

Strategies FOR Mobilizing Voters

A Toolkit for Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations



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Strengthening your voter engagement efforts

CEO Susan Dreyfus Calls Network to Commit to Voter Mobilization Among Communities and Staff

Since the founding of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities over a century ago, we have always been a network committed to building strong families and communities, and we have always understood that, as a sector, we are more than great providers of programs and services—we are also builders and protectors of a free, just, and civil society. Ensuring that all people in our organizations and communities who are eligible can cast their ballots this year is one way we demonstrate our distinction.

To support you, the Alliance, in partnership with Nonprofit VOTE, has created this handbook on civic engagement and voter education, registration, and mobilization, featuring the inspirational stories of our members. We hope that you use this guide to kickstart or strengthen your own voter engagement efforts in your respective communities.

You will read stories from Alliance members that have:

- » Made voting an extension of their missions, leading voter registration drives year-round, not just leading up to election day
- » Galvanized staff to register themselves, as well as their communities
- » Confronted and overcame communal apathy stemming from intergenerational poverty and systemic neglect
- » Inspired people to act with educational, relatable messaging on issues that mattered to the community

The commitment you make to civic engagement and voter mobilization will help bring more people into active participation in their communities for years to come. Our network is in a great position to rise above the partisan divides by doing our part to ensure people are registered to vote, providing them with opportunities to be educated on issues that impact everyday lives and, as you can, helping people vote in November.

We look forward to hearing your stories of how you invite and engage your staff and community in civic engagement and exercising their right to vote in the year ahead!

Using this guide

This guide is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on nonpartisanship, providing details on what nonprofits like yours can do around elections and advocacy. The second section shares information your organization may need to register, educate, and mobilize potential voters. Section three dives deeper into why this work is important and how engaging voters and remaining nonpartisan can strengthen communities and develop civic leaders.

The last section is an appendix and workbook that will help you plan and implement the activities outlined in the first three sections. Throughout the guide there are links to additional resources that you may need during your planning process. State and local laws may apply to voter registration, lobbying, or funding for nonprofits, and you should work with your state or local elections board to ensure that you are following all relevant laws. More information about your state can be found at Nonprofit VOTE's [*Voting in Your State*](#) webpage.



Reasons to engage

Voter engagement efforts build stronger nonprofits. Nonprofits whose communities vote have greater access to elected officials, increased clout on issues, and are better positioned to advance their mission.

Nonprofits reach people missed by political campaigns, contributing to more active citizenship and an electorate that more fully represents the communities we serve. We create a more representative electorate. Members of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities are uniquely positioned to reach individuals across the country who are younger, lower-income, and more diverse than the general public—groups that historically vote at lower rates. Because of our trust, personal relationships and nonpartisan approach, the individuals we serve, and those who serve us, are more likely to respond to our appeals to vote.

Voter engagement raises our profile. Candidates and campaigns seek out and respond to communities with higher voter registration and turnout rates and to organizations that care about voting. While campaigning, they're more likely to come to our neighborhoods, attend our events, respond to our questions, and listen to our concerns.

Voter engagement boosts our advocacy. Voter engagement gets us a seat at the table and enhances our ongoing advocacy efforts. When our staff and communities participate, we have more access to decision makers, increased clout for our organization, and a greater chance to have our issues addressed. Voter engagement makes us relevant during and after elections.

We are effective. Nonprofit VOTE's [*2018 evaluation*](#) showed that voters contacted in person by nonprofits while receiving services (provided by the nonprofit) voted at higher rates than other registered voters in their state across all demographics. Nonprofits had the biggest impact on turnout among least-likely voters—whom campaigns typically disregard based on low “voter propensity scores” assigned before the election predicting the likelihood that they will vote.



SECTION 1: Staying Nonpartisan



The power of nonpartisanship

In 1954, Congress added a sentence to Department of the Treasury regulations requiring charities to remain nonpartisan in elections. They did it to protect charities from becoming vehicles for partisan political activity and to deter the risk of Congress eliminating the charitable deduction.

But the power of being nonpartisan is much more than this statute.

1. Nonpartisanship respects the diversity of political opinions among your staff, volunteers, and the people you serve.
2. It strengthens your ability to advocate across 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 and the IRS created 501(c)(4) social welfare advocacy organizations (and other partisan vehicles), which can do a certain amount of partisan political activity, but whose donors don't receive a tax deduction.
3. It makes us trusted messengers who can engage underserved populations that campaigns and candidates often miss. Our nonpartisan approach is one reason nonprofits have proven effective at reaching youth, new citizens, and new voters, and increasing voting rates across all demographics. (Also see Common Sense and Reaffirmation of 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Nonpartisanship by the National Council of Nonprofits).

What nonprofit staff can say about the election

Staff working for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations should be nonpartisan when representing their nonprofit onsite, at events, or during voter engagement activities. You cannot suggest which candidate to vote for or political party to support.

What is ok to talk about on a nonpartisan basis?

It's fine to provide information about the voting process like dates and deadlines, early voting hours, getting a mail ballot, or help registering to vote. You can let people know about a candidate forum or debate.

What if someone asks me who I support or who they should vote for?

Remind them that you must be nonpartisan.

Your options are:

- » Encourage the person to talk to a friend or family member they trust and share values with.
- » Direct the person to a sample ballot or nonpartisan voter guide if available.
- » Closer to the election, you can link them to online tools that let voters know what's on their ballot. Google "What's on (my state) ballot? Or use *Nonprofit VOTE's Voting In Your State: 50 State Guide.*

Can I say anything about specific candidates?

You can only answer simple facts like what party they are in, if they're an incumbent or challenger, or where they live. Don't 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 outside of the party websites. You could mention the names of the current nominees for president and their party but go no further. Do the same as you would with candidates and tell them to ask a friend or go to the political party official websites.

What if I'm asked about a ballot measure?

Ballot measures are about laws not candidates. You may discuss the pros and cons of a ballot measure unless it is a policy of your organization not to. You can also tell them that your organization doesn't have an official position on ballot questions.

Can I support candidates in my personal time?

Yes. You may support candidates when not "on the clock" working for your nonprofit.

Can I use social media to post or share information about the candidates?

This is not acceptable for the nonprofit's accounts. It's ok to say what you want on your personal accounts. (Chief executives and other staff who are viewed as spokespeople for their nonprofit may wish to be more careful.) Check with your communications staff to ensure you are following appropriate practices on your personal social media accounts.

What about talking to other staff about the elections?

It's normal and acceptable to exchange views on candidates and the election with other staff in casual conversations. But don't conduct political activities during work hours with staff like handing out literature or signing up other staff to support a candidate. Also, do not use professional email accounts to discuss political activity.

MEMBER STORY:

Children's Home and Aid in Chicago, Illinois

Over the course of an election year and two gubernatorial administrations -one Republican and one Democrat -Alliance member *Children's Home & Aid* secured several concrete legislative victories on behalf of the children of Illinois, highlighting the effectiveness of nonpartisan activism and commitment to higher principles, like child well-being and resilience. Working closely with the Republican Bruce Rauner administration and two leading Democratic state representatives in 2018, the organization's policy arm, The Ahlquist Center, helped develop *HB 4885*, a piece of legislation aimed at increasing the number of young children in the child welfare system who attend high-quality early care and education programs. Enacted into law in August 2018, the bill has already resulted in more children who experience abuse or neglect receiving early care and education services.

The Ahlquist Center also worked with the Rauner administration to pass PA 100-0818 in August 2018. They then worked the following year with the succeeding governor, Democrat J.B. Pritzker, to implement one of its main elements, the Youth Budget Commission, which built upon the Ahlquist Center's prior work of reimagining the state budget process, embodied in the *Fiscal Scan of Public Investments in Children and Youth ages 8-15*. Looking at the budget from a lens of positive youth outcomes, the commission will use the scan's methodology to annually track public funding that supports programs for youth and young adults and compare these investments to program outcomes. This scan represents the first time the state's budget is organized by goal rather than line item. It serves as an official tool to recommend policy and practice improvements to support positive outcomes for all youth in Illinois.

Children's Home & Aid shows how nonpartisan advocacy can create positive, concrete change for children at scale by staying committed to children and families and building principled arguments to support its policy prescriptions. The organization continues to stay focused on state budget-related advocacy, including creating a 26-member policy action team that mobilizes staff to reach out to elected officials. Influencing public policy has been core to the organization since its founding. Through the Ahlquist Center and its nonpartisan activism, Children's Home & Aid continues to fight for its vision of children, youth, and families thriving in strong communities across Illinois.

Children's Home & Aid is a leading child and family service organization in Illinois, serving nearly 40,000 children and families each year in over 60 counties. It partners with at-risk children, youth, and families to create hope, opportunity, and bright futures. Since 1883, Children's Home & Aid has been a leader in responding to the changing needs of children and families in Illinois. This work continues today through the agency's Ahlquist Center for Policy, Practice & Innovation.

SECTION 2: Voter Engagement Strategies



Start with staff

TIMING: When to do it.

National Voter Registration Day takes place in advance of states' voter registration deadlines for the fall elections. You may also prefer to do it at a time when more volunteers are available or around a major staff event.

STAFFING: Who coordinates and who does the voter registration.

Every voter registration drive needs a coordinator or staff team to run the activity. It could be a program or policy staff person, or someone who organizes staff activities. Larger nonprofits may want to make department heads responsible to make sure staff register, like issuing a reminder during a weekly staff meeting or call.



KICKOFF: Inform staff about the drive and encourage them to participate.

A drive should start with an email to all staff from the chief executive or member of the senior staff two to three weeks before the drive begins. All staff need to know this is an important commitment of the organization.

SUGGESTED TACTICS: Ideas to get started.

- » Door knock – or “cube knock” – throughout your office. Door knocking is a campaign staple. Have a few volunteers divide and conquer or have one person do it. Find someone who is passionate about voting and can persuade their colleagues.
- » Set up a table or booth for a week during office hours in an area that is convenient for staff and volunteers. Provide treats or giveaways to make the booth more inviting.
- » Some nonprofits can register staff to vote in a regular staff meeting. Be prepared with forms and information about voting in your state.

- » Talk to staff, volunteers, and community members over webinars or video conferences about how they can get involved in the election! Share a link to canivote.org so they can look up their election information.
- » Throw a party! Don't make it for a specific political party, but offer pizza or cake to create an inviting space for colleagues to consider registering to vote.
- » Create a little competition between departments. Find out which team can get to 100% of eligible staff registered first or the most total registrations.
- » Voter registration is a perfect activity to integrate into volunteer orientation to show your organization's commitment to civic participation and active citizenship.
- » Create a photo challenge among staff members showing how they are engaging as voters. Maybe show how they signed their voter registration form or submitted their form online.
- » Host a phone bank where a staff member can call others to share information about the upcoming election.

PROMOTION: Create visibility for the drive.

- » Provide email and social media reminders.
- » Place promotional posters in high-traffic areas.
- » Take pictures and post them in your internal communications.
- » Utilize well-known holidays to build hype, such as National Voter Registration Day.

RECOGNITION: Give props to those who led the effort.

Hand out awards or give recognition to coordinators and registrars in a staff meeting or newsletter. A personal note of thanks is always welcome!

MEMBER STORY:

SaintA in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Leading up to the 2018 midterm elections, Alliance member SaintA exerted significant effort to educate and mobilize staff around voting. Acknowledging they did not have the capacity to extend these efforts to the wider community, they proudly doubled down on internal efforts, despite being faced with budget and time constraints. Under the leadership of a few staff organizing these efforts in their “spare time” at work, the organization leveraged the resources and insight they already had—the understanding that voting is an extension of the organization’s mission.

SaintA developed a short video with pictures of their students and families, along with the message, “this is why we vote.” This was an effort to connect policies and voting with lives they serve every day. In digital flyers and staff meetings, they emphasized how voting keeps their organization relevant during and after elections and helps them participate in critical public policy discussions and weigh in on issues that matter for their families and communities. They also highlighted to staff that voting is associated with better health outcomes, cohesive communities, and more effective advocacy—all values important to their community and organization.

SaintA also disseminated information on election dates and voter-registration processes. They helped staff create plans for when and where to vote. SaintA’s administration strongly encouraged staff to use the three hours of paid time off allotted to each employee if they were unable to get to the polls outside of the workday hours. They also printed educational handouts and flyers from Nonprofit VOTE for the breakroom and passed out stickers that read “I work at a nonprofit and I vote!” to boost enthusiasm.

SaintA also launched a “5-3-1 campaign,” which challenged staff ambassadors to ask five colleagues three questions:

1. Are you planning to vote?
2. Do you know where and when you will vote?
3. Are you registered, and if not, do you know how to get registered?



Based on these answers, the ambassadors provided additional voter information to their colleagues. This was an inexpensive yet impactful one-on-one opportunity for staff to connect with their colleagues about voting and share a sense of camaraderie.

SaintA promoted nonpartisan efforts. They diligently remained nonpartisan throughout their mobilization efforts and spelled out in their outreach material the parameters for nonprofits and voter engagement. It was important to SaintA that staff felt informed not only about their voting rights and opportunities but also about the nonpartisan role for nonprofits in this space.

SaintA followed up their voter education efforts with a staff survey the day after the 2018 midterm election. Five questions were emailed to all staff to collect feedback on the impact of SaintA's voter engagement efforts in the workplace and to learn what staff thought about expanding engagement efforts to include the families they serve.

With a total staff of about 340, there were 109 survey responses. The report was run 16 business days after it was released and provided the following insights:

- » 96% of participants responded “very likely” to vote in the next election.

For the question about whether SaintA should engage families and youth they serve:

- » 57% of responders said it was extremely important.
- » 33% of responders said it was very important, and
- » 7% of responders said it was somewhat important.



SaintA is taking this feedback into consideration as they continue to weave voter engagement into their mission. They plan to continue their voter education efforts and would like to expand them to include voter registration and broader engagement efforts to reach families and youth- but they started with staff.

SaintA's mission is to facilitate equity, learning, healing and wellness by restoring the connections that help children and families thrive. Always evolving, SaintA now advances foster care, education and mental health services for thousands of children, families and adults daily. SaintA is a national leader in trauma informed care in child welfare.

Voter registration and pledging

Voter registration is a common and important nonpartisan activity for nonprofits. Even in states where automatic voter registration is available, some eligible individuals will still need assistance registering for the first time or updating their registration. However, since so many people are already registered, consider adding a “Pledge to Vote” component to your plan or ask. Pledging to vote can increase the likelihood someone will actually turn out to vote¹ and it gives you a way to contact people with reminders during election season.

Options for nonprofits to conduct voter registration:

- » Table at your site, at events, or in the local community.
- » Register and pledge clients and constituents during services or other programs and activities.
- » Register staff, board, and volunteers.
- » Have youth or volunteers conduct voter registration/pledge drives in advance of elections.
- » Use communications to encourage people to register to vote.
- » Participate in National Voter Registration Day, a nationwide, nonpartisan day of action held annually on the fourth Tuesday of September.²
- » Share important election information over social media such as when the voter registration deadline is and how they can register.
- » Host an online pledge-to-vote drive.

¹ Costa M, Schaffner BF, Prevost A (2018) Walking the walk? Experiments on the effect of pledging to vote on youth turnout. *PLoS ONE* 13(5): e0197066. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197066>

² Visit www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org for more information

AmeriCorps Members and Voter Engagement

Like 501(c)(3) nonprofits, AmeriCorps members are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity while charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise representing AmeriCorps or Corporation for National and Community Services (CNCS). Members are also not allowed to conduct voter registration drives, conduct ballot measure advocacy, or lobby for proposed legislation. Members may not recruit, train, or manage others partaking in these activities.

How can AmeriCorps members be involved?

Conducting voter education, helping with candidate forums, and doing get out the vote are all acceptable under CNCS guidelines. Members may also take part in your organization's other voter engagement activities so long as they are doing so of their own initiative, not on AmeriCorps time, and not wearing the AmeriCorps logo.

Every voter registration drive needs a coordinator or staff team to run the activity. It could be a program or policy staff person, or someone who ordinarily organizes staff activities. For staff and volunteers doing voter registration, it helps to have someone who is naturally outgoing and is passionate about voting. Even if voter registration isn't a core component of your voter engagement plan, make sure you have some familiarity with it so you can assist the people you serve that are not yet registered.

Follow your state's voter registration laws and procedures. Voter registration differs in each state. Visit Nonprofit VOTE's official [50 State Guide to Voting in Your State](#) to review registration guidelines, download forms, or access online voter registration or registration look up tools. Another great resource is your local election office. It can help by providing training, guidelines, and forms for conducting voter registration drives.

Tips for active tabling

Staffing a table at your site or at an event is an effective strategy for engaging your clients and constituents in voter registration, pledging to vote, and other voter outreach activities.

- » Be proactive! Engage people and encourage them to approach the table. Stand up, get out from behind the table, and greet people. Instead of asking, "Are you registered?" ask "Is your registration up to date for your current address?" or "Have you voted since you last moved?"
- » Use large signage to attract attention. Banners, posters, balloons and other decorations can make your table inviting.
- » Use snacks or other freebies to encourage people to approach the table and talk to you.
- » When you're talking to somebody, start to put the pen and clipboard in their hand. You'll be surprised at how many people will automatically start filling it out.
- » Staff your table in the weeks leading up to the registration deadline, early voting period, or Election Day. For a November election, the best time to table is between August and October.

Voter education

New voters, or those new to the state or community, may have little knowledge about the voting process, but you can shed light on when, where, and how to vote. Reminders (ideally multiple!) from your nonprofit will set them up for greater success at the ballot box.

Sample activities

- » Use your communications, events, video displays, classes, or forums to:
- » Remind people of voter registration deadlines or how to register online.
- » Announce the dates of elections and early voting period.
- » If voters in your state are required to show ID at polling places, include a list of acceptable forms of ID.
- » Help people get information on early voting or find their polling place.
- » Partner with a high school or community college to provide voter education and registration.
- » Make a short video with interviews from constituents and staff on why they think voting is important. Engage your supporters in sharing the video message—especially young people.

Voters want to know in advance what's on their ballot. Nonpartisan ways to provide this information include distributing nonpartisan voter guides from a trusted partner or sample ballots from your state election office. If you need help determining whether a voter guide is considered nonpartisan, please reach out to the Alliance policy department, who can help.

Sample activities

- » Display or give out a sample ballot.
- » Provide a copy or link to a nonpartisan voter guide.
- » Hold a mock election for young people.

MEMBER STORY:

EMPath in Boston, Massachusetts

EMPath’s civic engagement and community empowerment efforts demonstrate that when people understand the voting process, they are more likely to engage now and in the future. For these reasons, EMPATH works closely with families and staff to inform them about the voting process. EMPATH strives to ensure residents feel empowered and understand how to make their voices heard.

EMPath’s Voices Advocacy Council (VAC) trains members on the legislative process and equips participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to advocate for themselves and their families. VAC members, in turn, spread this education and knowledge to their



neighbors, which fosters a true environment of co-creating with community. EMPATH co-creates and leverages the assets of their own community members to strengthen and empower those around them. VAC members visit EMPATH’s shelters to help people register to vote with their new address and connect new residents to local information.

Leading up to elections, EMPATH provides nonpartisan information on the voting process to families. They clear up confusion and prepare people for what to expect at the polls. They teach Know Your Rights sessions, which emphasize the right to ask for a translator if the ballot is not in your language, and they inform community members what “yes” and “no” stand for on ballot initiatives. This type of work is extremely important for first time voters and for community members whose first language is not English.

Regardless of voter eligibility, EMPATH emphasizes the democratic value of educating all community members on how voting works in order to build a more empowered community across the board. EMPATH’s civic engagement efforts are driven by the belief that voting is a critical part of elevating community voices to impact policies. For organizations like EMPATH with a commitment to high impact, an engaged community is an empowered community.

EMPATH is a Boston-based nonprofit that combats poverty through direct services, research, advocacy, and a global learning network.

MEMBER STORY:

Rockford Housing Authority in Rockford, Illinois

Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) demonstrates the transformational potential of human service organizations, as described in the report, *A National Imperative: Joining Forces to Strengthen Human Services in America*, by making civic engagement a year-round extension of the human services mission.



RHA conducts voter engagement efforts by doing outreach across their housing sites. They hold group information sessions and one-on-one discussions to learn from residents about their relationships with the voting process. These community conversations revealed several reasons why some citizens do not vote, such as feeling they are only targeted during election season and otherwise ignored.

“If someone feels discouraged by poverty or the difficult situation they are in, this may cause them to not be able to identify with the system. People who are struggling often do not think the system works for them or is built for them,” shared Odessa Walker, director of human services at RHA.

To combat these thoughts and empower the community, human services organizations like RHA keep civic engagement and voter activation at the forefront of conversations year round. RHA mobilizes community members

by demonstrating how elections relate to everyday life. They highlight themes that directly touch lives in the community, such as housing, health care, and education. When voting is a continual conversation, it is more likely to become a habit and helps connect everyday life to civic engagement. To that end, RHA led their own voter registration efforts, while also partnering with *The League of Women Voters*. In addition, RHA brought candidates to the community by hosting forums, where residents were able to engage with elected officials through thoughtful and intentional questions and conversations.

RHA not only provides public housing to thousands in Illinois, but they cultivate a sense of belonging in the community by promoting civic engagement and community connections all year long.

Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) partners with the community and residents to transform houses into homes while guiding families to self-sufficiency. RHA provides the city with 1,702 housing units and approximately 1,678 Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers.



Third party tools for voter education

BallotReady[®]

The Ballot Ready tool. Creates personalized, interactive ballots based on voting location to inform residents of the issues and candidates they'll be voting on.



The League of Women Voter's Vote 411 tool. Provides up-to-date information on polling locations and local ballots. Just enter location information and see everything relevant to that election.



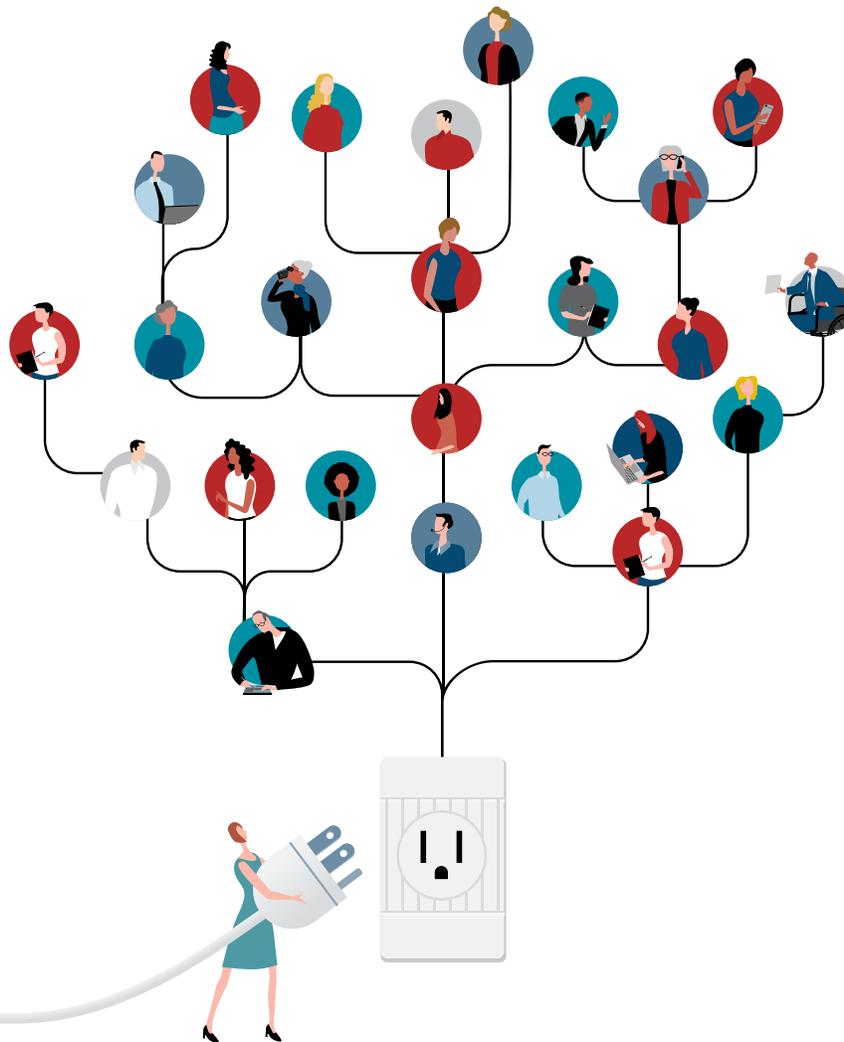
The Voting Information tool. Provides official voting information, such as polling place and ballot information, based on address in 17 languages. This mobile-responsive tool can be easily customized to an organization's brand and embedded on any website.

Using social media

The prohibition on nonprofits participating in partisan political 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 I use my personal account to support candidates?

Individuals have a right to express preferences for or against candidates. 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. It is suggested to include “thoughts are my own” or an equivalent statement in the biography of your personal social media accounts. You are encouraged to check with your communications department to determine best practices and internal policies for personal social media usage.



What about the Chief Executive?

The chief executive 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, they should exercise more restraint in what they say on the internet to avoid any appearance of partisanship.

What are guidelines for tagging, sharing, or retweeting?

Don't use organizational accounts to tag, re-tweet, or share posts from political campaigns or partisan organizations that have endorsed candidates. If you'd like to share educational information about upcoming elections, look for a news article or other neutral source that references all candidates' plans to address an issue.

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 it is educational in nature and clearly nonpartisan. If you're not sure, it is always safer to share content from a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, educational source, or public media outlet not affiliated with a partisan political campaign.

Make sure to note that elected officials typically have two social media accounts on each platform, one for government business and a second for their campaigns. If you do tag an elected official in a post, make sure to link to the government page. You can tell the difference in accounts by looking for their government email or website on their profile (as indicated by link to a .gov email address).

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 or posts that tag us?

While you can't control what other people post to your Facebook page or mention you in on Twitter, you can make a general disclaimer on your social media site that you're not responsible for opinions posted by people not under your employ. Create and enforce a policy for deleting partisan content or other types of posts (like unauthorized commercial activity).

Get-Out-The-Vote

Often abbreviated to GOTV, Get-Out-The-Vote efforts target eligible voters in the weeks leading up to an election. Political campaigns typically spend significant resources coordinating robust GOTV efforts to turn out likely voters in favor of their candidacy or ballot measure. However, since their resources aren't endless and their focus is on winning rather than equity, they are far less likely to contact "low propensity" voters—voters who, based on their voting history, aren't likely to turn out in the upcoming election. This can have a compounding effect because if those voters miss another election, their propensity score continues to drop, and they become even less likely to be contacted by a political campaign. Your nonprofit can help change that.

GOTV happens in the weeks directly before the election. At this time, your staff is busy, and capacity is stretched. **Here are 10 easy-to-implement tactics nonprofits can implement to encourage their communities to vote.**

For engaging staff:

- » Include personal messages in internal staff communications such as meetings, video conferences, or email with dates and voting information.
- » Have the chief executive send an email reminding staff of time-off-to-vote policies and their options for voting early or by mail.
- » Conduct a staff education activity on a ballot measure or the election's impact on your issue and the community you serve.
- » Circulate a sample ballot, nonpartisan voter guide, ballot lookup tool, or list of key races.

For engaging community members:

- » Put election reminders in communications. Two weeks out, one week out, and the day before.
- » Create a flyer or social graphics with basic voting information. Hand out flyers at the front desk and during staff-client interactions or share social graphics through online platforms.
- » Recruit youth to lead activities. People respond to young people asking them to vote.
- » In the final week, make announcements at events and meetings, on message boards, and with signage to make the election visible. Put up posters and share social graphics for both staff and community members.
- » Organize a phone bank to contact people you've registered or have numbers for. If people have a list, they can phone bank on their own time.
- » Devote the day before Election Day to asking everyone when and where they plan to vote. Have a phone number or website to go to for help.

Rides to the polls

For nonprofits of many varieties, providing rides to polling places will be a must on Election Day. For some groups, providing rides will be their only activity. Bringing people directly to the polls is the best way to ensure that they vote.

Create a plan.

- » How many people can you involve? How many staff? How many volunteers?
- » Where do you want to focus?
- » What resources are available?

Form partnerships.

- » What other groups can you work with?
- » Who has done this before?

Start thinking about drivers and vehicles as soon as possible. Election Day will come sooner than you think, and it is better to have more people than you can use than to not have enough. Recruit volunteers who will remain nonpartisan and whose vehicles will not have political bumper stickers.

When reminding people to vote, ask if they need a ride to the polls. Ideally you have a schedule, designated pickup location, efficient routes, and knowledgeable drivers lined up several days before the election. Look to have a couple of drivers who are available for last minute calls or problems. These drivers could be shared with other organizations in the area.

Make sure that drivers are licensed and insured, and that vehicles have up-to-date registration and inspections, as required by state law. For voters that need accommodations with transport and at their polling place due to disability or mobility issues, reach out to your local disability advocacy organization. Visit NDRN.org to locate a Protection & Advocacy System or Client Assistance Program near you.

B

Ballot measures

Ballot measures ask voters to vote on laws, bonding issues, or constitutional amendments. About half of all states allow ballot questions or propositions to be put before the voters either by voter petition or legislative action. Ballot measure advocacy is not considered a partisan activity; however, it is considered direct lobbying.

What are common activities for nonprofits on ballot measures?

Your organization can engage in a range of activities related to ballot measures such as making an endorsement, communicating your position to the public, organizing volunteers to work on passage or defeat of an initiative, 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.

Are there any spending limits for ballot measure advocacy?

There are no limits on spending on ballot measures, beyond the limits on lobbying. 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 or an active partner. Contact your state's campaign finance office for more information.

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

Your spending limits depend on which test your nonprofit chooses to measure lobbying. If your nonprofit has elected to measure its lobbying under the *501(h) expenditure test*, you will have clearer guidance and can do more advocacy. Under this test, you can spend as much as 20% of your annual budget on lobbying, including influencing ballot questions or legislation. Filing the 501(h) form is generally recommended for nonprofits that do any significant amount of lobbying and advocacy.

If your 501(c)(3) has not filed the 501(h) form, your lobbying falls under the “insubstantial part test.” In this case, you may only spend an “insubstantial” amount of money on lobbying efforts. “Insubstantial” is generally assumed to be 3-5% of annual spending.

MEMBER STORY:

Bridge Meadows in Portland, Oregon

Every day, *Bridge Meadows* witnesses the importance of housing stability. Bridge Meadows identifies housing as the foundation for health and well-being for all generations. As an organization that creates intentional intergenerational communities, they found it of great importance to elevate the voices of stakeholders to promote more funding for affordable housing across Oregon.

Bridge Meadows formally endorsed and put their name on two ballot measures related to affordable housing. These two measures were endorsed by an unprecedented 500+ organizations, businesses, elected officials, and community leaders united in the fight for affordable housing. The measures would ensure the creation of more affordable housing options for thousands of people across Oregon. They also would allow local governments to partner with private and nonprofit partners to build more affordable housing using bonds as a financing tool.

Bridge Meadows' endorsement of these two affordable housing ballot measures was an actionable way to align their housing services and mission with policies that influence everyday life. They consistently strive to create opportunities that empower and engage their multi-generational living communities in the fight for fair and stable housing.

Bridge Meadows is an intentional intergenerational living community — where youth formerly in foster care, their adoptive parents, and elders find a true home built with love and a shared vision of a better tomorrow.

MEMBER STORY:

Pressley Ridge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Pressley Ridge is calling for a systemic shift in how Pittsburgh’s Allegheny County cares for kids. Knowing that 90% of brain development happens before the age of five, and that one-in-six children in Allegheny County goes hungry, Pressley Ridge joined ten organizations in forming the steering committee, “Our Kids. Our Commitment.” This committee, united by the goal of improving the well-being of children in Allegheny County, works with community partners, neighbors, government, and community-based organizations to promote health and well-being for children. The committee’s foundation is a shared belief that each child deserves access to proven, successful programming in early learning, after school, and nutrition.



Pressley Ridge’s first effort with “Our Kids. Our Commitment.” was a ballot initiative. Using the voter referendum process, grassroots efforts, and door knocking, the committee obtained more than 64,000 signatures to get a question on the ballot that would establish the Allegheny County Children’s Fund. If enough people voted “yes,” the proposed fund would support early learning, after school programs, and nutritious meals through a \$0.25 per mile increase in the local real estate tax. This tax increase, which broke down to be \$30 per year for each county homeowner, would generate more than \$18 million per year for children’s programs. The committee spearheaded thousands of community conversations about the needs of children and ways to invest and promote their prosperity. Ultimately, the ballot lost on election day Nov. 6, 2019 by a small margin of approximately 10,000 votes. The Children’s Fund was not established, yet Pressley Ridge and “Our Kids. Our Commitment.” continue to develop potential sustainable funding for children. The ballot initiative fortified the partnerships within the committee and raised an urgent conversation on early childhood well-being that has not since gone away in Allegheny.

Pressley Ridge highlighted the key value of community education and engagement when putting forth a ballot measure initiative. They, along with other committee members, still host community coffee conversations, where they set up in coffee shops with “Our Kids. Our Commitment.” materials to chat with neighbors about the committee’s initiatives to protect and promote children’s well-being. These community conversations educated people about the needs and possibilities for children in the community. The committee also heard from neighbors about what they identify to be the needs of their own children. Furthermore, community members did a significant amount of the legwork to get the proposal on the ballot and inform voters of the measure. This was grassroots community organizing that took the shape of door knocking and phone banking, with all the requisite schwag, like t-shirts, doorhangers, and lawn signs.



Pressley Ridge’s involvement with other organizations in the steering committee and their ongoing conversations with the public exemplifies key tenets of the Alliance’s report, *A National Imperative: Joining Forces to Strengthen Human Services in America*, particularly where it calls for organizations to adopt strategic partnership approaches. Pressley Ridge would not have applied for monies made available from the ballot initiative because their organizational programming does not directly fit the criteria. However, the Pressley Ridge mission lies in the well-being of children and families in the community, and in order to achieve that, it means partnering together and innovating.

Pressley Ridge’s innovative programming helps to rebuild communities and families who are facing difficult challenges and complex situations. From mental health and foster care services to residential treatment facilities and education for children with special needs, including autism and deafness, Pressley Ridge empowers 7,300 kids and families each year with the ability and confidence to succeed.

SECTION 3: Creating Community Leaders



Creating community leaders

This section is pulled from the *2018 Engaging New Voters Report* produced by Nonprofit VOTE. According to the report, voters contacted by nonprofits are twice as likely to be nonwhite, under 25, and have less than \$30,000 in household income. These voters were also more likely to vote—11 percentage points more likely. Asian, Latino, and Black voters contacted by nonprofits showed up 13-16 percentage points higher than those who weren't; those under 25 turned out 20 percentage points higher. You can read the full report on the Nonprofit VOTE website.³

Motivation

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ Read the 2018 Engaging New Voters Report here: www.nonprofitvote.org/engaging_new_voters-2/

LOOKING BEYOND OUR NETWORK, PARTNER STORY:

People Serving People in Minneapolis, Minnesota

People Serving People, a family-focused homeless shelter, sees civic engagement as an equalizing opportunity for staff and shelter guests to work together towards the shared interest of systems change. A core team comprised of seven guests and nine staff from five different departments partnered together to build awareness and excitement around civic engagement through a variety of nonpartisan voter education and voter registration opportunities. The team, driven by shelter guests, strives to co-develop voter activation strategies that best suit community needs and interests.

The core team delegated responsibility of voter engagement initiatives into three areas:

1. voter education;
2. registration;
3. mobilization.

These efforts took the shape of informational resource fairs, registration and pledge drives, tabling on National Voter Registration Day, and providing practice and sample ballots for people to feel prepared for what to expect when voting. They also initiated a webpage with resources, message boards, and information blasts to provide staff and guests with education and engagement opportunities. The engagement and leadership of guests and residents are at the center of any programming at People Serving People.

“Our voter engagement work demonstrates to staff and community that our families have keen insight into system gaps and the solutions that can lead to preventing the experience of family homelessness,” shared Renal Ray, associate executive director at People Serving People.



On Election Day, the People Serving People team had specific plans in place derived directly from guest preferences. They created a civic engagement atmosphere leading up to elections with posters and resources throughout their buildings, as well as decorating the lobby entrance with red, white, and blue balloons. The team organized childcare for part of election day, provided vans to the polls as well as hourly escorts to accompany guests to the polls to vouch for residency at the shelter. They engaged youth who were too young to vote by providing activities, voting stickers to be colored in, and a kid's-play voting booth. People Serving People also hung an Election Day countdown in their lobby that was created by resident youth.

People Serving People's civic engagement efforts directly demonstrate Engaging All Voices – one of the Alliance's *Commitments for High Impact Organizations* – by placing residents and clients at the center of their decision making and goal setting. They have already seen the lasting impact of their co-created community activation strategy.

“Together, we are building the collective – personal and political – power of people experiencing homelessness” said Ray.

People Serving People is the largest and most comprehensive, family-focused homeless shelter in Minnesota. People Serving People helps children and families at-risk of or currently experiencing, homelessness, manage crisis situations and build a strong foundation for their long-term success.



Implementation

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

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

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

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

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

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

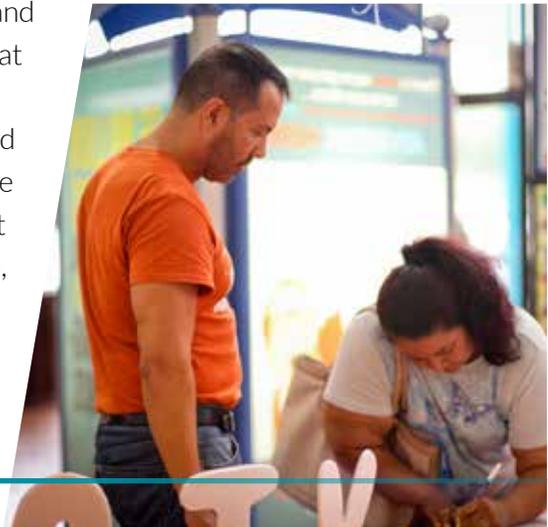
Don't leave out staff. Groups that registered and pledged their staff had 25% more contacts than those who did not. Use your normal internal communications as well as staff meetings or events to reach staff.

MEMBER STORY:

Baker Ripley in Houston, Texas

Time and time again, *BakerRipley* has prioritized Co-Creating with Community, one of the Alliance's *Commitments of High-Impact Nonprofit Organizations*, by building upon its strong relationships and partnerships in the community to accelerate effective and comprehensive support services for voters. They have trained over 200 community members in the organization's Community Engineers Leadership Program, where leaders create goals for engagement in their neighborhood and with elected officials. As a result, BakerRipley executed impressive get out the vote efforts in 2016 and 2018. The team made 8,541 phone calls, knocked on 5,870 doors, and registered 839 new voters in 2018 alone. Through its services and programs, BakerRipley already had strong relationships with local school districts and worked with principals to ensure that 18+ youth were informed and registered to vote. They also partnered with *The League of Women Voters* for Spanish and Vietnamese translation services.

In 2017, BakerRipley used an appreciative inquiry approach and their strong ties in the community to put together a study that shed light on voting patterns and challenges in the local population. Through focus groups and surveys, they collected information from 46 participants from six neighborhoods in the organization's service area. The findings revealed factors that influence voter decisions, barriers that discourage participation, as well as suggested solutions to increase engagement. Participants frequently brought up lack of information as an obstacle to voting, be it information on the candidates or the logistics behind voting, like location, day, or time. They also cited language barriers, lack of transportation, and work



schedules as other reasons for not voting. Solutions that came from the community in the study were framed around information accessibility, addressing logistical barriers, and developing a sense of connection. Participants expressed that relationships were key to increasing likelihood to vote. If they felt like candidates were attempting to build a relationship with them, rather than just get their vote, they would be much more likely to vote. One of the strongest recommendations of BakerRipley's report was to help build small, local networks of relationships within communities and create ongoing opportunities for candidates and constituents to connect.



The most impressive example of BakerRipley's ties to the community is its yearly event, *Art of the Vote*, which connects the community to the political process through art. Using its connections with the local museum and school district, the organization puts on an art show with hundreds of works of art relating to community issues, identity, and civics. Students and community members can share their perspectives in an open, casual setting. Instead of speaking at constituents through debates, political candidates mingle and hold round table conversations with community members on issues raised in the artwork. Art of the Vote is a compelling, creative way to inspire a sense of belonging and engagement and demonstrates how strong relationships with the community can lay a foundation for increased civic participation and co-creation.



BakerRipley's impact is targeted towards strengthening community engagement, improving financial well-being, and increasing educational attainment in every community they serve. BakerRipley provides a wide range of community-based programs that benefit youth, families, and seniors. Their mission is to bring resources, education, and connection to emerging neighborhoods.



SECTION 4: Appendix



Voter registration script

On the following page is a sample script to help guide your interactions with constituents. Make sure to keep these things in mind:

- 1) Keep the conversation positive.
- 2) Be interactive – get up from behind the table.
- 3) Make it personal.
- 4) Rules for collecting voter registration vary from state to state. View “Third Party Voter Registration Drive Guides’ at Fair Elections Center (<https://www.fairelectionscenter.org/voter-registration-drive-guides>).

SCRIPT

Voter registration ask:

Hi. Have you voted since you last moved? We’re trying to make sure everyone in our community is registered to vote in the upcoming election.

If registration is up to date:

Thanks! Please remind your friends and family to register to vote too.

Not registered/needs updated registration:

I can help you get registered to vote right now. This will only take a few minutes - and I can save you time by returning the form for you. (Register the person and move to closing.)

Common responses:

1. “I don’t have time.”

I understand you are really busy. Filling out this form only takes a couple minutes and I can make sure it gets turned in for you. You can save time by registering with me today.

2. “I’m not interested in registering” or “I don’t care about voting.”

Respect their hesitancy. Be ready with reasons to register. Use a reason from your own personal experience. For example-

- » Our ability to provide services and receive funds depends on the support of elected officials. It helps when they know our community members are registered to vote - OR
- » Cite an example of an important upcoming issue or important election. - OR
- » Add your reason to register here _____.

3. “I don’t know the candidates.”

(Mention some important races.) We’re a nonpartisan organization and can’t tell you who to vote for. The best way to get information is either to ask friends or family. You can also get a sample ballot from your local election office or from another nonpartisan source.

4. “I can’t register to vote. / I don’t think I am eligible.”

May I ask why not? I am trained in eligibility issues and may be able to help.

- » **Not a citizen:** I understand. You can make a difference by making sure friends and family members are registered.
- » **Have a felony conviction:** In most states you can vote as soon as you leave prison or finish your sentence. See your state’s rules at www.nonprofitvote.org/voting-as-an-ex-offender/
- » **Not old enough:** Will you be 18 by Election Day? If so, I can register you today.

5. “I don’t want to be called for jury duty.”

States get jury pools from a variety of lists (e.g. motor vehicles or other state programs)

6. “Will my information be used to contact me?”

It can be. The name, address, phone and party affiliation of registered voters are public record* You may receive mail from candidate campaigns. If you don’t want to be called, you don’t have to include your phone number.

Closing:

Thanks so much for registering to vote with me! I’ll submit this right away to our local elections office and you should be all set for the upcoming election. (Get a postcard in the mail)

Pledge to vote card script

If person is registered:

Would you be willing to sign a pledge to vote card for this upcoming election? (Give Pledge to Vote Card to voter to fill out). This is a great way to help our organization because it shows our communities are voting. If you fill out this Pledge to Vote Card, we'll let you know how to get the information you will need on Election Day.

If person says no or is unsure:

- » This is a way to help our organization! This is a public way to show our community is voting and paying attention.
- » We have a goal of collecting [xx] pledges from voters in our community. We'd love to have you join us in our efforts to show elected officials our community votes.
- » To ensure support for our services, it's really important we show elected officials that people in our community vote.
- » We know voting may not always be convenient. That's why we want to make it easier for you. We can send you all the information you need to be set on Election Day.
- » The election is coming up and every vote will count. It's important we get everybody engaged in time for Election Day.

Filling out the voter registration form

(legibility counts!)

State voter registration forms vary. The following fields are mandatory. Make sure to go over the form with the voter when finished to be sure nothing is left out.

- » Citizenship and Age Requirements: Be sure to check both of these boxes. In order to register to vote you must be a U.S. citizen and be 18 years old or older by the date of the next election.
- » Name and Residence Address: You must give a street address. P.O. Boxes or work addresses may not be used. You can use a P.O. Box for your mailing address.
- » Identification: States ask for driver's license number or the last four digits (or full) Social Security number. If you don't have either, write "none". A number will be assigned to you. Not providing an ID could put your registration under scrutiny.
- » Date of Birth, Signature and Date: Surprisingly, registrants frequently forget one of these.
- » Other Common Fields: Change of Address or Change of Name; Party Affiliation

Returning registration forms.

- » Encourage voters to let you turn in their cards. This will ensure that their registration gets to the right place in time. Assure them that you are turning in many people's cards and can make sure that theirs gets to the office in time.
- » Return completed forms to the registrant's local election office: You may return the forms in person or by mail, but in person is preferable.
- » Turn in forms promptly: Some states require forms collected in a registration drive to be turned in within a certain period of time after the form is signed and dated. Check with your state about their turn-in policy for voter registration drives.
- » Know the deadlines: Find your registration deadlines on your state election website or by contacting your local election office. Forms generally must be delivered or postmarked by 5 p.m. on the day of the deadline.

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION (OVR). The process is the same to register to vote online. Generally, the voter must have a current state issued ID like a driver's license to use a state online voter registration tool.

CHOOSING PARTY AFFILIATION. More than half the states ask registrants to choose a party affiliation or list themselves as "unaffiliated" or "unenrolled". It is nonpartisan to explain the difference. Choosing a party allows you to participate in that party's caucuses and conventions. Many states have "closed primaries" where only those registered in the party can vote.