Nonprofit VOTE

VOTER ENGAGEMENT BASICS FOR NONPROFITS

August 12, 2010
AGENDA

• Overview of Nonprofit Voter Engagement
  - Why voting?
  - Why nonprofits?

• Activity Areas
  - Making Your Plan
  - Dos and Don’ts
  - Voter Reg, Voter Ed, GOTV
WHY VOTING?

- Stronger, healthier communities
- Public policies that represent our communities
- Clout for your organization
WHY VOTING?

• Safe
• Easy
• Important
Voter Turnout in the 2006 Midterm Election

- Voters under 30: 25%
- Voters residing in their home for less than one year: 29%
- Asian and Latino voters: 32%
- Total 2006 Turnout: 48%
WHY NONPROFITS?

- Size of our sector
- Trust of our communities
- Access to underrepresented populations
- Social missions
- Interest in good government
- Nonpartisanship
YOU are the Trusted Voices in Your Communities
EXPANDING DEMOCRACY

- What we know about creating new voters
  - Personal contact
  - Repeat messages from multiples sources
  - Voting is a habit
PLAN FIRST!
WHAT’S YOUR PLAN?

1. As we walk through this webinar, think about which activities can be most easily integrated into YOUR work?
WHAT’S YOUR PLAN?

2. Get buy in and keep it simple
3. Determine who the point person is in your organization
WHAT’S YOUR PLAN?

4. Plan around voting deadlines in your state
WHAT’S YOUR PLAN?

5. Decide on key partners
EXECUTING YOUR PLAN

• Know Your Audience
  - Your service population or constituents
  - Staff, board members and volunteers
  - Your neighborhood or local community
EXECUTING YOUR PLAN

Where Can You Integrate Voter Engagement Into Your Work?
- Conversations at point of service
- Classes and trainings
- Meetings
- Community events
- Materials in your agency’s lobby
EXECUTING YOUR PLAN

• What are your communications vehicles?
  - In person, face to face is always best
EXECUTING YOUR PLAN

• What Are Your Communication Vehicles?
  - Information in your agency’s lobby
  - Signage and posters
  - Website
  - Printed newsletters
  - E-newsletters
  - Social media
  - T-shirts
STAYING NONPARTISAN

The IRS places only one restriction (or opportunity) on nonprofits doing voter engagement work.
STAYING NONPARTISAN

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization may NOT support or oppose a candidate for public office or a political party. That means no endorsements or rating of candidates.
STAYING NONPARTISAN

• What CAN you do?
  - Nonprofits may conduct nonpartisan voter engagement activities designed to educate the public and help them participate in elections
    • Voter Registration
    • Voter Education
    • Get Out The Vote (GOTV)
WHAT STAFF CAN DO

Nonprofit staff MAY engage in partisan political activities on their own time, off the clock.
VOTER ENGAGEMENT

• Step 1: Voter Registration
• Step 2: Voter Education
• Step 3: Get Out The Vote
STEP 1: VOTER REG

Get to know the voter registration rules in your state
STEP 1: VOTER REG

- Publicize and promote voter registration deadlines and how-to’s
- Announce registration deadlines at events, in newsletters, in e-blasts or on your website.
- Talk about registering to vote at staff or board meetings. Ask new staff if they are registered to vote.
- Put up posters advertising voter registration deadlines, along with where to get and return voter registration forms
STEP 1: VOTER REG

- Conduct In-Agency Voter Registration
  - Train staff members who have direct contacts with community members
  - Assign a staff member to plan and direct voter registration activities
  - Make voter registration forms available and offer voter registration to new clients at intake
  - Designate a staff person to promptly return forms to your Local Election Office
STEP 2: VOTER ED

Promote the when, where and how of voting
STEP 2: VOTER ED

• Knowledge About the Voting Process
  - Voting takes basic skills not always learned in school or from families. Nonprofits are trusted messengers that can help voters with messages and assistance about the when, where and how of voting.
  - If you help one person vote, they’re likely to spread that knowledge to families, friends or neighbors.
STEP 2: VOTER EDUCATION

- Confidence about Casting a Ballot
  - A big reason many people don’t vote is fear of failure. No one wants to make a mistake voting or go to vote unsure of their choices. Voters have more confidence when they know the candidates or issues in at least one key race on the ballot. After voting once, it becomes easier to be a repeat voter.
  - Many voters who are registered still lack the confidence or knowledge to take the time to vote in the election.
STEP 2: VOTER ED

• Urgency and Importance
  - Above all, voters benefit from a reason to vote*
    Research shows that voters are much more likely to vote when they sense something at stake - to gain or to lose. And they believe the vote not just of themselves but of their peers or community will make a difference.
  - The urgency and importance your nonprofit communicates will make a difference in how your staff and constituents view voting
STEP 2: VOTER ED

- When
  - Election date, Deadline to vote by mail or vote early, Polling hours
- Where
  - Polling places, Early voting locations
- How
  - How to vote absentee or early in-person,
- Where to get help voting, ID requirements
California

Clicking on the buttons below will take you to the appropriate page of your state's elections division's website. The following information was provided in cooperation with the National Association of Secretaries of State and their Can I Vote project.

Register to Vote
Check your Registration
Find your Polling Place
Learn about Voter ID
Absentee/Vote-by-Mail
Become a Poll Worker

County and City Elections Offices

Clicking on the links below will take you to elections offices in a particular county or city.

Alameda County's Registrar of Voters
Los Angeles County Registrar
Orange County Registrar of Voters
STEP 2: VOTER ED

- Sample activities:
  - Hold a mock election at your nonprofit
  - Teach voting vocabulary words
  - Discuss the principles of a fair democracy or fair election.
  - Pass out voter registration forms or sample ballots
  - Cover specifics for your area
    - what races are on the ballot
    - how to vote
    - polling place locations
    - ballot initiatives.
STEP 2: VOTER ED

• Special Activities
  - Make it a party: Hold a special event about the election for one of your programs.
  - Discuss the election with those who are not citizens and ways they can participate as a volunteer or helping others vote.
  - Make sure ex-offenders understand their right to vote in their state.
STEP 2: VOTER ED

- Sample Ballots
  - A sample ballots help voters feel more comfortable with the process of voting and have more confidence going to cast their ballot. Print out copies and post them in your lobby, or have a stack of them available in waiting rooms and intake areas.
STEP 2: VOTER ED

• Candidate Questionnaires and Voter Guides
  - Checkout our online guide “Nonprofits, Voting and Elections” to learn about creating your own questionnaires and guides
  - Distribute questionnaires and guides from other organizations like a nonprofit coalition or local League of Women Voters
STEP 3: GOTV
STEP 3: GOTV

- Principles of GOTV
  - Make it Personal
  - Get Voters the Help They Need
  - Turn up the (Nonpartisan) Volume
STEP 3: GOTV

• Create Visibility
  - The election should be visible to everyone who walks into your agency or attends any of your trainings or events
  - Put up Vote November 2 signage – posters, flyers, etc throughout the lobby and all public spaces
  - Make announcements or hold discussions at meetings, events, classes, etc
  - Encourage media popular with the people you serve to promote the election and where voters can find help
STEP 3: GOTV

• Provide Help
  - Help your constituents succeed in voting. Once a voter, they’ll be more likely after the election to follow issues and participate in community affairs
  - Orient staff to answer basic election questions or where a voter can get help voting
  - When providing services, ask people if they’re planning to vote and if they need help
  - Help people vote early – 1 of 3 voters are early voters
  - Advertise rides to the polls or where to get help
  - Call a list of your constituents about voting with help from volunteers
STEP 3: GOTV

- On Election Day
  - Make Election day special. Treat it like day both of political importance and time celebrate democracy
  - Allow staff to spend part or all of Election Day doing nonpartisan get out the vote activities
  - Encourage your staff and volunteers to sign up as poll workers or translators
  - Ask everyone you connect with if they’ve voted or need help voting
  - Put up big “Vote Today” signs with a number to call or place to go for help
  - Have an Election day party
MORE RESOURCES

More Resources at www.nonprofitvote.org

Webinar page – Download or view past webinars

Nonprofit Voter Participation Starter Kit – Order free copy

501c3 Online Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Participation – Soon to be available as a narrated online training presentation

Hosting a Candidate Forum – Download the print publication or watch the narrated online training presentation

Learn About Voting in Your State – State by state voting information provided in cooperation with the National Association of Secretaries of State

Fact sheets, checklists and more

Coming Soon
Posters for nonprofit agencies
Links to voter guides and sample ballots (coming in September)