



NONPROFIT & FAITH-BASED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Empowering Communities One Vote at a Time



“So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind - it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact - I can only submit to the edict of others.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Give Us the Ballot*, 1957

Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner and the Voting Rights Institute recognize the vital roles faith-based institutions and other nonprofit organizations play in their local communities. Houses of worship, other faith-based organizations, charities and nonprofit agencies offer touchstones in the lives of those they serve. The compassionate and trustworthy relationships these organizations build can touch individuals in very powerful ways.

Through these relationships, these organizations can encourage people to participate in the democratic process. They can educate voters and empower constituents to become engaged in their communities. In fact, many faith-based institutions and other community-based organizations are often best suited to reach eligible voters in their localities.

Unfortunately, information available on the involvement of these organizations has often been focused on what cannot be done, most often because of federal laws governing tax-exempt status. While this publication is not meant to be a review of federal law, it is meant to offer guidelines on ways nonprofit organizations can engage constituents to exercise their voting rights.



JENNIFER BRUNNER, OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE

For additional resources please contact the Voting Rights Institute. You can e-mail at vri@sos.state.oh.us or call toll free at (877) VOTE-VRI.

What Can Staff and Volunteers of Nonprofit Organizations Do to Help Facilitate Increased Voter Participation?

REGISTER VOTERS

Employees and volunteers of nonprofit organizations may provide voter registration forms and guidance to ensure the forms are completed correctly. This service can be provided to congregations, clients, people targeted in outreach activities, and the general public. For example, a church may undertake a voter registration effort aimed at new congregants who may have recently changed addresses, or organizations that provide direct services to individuals may offer voter registration as a part of their client intake procedures.

EDUCATE VOTERS ON VOTING

Nonprofit organizations may educate the public and those they serve directly on their rights as a voter and how to vote. Information provided may include election dates and times, polling places and precincts, what it means to register with a political party, voting rights of individuals who were formerly incarcerated and on the different ways to vote.

Please note, Ohio law now allows any registered voter to request and receive an absentee ballot in the mail without needing to provide a reason. This option can be more convenient for any voter who may have a problem getting to a polling place on Election Day, and requires less identification than a voter would need at a polling place. Nonprofit organizations may find this choice works better for those they serve.

GET OUT THE VOTE ACTIVITIES

Nonprofit organizations may remind people to vote, offer rides to the polls, advertise rides offered by other community groups, educate the public on the importance of voting, hand out information about election dates and times, call or e-mail with voting reminders, remind voters of their rights, and provide numbers to call for help or questions, such as those of the Voting Rights Institute or the local board of elections.

HELP ON ELECTION DAY

Employees, volunteers, clients, congregants or constituents of a nonprofit organization can work as poll workers, translators, non-partisan observers, or spend time with any other community group that focuses on non-partisan get out the vote activities. For more information on how your church, faith-based organization or nonprofit agency clientele can serve your community and earn extra money, please contact your local county board of elections office to serve as a poll worker on Election Day.

USE A POINT PERSON

A "best practice" suggestion for coordinating efforts similar to those referenced above is to designate a point person within the organization, whether an employee or volunteer, who is responsible for handling specific tasks. For example, within a smaller organization, a point person could handle all voter registration, which could provide for a more streamlined and efficient process. Additionally, a point person could help relieve any extra work that would be created for frontline staff and volunteers. A point person in a larger organization could coordinate a team of volunteers, or even train employees on procedures.

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