

## SEVEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL REGISTRATION DRIVE

Successful voter registration drives have similarities – they are well planned and well organized. Yet every voter registration drive is unique if you design it to meet community needs. This guide will help you plan and carry out voter registration efforts. Please note that setting goals and dates come only after extensive advance planning.

### STEP ONE – KNOW THE LAW

Become familiar with the federal, state and local laws that govern voter registration. In 1993, the U.S. Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). The Help America Vote Act of 2002 has additional provisions designed to make registration more convenient. The following points reflect changes in registration and voting:

- NVRA expands the ease of registration by allowing the distribution of mail-in registration forms as part of a door-to-door or single location voter registration effort. Persons may also download a blank mail-in IL voter registration form from register to vote at the State Board of Elections website: [elections.il.gov](http://elections.il.gov)
- Completed mail-in-forms must be postmarked or delivered to the proper election authority (county clerks or boards of election commissioners) by the deadline date for registration.
- If you do not include a photo copy of a current and valid photo ID or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check or paycheck or other government document that shows your name and address with your application, you will need to show ID the first time you vote.

In addition, the state of Illinois allows the following:

- Voter registration requirements are: the person must be a U.S. citizen, must be at least 18 years of age by Election Day (17 years of age to vote in a General Primary if individual will be 18 as of the following General Election), and must have been a resident of the precinct at least 30 days prior to Election Day.
- Registration is open year round except during the 27 day period just prior to an election and during the 2 day period after each election (1 day after in Chicago).
- Grace period registration is an extension of the regular registration deadline from the 27<sup>th</sup> day prior to an election through Election Day. Grace period registration is only available in person at sites authorized by each election authority.

Emphasize the following facts for voters:

- Basic requirements for registering are the same: U.S. citizen, age 18 by the date of the next regular election and resident of his/her voting precinct for 30 days prior to the election.
- Newly registered persons should notify their election authority if their voter ID card is not received within 3 weeks of their registration.

- Elderly or handicapped persons should be encouraged to request information from their election authority on handicapped accessibility of their polling place and information on obtaining an absentee ballot.
- Persons whose registration can't be verified at their polling place on election day may vote a provisional ballot.

Know the requirements for keeping your drive nonpartisan and be sure that all groups and volunteers involved understand and observe the rules.

## **STEP TWO – WORK WITH ELECTION OFFICIALS**

To register voters, you will need a supply of forms. Standard and mail-in registration forms may be obtained from local election authorities. Some jurisdictions may refer requesting organizations to their vendors. If you are requesting large numbers of mail-in forms, your organization may have to pay for them. The National Mail-In Voter Registration Form is available from the State Board of Elections. It is intended for use in assisting persons who wish to register outside Illinois.

## **STEP THREE – FORM A COALITION & SET GOALS**

Many groups plan registration drives before major elections. Seek ways to coordinate and share information. Successful drives need many contacts, skills and volunteers, so take advantage of each group's special strengths. One group may have good relations with election officials, while another may have access to under-registered groups such as youth and minorities.

Your goals for a drive depend on the nature of the community and your resources – time, people and money. Set an achievable numerical goal to inspire volunteers and to serve as a guidepost for evaluation of these goals. Remember that you won't know when you've arrived unless you know where you are going.

## **STEP FOUR – RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND ASSIGN VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers will interact directly with potential voters and will need to be knowledgeable about how to fill out forms and get them to the election authority promptly. Standard registration forms used by deputy registrars require registrants to show two pieces of ID, one of which lists their current address. The carbon copy of this form is verification of an official registration and should be retained by the registrant until the voter ID card is received.

League members and others who have taken the training are granted **deputy registrar** status by the election authority who does the training. The registrars are deputies of that authority, not of LWV. As deputies, they are bound by law not to promote any candidate, ballot issue or public policy question when acting as deputy registrars. This includes promoting membership in LWV. An informational brochure about registration and voting, including absentee voting, is appropriate and may list the *election authority*, League's name and phone numbers for additional information. League of Women Voters members are eligible for deputy registrar's

training because the League has been given recognition as a bona fide civic organization. Failure of League members to adhere to the law could jeopardize the League's status as such a recognized organization.

#### **STEP FIVE – “SELL” VOTER REGISTRATION**

Visibility is one of the most important aspects of a voter registration drive. It may be the most important aspect of your drive.

- Use traditional media outlets plus posters, flyers and cable TV video bulletin boards, web pages and web pages to alert the community to the importance of voting.
- Provide plenty of information about eligibility, site and registration deadlines.
- Advertise the times and places of your sessions.

Site selection and careful timing can make the difference between a successful registration drive and one with dismal and discouraged volunteers. Good locations where large numbers of unregistered citizens can sign up include:

- Festivals, fairs and sporting events.
- School and college registration tables.
- Public transit stops, malls and downtown areas.
- Workplace cafeterias, concert intermissions and naturalization ceremonies.
- Schedule sessions at peak activity times.
- Get permission to register at both privately and publicly owned sites and let authorities know if you anticipate attracting a large crowd to a public place.
- Visit sites ahead of time and choose the most visible and accessible place to station volunteers.
- Consider the needs of disabled people.

#### **STEP SIX – HOLD THE SESSION**

- Stage an event to attract a crowd – a celebrity appearance, band concert or remote broadcast.
- Make sure people can find your table at the site by using banners, bunting and balloons.
- Recruit enough volunteers so one or two can get out from behind the table and work the crowd if necessary.
- Utilize door-to-door registration using deputy registrars or supplying persons with mail-in forms. It is important to tell voters who register by mail that they must vote in person the first time, either at their polling place or absentee at the office of the election authority or in some municipal or township offices and be prepared to show photo ID with current address.

On a separate tally sheet, you can write the names, addresses and phone numbers of people who register. This information is valuable in case forms are illegible or other problems arise.

You can copy and use these lists later for your group's efforts to Get Out the Vote and to evaluate which sites and dates were most successful.

### **STEP SEVEN – PUBLISH RESULTS, EVALUATE AND CELEBRATE**

Tell the world that your voter registration drive made a difference. Registrants will be happy to hear that they were part of a success and may be more motivated to vote. Volunteers will feel positive about their hard work. Decide which sites and techniques worked best and keep this information, along with the names and phone numbers of the volunteers for the next time. Reward volunteers with a well-timed show of appreciation. It may help persuade them to work on a get-out-the-vote campaign and your next registration drive. If a coalition of groups worked on the drive, a joint celebration will establish rapport for future projects.

*Materials for this section have been adapted from the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts citizen education project, 1995*