PROJECT VOTE

NONPROFIT PARTNERS

A MANUAL FOR NONPROFIT STAFF

July 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS
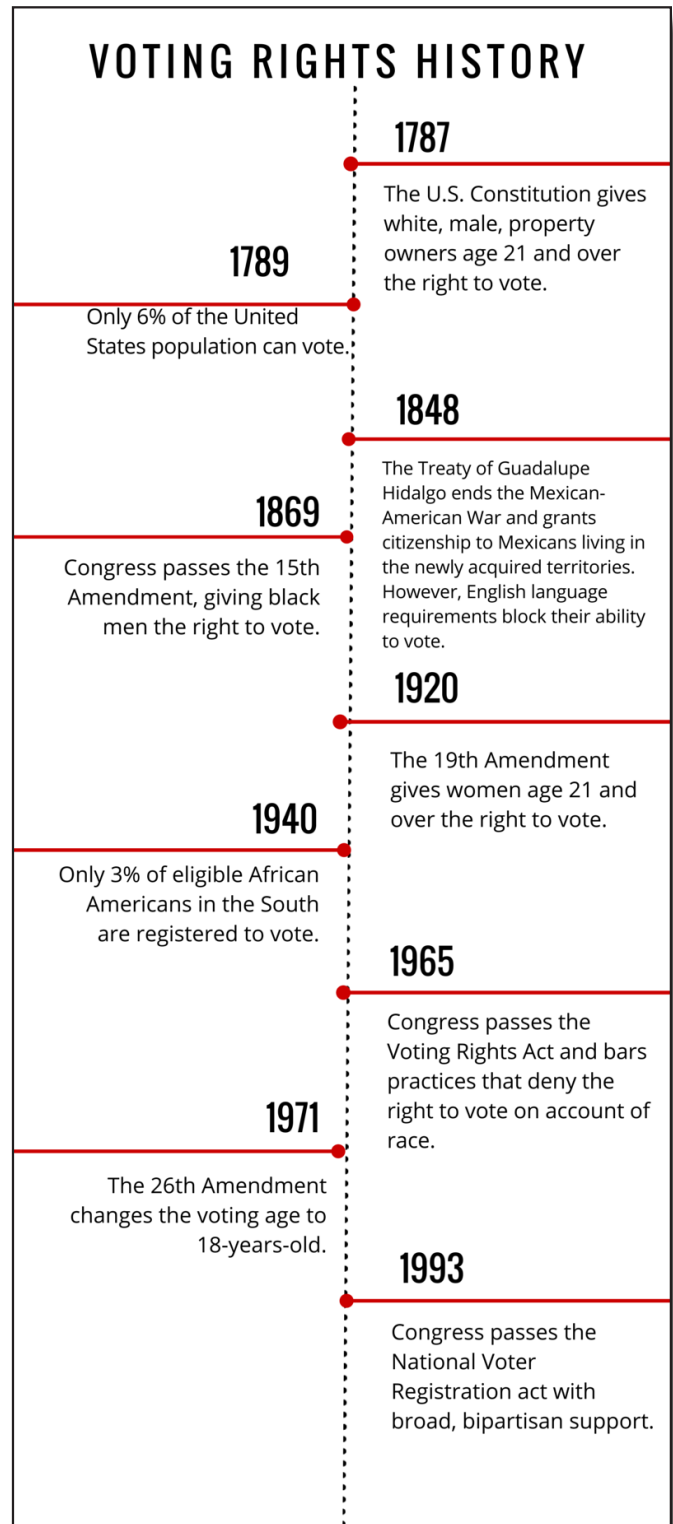
WE ARE NON-PARTISAN

Project Vote is a 501(c)(3) non-partisan, non-profit organization, and its support and training of nonprofit staff is also entirely non-partisan. Non-partisan means that no aspect of this program will, in any way, advocate, encourage, suggest, or imply the favoritism or preference of one political candidate or party over another.

NONPROFIT PARTNERS INITIATIVE

In the Nonprofit Partners Initiative, Project Vote works with service providers nationwide to bring voter registration to their clients and communities. The program includes the unique, hands-on Project Vote Nonprofit Partners Training and Certificate for managers and frontline workers, as well as individualized management suggestions, and ongoing support and training opportunities.
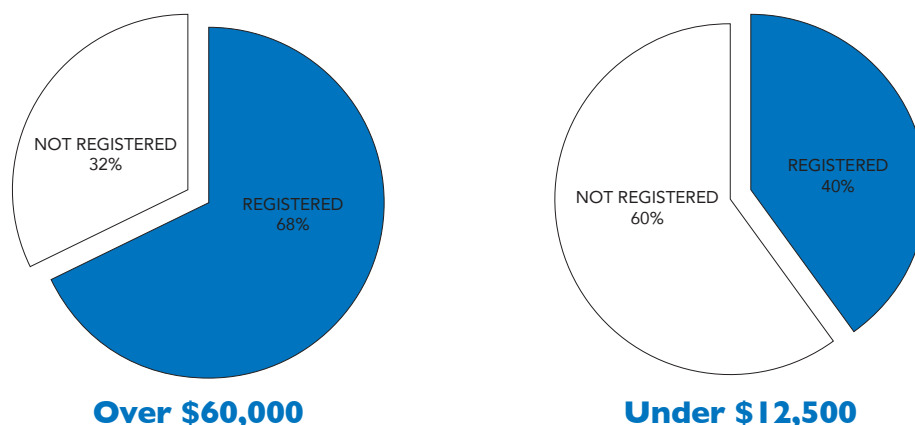
A selection of key dates in the history of voting rights

VOTING RIGHTS HISTORY

1787
The U.S. Constitution gives white, male, property owners age 21 and over the right to vote.

1789
Only 6% of the United States population can vote.

1848
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends the Mexican-American War and grants citizenship to Mexicans living in the newly acquired territories. However, English language requirements block their ability to vote.

1869
Congress passes the 15th Amendment, giving black men the right to vote.

1920
The 19th Amendment gives women age 21 and over the right to vote.

1940
Only 3% of eligible African Americans in the South are registered to vote.

1965
Congress passes the Voting Rights Act and bars practices that deny the right to vote on account of race.

1971
The 26th Amendment changes the voting age to 18-years-old.

1993
Congress passes the National Voter Registration act with broad, bipartisan support.

1. ACLU: https://www.aclu.org/files/VRATimelinehtml?redirect=timeline-history-voting-rights-act

Voter Registration Rates in the United States

INCOME

| **Over $60,000** | **Under $12,500** |

Voter registration rates among low-income and higher-income Americans vary greatly. Nationally, 68% of all people who make more than $60,000 are registered to vote. However, only 40% of people who make less than $12,500 are registered.[1]

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity[2]	**Percent Registered to Vote Nationally**
Asian/Pacific Islander	**57.1%**
Black	**75.7%**
Latino	**60.1%**
Native American	**64.2%**
White	**75.8%**

United States Voter Turnout Today

2010 MIDTERM ELECTION	2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
36.7% of eligbile voters--the lowest since World War II.	57.2% of eligible voters.

1. *Project Vote Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey Data, November 2012 Voting and Registration Supplement, Accessed 5/22/22014. Project Vote Analysis of Catalist Data, Accessed 5/22/2014*
2. *Project Vote 2012 Representational Bias Report*

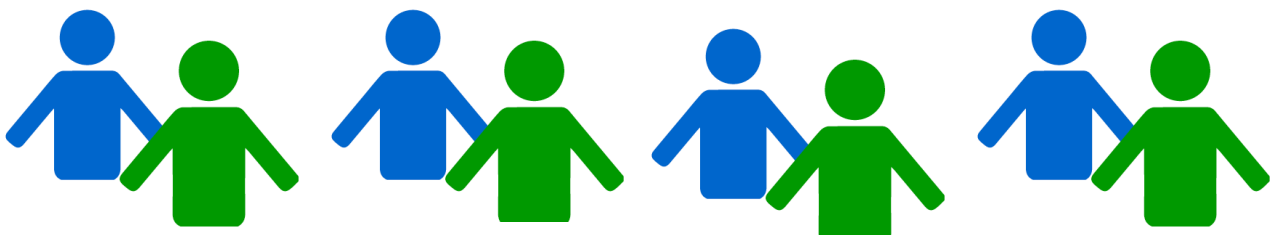# Why does access to voter registration matter?

It's power
There is power in numbers. Elected officials pay attention to who votes.

It's our voice
It's the best way to communicate with elected officials

Without it, government CAN'T and WON'T serve us

Government decides the budget, including for social programs.

Elected officials represent the community's interests in local, state, and national government

The community votes.

The community's priorities are reflected in policy and in government spending.

Through voter registration, you can…

Make Voting More Accessible to Low-Income and Minority Americans

- Low-income citizens face technology, access, information and other barriers in registering to vote, which helps explain why they are registered to vote at lower rates than other groups.
- These are barriers that nonprofits are uniquely positioned to help them overcome.

Build Stronger Communities

- Lack of representation of low-income and minority voters means the people who are often the most affected by government policies are unable to change or participate in the conversation about those policies.

Empower and Improve the Health of Your Clients

- Voting is empowering and can give your clients a greater sense of control in their lives and communities.

- Community involvement, including registering to vote and voting, makes people feel more powerful and more connected to their community and country, which has been shown to improve health.

- The WebMD article "Voting Counts a Healthy Habit" examines studies showing voting may have a particularly powerful effect for the disadvantaged and people with a history of mental illness.[1]

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1. *WebMD Article:* http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/voting-counts-as-healthy-habit.
   Project Vote has also written about the relationship between voter registration and health here: http://www.projectvote.org/blog/2014/04/health-benefit-exchanges-can-improve-health-through-voter-registration-as-well-as-affordable-insurance/

Raise Your Organization's Voice and Amplify Your Impact

WHEN MORE CLIENTS VOTE:
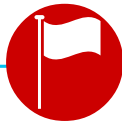
NATIONALLY	LOCALLY	YOUR CLIENTS
Clients are better represented	Clients are better represented	Clients realize the power of engagement
National policy shifts to represent your clients	Officials make shifts on the local level	Clients become more active in the community
Your org makes a nationwide impact	Clients are more likely to have needs met	Clients engage in civic leadership and engagement

THE GREATER COMMUNITY RECOGNIZES YOUR CLIENTS AS IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

YOUR CLIENTS

Empowered	Better Represented	Active	Fulfilled

When your organization encourages your clients and community to register to vote, you're making your voice stronger and empowering people to support your cause in the long term.

CUANDO MÁS CLIENTES VOTAN:

AL NIVEL NACIONAL	AL NIVEL LOCAL	SUS CLIENTES
Sus clientes están mejor representados	Sus clientes están mejor representados	Clientes se dan cuenta de la fuerza de participación
Politicas nacionales cambian para representar sus clientes	Funcionarios hacen cambios en el nivel local	Clientes se vuelven más activos en la comunidad
Su organización produce un impacto nacional	Clientes son más propensos a tener necesidades satisfechas	Clientes se vuelven lideres comunitarios y civicos

LA MAYOR COMUNIDAD RECONOCE SUS CLIENTES COMO MIEMBROS IMPORTANTES E INFLUYENTES DE LA COMUNIDAD.

SUS CLIENTES

Fortalecidos	Mejor Representados	Activos	Satisfechos

Creating A Voter Registration Message for Your Organization

Your Organization

Your mission: _____

The goal of your program: _____

How is voter registration important to...

Your mission: _____

The community you serve: _____

Issues that affect your community: _____.

Build a sentence to share

Voter registration is important to our organization because: _____

_____

_____.

Your organization most likely has 501(c)(3) non-partisan, nonprofit status, so you are probably already familiar with what it means to be non-partisan. However, it is especially important to remember to be non-partisan when helping your community members register to vote.

NON-PARTISAN
means you will not in any way advocate, encourage,
suggest, or imply the preference of one political candidate
or party over another.

NON-PARTISAN VOTER REGISTRATION
means you will assist anyone to register to vote,
no matter his or her political preferences or party.

Being non-partisan means you CANNOT:

- advise a client about which party to join;

- make positive or negative comments about political parties or politicians that may affect your client's decision about which party to register with or to register at all;

- dissuade clients in a different political party from yours from registering to vote;

- only ask people who seem like they are in your political party to register to vote; or

- wear clothing or put up posters or stickers in your office promoting politicians or political parties.

You CAN:

- discuss the importance of voting; or

- highlight issues, like health care and education, that are important to your clients.

If an organization or the employees of an organization with 501(c)(3) status engage in partisan activity, the organization can lose its funding and 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, which can greatly hinder its ability to function. Additionally, acting in a partisan way may discourage citizens from registering to vote, which is detrimental to our democracy and communities.

Important additional considerations

1. **Voter registration cannot affect your clients' access to services.** When you ask clients about voter registration, it is important that they know the decision about whether to register to vote is voluntary and their decision about voter registration, including their political party, will not affect their eligibility to receive other services that your organization offers.

2. **You cannot offer any incentive to get someone register to vote, or offer anything in exchange for their filling out a registration form.**

3. **You should ask everyone** about their eligibility and interest in registering—don't make assumptions about eligibility and always double check. Consistency is a big part of creating a successful voter registration system.

4. **Only United States citizens are eligible to register to vote.** You can find more information about eligibility in your state's voter registration guide, but this is a Federal eligibility standard, consistent in all the states.

Voter Registration Fraud

Knowingly providing false information on a voter registration application is voter registration fraud. When a person commits voter registration fraud, it is not always because they are actively trying to break the law – oftentimes it is because a person is not aware of the law.

Examples of voter registration fraud include:

- Asking anyone to fill in information on the application that is not true and accurate OR on behalf of another person.

- Filling out a voter registration application for a person without his or her consent.

- Knowingly asking a person to complete an application who is not eligible to register to vote (e.g., she is too young, not a resident of the state, not a citizen, etc.).

- Asking a person to complete an application even though you know the person is already registered at their current residence. Note: if a person cannot remember if he or she is registered to vote at their current residence, it is **not** voter registeration fraud to complete a voter registration application.

- Leading a person to believe what they are filling out is not a voter registration application.

- Putting fake or made-up information on the application (e.g., completing an application with "Mickey Mouse," or making up an address, etc.)

- Filling in any information on an incomplete application (including checking any unchecked boxes) without the applicant's consent.

A Final Reminder

You are not actually "registering" anyone to vote. Only election officials can register someone to vote. You are assisting your clients in the process.

Least and Most Effective Nonprofit Voter Registraton Activities

Best

Collect completed voter registration forms and turn them into election officials for your clients.

One-on-one, in-person conversations:

One-on-one interactions are the most effective way to have a meaningful conversation regarding voter registration. People are more open and receptive and it's easier to establish trust.

Offering voter registration to groups and in program groups:

Where one-on-one interactions aren't possible, face-to-face conversations with multiple people is the next best option.

Better

Including voter registration in paper-work and intake:

It's a great compliment to your other activities to place a voter registration form in intake paperwork and train the front desk team to talk to community members about voter registration. However, as intake is often very busy and conversations are best, this is not a good option to do by itself without follow-up.

Ok

Independent in-office voter registration:

A voter registration self-service booth with online or paper forms that individuals fill out alone can be intimidating. Options without staff follow-up are simply less effective than in-person, compassionate encouragement.
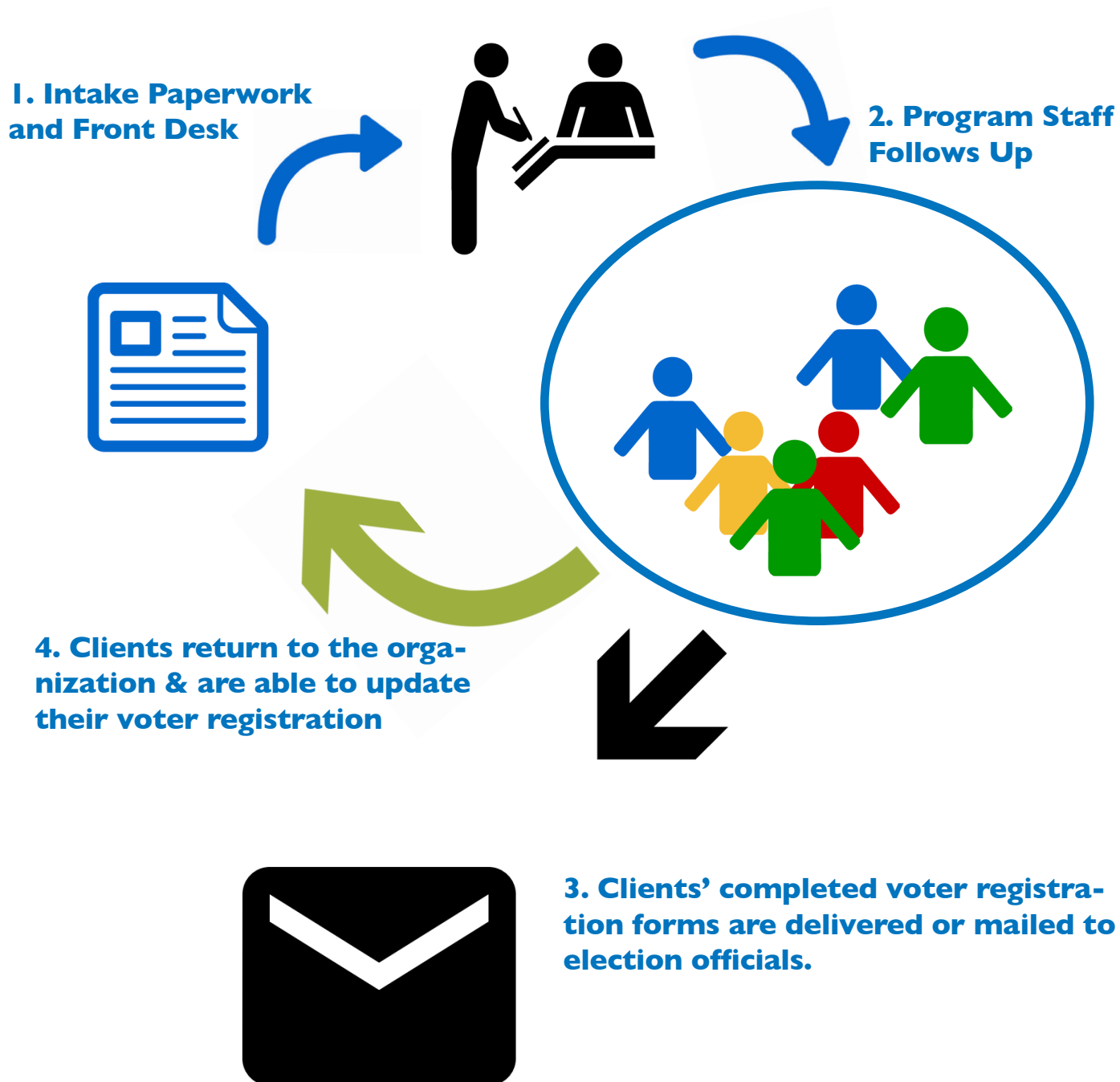
Why collect completed voter registration application forms?

- **Eliminate all the barriers communities face in registering to vote, including:**

  - knowledge about and interest in voter registration

  - stamps

  - access to the internet and a printer

  - postage to mail their voter registration form to election officials

  - transportation to the elections office to drop off their completed form

  - literacy

  - language barriers in understanding the form

  - filling out the form correctly and completely

- **Ensure that your clients' completed voter registration forms get turned into election officals.**

- **Be able to say, "We have a form right here and can help you fill it out right now."** Simplify the process for your clients and give them a compelling reason to fill out a form immediately.

Lessons from The National Voter Registration Act:
12 Million People Registered by Public Assistance Agencies

Have you ever noticed that you're offered a chance to register to vote by the DMV? What about by SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and WIC agency? In most states, these agencies are required to offer voter registration by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), a federal law passed in 1993 with bipartisan support in Congress. The law has been enormously effective; since 1995, when it went into effect, 11.9 million people have registered to vote through public assistance agencies alone. There's a lot to learn from the NVRA and experience to implementing it over the years – the biggest takes-aways are the importance of providing meaningful assistance and tracking the number of voter registrations collected. These lessons are expressed in the model we recommend to our nonprofit service provider partners.

The points of voter registration in an organization

1. Intake Paperwork and Front Desk

2. Program Staff Follows Up

4. Clients return to the organization & are able to update their voter registration

3. Clients' completed voter registration forms are delivered or mailed to election officials.

Make A Good "Ask"   **Make it Personal**   **Be Persistent**

1. Make a Good "Ask"

~~ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE?~~

This question is simply NOT effective. How you talk to a client about voter registration has an enormous impact. You want to ask in a way that is more indirect and makes it safe for your clients to talk about voter registration with you. Don't ask "yes" or "no" questions. Do be more indirect and kind.

Before you ask clients about their voter registration status, consider explaning why voter registration is important. You could say something like:

* "Voter registration is important to our organization this year because..."

* Draw from your organization's language and mission.

After you've introduced the subject, you can ask your clients a question about voter registration. The following are some good ways to phrase a question.

* "Do you remember when was the last time you updated your voter registration?"

* "Are you registered at your current address?"

* "Do you know if your voter registration information is all up-to-date?"

PRO TIP:

If someone seems like they're on the fence (but eligible to vote), don't wait to give you a definitive "YES!" before you hand them the voter registration form. Instead, go ahead and put the form in their hands. This can help speed up the process.
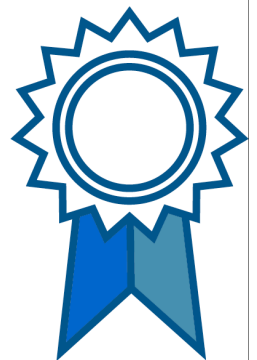
2. Be Persistent

We can't emphasize this point enough. Many of your clients will not be aware of reasons, like a name or address change, to update their voter registration. Asking a few follow-up questions can make all the difference in whether or not your clients decide to register to vote.

3. Make it Personal

It's hard to reach people at a big-picture or abstract level. When your clients have strong opinions about "how things work," it can be really tempting to engage them or try to convince them they're wrong. Instead, really try to 1) validate where they're coming from and 2) bring the conversation back to why voter registration is important to you. Keep bringing the conversation back to your organization and your community.

Before you start talking to clients, try to think through your own personal connection to voter registration and think through some of the more common ways community members might responde to voter registration.

If a client says they don't need to register or update:

- _____
- _____

If they say don't have time or are tired of paperwork:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

If they are confused about why you're asking:

- _____
- _____

If they're not interested or don't care about voting:

Validate! "I hear you—
_____

> *Remember: this might be the only chance this person has to register to vote before the next election.*
>
> ***Be persistent!*** *It's worth it!*

Extra Tips:

When talking to non-citizens, remember:

- Non-citizens are not allowed to register or vote. However, once people become citizens they are allowed to register and vote.

- Many people are eligible to apply for citizenship but have not—you can encourage the client to double check their eligibility and consider applying for citizenship. Even if your client cannot register, she/he can help make sure eligible members of her/his family (particularly U.S. citizen teenagers who will turn 18 before the next election) and household register!

Talking to clients about voter registration deadlines and voting

- A client may be curious about when, if they want to vote in an upcoming election, they must register to vote. When discussing voting and elections with clients, it is important to communicate that unless the client registers on or before the close of registration for a given election, the client will not be able to vote in that election.

- For example, you can say, "If you would like to vote in the upcoming primary, the voter registration deadline is [DATE]. If you register after that date, you won't be able to vote in the primary election."

Another option: make the ask even more personal

- Explain to clients that you've been assisting them with services and that you want to ask them to give you a few minutes of their time to talk about voter registration. Don't be afraid to let them know that it's important to you and that you want them to be open to the conversation.

Sample voter registration interaction

You: "So, while I have you here, I want to talk to you a little about voter registration. [Your introduction sentence about why voter registration/voting is important.]

When was the last time you updated your voter registration?"

Client: I'm not sure.

"Great, well I can make sure we get you all up-to-date right now!"

I'm a little tired—I don't think I want to right now.

"I hear you—I know it's been a long day. Still, this will take just a minute or two and if you fill this out with me, I can even turn it in for you and save you a trip to the elections division/post office."

Just one thing—are you a US citizen? And you're going to be 18 before the next election?" (Note: In some states, people under 18 can register to vote—check your state's law to be sure!)

Yes.

"Great! OK, you can start at the top left!" [Hands the client the form and indicates where to start.]

A few final helpful phrases to remember:

- "I'm going to make this really easy for you."

- "It's only one page."

- "You can do it right here—we'll send it in and mail it."

- "You don't have to vote—you can just register and that gives you the opportunity to vote later if you change your mind."

Ejemplo de una interacción con inscripción de votantes, en español

Usted: "Bueno, mientras que está aquí, quisiera hablar sobre algo muy importante para mí y nuestra comunidad, que es la inscripción de votantes. [Utilizar su frase preferida para expresar la importancia de inscripción de votantes.]

Cuando fue la última vez que usted actualizó su inscripción de votantes?"

Cliente: No sé exactamente.

"Bueno, puedo aseguarar que tengamos todo actualizado, ahora mismo."

Estoy muy cansada/o, no sé si quiero hacerlo ahora...

"Entiendo. Ha sido un día bastante largo. Pero esto sólo dura uno o dos minutos y si usted rellena el formulario aquí conmigo, lo puedo entregar yo."

Sólo una cosita: ¿Es usted ciudadano/a de los Estados Unidos? Y tendrá por lo menos 18 años antes de la próxima elección?" (Aviso: en algunos estados, la gente que tiene menos de 18 años puede registrarse para votar. Hay que revisar la ley de su estado.)

Ok, sí.

"¡Buenísimo! ¡Usted puede comenzar en la parte aquí!" [Hay que indicar dónde el cliente puede comenzar a escribir en el formulario.]

Unas frases útiles para recordar:

- "Le voy a ayudar para que sea super facil."

- "Sólo será una página."

- "Usted puede hacerlo aquí mismo, y nosotros lo entregaremos para usted."

- "Usted no está obligado a votar si se registra. Pero registrarse le da la oportunidad de votar más tarde, si desea."

- "Si quiere ver cambio en la comunidad, hay que votar."

Components of a Good System for Voter Registration

If your organization decides to collect forms, you will have to work out a system for making sure ALL collected voter registration forms are turned in or mailed to local officials in a timely manner. You may also want to develop a good system to track how many people your organization is helping register to vote.

A Secure Place to Store Completed Forms

Keep completed voter registration forms in a neat and tidy, secure area of the office (i.e. a specific drawer used only for voter registration in a supervisor's office).

A Designated Person Responsible for Turning in or Mailing Completed Forms

You will need to choose someone from your organization to be responsible for collecting everyone's completed voter registration forms and mailing them or delivering them to the appropriate election officials. Every person who collects voter registration forms needs to know to whom they are responsible for entrusting the completed forms.

A Clear Time Frame for Turning in or Mailing Completed Forms

You will need to decide on a day for turning in or mailing completed voter registration forms in accordance with your state's turnover deadlines, as applicable. This should happen every week and never more than every two weeks. You must also have a clear system for tracking upcoming elections and making sure collected forms are turned in before the close of voter registration before those elections.

A Clear Decision about Turning in vs. Mailing Forms

You will need to decide if it makes more sense to mail or turn in in-person voter registration forms to the appropriate office. Whoever is charged with turning in or mailing the voter registration forms should make sure each form is turned in to the appropriate county office.

Track Your Success

Tracking the number of voter registration forms you distribute and collect is easy and has numerous benefits for your organization.

Why Track Your Voter Registration Numbers

1.   Share your story with your partners

You're constantly communicating what you do to partner organizations, the state, and other community entities. Let them know that this is a service you're providing that you're serious about. Let them know this is available at your organization and that your staff has this extra ability.

2.   Improve the quality of your voter registration program

When staff members track the number of forms they collect, it is easier for them and managers to know whether they have all the forms they should when it's time to turn them in. Also, knowing that you're all going to be sharing these numbers helps keep everybody on task and remembering to ask all your clients!

3.   Strengthen your fundraising

The ability to incorporate an additional service and training is a great strength to show future funders. Additionally, when you are able to share successes about new programs with concrete numbers, your claims are even stronger. For example, instead of saying that you support your community with voter registration assistance, you can say that in the last year you collected a specific number of voter registration forms. Finally, having a track record for engaging clients with voter registration could open up new sources of funding for you in the future for civic engagement-oriented grants and funders.

Best practices for tracking your numbers

The best way to track voter registration forms is to simply add voter registration to your current tracking system. If you already keep track of the number of people each staff person sees or how many people receive certain services, in most cases you can easily add voter registration to that system.

If you are concerned that staff will need extra help keeping track of voter registration numbers week-by-week, or if you don't have a current system for tracking your client numbers and other data, Project Vote recommends using "Weekly Tracking Sheets" to track form collection (you can find an example online at Project Vote's website or in your training binder). Weekly Tracking Sheets aid staff and managers in tracking how many forms a staff member distributes and helps clients complete.

Worksheet: Your Voter Registration System

How to use this worksheet:

1. *Fill out the following information in coordination with the nonprofit staff/program team*
2. *Type or develop an agreement in writing about your voter registration system*
3. *Distribute copies of that typed agreement*

1. Will your organization collect and turn in/mail completed voter registration forms?

   YES/NO

2. Where will you store completed forms?
_____

- Is the location secure? YES/NO
- Is the location clean? YES/NO
- Will the location only be used for voter registration? YES/NO

3. Who will be responsible for turning in or mailing completed forms?
   _____

- Can everyone who collects voter registration forms communicate with and access this
  person in the given time period? YES/NO
- Does this person have the resources he/she needs to turn in or mail the forms?
  (I.e. a car, stamps, etc.) YES/NO

4. How often will your organization turn in or mail forms?

- How quickly are you required to turn in a completed voter registration form after you have collected it in your state?
  _____
- Which time period best corresponds to the required turnover time frame (above) in your state?
  Every week   Every two weeks
- What day of the week will you turn in the forms? _____
- Do you have an upcoming primary election? YES/NO
- What is the voter registration deadline for the upcoming election? _____
- How will you track voter registration deadlines before future elections?

  _____

5. Will that person turn in (in-person) or mail completed forms?

- What is the appropriate office to turn in the forms?   _____
- Where is the nearest office—how far away?   _____
- Will you mail the forms or deliver them in-person?   _____

6. Identify who will need to know this information.

- Ex: Executive director of your organization, nonprofit staff/program team, community outreach team, front desk, etc.
  _____

- _____

When it comes to voter registration, progress is slow and requires persistence. Sometimes the conversations you'll have will be difficult. Sometimes (though hopefully not often!) you will go weeks without talking to anyone who's interested in registering to vote or isn't registered already. But when you get to the mom who's never registered before and needed help filling out the form or the 18-year-old first-time-voter, you'll remember why this is so important. And with time, you'll become more confident and comfortable in the process. At first you will be nervous. That's ok! What's important is that you keep going. Eventually, you'll find the message that works for you.

Of course, if it has been several months and you're still not having any luck helping people register or feeling very confident, then it's time to consider taking some extra steps. Below are some suggestions:

- Role play the voter registration interaction with your coworkers or supervisor.

- Ask people who have had a lot of success with voter registration to walk you through their process.

- Try brainstorming the "why" more—why does this matter? To you? To your organization? Make sure you've got great reasons and, if possible, stories that you can share with your clients and that can keep you motivated.

- Set a goal! Try for one form this week. Sometimes, having a concrete goal to work towards is helpful and will keep you going.

Notes and Next Steps (*fill this in*):

GOAL VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS COLLECTED

BEFORE _____

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