Understanding and Overcoming the Challenges of Voter Registration

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1. Introduction to the Voterization Project and the Issue of Voter Suppression
2. Restrictions and Considerations for 501(c)(3) Organizations
3. Overview of NLIHC’s 2016 Voterization Plan
4. Best Practices in Voter Registration Drives
5. Survey of Additional Resources
6. Q&A
What is Voterization?

Voterization is a term that encompasses the three part process of effective voter engagement:

1. Registration
2. Education
3. Mobilization
Why Should We Care About Voterization?

- The Voterization Project is a direct response of low voter turnout among our constituents.
- When our constituents do not vote, they lose the opportunity to have a voice in the policies that affect them!
- Put simply, low turnout from our constituents leads to unfavorable housing policy decisions, something we want to avoid.
Who Are We Targeting?

- Our constituents are predominantly renters and low income households.
- The percentage of renters who voted in 2014 was 51%, far below homeowners who turned out at 70%.
- While 75% of people with incomes over $100,000 were registered to vote in 2014 and 53% voted, just 48% of people with incomes below $20,000 were registered, and only 26% actually voted.
Voter Suppression

What are some examples?
- Voter ID Laws
- Targeting Specific Communities with Misinformation
- Efforts to Curtail Early and Absentee Voting Opportunities
- Reducing or Relocating Polling Places
- “Voter Caging” (challenging registration status at the polls)

Who is targeted?
- Low income people
- Members of racial or ethnic minorities
- Students
- Senior citizens
- Persons with disabilities

Significant overlap with our constituents!
Nonprofits: The Do’s and Don’ts of Voter Registration & Outreach

Nonprofits CAN

- Conduct voter registration
- Conduct voter education and mobilizing efforts
- Conduct candidate engagement efforts

As long as all efforts and activities remain NON-PARTISAN!

Nonprofits CANNOT

- Make endorsements for any political candidates.
- Donate money, resources, or time to any particular candidate.
- Staff engaged in partisan political activities should do so without representing the organization.

501(c)(3) organizations ARE allowed to participate in voter registration efforts!

www.nlihc.org
Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) **CAN** participate in voter registration activities!

- PHAs can provide registration materials as well as help residents fill out registration forms.
- Resident Councils or Resident Advisory Boards can be a great resource for organizing renter-to-renter registration efforts.
- PHA newsletters can and should contain information about registration and voting.
  - Public housing buildings should display registration information in common areas such as bulletin boards near elevators or in community rooms, etc.
Federal Funds Do Put Restrictions on Certain Organizations:

- Staff who are paid through AmeriCorps or HeadStart funding cannot participate in voter registration activities.
- Legal Services groups cannot participate in any election activity, even if nonpartisan.
- Recipients of Community Services Block Grant funding can participate in voter registration, but CSBG funds cannot be used.
- More information on federal funds and voter registration restrictions can be found at: [http://bit.ly/1lnQxh7](http://bit.ly/1lnQxh7)
Any Questions so far? Please post them in the question chat box!
VOTERIZATION: 2016 Voterezation Narrative Guide and Plan

The Voterization Plan is a step-by-step model for launching a campaign to register, educate, and mobilize voters.

The Voterization Narrative is a companion piece to explain steps in the Voterization process.

And of Course – The NLIHC Field Team!
Getting Started – Goals and Roles

REGISTERING VOTERS

Setting Goals for Registering Voters
A. How many residents/clients does your agency serve ________________________________
B. What percentage of your clients will you register? What number? ________________________
C. Will your agency also register other low income members of the community, beyond your clients? If so, how many? ________________________________
D. What is your agency’s total goal for new registrants (B+C)? __________________________
E. How many weeks do you have until the deadline to register voters? ____________________
F. 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? ______________
First – Know the Law!

Preparing To Register Voters

Your local Board of Elections can be a valuable source of information as you plan to register clients to vote. You will want to check in with them to:

- Learn the registration deadline for the general election in your state.
- Ask whether anyone can register voters in your state, or whether a person must first become deputized or meet other requirements.
- Request the voter rolls for your locality. There may be a small charge for this, but it’s 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.
- Request enough voter registration forms to meet your registration goals.

Are there special requirements someone must meet before registering voters? __________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Who will obtain the county voter list and pick up the voter registration forms? ______________________________

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________________________________________________________
# Register Voters!

## Registration Checklist

For each section, check those 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. Specifically, ask people to register and assist them in completing the form; don’t 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, or other classes offered by your agency.
- Other: ____________________________________________

### 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 27, 2016), [http://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/](http://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/).
- Other: ____________________________________________

### 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 turnover) 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.

### 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!
Register Voters!

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. NLIHC has a sample database that you can use for recordkeeping at the end of this document.

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; you will keep the half with their contact information.

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

• Keeping a voter list on hand can help with updating addresses for people who have moved, and can be used to verify who is already registered.
• Developing a list of new registrants is essential. This list can be used for Get Out the Vote efforts and follow up for voter education activities.
Tips for a Successful Registration Drive

Get to Know Local Election Officials
- Registration forms, processes, and timelines will be coordinated by local authorities.
- Local authorities will give the best information on required training voter registration volunteers.

Build a Coalition
- Seek help and collaboration from a state or local partner with expertise and experience in conducting voter engagement activities.
  - This will help prevent overlapping registration efforts.
- Participate in organized events like National Voter Registration Day, September 27, 2016
  - More information on National Voter Registration Day: http://nationalvoterregistrationday.org
More Helpful Tips for a Successful Registration Drive

It’s never too EARLY to start planning!

• A study conducted by NonprofitVOTE showed that organizations who were most successful in their registration drives began planning in June or earlier with implementation beginning in the July before the election.

Recruit Volunteers and Staff

• A huge component to having a successful registration drive is to make sure your staff are knowledgeable and dedicated to the voter outreach efforts. Make sure everyone on your staff is registered to vote as well.

• Volunteers are a great way to get the community involved with your organization and its efforts. It’s also a good way to recruit volunteers and interns for your organization as a whole.

• Make registration materials available at ALL meetings, events, and facilities.
More Helpful Tips for a Successful Registration Drive

Incorporate “Active Tabling”

• A study conducted by NonprofitVOTE showed that “Active Tabling” was the most effective way to engage during a registration drive.
• Involves simply using your table as a base and moving around the room/area with clipboards to engage more people.
• NonprofitVOTE has a great how-to guide on active tabling that can be found here.
Common Obstacles

**Homeless Voters**
- Various court decisions have affirmed that homeless people cannot be denied voting rights simply for not having an address.
- Homeless people can use a shelter or a park as an address when registering, though state laws regarding proof of residency vary widely.

**Voter Apathy**
- Non-voters are often concerned that nothing will change because they vote. Registration staff and volunteers should be trained to connect housing and neighborhood policy issues to the lives of the voters. Nonprofits have a unique position in the community because they garner more trust from members of the communities they serve.
- Point out that registering to vote does not require a person to vote, but just provides the option.

**Formerly Incarcerated Voters**
- In most states, voters with prior felony convictions can legally register as long as the parole or probation periods of the sentence have been completed.
- This varies by state. To find out the rules in your state, see this map from the ACLU: [http://bit.ly/1u5i2jm](http://bit.ly/1u5i2jm)
More Helpful Resources

Beyond our 2016 Voterization Plan, there are some other great resources for voter registration.

1. Fair Elections Legal Network’s (FELN) State-By-State Resources
2. Housing Preservation Database
3. Online Voter Registration Tools
4. NonprofitVOTE’s Resources
Resources—Knowing the Law

Fair Elections Legal Network
- Information about voter suppression efforts.
- Election reform campaign resources.
- Essential: State-by-State registration and voting guides.
The National Housing Preservation Database was created by the Public and Affordable Housing Research Corporation (PAHRC) and the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) in an effort to provide communities with the information they need to effectively preserve their stock of public and affordable housing. The National Housing Preservation Database incorporates all available data on federally subsidized housing properties and includes nine separate funding streams. The National Housing Preservation Database is not only searchable, but it also provides downloadable data extracts. Users can customize their searches by location, funding stream, or 'at risk of loss' status, in addition to other characteristics.

Log-in to the 'Research' tool to see our newly updated data!
Online registration is the simplest approach to building a bigger base of voters.

- 33 states now have online registration including: AL, AK, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, DC, GA, HI, IL, IN, IA, KS, LA, MD, MA, MN, MO, NE, NV, NM, NY, OR, PA, SC, UT, VT, VA, WA, and WV.
  - Oklahoma and Florida have passed legislation, it just hasn’t been implemented yet!

- [Registration Tool](www.nlihc.org)
NonprofitVOTE Resources

NonprofitVOTE has resources that can be beneficial when thinking about organizing voter engagement efforts.

- NonprofitVOTE Resources Webpage

Key Highlights:
- State-by-State resources
- Nonprofits, Voting, & Elections, a 501(c)3 Guide
- Permissible Activities Checklist
- Voter Participation Starter Kit
Any more questions? Please post them in the question chat box!
Mark Your Calendars!

More Webinars Coming Soon!

Monday, April 18th – Educating Voters

Thursday, September 15th – Mobilizing Voters – Get Out the Vote!
Thank You for Joining!

For more information or to find out how to get involved, please contact NLIHC’s field team!

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