

NON-PARTISAN VOTER REGISTRATION

INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES

The first step in exercising our right to vote is registering with local election officials. In most states people must register before Election Day, although some states allow "same day registration." (see registration deadlines in Appendix A). Nonpartisan voter registration is simply registering eligible citizens without connecting it to any candidate or political party. Here's information on organizing a Voter Registration Drive in your community.

How Do You Organize a Voter Registration Drive?

The Recovery Community Civic Engagement Advisory Committee should designate one person as the lead coordinator for the drive. This person should act as the liaison between the elections board and the participating voter registration volunteers. It takes some amount of planning and preparation to conduct a voter registration drive and will require teamwork to organize (see checklist of activities in Appendix B).

Contact the local elections office in the county where you will hold the drive and let them know that you want to hold a voter registration drive. They can give you information about your state's voter registration requirements and the materials you will need $\frac{3}{4}$ voter registration information manuals, voter registration forms and voter's guides. Ask them how to store the completed voter registration forms and make arrangements for their timely return to the appropriate elections office.

Contact registration outreach programs, sponsored by such groups as the League of Women Voters, to obtain voter educational information and materials that can be distributed to registrants (optional).

Make up a list of possible locations for your voter registration drive. You might include clinics, day treatment programs, peer advocacy organizations, self-help organizations, or "high-traffic" public areas such as community centers, schools, libraries, shopping centers, grocery stores, churches, or community festivals or rallies. Don't forget to include September 2006 Recovery Month activities on your list.

Contact the appropriate organizations for permission to register voters on their premises. You may want to stress the non-partisan aspect of your drive as many property or business owners may not want partisan activity happening on their premises but will not mind non-partisan activities.

Set the date and time(s) for your drive. Pick a date that gives you enough time to register voters and return their completed registration cards before the deadline in your state (see Appendix A for voter registration deadlines in your state. You can decide how long the drive should be depending upon where you're going to hold it. For example, it's good to schedule lunchtime drives between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Drives at libraries, grocery stores, shopping malls and similar locations can last four to six hours between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. And if you're setting up a voter registration table during a community festival, you may want to be there the entire day.

Figure out how many people you will need and sign up volunteers to staff the drive. You will need a team of at least two people to staff the registration table. If you have a list of your members, you can develop a phone bank to recruit volunteers and let them know that you'll be registering people to vote and where. Set up time-slots and make your assignments.

Gather all of the necessary equipment and supplies several days before the drive. You will need a table, chairs, clipboards, pens, voter registration applications, voter's guides and your organization's literature, e.g. fact sheets, pamphlets, newsletters, etc. Be creative with your table. Decorate it with banners, balloons and/or signs encouraging people to "Be Another Voter for Recovery" and "Register to vote here." (See Appendix C for sample sign). In preparing a voter registration banner, don't forget the name of your organization or group and its logo. Because this activity is non-partisan, make sure that you do not have any materials endorsing a particular candidate on your table.

Keep track of those you have registered to vote. If you have contact information for the people you register, you can create phone-bank lists to contact these new voters before Election Day to remind them to exercise their right to vote and offer them transportation to the polls. While this may seem like an invasion of privacy, it is perfectly legal and will be a major advantage in following up with registered voters. (See Appendix D for sample registration sign-up sheet).

Publicize your voter registration drive. Put up posters and flyers around your community and hang them in your organization, and in store windows. You can also send out press releases to local media announcing the date, time and location of your voter registration drive. This is a great way to publicize your drive and to raise awareness in the community. (See Appendix E for sample flyer)

Train your volunteers. Schedule a training session to review your state's guidelines for registering voters. Make sure that each volunteer is thoroughly familiar with the registration forms. If required in your state, volunteers should attend any mandatory training sessions conducted by the local elections board.

On the day of the drive, set up the table with plenty of pens, voter registration applications and instructions, voter's guides and your organization's literature. Volunteers may stand by the registration table with clipboards and voter registration applications in-hand, ready to ask passers-by if they are registered to vote.

"Are you a registered voter?"

- If the person says *no*, encourage him or her to fill out an application. Review each completed application for accuracy and completeness: Can you read the writing? Are all the sections filled out? Is the form signed?
- If the person says *yes*, ask whether there has been a change in name or address since the last time he or she voted. If so, you can show them where to update that information on the application.
- If the person is reluctant to register, here are some possible answers to common responses:

"I don't have time."

Response: "That's why we're here. This will take less than a minute. What's your last name?"

"My candidate always loses."

Response: "That's why we're here. So many people just didn't vote in the last election. We're going to register people and encourage them to vote so we can make a difference on Election Day. What's your last name?"

"My vote doesn't make a difference."

Response: "That's why we're here. A lot of people feel that way, but if we all voted we could make a difference. We're going to register people and encourage them to vote so we can hold politicians accountable on Election Day. What's your last name?"

Response: "I think it's important that you register to vote. We need more people in the community to get involved and support candidates who will help our neighborhood."

Response: "We can't keep electing politicians who don't care about addiction recovery. We need to elect officials who care about our community."

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission points out that "Just" one vote can and often does make a difference in the outcome of an election. Here are a couple of examples:

In 1997, Vermont State Representative Sydney Nixon was seated as an apparent one-vote winner, 570 to 569. Mr. Nixon resigned when the State House determined, after a recount, that he had actually lost to his opponent Robert Emond 572 to 571.

In 1989, a Lansing, Michigan School District millage proposition failed when the final recount produced a tie vote 5,147 for, and 5,147 against. On the original vote count, votes against the proposition were ten more than those in favor. The result meant that the school district had to reduce its budget by \$2.5 million.

Every vote does count, however, if an individual further refuses to register to vote, wish them a good day and look for your next voter registrant prospect.

When you're talking to people about registering to vote, please remember that because you are conducting a nonpartisan voter registration drive, you must:

Never mention the name of a candidate or a party, and staff and volunteers should make sure that none of their materials or clothing contains candidate or party information or advertising.

If asked how you plan to vote, do not answer the question.

If you are asked what party you prefer, do not answer the question. Rather explain that your purpose is to promote the democratic process and not particular candidates.

Do not ask the persons you are working with how they plan to vote or what their party preference is or make any effort to find out their allegiance to any candidate or party – whether directly or indirectly.

Do not select a target area or group because you believe the voters in that group or areas will favor a particular candidate even if the candidate is a member of a group that your organization serves.

Do not publicize which candidates agree with the positions that your organization supports.

Avoid any appearance that your voter registration activities are timed to coincide with politically significant events in a particular candidate's campaign.

Smile, make eye contact, be enthusiastic!!

Tell people who register that they will receive in the mail a voter registration card within two or three weeks and, if not, they should contact the local board of elections.

Turn in completed voter registration applications to the local elections official in a timely manner. It's really important that you know the laws in your state and be sure to get the card turned in to the right place within the correct amount of time. Legally-mandated time limits vary by state. For example,

California requires that all completed cards be returned to the county elections official within three days, excluding Saturday, Sundays and holidays, of receipt from a voter.

Colorado requires that forms be delivered to the county clerk or registrar within five business days of completion.

Contact your local elections board or consult the rules governing voter registration drives on your state's web site which can be accessed via the web site of the National Association of State Elections Directors at <http://www.nased.org/membership.htm>.

VOTER REGISTRATION BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Who has the right to vote?

In general, an individual must be

- a United States citizen by birth or naturalization
- 18 years old on or before the date of the next general election following the date of registration
- a resident of the state in which he or she wishes to vote

Each state has different voter eligibility rules. For instance, many states have eligibility requirements that permanently or temporarily disqualify citizens for felony conviction or adjudication as mentally incompetent by a court of law. The conditions for restoration of these voting rights are listed on state voter registration application forms. There's information elsewhere in our Recovery Community Civic Engagement Campaign materials about efforts to restore the voting rights of individuals with criminal convictions.

When is the deadline for registering to vote in the 2006 General Election?

Each state has its own deadline for registering to vote. Although deadlines vary, many states require the receipt of completed voter registration application forms 30 days before the November 7 general election date. See Appendix A for a state-by-state listing of voter registration deadlines for the 2006 general elections.

Who Can Conduct a Voter Registration Drive or Project?

Any group or organization may conduct a voter registration drive. In most states, anyone who is eighteen years or older may register other people to vote. However, each state has its own laws governing voter registration. For instance, to qualify as a voter registration volunteer in some states, a person must first become deputized, attend a training session, or meet other special requirements. To find out about your state's voter registration requirements and its rules governing voter registration drives, you can go to the National Association of State Elections Directors' web site at <http://www.nased.org/membership.htm> and click on the link for your state elections director. Each state site also includes information about how to contact your local elections boards or officials who can answer any questions you have concerning your voter registration drive.

What Does a Voter Registration Volunteer Do?

A voter registration volunteer helps to register voters individually or as part of an organization or group. The voter registration volunteer offers eligible individuals the opportunity to apply to register to vote by distributing voter registration applications, providing assistance with completion of the application and, when requested, returning promptly the completed applications to a state or local election official for processing.

Voter registration drives must be conducted in a non-partisan manner

All activities conducted by a non-profit 501(c)(3) (non-profit) organization during the election season *must* remain non-partisan. Organizations and individuals engaged in voter registration drives cannot make any statements in support of or in opposition to any particular candidate or party, or carry on any activity designed to reflect a preference or recommendation for a political party or candidate. This means that you can never endorse or oppose *any* candidate for *any* public office. When you do voter outreach, please talk only about the issues affecting our recovery community, not the candidates who support or oppose them. Absolutely no attempts may be made to sway the voters to register for a particular candidate and/or political party. The Alliance for Justice has published single page checklists of rules for nonprofit-election related activities which can be obtained at www.allianceforjustice.org/nonprofit/index.html.

When conducting nonpartisan voter registration drives, volunteers and staff of nonprofits are frequently confronted by individuals who would like to engage in a partisan discussion. Here are some helpful suggestions for disengaging from these conversations:

How to respond to partisan statements:

“Which of the two mayoral candidates should I vote for?”

Response: “I’m not here to tell you who to vote for. I respect your ability to make that decision for yourself. I would encourage you to check the candidates’ websites, attend a candidate forum, or speak with the candidates directly to see who is most in line with your values and the issues you care about.”

“We need to get out the vote for Candidate X – I hope you are telling everyone who she is and to vote for her!”

Response: “This is a nonpartisan voter registration drive. We just want to make sure that everyone is participating in our democratic system and getting their voice heard in the upcoming election!”

The Federal Election Commission requires that a sign or written notice (see Appendix F) be posted stating:

Our voter registration services are available without regard to the voter’s political preference. Information and other assistance regarding registering or voting, including transportation and other services offered, shall not be withheld or refused on the basis of support for or opposition to particular candidates or a particular party.