elected or appointed leaders.

g. Find their email, phone number, physical office address, and web portal if they have one (see the example tracker below) and join their email newsletter where applicable. They may answer communications directly or they may have an administrative staff member.

3. Prepare Your Organization to Build Relationships with Elected Leaders and Share Your Expertise.

a. Review lobbying policies for your organization. The executive director or board should have access to or create policies to provide guidance for staff who may be carrying out the work.

b. Learn about the policy maker's influence, goals and motivations. Is there a topic or issue in which your nonprofit has expertise? Do you operate in the elected official's district? Do any of your board, staff, or volunteers have a connection with the elected official?

c. Make a plan for documenting and tracking any lobbying activity or interaction with elected leaders. If you have taken the 501(h) election, you'll want to document expenditures as well.

d. Review lobbyist registration requirements. Lobbyist registration is most common at the state and federal level but may be required at the county or city level too.

e. Develop one pagers and other materials that explain your priorities in a clear and concise manner and in a form that you can leave behind with the elected leaders.

4. Establish an Organizational Relationship with Your Elected Official(s).

a. Focus on building relationships with elected leaders over time. If you want your organization to be known as a trusted entity for addressing community issues, it will take time.

b. Set up an educational meeting with them or invite them to your nonprofit to help them better understand your organizational mission and the community's need for your organization. Invite them to opt into your organization's communications like newsletters, fundraiser invitations, texts, holiday cards, etc.

c. Be polite and persistent with communications. Elected leaders often receive a great deal of communication so response times may be slow, but it is responsible for them to respond.

5. When Your Organization's Issue is Up for a Vote or Critical Discussion, How Can You Participate?

a. Where are legislative meetings held? In person? Virtual? Are they recorded?

b. How do you sign up to comment on legislation? What is the timeline? Written or spoken comments? (ex: via website, email, call, or in person comment).

c. Remember that sometimes delays or changes to agendas are intentional political moves, some times they are just the reality of the process.

6. Evaluate and Celebrate Your Work.

a. Talk about your advocacy work and the issues your organization is addressing. Advocacy can be an important part of your mission and a great way to engage new audiences.

b. Document and evaluate your work to ensure the lessons you learned and relationships you built will position your organization to be more effective each year.

Resources

- Lobbying Under the Insubstantial Part Test (the default for nonprofits), from Alliance for Justice (AFJ)
- Maximize Your Lobbying Limit by taking the 501(h) Election, from Bolder Advocacy / Alliance for Justice (AFJ)
- IRS H Election Form
- Ballotpedia Directory of Elected Officials

Example Elected Leader Tracker

These are all made up examples to show possibilities.
Create your own based on your locality with this tool.

Position	Name	Phone	Email Address	Last Elected & Next Election	Responsibil-ities	Notes (When they were elected, when their next election is, if they've held any elected positions in the past)
U.S. Senator	Ex. Jo Jenkins	(555) 555-5555	jo.jenkins@us.senate.gov Staff Scheduler: Percy Price percy.price@us.senate.gov	Last: 2024 Next: 2030	Ex. Votes to confirm presidential appointments	Ex. Former teacher, voted in favor of additional FEMA investment
U.S. Congressional District(s)						
Governor						
State Senator						
State Representative						
County Executive, or Commission						
Mayor						
City Council Member						
School Board Members						



Section 5:

How-to Guides

Choosing between paper-based and online activities

Paper, digital, or both? How should your organization approach engaging voters, especially when it comes to official forms like voter registration or voting by mail? This quiz can help.

Who are you trying to reach?

A. Low-income voters and those without state IDs, older voters, or voters who use your services

B. Younger voters, college students, or the friends and families of voters connected with your organization

C. Your staff, volunteers, or supporters of your organization or cause or voters who speak a language other than English at home

Where or how do you normally interact with them?

A. In-person when providing services (either at your organization, their homes, or at a recurring venue)

B. In-person at community events, while door knocking, or at neighborhood hot spots (like a bus station, grocery store, or public park)

C. Via your website, newsletter, social media, text campaigns, or phone call

What special strengths does your organization have?

A. Your staff is good at walking clients through paperwork, you have a waiting area, or your staff and clients have one-on-one time.

B. You have a lot of voter-facing staff or volunteers who can wear voting swag (like buttons, stickers or lanyards).

C. You have tech-savvy staff/volunteers or you have access to a large social media audience or social media influencers

What limitations does your organization have?

A. Internet service in your area is unreliable or your staff is less comfortable with digital platforms.

B. Your staff or volunteers are too busy to assist voters one-on-one or are trying to minimize close interactions for health/safety reasons.

C. There are restrictions on who can conduct voter registration in your state or you have few in-person interactions with voters.

Results

Mostly As: Try a paper-based strategy. Your staff and voters may have the best luck with good old-fashioned paper and pen. Develop a relationship with your local elections office to receive printed voter registration forms.

Mostly Bs or a mix: Consider blended organizing. It's good to have paper on hand for when internet access is spotty or devices aren't working and for voters who just feel more comfortable filling out a paper form. Add digital components to your in-person efforts by putting links and QR codes on your materials, such as a lanyard card, so voters can engage from their own device.

Mostly Cs: Focus on digital outreach. From your state's voting website, to online voter guides, to motivational apps, there is plenty of content to populate your communications channels. Develop messaging that will resonate with your unique audience.



Hosting a phone or text bank

Why host a phone or text bank to reach voters?

Phone or text banking involves individual outreach to eligible voters through phone calls or text messages. Contact from a trusted organization can help prepare and motivate people to vote and is more effective than emails or postcards. Include phone or text banking as part of your strategy in the weeks leading up to the election.

Benefits include:

- Flexibility to organize staff and/or volunteers in-person, at a distance, all at once, or over many shifts.
- The ability to pair voter engagement messages with wellness checks, invitations to events/services, or other messages you want to get out to your community.
- It's enjoyable for your staff and volunteers!

Every good phone or text bank has 4 key ingredients:

1. A list of clients/voters to contact.
2. Staff or volunteers (phone/text bankers) to make the calls/texts to voters.
3. A tracking system (e.g. shared spreadsheet like a google doc, your existing CRM might have options, or you can use a company with more robust texting programs) to record voters' answers and important notes. Tracking is especially important if you plan to do multiple rounds of calls to voters who don't pick up at first.
4. A script to guide their interactions.



What if I don't have a list of clients or community members that includes their name and phone number?

There are a few options. You can buy a list for your area from a data company (rates vary but, in some areas, it could be around $50 for a few hundred names and numbers). You can also collect the desired contact information in a way that makes it clear to your audience of clients or community members that you're going to follow up with them about voting.

Who should I ask to phone/text bank? How many people should I ask?

For every 100 phone numbers, recruit two people to phone/text bank for two hours (you could also recruit four people for a Power Hour!) Consider asking staff to participate, as well as committed volunteers, members of your board, or program participants. Members of a local youth leadership program make great bankers. Recruit bilingual speakers if many people in your community speak languages other than English as a primary language.

What every phone banker should know:

If this is your first time phone-banking, welcome! This is generally a very positive experience for both the caller and the voter being called. Keep in mind the following:

- It will feel awkward at first and that's okay! You'll start feeling more comfortable after the third or fourth conversation.
- Most people won't pick up and you may only have a handful of conversations with voters. This is okay too! Every call makes a difference.
- You never have to stay on the phone with someone rude or aggressive. If you feel uncomfortable, disconnect the call, and make a note in the tracker.



Candidate engagement

Sharing your policy ideas

Educating candidates about policy solutions you are prioritizing is an important step to ensuring all candidates have a robust plan. This helps ensure that the newly or recently re-elected official will work to address these challenges while in office.

Sharing your policy ideas with a candidate is similar to how you would engage an elected official. Utilize email, in-person meetings, social media, or other contacts to make them aware of your policy priorities. Additionally, be sure to engage all candidates when doing your outreach. Do not conduct research on behalf of a candidate or campaign, and do not sign your organization's name on to their policy proposals or platforms issued as part of their campaigns. This can be viewed as an endorsement of support.

Candidate appearances at your nonprofit event

During the election season, a candidate may appear at your nonprofit event in one of three ways:

1. In their capacity as a candidate invited to your event,
2. In their capacity as a public figure invited to your event, or
3. As an uninvited attendee at a public event.

Each scenario has different guidelines to ensure that their appearance maintains your organization's nonpartisanship.

1. Inviting candidates to an event in their capacity as candidates

Your nonprofit may want to invite candidates for office to a function or event to expose them to your work, develop relationships with future office holders, or for a purpose related to your ongoing programs.

If you invite all the candidates to the SAME event:

- Invite all candidates from all political parties in the same race. They don't all have to come, but all must be invited.
- Remind candidates – in writing – that they are attending as guests. Campaigning and political fundraising are prohibited.
- Remind the audience that this is a nonpartisan event.
- The atmosphere is kept entirely nonpartisan and free of campaign activity with no campaign brochures or materials distributed or on tables.

If you invite candidates to appear at DIFFERENT events:

- Provide equal opportunities to candidates for the same office, including a similar time, venue, and presentation format.
- Remind candidates – in writing – that they are attending as guests. Campaigning and political fundraising are prohibited.
- Prior to introducing the candidate, clarify for the audience that the appearance is not an endorsement and that there will be additional opportunities to meet the other candidates.
- Ensure the atmosphere is kept entirely nonpartisan and free of campaign activity with no campaign brochures or materials distributed or on tables.

Keep in mind that elected officials are themselves candidates when they are running for re-election in a primary or general election. This is particularly important to remember in the last two months leading up to the election.

2. Inviting a candidate to an event in their capacity as a public figure

A charitable nonprofit may invite a candidate to an event in their capacity as a recognized public figure, like an elected official or expert in their field. You might invite a candidate to speak because they 1) currently hold, or formerly held, public office; 2) are considered an expert in a field unrelated to office held; or 3) are a celebrity or have led a distinguished public service, military, legal, or other career. Under these circumstances only extend an invitation if:

- The candidate is chosen to speak solely for reasons other than their candidacy and speaks only in a non-candidate capacity.
- There is no mention of their candidacy during the presentation or event.
- Remind the public figure – in writing – that they are attending in that sole capacity and not as a candidate, and that campaigning and political fundraising is prohibited.
- The atmosphere is kept entirely nonpartisan and free of campaign activity with no campaign brochures or materials distributed or on tables.

3. Candidates attending your event on their own initiative

Candidates may appear at a public event held by your nonprofit on their own initiative. Take care that there is no actual or implied endorsement. Do not give the candidate an opportunity to address the gathering or distribute campaign literature.



Candidate forums

Keeping your forum nonpartisan

When planning your nonprofit candidate forum, remember—nonpartisanship is key! Not only is it required for 501(c)(3) organizations, but it also encourages attendance by candidates, attracts more interest from the media, and is an effective tool for engaging your community around the issues that matter to them.

Basic guidelines for staying nonpartisan

- The forum should cover a broad range of issues.
- Candidates should have equal time to present their views.
- The candidates are asked about issues but are not asked to pledge to or agree with specific positions of the sponsoring organizations.
- The moderator stays neutral and does not imply approval or disapproval of the candidates.

Staying nonpartisan is fairly straightforward. Here are some tried and true tips from the experts:

Inviting the candidates

Invite all viable candidates for a specific office to your forum and make an equal effort to encourage each of them to attend. If it is a two-candidate race and only one agrees to attend, you should not go forward with your forum because it could be perceived as partisan with only one candidate.

Q: What about a race with several candidates?

At least two candidates must attend in order for the forum to remain nonpartisan. You may want to ensure the front runners can attend, but having two or more candidates participate can help maintain a nonpartisan forum.

Q: What about a last minute cancellation?

If it is a two-candidate race and one cancels with very little notice, or worse, doesn't show up, you may cancel or go forward with the candidate event as planned. If you go forward, make sure to announce that this in no way signifies the endorsement of the attending candidate by your organization.

Read about Rosie's Place, a community center serving women experiencing homelessness, and how they meld empowering women with civic engagement through candidate forums at https://www.nonprofitvote.org/field-program/.

Questions asked at the forum

You may want to have one or more staff members in charge of reviewing audience questions before handing them to the moderator. Your forum should ask clear, relevant, and balanced questions; none that signal a bias for or against a candidate. It's okay to ask straightforward questions on the issues, but balance these across partisan lines.

Ground rules inside the forum

Partisan Attire: Insist in advance that anyone helping to staff the event may not wear partisan attire (e.g. t-shirts, hats, buttons). While not required, you may want to ask audience members to check their partisan materials (including buttons and signs) at the door. This helps to create a sense of nonpartisanship within the forum hall.

Audience: Ask the audience to respectfully refrain from excessive exuberance for or against a particular candidate.

Security: Although not required by laws governing nonprofits, consider hiring security to be visible onsite to help discourage anyone who might otherwise want to disrupt the event.

Site selection

Choose a neutral site for your forum – one that is not associated with any party, candidate, or strong advocacy for any issue.

Literature

You may provide nonpartisan voter education and voter registration materials for your audience. Have a separate table outside the room of the forum for candidates to place their campaign literature.

What the candidates want

It is helpful to understand what the candidates hope for in a nonprofit candidate forum. Use this information to entice candidates to attend.

- **A large audience!** Candidates are spread very thin during a campaign season. They cannot attend every event to which they are invited. You and your co-sponsoring organizations should focus on turnout to increase the chances that candidates will attend. This is a great opportunity to invite volunteers, campus chapters or young professional groups, donors, and more to participate. Be sure to communicate your expected audience size to the candidates in advance, as a large turnout at your candidate forum demonstrates that your organization has influence on voters.
- **A guarantee of neutrality:** Candidates will avoid any event where they think they could be ganged up on – especially if the media is expected to attend. Remind all candidates of the nonpartisan nature of the forum and share any ground rules you have established to keep everything neutral.

- **A trusted and well-respected nonprofit in the district:** Leverage your reputation as a respected community organization and partnerships with other nonprofits. Since candidates are aware of nonprofits that have held successful and neutral candidate forums in the past, they will be more likely to attend if those organizations are involved as one or more of your co-sponsors.
- **Time to meet informally with voters:** Allow time after the forum for the candidates to speak one-on-one with voters and shake hands. Tell candidates about this opportunity in your invitation to them.
- **More information about your organization:** In your invitation to the candidates, briefly explain the mission of your organization and your constituency as well as how your organization affects policy – and how those policies hurt and could help your organization's work in the community. Many candidates and elected officials already rely on nonprofits as resources for policy information. This is a fantastic opportunity to mention your policy priorities and issues that impact your community members.

Selecting a format

At the top of your to-do list is selecting the format of your forum. As you decide, remember that it's important to select the option that best meets your community's needs.

- **Equal Time Q&A:** An impartial moderator and panelists question the candidates, who are allowed equal response time. Traditionally, the candidates are unaware of the exact questions but know the established focus of the program. Candidates may answer the same questions or may be asked different questions, as long as each is given equal time to present their point of view.
- **Follow-Up Q&A:** In this approach, the moderator and/or panelists ask the candidates questions. To get clarifications and more specific answers, follow-up questions are permitted.
- **Town Meeting Q&A:** Members of the audience ask all questions. Questions should be screened by a staff member of your organization to avoid partisan questions and to facilitate substantive dialogue. The audience members asking questions will educate the candidate on the concerns of the constituency.
- **Prepared and Spontaneous Debate:** Prior to the forum, the candidates are presented with several prepared questions constructed to elicit detailed responses. A selection of these questions will be asked at the forum. Candidates will then be asked to give spontaneous answers to questions that originate with the moderator, their opponents, and/or the audience.

Logistics

Ideally, you will begin planning your forum at least 4 months in advance. Shorter timelines can work, but make sure the date and location are set and candidates are confirmed with enough time to do thorough promotion. See the task checklist at nonprofitvote.org/resource/candidate-forum-checklist/.



Publicizing your forum

1. **Promote, promote, promote!** Use all your communication channels. Target and time your online and print to maximize impact. Post flyers and make details about the forum available.
2. **Leverage partners and media outlets** that have featured your work in the past.
3. **Use key election dates or campaign news** to drive communications in the lead-up to the forum.
4. **Try to personally contact and invite** local and regional media outlets. Use this to establish new relationships and raise your profile.
5. **Use a known moderator** to draw additional attention (ex. local news anchor, university professor, retired or former elected leader, civic leaders who are not associated with a political party).
6. **Your nonpartisanship is an advantage.** For media and your audience, a forum is a chance to hear from candidates in a nonpartisan setting rather than hear stock messages from the campaign trail.
7. **Frame your forum as a "community event"** – one that brings voters and residents together to engage in the democratic process and influence their government.

What NOT to do when planning a forum

- Start planning late.
- Make assumptions about turnout (typically, actual attendees are half or less of RSVPs).
- Over rely on partners and co-sponsors for audience turnout without verifying their effort (social media posts are great for getting the word out but relational organizing is the strongest tool for turnout).
- Send media releases without personal follow-up.
- Fail to take advantage of media outlets in other languages common to your community.
- Forget good signage around the building so people know where the forum is (including parking, entrance, online accessibility, etc.).
- Leave out instructions to your audience at the start about what will occur – who asks questions, when the audience participates and how, expected decorum, etc.



Candidate questionnaires

Candidate questionnaires serve two purposes. First, they collect information about the candidates for voters. Second, they let candidates know the range of issues of concern to the organization(s) preparing the guide. Questionnaires do take time to prepare and require care to ensure they are nonpartisan. If you wish to do a candidate questionnaire, consider these key factors in determining whether a voter engagement guide is nonpartisan:

- Do the questions cover a broad range of issues related to the broad interests of the electorate? For example, do the questions address a range of issues relevant to a specific elected office or reflect a truly broad range of concerns within your issue area?
- Are the questions or any description of the issues clear and unbiased in both structure and content?
- Are the questions posed to candidates identical to the questions you later publicly print or post online? (They should be.)
- Are the candidates given a reasonable amount of time to respond?
- If the questions ask the candidates to respond with "Yes" or "No" or "Undecided," are candidates given the opportunity to give short one or two sentence explanations to explain their positions in their own words?
- Have all major candidates responded?



Q: What if the candidate does not respond?

You may list "Did Not Respond." When a candidate fails to respond, some 501(c)(3)s choose to provide information about the candidate that is a matter of public record or on their website. If you do, be sure to stick strictly to factual information – name, address, etc. – and avoid efforts to summarize the candidate's positions on issues, which might appear to be slanted to favor or disfavor the candidate. You should provide all candidates with the same reasonable time period – for example, three weeks – to give their responses and information. As the deadline nears, let the candidates know that if they don't respond, you will print "Did Not Respond." While not required, it is a good practice to give the candidates the chance to review the final draft of their information and make any last-minute corrections.

Reminder

Federal law requires that all 501(c)(3) organizations – charitable nonprofits, private foundations, and houses of worship – remain strictly nonpartisan when doing any voter engagement activity. While the law does not require you to have an attorney provide advice about any of the activities, legal assistance is still advised in many circumstances.

The most visible of all the activities are the "Candidate Engagement" options. These present more opportunity for an organization to be accused of being partisan or showing bias in favor of, or in opposition to, a particular candidate or political party. The steps a 501(c)(3) nonprofit needs to take to prevent bias or partisanship in "Candidate Engagement" activities may vary depending on the nature of the issues that would be covered in a candidate forum or questionnaire and other specifics about the nonprofit and the elections at issue. Among "Candidate Engagement" activities, it can be easier for a candidate who doesn't want to be held accountable to refuse to answer by alleging bias in a questionnaire.

Therefore, when "Making a Plan" and "Selecting the Best Activities," organizations with less experience may wish to consider starting with activities other than "Candidate Engagement" to build more experience. It is a sign of respect for the law in your desire to remain nonpartisan and an acknowledgment that legal assistance may be needed.

Candidate questionnaire invitation

Dear Candidate,

On behalf of charitable nonprofits across [STATE], [ORGANIZATION] invites you to participate in our 2026 candidate questionnaire. Through this survey, we invite you to answer questions that affect our state, charitable nonprofits, and the communities they serve.

In [STATE], more than # charitable nonprofits feed, heal, shelter, educate, inspire, enlighten, and nurture people of every age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. They foster civic engagement and leadership, drive economic growth, and strengthen the fabric of our communities. One in every [#] jobs is at a nonprofit, and the sector is an indispensable partner to government, providing community-focused solutions to critical needs across human services, education, the environment, arts, and more. The nonprofit community is eager to work with elected leaders to continue breaking down barriers for nonprofits and to provide quality services that benefit all [State..ians].

This candidate questionnaire is focused on the nonprofit sector, designed to provide voters and the communities served by nonprofit organizations with insights into candidates' stances on issues impacting the sector. Please share your thoughts and vision about [STATE] and the nonprofit community's part in that vision, by completing this short online survey no later than [DEADLINE].

All candidates' responses received by the survey deadline will be shared (unedited) with community leaders throughout the state.

Thank you for participating.

Sincerely,

[INSERT SENDER]

Sample questions

The questions below are examples of what a state or regional nonprofit association might ask candidates for elected office. Not every question will fit every race – one well suited to a candidate for Congress may have little relevance to a city council candidate beyond a general statement of support. Adapt the set below to the office and level of government you're asking about. Add questions tied to the issues your organization is working on, or include additional context about your policy priorities. Just keep every question nonpartisan – clear, unbiased, and free of leading language.

- *Please describe your personal involvement with, support for, or experiences with the nonprofit sector. How will these experiences shape your policy priorities, if elected? What are your top three priorities, if elected?*
- *Nonprofits are currently facing increased demand for services while managing rising costs and uncertain funding streams. What specific steps would you take to ensure the financial health and long-term sustainability of the nonprofit sector?*
- *The nonprofit sector is a significant employer, making it a vital part of the economy. Workforce shortages at charitable nonprofits result in the loss of critical services on which communities rely. If elected, how would you address the workforce shortages facing the nonprofits who serve your constituents?*
- *Sound tax policies that support charitable nonprofits are one of the most important ways to help organizations secure the resources necessary to serve the public good and address community needs. If elected, how would you preserve and strengthen the tax-exempt status of charitable nonprofits and strengthen and expand incentives for individuals to give their time and money to the organizations whose missions they support?*
- *Many nonprofits struggle to access affordable and adequate insurance coverage for both health insurance and property and casualty insurance. If elected, what would you do to make insurance more affordable and accessible to nonprofits?*
- *Nonprofits possess deep community understanding, innovate solutions, and fill systemic gaps by collaborating with government agencies. If elected, what specific policies or structures would you prioritize to foster stronger partnerships between government and the nonprofit sector to address challenges effectively?*



Support effectively run elections

Voting is an incredibly local process and relies on volunteers at every stage to carry out that process. When nonprofit organizations show support for election officials and poll workers, it humanizes them, demystifies the process, encourages more engagement, and helps build public confidence in elections. In doing so, it helps to temper conspiracies and misinformation that thrive when election mechanics are not fully understood.

Recruit Poll Workers

Poll workers are everyday community members who undergo specialized training to help administer the in-person voting process during early voting and on Election Day. These dedicated individuals work to ensure that polling locations operate smoothly and can help minimize problems such as malfunctioning equipment, closed facilities, and hours-long lines that actively discourage voter turnout. Ultimately, how a poll worker welcomes, supports, and treats a voter with fairness and dignity can shape that person's confidence in the system and determine whether they choose to vote in future elections. These positions are often paid.

Resources

- Election Assistance Commission: Sign Up to be a Poll Worker
- Power the Polls: Poll Worker FAQs
- Power the Polls: Support for poll worker recruitment
- USA.gov: State and Local Election Offices

Connect With Election Officials

Every state must designate a chief election official to oversee elections in that state. While most often an elected position, the chief election official can be elected, appointed by the governor, selected by the legislature or could have a board or commission type structure. Elections officials administer and ensure the integrity of our democratic processes. They are the backbone of our democracy, and they work under immense pressure. Election officials now face intense public scrutiny, shifting legal regulations, and, unfortunately, high levels of harassment and threats. Despite the heightened stress, tension, and long hours, they show up to do their jobs with complete professionalism so that every eligible citizen can make their voice heard.

Thank Election Officials. Support election officials by directing your network to send thank-you cards or positive community messages. Consider joining in on Election Hero Day, held each October.

Resources

- U.S. Vote Foundation: Local Election Office Contact Information
- Center for Civic Design: Message Templates for Thanking Election Officials
- Election Hero Day
- Election Hero Day: Toolkit: Includes key messages and talking points, ways to celebrate, social copy and graphics, email copy, and more.

Recruit Volunteers for Other Electoral Activities

As mentioned earlier, there are many ways volunteers can engage in elections while remaining nonpartisan–from supporting election officials and poll workers, to ensuring a free and fair election process, to supporting people waiting to vote. In certain states/localities, specific opportunities exist to do poll monitoring, help cure ballots, and more. Additionally, nonprofit organizations can provide resources and opportunities for their staff and clients to participate in their own nonpartisan way or take advantage of programs. Check your local laws and election guidelines to see if your organization can support initiatives such as:

- Protect the Vote: Nonpartisan Election Protection Volunteer Program: Ensure eligible voters are able to participate in our democracy.
- Pizza to the Polls: Deliver free food to people who are participating in civic life, such as those on long lines at polling places and folks at nonpartisan events focused on voter education, registration, and turnout.
- Election Protection Volunteers
  - Opportunities for legal professionals
  - Poll monitoring program
  - Ballot curing: Ballot curing is a process that allows voters to correct certain problems with their mail-in or absentee ballots (such as signature doesn't match, missing date, etc.). Ballot curing rules and timelines vary dramatically across states, and sometimes by counties within states.
    - Organizations should identify supporters in localities with ballot-curing protections and connect them with organizations that are doing ballot curing. Let them know they could be contacted on a short timeline, including same-day volunteer requests.

Educate the Public About How Elections Work

Providing clear, basic voting information from trusted sources helps reduce confusion, address voter concerns, and instill confidence that our election process works. By encouraging community members to rely on official communications rather than rumors or speculation, trusted organizations can effectively counter misinformation and inoculate against both existing and future disinformation.

Resources

- How Elections Work: Learn what happens before the election, during the voting period, and after the election.

Publicize the Election Protection Hotline

Ensure community members are aware of the 866-OUR-VOTE Election Protection Hotline so they know where to turn should they encounter problems or have any questions while voting. Individuals can call or text the hotline to report a voting issue or connect with trained volunteers. Include the hotline number in voter guides, email and SMS programs, and social media content.

Election Protection Hotline Information

- **English: 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683)**
- **Spanish: 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (1-888-839-8682)**
- **Asian languages: 1-888-API-VOTE (1-888-274-8683)**
- **Arabic: 1-844-YALLA-US (1-844-925-5287)**
- **Text: 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683)**
- **Email: hotline@866ourvote.org**

Resources

- Election Protection: Toolkit Materials

Encourage Supporters to Follow Best Practices at Polling Places

Prepare community members for a positive voting experience by reminding them to remain patient, to follow any instructions from an election official or poll worker, and to treat their fellow voters with respect. Remind community members that if they witness any voter intimidation or have other concerns, they should reach out to the Election Protection Hotline immediately.

Key Protections

- **If polls close while you're in line, you have the legal right to stay and vote.**
- **If your name isn't on the voter list, ask for a provisional ballot – don't leave.**
- **If voting machines malfunction, request a paper ballot.**
- **If you make a mistake on your ballot, ask for a new one.**
- **Your vote is private. No one has the right to see how you vote or pressure you inside the polling place.**
- **Voter intimidation is illegal.**

Resources

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): Know Your Rights: Voting Rights
- National Conference of State Legislatures: Electioneering Prohibitions Near Polling Places

Help Supporters Identify and Resist Misinformation

Provide information and resources that help supporters evaluate election information before sharing it online.

Tips:

- Only repost messages directly from state or local election offices to avoid partisanship or misinformation.
- Use FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, Snopes, or the Brennan Center's election rumor tracker to debunk election rumors.
- Use the SIFT framework to verify any claim about voting procedures or election results.
  - Stop.
  - Investigate the source.
  - Find better coverage.
  - Trace information to its original context.

Respond to Interference

In the case of external interference in the election, nonprofits should follow core principles to ensure free and fair elections:

- **Amplify Verified Facts Only.** Only share updates from official state and election officials. Do not post unverified statements, rumors, or other posts regarding ballot counts or system errors.
- **Commit to Strict Nonviolence.** Center all messaging on peaceful, unified community resilience and respect for the legal administration process.
- **Call for Accountability to Ensure Votes are Counted.** It may be necessary to demonstrate unity in the call for election integrity by echoing the call for election officials to carry out legal election processes to count every vote. This is why it's important for leaders to organize and communicate with one another ahead of time: so they can quickly align messaging in the moment.

Resources

- Princeton University: Elevating Community Safety and De-Escalation Approaches
- Harnessing Our Power to End Political Violence



Section 6:

Tips and Scripts for Voter Engagement

Organizational staff or volunteer voter engagement sample email

Sample Email

	Content Outline
Subject Line Register to Vote for the Upcoming Election **Email Draft** Dear [Name], We at [Organization Name] are asking all our staff, board members, and volunteers who are eligible to make sure you are registered to vote. You are important to us and our community, and we want to make sure that your voice is heard in the upcoming (and future) elections.	**Ask:** Include an ask, goal and a date or timeframe.
If you're already registered, now is the time to make sure your official voter registration information is up to date at your current address. Our goal is to have 100% of eligible staff, board, and volunteers registered by the week of National Voter Registration Day on [Insert Date]. Will you help us reach that goal? When we ask elected officials to support our issues and funding for services like ours, having our staff, board, and volunteers be registered voters makes our voice that much stronger. [Insert org. specific or election-specific information].	**Why:** Note importance to your organization and community.
Option 1: Direct [Employee Name] will be coming around the office with registration forms asking you if you need to register or update your registration [Insert timeframe]. They can help you fill it out and return it. **Option 2: Indirect** You can learn more about registering and voting using [Organization's registration tool of choice].	**How:** Highlight registration activity or how to get registered.
We appreciate your service to [Organization Name]. Thank you for being a registered voter! Sincerely, [Insert Sender]	Thank you.



Don't forget your staff, board, and volunteers

Encourage everyone to vote

In our zeal to register people to vote in our offices and at events, it's easy to overlook those closest to us: our staff, board members, and volunteers. Their voices deserve to be heard at the ballot box, too. Intentionally reach out to them to make sure they're registered and invite them to the nonpartisan voter education events you host, such as candidate forums or sessions explaining ballot measures. Also provide them with information about how, when, and where to vote, and encourage them to vote with a reminder that they are important to you. Even a small nonprofit can have a mighty impact on voter turnout by leveraging the power of our most natural, closest connections.

Give paid time off to vote

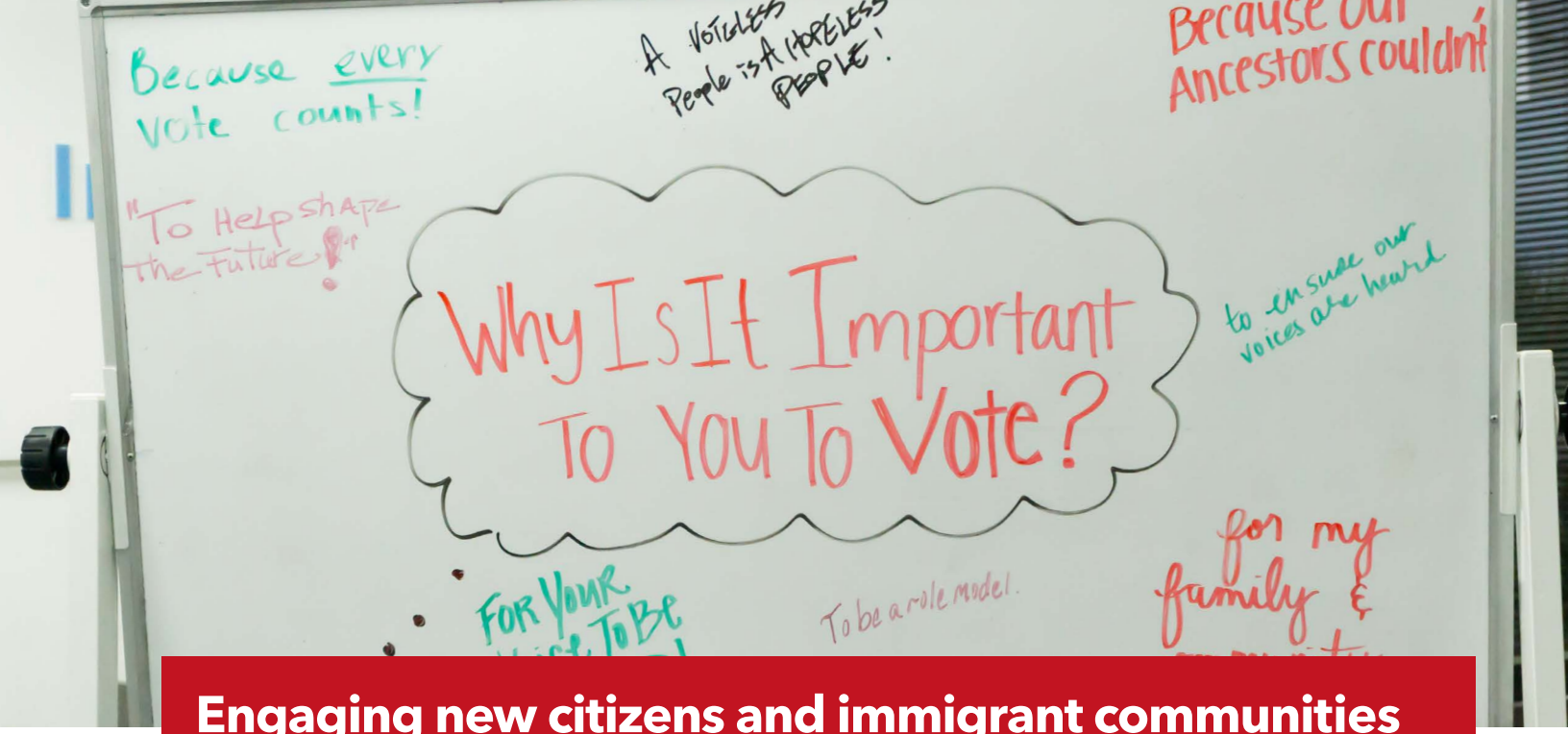
Inability to take time off to vote (or not being aware of time off to vote policies) can be a barrier for potential voters. While nearly half of states require employers to offer paid time off to vote, the rest do not. Offering unpaid time off to vote can also help, but makes employees choose between voting and their paycheck.

Nonprofits can make a difference by leading with policies that ensure all employees have access to the ballot box. Make sure each employee is aware of your policy for time off to vote in addition to publicizing election deadlines, helping voters make a plan, and encouraging folks to vote.

The standard elements of any time-off-to-vote policy include:

- A statement of support for active and engaged citizenship;
- The number of hours granted, usually two hours with pay;
- Time off granted conditioned on the employee not having time to vote before or after work on Election Day, not able to use or access an absentee/ mail ballot, or not able to vote early; and
- A requirement that the employee notify their supervisor before Election Day.

See sample policies and state requirements for time off to vote at nonprofitvote.org/nonprofit-staff-vote/.



Engaging new citizens and immigrant communities

Thriving communities of first- and second- generation immigrants exist across the country, building robust networks of mutual support and honoring their shared cultures. Although some of these residents may be ineligible to vote, their American-born and/or naturalized family members do indeed have the right. Yet, voter participation gaps suggest voters from immigrant communities are turning out to vote at rates lower than their non-immigrant counterparts. Voter eligibility of immigrants in the United States grew from 12% in 2000 to 23% in 2020. One in ten eligible voters today is an immigrant, and their U.S.-born children and families make these communities an even bigger segment of the electorate. As these communities grow, so should their representation.

Barriers and strategies

Every community is different, but nonprofits working with new citizens and recent immigrants see the following barriers and strategies as key to addressing voter participation.

Lack of visibility

Barrier: Many immigrants rarely see elected officials or people in positions of power who share their countries of origin, languages, or cultural traditions. They may not see their networks as a source of political power, and candidates and policymakers may overlook immigrant communities and the issues that matter most to them.

Strategies: Emphasize community power instead of messages about individual rights or duties. Integrate voting into cultural events to strengthen pride and sense of unity in their identity. Be visible yourself as a role model of individual empowerment and cultural pride and representation.

If you're not a member of the community but still want to engage these communities you can start by attending events and building relationships.

Language barriers

Barrier: As of 2018, just over half of immigrants aged 5 or older were proficient English speakers. For non-English speakers, especially senior citizens, in-language assistance is the only way to ensure the voter registration process is completed.

Strategies: Voters who prefer to read or communicate in languages other than English benefit from translated resources and information. When providing in-language or bilingual assistance to voters, ensure that materials are translated accurately, reflect the true meaning you're attempting to convey, and will resonate with speakers of that language. Whenever possible, have your text reviewed by a native speaker who understands the context of the message. Consider using simple, universally understood graphics to emphasize your meaning.

Unfamiliarity or distrust in the process

Barrier: For immigrants and families whose country of origin does not have a cultural history of voting and democracy, the voting process can seem complicated and meaningless. These voters may have concerns about corruption or extremism. They may also be skeptical of candidates or campaigns that drop in to win over their vote, but do not listen to their concerns or work to improve conditions for their community.

Strategies: Provide clear and unbiased information for voters without emphasizing a particular candidate or issue. Invite elected officials or candidates to talk about what they are doing and how they would support your community so people can see how voting would improve their own lives.

Trust and patience are the starting point for conversations about the importance of voting and the steps to cast a ballot. Be prepared to walk voters through each step of the process, from voter registration to casting a ballot. For some potential voters you will encounter, becoming a citizen is the first step they need to take on that journey.

Ineligibility to vote

It is impossible to tell if an adult is eligible to vote just by looking at them, so don't hesitate to offer voter registration and education opportunities to everyone who walks through your doors. Still engage with people who may not be eligible to vote, including non-citizens and their children. Even if individuals cannot vote themselves, they can still be involved in the civic process by supporting and encouraging others to vote.



Engaging potential voters in rural areas and small towns

Rural areas and small towns hold some of the nation's closest elections, but they are frequently overlooked by major parties. In many of these communities, food accessibility is scarce, healthcare access is limited, and public transportation is nonexistent. Yet neighbors, nonprofits, and local leaders work together to build vibrant communities that are vital to our democracy. Every community, regardless of size, deserves adequate representation. Residents are more likely to know their local elected officials and their individual vote can have more power. In local races, a handful of votes may be enough to change the outcome of an election. And yet, most small communities continue to have lower participation rates in local elections than in federal elections.

Engaging potential voters in rural areas and small town communities may look different from how to engage people in cities or suburban areas. Here are a few strategies from nonprofits in rural areas and small towns:

Make space for one-on-one conversations

In rural areas and small towns, a one-on-one conversation is an effective way to engage and educate people. Making space to ask how people are doing can help meet more holistic needs and connect them to other resources.

Use physical materials to distribute information

Internet access is often harder to access in rural areas. Having printed voter registration forms and flyers that educate voters on the processes and candidates are a reliable way to engage voters.

Read about how Community Partnership Family Resource Center reaches rural communities through trusted relationships at https://www.nonprofitvote.org/field-program/.

Host a meet and greet with local candidates and officials

Candidates and local officials in your small town/rural area might be neighbors you already know and work with. Host a meet and greet with local candidates" to be: When people know their candidates, voting is more personal.

Utilize the trust in the community

Organize your voter engagement around local events. Try partnering with local businesses or libraries to help increase awareness about the approaching elections because people are already going there, linking voting to something safe and familiar.



Engaging potential voters with disabilities

A disability includes any condition that significantly impacts a person's life activities. This can include matters of mobility, cognition, hearing, and/or vision. Any of these can impact the ability to vote in unique ways. If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities who have the same demographic characteristics, there would be about 1.75 million more voters. The landmark Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires states and local governments to make voting more accessible to ensure that people with disabilities have a full and equal opportunity to vote in all elections. The ADA covers all parts of voting, from voter registration to selecting a location for polling places to actually voting, whether on election day or during an early or absentee voting process. Since then, other laws such as the Help Americans Vote Act of 2002 have continued these efforts. Despite this, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to voting. In 2022, voters with disabilities were three times more likely to experience some type of difficulty in voting than people without disabilities.

Strategies for making voter engagement activities more accessible:

Use multiple formats in different mediums

Make any needed adjustments for the physical and digital space in which voter registration is done. This may mean providing information in multiple formats in various visual, auditory, and tactile mediums. For visual information and forms, you may need to provide both paper printouts and digital devices so screen readers can be utilized.

- Hosting a webinar on voting information? Be sure to turn on captioning.
- Posting an image to social media? Be sure to use the "alt tag" features.
- Using the web? Use free online tools to simplify language or check for color contrast to ensure readability.



Visualizing and walking through the steps to vote

One way to work with people with disabilities is in preparing to vote, from making sure voter information is clear and understandable to addressing potential concerns, such as: How will the voter get to the polling place? If driving, will there be accessible parking? Will the pathways to the entrance be accessible and clearly marked? How will the doors open?

- For first-time voters or if a polling place has changed, visiting the site together in advance can help to give the person a feel for the location and opportunity to identify any areas of concern.
- Any issues can be shared with the local county election office, which can be an ally in making sure accessibility requirements for polling places are met. Frame it as, "We want to help you make sure everyone can vote."
- Try reaching out to the local election office to receive a demonstration to give people with disabilities experience with the actual voting machine that will be used.

By better understanding the full range of possible disabilities and appropriate accommodations, nonprofit staff can help address some of the barriers to voter registration and education, while maintaining dignity and independence for people with disabilities.



Voting and homelessness

People experiencing homelessness or who are otherwise in transition face special challenges when registering to vote. Remember, the best source of information about these issues is your state or county election officials.

Can someone who is homeless register and vote?

Yes. Persons experiencing homelessness can register and vote in all 50 states.

What should this person list as his or her home address?

It is recommended homeless registrants list a shelter address as their voting address where they could receive mail. Alternatively, homeless registrants may denote a street corner or a park as their residence, in lieu of a traditional home address. The federal voter registration form and many state forms provide a space for this purpose.

Does the registrant have to have lived at this location for any particular length of time?

Most states have some duration of residency requirements for voter registration – for example, having resided for 30 days or more before the Election Day in the state or county. Contact your local elections officials to find out what the rules are in your state.

Where can I find more information on registration and voting for the homeless?

For further information about registration and voting The National Coalition for the Homeless provides extensive information in their You Don't Need a Home to Vote campaign. The National Alliance to End Homelessness has a toolkit that may also be helpful.



Engaging young voters

Younger voters, especially those aged 18-29, have lower voter participation rates compared with older voters due to a variety of factors. According to research by CIRCLE and Ideas42, young people are often unfamiliar with the process of registering and voting. They may misunderstand key voting rules, such as the need to update their voter registration whenever they move or how to locate their polling place. Justice-involved youth may believe they lost their right to vote due to a misdemeanor charge (only felony convictions can impact voting rights) and students may be unsure whether they can vote in their home or school state. There are actions your organization can take to help young people feel identified with voting and empowered to participate.

Make the Process Clear: Not all young people will locate key information on an official website – or may not even know there is such a website where they can find that information. Whether printed or digitally, write out dates of various elections, the opening hours of polling places, and what ID they need to bring, if any.

Help Navigate the Barriers: Young voters may need to rearrange their work or school schedule to make it to the polls, or may need help with transportation. Help them set a concrete plan around when they will vote, how they will get there, and with whom they will go to make their participation more likely.

Host Youth-Friendly Events and Workshops: Organize events, workshops, and seminars tailored to young people, focusing on issues that resonate with them. As often as possible, include young people in planning and hosting the event.

Encourage Peer-to-Peer Outreach: Empower young people to become ambassadors for voter registration and civic engagement within their communities. This is a form of relational organizing, and it is one of the most effective ways to boost turnout.

Publicize Paid Poll Worker Opportunities: In addition to making some money, young people can get an in-depth experience with the election process and contribute to a more welcoming environment for other youth voters.

Additional resources:

Campus Vote Project

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge



Engaging formerly incarcerated voters

For justice system-involved individuals, the rules and processes around voting may be another difficult element of transitioning back into the community. Returning citizens may be unsure of whether their voting rights have been or can be restored, they may lack the ID or information about the process of re-registering to vote, and they may feel that their voice does not matter in elections. For these voters and their families, assistance with voting can help them feel more integrated within their community.

Voting rights are taken away in some states after a felony conviction. **Citizens serving time for misdemeanor convictions or detained awaiting trial or conviction still have the right to vote.** Jail-based voting varies across states and localities, so reach out to your local elections office with questions.

What to know about voting after a felony conviction:

1. In D.C., Maine, and Vermont, people convicted of felonies never lose their right to vote.
2. In 38 states where a felony conviction results in the loss of voting rights, those rights may be automatically restored upon a person's release from incarceration (in 23 states) or once their sentence ends, including parole or probation and potentially until any fines, fees, or restitution are paid (in 15 states).
3. In the other 10 states where voting rights are lost, citizens may need to undergo a waiting period or a special process to restore their voting rights. Some types of convictions may result in the loss of voting rights indefinitely. Check the NCSL website for additional information.

Even in states where voting rights are automatically restored, **returning citizens must update their voter registration with their current address.** This includes voters who never lost the right to vote but moved after a period of incarceration or detention.



Engaging LGBTQ+ voters

Having an accurate ID is crucial to voting in the United States. If someone's ID does not match the ID checker's idea of the gender associated with their name or gender marker, it can threaten the voter's access to their right to vote. This process can put up a barrier for many transgender and nonbinary people accessing the ID they need to register and vote safely.

For transgender and nonbinary people whose ID doesn't match their name and gender, voter ID laws can make the experience of casting a ballot invalidating and intimidating.

Our partners at VoteRiders have gathered important information for voter IDs, including a list of ID laws by state.

Step by Step

Trans and nonbinary voters: follow the steps specified for each state to update your ID and voter registration. It is an administrative process so it's going to take some time and differ from state to state. It's important to start the process as soon as you're ready so that you can vote in the next election.

Update Your ID

The ID you need (or don't need!) to vote depends on where you live. Your state also determines the process for changing your name and updating the gender marker on your driver's license, state ID, or birth certificate.

Contact VoteRiders if you have questions or need help. They could help with documents you need, cover costs, and even provide a free ride to the DMV. If you have questions or need free help getting ID, call or text the VoteRiders Helpline at 866-432-8683.

Learn about more specific state laws from VoteRiders at Voteriders.org/pride.



Additional resources

General Resources:

[Nonprofit VOTE](#) – Get webinars, factsheets, and support for nonpartisan voter engagement.

[National Council of Nonprofits](#) – Learn more about nonpartisan ways nonprofits can and do promote voting and community engagement, how to take the 501(h) election, and the many benefits of doing so.

[Bolder Advocacy/Alliance for Justice](#) – Find answers to questions about nonpartisanship through their library of factsheets or by contacting their technical assistance team.

[National Conference of State Legislatures](#) – Learn even more about election issues, including 50-state surveys on state laws, legislation databases, podcasts, and webinars.

Nonpartisan Voter Information (National):

[Vote.gov](#): National governmental website for the most direct access to accurate voter registration and election information.

[Vote411](#): Provided by League of Women Voters, a decades old organization providing nonpartisan voter information.

[BallotReady](#): See what is on your ballot ahead of election time.

National Civic Holidays:

[Civic Holidays](#)

[National Voter Registration Day](#)

[Election Hero Day](#)

[National Voter Education Week](#)

[Vote Early Day](#)