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NONPARTISAN VOTER EDUCATION AND MOBILIZATION GUIDE FOR THE 2009 CITYWIDE ELECTIONS

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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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*Information for Voters*¹

Important dates for the 2009 citywide elections

Deadline to register to vote in the Primary Election: August 21, 2009

Primary Election: September 15, 2009

Deadline to register to vote in the General Election: October 9, 2008

General Election: November 3, 2009

*Absentee voting ends the day before Election Day. For more information, see p. 9.

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.

¹ Information in this section comes from the New York City Board of Elections "Registration & Voting," <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/documents/boe/fourlanguages/registrationandvotingenglish.pdf>; the New York City Board of Elections website, <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/>; and the New York State Board of Elections website, <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/INDEX.html>.

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.

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>.

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, it is a good idea to confirm with the Board of Elections that you are still registered to vote.

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 vote

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 through 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.

Using the voting machines:

1. When your turn comes to vote, part the voting machine's curtains and enter the voting booth. Once you enter the voting booth, you have three minutes in which to vote.
2. Pull the large red handle from left to right. Do not touch the handle again until you have finished making your selections.
3. To make a selection, turn down the lever next to the candidate of your choice. After you do this, an "X" should appear next to the candidate's name. Leave the lever down. If you make a mistake, move the lever back to its original position and try again.
4. When you have finished making your selections, leave the levers down and pull the large red handle all the way to the left. The levers should return to their original positions.
5. Part the curtains and exit the voting booth.

If the voting machines 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

If you do not speak English as a first language:

The Board of Elections is required to provide written and oral language assistance to voters who speak Spanish, Chinese, or Korean. Spanish assistance is required in parts of Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Chinese assistance is required in parts of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Korean assistance is required in parts of Queens.

At poll sites with written assistance, all voting instructions and materials are translated into the appropriate language(s). Currently, all Board of Elections voting materials are published in English and Spanish, and most materials appear in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean.

At poll sites with oral assistance, interpreters are present to assist voters who do not speak English. Interpreters are available to answer questions and, if asked by a voter, can enter the voting booth to help translate the ballot.

Voters who do not speak English as a first language can also vote on Ballot Marking Devices, which translate ballots through visual and audio features into Spanish, Chinese-Mandarin, Chinese-Cantonese, and Korean.

If you need language or physical assistance, you can bring someone with you to the polls as long as that person is not your employer or union representative. You may also request to have an interpreter or a bipartisan team of inspectors at the poll site enter the voting booth with you.

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 which will appear on the ballot in the 2009 citywide elections.

Elected Offices – New York City²

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.

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

² 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.

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 Ruben Diaz, 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/>.

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.

Election Resources

Information about candidates:

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

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

Gotham Gazette website, "Who's Running for What?":

<http://www.gothamgazette.com/city/campaigns/index.php>

New York City Voter Assistance Commission:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/vac/html/home/home.shtml>

Election protection hotlines:

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

Useful websites:

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>

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

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

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

*For 501(c)(3) Organizations – Nonpartisan Voter Mobilization Activities*³

Don't assume that everyone believes in the importance of voting or that his/her vote matters. It is often necessary to educate staff and program participants about the importance of voting and actively encourage them to participate in the democratic process. To carry out effective voter education and mobilization activities, your organization will need a group of committed and trained staff and volunteers.

Remember that as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, you must engage in *nonpartisan* voter education, registration, and mobilization activities. It is very important that your organization and staff do not appear to favor a candidate or political party during election-related activities.⁴

Voter Registration Drives

Voter registration drives are a popular way to engage your community and encourage electoral participation. Here are some guidelines on how to carry out successful drives:

Ensuring the Nonpartisan Nature of Your Voter Registration Drive – Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Choose a target population on a nonpartisan basis. It is entirely acceptable to focus on your clients and/or neighborhood but make clear, for example through a board resolution, that your organization is doing so in order to help the people it serves participate in the political process;
- If using issue advocacy to encourage potential voters, make sure to focus on a range of issues and keep them as broad as possible;
- Make sure staff are trained to carry out nonpartisan voter registration drives;
- Have at least two staff members present at each registration drive so that one can verify the nonpartisan nature of the drive if your organization is called to testify;
- Provide nonpartisan information about the electoral process, including election dates, registration deadlines, and sample ballots; and
- Post a sign with language emphasizing the nonpartisan nature of your registration drive and/or put such language on your written materials.

³ Information in this section comes from the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network, "A Nonprofit's Guide to Voter Registration," <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/Toolkits.html>; the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York, "Nonpartisan Voter Registration Drives," <http://www.npcnny.org/info/adv8.htm>; the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network, "A Nonprofit's Guide to Hosting a Candidate Forum," <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/images/publications/hosting-a-candidate-forum-eng-1-8-08.pdf>; the National Association for the Education of Young Children "Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Registration and GOTV Drives," <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/toolbox/pdf/gotv.pdf>; and UNH's 2004 Nonpartisan Voter Registration and Mobilization Guide.

⁴ This guide does not constitute legal advice. If you have specific questions about permissible nonpartisan election-related activities, you may wish to consult legal counsel.

Don't:

- Discuss political parties or candidates during the voter registration drive. If asked for information about either, direct people to candidate or party websites;
- Wear buttons, t-shirts, or any other form of paraphernalia that refers to or identifies a candidate or political party;
- Ask registrants how they plan to vote or try to influence registrants in any way towards a particular candidate or political party;
- Indicate how you plan to vote or reveal your personal political preferences. If asked, respond that your purpose is to promote the democratic process and not to endorse particular candidates;
- Publicize which candidates agree with the positions your organization supports; or
- Time your voter registration drive to coincide with politically significant events in a particular candidate's campaign or otherwise coordinate with a political campaign or party.

Planning the Drive

- Review guidelines for holding a nonpartisan voter registration drive;
- Contact the Board of Elections to find out voter registration deadlines for the primary and general elections;
- Recruit staff, volunteers, and community members (including youth and seniors) who are interested in working at voter registration tables or helping plan the drive. Recruitment techniques include sending out emails and letters, printing flyers, and making announcements during organization meetings, activities, and events;
- Choose sites for your registration tables that are visible, accessible, and have steady traffic flows. Possible sites include lobbies of settlement houses, public housing complexes, community and religious centers; outside locations near farmers markets, street fairs, and public transportation stops; locations inside or near the entrance of supermarkets and popular local stores; and at community and school-related events. If you put registration tables outside, be sure to alert local business owners in advance;
- Order and collect all the necessary materials from the Board of Elections. Necessary materials include voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications in several languages; basic information about voting, including who is eligible to vote and how to find poll sites; list of registration deadlines and election dates; and pens (black and blue only);
- Train and assign volunteers. Train volunteers in particular about how to correctly fill out voter registration applications, answer basic questions, and remain nonpartisan during the registration drive;
- Publicize your drive through flyers, posters, emails, letters, and advertisements in local media outlets; and
- Include a nonpartisan disclaimer on all materials.⁵

⁵ The following is an example of a nonpartisan disclaimer: "United Neighborhood Houses of New York is a nonpartisan organization that neither supports nor opposes a political party or candidate for office."

During the Drive

- Be active. Approach people and ask them if they have registered to vote. If they have not, encourage them to do so and give them the appropriate materials;
- Attract the attention of passersby with decorations, colorful signs, refreshments, and food;
- After someone has filled out a voter registration application, check to make sure there are no mistakes;
- Volunteer to drop off completed registration applications at the Board of Elections;
- Make copies of all completed applications for your records;
- Ask people to fill out self-addressed postcards pledging to vote. These postcards should include election dates, polling hours, and contact information for Board of Elections offices. The postcards should be mailed to registrants a week before the election; and
- Ask registrants for their contact information (phone number or email) so that you can remind them to vote.

After the Drive

- Contact the Board of Elections to make sure the voter registration applications were received and processed correctly.

Additional Voter Registration Tips

- Register clients during your organization's regular activities, for example during sign-in or intake;
- Keep registration applications at your organization's headquarters and make them available at meetings, activities, and events;
- Encourage your organization's staff, volunteers, and board members to register to vote, for example by sending an agency-wide reminder email; and
- Put a message on your organization's answering machine reminding people to register to vote a week or two before the registration deadline.

Candidate Forums

Before a primary or general election, your agency may want to invite the candidates to a local forum at your agency headquarters. Candidate forums allow candidates to get to know your agency and enable your staff and program participants to learn more about the candidates' positions. Here are some guidelines on how to carry out successful candidate forums:

Ensuring the Nonpartisan Nature of Your Candidate Forum

- Invite all candidates running for a specific office to your forum and encourage all of them to attend. Do not hold the forum if there are two candidates running for an elected office and only one can attend;
- Make a statement regarding the nonpartisan nature of your forum to the candidates and at the forum itself;
- Make sure the forum covers a broad range of issues;
- Give the candidates equal time to present their viewpoints;
- Choose a neutral moderator and/or panelists;
- Review audience questions before handing them to the moderator to ensure they are not partisan or leading;
- Do not ask candidates to agree or disagree with specific issues your organization supports;
- Ask the audience to refrain from excessive exuberance for or against any of the candidates;
- Ask audience members to leave any partisan attire or paraphernalia at the door
- Chose a neutral site for the forum;
- Provide nonpartisan election materials, including voter registration forms and key election dates and deadlines;
- Set up a table on which candidates can place their campaign literature; and
- Review guidelines for 501(c)(3) organizations.

Planning the Forum

- Select a format for your candidate forum. Possible formats include a forum with an impartial moderator and/or panelists or a town hall meeting at which audience members ask all the questions;
- Contact other nonprofit organizations about cosponsoring the forum. Working with a coalition of nonprofit organizations helps to achieve greater turnout and broaden the range of issues discussed at the forum;
- Chose a date, time, and place for the forum. Chose a central location, preferably accessible by public transit, and try to host your forum on an evening during the workweek;
- Contact the Board of Elections for a complete list of names and contact information for all candidates running for the public office;
- Send invitations to all the candidates. In your invitations, inform the candidates about your organization's mission and constituency and remind them about the nonpartisan nature of the forum;
- Compile a list of media that you would like to have advertise and/or cover the forum, including community media outlets, and notify them about the forum;
- Recruit volunteers for the forum;

- Select a well-respected, politically neutral moderator. If possible, choose a moderator who lives outside of the election district;
- Publicize the forum as much as possible. Advertise through local media and at organization events and meetings, send letters and/or emails, make flyers and posters, and publicize the forum online;
- Follow-up with the candidates to verify attendance and communicate the expected turnout; and
- Confirm site arrangements and with volunteers, the moderator and/or panelists, and the media.

Additional Tips

- Schedule time for a question and answer or meet-and-greet period after the forum during which voters can meet and talk to the candidates
- Set up voter registration tables outside the forum and hand out nonpartisan election literature and materials

After the Forum

- Send thank you letters to the candidates as well as to the moderator and/or panelists

Get Out The Vote (GOTV) Activities

As Election Day approaches, it is important that you remind your staff and program participants to go to the polls. Here are some examples of effective GOTV activities:

- Make announcements reminding people about the upcoming election at organization meetings, activities, and events;
- Send emails to your staff, volunteers, and board members reminding them to vote;
- Put up posters reminding people to vote;
- Utilize your organization's programs. If your organization runs child care or youth programs, for example, engage the children by having them make GOTV posters and reminder notices for their parents;
- Mail pledge postcards to new registrants and remind them to vote by phone, email or in person;
- Put a message on your organization's answering machine reminding people to vote in the upcoming election; and
- Provide transportation from your organization to the polls on Election Day and advertise that service.

Protecting Your Organization’s Tax-Exempt Status⁶

As a 501(c)(3) organization, you are tax-exempt under the Internal Revenue Code. In exchange for the privilege of tax exempt purchases and tax deductions, your organization is prohibited from engaging in partisan activities. While you are allowed to participate in many election-related activities, it is crucial that your staff understand which activities are permissible by law so that they avoid jeopardizing your organization’s tax-exempt status.⁷

Your 501(c)(3) organization CAN:

- Conduct nonpartisan voter education sessions;
- Conduct nonpartisan voter registration drives;
- Organize nonpartisan candidate forums;
- Engage in nonpartisan Get Out The Vote (GOTV) activities;
- Educate candidates about public interest issues as well as policies and programs your organization supports;
- Canvass the public on issues; and
- Publish candidate questionnaires and voter guides (with certain restrictions).⁸

Your 501(c)(3) organization CANNOT:

- Endorse candidates for public office;
- Make campaign contributions or otherwise participate in a political campaign on behalf of a candidate for public office;
- Publicize which candidates agree with the positions your organization supports;
- Publish or communicate anything that explicitly or implicitly favors or opposes a candidate; or
- Allow employees or anybody speaking on behalf of your organization to engage in partisan activities or make partisan statements of any kind as representatives of the organization.

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.

⁶ Information in this section comes from the Alliance for Justice “Permissible Election Activities Checklist,” <http://www.afj.org/assets/resources/resource1/Electoral-Activities-Checklist.pdf> and the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network “Nonprofits, Voting & Elections: A Guide for 501(c)(3) Organizations on Non-Partisan Voter Participation and Education,” <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/images/publications/nonprofits-voting-elections-eng-1-31-08.pdf>.

⁷ This guide does not constitute legal advice. If you have specific questions about permissible nonpartisan election-related activities, you may wish to consult legal counsel.

⁸ For guidelines regarding nonpartisan candidate questionnaires and voter guides, consult the Alliance for Justice “Election Year Advocacy: Candidate Questionnaires and Voter Guides,” <http://www.afj.org/assets/resources/resource1/Candidate-Questionnaire-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.