

OUR HOMES

OUR VOTES

BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS



TOOLKIT

OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES – AN OVERVIEW

The National Low Income Housing Coalition's nonpartisan *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign aims to boost voter turnout among low-income renters and elevate affordable housing as an election issue.

BACKGROUND

Federal housing policy disproportionately favors homeownership. For example, only 1 out of 4 low-income households eligible for federal housing assistance actually receives it, while mortgage tax benefits are available to nearly every homeowner. These disparities in federal investment are at least in part the result of disparities in voter participation. In the 2022 midterm elections, 58% of homeowners voted, compared with a turnout rate of 37% for renters. The disparities between low-income people and high-income people are even greater. 67% of citizens with household incomes over \$100,000 voted, compared to just 33% of citizens with household incomes less than \$20,000. Over the past several years, many states have introduced and passed legislation to suppress the votes of low-income people, people of color, students, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. These groups are disproportionately represented among renters.

OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES RESOURCES

The *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign will provide tools to assist organizations working to engage low-income renters in the upcoming elections. *Our Homes, Our Votes* offers a comprehensive suite of toolkits and online resources, and will host a series of webinars in the months leading up to the 2024 elections. The *Our Homes, Our Votes* toolkit contains quick reference factsheets, guide materials, and templates for organizations that are doing nonpartisan election work.

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GETTING STARTED ★★★★★

LEGAL DO'S AND DON'TS FOR 501(C)3 NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS |

Nonprofit organizations can, and should, engage in nonpartisan election-related activity, including voter registration, education, and mobilization. The basic rule is that 501(c)(3) organizations cannot in any way support or oppose particular candidates or political parties. Coordination with a campaign or a party is specifically and clearly forbidden. There are many ways, however, that nonprofit organizations can legally engage with candidates to inform them on issues and to gather position statements to be shared with low-income residents and allies.

501(c)(3)s CAN

- Register voters
- Educate voters
- Engage candidates on issues
- Endorse ballot initiatives
- Host election-related public events
- Get voters to the polls

**As long as all efforts
and activities remain
NONPARTISAN!**

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.

With regard to ballot initiatives placed before voters, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations **CAN** take an official position as long as engaging on the ballot initiative fits within the organization's mission. Engagement on ballot initiatives is thought of as lobbying on a bill, but with the voters acting as the legislators.

Nonprofit organizations engaging on elections should be familiar with the Bolder Advocacy campaign of the Alliance for Justice. Bolder Advocacy works to ensure that nonprofit groups are current on rules governing lobbying and campaign involvement. Review their materials and sign up for upcoming webinars at www.bolderadvocacy.org. Bolder Advocacy also provides a legal support hotline at 866-NP-LOBBY.

Organizations with specific types of federal funding might have additional limitations on electoral engagement. For example, organizations that receive funding from Legal Services Corporation are strictly forbidden from any type of electoral participation. Organization staff paid through the AmeriCorps VISTA program cannot participate in any election work, including voter registration. Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) organizations can participate in elections, by using any CSBG funds. Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) notably are allowed to register voters and use resources to mobilize them on Election Day, though these activities are best coordinated through resident councils.

CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT & TOWN HALLS ★★★★★

OVERVIEW OF CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT |

Elections are a fantastic opportunity to get decision-makers thinking about housing issues. Too often, affordable homes are ignored in the public debate leading up to elections. 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—and to do that, advocates must educate and engage.

Candidate engagement can take many forms: candidate forums, town hall meetings, candidate surveys, and candidate fact sheets. There are also opportunities to invite candidates to interact with residents or community members through meetings and site visits.

Asking candidates to fill out a questionnaire or inviting them to your agency can be a way to learn more about them while making them aware of your organization and the issues that are important to renters. You may also want to report the number of new voters your organization has been able to register and demonstrate the strength of your constituency. Candidates also learn what issues are key to voters by reading the letters to the editor page of the newspaper. Consider having clients write letters about issues that are important to them; letters can often be published as a response to a story in which candidates have discussed poverty issues.

When educating candidates, be sure to stay nonpartisan. To do this, remember:

I. NEVER CRITICIZE CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

- But you can add perspective or correct the record

II. DO NOT RANK OR RATE CANDIDATES

- Constitutes an endorsement

III. LEGISLATIVE SCORECARDS

- Only for incumbent legislators
- These are distinct from voter guides

IV. WHAT ABOUT NONPARTISAN CANDIDATE ELECTIONS?

- It's still not okay to endorse candidates or coordinate with campaigns

QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FORUMS |

- I. **Keep it nonpartisan:** This means inviting all the candidates for an elected position, and not just the Democrat and the Republican. Inviting only the major parties shows partisan preference to those two groups.
- II. **Build a coalition:** You can generate a larger audience and guarantee more candidates accept your invitation by having more groups involved in hosting the event. Caution: one issue with having too many groups involved in hosting is you might not have enough time to focus specifically on housing.
- III. **Bring the cameras:** Do your best to get commitments from media outlets to broadcast the event or cover it in their publications. Use live-streaming options such as Facebook or consider posting recordings to your website or your blog. Let the candidates know the media has been invited.
- IV. **Follow-ups are essential:** Be sure to have a sign-in table where you can collect contact information of attendees. This table should also have voter registration forms for people who have not yet registered.
- V. **Materials and factsheets:** Provide information to attendees and candidates in advance so that the conversation starts from an informed perspective with the most recent data available about the housing shortage and homelessness in your community.
- VI. **Curate the questions:** A fully open Q&A can often get off topic or even unruly. Ask attendees to write their questions on note cards as they arrive. Arrange for some of your volunteers to go through the cards to pick the ones that are most interesting, relevant, and timely.
- VII. **Give the candidates time:** The candidates for office are making time available during their very busy campaign schedule. Be sure to offer them time at both the beginning and end of the forum to discuss their vision and campaign in their own terms.
- VIII. **Make it easy to attend:** When organizing events where many attendees are likely to be low-income, always consider barriers that can be addressed to get people in the room. Offer food or childcare services, which can often be coordinated through volunteers. If you have the capacity, organize carpools to the event to boost attendance.

SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE |

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES SERVE TWO PURPOSES:

- I. Collect information about candidates' views for voters.
- II. Inform candidates about the range of issues that are important to your organization.

The candidate questionnaire uses open-ended questions to solicit the candidate's opinions on a range of important issues.

The questionnaire should go to all candidates and it should be publicly posted. Provide clear instructions to candidates including a word limit, a clear deadline, and instructions for how to submit. Give candidates a reasonable amount of time to respond and be sure to keep the survey brief to ensure a good response rate.

Develop a plan for how the answers will be shared, and indicate to candidates how you will distribute their answers. Do not modify candidate responses in any way.

Remind candidates ahead of the deadline to submit their responses—and let them know that "Did not respond" will be used if no response is received. It is completely acceptable to list "Did not respond" for their responses.

Offer the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire to **all** candidates. This is important to ensuring that your efforts are nonpartisan.

SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE |

[Print on Organization's Letterhead]

[Date]

Re: 2024 Affordable Housing Election Questionnaire

Dear [Name]:

Today, the affordable housing crisis continues to reach new heights. In our [city/county/state], [#] renters are cost-burdened and [#] people experience homelessness on the average night. Among those hardest-hit are low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness. These families must make desperate tradeoffs between keeping a roof over their heads and buying food or medicine. Recent reports show that nearly every community in our nation—in urban, rural, and suburban areas alike—is impacted.

As a nominee for [Elected Office], [Organization Name] invites you to complete the attached **2024 Election Questionnaire** on key affordable housing issues. The purpose of this questionnaire is to educate and inform communities on each candidate's stance on the housing issues directly impacting them. *It is not meant to serve as an endorsement of/for any particular candidate and/or political party.* All major nominees for [Elected Office]—regardless of party affiliation—have been invited to complete the questionnaire.

In [recent polling](#) by NLIHC's Opportunity Starts at Home campaign, 74% of respondents supported policies that expand investments in housing development programs that will build more housing units that are affordable for low-income people. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents said it was important to them personally that their elected officials work to make sure there is enough affordable housing available. For many Americans, this issue is personal: nearly 6 in 10 respondents said that the amount they pay for housing is a concern.

Please send your completed questionnaire to [Point of Contact] at [Email] by [Date]. Upon receipt, we will post your response on our websites at [website] and use social media to connect the public to your completed questionnaire.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

2024 ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

[Questions for ALL candidates; include local data where available]

1. The Availability of Affordable Housing

46 percent of U.S. renter households are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Nearly one-quarter are severely cost-burdened and pay at least half their income on rent. In our [state/county/city], [#] renters are cost-burdened, and [#] pay more than half of their monthly income on rent. The lack of supply—especially for those with the lowest incomes—has only made this problem worse. **What would you do to encourage the production of more affordable homes for these families?**

2. Mobility and Discrimination

According to research from Raj Chetty, moving a poor child out of a high-poverty community to a more affluent community increases access to college, decreases their chances of becoming a single parent, and increases future earnings. Despite the benefits, many low-income families face barriers to moving to high-opportunity areas, including discrimination based on source of income and lack of access to housing assistance. **What actions would you take to encourage mobility and stop source of income discrimination?**

3. Achieving Racial Equity

Because of centuries of structural racism and ongoing discrimination in the housing market, people of color are far more likely than white Americans to face evictions and experience homelessness in the United States today. **What is your plan to remedy these injustices and promote housing stability for communities of color?**

4. Housing Intersections

Having an accessible, affordable place to call home is critical to improving education, health, and economic outcomes. **What housing-based strategy would you use to address the education, health, transportation, and economic needs of low-income families?**

5. Homelessness

On any given night, more than half a million people are experiencing homelessness—sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. **What will you do to end homelessness?**

6. Housing Challenges In Rural America

Although millions of rural families have trouble paying their rent or mortgage, rural housing issues are often overlooked. Moreover, resources used by rural communities have been cut significantly. **How would you prioritize the housing needs of our rural communities?**

[Questions for federal candidates only]

7. Housing as a Safety Net Program

Unlike other federal safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare, federal affordable housing assistance is not guaranteed, even if a family qualifies for the program. Today, just one in four households that are eligible get the assistance they need. **What specifically will you do to expand access to this assistance?**

8. Legislative and Regulatory Changes to Federal Housing Programs

Several proposals to change federally assisted housing programs have been introduced over the past sessions of Congress. **How, if at all, would you propose to change federally assisted housing programs that serve low-income households, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Section 8 housing vouchers, and public housing?**

9. Preservation of Affordable Housing

The preservation of existing affordable housing—including public housing and developments receiving project-based rental assistance—is a critical and cost-effective component in addressing the housing crisis. Due to chronic underfunding, there is an estimated backlog of \$70 billion in deferred maintenance costs for public housing alone. Communities like [cities in the state] are in severe need of updates for public housing developments, as well as developments receiving project-based rental assistance. **What would be your plan to preserve this critical resource for the long-term?**

10. Permanent Housing Stability Solutions

Emergency rental assistance (ERA) programs established in COVID-19 relief legislation have provided necessary support to keep low-income renters stably housed through a time of crisis. As these emergency resources are depleted, housing instability is increasing and eviction rates are rising to their pre-pandemic levels in many communities. **What is your plan to enact permanent solutions that would be used to prevent evictions and homelessness in the way that ERA has done during the pandemic?**

TIPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN A TOWN HALL |

Town Hall Meetings: Asking the Best Question

- Submit a question in advance
- Tweet your question before the event. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag.
- 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
- Videotape the question and answer, and send it to outreach@nlihc.org to be included in the www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org website cataloguing all candidate comments on affordable housing. Share the video via social media using the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag.

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?"

BUILDING THE BEST AUDIENCE |

Engaging and Empowering Low-Income Renters to Attend Candidate Events

The best way to get candidates to acknowledge the importance of low-income renters as part of the electorate is to provide opportunities for them to interact with people who have lived experience in the housing crisis. Some ideas for powerful community events include: candidate coffees, town hall meetings, and tours of affordable housing or shelter facilities that allow candidates to directly interact with residents. To maximize the impact of these events, be sure that they are accessible to low-income renters.

KEY STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE TURNOUT FROM LOW-INCOME RENTERS:

- I. **Host the event near low-income renters.** Select a location central to your intended audience. Consider using the community room of a public housing building or the meeting room at a local neighborhood center.
- II. **Ask people to RSVP.** Build a list in advance of people who say they are interested in attending. You will generally want about twice as many RSVPs as your target number for attendance. Use the RSVP list to call people the evening before or email them day-of to remind them of the event.
- III. **Use social media.** Many low-income renters are active on Facebook or Twitter. Always create a Facebook event page to promote your event and request RSVPs. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag.
- IV. **Provide food!** Low-income renters might have to adjust their dinner or lunch plans to attend your event. Providing food always builds a bigger crowd.
- V. **Provide childcare.** Low-income renters are less likely to have backup support for childcare. Oftentimes, in order to attend a community event, they will either need childcare provided on site or they will need the event to be kid-friendly.
- VI. **Have interpreters available.** Make your event as accessible as possible. If there are community members whose primary language is not English, make it known that translation will be available. Having sign-language interpreters can be helpful for community members who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
- VII. **Send out reminders.** Frequently remind people about the event through emails, and consider hosting a volunteer phone bank the evening before to remind people.

- VIII. Encourage people to bring new voters.** When doing reminder outreach, encourage attendees on your RSVP list to please bring a friend or neighbor.
- IX. Provide clear directions.** If you are not transporting low-income people to your event or hosting it at their facility, provide clear instructions on the address and mass transit options that can get people to the event.
- X. Post clear signs at the event facility.** If your event is hosted in a large building, make sure signs or volunteers are directing people to the correct room in a clear and simple manner.

TIPS FOR PROPERTY MANAGERS HOSTING CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT EVENTS |

Elected leaders always start as candidates before they become policymakers. Engaging candidates, whether incumbents or challengers, can be a great way to increase the visibility of your housing programs and the impact your work makes in people's lives. Here are some suggestions to maximize the impact of your event.

- I. **Remember to invite all candidates.** Events that host several candidates such as "town hall"-style meetings should include all candidates so that you are not engaging in a partisan way or favoring a particular candidate. It can be acceptable to establish criteria for the candidates you invite, such as only candidates who have met a certain polling threshold or who have raised a certain amount through contributions, but always consult with an attorney or review the [resources provided](#) by the Bolder Advocacy campaign.
- II. **Offer a tour.** In advance of your meeting with candidates or your moderated discussion, offer to show them around your facility, and perhaps to see one of the homes you provide. This will help them contextualize your work and your use of subsidy funds.
- III. **Provide a chance to hear from residents.** It's important for subsidized housing residents to hear from candidates, but candidates should also hear the concerns of residents. Your event should provide residents the opportunity to share their perspectives and priorities with candidates. If you're operating with a tight agenda, it might make sense to have residents submit questions in advance or to identify resident leaders to offer perspectives and lead the Q&A.
- IV. **Inform candidates about your work in advance.** When inviting candidates, let them know who you are, what mission you serve with your properties, who the eligible residents are, and basic information about the challenges you're facing. This will allow candidates to prepare statements and thoughts in advance of their visit.
- V. **Share about your event.** Highlight your event afterward in any newsletters, blog posts, or social media. By publicly demonstrating your appreciation for the candidates and their attention to housing affordability issues, you will encourage them to remain engaged and to elevate housing as a top priority.
- VI. **Invite the media.** Send out a press advisory in advance of your event to traditional news outlets. Journalists often enjoy covering campaign events where directly impacted people have an opportunity to interact with candidates. In order to attract TV journalists, produce large-scale visuals or infographics to help create a setting suitable for filming.

TOP 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK A CANDIDATE |

3 Questions to Ask on the Campaign Trail

Before you cast your vote, know where the candidates stand on affordable housing issues.

Here are three questions to ask candidates:

- I. What generally should be the role of government in addressing housing affordability issues, and what steps would you take to encourage the production of more affordable homes for families who are cost-burdened—those paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs?
- II. What specifically will you do to expand access to housing assistance to every household that needs it?
- III. What will you do to end homelessness?

Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio, or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag. Share the video with outreach@nlihc.org for posting on the www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org website.

TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR QUESTION HEARD BY THE CANDIDATE |

Tips for Getting your Question Heard by the Candidate!

- Be ready with a question and ask it directly, such as: "What specifically will you do to expand access to housing assistance to every household that needs it?"
- Practice asking your question out loud in advance of the event so that you can clearly and quickly articulate it.
- If there is a formal Q&A portion of an event, you can ask your question then. But get in line early to make sure you have the opportunity to get your question heard.
- You can ask your question by respectfully approaching the candidate when they are entering or exiting or mingling.
- Position yourself in the decision-maker's path, in a place where they are walking out and shaking hands and be ready to ask the question right away.
- Get there early and find a good seat. If there is a formal Q&A session, consider sitting near the microphone to be first in line.
- Go with a friend or colleague and have people positioned in different locations around the event.
- Use your phone to videotape the exchange and the answer (or have a friend tape you asking the question)—and use social media to lift up the question and response!
- Look for an opportunity to talk with the media and explain why you're there, what the candidate was asked, and what their response was.
- Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag. Share the video with outreach@nlihc.org for posting on the www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org website.

TIPS FOR CANDIDATE EVENTS: FORUMS & TOWN HALLS |

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

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

- I. Be sure to invite all candidates and give equal effort to getting all to attend. If you set criteria to lower the number of invitations, be sure they are based on impartial facts such as funds raised by a certain date, polling with voters at a certain percent, etc.
- II. Ensure the moderator is nonpartisan in both tone and facilitation.
- III. Set time limits for responses and give all candidates a chance to respond.
- IV. All candidate materials (signs, stickers, etc.) should be kept outside of the space where the event is taking place.
- V. If possible, screen audience questions ahead of time to get a diversity of viewpoints.
- VI. Set rules for the audience at the start of the event.
- VII. No applause, no partisan materials (buttons, stickers).
- VIII. Invite media.
- IX. Write up a recap of the event and share widely. Capture the exchange with video, audio, or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag. Share the video with outreach@nlihc.org for posting on the www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org website.

TIPS FOR CANDIDATE VISITS |

MAKING THE MOST OF 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:

I. 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. But it is a best practice that the award be given on a regular basis, such as annually

II. 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
- As a best practice, have residents or members lead these events, ask questions, and tell their stories

III. 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 candidates the opportunity to address the gathering, unless it is clearly in another capacity and does NOT reference their candidacy

Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio, or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes hashtag. Share the video with outreach@nlihc.org for posting on the www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org website.

VOTER GUIDES ON CANDIDATE POSITIONS |

A voter guide seeks to provide voters with general information on each of the candidates and the offices they will fill.

Ballot measures should be discussed and CAN include an organizational position.

Things to consider:

- Include general candidate information such as name, photo, occupation, party affiliation, contact information, website, etc.
- Can include their responses from a questionnaire (do NOT coordinate with candidate on including this information).

Survey responses:

- The best candidate positions to include for your network are the ones that are provided from all candidates.
- Show responses in their entirety; picking and choosing quotes can be partisan.
- If providing websites or candidate flyers, make sure to include all candidates.

VOTER REGISTRATION ★★★★★

TIPS FOR VOTER REGISTRATION |

Voter turnout begins with nonpartisan voter registration. In order to cast a vote, a citizen must provide proof of residence and age prior to a given state's voter registration deadline. Low registration rates among low-income renters are a consistent barrier to federal housing policy that serves the lowest-income people. Census data confirm that low-income voters are registered and vote at lower rates than higher-income citizens. While 82% of people with household incomes above \$100,000 were registered to vote in 2022 and 67% voted, just 57% of people with incomes below \$20,000 were registered, and only 33% actually voted. ([U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022, April 2023](#)) This lack of representation at the polls has been [demonstrated](#) to affect public policy. Studies find that increased turnout among the rich leads to policies that reduce taxation on the wealthy, while increased turnout among the poor increases support for safety net programs.

Here are some tips for effective voter registration efforts:

1. Set Goals

Define who you want to register, and how many you hope to register. Will it be by increasing registration in a certain set of subsidized buildings? Increasing registration in a particular neighborhood? Targeting young voters? These are all examples of important considerations for structuring your efforts. Having goals will provide clarity for staff and volunteers working on the project.

2. Get to Know Your Local Board of Elections

Your local Board of Elections or County Clerk can offer a wealth of information as you plan to register low-income renters to vote. You will want to check in with them to learn the registration deadline for the general election in your state. Ask whether anyone can register voters in your state, or whether a person must first become deputized or meet other requirements. Request the voter rolls for your community, so you will know who in your target audience is already registered. Learn about identification requirements for registration and voting. Explore whether online voter registration is an option—this might allow your voter registration drive to be done on tablets or smartphones. Request enough voter registration forms to meet your registration goals. In many places, the role of the Board of Elections will be conducted out of the office of the County or City Clerk. Please contact NLHHC if you need help determining who the best local authority is for your organization.

3. Offer Registration Trainings

Residents and staff who plan to register voters will often benefit from receiving training on the process. You may want to bring in someone from the local Board of Elections or County Clerk's office who can explain the state's registration requirements and how voter registration forms must be filled out, whether online or in paper. It can also help to spend a bit of time role-playing so that people who are registering voters are not discouraged when confronted with apathy. It is also helpful to practice voter registration updates for renters who have recently moved.

4. Fit Voter Registration into Your Agency's Regular Contact with Residents

A key best practice is to incorporate registration into day-to-day activities that already take place at your agency. Registration can usually be incorporated with few resources and little hassle into the intake process, training sessions, resident association meetings, and any other meetings of clients.

5. Plan Specific Voter Registration Activities

Another way to think about registration at your organization is to plan special registration activities or campaigns. Many organizations have had success holding social or other events at which residents are encouraged to register to vote. Consider hosting an event for [National Voter Registration Day](#).

6. Organize a Door-To-Door Campaign

The most effective way for larger organizations to systematically register clients is through a door-to-door campaign. If your agency is a housing provider or a resident council, such a campaign can be especially effective. In particular, resident leaders can volunteer to receive training and serve as 'building captains' or 'floor captains.' Captains can take on responsibility for registering, keeping registration records, and then turning out all of the people in their building or on their floor. Such a system can be a great way to get residents or clients involved while ensuring that staff does not become overwhelmed with additional responsibilities. The key is to have personal and organized contact with potential voters by people they know or trust. Especially in this type of campaign, you will want to use the voter list from your county to see who in your buildings is already registered or whose registration needs updating. Voter lists may cost a small fee, but they are essential for tracking who is already registered.

7. Go into the Community

Finally, especially if you have a smaller membership or client base, you may also want to think about having your volunteers reach out into the community to register other low-income renters, people experiencing homelessness, or members of other underrepresented communities. Consider staffing voter registration and information tables at community events. Also, make sure to promote your voter registration efforts through your website and other social media platforms. Let people know they can come to your location or events to register to vote.

8. Full Participation from Your Team

Do not forget to make sure everyone on your staff, in your membership, and on your board is registered!

BEST PRACTICES FOR REGISTERING LOW-INCOME RENTERS |

Many low-income renters have justifiable skepticism towards the political process and may feel hesitant about voter registration. Here are some tips for overcoming common challenges in registration drives.

- **VOTER APATHY** – Messaging matters. There have been numerous studies that indicate low-income people are more likely to register to vote and turn out on Election Day if they are engaged with a positive message. Always rely on an individual's personal experience and connect that to the process for social change in a hopeful way. Do not deliver a message that reminds voters of the ways they have been failed by our institutions, which reinforces feelings of despair. Instead, remind low-income renters that their vote is about a new future for their neighborhood, community, or family. Discuss opportunities for change. Be prepared to share reminders of recent very close elections where a small number of votes determined the difference.
- **TURN FRUSTRATION INTO A PURPOSE** – Use an issue voters are frustrated with as a reason to continue to vote. Pivot to solutions to the problems, and remind the voter that their opponents are standing up and being counted when working in the opposite direction. If they are frustrated that all politicians are the same, that their candidates always lose, etc., you might tell them that you share the same concern and that is why you are registering voters to elect new leaders.
- **REMINDE SUBSIDIZED RENTERS THEY HAVE SOMETHING AT STAKE** – If you are organizing in public housing or registering low-income renters in specific properties, you should encourage them to protect their housing program by voting. There can be three important aspects of this message:
 - I. Housing programs are always being threatened with budget cuts, and the voter's affordable home needs to be supported at the ballot.
 - II. Improvements to repair subsidized properties require better budget support, and elected leaders know who votes in high numbers. When residents of subsidized properties turn out to vote, elected officials will pay more attention to their concerns.
 - III. Discuss the number of people in a voter's family or community who aren't fortunate enough to have subsidized housing and experience hardship while on the waiting list. Remind the voter that housing programs need to be protected AND expanded, which requires strong political leaders who represent the interests of low-income renters.

PARTNERS & RESOURCES FOR VOTER REGISTRATION |

BOLDER ADVOCACY, AN INITIATIVE OF THE ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE

Bolder Advocacy promotes active engagement in both elections and lobbying by giving nonprofits and foundations the information they need to advocate with confidence. They provide knowledge and tools that demystify advocacy and election engagement for nonprofit organizations. Bolder Advocacy makes it clear that nonprofits should not shy away from electoral activities. They lay out the differences in what organizations can and cannot do under IRS tax rules for nonprofits.

For more information, visit: <https://bolderadvocacy.org>

NONPROFIT VOTE

Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. They are the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services. Their excellent library of online resources includes a Voter Participation Starter Kit and a Voting in Your State Guide, as well as helpful guides on planning a voter engagement program, engaging candidates, and staying nonpartisan in all activities.

For more information, visit: <http://nonprofitvote.org>.

FAIR ELECTIONS LEGAL NETWORK (FELN)

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights, legal support, and election reform organization whose mission is to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. FELN works to improve overall election administration through reforms. They also provide legal and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations. Their state-specific resources include information on voter registration deadlines, ID requirements for voting, and how to vote early or by mail in any state.

For more information, visit: <http://fairelectionsnetwork.com>.

BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

The Brennan Center for Justice understands that voting is the foundation of our democracy. It fights to preserve and expand the right to vote for every eligible citizen. Through practical policy proposals, litigation, advocacy, and communications, the Brennan Center works to make sure that voting is free, fair, and accessible for all Americans. It tracks and publishes analyses of voting rights policies in every state legislature across the country.

For more information, visit: <https://brennancenter.org>.

VOTE411.ORG, A RESOURCE OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

VOTE411.org is an online voter education resource of the League of Women Voters and a "one-stop-shop" for election-related information. The site provides a voter registration tool, a nationwide polling place lookup, and ballot guides for voters in every state. The website will be updated with information on ballot questions and candidates for office. This level of information will be available for every voter in America, down to at least the statewide level, for both primary and general elections.

For more information, visit: <http://vote411.org>.

YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE, A CAMPAIGN OF THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

The You Don't Need a Home to Vote Campaign seeks to promote voting access by specifically engaging people experiencing homelessness in the democratic process. Online resources include a state-by-state breakdown of how homeless people can exercise their right to become registered voters, how homeless service agencies can incorporate voter registration into their client intake process, and how homelessness advocates can facilitate both comfort at the polling site and familiarity in casting a ballot.

For more information, visit: <http://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/voting>.

VOTE.ORG

Vote.org is a wonderful resource targeted to individual voters. The website provides opportunities to check voter registration status, register to vote, request absentee ballots, and sign up for election reminders. Vote.org additionally maintains state-by-state election center webpages with further state-specific information important to voters.

For more information, visit: www.vote.org.

THE SENTENCING PROJECT

Founded in 1986, the Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration. It produces a comprehensive report on the state-level estimates of felony disenfranchisement.

For more information, visit: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/felony-disenfranchisement/>

EVERY ONE VOTES (NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS)

Every One Votes is an initiative to ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness are registered to vote and able to exercise their right to vote. Providers can access resources and tools that provide guidance and strategies to support clients and consumers to register to vote, and to encourage voter turnout.

For more information, visit: <https://endhomelessness.org/every-one-votes-you-have-a-stake-in-elections/>

ELECTION PROTECTION COALITION

The Election Protection coalition, a project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, is a national, nonpartisan initiative that works year-round to ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to vote and have their votes counted. Election Protection provides comprehensive information and assistance at all stages of voting. It offers a multilingual suite of voter hotlines and opportunities to get voting help from trained volunteers. For more information, visit: <https://www.lawyerscommittee.org/project/election-protection/>

REV UP

The REV UP Campaign, launched by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), is a nonpartisan initiative that coordinates with national, state, and local organizations to increase the political power of the disability community while also engaging candidates and the media on disability issues. REV UP stands for Register! Educate! Vote! Use your Power! REV UP produces an election accessibility toolkit that can be accessed [here](#). For more information, visit: <https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/voting/join-rev-up/>

VOTER EDUCATION ★★★★★

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VOTER EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT |

There are three primary components of educating voters:

- Making a voting plan
- Voters' rights
- Candidate positions on issues

VOTING LOGISTICS

Ensure that voters know the date of the election, the hours that polls are open, and where to find their polling locations. Always educate your targeted voters in advance about the basics, and make sure these details are included in your materials, mailings, campaign emails, or other outreach:

- The date of the election
- Opportunities for early voting
- Polling location – If you are organizing your voter education efforts across many voting precincts, then include resources such as [vote.org](https://www.vote.org) or [vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org) where voters can look up their polling location.
- Hours of polling locations
- Identification requirements

RIGHTS OF VOTERS

Voters are often unclear on their rights, and many misinformation campaigns are designed to intentionally confuse low-income people so that they don't show up to vote. Your organization can educate voters about their rights at the polling place. Here are some common concerns:

- **EVERYONE CASTS A BALLOT!** All voters who show up to the polls should cast a ballot. If there is a question about any person's identification or residency in the ward where they are voting, that voter should cast a provisional ballot that will be counted after the initial run of results. Provisional ballots should always be completed, especially as protection from "voter caging." Voter caging is defined by [The Brennan Center](https://www.brennancenter.org) as "the practice of sending mail to addresses on the voter rolls, compiling a list of the mail that is returned undelivered, and using that list to purge or challenge voters registrations on the grounds that the voters on the list do not legally reside at their registered addresses." This practice largely targets low-income renters as they move at higher rates than homeowners. Make sure to keep updated databases on voter information to prevent anyone you have registered from being "caged."
- **YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE!** You might be surprised to learn that no state requires a resident to have a traditional address in order to vote. People experiencing homelessness, including those who do not reside in a shelter, still have the right to vote. In most cases, the address is really needed to determine what districts a voter should be voting in for local office or state legislature, etc. Different states approach this question in different ways, so this is another instance where getting more information from your local Board of Elections or County Clerk is a best practice. In many states that require an address to register to vote, voters experiencing homelessness should list any place where they reside, whether it is a shelter, street corner, or park.

In some states with Election Day registration, voters experiencing homelessness can arrive at the polls with another voter in a given ward or precinct who vouches for them.

- **VOTING RIGHTS FOR THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED** – A common misconception is that people who have been convicted of a felony are permanently barred from voting. This is only true in the states of Kentucky and Virginia. In most states, people who have been incarcerated have their voting rights restored when their sentence is completed or when they are released. In the states of Vermont and Maine, people convicted of felonies never lose the right to vote and can vote while incarcerated. For a state-by-state breakdown of these voting rights, see the map on felony disenfranchisement that the ACLU maintains at: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights/voter-restoration/felony-disenfranchisement-laws-map>. Because of structural racism in the criminal justice system, felony disenfranchisement is more likely to exclude people of color from voting, which perpetuates the legacy of racially discriminatory voting laws and exacerbates racial inequity in voter participation. The Sentencing Project found that [5.2 million Americans](#) were forbidden from voting in 2020 due to felony disenfranchisement. This statistic has increased from 1.17 million in 1976, indicating the declining voting power of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. It is important to inform people with a prior conviction that their voting rights have been restored after their sentence is completed. Check out ProCon's state felony voting laws [factsheet](#) for information on your respective jurisdictions because often states that disallow returning citizens to vote have formal voter restoration processes.

CANDIDATE POSITIONS ON HOUSING ISSUES

Registering and turning out voters always has the strongest impact when those voters arrive at the polls with information about which candidates are committed to their values. Educating voters about candidates can be done in a nonpartisan way, and the best method is to provide the candidate's own words. Consider these two voter education and candidate engagement tools.

- **CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES** – Circulate to each candidate for office a simple and brief questionnaire asking for their solutions to homelessness and the affordable housing crisis. Your questionnaires can explore specific issues related to housing development, renters' rights, evictions, or whatever best fits the mission of your organization. The trick with questionnaires is getting candidates to actually respond to them, so keep your questions brief, and be clear about how you will broadcast and distribute their responses to your network.
- **HOSTING CANDIDATES TO MEET YOUR RESIDENTS** – Consider inviting candidates to your membership meetings or to "town hall" types of events where they can interact with your community. To do this in a way that is nonpartisan and does not favor a specific candidate more than another, be sure to invite all candidates to these events or to meet your residents and advocates.

VOTER GUIDES

- A good voter education resource will contain all three types of essential information: 1) where and when to vote; 2) Voters' rights; and 3) Candidate positions. Producing a comprehensive voter guide for a mailing to voters and residents, or just producing one for your website, can be helpful. This project can be time-consuming, and summarizing candidate positions can be difficult to do without seeming to endorse one or the other. To increase capacity, partner with organizations already producing voter guides in your community, such as the League of Women Voters. Work to include a question about affordable housing policy or to provide a synopsis of key housing issues for voters heading to the polls.

Many low-income voters face logistical challenges that prevent them from getting to the polls on Election Day. Less-flexible work schedules, more difficulty obtaining legal identification, mobility challenges, and exposure to misinformation campaigns can all combine to powerfully suppress voter turnout in low-income communities. Here are some important tips for Getting Out the Vote (GOTV).

VOTER MOBILIZATION ★★★★★

TIPS FOR MOBILIZING LOW-INCOME VOTERS |

- **PROVIDE RIDES TO AND FROM POLLING LOCATIONS.** Recruit volunteers, or perhaps fundraise to rent vans for Election Day so that low-income residents with disabilities or mobility concerns can cast their ballots. Volunteers are often eager to help with this project.
- **BECOME A POLLING LOCATION.** Your organization should connect with your local Board of Elections or County Clerk to begin the process of becoming a polling location. Low-income renters will have better turnout if they can vote in the community rooms of their buildings or if they need only go to a familiar neighborhood center or service agency.
- **ENCOURAGE VOTE-BY-MAIL AND EARLY ABSENTEE VOTING.** Rather than turning out the vote all on one day, encourage low-income voters with mobility concerns to request absentee ballots and vote by mail. Keep a list of absentee voters in your properties and neighborhoods, and contact them at least 10 days before Election Day to be sure that ballots are being put in the mail in time to be counted. If your community allows it, it can be very effective to allow volunteers to collect and deliver the ballots themselves so that the postal service is removed from the process. The National Conference of State Legislatures compiles a [guide](#) to state ballot collection laws.
- **ORGANIZE GROUP VOTING.** Many voters are more likely to make it to the polls if they are joined by their neighbors. Resident councils and other low-income peer organizing efforts should consider selecting times when groups of residents can walk or ride to the polls altogether, making it a community activity. People are more likely to vote when there are others expecting them to do so.
- **ASK VOTERS TO MAKE A PLAN.** When contacting voters in the days leading up to Election Day, ask them how and when they plan to vote, and how they plan on getting to their polling place. Asking voters to express this plan can allow organizers to verify the polling location and hours with the voter and also learn if there are transportation issues that need to be addressed.
- **EDUCATE VOTERS ON WHAT TO BRING WITH THEM.** Make sure people know what is and is not acceptable identification and what is required in your community. Many low-income people have the correct identification, but they don't vote because they have been misinformed about the identification requirements. To ensure that voters are prepared to show up at the polls with confidence, you can create a "What to Bring with You" sheet and distribute it through your GOTV campaign.
- **PROVIDE CHILDCARE ON ELECTION DAY.** Consider recruiting volunteers to provide childcare at subsidized properties for residents who need flexibility to get to polls and cast their ballot.

GETTING TO THE POLLS |

Vote411 has a very simple polling place lookup [tool](#) where a voter can enter their address to get the address and hours of their polling location. In addition to providing the nearest polling place, it links to personalized information on the candidates and issues, and provides a sample ballot. Voters can also verify the status of their registration.

Knowing the location of a polling place is only the first step, as many people struggle to find transportation to their polling place due to cost, time, and distance. Research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [shows](#) that lack of transportation and inconvenient polling locations are two of the most common barriers that prevent registered voters from turning out on Election Day. Fortunately, there are several tactics that organizers can consider adopting to overcome these obstacles.

- Consider becoming a polling location at your facility or property.
- Many cities offer discounted public transit on Election Day; check to see if yours does.
- Recruit volunteers to provide rides on Election Day, or partner with groups who already do so, such as [Rideshare2Vote AWARE](#).
- In recent elections, Uber and Lyft partnered with national and local organizations to provide [free or discounted rides](#) on Election Day and may do so again in upcoming elections.

Make sure to exhaust all resources when determining transportation options as part of your voter efforts.

EARLY VOTING |

Early voting provides the opportunity to resolve challenges that low-income voters commonly face at the polls. There are many reasons this option is particularly important to low-income voters. Early voting is growing in popularity: [more than 40 percent](#) of registered voters planned to vote early, whether in-person or by mail, in the 2022 midterm elections.

- Low-income people often have inflexible schedules. They have rigid work hours, limited transportation options that often require catching buses or trains at particular times, and challenging childcare responsibilities. States have varying laws on whether workers can legally leave work in order to vote, but even in states that offer this protection, workers are often timid about using it. **Early voting offers more opportunities for people with inflexible schedules or limited transportation options.**
- Early voting usually provides for much **shorter lines** both at the early voting site AND at the polls on Election Day, because so many people will have already cast their votes. Long lines are a barrier to voting, and they are more common in voting precincts that are predominantly populated by people of color. When the Supreme Court repealed Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, this led to many states in the South closing polling locations intentionally to increase long lines at polls. Reducing long lines matters tremendously because **3% of voters who face long lines at the polls will leave without voting**, according to the [findings of the Bipartisan Policy Center](#).
- The voting system is less stressed when the election takes place over several days. Voters have more time to mitigate potential registration errors or resolve discrepancies. This opportunity can be especially important for voters who have recently moved and changed their voter registration, including many renters.
- In states with rigid voter identification laws, early voting can provide voters who do not have the correct documents the opportunity to retrieve them and return at another time to cast their vote. **Early voting can mitigate the effects of [voter caging](#) that are common on Election Day.**
- Early voting also makes election workers and volunteers better at their jobs. The early polling sites provide opportunities for training and observation of how an election is administered. This contributes to a smoother experience on Election Day, which matters in low-income communities where the voting process is often perceived as intimidating.
- Celebrate Vote Early Day, a nonpartisan Civic Holiday dedicated to raising awareness of early voting. Vote Early Day creates an opportunity to activate your community around early voting and encourage turnout during the early voting period. Vote Early Day takes place annually during the last week of October. For guidance on celebrating Vote Early Day and state-specific early voting rules, [visit www.voteearlyday.org](http://www.voteearlyday.org).

EARLY VOTING IS NOT ENOUGH! MOBILIZATION EFFORTS ARE STILL NECESSARY!

Early voting opportunities do not increase voter turnout on their own. To encourage early voter turnout, campaigns must launch a concerted effort to get out the early vote. Here is how voter turnout campaigns can best plan and execute efforts around early voting:

- Educate voters on their early voting options – be sure that voters know the location and hours of early voting sites. Remember that early voting sites are usually different from Election Day polling locations. Be prepared for people who are skeptical based on years of voting at a different location.

- Recruit drivers who can transport voters to early voting sites. There will always be fewer locations for early voting than Election Day voting, which means the travel distance to the polling location will be longer. Providing rides to the polls will be important.
- Be sure to indicate to all voters what they need to bring with them to vote early, focusing on identification requirements. Also inform voters on how they can register to vote on site in places where that option is available.
- Keeping a list of voters is always a best practice. Communities and states with early voting will often provide overnight updates on who has voted. This can allow turnout campaigns to eliminate potential voters who have already cast their ballot. This practice narrows the universe of target voters so that campaigners and volunteers aren't calling or knocking on doors of people who have already voted.

OUR HOMES

OUR VOTES

BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS



TOOLKIT



NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION

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Washington, DC 20005
<http://nlihc.org>

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