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UNH Guide to Elections and Voting in New York City

Prepared by:

United Neighborhood Houses of New York

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United Neighborhood Houses promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. A membership organization rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy, and capacity building activities. United Neighborhood Houses is a nonpartisan organization that neither supports nor opposes political parties or candidates for office.

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Who is eligible to vote?

To register to vote in New York City, you must:

- Be a citizen of the United States (Includes those persons born in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands);
- Be a New York City resident for at least 30 days;
- Be at least 18 years old on the date of the next election;
- Not be serving a jail sentence or be on parole for a felony conviction;
- Not be judged mentally incompetent by a court; and
- Not claim the right to vote outside the City of New York.

Many people mistakenly believe they do not have the right to vote when in reality they do.

You *are* eligible to vote if you are:

1. A convicted felon who:

- Has been pardoned;
- Is on probation;
- Has served his/her maximum prison sentence;
- Has been discharged from parole; or
- Has not been sentenced or has had his/her sentence suspended.

2. A person convicted of a misdemeanor.

3. Homeless. In order to register, supply the mailing address of a shelter, settlement house, drop-in center, or other location in the polling district where you primarily stay.

Registering to Vote

In Person

You may register to vote in person at any NYC Board of Elections office: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html>. Board of Elections offices are open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and on the weekend prior to Election Day.

By Mail

To register to vote by mail, fill out a voter registration application in blue or black ink. Registration applications are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean on the Board of Elections website: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/register.html>. Registration applications are also available at public libraries, post offices, and motor vehicle offices.

If you would like a postage-paid registration application mailed to you, call the Board of Elections phone bank at 1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC. (You can also make this request by sending your mailing address to vote@boe.nyc.ny.us.)

Mail your completed registration application to:

Board of Elections in the City of New York
32 Broadway, 7 Fl
New York, NY 10004-1609

*Registration applications must contain original signatures. The applications cannot be photocopied or faxed.

Documents needed for initial registration

First-time registrants will be asked to provide:

- Driver's license or non-driver ID number *or*
- Last four digits of social security number

If you do not provide this information on your registration application, you will have to present some other form of identification prior to voting. Acceptable forms of identification include a valid photo ID or a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government-issued document indicating your name and address. You can mail in a copy of one of these documents with your registration application or bring the document with you when you go to the polls.

Registration deadline

Although you can register to vote any time during the year, registration applications must be postmarked or delivered **at least 25 days** before the date of the election in which you wish to vote.

Maintaining your registration

Voter registration in New York City is permanent. In order to maintain your voting rights, however, you must notify the Board of Elections about any address or name changes by submitting an updated voter registration application. New York State law requires voters to notify the Board of Elections within 25 days of an address change and at least 20 days before an election.

If you are convicted of a felony, you must re-register to vote after completing your sentence. If you did not vote in the last two federal elections, confirm with the Board of Elections that you are still registered to vote.

Confirming your registration

To confirm your registration, call the NYC Board of Elections phone bank (1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC) or look up your registration on the NYS Board of Elections website at <https://voterlookup.elections.state.ny.us/votersearch.aspx>.

Enrolling in a Political Party

When you register to vote, you can choose to register as a member of a political party. Enrolling in a political party allows you to vote in primary as well as general elections. If you are not enrolled in a political party, you can only vote in general elections. Primary elections determine which candidates run on the party tickets; general elections determine which party's candidates get elected. You can change your party affiliation by sending in an updated voter registration application.

*It is important to note that enrolling in a political party does not mean you have to vote for your party's candidates in general elections. In general elections, you can vote for candidates from any party.

The political parties in New York

Voters in New York City and State may enroll in one of five political parties. The parties appear in the following order on New York City and State voter registration applications:

Democratic Party: <http://www.democrats.org/>; <http://www.nydems.org/>

Republican Party: <http://www.gop.com/>; <http://www.nygop.org/>

Independence Party: <http://www.independencepartyny.com/>

Conservative Party: <http://www.cpnys.org/>

Working Families Party: <http://www.workingfamiliesparty.org/>

Going to the Polls

Poll Site Hours

New York City poll sites are open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Primary and Election Day.

Finding Your Poll Site Location

There are poll sites across New York City, but you can only vote at your designated poll site location. The Board of Elections is supposed to send every registered voter a postcard containing information about the voter's poll site. You can also find your poll site location by using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator:

<http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>, calling the NYC Board of Elections voter phone bank: 1-866-VOTE-NYC, or sending your mailing address to vote@boe.nyc.ny.us.

What you should bring to the polls

You should not be asked for ID at the polls unless you are a first-time registrant whose identity has not been verified by the Board of Elections (see p.5).

Although you should not be asked for identification at the polls, it is a good idea to bring some form of ID when you go to vote in case your name does not appear correctly on the list of registrants and you need to verify your identity.

When you go to vote, remember that distributing, wearing, or carrying political literature, posters, buttons, or other paraphernalia is prohibited within 100 feet of any poll site entrance. Soliciting votes within 100 feet of poll site entrances is also prohibited.

At the polls

When you enter your poll site, go to the table for your Election District. You can look up your Election District using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator: <http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>. You will be asked to sign next to your name to indicate that you came to the polls.

In 2009, New York State will likely implement a new voting system. If this occurs, the manual lever machines will be replaced with electronic voting machines similar to the Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) available at some poll sites during the 2008 primary and general elections. The new voting machines will be accessible and will have multilingual translation features. The exact model for the voting machines has not been determined.

If for any reason the voting machines at your poll site are not functioning properly, you will be given an emergency paper ballot and directed to a cardboard voting booth. Fill out the emergency ballot with a pencil or pen (blue or black ink only), fold the ballot, and deposit the ballot in the emergency ballot box.

If your vote is challenged

If your name does not appear on the list of registered voters, your signature is missing or does not match the one on record, or you fail to show identification before Election Day, you will be given an affidavit ballot (a paper ballot) and an affidavit envelope in which to seal it. Fill out the envelope and mark the ballot with a pencil or pen (blue or black ink only). Fold the affidavit ballot, place it in the affidavit envelope, and give the envelope to a poll worker.

If you wish to vote on a machine and not by affidavit ballot, you can request a Certificate to Obtain a Court Order at your poll site. Take the Certificate to your Board of Elections Borough Office, where you will find a Supreme Court Justice. Ask the Justice for a Court Order. When you bring the Court Order back to your poll site, you will be allowed to vote on a machine.

If your vote is challenged at the poll site for some other reason, you will be asked to take a challenge oath (in which you affirm your right to vote) before voting on a machine.

If you have problems at the polls

If you have problems at the polls, there are a number of voter protection hotlines you can call:

1. NYC Board of Elections phone bank: 1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC
2. New York Public Interest Research Group/Common Cause New York Voter Hotline: 1-212-822-0282
3. Election Protection: 1-866-OUR-VOTE

Voting by Absentee Ballot

If you are unable to go to your poll site on Election Day because you will be outside of New York City or because you are physically unable to go to the polls, you may vote by absentee ballot. You may also vote by absentee ballot if you are in prison for a non-felony offense.

In Person Absentee Voting

You can fill out an absentee ballot in person as soon as the absentee ballots have been certified and sent to the Board of Elections Borough Offices. In person absentee voting is conducted at Board of Elections Borough Offices <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html> from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and on the weekend prior to Election Day. In person absentee voting ends the day before Election Day.

Absentee Voting by Mail

To send an absentee ballot by mail, you must first fill out an absentee ballot application. These applications are available at Board of Elections offices and on the Board of Elections website (<http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/forms/boe/absenteevoting/absenglish.pdf> and <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/publications.html>). Absentee ballot applications must reach your Board of Elections Borough Office <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html> no later than **a week before Election Day**.

Once you receive your absentee ballot, complete the ballot and send it back to your Board of Elections Borough Office <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html>. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by **the day before Election Day** and must reach the Board of Elections no later than seven days after the election.

*If you are permanently homebound, you can request on the absentee ballot application to have absentee ballots automatically mailed to you for future elections.

Who is on the Ballot

To view the list of races and candidates in an upcoming election, go to the NYC Board of Elections website: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/candidateslist.html>. You can look up your Election Districts using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator: <http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>.

Below is a list and brief description of elected offices (City, State, and Federal) that may appear on the ballot in a given election year.

Elected Offices – New York City¹

The Mayor

The Mayor is the Chief Executive Officer of the City of New York. As the head of the executive branch of City government, the Mayor is responsible for proposing the City budget and revenue estimates, which must be approved by the City Council; appointing and monitoring the heads of City agencies; enacting local laws by approving or vetoing bills passed by the City Council; and proposing initiatives for the City.

The Mayor is elected by the voters of New York City and serves a four-year term. The Mayor is limited to two consecutive terms under the 1993 Term Limits Law; in 2008, however, the City Council voted for a one-time term extension, enabling all currently term-limited City elected officials to run for a third consecutive term.

Michael Bloomberg is the current Mayor of the City of New York:
<http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.beb0d8fdaa9e1607a62fa24601c789a0/>.

The Comptroller

The Comptroller is the Chief Financial Officer of the City of New York. The Comptroller advises the Mayor, City Council, and the public about the City's financial condition; makes recommendations about citywide programs and fiscal policies; audits City agencies; issues and sells City bonds; manages City contracts; and oversees the City's pension funds and other trusts.

The Comptroller is elected by the voters of New York City and serves a four-year term. The Comptroller is limited to two consecutive terms under the 1993 Term Limits Law; in 2008, however, the City Council voted for a one-time term extension, enabling all currently term-limited City elected officials to run for a third consecutive term.

¹ Information in this section comes from the New York City Charter (2004) <http://www.nyc.gov/html/charter/downloads/pdf/citycharter2004.pdf> and http://home.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/?pageID=nyc_home.

William C. Thompson is the current Comptroller for the City of New York:
<http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/>.

The Public Advocate

The Public Advocate acts as the liaison between City government and its constituents by serving as a medium through which New York City residents can express feedback about local government policies and operations. The Public Advocate responds to people's complaints, problems, and inquiries involving City employees and agencies; investigates problematic City agencies and programs; proposes ways to make City agencies and programs more beneficial and effective for the public; and monitors the effectiveness of the City's public information and education efforts. The Public Advocate also presides over City Council meetings, is a member of all Council committees, and is next in line to succeed the Mayor if he or she were to leave office during a term. In the Council, the public advocate can vote in the event of a tie and has the power to introduce legislation.

The Public Advocate is elected by the voters of New York City and serves a four-year term. The Public Advocate is limited to two consecutive terms under the 1993 Term Limits Law; in 2008, however, the City Council voted for a one-time term extension, enabling all currently term-limited City elected officials to run for a third consecutive term.

Betsy Gotbaum is the current Public Advocate for the City of New York:
<http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/index.html>.

City Council Members

The New York City Council is composed of 51 members, who represent districts throughout the City, and serves as the legislative body for the City of New York. Council members are responsible for approving the City budget; drafting and passing bills affecting the City which the Mayor can either veto or sign into law; overseeing City agencies; and holding public hearings on the City budget as well as on proposed laws, programs, and other proposals affecting New York City and its residents. The Council also makes decisions regarding land use issues, including zoning changes, community development plans, and the sale of City-owned property. The Council can override mayoral vetoes with a two-thirds majority.

Council members are elected by voters in their respective districts and serve four-year terms. Council members are limited to two consecutive terms under the 1993 Term Limits Law; in 2008, however, the City Council voted for a one-time term extension, enabling all currently term-limited City elected officials to run for a third consecutive term.

The Council elects a Speaker from among its own members. The Speaker assigns Council members to committees and serves as an ex-officio member of all committees. Christine

C. Quinn is the current Speaker of the New York City Council:
<http://council.nyc.gov/d3/html/members/home.shtml>.

For a list of current Council members, consult the New York City Council website:
<http://council.nyc.gov/html/members/members.shtml>.

Borough Presidents

Borough Presidents are elected officials responsible for improving the quality of life for the residents of their respective boroughs. Borough Presidents monitor many City services, including street repair, park maintenance, and housing code enforcement. Borough Presidents also control a portion of the City's capital and expense budget for projects in their boroughs, appoint members of community boards, recommend capital projects for the Borough, and have an advisory role in the City's budget process. As representatives of their boroughs, Borough Presidents are expected to organize and advocate on behalf of their constituents and bring their constituents' needs to the attention of the larger City government.

Borough Presidents are elected by voters in their respective boroughs and serve four-year terms. Borough Presidents are limited to two consecutive terms under the 1993 Term Limits Law; in 2008, however, the City Council voted for a one-time term extension, enabling all currently term-limited City elected officials to run for a third consecutive term.

The current Manhattan Borough President is Scott M. Stringer: <http://www.mbpo.org/>.

The current Brooklyn Borough President is Marty Markowitz: <http://www.brooklyn-usa.org/>.

The current Bronx Borough President is Adolfo Carrion, Jr.:
<http://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/>.

The current Queens Borough President is Helen M. Marshall: <http://www.queensbp.org/>.

The current Staten Island Borough President is James P. Molinaro:
<http://www.statenislandusa.com/>.

District Attorneys

District Attorneys investigate and prosecute people accused of committing crimes in the areas under their jurisdiction. Each borough in New York City has its own District Attorney.

District Attorneys are elected by voters in their respective counties and are not term-limited.

Robert M. Morgenthau is the current District Attorney for New York County (Manhattan): <http://manhattanda.org/>.

Charles J. Hynes is the current District Attorney for Kings County (Brooklyn):
<http://www.brooklynda.org/>.

Robert T. Johnson is the current District Attorney for Bronx County (Bronx):
<http://bronxda.nyc.gov/frames.html>.

Richard A. Brown is the current District Attorney for Queens County (Queens):
<http://www.queensda.org/index2.html>.

Daniel M. Donovan, Jr. is the current District Attorney for Richmond County (Staten Island): <http://rcda.nyc.gov/>.

Elected Offices – New York State²

The Governor

The Governor is the Chief Executive Officer of the State of New York. As the head of the executive branch of State government, the Governor is responsible for proposing the State's budget; appointing and monitoring the heads of State agencies; enacting State laws by approving or vetoing bills passed by the State legislature; and proposing initiatives for the State. The Governor also serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the State's military and naval forces and has the power to grant pardons and commutations, except in cases of treason or impeachment.

The Governor is elected by the voters of New York State and serves a four-year term. The Governor is not term-limited, as there are no term limits for State elected officials.

The current New York State Governor is David A. Paterson:
<http://www.ny.gov/governor/>.

The Lieutenant Governor

The Lieutenant Governor is the second highest ranking official in New York State government. The Lieutenant Governor assumes the role of Governor if the Governor leaves office during his or her term. The Lieutenant Governor also presides as President of the State Senate.

The Lieutenant Governor is elected by the voters of New York State on a ticket with the Governor and serves a four-year term. The Lieutenant Governor is not term-limited.

The office of New York State Lieutenant Governor is currently vacant.

The Comptroller

The Comptroller is the Chief Financial Officer of the State of New York. As Chief Financial Officer, the Comptroller is responsible for reviewing the New York State budget; making recommendations about State fiscal policies; auditing State agencies and local governments; overseeing the State's pension funds and other trusts; managing State contracts; and issuing and selling State bonds.

² Information in this section comes from <http://www.ny.gov/>.

The Comptroller is elected by the voters of New York State and serves a four-year term. The Comptroller is not term-limited.

The current New York State Comptroller is Thomas P. DiNapoli:
<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/>.

The Attorney General

The Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer in the State of New York. The Attorney General is responsible for representing the State of New York and its residents in civil and criminal legal matters.

The Attorney General is elected by the voters of New York State and serves a four-year term. The Attorney General is not term-limited.

The current New York State Attorney General is Andrew M. Cuomo:
<http://www.oag.state.ny.us/home.html>.

State Legislators

The New York State legislature is composed of 150 State Assembly members and 62 State Senators. Each legislator represents a district within the State of New York. The State legislature is responsible for approving the State budget; drafting and passing bills affecting the State of New York, which the Governor can either veto or sign into law; overseeing State agencies and departments; and holding public hearings on the State budget as well as on proposed laws, programs, and other proposals affecting New York State and its residents. The State legislature can override gubernatorial vetoes with a two-thirds majority.

State legislators are elected by voters of their respective districts and serve two-year terms. The State Senate elects a Majority Leader from among its members and the State Assembly elects a Speaker. The current New York Senate Majority Leader is Malcolm A. Smith and the Speaker of the New York State Assembly is Sheldon Silver.

For a list of current State legislators, consult the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate websites: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/> and <http://www.senate.state.ny.us/senatehomepage.nsf/home?openform>.

Elected Offices – Federal Government³

The President

The President is the head of the executive branch of the federal government and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. As the head of state, the President is responsible for proposing a federal budget; appointing and monitoring heads of federal

³ Information in this section comes from <http://www.usa.gov/> and <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

agencies, including the Cabinet, as well as heads of federal commissions, federal judges, and ambassadors. The President is responsible for enacting federal laws by approving or vetoing bills passed by Congress and implementing and enforcing those laws. The President has the power to negotiate and sign treaties, with the approval of the Senate, and issue executive orders to clarify or expand upon existing laws. The President has unlimited power to grant pardons and commutations for federal crimes, except in cases of impeachment.

The President is elected directly by members of the Electoral College and indirectly by the voters of the United States. Each of the 538 members of the Electoral College represents the state from which he or she was elected. Although electors rather than the voters directly elect the President, electors are beholden to their constituents and vote according to the way in which those constituents voted.

The President serves a four-year term. Under the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1951, the President can only serve two terms.

The current President of the United States is Barack Obama:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president_obama/.

The Vice President

The Vice President is the second highest ranking official in the United States. The Vice President assumes the role of President if the President leaves office during his or her term or is unable to perform his or her duties. The Vice President advises the President and serves as President of the U.S. Senate, where he or she casts a vote in the event of a tie.

The Vice President is elected by the Electoral College on a ticket with the President. Like the President, the Vice President serves a four-year, once-renewable term.

The current Vice President of the United States is Joe Biden:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice_president_biden/.

U.S. Congress

The U.S. Congress is composed of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate has 100 members, two from each state, and the House of Representatives has 435 members, who are elected from the 50 states in proportion to the total state population. The House has six non-voting members who represent the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and five territories of the United States.

Congress, established by Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, serves as the legislative branch of government. The Senate and House of Representatives have some slightly different powers, but as a whole, Congress is responsible for approving the federal budget; drafting and passing bills affecting the country, which the President can either

veto or sign into law; overseeing federal agencies and departments; approving Presidential appointments; and declaring war. Congress can override presidential vetoes with a two-thirds majority in each chamber.

Members of Congress are directly elected. Senators are elected by the voters of their states and serve six-year terms. Members of the House of Representatives are elected by the voters of their Congressional Districts and serve two-year terms. The Senate elects a Majority Leader from among its members and the House of Representatives elects a Speaker. The current Senate Majority Leader is Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and the current Speaker of the House is Nancy Pelosi (D-California).

For a list of current members of Congress, consult the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives websites: <http://www.senate.gov/> and <http://www.house.gov/>.

Other Elected Offices

Civil Court judges, Supreme Court judges, and judicial surrogates are also elected officials, as are many party positions. Elected party positions include District Leaders, who help coordinate party and election-related activities, and County, State, and National Committee members, who determine party platforms and the nominating process for other elected officials.

NYC Board of Elections Offices and Contact Information

General Office

32 Broadway, 7 Fl
New York, NY 10004-1609
Tel: 1-212-487-5300

Manhattan Office

200 Varick Street, 10 Fl
New York, NY 10014
Tel: 1-212-886-2100

Bronx Office

1780 Grand Concourse, 5 Fl
Bronx, NY 10457
Tel: 1-718-299-9017

Brooklyn Office

345 Adams Street, 4 Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11201
Tel: 1-718-797-8800

Queens Office

126-06 Queens Boulevard
Kew Gardens, NY 11415
Tel: 1-718-730-6730

Staten Island Office

1 Edgewater Plaza, 4 Fl
Staten Island, NY 10305
Tel: 1-718-876-0079

Phone Bank

1-212-VOTE-NYC (868-3692)
1-866-VOTE-NYC

Key Election Dates - 2009

February 24: Special Election for vacant City Council seats

August 14: Deadline to register to vote in the New York Primary Election

September 8: New York Primary Election

October 9: Deadline to register to vote in the general election and to change party affiliation for the following year

November 3: Election Day – General Election

Useful Resources

Elections

NYC Board of Elections: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/>

NYS Board of Elections: <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/INDEX.html>

Vote NY: <http://www.vote-ny.com/>

League of Women Voters Smart Voter: <http://www.smartvoter.org/>

League of Women Voters - Vote 411: <http://www.vote411.org/>

League of Women Voters in the City of New York: <http://www.lwvnyc.org/links.html>

Project Vote Smart: <http://www.votesmart.org/index.htm>

New York City Voter Assistance Commission:
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/vac/html/home/home.shtml>

NYC Campaign Finance Board Voter Guide: http://www.nyccfb.info/public/voter-guide/about.aspx?sm=public_00

Election Protection: <http://www.866ourvote.org/>

Rock the Vote Election Center: <http://www.rockthevote.com/electioncenter/>

Government

New York City Government
<http://www.nyc.gov>

New York City Council
<http://council.nyc.gov/html/home/home.shtml>

New York State Government
<http://www.state.ny.us>

New York State Assembly
<http://www.assembly.state.ny.us>

New York State Senate
<http://www.senate.state.ny.us>

U.S. Congress
<http://www.congress.org>

U.S. Senate
<http://www.senate.gov/>

U.S. House of Representatives
<http://www.house.gov/>

White House
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

U.S. Government Portal
<http://www.usa.gov/index.shtml>

If you have any questions about this guide, please contact Clara Botstein, Project Coordinator for UNH's nonpartisan voter mobilization campaign, at 212-967-0322 ext. 316 or cbotstein@unhny.org.