

Checklist: Getting Started with Voter Engagement

Get Started

Before you begin, think about why this work is important to you and your organization. This might include advancing your issues, building clout in your community, or empowering your clients by promoting engaged and active citizenship. Visit Nonprofit VOTE's website to learn about the many ways nonprofits have encouraged their staff and individuals they serve to vote.

Capacity

- Get buy-in from your Executive Director or other leadership
- Choose a staff lead who can involve and motivate other staff and volunteers
- Consider ways to involve the people you serve in your election activities
- Identify assistance and resources from a community partner and your local elections office

Knowledge

- Understand the guidelines for 501(c)(3)s on how to stay nonpartisan
- Learn about voting in New York State – key dates, how to register, early voting options, etc.
- Find out what's on the ballot in your locality and state for the upcoming election

Plans

- Choose your target audience – clients, constituents, staff, your local community, or others
- Select appropriate opportunities for engagement: as part of daily services, in classes, at trainings or events, as a project for a youth group, or incorporated into community outreach
- Create a specific timeline for your plan

Voter Registration

Decide on your approach. Some nonprofits actively register voters, while others focus on promoting registration by announcing deadlines, making forms available, or helping voters register online. If you plan to conduct voter registration make sure to:

- Familiarize yourself with New York State's voter registration procedures, how to obtain and return forms, online registration (if available), and guidelines for hosting a registration drive
- Set concrete and attainable goals and tie them to deadlines
- Target pre-existing opportunities – at your nonprofit and in the community at citizenship ceremonies, graduations, or other events
- Create a schedule for tabling opportunities in the waiting room, lobby, and at events
- Enlist volunteers and staff to enhance your efforts

Engaging Candidates

- Plan at least one activity that engages local candidates on your issues.

- Identify a race that's important to your community – city council, mayor, state representative, Congressional representative, or others
- Choose from five main candidate engagement options: Candidate Forums, Candidate Appearances, Sharing Research, Candidate Questionnaires, or Asking Questions at events
- Be familiar with nonpartisan guidelines for candidate work, which requires equal treatment of all candidates in the same race

Ballot Measures

The majority of states ask voters to weigh in on laws, referendums, constitutional amendments, local bond issues for public programs, and other issues.

- Find out if any ballot measures, amendments, or other questions are on the ballot
- Learn what 501(c)(3) nonprofits can do to influence passage and educate the public
- Decide your approach: Will you take a position for or against the issue? Or will you stay neutral and share nonpartisan information highlighting both sides of the issue?

Voter Education

There are two kinds of voter education. The first covers the when, where, and how of voting. The second identifies what's on the ballot.

- Identify voter education opportunities at your events, classes, and in your communications
- Develop an internal and external communications plan for the election

Get Out the Vote and Election Day

Don't forget that some of the most important work happens near and on Election Day when you encourage, help, and mobilize your community to vote. The final push takes preparation and a clear understanding of the payoff: research shows that the most effective messages come from trusted messengers – people of similar interests and backgrounds – made in-person or through peer-to-peer social media.

You can activate voters simply by:

- Promoting early voting (by mail or in-person)
- Providing personal reminders in-person, by mail, or over the phone
- Giving out information to help your community vote – help lines or polling hours and locations
- Linking the election to the future of your issue or nonprofit services
- Making Election Day special by treating it as a holiday for democracy!

Source: [Nonprofit VOTE](#)