

Our Homes, Our Votes Engagement Plan

Completing a voter engagement plan for your agency will help you assess how best to incorporate voter registration, education, and mobilization into your agency's work. This template presents a menu of activities that your organization may want to consider.

Please let NLIHC know that you are participating! Contact NLIHC's Field Team at 202-662-1530 or outreach@nlihc.org with a description of your project.



WHY PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS?

Below are some goals driving organizations' efforts with voter engagement projects. Check those that apply to your organization and add any others.

- Engage residents in civic participation and help them become familiar with how the decisions of elected officials affect their lives.
- Elevate the issue of homelessness and housing scarcity in public debate.
- Educate elected officials on low-income housing issues and on how their decisions affect residents.
- Build influential relationships with elected officials. Help develop residents' leadership skills.
- Assist residents in meeting community service requirements, if applicable. Earn positive press for your program or project.
- Other:

LEGALLY SPEAKING

501(c)(3) organizations can, and should, engage in nonpartisan election-related activity, including voter registration, education, and mobilization. 501(c)(3)s cannot in any way support or oppose particular candidates. For detailed information on these issues:

_____ Contact the Office of the Secretary of State or Board of Elections in your state to learn your state's rules for voter registration drives.

_____ Look at the *Permissible Activities Checklist* put together by Nonprofit VOTE at: www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2017/04/nonpartisan-election-activities-501c3-nonprofits.pdf.

_____ Visit the League of Women Voters at www.vote411.org for the latest information on voting in your state.

_____ Read and review *Nonprofits, Voting, and Elections* produced by Nonprofit VOTE at: <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2010/11/nonprofits-voting-and-elections.pdf/>.

REGISTERING VOTERS

Setting Goals for Registering Voters

- A. What percentage of your clients will you register? What number?
- B. Will your agency also register other low-income members of the community, beyond those served by your programs?

- C. How many weeks do you have until the deadline to register voters?
- D. How many people must you register on average per week to meet your goal?

Assigning Responsibilities

- A. What staff person will ultimately be responsible for meeting registration goals?
- B. What resident leaders will have responsibility for meeting registration goals?

Preparing to Register Voters

Your local Board of Elections or County Clerk’s office can be a valuable source of information as you plan to register clients to vote. You should check with them to:

- A. Learn the registration deadline for the general election in your state.
- B. Ask whether anyone can register voters in your state or whether a person must first become deputized or meet other requirements.
- C. Request the voter rolls for your locality. There may be a small charge for this, but it is important; you will use this list to determine which of your residents and clients are already registered and which need to change their official voting address.
- D. Request enough voter registration forms to meet your registration goals.
- E. Determine whether there are special requirements before registering voters.
- F. Determine who will obtain the county voter list and pick up the voter registration forms.

REGISTRATION CHECKLIST

For each section, check the ways in which your agency will register voters. In the space after the activity, list the staff or resident(s) who will carry out the activity and the timeframe for carrying it out.

Fitting Voter Registration into Your Agency’s Regular Contact with Residents

_____ Add voter registration to the client intake process. Ask people directly to register and assist them with completing the form; do not just provide the form.

_____ Register clients when they come in to receive your services.

_____ Train all staff and volunteers who work directly with clients to be able to answer questions and assist with registration forms.

_____ Add a voter registration component to all job training, computer skills, financial literacy, or other classes offered by your agency.

_____ Other: _____

Staff or volunteer responsible for organizing these activities: _____

Planning Specific Voter Registration Activities

_____ Hold a social or other event at which voter registration is an activity.

_____ Host an event for National Voter Registration Day (September 28, 2021), <http://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/>.

_____ Other: _____

Staff or volunteer responsible for organizing these activities: _____

Organizing a Door-To-Door Campaign

_____ Train residents, staff, and other volunteers who are already registered to go door-to-door to register low-income renters. Use the county voter list to determine who needs to be registered and whose registration needs to be updated.

_____ Appoint residents as building captains, floor captains, etc. Ensure they are trained on the rules in your state and make them responsible for registration and turnout where they live.

_____ For locked buildings where you have not recruited a resident captain, approach landlords to ask if they will allow door-to-door registration or a registration table in the lobby.

_____ Consider offering public recognition to those who register the most new voters or the highest percentage of their area.

Staff or volunteer responsible for organizing these activities: _____

Reaching Out to the Community

_____ Have your registrars reach out into the community to register other low-income, homeless, or underrepresented people.

_____ Provide a voter registration and information table at neighborhood events.

_____ Make sure everyone on the staff and board is registered.

Staff or volunteer responsible for organizing these activities: _____

KEEPING RECORDS

Keeping records of the people you register to vote helps both with determining whether you have met your registration goals and with planning Get Out the Vote activities. There is a sample database for recordkeeping at the end of this section.

Where allowable by law, one easy way to gather the information for your list is to collect voter registration forms from new registrants, then photocopy the forms or portions of forms before mailing them in. You can also have new registrants fill out a two-part pledge card. They will keep the half of the card that reminds them of their pledge to vote and you will keep the half with their contact information.

Who will be responsible for keeping records of who becomes registered to vote?

EDUCATING CLIENTS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

A. Which staff person will ultimately be responsible for meeting education goals?

B. Which resident leaders will have responsibility for meeting education goals?

Education Checklist

For each section, check the ways in which your agency will educate voters and candidates.

Educating Renters on Voting and Their Rights as Voters

_____ Educate clients and low-income renters on identification requirements for voter registration and voting in your state, especially if these rules have recently changed.

_____ Obtain sample ballots from your Board of Elections or County Clerk's office and distribute to residents.

_____ Arrange for someone from your Board of Elections or County Clerk's office to come to your

agency to provide a demonstration of your county's voting machines and explain people's rights as voters.

_____ Host a discussion on the importance of voting and what can be gained by increasing the percentage of voters who are low-income renters and allies.

_____ Encourage residents to sign up with the Board of Elections as poll workers.

Educating Voters on the Issues

_____ Obtain materials on current federal affordable housing issues from NLIHC at <http://nlihc.org/explore-issues>.

_____ Host a discussion to clarify who your community's elected officials are and the connection between what those officials do and your clients' lives.

_____ Arrange for clients to attend or watch a candidate debate or public forum.

_____ Ask all candidates to complete a candidate questionnaire and distribute their answers. Publish the answers on your website, if possible. For information on putting together a questionnaire or hosting a forum, see the *Voter Engagement Resources Library* from the Nonprofit Vote website.

_____ Other: _____

Educating Candidates

_____ Include information on your agency when sending candidates your questionnaire.

_____ Encourage clients to write letters to the editor explaining why affordable housing is an important issue as they consider how they will vote.

_____ Prepare low-income voters to ask questions at candidate forums or town hall events.

_____ Arrange for each candidate for office to take a tour of your agency and speak with clients.

_____ Other: _____

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Some low-income people, including people experiencing homelessness and ex-offenders, are at a greater risk of being turned away from the polls on Election Day or otherwise being disenfranchised. Many national organizations participate in the non-partisan Election Protection coalition which staffs a voting rights hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE. In addition to the hotline, you can find more information about voting requirements and potential voter suppression issues in your state by visiting www.866ourvote.org/state.

You may also want to contact a local attorney who is experienced in voter protection. He or she can help identify potential local issues and can also be available on Election Day in case anyone experiences problems voting.

Who will be responsible for ensuring that the rights of the people you work with are protected on Election Day?

MOBILIZING VOTERS

Setting Goals for Getting Out the Vote (GOTV)

- A. What is the total number of people your agency plans to register to vote?
- B. How many additional renters are already registered (from the voter list you obtained from your county's Board of Elections)?
- C. What is your total number of potential voters (A+B)?
- D. What percentage of these people would you like to see vote on Election Day?
- E. What is the total number of people you would like to see vote on Election Day?

Reminding People to Vote

- A. Which staff person will ultimately be responsible for meeting mobilization goals?
- B. Which resident leaders will have responsibility for meeting mobilization goals?

PLANNING FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS AND EARLY VOTING

Absentee ballots can be requested by residents in all states who are unable to get to the polls on Election Day. In some states, there is no reason required for absentee voting and all voters have the option to vote by absentee ballot or to vote before Election Day. Providing your clients with absentee ballot request forms or helping them to take advantage of early voting, if available, is a great way to increase voter turnout.

Voting by absentee ballots generally involves two steps. First, clients fill out forms requesting their ballots. Once they receive their ballots, clients fill them out and return them.

Check with your county's Board of Elections on each of the following questions:

- A. What is the deadline in your state for requesting absentee ballots?
- B. When must ballots be returned to the county?
- C. Does your state allow for no-excuse absentee ballots (residents may vote absentee even if they are able to go to the polls on Election Day)?
- D. Does your state allow for early voting?
- E. Who will be responsible for coordinating absentee ballots and early voting?

MOBILIZATION CHECKLIST

For each section, check the ways in which your agency will mobilize voters and candidates.

The Months and Weeks Before Election Day

_____ If time allows, request an updated list of registered voters from your Board of Elections to ensure that the voters you registered are included.

_____ Investigate the possibility of adding a polling place at your agency.

_____ Download and print GOTV materials, including posters, from www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org.

_____ Host voting-related events on the first Tuesday of the month to get residents accustomed to participating in civic engagement activities on that day.

_____ Make first contact with each voter in your database. Call them, thank them for registering, and remind them to vote.

_____ Plan for Election Day:

Recruit residents or other volunteers who will spend Election Day going door-to-door to get out the vote. Prepare captains to turn out all registered people on their floor or in their building, etc.

Once the deadline for registering new voters has passed, obtain an updated voter registration list from your county. Check against your database and prepare a final list of voters to be mobilized.

One to Two Weeks Before Election Day

_____ Make second contact with voters in your database. Call them, remind them to vote on Election Day, and provide them with their polling place. Ask whether voters will need a ride to the polls.

_____ Continue to plan for Election Day:

- Hold a training session for Election Day volunteers.
- Print lists of all of your registered clients from your database whose doors will be knocked on when Election Day comes. Print in groups of 20-30 people based on geography and the number of Election Day volunteers.
- Arrange to provide rides to the polls for those who need them.
- Plan to provide lunch for your Election Day volunteers.
- Plan a party for after the polls close.
 - Other: _____

The Day Before Election Day

_____ Make your third contact with each voter in your database. Call and ask them to commit to vote the following day. Remind them of the location of their polling place and the times that polls will be open.

_____ Other: _____

Election Day

_____ Have volunteers with lists of registered residents knock on the doors of everyone on their list, crossing off the names of those who have voted. If a voter is not home, leave a pre-printed note on the door. Call or knock again until everyone has voted, or until the polls are closed.

_____ Provide rides to the polls for residents who need them.

_____ Celebrate! Host a party for voters and volunteers. Watch the election results.

_____ Other: _____

Post-Election Day

_____ Thank voters and volunteers and share your success stories.

_____ Evaluate your program and plan your next project. Continue with registration and education activities.

_____ Meet with newly elected officials and discuss your priority issues.

_____ Consider if there are staff or residents who should be encouraged to run for office.

_____ Other: _____

CONSIDERING RESOURCES

Once you have gone through all the items in this template you will have a better sense of what resources will be required to implement your voter engagement project. Whether simple or more involved, all voter engagement projects will involve some level of resources. Now that you know what you would like to accomplish, you should identify what funding sources you can access and how you might work with other organizations to leverage resources.

How much funding do you anticipate needing? This funding should cover things like voter databases, supplies, transportation, training, events, etc.

What sources of funding can you access?

Other organizations may have resources that your organization can access such as meeting space, access to volunteers, or machines for printing materials. Student groups may be interested in registering voters as part of a community service project. A civic group may already be providing rides to the polls and could include your targeted voters in their plans. Remember to partner only with non-partisan, nonprofit organizations.

What groups in your area might you partner with, and in what ways?

APPENDIX: SAMPLE RECORD KEEPING DATABASE

Just registering voters will not ensure an increase in voter turnout. To have a successful mobilization operation, you must contact your newly registered voters in the weeks and days leading up to the election. To do this effectively, you will need to have a record of who is registered to vote.

The easiest way to keep records is in a database format. There are numerous voter data tools available, and some are quite expensive. In many states, there might be a Civic Engagement Roundtable or other such organization that is providing nonprofits with access to voter lists. This will be for more advanced operations that intend to register and mobilize voters over several election cycles.

Your voter database does not have to be complex or have a lot of fields. Many people find Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access to be the easiest platforms to use. Your database should include the following fields:

| First Name | Last Name | Street Number | Street Name | City | State | Zip Code | Phone | Email | Polling Place |
|------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|------|-------|----------|-------|-------|---------------|
|------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|------|-------|----------|-------|-------|---------------|

Note that street number and street name are kept as two separate fields. If you plan to knock doors on Election Day, the ability to sort by street will be useful for organizing a door-to-door Election Day outreach drive.

There are many ways to compile this data. One way is to enter the data straight from the voter registration card once the new registrant fills it out. Another way is to have the new registrant fill out both sides of a pledge card. They give you one side and keep the other side. Once you have this information recorded you are well on your way towards a successful Get Out the Vote operation.

