

UNH Guide to Voter Registration

Motivating members of your community to exercise their right to vote is a vital component advocacy for our communities. Settlement houses have a unique opportunity to gather and encourage individuals to be a part of elections. Your organizations can make an impact by holding non-partisan voter registration drives in the community and candidate forums for all persons on the ballot. Registering and educating community members can have a positive impact on the turnout in your district because many will be encouraged by your advocacy.

Nonprofit organizations can legally operate nonpartisan voter registration drives. But the drives must be designed solely to educate the public about the importance of voting and cannot show bias for or against any candidate or party.

Planning a Voter Registration Drive¹

Before your drive

- **Be prepared. Know the facts.** Read and familiarize yourself with this packet of information, especially understanding rules around partisan activities.
- **Work with others.** Identify staff members that are interested in helping to plan the drive and working at the registration tables. Consider recruiting youth participants to work on your registration drive.
- **Select a site for your registration table.** Find a place that is visible, accessible and has a steady flow of pedestrian traffic. Depending on the number of volunteers you have, you may want to set up a few tables in strategic areas. If you plan to do the registration indoors, remember to get permission from the person in charge of the building area. While you can set up tables on any public sidewalk, it is a good idea to let business owners know ahead of time.
- **Select dates and times.** Try to select times when the area will be most crowded to increase the number of potential registrants. Make sure that the dates you have selected are on or before the deadlines.

Reliable Public Places for Voter Registration Drives

- 1) Outside of Schools
- 2) Outside of churches and synagogues
- 3) In front of supermarkets
- 4) Near subways stations and bus stops

¹ Information in this section comes from [The Voter Registration Kit](#), JPAC for Older Adults

- **Gather the necessary materials:**
 - Registration forms in several languages (Call the Board of Elections at 1-866-VOTE-NYC to order forms in advance and to obtain forms.)
 - Absentee ballot applications (Call the Board of Elections)
 - List of registration deadlines and election dates
 - Pens (colors black and blue only)
 - Lightweight tables and chairs
 - Basic information for volunteers
 - Identifying posters and signs for volunteers
 - List of public offices to be filled
 - Information sheet on how to use the voting machine
- **Recruit, train, and assign volunteers.** Volunteers should be trained to fill out forms correctly and be prepared to answer basic questions. Be sure that volunteers know where registration is being held and what time they are expected to be there.
- **Publicize your drive.** Use flyers, announcements and local papers to advertise where and when your drive will take place.

During your drive

In line with the Nonpartisan requirement, do not tell people which political party to register for or which candidate to vote for, even if they ask! Advise them to contact party headquarters and read the papers for more information.

- **Arrive at least 20 minutes before you are scheduled to begin,** to set up your table and organize your materials. Remember, if you have a table don't stand behind it! Approach each person and get his or her attention.
- Once you've encouraged individuals to register, set them up at a table with a pen (blue and black ink only), form, and a clipboard. Then move on the next person.
- **Check the voter registration forms for mistakes:**
 - Make sure the form is filled out legibly in blue or black ink.
 - Check for blank spaces.
 - Make sure they sign the form.
 - Volunteer to drop off or mail their completed forms.
 - Make sure that completed forms are placed in a secure area during the drive.

Nonpartisan Voter Registration Do's and Don'ts³

Important Note About Nonpartisanship at Voter Registration Drives

Can you talk about the importance of issues (i.e. severe funding cuts to social programs or the recognition of gay marriages) to motivate people to get involved, register, and vote?

This is tricky. It would probably be best if you did not. But it may be the case that you can. For instance, the authority quoted below has this to say on the subject:

It is clearly permissible for a [nonprofit] to try to persuade people to register and vote by emphasizing that the election's outcome will influence government policy on issues of importance to them. This is so even if the issues are controversial, in the sense of generating strongly held opposing views within the community, but the focus of the [nonprofit's] efforts must be on the issues, no on the candidates.²

The crux here is that it is safe to talk about issues when the issues are broadly defined so that some of the issues you are talking about may not be at play in the particular election for which you are trying to get people to vote. But if the issues you are raising are narrow in scope (i.e., welfare reform) and the candidates running in the district in question are clearly associated with one side of the issue or the other, there may be a problem.

²Handbook on the Tax Rules For Voter Participation by Section 501(c)(3) Organizations, Troyer, Slocombe, Lauber & Cerny for Independent Sector (1992), p. 20.

Do's:

- Before a drive is actually implemented, it is important to get together with those who will conduct it and carefully explain to them what has to be done to assure that the drive is nonpartisan. It might be a good idea to ask them to imagine that while they are conducting the drive, there is someone in the room from the "other" side with an audiocassette taping everything that is said.
- If you plan to use issue advocacy to motivate potential voters, keep the issues broad or be sure you identify a wide range of issues.

Don'ts:

- Never mention a candidate or party's name.
- Do not wear buttons, t-shirts, or any other paraphernalia that identifies a political party or candidate.
- If asked how you plan to vote, do not answer the question.
- If you are asked what party you prefer, do not answer the question. Rather explain that your purpose is to promote the democratic process and not particular candidates.
- Do not ask the person you are working with how they plan to vote or what their party preference is or make any effort to find out their allegiance to any candidate or party- whether directly or indirectly.
- Do not select a target area or group because you believe the voters in that group or areas will favor a particular candidate even if the candidate is a member of a politically disadvantaged group that your organization serves.
- Do not publicize which candidates agree with the position your organization supports.
- Avoid any appearance that your voter registration or Get Out The Vote (GOTV) activities are timed to coincide with politically significant events in a particular candidate's campaign.

³ Information provided in this section comes from [You May Do Nonpartisan Voter Registration and Get-Out-The-Vote Drives](#), Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York.

