

# Your Vote Your Voice » 2012

[www.YourVoteYourVoice.org](http://www.YourVoteYourVoice.org)

## INTRODUCTION

In the 2012 Presidential election, higher education is a centerpiece of both the Democratic and Republican campaigns. Whether the issue is college cost, student loans, measurement of outcomes, or success and attainment, America's colleges and universities are the subject of intense discussion and debate as we move toward **Election Day – November 6, 2012.**

Beyond choosing the President and Vice President this fall, voters also will elect all members of the House of Representatives, a third of the Senate, and many state and local office holders – and will do so against a backdrop of a still-struggling economy, fiscal crises in many states, high levels of student debt, immigration issues, a weak job market, and a polarized electorate.

Voters' decisions on Election Day will shape the middle years of this decade, and beyond. One of the most pervasive, objective, and effective venues for informing those decisions are America's colleges and universities. Encouraging, informing, and facilitating widespread participation in the electoral process has long been one of higher education's most basic responsibilities.

To support and enhance this civic engagement and political participation among college students, the [Washington Higher Education Secretariat](#) launched Your Vote, Your Voice in 1996, and has been active in every federal election since then. These efforts gained heightened importance in 1998 when Congress mandated that all colleges and universities make a good-faith effort to distribute voter registration forms to all degree- or certificate-seeking students attending class on campus.

College students are increasingly engaged in the electoral process and in voting. Research by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE) found that, since 2000, voter turnout among college-educated youth has increased by 12 percentage points. In the 2008 presidential election, the turnout rate of college-educated 18-to-29 year-olds was 62 percent – 26 percentage points higher than the rate of non-college youth.

Not just students, but every member of the campus community can play a role in voter registration, education, and participation. We suggest that presidents work with their registrar, student affairs office, student leaders, and employee groups in developing creative ways to foster voter education, encourage nonpartisan voter registration, and

build a commitment to vote on Election Day. The project can serve as a focal point for common discourse, promote the vital responsibility of citizenship, and enhance the role of the campus as a setting where ideas and issues are openly and vigorously debated.

In this critically important election year, we urge you and your campus to become active participants in the nation's electoral process.

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## COALITION BUILDING

All successful voter registration campaigns have one thing in common: they are run by a coalition of people on campus or in the local community. Before you undertake a registration drive on your campus, it is critical that you form a coalition to help you in this task. Look to all segments of the campus community: administrators, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff. Each group will bring different strengths, which will make a more successful campaign.

Be sure to look off-campus for community organizations that might be interested in assisting your nonpartisan voter registration campaign. When you form your coalition, be sure to include local businesses on and off your campus – the bookstore and food service vendors on campus; pizza restaurants, bookstores, and grocery stores off campus. As sponsors of your coalition, these businesses can provide funding or other in-kind services (photocopies, postage, food for volunteers, etc.) in exchange for acknowledgement of their sponsorship. Think of everyone with whom you can possibly work and make a concerted effort to reach them. Don't just ask them to attend your meeting – attend their meetings to pitch your voter registration plan.

Once you have formed the basis of your coalition, set up an organizing meeting. Here's how to get the meeting off the ground.

1. Schedule it. Find a room on campus or in the community in which to hold the meeting. Make sure it is convenient, or few people will attend.
2. Prepare a contact list of all the organizations you think should be there, including all segments of your campus. The list should include the name, phone number, and e-mail address of a contact person for each group.
3. Network, by asking those you've contacted to suggest other organizations or individuals that might be interested in participating.
4. Invite each contact person to attend the meeting.
5. The day before the meeting:
  - Send a reminder e-mail message to all the people you invited
  - Set an agenda.
  - Arrange for refreshments.
6. Begin the meeting with a round of introductions, including a brief description of each group represented at the meeting and the strengths it has to offer to the project.

7. Talk about tactics you can use to increase the voter registration numbers on your campus. Check the resources page for links and more idea starters.
8. Learn from what others have done in the past. Find which groups have done voter registration before. Ask them to explain what worked, and what didn't. There is no sense in reinventing the wheel.
9. Agree on a game plan for voter registration. How many people do you hope to register and when to you want to register them?
10. Assign tasks and set a timetable to make sure it happens. Each person in the room should leave with a specific assignment and a deadline for reporting back to the group.
11. Set a time for your next meeting, and thank everyone for their participation.

Throughout this and all of your coalition meetings, encourage the attendees to brainstorm for new ideas. Be inventive, and have fun. Just remember that your objective is to run a nonpartisan campaign, and to register as many people as possible on your campus and in the community.

## **Coalition Work**

Coalition work is very important, but it's not easy! It should be handled carefully and strategically. Here are some principles to keep in mind.

### **Common Development of Goals**

Coalitions come together around common goals. These goals must be developed by more than one individual or organization. Don't decide on the issue and the strategy and then "invite others to join you." This doesn't work, because other groups won't feel invested in the project.

### **Sensitivity**

Understand and respect differences between organizations. Each organization has its own particular focus, values, history, and agenda. Find out as much as you can about other organizations, and about the history of their interactions on campus and in the community.

### **Self-Interest**

Understand and respect organizational self-interest. People join the coalition to build up their own organizations as well as to work on a common agenda. Your organization will have to ask itself whether it makes sense to join coalitions initiated by other groups. Are they sensitive to your organization's needs and priorities? Are your goals complementary? Do they want to be involved?

**Give and Take**

Build on existing connections between organizations. Ask a member of your organization who is familiar with another organization to approach them on behalf of the coalition. Ongoing relationships are built by supporting each other's agendas and projects. If you want to ask an organization to support you, consider asking first what its major concerns are and how your organization might support them.

**Common Strategy**

The strength of a coalition is in its unity. Work with organizations to develop a strategy that makes sense for everyone. The tactics your coalition chooses should be supported by all members of the coalition.

**Be Strategic**

Don't assume the coalition will come together "naturally." Whom you ask, how you ask them, and the order in which you ask them are all important. Some organizations won't join if others have been asked first. Some organizations won't work together, and you won't be able to get both on board. Take into account your own goals and organizational considerations.

**Different Contributions**

Each organization will have something different and important to offer, whether it's volunteers, meeting space, publicity, passing resolutions, funding, refreshments, or other resources.

**Formalize Your Coalition**

Draw up explicit agreements. Make sure all participants understand what their responsibilities and powers are – this prevents misunderstandings. Be sure to designate a coalition leader.

-Adapted from the United States Student Association

## **THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF VOTER REGISTRATION**

If there is a significant voter turnout, elected officials will take the concerns of the college community and young voters more seriously. But you have to get voters on the rolls before you can turn them out at the polls. This section outlines the steps of a nonpartisan voter registration campaign on campus. Before starting your registration campaign, you must know:

- How can the 1993 National Voter Registration Act make your voter registration activities easier?
- What must your institution do under the federal requirement for a “good faith” effort to distribute voter registration forms to students?
- What are the voter registration laws in your state?
- What are the various deadlines in the voter registration process?
- How can you develop a good working relationship with the local election officials?

### **What is National Voter Registration?**

The 1993 National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which took effect in most states in 1995, requires each state\* to:

- Enable individuals to register to vote in local, state, and federal elections using a postcard voter registration form.
- Offer voter registration when people apply for a driver’s license, renew a driver’s license, or change their address with their state’s motor vehicle agency (hence the nickname “motor voter”); or apply for public assistance, defined as Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Women Infants and Children (WIC), Medicare, or payments from state-funded agencies serving the disabled.
- Make voter registration available by mail, without requiring a witness or notary.
- Mail a follow-up notice to new voter registration applicants informing them of the status of their application (registered, rejected, or requiring additional information).
- Stop “purging” from the registration lists people who do not vote.

*\*Six states – Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming – are exempt from the law because they allowed Election Day registration at the time of the passage of the NVRA, or, in the case of North Dakota, have no voter registration at all. The territories are not subject to the NVRA.*

The law requires the federal government to:

- Require the U.S. Election Assistance Commission to develop a form that will be accepted in all states that do not offer Election Day registration.
- Offer voter registration at military recruitment offices.

The most advantageous part of the law is the requirement that each state provide mail-in voter registration cards. In the past, some states required you to go to a central location – usually the county courthouse – to register. Nearly every state now has mail-in registration.

Each state sets its own registration deadline. Most are around 30 days before the election, although some are closer to Election Day. It's a good idea to double-check the election laws with your state or local elections office before you start.

Throughout your voter registration activities, arrange to have both federal and your state's voter registration forms on hand. Some people may register to vote locally – that is, where your campus is located – while others may prefer using their home address. There are advantages and disadvantages for both, such as establishing legal residency, qualifying for jury duty, personal property taxes, etc.

The important thing is that those on your campus vote. If they register to vote at home, be sure to give them information on how to obtain an absentee ballot. Use the federal form to register people at their home address in another state. You can download and print the federal form from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website.

### **The Help America Vote Act**

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which became law in 2002, grew out of the voting irregularities that clouded the outcome of the 2000 presidential election, and calls for improvement of elections and voting procedures. The bill requires that states play a more central role in elections, and makes them more accountable for future problems.

Most importantly, for your voter registration efforts, HAVA introduced new procedures to verify voters' identities, and to assure that no voters are turned away at the polls:

- When they register to vote, citizens must provide a driver's license number or, if they don't have a driver's license, the last four digits of their Social Security number. Those who don't have a Social Security number will be assigned a unique identifier.
- First-time voters who register by mail will have to provide identification at the polling place when they cast their ballots.
- Voters whose eligibility is in doubt on Election Day – voters whose names are not on the registration rolls or whose eligibility has been questioned – will be allowed to cast a provisional ballot that will be counted once election officials determine the voter is eligible.

HAVA also included a new Help America Vote College Program, established to address two very important needs: the need to recruit additional poll workers in just about every election jurisdiction in America; and, the need to get more 18- to 24-year-olds engaged in the regular practice of voting. More information on the program is available through a link on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website.



## **For Colleges, Making Voter Registration Forms Available Is Now the Law**

Beginning with the 1998 Higher Education Act, colleges and universities were required to distribute hard copies of in-state voter registration forms to students prior to their state's voter registration deadline.

The 1998 statute didn't specifically state that electronic transmission of the forms was legal. However, the 2008 Higher Education Act clarified that e-mail messages with links to the state forms are acceptable, as long as the messages are devoted exclusively to voter registration. The requirement for colleges and universities to make voter registration information available applies to all federal and gubernatorial elections, as well as to special elections for such offices.

Voter registration forms are now commonly available via the web for downloading and printing. Colleges can send an e-mail message to all students telling them that they can register to vote through the university's web page, which has a link to the secretary of state's website.

Colleges can then supplement the e-mail announcement by providing news releases and placing stories to support and promote the voter registration efforts. The student newspaper and other campus-wide periodicals might also carry information on how to register to vote.

## **Working with Election Officials**

Your local election officials can be quite helpful in answering questions, and even making suggestions on how best to operate your registration drive. Once you have developed a working relationship, you may be able to persuade them to open a polling place on your campus, which will make it easier for people there to vote. When you meet with them, keep these points in mind:

- Be professional and polite. The election official is there to help you.
- Be prepared. Walk into the office with a well-thought-out plan of how many people you plan to register, and how you intend to reach them.
- Follow through. If you make a commitment to the election official, be sure you keep it. This will build respect and foster better cooperation in the future.

If for some reason you find the election officials uncooperative, or you suspect they are discriminating against anyone, enlist the support of local elected officials, or contact your state's chief election officer. Remember, every U.S. citizen has a constitutional right to vote.

## **MAKING VOTER REGISTRATION A PART OF YOUR CAMPUS**

Registering to vote should be an ongoing part of civic life on your campus for all federal elections – not a one-time event. If you have built a broad-based coalition, then this will be easier to achieve. All segments of the community can work together to provide regular reminders and opportunities to register quickly and easily. When the mechanics of voter registration become a permanent fixture in campus life, you can devote more time to educating people about the issues of national, state, and local importance, and developing plans to get people out to vote.

Here are some suggestions for integrating voter registration into campus life. Of course, your choices aren't limited to these. Be creative! Assess the needs of your campus and decide what will work best for you.

**Course Registration.** Attach a voter registration form to each course registration form. This ensures that every student will have an opportunity to register to vote at least once a semester. If your institution has telephone registration, add a message encouraging all students to register and informing them how to obtain a form. Be sure to coordinate with the registrar.

**E-mail.** Use your campus e-mail system to reach every student on campus with a message from the coalition promoting your campaign. Be sure to include a link to the web version of the National Mail Voter Registration Form at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

**Voice Mail.** If your campus has a voice mail system that reaches every phone on campus, arrange to have the college president or the leader of your coalition record a message, delivered to every voice mail box, encouraging people to register and vote.

**Web.** Check with your college's webmaster about posting voter registration information on the site, and linking to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission site, where potential voters can download and print the National Mail Voter Registration Form. You might also explore creating your own web page on the campus site to provide a one-stop source for information on your voter registration and education efforts.

**Paychecks.** It's important to register all segments of the campus, including teaching assistants, faculty, administrators, and other staff. Include a voter registration card or information on downloading the form in the envelope with paychecks, giving every employee an opportunity to register. Coordinate with the business office.

**Department and Staff Meetings.** Have someone from your coalition attend departmental meetings to explain the voter registration campaign.

**Incorporate into the Curriculum.** Encourage each professor or teaching assistant to spend a few minutes at the beginning of each semester to discuss voter registration. Coordinate with the provost's office, the faculty senate, teaching assistant organizations, and each department chair.

**Campus Mail Boxes.** Draft a letter from your coalition explaining the voter registration project, and how to obtain a registration form. Distribute these letters to all the mailboxes on campus.

**Orientation.** Work with the student affairs office or the person who organizes orientation sessions. Get permission to make a presentation to the students, then distribute voter registration cards and help them complete the forms. Be sure to have the federal form on hand for those who wish to register at their home address in another state.

**Central Drop-Off Points.** Even if you have made voter registration forms accessible to every student and staff member on your campus, your work isn't done. You need to establish a system to collect all the completed forms. Set up drop boxes in front of key buildings on campus, especially in areas with high pedestrian traffic.

**Community Service Projects.** This could provide a unique opportunity to reach out to the community and generate media coverage of your voter registration campaign. Have a group of people from your campus go door-to-door in parts of the community that have traditionally had low voter participation rates. Or encourage existing community service programs to adopt voter registration efforts as part of their ongoing activities.

**Tables in High Traffic Areas.** Set up voter registration tables in such places as the student union, dining halls, the library, financial aid offices, and outside sporting events. Stock the tables with lots of registration forms (both state and federal), and other promotional material. This is an opportunity to educate new voters on issues of national, state, and local importance, and how they will affect your campus.

**Door-to-Door Registration.** Organize a group of volunteers to go door-to-door in the dorms to register students. Take clipboards loaded with voter registration cards and start walking the halls.

**Alumni Voter Registration Opportunities.** Homecoming week, class reunions, fall sports events, and the alumni magazine all provide opportunities to encourage your alumni to register and vote. Coordinate with the alumni office, and ask them to write articles for the newsletter.

## A Collection of Idea Starters

Colleges participating in the National Campus Voter Registration Project over the course of recent national elections came up with a number of innovative ways to encourage their campus communities to register, vote, and get involved:

- One college whetted students' appetites for politics by arranging discounts at local restaurants with proof of voting. Free lattes and discounted milkshakes were offered at on-campus cafes.
- Students seemed to respond best to student-led activities. On one campus, for example, representatives of the student Democratic, Republican, and Green Party organizations conducted a joint voter registration drive, and also providing absentee ballot request forms at each meal in the cafeteria for a week.
- Students volunteered at the Democratic and Republican Party headquarters, with a particular focus on turning out the student vote.
- Some colleges conducted voter registration drives at their football games and festivals.
- Some political science departments offered a course in which students were required to organize a voter registration drive, while others had students study candidates and state ballot issues, then share their findings with the class.
- Several colleges and universities held mock elections in concert with their voter registration drives.
- A number of campuses invited the League of Women Voters, and others invited county elections officials to assist in their registration efforts.
- One vice president for student affairs organized a "march to the polls," where t-shirts, flyers, and sample ballots were handed out. Over 300 students then walked through town to the polls with a police escort.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION KICK-OFF**

Now that you have made the registration forms accessible to all, know the election laws, and have planned your voter registration activities, it's time for the kickoff. But just setting up a table in the corner of the student union won't do it – you have to get people excited about the campaign. Whether your campus has institutionalized voter registration, or you will be registering people yourself, you should have a campaign kickoff event.

Working with your coalition, plan a week of activities to raise awareness on campus about the upcoming election. Alert the media, post signs around campus, ask professors to make announcements in class, ask the faculty senate, student government, and graduate student associations to adopt resolutions supporting voter registration. Below is a sample checklist to get ready for your registration campaign.

### **Campaign Kickoff Checklist**

- Pick a week to hold your voter registration campaign – early in the fall semester is the most logical time. Try to avoid a schedule conflict with other major campus events.
- Set a goal to register a certain percentage of the students and employees on campus, and then publicize it. Setting a goal provides additional focus and urgency to the registration drive. This goal should be based on the level of political activism at your institution, the number of people in the coalition, and the number of people on campus already registered to vote. The ultimate goal is 100 percent, but that's not realistic. However, some campuses have registered more than half of their students and faculty.
- Begin arranging media coverage and visibility. Produce and distribute posters, handbills, and table tents. Write news releases, and submit editorials to the local and college papers. Put ads in the newspapers. Make sure all materials include the name of your coalition and other sponsors.
- Contact high-profile people in your community and ask them to join you on campus to register people to vote. This will provide a hook for the media to cover your event. (Find more info on the Media page.)

Once people have completed the registration form, ask them to sign post cards informing their legislators that they just registered and intend to vote in the next election, and listing the issues they are concerned about. A good source for determining names and addresses of your congressional delegation is Project Vote Smart ([www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)); enter your ZIP Plus Four code for state and federal information, including district office addresses.

## **WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THOSE COMPLETED FORMS?**

### **Count them**

Since your coalition set a goal to register a specific number of people on campus, you'll want to find out if you accomplished that goal. If your campus has institutionalized vote registration, it's important that you set up a system to collect the completed forms, so you can find out how many people have registered. You can publicize the total with the media and use it in future promotional material for voter registration or education efforts.

### **Copy them**

Before you mail the completed voter registration forms to the elections office, photocopy them. This is very important. It will save you time and money as Election Day nears. These are the people you want to encourage to vote. If you have reminded them to include their phone number when they fill out the form, you will be able to contact them on Election Day and make sure they voted. These people could also be a potential pool of volunteers.

### **Send them in**

This is the most important step of all. Mail in the completed forms. If you forget this step, all your work will be for naught. To save time and postage, just bundle up all the cards, put them in a box, and mail it to the elections office in your state or local jurisdiction. Or better yet, hand-deliver all the cards to the elections office yourself.

### **Publicize your results**

Notify the media on how successful your campaign was, and offer them a "photo op" (photo opportunity) when you deliver that big box of voter registrations to your elections office. Stress with the media your plans to turn out all those people, and more, on Election Day!

## **WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

If you hold an event on campus to raise awareness or encourage action, but you don't invite the media, then the event didn't happen as far as most people are concerned. Media coverage helps you inform your community about issues. It also sends a message to both candidates and incumbents: "This community is vitally involved in the issues that affect us."

Even candidates for national office will closely follow local and regional as well as national news stories. For example, stories on issues of interest are clipped on line by staff in the Capitol Hill or district offices of representatives, and then read by your member of Congress – usually the same day.

### **How do you interest the media in your voter registration effort? Be creative!**

Remember that it is out-of-the-ordinary activities and research that draw news coverage. It is also important to think visually, to give photographers and television news crews the best shot at covering your event. A kickoff rally, including campus and community leaders as speakers, is one way to draw coverage. Busy voter registration tables, with volunteers handing out flyers, could also provide a good photo opportunity. Encourage a local celebrity to endorse your voter registration campaign, and publicize that endorsement.

Try to link your events and activities to national news stories or events. It is very important that you develop a media strategy to use throughout your voter registration campaign, because you want every member of the community to know about the success of your efforts.

### **Designate someone in your coalition as the media contact**

This person will be the main contact listed on media advisories, responsible for following up with the media and keeping track of the stories that are published. Recruit someone who is willing to be "on call" via phone or e-mail – not just during the weekday, but evenings and weekends as well.

### **Compile media information**

Work with your institution's public relations office to coordinate your media activities. You may be able to use their media contact lists. This information can also be found in the local phone book, or in reference books that are likely to be in your institution's library. You'll also find a comprehensive list of media by state and type at [www.newslink.org](http://www.newslink.org). Don't overlook campus news organizations, such as the student newspaper or radio station, and the growing list of on-line media outlets.

## **Here is the information you'll need for your media list:**

### **Newspapers**

- Names of the editor, publisher, political reporter, education reporter
- Deadlines and days of publication
- Address, phone, e-mail address

### **Radio Stations**

- Names of the news director, talk show host(s) and producers
- Deadlines
- Address, phone, e-mail address

### **Television Stations**

- Names of the news director, assignment editor, political reporter, education reporter
- Deadlines for each newscast
- Address, phone, e-mail address

## **GETTING COVERAGE FOR AN EVENT**

### **Tell the media**

Draft a one-page media advisory giving details of the voter registration campaign – who, what, when, where, and why – and send it to your media list. This should be done about a week in advance to allow assignment editors and reporters to plan ahead. If you are holding an event, list the names of the speakers. Be specific about possible photo opportunities and visuals, such as students registering to vote or getting into a van that will take them to a polling place.

Whether or not you plan to hold a kickoff event, write a news release that concisely describes the campaign and the message – that voting is an important civic duty, and college campuses should be models for the nation. It should be no more than one page. Be sure your media contact's name and phone number are on the first page of all media advisories and news releases.

### **Follow up, follow up, follow up**

Call the media the day before the event to remind them that you are holding a campaign kickoff the next day. Confirm the time and location, and tell them again why it is important and who will be attending. If possible, e-mail the advisory to them again.



## **Be ready to greet the media**

At the event, the media contact should greet the reporters, give them a news release, and be available to answer questions or set up interviews with participants and speakers. Use a sign-in sheet to get the names of the reporters who attend and the organizations they represent, so you can follow up with them after the event, and call them before future events.

## **Send the news release to reporters who did not attend your event**

After the event, read the newspapers, and watch and listen to the TV and radio stations for coverage. Send copies of the news release to your national organization, and to the candidates. This is a valuable point of contact with the candidates – it will let them know that your campus is taking an active role in the election.

## **Talk shows**

During off-air time, call the host or producer of a local radio talk show or television community affairs program and pitch your idea of doing a show on voter registration in your community. (They may ask you to submit details in an e-mail.) Suggest guests such as your institution's president, student leaders, and community leaders. When the show airs, be sure to have plenty of callers lined up to support your message.

Candidates and members of Congress are also frequent guests on talk shows. This provides an excellent opportunity to let them know about your voter registration efforts. When the show airs, get your coalition members to call and ask about voting as a civic duty. This will drive home the point that constituents are interested in the subject. It's also an excellent way to educate the general public.

## **Newspapers**

Letters to the editor provide another useful way to educate the general public about voter registration. Following a few basic rules will improve your chances of getting published.

- Keep the letter short and to the point (around 150 words). Do not try to make several points in the same letter let someone else cover other topics.
- Type the letter neatly and proofread it carefully.
- Always sign your letter and provide your postal and e-mail address and phone number. Most newspapers will not accept a letter unless they can call to verify the author's identity.
- Most newspapers will also take letters to the editor via e-mail. Check the newspaper's website or call to learn the e-mail address to which letters should be sent.
- Most papers will accept no more than one letter per month from the same person. Demonstrate the diversity of your coalition by having many people write.

Also consider putting together a group of influential people – business or community leaders, college presidents, and student leaders – to meet with the editorial board of your local newspaper. If you are well prepared and armed with facts about the importance of voting to American democracy, you may generate a positive editorial. Your members of Congress monitor the editorial page closely as a barometer of their constituents’ opinions.

Many newspapers will accept opinion pieces submitted by members of the community. These pieces (often called “op-eds,” from their location opposite the editorial page) allow you to make several arguments in support of get-out-the-vote efforts in your community. Have the college president, student government officials, and community leaders submit op-eds to the newspaper. The ideal length for most op-eds is 750-800 words or less.

For professional help with your media relations activities, contact your campus public relations or communications office. The staff there can be a source of media lists, insights into reporters likely to be interested in your activities, and advice on how to prepare your materials. They also may find the potential visibility to the college or university valuable enough for them to become full partners in helping you with your media outreach.

### **Basic Rules for Working with Media**

- Be accurate, organized, and well prepared.
- Provide plenty of advance notice for events.
- Respect their deadlines.
- Always be honest and straightforward.
- Be available to answer questions.

Visit the Your Vote, Your Voice website, [www.yourvoteyourvoice.org](http://www.yourvoteyourvoice.org), for more tips and resources.

## **VOTER EDUCATION**

You can register 100 percent of the people on campus, but still have poor voter turnout if they are not motivated to vote on Election Day. The best way to motivate people is to educate them about the local, state, and federal issues that have an impact on their lives.

By following the League of Women Voters model, you can conduct an effective nonpartisan voter education campaign on your campus. This section will explain how to gather and distribute information about the candidates' stance on issues that are important to your community.

### **Candidate and Political Fairs**

A candidate or political fair is similar to a job fair. Invite the candidates, political parties, groups supporting or opposing ballot measures, and other interested parties onto your campus to set up tables, distribute information, and meet people. If the candidates show up, it will give people a unique opportunity to talk with them in an informal atmosphere about the issues of interest.

A political fair requires advance planning. To get on the candidates' schedules, select the date for your fair early, doing preliminary planning before the end of the spring semester. October is usually a good time to hold the political fair. Send out an invitation to all the groups you wish to invite. And be sure to invite all the candidates to participate.

Candidate fairs can also be used to raise money for your voter registration activities. A fee of \$25 to \$50 is a reasonable amount to charge the candidates and organizations for table space – but only you can judge what they are willing to pay on your campus. And don't forget to alert the media about your political fair.

### **Debates and Forums**

Candidate debates and forums are a staple of American politics. Hosting a debate on your campus will help make people more aware of the upcoming election, and allow them to interact with the candidates.

Debates are a lot of work to organize, but worth the effort. Again, you need to start planning well in advance. Contact your local League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, media outlets, Chamber of Commerce, or service clubs to see if they are interested in cosponsoring a debate on your campus. Many of these groups have hosted candidate debates in the past and can help ensure a successful event.

Pick several dates, then contact the candidates. Since you want them to attend, you will have to work around their schedules. Contacting them early in the process increases the probability of finding an open date agreeable to everyone involved.

The next step is to settle on the format of your debate. A standard format has a moderator (the college president, anchor of a local newscast, etc.) who will introduce the candidates, explain the rules of the debate, ask the questions of the candidates, and act as referee. The questions should be developed by a panel of people representing a broad range of views and interests in the community. Make sure the questions cover a variety of topics. Don't give the questions to the candidates in advance!

Not every candidate will agree to take questions from the audience, but when they do, it can be very effective. It will allow the community to question the candidates about issues they care about that may not have been covered in the prepared questions.

Publish audio and video clips on your institution's website. Try to get your campus station, or a local radio or TV station to broadcast the debate so that you can reach a wider audience. Be sure to alert the local media.

### **Campus Visits by Candidates**

If candidates for local, state, or federal office can't make it to campus for a debate or political fair, invite them to campus for a meeting with your voter registration coalition. Visiting with candidates on your campus will allow you to talk with them about the issues in a relaxed atmosphere. Be sure to make this opportunity available to all candidates.

### **Voting Records**

You can obtain the voting records of federal elected officials from several sources. A number of websites offer voting records as well as election news and issues-oriented discussions on line. See "Other Sources of Information" below, or do a Google search for Congress voting records for more possibilities.

*Congressional Quarterly*, a weekly publication, provides voting records on all the key legislative votes held during the previous week. It explains the impact of each vote and analyzes the political implications of legislation. You should be able to access it on line, as well as the *Congressional Record*, the official transcript of the U.S. Congress. Every statement, every amendment offered, and every vote taken on the House or Senate floor is recorded here.

It's important to be nonpartisan in presenting voting records to the public. Don't make judgments about the candidates or their voting records. Just provide the information and let the readers draw their own conclusions.

## **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Here are some sources you can contact to find where the candidates stand on the issues. For resources on other aspects of voter registration and education, see our regularly updated list of links on our Resources page, on the Your Vote, Your Voice website, [www.YourVoteYourVoice.org](http://www.YourVoteYourVoice.org).

### **THE MAJOR PARTIES**

The political parties in your state should be able to help you gather information about the candidates for local, state, and federal office. Check your telephone directory for a local number, or contact the Washington offices:

- **DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE**  
(202) 863-8000.
- **REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE**  
(202) 863-8500.

### **THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**

Most state chapters of the League publish a voter's guide before each election, based on questionnaires answered by candidates seeking state and federal office. Go to their website and click on "Find a Local League."

### **PROJECT VOTE SMART**

This nonpartisan organization maintains a database on all presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative candidates that includes their responses to questionnaires, and the incumbents' voting records. Go to their website and click on "My State."

### **THOMAS**

The Library of Congress website contains a searchable electronic version of the *Congressional Record*, as well as information on congressional schedules and the budget and appropriations process. Thomas also provides links to the websites for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, the White House, and other government agencies.

## **GET OUT THE VOTE**

Now that you have registered all these new voters, and have educated them on the candidates and the issues, it's important to get them to the polls on Election Day, or make sure they submit absentee ballots. Elected officials will be far more responsive to your campus's concerns if a high percentage of voters from your campus turn out and vote. By following up with these new voters, knocking on their doors or phoning the night before and the day of the election, offering rides or directions to the polls, you greatly increase the likelihood that they will actually vote.

An effective campaign requires a significant amount of preparation and volunteers to be successful, so start planning your get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts as you conduct your voter registration campaign. As with voter registration and education, there are many options for increasing voter participation on your campus. Outlined below are several standard GOTV tactics.

## **WHAT TO DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY**

### **Open a polling place on campus**

If you are interested in opening a polling place on campus, you will have to begin planning months in advance of Election Day – so consider this a to-do item for the spring preceding the 2012 presidential election. The involvement of the campus administration will enhance the success of this project. Contact the local elections office and see what is required to operate a polling place on your campus.

College campuses are ideal polling places because they offer ample space, and are accessible to the handicapped. Opening a polling place will make it easier for people to vote between classes, and will probably increase voter participation.

### **Absentee ballots**

As you conduct your voter registration campaign, you should also include a program to get people who will be away from home on Election Day to obtain an absentee ballot. If someone chooses to register to vote at their home address – either in another state, or in another part of your state – be sure to provide the address of the local election official so the voter can contact them to obtain an absentee ballot.

You may want to create a form letter for people to use when requesting an application. Be sure they print their name, address, and phone number, and sign the letter. Each jurisdiction has different laws and regulations for absentee voting, so each person should contact their elections office to get further information on when the applications and ballots are due.

Keep a list of people who have registered to vote at their home address. Then your coalition can contact them about three weeks before the election to be sure they have requested their absentee ballot, and again about one week before the election to be sure they have mailed the ballot back to the appropriate elections office. Most states require the ballots to be received at the elections office by the time the polls close on Election Day – postmarks do not count!

You also might want to consider holding an absentee ballot event on campus about a week before the election. Bringing out-of-town voters together to cast their ballots will make them feel less isolated from the process. Make a notary public available, since some states and jurisdictions still require notarized absentee ballots. Ask the sponsors of your coalition to provide music, food, drinks, and promotional materials to draw the attention of students.

As people complete their absentee ballots, ask them to volunteer with your GOTV efforts on Election Day. Doing so will make them feel like they have been able to affect the election process in both their home and school communities.

Remind students and faculty who will be out of the country for the fall semester that they can vote from overseas. Direct them to the Overseas Vote Foundation, where they will find on-line tools to help them register and obtain an absentee ballot.

### **Voter file**

The voter file is a list of names, addresses, phone numbers, and party registrations that is maintained by your local elections office. This list is public information and you can purchase it for a nominal fee to use in your GOTV efforts. The list can be sorted many ways – by precinct, street, last name, party, etc.

If you copy all the voter registration forms before you send them in to the elections office, you may not need to invest in the list. But the lists are fairly inexpensive, so if you have the money, it may be wise to purchase the most up-to-date list before Election Day. You need a voter file so you can focus your GOTV efforts on turning out registered voters from your campus and in the neighboring precincts). At this point in the election process, there would be little value in calling people who are not registered to vote, unless your state is one of the few with same-day voter registration.

Work with only one copy of the list for your coalition, distributing parts of the list to different volunteers. You don't want three different people calling the same person – it's a waste of time, and will probably irritate the person on the other end of the phone.

### **Phone banking**

Phone banking is the easiest and fastest way to contact people and urge them to vote. You will need a list of names and phone numbers (from your voter file), a bank of phones, and clear directions to your local polling places.

Secure several phone lines to use at night from offices on campus, or real estate and insurance offices off campus. Check with your campus development office to learn if your college has a “phonathon” room for calling prospective donors; you may be able to get permission to use it on nights it’s sitting unused. You should try to recruit as many volunteers as you have phone lines.

When do you start making your phone calls? That will depend upon how many names are in the voter file and how many volunteers have signed up. Typically one person can contact 20 to 25 people per hour. Ideally, you will want to call people the night before the election and remind them that the next day is Election Day. However, if there are too many names on the list to make that possible, start calling a few days earlier. Make sure everyone on the list receives one phone call before Election Day.

### **Canvassing**

Canvassing is walking through the dorms or the neighboring precincts, and knocking on doors reminding people to vote in the election. Canvassing provides a cheap and effective way to distribute voter education materials.

Using your voter list, start walking through the neighborhoods and knocking on doors of registered voters. Unless your state has Election Day registration, skip the doors without registered voters—you will be wasting your time.

When you approach the door, identify yourself and tell them why you’re there (to make sure they remember to vote). Leave material with them – including directions to the polling places, and the voting hours – and move on to the next house. If you are providing transportation to the polls, ask if they will need a ride, and give them the phone number to call on Election Day.

Never go out knocking on doors alone. Always travel with another person. Divide up the street – one person takes the even side, the other takes the odd side. This is for your own protection.

In general, canvassing should not be done on Election Day, since you can reach more people faster with a phone call than knocking on doors. Canvassing is a good activity for the weekend before the election as a last-minute voter education tool.

### **Promotion**

Ask your campus and local radio and TV stations to broadcast public service announcements (PSAs) in the days before the registration deadline, and the election, reminding people to vote. Put up table tents in the cafeteria, the library, and the student union urging people to vote. Make sure to list the date of the election, polling locations, and what time the polls open and close.



## **WHAT TO DO ON ELECTION DAY**

### **Maximize your visibility**

This could range from standing on the side of the street with signs saying “VOTE,” to leafleting the parking lots with flyers reminding people to vote before the polls close. Be creative! And make sure the name of your campus organization appears on the material.

### **Get the voters to the polls**

- If you decide to offer rides to polling places, you will need to begin planning well in advance.
- Decide if you want to offer rides all day, or just part of the day.
  - Publicize the service on the campus and in the community using some of the media devices we’ve already discussed.
- Arrange for the cars and vans to be used. Your campus may have vehicles available in the motor pool, or volunteers may be willing to use their own vehicles.
- In using private vehicles, have volunteer drivers check to make sure their auto insurance will cover their transporting voters.
- Set up a system to keep track of who needs a ride and to keep in touch with drivers by cell phone.
- Find volunteers to drive the vans and work the phones.

### **Poll watching**

Most states allow each candidate or party to designate poll watchers on Election Day. Some states also permit representatives of nonpartisan citizen organizations and supporters or opponents of ballot measures to observe polling places. Poll watchers are only permitted to watch Election Day proceedings and vote counting. They are not allowed to interfere with the actual election process. A certificate or identification badge is usually required. Contact your local elections officer to find out what requirements your organization must meet to serve as poll watchers.

If you qualify, go to the polling place in the early afternoon (this is usually a slow time at the polls) and check your lists against the polling book. Those who have voted will have signed the poll book, or the poll workers will have made some sort of notation by their names. Scratch from your list the people who have already voted. Then take the list to your phone bank, and have volunteers start making reminder calls to those who have not voted.

It is critical that poll watchers obey all election laws, which should have been provided to you by the local election officials. Be courteous, and let the poll workers do their job. If voters come along while you’re checking the poll book, stand aside so they can sign the book and get their ballots. Who knows, it may be someone on your list.

## **Be prepared to help**

The Voting Rights Act mandates that people with disabilities be permitted to receive voting assistance from the person of their choice. Check to be sure that your state's rules do not conflict with this provision. It is also important to determine if the polling place itself is accessible to people with disabilities. If not, perhaps ramps or volunteers capable of lifting wheelchairs can be made available.

People's right to vote is sometimes questioned on Election Day if their current address differs from the address appearing on the registration list, or their name does not appear on the registration list at all. The official term for this practice is a "challenge."

Challenged ballots can be handled in several ways – the conflict may be resolved on the spot, and the individual permitted to vote; the voter may be forced to cast a paper ballot, which is put in an enveloped marked "challenged"; or the person may be referred to the central elections office. Be sure you know the procedures that apply in your state, as well as the provisions of the 2004 "Help America Vote Act", and have someone on hand who can help challenged voters.

## **Celebrate!**

Now that you have successfully registered, educated, and turned out the voters, you can sit back and relish the fact that the voice of your campus community is being heard in the halls of the White House, Capitol, State House, and City Hall. But don't rest on your laurels too long...

## **WHAT TO DO AFTER THE ELECTION**

### **Follow up! This is very important!**

Your coalition should thank the businesses, volunteers, elected officials, and others who helped, or participated in, your voter registration campaign. Send each of them a thank-you letter or a certificate of appreciation for their work. This will make them realize that they were an integral part of your coalition, and may make them willing to assist in future efforts.

After the election, go to the local elections office and determine what the voter turnout was in the precincts on and around your campus. Look at similar past elections (e.g., midterm congressional, primary, presidential, etc.) to determine how successful your GOTV efforts have been. If your coalition conducted an active GOTV campaign, you should see an increased turnout. Send the information you gather from the elections office to local political reporters. Perhaps they will run a story about the impact of your campus on the election.

Make an appointment with the newly elected or re-elected officials to talk about the issues your campus is concerned about. Prepare information sheets on those issues, and make a packet of press clips, or statistics from the elections office to act as a gentle reminder of how the involvement of your campus affected the elections. They will remember this when they cast votes on issues important to your campus.

Finally, take pride in the fact that you've made a real difference in one of the most basic and important events of our democracy.