



**OUR HOMES,
OUR VOTES**

**An Informed Debate: Effectively Engaging
Candidates while Remaining Non-Partisan**

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Presenters



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Agenda



- Nonpartisan Candidate Engagement
- Questionnaires, Fact Sheets, and Letters
- Forums and Town Halls
- Candidate Visits to your Organization
- Question and Answer
- Additional Resources

Our Homes, Our Votes



Our Homes, Our Votes is NLIHC's voter engagement effort focusing on increasing voter registration and turnout amongst low income housing renters and advocates.



Nonpartisan Candidate Engagement

Automatic voting machine with privacy
curtains, invented in Iowa, 1898.
Gift of Rockwell Manufacturing Company


**VOTE
HERE**

Legal Considerations for Nonprofits



501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations ARE allowed to participate in voter registration efforts!

501(c)(3)s **CAN**

- Register voters
- Educate voters
- Engage candidates on issues
- Get voters to the polls

As long as all efforts and activities remain NON-PARTISAN!

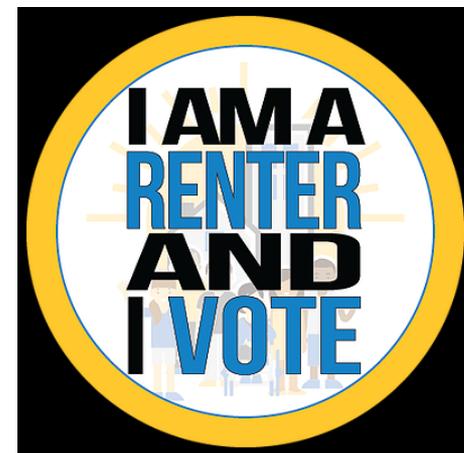
501(c)(3)s **CANNOT**

- Make endorsements of any political candidates.
- Donate money, resources, or time to any particular candidate.
- Any staff engaged in partisan political activities **MUST** do so without representing the organization, **NEVER** on staff time, and **NEVER** using 501(c)(3) resources.

Staying Nonpartisan with Candidates



- Never criticize candidate statements
 - Add perspective
 - Correct the record
- Do NOT Rank or Rate Candidates
 - Constitutes an endorsement
- Legislative Scorecards
 - Only for incumbent legislators—distinct from voter guides
- What about nonpartisan candidate elections?
 - Still not okay to endorse candidates or coordinate with campaigns





Questionnaires and Fact Sheets





Implementing a Legislative Candidate Survey

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What Is The Reason For Doing It?

Simple Answer:

ENGAGEMENT!!

Engagement with Two Separate Target Audiences:

- 1) Candidates for state house and senate races
- 2) Continuums of Care / Local Planning Bodies

Goals With Candidates

- 1) Introducing homelessness as an issue for them to have on their radar
- 2) Finding out what they actually know about the issue
 - *This will inform the way you interact with them, if elected*

Goals With Candidates

3) Assessing whether they could be a potential “ally” or “obstacle”

➤ *Developing possible “champions”*

4) Putting our organization’s name in front of them

➤ *Greasing the wheels for future engagement*



Goals With CoCs / LPBs

1) Informing community stakeholders about candidates running for office in districts that include their service area

Goals With CoCs / LPBs

2) Motivating them to reach out to candidates and to engage as appropriate based on the “ally” or “obstacle” assessment

- ***Education at the district level!!***
- ***The ground game at the local level empowers action at the state level.***

Education At The District Level:

- *Correspondence, introducing the issue and stakeholders “on the ground” in-district*
- *Invitation to attend a meeting(s)*
- *Invitation to make a site visit with a local provider(s)*

Remember The “Long Game”

Be aware of the value of the “long game” in establishing and maintaining relationships. Even if they lose the election, the candidate may continue to be involved in other community capacities and/or may run for office again.

Engage with people of influence (for today and the future).

Questionnaires – Best Practices



- Questionnaires serve two purposes:
 1. Collect information about candidates' views for voters
 2. Inform candidates about the range of issues that are important to your organization
- Questionnaires should be publicly posted and shared once completed
 - Develop a plan for how the answers will be shared, and indicate to candidates how you will distribute their answers
- Provide clear instructions
 - Word limit
 - Clear deadline
 - How to submit

Questionnaires – Considerations and Guidelines



- Share with all candidates
- Use open ended questions
- Ask questions on a range of issues
- Do not ask for pledges of support or compare candidate's responses to organization's views
- Give candidates a reasonable amount of time to respond
- Make your survey brief to ensure a good response rate
- Do NOT modify candidate responses in any way

Questionnaires – What Happens if a Candidate Doesn't Respond



- Completely acceptable to list “Did not respond” for their responses.
- Remind candidates ahead of deadline and let them know that “Did not respond” will be used if no response is received.
- If you decided to print campaign contact information, only use that which is factual (name, address, etc.) and can be found on their website/official materials.

Candidate Fact Sheets

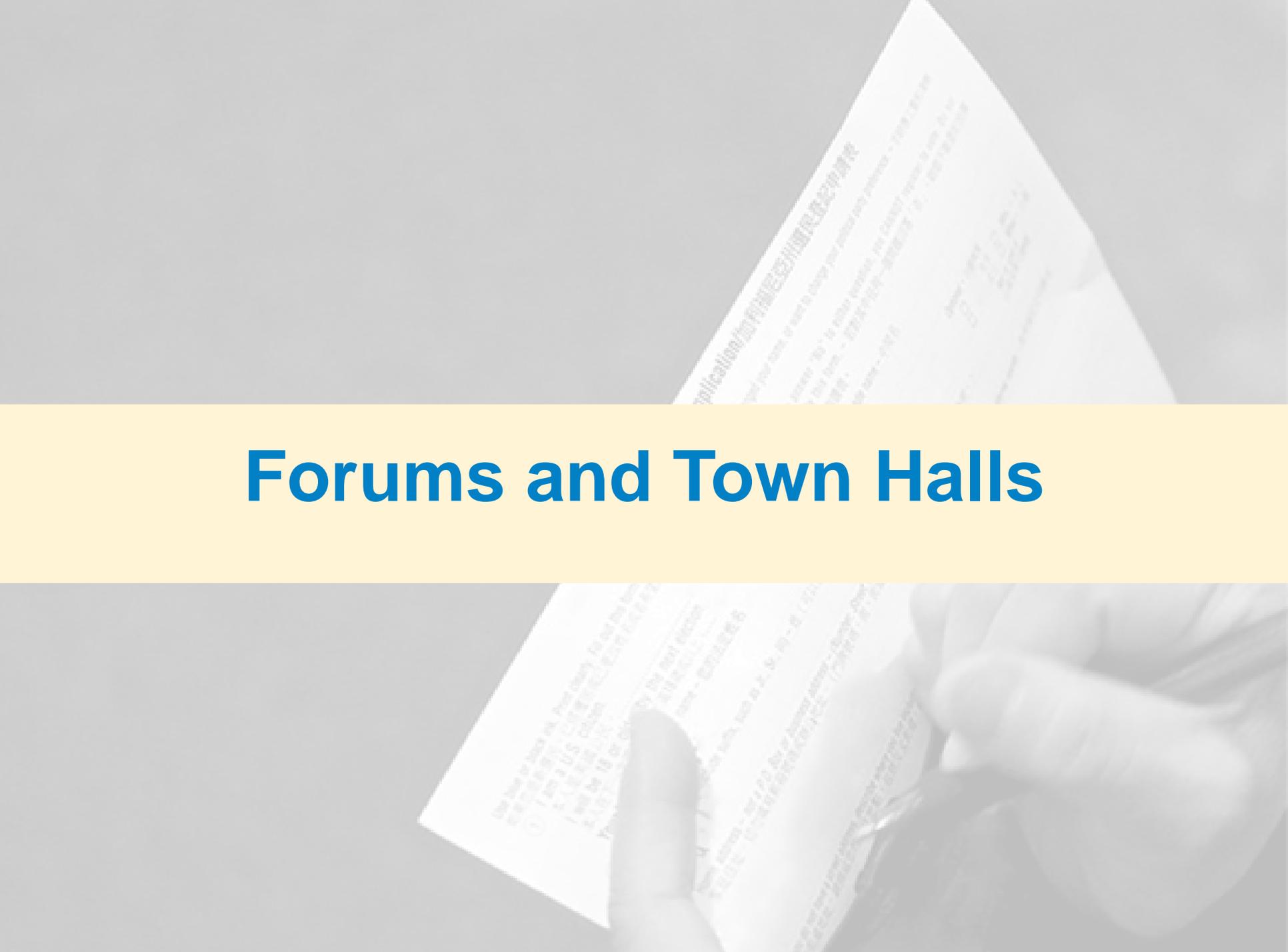


Inform the Debate

- Provide data for candidates to kickstart and clarify discussion of homelessness and housing shortages

Good Data Sources

- NLIHC Housing Profiles (<http://nlihc.org/library/housingprofiles>)
- National Housing Preservation Database
<https://preservationdatabase.org/preservation-resources/preservation-resources/>
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
 - National and State Housing Fact Sheets <https://www.cbpp.org/research/national-and-state-housing-data-fact-sheets>
- HUD CART (<https://egis.hud.gov/cart/>)



Forums and Town Halls

Candidate Forums and Town Hall Meetings



Candidate forums and town hall meetings are public events that allow candidates to have open discussion of topics and issues.

- Forums tend to be more moderator-led discussion while town halls allow for larger audience participation.



Candidate Forums – Key Considerations



- Be sure to invite all candidates and give equal effort to getting all to attend
 - It is okay to set criteria regarding invitations but be sure that it's based on an impartial facts such as funds raised by a certain date, polling with voters at a certain percent, etc.
- Ensure the moderator is able to be nonpartisan in both tone and facilitation
- Set time limits for responses and give all candidates a chance to respond
- All candidate materials (signs, stickers, etc.) should be kept outside of the space where the event is taking place

Candidate Forums and Town Halls – Key Considerations



- If possible, screen audience questions ahead of time in order to get a diversity of viewpoints.
- Moderator questions can be controversial but should not in give any suggestion of a preferred response.
- Set rules for the audience at the start of the event
 - No applause, no partisan materials (buttons, stickers)
- Invite media
- Write up a recap of the event and share widely

Town Hall Meetings – Asking the Best Question



Being Heard

- Submit a question in advance
 - Tweet your question before the event
- Sit near the microphone

Ask Direct Questions

- Consider a question with two parts
 - A Yes/No aspect in the beginning
 - An opportunity for the candidate to offer additional thoughts.

Include Facts in a Question

- Opportunity to inform the candidates

Example Question



“In our community, more than one-quarter of all renters have an eviction on their record. Do you support a new law guaranteeing the right to an attorney for all renters facing eviction? Also, what will you do to decrease the rapidly increasing evictions in our neighborhoods?”

Minnesota Case Study – Homes for All Candidate Forums



SEP
12

Homes for All Gubernatorial Forum

by Homes for All

Free



REGISTER



Candidate Visits to Nonprofit Organization Sites or Meetings



Candidate Visits



Candidates are allowed to visit your organization and/or any events being held by your organization. All contact must fit into the following three types:

1. As a public figure (elected official or field expert)
 - Should not mention candidacy at any point, event should be free of all campaign materials or discussion.
 - Can speak about legislative accomplishments.
 - It IS appropriate to give an elected official an award, even in an election year. Best if the award is given on a regular basis such as annually.

Candidate Visits



2. As a candidate invited by the nonprofit
 - Must invite all candidates and cannot give any indication of support or opposition
 - No fundraising at these events
 - Best practice – have residents or members lead these events, ask questions, and tell their stories

Candidate Visits



3. Of their own initiative and interest

- Candidates can attend nonprofit sponsored events
- Nonprofits should ensure that there is no endorsement of candidate implied or otherwise
- Do NOT give candidate opportunity to address the gathering unless it is clearly through another capacity and does NOT reference candidacy



Questions?





Additional Resources



Key Partners



Bolder Advocacy

www.bolderadvocacy.org



Nonprofit VOTE

www.nonprofitvote.org



Voter Engagement Tools



Our Homes, Our Votes: A Guide to Voter Engagement Activities for Nonprofit Housing Providers and Resident Organizations



Our Homes, Our Votes is NLHC's effort to expand voter engagement work conducted by community organizations dedicated to expanding affordable housing. This guide is designed to help you through the steps of planning your agency's voter engagement work. These materials offer resources for organizations seeking to engage traditionally underrepresented people in the civic process. Beyond this guide, NLHC will offer trainings and additional tools through the 2018 election. Be sure to visit nlhc.org/library/voter-engagement for the most updated materials and announcements.

This voter engagement plan provides all of the steps you need to implement a campaign to integrate registration, education, mobilization, and voter protection without overtaxing your staff or resources, while staying within legal guidelines for nonprofits. Our plan presents a menu of activities for your group to consider. Your organization may or may not be able to undertake all of the suggested activities; plan according to available resources. If this is your first voter engagement project, remember to think long-term. It is usually best to start small and build your project over several election cycles.

Please let us know if you are conducting a voter engagement effort so that we can provide assistance, connect you with helpful resources, and spotlight your election-related work on our blog or in other NLHC publications such as Tenant Talk. Call NLHC's Field Team at 202-662-1530, or email us at outreach@nlhc.org.

WHY ENGAGE IN ELECTION WORK?

Raising housing on the national agenda will happen only when candidates for elected office understand that the issue of affordable housing is important to voters. At the same time, it is vital that low income voters understand how the decisions made by federal elected officials

directly affect their lives; know how to register to vote; and, know how to get to the polls on Election Day.

Census data confirm that low income voters are registered and vote at lower rates than higher income citizens. While 85% of people with incomes over \$100,000 were registered to vote in 2016 and 74% voted, just 60% of people with incomes below \$20,000 were registered, and only 38% actually voted. (U.S. Census Bureau. Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016. May 2017.)

People in low income communities face several challenges to voting such as less-flexible work schedules that may not allow time off to vote; more difficulty obtaining legal identification; transportation impediments that may make getting to the polls more difficult; and, a greater likelihood of misinformation about their rights as voters. People experiencing homelessness, ex-offenders, and survivors of a natural disaster may face especially tough barriers to voting.

Nonprofit organizations, which benefit from close ties with their members, are a natural fit in helping people overcome these challenges. Nonprofits that have implemented voter engagement projects have identified several benefits of doing so:

- Residents engage in civic life and learn how decisions of elected officials affect their lives.
- The issue of homelessness and housing scarcity is elevated in public debate.
- Elected officials become educated on low



OUR HOMES,
OUR VOTES

2018 Our Homes, Our Votes Engagement Plan



Completing a voter engagement plan for your agency will help you assess how best to incorporate voter registration, education, and mobilization into your agency's work. This plan template presents a menu of activities that your organization may want to consider.

Please let NLHC know you are participating! Contact NLHC's Field Team at 202-662-1530 or outreach@nlhc.org with a description of your project.

WHY BECOME VOTERIZED?

Below are some reasons that organizations have undertaken voter engagement projects. Check those that apply to your organization, and add any others that apply.

- Engage residents in civic participation and help them become familiar with how decisions of elected officials affect their lives.
- Elevate the issue of homelessness and housing scarcity in public debate.
- Educate elected officials on low income housing issues and on how their decisions affect residents.
- Build influential relationships with elected officials. Help develop residents' leadership skills.
- Assist residents in meeting community service requirements, if applicable. Earn positive press for your program or project.
- Other: _____

LEGALLY SPEAKING

501(c)(3) organizations can, and should, engage in nonpartisan election-related activity, including voter registration, education, and mobilization. 501(c)(3)s cannot in any way support or oppose particular candidates. For detailed information on these issues:

- Contact the Office of the Secretary of State or Board of Elections in your state to learn your state's rules for voter registration drives.
- Take a look at the Permissible Activities Checklist put together by Nonprofit VOTE at: www.nonprofitvotes.org/documents/2017/04/nonpartisan-election-activities-501c3-nonprofits.pdf.
- Visit the League of Women Voters at www.women411.org for the latest information on voting in your state.
- Read and review Nonprofits, Voting & Elections produced by Nonprofit VOTE at: <http://www.nonprofitvotes.org/nonprofits-voting-elections-online/documents/2010/11/nonprofits-voting-and-elections.pdf>.

REGISTERING VOTERS

Setting Goals for Registering Voters

- What percentage of your clients will you register? What number? _____
- Will your agency also register other low income members of the community, beyond those served by your program? _____
- How many weeks do you have until the deadline to register voters? _____
- How many people must you register on average per week to meet your goal? _____



OUR HOMES,
OUR VOTES

New Resource!

www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org



- Step-by-step voter engagement planning resources
- Infographics and images for use in your materials
- Articles and updates on efforts throughout the country
- Recordings of previous webinar presentations
- Helpful links to additional resources and information

OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES

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OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES

Affordable homes are built with ballots every bit as much as they are built with bricks and drywall. Advocates for expanded housing affordability need to be a significant voting bloc in the 2018 election.

[Start planning](#) your *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign today.

Upcoming Webinars



**Tuesday, August
14**

“I Vote for More Affordable Homes!” Educating Voters Before Election Day

**Tuesday, August
21**

Voter Mobilization: Getting Out the Vote

All Webinars begin at 3:00pm ET
For more information, please visit <https://bit.ly/2KooyTi>

It's never been easy.

Our commitment is unwavering.

**Join us and amplify the voices of
the poorest families in need.**

**OUR MEMBERS
ARE OUR STRENGTH.**



NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION

JOIN TODAY
WWW.NLIHC.ORG/MEMBERSHIP

Contact Us



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