



Guide to Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort for 501(c)(3)s

Voter registration is categorized as an electoral advocacy activity. See the Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy for more details about how nonprofits can engage in electoral advocacy activities. Although a voter registration event is a single activity to encourage those who support your issue to register to vote, it can also take place as part of a Get Out the Vote (GOTV) Drive. See the Guide to Hosting a Successful GOTV Drive tool for more information. Either way, these efforts must be nonpartisan, focused solely on the importance of voting and how to register.



How to Use this Guide to Organize a Voter Registration Effort

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8 Steps to Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort

Step 1

Date, Time, Type of Activity, and Location

Date: _____

Time: _____

Type of activity: _____

Location: _____

Step 2

Determine Audience, Message, Call to Action, and Content

Audience: _____

Message: _____

Call to action: _____

Content: _____

Step 3

Materials

Materials that already exist: _____

Materials from the Board of Elections Office:

Materials to develop: _____

Step 4

Recruit and Train Volunteers

of Volunteers needed: _____

of Volunteers recruited and trained: _____

Training content: _____

Step 5

Publicize Activity and Reach Out to Participants

Promotion activities: _____

Strategies to reach out to participants:

Media outreach activities: _____

Step 6

Finalize Logistics

Volunteer tasks: _____

Other tasks depending on type of activity:

Step 7

Day-of

Media follow up and materials: _____

Last-minute set up items: _____

Volunteer arrival time: _____

Materials to hand out: _____

Step 8

Follow Up

Thank you note to volunteers: _____

Communications to those who registered:



Reference Page to Fill Out the 8 Steps to Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort

Step 1 Date, Time, Location

Determine the date, time, type of activity, and location. See FAQ for a list of different types of voter registration activities and how to choose a location if you are having a formal event. Before you finalize the date and time, make sure that there aren't any other large events that may impact attendance at your event.

Step 2 Determine Audience, Message, Call to Action, and Content

Determine your target audience(s) for your voter registration activity. All of your outreach will be geared toward this audience. Your target audience should be those who already support your organization's mission, but can be extended to include communities who are likely to support your issue. The promotion of your activity should be directed toward this audience. After you determine your audience, you can determine your message. Why is voting important to that audience? What is your call to action (i.e., register to vote, vote early, fill out an absentee request form)? Think about the day of the activity, what content do you want to provide to the attendees? Will you have a prominent speaker or information on ballot initiatives? If you have a speaker, be sure to invite the speaker and incorporate any additional technology/logistical needs they will have into logistics planning. Will you conduct a more informal activity, like asking your friends to vote over the weekend? When determining your content, keep in mind that this must be a nonpartisan activity.

Step 3 Materials

Your organization should have materials to provide participants in the activity. Get in touch with your Local Election Office and ask them to provide you with basic nonpartisan registration materials (flyers, buttons, booklets) as well as more information on conducting a voter registration activity. If you develop materials of your own, make sure that you include the Federal Election Commission disclaimer on all materials (see [FAQ](#) for more information).

Step 4 Recruit and Train Volunteers

It is important that your activity has enough people. If you are holding an event, the event should be well-staffed with volunteers to help run the event and talk to attendees and help them register to vote. Make sure you have enough people to staff your event (set up, break down, sign-in, etc.). Depending on the size of your event, you may need anywhere from 10-30 volunteers. If you are conducting a more informal activity, you may only need a handful of volunteers to help. If you need to reach outside of your organization for volunteers, it is important to do so well in advance of the event!

Step 5 Publicize Activity and Reach Out to Participants

Use the online and print resources of your organization, partner organizations, and volunteers to publicize your activities. If you are holding an event, put flyers up about your event near the location of the event, develop an online invitation and event page and ask community organizations, volunteers, and friends in the neighborhood your event will be at to invite their networks. Use media outlets as a tool to reach out to your audience and the public. See the FAQ section for tips on reaching out to the media. If you are holding an informal activity, like registering people to vote at a local baseball game, you might not need to publicize the activity as much as you would need to publicize an event.

Step 6 Finalize Logistics

Make sure you have all of the logistics for the day of the activity. If you are hosting an event, this includes assigning volunteer tasks, having all the materials necessary to set up sign-in and registration tables, refreshments, and any additional logistics that need to be planned. Your sign-in sheet should ask attendees for their email and phone numbers. If the event is outside, make sure you have a back-up location in case of inclement weather. If you are hosting an informal activity like setting up a registration table at an existing event, this includes ensuring you have set-up materials, tables/chairs, any permissions you need, materials, and any additional items.

Step 7 Day-of

You spent all this time planning, now the day of the activity is finally here! If you invited media to your activity, be sure to follow up with media to confirm attendance, have a press release prepared to give media at the event, arrive at the location early to make sure everything is set up properly, and make any last-minute adjustments as necessary. Be sure to have volunteers arrive early, greet every attendee, and provide information and resources to all participants.

Step 8 Follow Up

Send all activity volunteers a thank you note. As voting day gets closer, reach out to attendees by phone and email and ask them to vote.



Timeline

6 weeks
before event

- Determine date, time, type of activity, and location.
- Determine speakers or additional content for the activity.
- Make a list of all logistical needs.

4 weeks
before the event

- Begin publicizing the activity if necessary.
- Reach out to other organizations in the community and ask them to promote the activity.
- Recruit and train volunteers.
- Start gathering materials you will need for the activity.

2 weeks
before the event

- Finish gathering materials needed for the activity.
- Assign volunteer tasks and inform volunteers about the activity.

Week of the event

- Do any preliminary set up before the activity.
- Confirm attendance with speakers and event.
- If you are hosting an event, heavily promote the activity.
- If you are inviting media, reach out to the media the day before the activity to confirm attendance.

Day-of
the event

- Ensure all volunteers know their assigned roles.
- Ensure sign-in/registration table, clip boards, pens, materials, and any other logistics are ready.
- Greet all participants in activity.

Within one week
of the event

- Send a thank you note to all volunteers at the activity.

The week of
Election Day

- Follow up with participants and contacts made during the event via email and phone reminding them of their polling location and urging them to vote.



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Other Best Practices

- Read the [FAQ](#) document in this guide!
- Start planning as early as possible.
- Consider getting at least one other well-known nonpartisan sponsor like a school or another well-respected organizations as a potential co-sponsor.
- If you are having an event, be sure to have plenty of people available to staff the activity. There should be multiple designated people to greet attendees, a designated person(s) to staff the sign in and registration table, a designated person to answer any questions that attendees should have, a designated person to greet the media and give them a press kit or press release, and a designated person to generally oversee the event and take care of any issues that arise. These roles should be defined and assigned before the event.
- If you are hosting an event, promotion of your activity will be essential. Spend time determining who you would like to be at the event, reaching out to them through social media, email communications, newspapers, community newspapers, posters, banners, and other media. Create an invitation through email or social media with an RSVP function so you can gauge and plan for how many people will be attending the event.
- It is important to understand that sending out a press release doesn't ensure attendance by the media. When you communicate with the media, you should send a media advisory to let them know the event is taking place, call each outlet and ask if a representative is coming, and be sure to provide them with at least a press release at the event. Be sure to highlight what will be "newsworthy" to cover.
- On the day of the activity, make sure you put signs at the location (if necessary) to let people know you are there, with directions guiding people to where the activity is happening (if applicable).
- Provide refreshments (beverage and snacks) at the activity. This can be as simple as having candy on your registration table.
- Remember, the purpose of a voter registration activity is to REGISTER voters, not to support or oppose particular candidates!



Voter Registration Frequently Asked Questions



As a 501(c)(3), what are the rules I must follow during voter registration activities?

Generally, a 501(c)(3) organization may conduct nonpartisan voter registration activities, as long as you follow the federal and state tax and campaign laws. Below is guidance on what a 501(c)(3) organization may and may not do.

501(c)(3) organizations may conduct nonpartisan voter registration activities. The efforts must be focused solely on the importance of voting and how to register. There can be no evidence of bias for a particular candidate or political party.

The following are a few things you can and cannot do as part of your voter registration activities. For a complete listing please see the Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy tool.



Things you CAN do:

- ✓ Provide voters with election information (early and Election Day voting locations, hours, and identification materials they will need).
- ✓ Encourage voters to register to vote.
- ✓ Encourage voters to vote early or on Election Day.
- ✓ Help voters learn where they can cast their vote.
- ✓ Encourage voters to research the candidates and ballot issues before casting their vote.



Things you Can NOT do:

- ✗ Recommend, endorse, or suggest that one candidate is better than another.
- ✗ Tell voters which candidates support your issue.
- ✗ Tell voters which party to register under or who to vote for.
- ✗ Plan activities with a candidate, campaign, or political party.
- ✗ Give money or volunteer time to a candidate.
- ✗ Allow a candidate to hand out materials about the campaign and his/her platform.

FAQs

2

What types of voter registration activities are there?

There are many different types of voter activities, ranging from hosting a large more formal event, to having a few volunteers/staff stand outside of a state fair with a clip board and work to get people registered. You can have a formal event, or you can register those in your neighborhood by conducting voter registration activities at places they attend. You can reach out to your family and friends, or to a broader audience. When choosing your type of activity, be aware of the legal implications of each activity. If you are off property of an activity (state fair), you can register people to vote as they enter/exit. If you are in the same space as an event, you need permission from those who run the event. If you are asked to purchase space to participate in another's event, contact your Board of Elections or the League of Women Voters. They may be able to connect you with an entity who could cover the cost of the space.

3

What should I consider when choosing a location for an event I am planning?

It is important to make sure that the location of the event is accessible to the public and your audience. Holding the event in a central location with plenty of parking is important. Make sure the location can meet the technology needs of the event, has enough space to hold the expected number of attendees and a defined area to set up registration tables, and is in a place that is open to the public. It is worthwhile considering a setting that is relevant to your issue.

4

What materials should I have at the activity?

Here are some examples of materials you might provide:

- List of reasons why voting is important.
- Information on topics important to your issue.
- Information about your organization.
- Information on all candidates and issues on the upcoming ballot.
- Voter registration forms.
- Polling location and vote by mail information.

5

What is Federal Election Commission disclaimer that must go on all materials?

A Federal Election Commission regulation requires that you post a sign or give written notice to people you are registering or helping to vote. Use the following language on your materials and on signs at your event: "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 serviced offered, shall not be withheld or refused on the basis of support for or opposition to particular candidates or a particular party."

FAQs

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Can I register people to vote during outreach, or should I just give them registration information and ask them to register themselves?

Some voter registration events do not allow people to register to vote, but rather give people information on how to register. This is because the organization has either chosen not to register voters at the event or state laws prohibit them from registering voters without becoming an official registrar. If you are not going to register people to vote during your outreach, you can still have an event and set up a table or booth at conferences, neighborhood fairs, and do other forms of outreach (such as door-to-door and phone banking activities) to inform members of your community of the voter registration dates, requirements, and the locations where they can pick up a form and register. If you are registering people to vote, be sure to contact your Local Election Office for the regulations for voter registration in your state.

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How do I get copies of a voter registration form?

You can get copies of the voter registration form by contacting your Local Election Office or you can use the National Voter Registration Form available on the Federal Election Commission website (www.fec.gov) and print as many copies as you need. If you are printing copies of the voter registration form, please check with your Local Election Office to make sure your state accepts forms printed on standard paper.

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If I do provide voter registration forms, how do I submit them?

If you are providing registration forms check with your local board of election office or the Secretary of State to determine how forms must be submitted. In some states you can collect the forms and mail them or drop them off in person, while in other states the individual who is registering may be required to submit the form themselves.



FAQs

- 9** → **Should I collaborate with other organizations?**
 Yes. Collaborating with another well-known organization who has an interest in your issue can certainly help increase the attendance at your event, increase the reach of informing the audience and publicizing the event and make planning and event coordination easier!
- 10** → **What should the role of collaborating organizations be in the activity?**
 When you decide to collaborate with another organization, it is important to outline the role of each organization as it relates to planning, attending, and participating in the event. Talk with the collaborating organization prior to agreeing to collaborate to ensure that roles are clearly defined about who will be leading, who will be doing what work, and the expectations of all organizations involved.
- 11** → **Are there additional rules I need to follow if the collaborating organization is not a 501(c)(3)?**
 Depending on the type of organization you are collaborating with, there may be additional guidelines you must follow. For more information on these rules please see the Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy tool.
- 12** → **How do I know if my voter registration activity was successful?**
 You can measure the outcomes of your voter registration activity in many ways. Use the chart below for some ideas.

Outcome	Measurement
Increased Awareness	Number of people reached during the activity
	Number of contacts collected
	Number of people registered to vote as a result of your efforts
	Number of attendees at an event
Increased Voter Participation	Number of people your event reached out to that actually voted (survey)
	Number of people who pledged to vote at the event

Voter Registration Guide to Answering Questions Voters Often Ask

1 → **Must I be able to read or write English in order to register or vote?**

No. You can take someone who can assist you in the voting process, but they may not vote for you.

2 → **How do I know if I am registered to vote?**

If you are not sure if you are registered to vote you can call your local Board of Elections to find out. If you have access to the internet, you can visit your county's Board of Elections website.

3 → **When can I register?**

You can use your state election page to find the deadlines for your state.

4 → **Does registration cost anything?**

No. It is free.

5 → **Am I registered once I fill out and mail the registration form?**

You must receive your voter registration card in order to be registered. If you have not received your card you can call your Registrar of Voters or City/County Elections Office and ask if you are registered.

6 → **Do I have to register every time I vote?**

No. The only times you have to reregister are when you move, change your name, want to change your political party, or if you have completed all conditions of a felony charge.

7 → **If I didn't vote in the last election do I need to register again?**

If you registered but did not vote you are still registered and do not need to register again.

8 → **How do I know where to go vote?**

If you are not sure of your polling location contact your local Board of Elections.

9 → **How do I vote if I am going to be out of town on Election Day?**

If you are out of town on Election Day, you will either need to vote during early voting or by absentee ballot. You may request an absentee ballot by contacting your local, county, or city election official. Depending on your State, this individual may be the County Clerk, County Auditor, County Registrar or Supervisor of Elections, or the Board of Elections. Call your local Board of Elections office for more details on early voting.

10 → **What if I move before the election?**

If you move before the deadline to register to vote, you will need to register to vote at your new address. If you move after the deadline to register to vote you must vote at your former precinct in person, early in person, or by mail.

11 → **I have to work, how late are polls open on Election Day?**

Most polling locations open early in the morning and stay open until late in the evening. Check the state polling location hours with your local Board of Elections.



Supporting Documents

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Is my employer required to give me time off to vote?

Many states require that employers give employees time off to vote but it may be without pay. Make sure to check with your state election office and employer for state specific rules.

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I'm a college student; do I vote where I go to school or at home?

You must vote wherever you are registered. If you are a resident in the state where you are attending college, you can register to vote at your address in that state. If you are attending school in a state different from where you are a permanent resident, you can register to vote at your "home" address (usually a parent or family member's address in your hometown) and request an absentee ballot be sent to your address at school.

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What candidates/issues are on the ballot this year

You can get a complete list of candidates and ballot issues from your local Board of Elections.



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