



Voter Engagement Guide

Information, Resources, and Tools to Help Engage Voters



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Introduction: Why voting matters for our clients

Nonvoters are disproportionately lower-income citizens. This is a shame, because decisions being made in Olympia and Washington, D.C. have a big impact on their abilities to buy food and other basic needs. Candidates are more responsive to communities that have the most active voters. Food banks and meal programs have an opportunity to help form a more representative electorate by engaging clients and giving them a voice in the political discussion. Our impact is maximized if the people we serve are being heard by candidates and politicians.

There have been cuts to SNAP benefits in recent years, and other bills often threaten low-income earners' access to food, shelter, and health care. Voting allows clients to be heard on the state and federal level in decisions about food assistance and safety net services. These cuts occur because of higher voter turnout from voters who may not understand the human impact of these harmful decisions or simply support the cuts.

In this guide, you will find information, resources, and tools to help engage clients to become active voters. You'll find links to state and local resources so you can be aware of voter registration deadlines and tools to help register and remind clients to vote.

Once you empower a client with the ability to be an informed voter their issues gain significance in the eyes of politicians and decision makers. They become actively engaged in the voting process and politicians will work harder to gain their votes during elections by supporting their issues. Becoming an active voter means electing representatives and candidates that address the most important issues faced by people who need SNAP, summer meals, and food bank services. Voting gives our clients power and the ability to change public policy and discourse for the better.

Harnessing the voting power of your program participants requires organization and outreach in **Voter Registration** and **Get Out the Vote** efforts.

TIP:

Find arguments for why hunger relief organizations should engage participants in voting here: <http://votetoendhunger.org/>

Section 1: Voter Engagement Planning

Engaging your program participants to help them become active and educated voters does not need to take away from your current capacity to perform your core programmatic duties. It does, however, require a good spokesperson, someone who is enthusiastic about voter turnout and can convey that energy and passion to others. Look for that person from your current staff, roster of volunteers, board members, or even someone standing in your program line.

Here are some tips to help you launch your voter engagement program:

- **Establish buy-in** from your organization's staff or volunteers (from Executive Director, senior staff, front desk volunteers, etc.)—have conversations with staff members on how voter engagement connects to their mission, emphasizing that our impact and public policy work is strengthened when the people we serve vote for the public officials who will strengthen the programs, services, and strategies to reduce poverty .
- **Choose a lead:** someone to be the point person for voter engagement work. This person will gather resources and field questions.
- **Staff up and train**—identify staff and volunteers; consider providing this as a volunteer opportunity to an engaging and enthusiastic client. Provide training and support and a rationale of why you're doing this work. Your voter engagement crew should set a good example by being registered to vote and engaged in the voting and voter education process.
- **Plan ahead**—be thinking about voter registration drives and getting buy-in from your organization months in advance (use our calendar below to help you plan), but ramp up efforts near the registration deadline so information is current.

Key 2020 Deadlines Calendar

- **Friday, October 16, 2020 (All day):**
Ballots are mailed out today and Accessible Voting Units are available at voting centers.
https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/voting%20centers%202019%20general%20election.pdf
- **Monday, October 19, 2020 (All day):**
Missing your ballot? Registered voters can print out and return your replacement ballot here:
<https://voter.votewa.gov/WhereToVote.aspx>
- **Monday, October 26, 2020 (All day):**
Last day to register to vote online and by mail: mailed-in voter registration forms must be post-marked by today.
 - Register online or check your voter registration status: <https://voter.votewa.gov/WhereToVote.aspx>
 - Request registration form to be mailed to you: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/>
 - More information about voter registration: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/>
- **Tuesday, November 3, 2020 (All day):**
Register in person, receive, and complete your ballot at your local county elections office. Find your elections office:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/auditors/>

Voter Engagement Resources

- Voter Registration Information and Deadlines
<http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/calendar.aspx>
- Voter Registration Rules and Requirements
<http://www.dmv.org/wa-washington/voter-registration.php>
- Voter Engagement Checklist
<http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/>
- Vote to End Hunger
<http://votetoendhunger.org/>

TIP:

Be sure to check the calendar of dates for Washington elections each year for specific voter registration and voting deadlines:
<http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/calendar.aspx>

Section 2: Voter Registration

How voter registration works in Washington state

In Washington, eligible voters may register to vote three ways:

- **Online:** <https://voter.votewa.gov/WhereToVote.aspx>.
To register online, you will need either a current Washington state driver license or a current Washington state ID card.
- **By mail:** Complete a voter registration form and mail it. The eligible voter will need a Washington driver license, permit, ID, or the last four digits of his or her Social Security number to register. Organizations can order or print out voter registration forms for eligible voters to complete and then mail the forms to complete the registration process. Order registration forms here: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/register-mail.aspx>
- **In person:** Complete the voter registration form in person at the local county elections department. (See Resources in this section for a list of county elections department locations.)

Who is eligible to vote?

To register to vote, you must be:

- A citizen of the United States;
- A legal resident of Washington state;
*To be eligible to vote, the voting residency address must be established at least **30 days** before Election Day. A voter may only be registered to vote at **one location**.*
- At least 18 years old by Election Day;
- Not disqualified from voting due to a court order; and
- Not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction.

TIP:

You can facilitate the voter registration process with referrals or running/hosting a voter registration drive for your program participants. Be sure to pay attention to the different deadlines for online, by mail, or in person voter registration.

TIP:

These organizations can help register voters for you:
Statewide Poverty Action:
<http://povertyaction.org/campaigns/>
Washington State Driver Licensing Offices:
<https://fortress.wa.gov/dol/dolprod/dsdoffices/>

Common Barriers to Voting for Food Bank Participants

We see all kinds of people with different life experiences waiting in lines at food banks. Many of our participants are experiencing social barriers that limit opportunities for work and education. They may assume that these same barriers will keep them from exercising their right to vote. Here is information to help people understand their rights and help ensure that everyone who is eligible and wants to vote is able to do just that.

Homelessness and Transitional Housing

For those experiencing homelessness, or living at a nontraditional address such as a motor home or in transitional housing, the voting residence is the person's physical location at the time when they register to vote. The voting residence address may be a shelter, a street corner, or the address of a park. The mailing address can be a PO Box, the address of a shelter or person who will accept mail deliveries, or general delivery with a nearby post office.

Prior Felony Convictions

A person with a prior felony conviction is still eligible to vote as long as she or he is not currently in prison or on community custody. If the person is uncertain about his or her status, you can call (800) 430-9674 to check with the Department of Corrections (DOC). The DOC and the state court system cross reference the list of registered voters to look for anyone who might be registered to vote who is ineligible to vote. Those individuals will receive a letter explaining that their registration will be cancelled in 30 days and provides information on how to dispute the cancellation.

People with prior convictions who are eligible to vote must re-register to receive a ballot.

A person does not lose the right to vote for a misdemeanor conviction or a conviction in juvenile court.

A prosecutor may request a court to revoke one's voting rights if he or she has failed to make three Legal Finance Obligation payments in an a 12 month period; however, the person may have their rights restored if she or he can show that they have made a good-faith effort to pay.

Mental Competency

Only a Superior Court can declare a person ineligible to vote due to mental incompetency. A guardian may not vote on behalf of the person under guardianship, and power of attorney does not extend to voting.

Foreign Language Speakers

In Washington state, only four counties and state officials must provide ballots in Spanish when requested. The Secretary of State provides voter registration forms in many other languages, including Vietnamese, Cambodian, Somali, and Ukrainian (<http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/Print-Voter-Registration-Forms.aspx>) and will also provide foreign language translations of voter guides.

Frequently Asked Questions Sheet

FAQs

I don't know if I'm registered to vote. How can I check?

Look up your voter registration status online with MyVote (<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/myvote/>). If you're listed as "inactive," update your address. If you can't find your voter records, register.

When is the registration deadline?

Applications and updates must be postmarked or submitted no later than 29 days before Election Day. If you are not already a Washington voter, you may register in person at your county elections department until eight days before an election. Applications and updates submitted after the deadline will take effect after the next election.

How will I know if my registration was accepted?

You should receive a card in the mail from your local elections office. You can also check online at MyVote (<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/myvote/>).

Do I need to update my address every time I move?

Yes. You need to update your mailing address when you move to ensure you receive your ballot.

Can I register using my school address?

Yes. You may register using either your home or school address. If you live on campus, you may list your dorm room or campus apartment as your residential address. PO boxes may not be used as residential but can be used as mailing addresses.

What's the difference between my residential and mailing addresses?

Your mailing address is where your ballot will be sent. Your residential address must be a Washington address. This address determines which candidates and measures will be on your ballot.

Can I register in Washington if I'm an out-of-state student?

Yes. You may register to vote if you have lived in Washington at least 30 days. You must use your Washington address as your residential address. Remember, you may vote in only one state. It's a felony to vote more than once in the same election.

Can I register to vote if I have a prior felony conviction?

As long as you are not currently in prison or on community custody, you can register to vote. If you are not sure of your current status, call (800) 430-9674.

How do people experiencing homelessness register to vote?

We recommend using the address of a shelter, a park, or even a cross street for the voter registration address. A PO box, the address of someone who will accept mail, or even general delivery will suffice for the mailing address requirement. Just make sure to check those locations when ballots are scheduled to arrive.

Can a survivor of domestic violence or other crimes keep their current address private if they register?

Washington state offers an Address Confidentiality Program. Contact your local elections office for more information: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/acp/>

Voter Registration Resources

- Print Voter Registration Forms
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/print-voter-registration-forms.aspx>
- Voter Registration Online:
<https://voter.votewa.gov/WhereToVote.aspx>
- Nonprofit Vote's Training Video on Voter Registration Process:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j705U3JNxc&feature=youtu.be>
- Registration Forms:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/register-mail.aspx>
- Registration Forms in foreign languages:
<http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/Print-Voter-Registration-Forms.aspx>
- Flyers and Posters:
http://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/VoterRegPoster_EN.pdf
- Printable Voter Registration Posters (in multiple languages)
https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/voterregposter_en.pdf
- Find your local elections office:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/auditors.aspx>

TIP:

Election and registration deadlines found here: <http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/calendar.aspx>

TIP:

Take down names and contact information of your newly registered voters or those who claim to already be registered, asking them to pledge to vote. You can then follow-up with them with reminders when they should have received a ballot in the mail and deadlines/options for returning their ballots.

TIP:

Be sure to reinforce at every training opportunity and talking points sheet that as a representative of a 501(c)(3), your voter registration crew must remain nonpartisan about the candidates. This means no political discussions or endorsements/condemnations of candidates.

Section 3: Voter Education

Registering voters is an important first step, but to make sure we see the changes we want to see in public policy, we need to make sure that voters are educated on the issues. Your organization can be a valuable resource to all voters in your community by educating them about hunger and poverty so that they choose the candidates they think will best support the public policies and strategic investments that will help low-income people meet their basic needs.

We can educate voters by helping them read and understand their voting guides, providing regular information on the issues, and helping voters get to know the candidates and their positions. In this section, you'll find information on what registered 501(c)(3) organizations can and cannot do during campaign seasons, ideas for voter education opportunities at your program, and resources for voter education materials to make available to your program participants.

Campaign Activity Rules for Nonprofits

- A 501(c)(3) organization or staff member while working for or representing the nonprofit **may not:**
 - Endorse a candidate.
 - Make a campaign contribution to or expenditure for a candidate.
 - Rate candidates on who is most favorable to their issue(s).
 - Let candidates use the organization's facilities or resources, unless those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value.
- 501(c)(3) organizations can conduct voter engagement and connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. This includes voter registration, voter education, candidate engagement, and organizing get-out-the-vote activities.
- 501(c)(3) organizations can also lobby on ballot initiatives. You can make an endorsement on ballot measures by taking a position for or against the initiative and encourage clients to vote one way or the other.
- Freebies, including stickers or food, and registration forms must be given to anyone who asks, regardless of their eligibility or intention to register or vote. You may not pay or bribe people to register.

TIP:

If you give out freebies, be sure to make this available to anyone who asks. It's an IRS rule for 501c3s that gifts cannot be given in exchange for someone's vote or registration to vote.

TIP:

When in doubt, ask an expert! Bolder Advocacy, a project of Alliance for Justice, can answer your questions to help you figure out whether something is permissible 501c3 activity. Call 866-NP-LOBBY (866-675-6229) or visit <http://bolderadvocacy.org/> and click on the Ask an Expert link under the how AFJ Can Help menu.

Materials for Voter Education Table

Another way to educate your program participants on the issues and candidate positions is to provide a table with voter guides, issue fact sheets, and other materials. Make sure the table is staffed with a volunteer who can answer questions and remind people about voter registration deadlines and deadlines for mailing or returning ballots. Here are some resources for stocking your table.

- The state General Election Voters' Pamphlet is mailed to every household in Washington. If you need the General Election Voters' Pamphlet in accessible formats or alternate languages, call (800) 448-4881 or email voterspamphlet@sos.wa.gov.
- For personalized ballot measure and candidate information online: <https://voter.votewa.gov/WhereToVote.aspx>.
- For local races, visit the county elections department website: <http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/auditors.aspx>.
- See Northwest Harvest's Advocacy Updates: <https://www.northwestharvest.org/news-insights/category/legislative-updates/>.

TIP:

Location of Your County Elections Office: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/auditors.aspx>

Voter Education Resources

- Nonprofit Rules for Campaign Activities: <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/npv-resource-library/>.
- Guidelines for Nonprofit Candidate Questionnaires and Voter Guides: <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/npv-resource-library/engaging-with-candidates/>.
- Templates and Sample Materials for Candidate Questionnaires and Voter Guides: http://lwwodc.org/files/tool_kit.pdf.
- *Northwest Harvest's Advocacy Toolkit, Volume III, Effortless but Effective Advocacy: Building Relationships with Your Elected Officials*, containing templates and tools for organizing candidate forums: https://www.northwestharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/toolkit_vol3_final_sm.pdf.

Section 4: Get Out the Vote

You've registered voters and provided them with opportunities to learn more about the candidates and issues on the ballot. It's time to take this over the finish line: your efforts will be in vain unless people actually vote!

Washington is a vote-by-mail state, meaning we no longer have polling sites, but instead, registered voters receive a ballot in the mail to complete and return on or before Election Day.

To be counted, your ballot must be:

- Postmarked **no later than Election Day**; or
- Returned to a designated ballot drop box **by 8 p.m. on Election Day**; or
- Returned in person to your county elections department **by 8 p.m. on Election Day**.

If you fail to sign the ballot declaration, or the signature on the ballot declaration does not match the signature in your voter registration record, your **county elections department** will contact you. If you are unable to sign the declaration, make a mark in front of two witnesses and have them sign in the designated spaces.

Ideas for Get Out the Vote Efforts for Food Banks

- When ballots arrive before an election, set up a table with a volunteer to ask participants if they received their ballot and have them sign a pledge to vote. Be sure to make the following information available:
 - Deadline reminders for mailing, dropping off, or returning ballots in person.
 - Information on requesting a replacement ballot using My Vote:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/>
 - Location of Your County Elections Office:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/auditors.aspx>
- Make it a condition for membership on your Board of Directors that each member must vote in every local, special, and general election.
- Offer carpools to a nearby ballot box or to your local county elections office for participants who are homebound.
- Have volunteers or staff ask participants if they plan on voting or need help voting when they check-in, sign-up for, or receive services. Offer assistance or provide information about upcoming voter registration drives or referrals to local elections office to register.
- Hang up posters to remind people to vote.

Get Out the Vote Resources

- Replacement ballot request:
<https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/voters/>
- Ballot Dropbox locations:
https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/ballot%20drop%20boxes%202019%20general%20election.pdf



Northwest Harvest
800.722.6924
info@northwestharvest.org