

Nonpartisan Voter Engagement Best Practices

AAUW

9-29-26

Agenda

- Welcome
- Who is Nonprofit VOTE?
- Why Should Nonprofit Organizations Do This Work?
- Staying Nonpartisan
- Voter Education
- What Nonprofits Can Do
- Ballot Measures
- Audience Q&A

Who is Nonprofit VOTE?

Mission: Nonprofit VOTE equips our nation's nonprofits with nonpartisan tools and resources to help the communities they serve participate in voting and democracy.

Vision: We envision a diverse network of nonprofits across the United States with the skills, resources, and commitment needed to foster a **more inclusive democracy** where all voices are heard, particularly those currently underrepresented in the voting process.



What do we do?

- Free Voter Engagement Resource Library
- Free national webinar series
- Research Based Partner Case Studies
- Nonprofit VOTE Blog
- Customized Trainings for your organization
- Lead National Voter Registration Day



Gaps in Voter Turnout

Gaps in:

- race, income, and age

Distort:

- democracy and policy debates

These gaps also diminish the influence of the nonprofits and faith-based leaders serving those communities, eroding their ability to deliver on their missions.



Participation Gaps are Self-Perpetuating

Campaigns perpetuate gaps in voter participation. Their goal is to win an election, not foster an inclusive electorate. As such, they focus their limited resources on engaging “likely” voters. **This fuels a negative, self-perpetuating loop.**

We need a new civic ecosystem that engages all eligible voters and brings historically marginalized voters into the process.

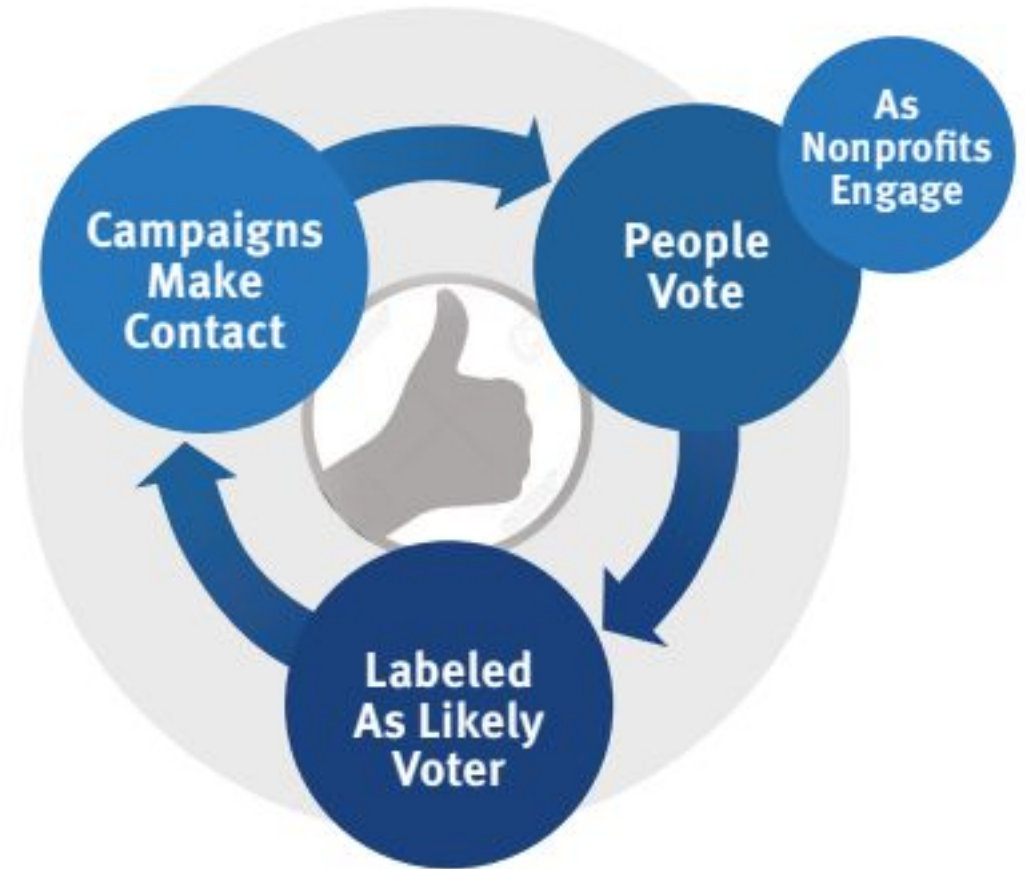


Nonprofits Can Make A Difference

Nonprofits have a fundamentally different goal that transcends any one election cycle – to ensure the communities they serve are heard.

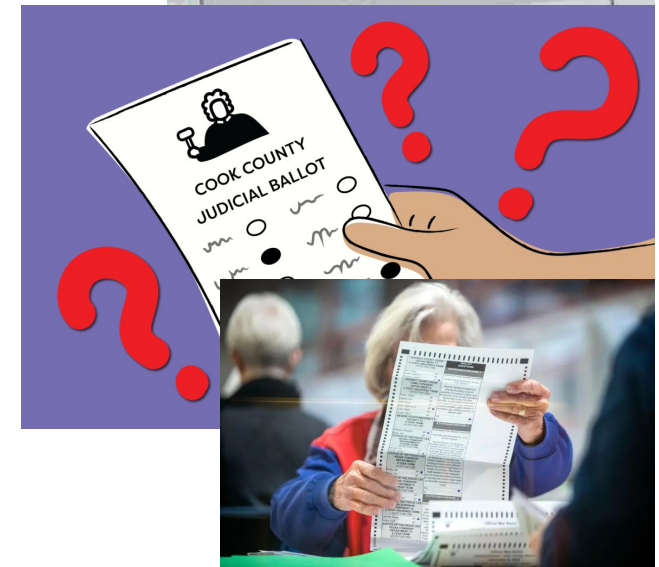
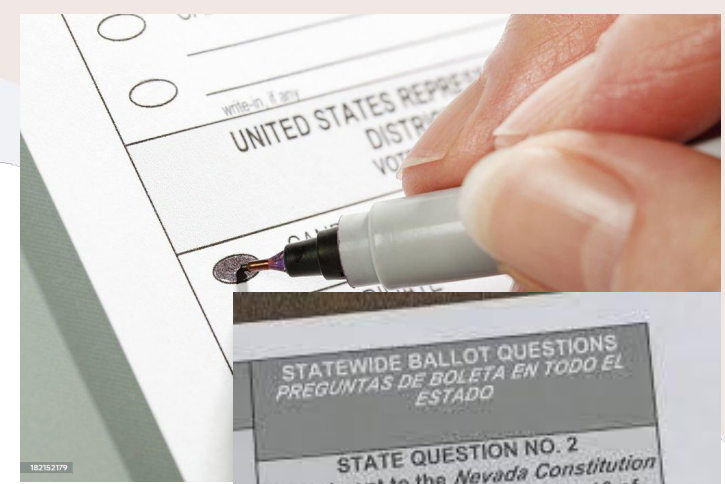
Nonprofits have trust, cultural competency, and deep, long-term roots with the communities served

Our research shows, it works!



What's special about 2026?

- Midterms
 - All 435 U.S. House seats
 - About one-third of U.S. Senate
 - Local races
 - Ballot Measures
- Turnout is typically lower
- Political power can shift
- Policy changes have caused confusion



Staying Nonpartisan

501(c)(3) Organizations MUST Remain Nonpartisan

A 501(c)(3) organization **MAY NOT**:

- Endorse or oppose a candidate or political party (either explicitly or implicitly, includes nonpartisan offices)
- Donate money or resources to a candidate or party (like space to hold events or research)
- Conduct any partisan election-related activity (say “no thanks” to political parties)
- Give out prizes/incentives to register or to vote



Staying Nonpartisan

What does the law say that nonprofits CAN do?

- Register voters
- Send election reminders
- Distribute nonpartisan candidate guides
- Host candidate forums
- Educate voters about options for voting (in person, early, by mail...etc)
- Drive people to the polls
- Support / oppose ballot measures
- Continue issue advocacy during an election



3 Things Voters Need to Get to the Polls

Every voter (or potential voter) needs...



Purpose: Why are they voting?

- Is their purpose for voting driven by **personal values, community concerns, policies** or a desire to be represented?
- Have they been satisfied with the policies and actions of the current elected officials or **would they like to see a change?**
- **What outcome** are they hoping for? *(not a necessarily a candidate but a community outcome or policy or set of values)*



Purpose: What impacts their community?



HOUSING

SECTION 8, HOMELESS SERVICES,
PUBLIC HOUSING, EVICTION SUPPORT



EMPLOYMENT

JOB TRAINING, LABOR LAWS,
SOCIAL SECURITY, UNEMPLOYMENT



HEALTHCARE

MEDICAID, DISABILITY SERVICES,
MEDICARE, MENTAL HEALTH



ENVIRONMENT

WATER/AIR QUALITY, WASTE
MANAGEMENT, ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Purpose: What impacts their community?



COMMUNITY PLANNING

PUBLIC TRANSIT, PARKS, ZONING,
SIDEWALKS, ROADS, SAFETY



CHILDCARE

HEAD START, FAMILY PLANNING,
CHILDCARE VOUCHERS



EDUCATION

FREE LUNCH PROGRAM, ESL,
UNIVERSITY/COLLEGES, LIBRARIES



FOOD ACCESS

WIC, FOOD PANTRY, FOOD SAFETY,
LOCAL AGRICULTURE, FOOD STAMPS

Every voter (or potential voter) needs...

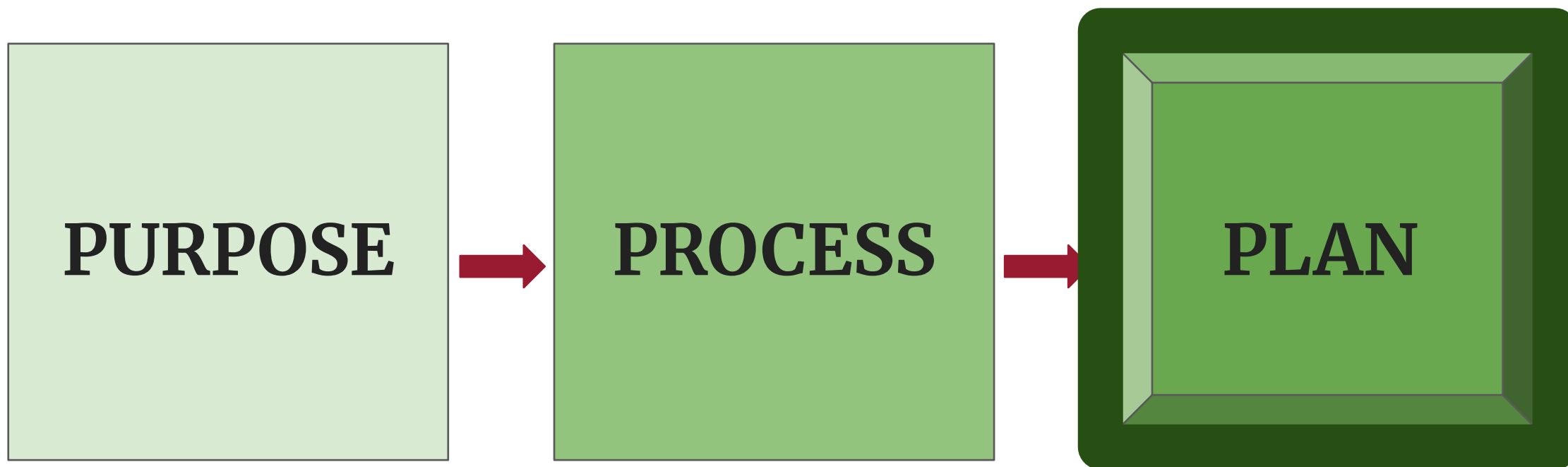


Process: What are the steps involved?

- Double check voter registration
- When is the election? **(actually look at the calendar)**
- What are the **deadlines** for mail-in or absentee ballots?
- How do you find out **what's on the ballot?** (elections office or nonpartisan org)
- What tools are accessible to **learn more about candidates?** (local news, candidate forums, nonpartisan advocacy organizations...etc)



Every voter (or potential voter) needs...



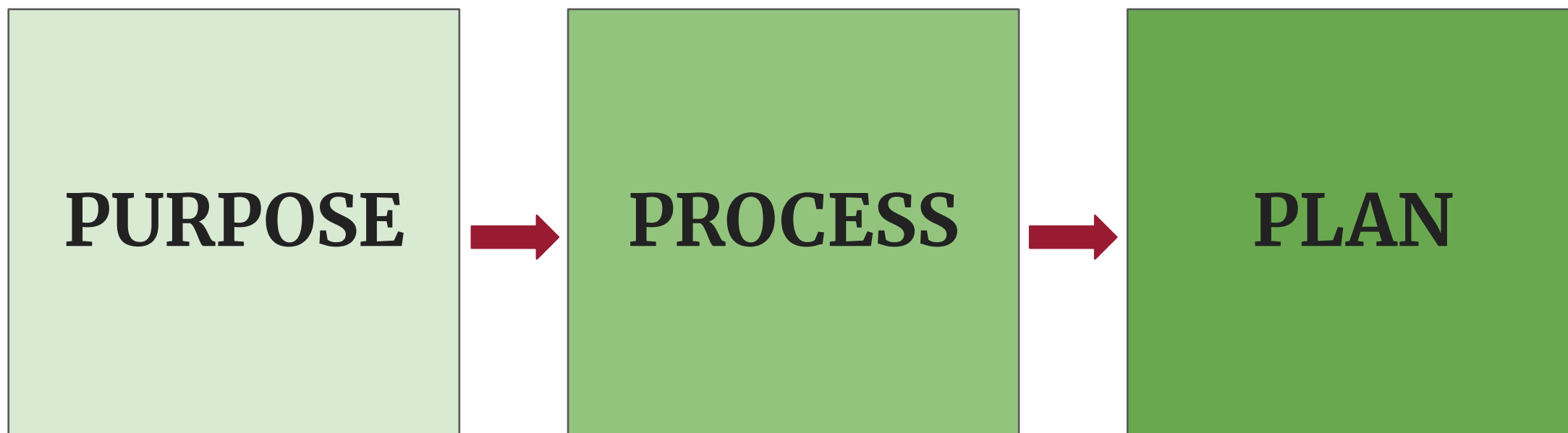
Plan

Every voter needs an **intentional strategy** for ensuring they participate in an election. (and a backup plan in case that doesn't work).

- **Register**
 - Online? Confirm 2 weeks after.
 - In Person? Check to see what ID you need
- **Review Ballot**
 - Sample ballot?
 - Attend candidate forum?
- **Show Up to Vote**
 - Mail Ballot? Turn in ASAP to ensure it's counted
 - Early? Check location and hours
 - Election Day? Bring ID and remember election protection hotline 866-OUR-VOTE
- **See Who Won**



Every voter (or potential voter) needs...



Nonpartisan Voter Engagement Activity Examples

Small Capacity Activities

- Add key election dates and deadlines to organizational calendar
- Email staff, board, and volunteers about voting options
- Amplify local or state Board of Elections information including election dates and deadlines (social media, posters in public place, email newsletter, front desk...etc)
- Provide and promote sample ballots for your region when they become available (pass out at services, include in new member packets and community communications).
- Share the election protection hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE and ensure voters know to use it if they run into unexpected issues with their ability to vote
- Give your staff the day off on Election Day to be poll workers.



Medium Capacity Activities

- Partner with nonpartisan voting organizations to table in the lobby or at an event with you and/or register voters
- Hold mock elections to raise awareness about upcoming elections (ex. best cookie or music genre)
- Host local organizations to talk about topics related to the election (ex. Former legislators, policy experts related to your mission...etc)
- Print bookmarks or business cards with key election dates and deadlines
- Provide rides to the polls
- Connect with your local Elections office to build trust in the election process



Large Capacity Activities

- Host a local candidate forum in partnership with other nonpartisan organizations
- Invite candidates to tour your organization, project site, or community event
- Organize intergenerational conversation about the importance of voting
- Incorporate civics education throughout the year, not just near the election (ex. trivia night, at outreach table...etc)
- Help election protection organizations by using your resources to recruit volunteers for activities like poll monitoring, staffing a hotline, or acting as poll workers.



Organize your community for or against a ballot measure

Ballot Measures

What is a Ballot Measure?

- All of the following can be considered ballot measures:
 - Initiative petition: signatures collected by residents to get a law change on the ballot
 - Constitutional amendment: currently elected legislators vote to send a change in the state constitution or city or county charter to the voters
 - Referendum: residents collect signatures to remove or overturn a law that has been passed
 - Levy: voters decide on tax increases for certain governmental budget lines
- About half of all states allow ballot questions or propositions to be put before the voters either by voter petition or legislative action.

Nonprofits and Ballot Measures

- **Can a nonprofit take a position for or against a ballot measure?**
 - Yes and it is considered lobbying and should be considered by the organization's Board of Directors
- **Common activities for nonprofits on ballot measures:**
 - making an endorsement and communicating your position to the public
 - organizing volunteers to work on passage or defeat of an initiative
 - hosting an educational forum or event
 - distribute neutral educational materials designed to inform the public about both sides of the question

Thank you!

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Bluesky!



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Contact us:

nonprofitvote.org and
info@nonprofitvote.org



Help Support Nonprofit
Voter Education in 2026 &
Beyond

Thanks to supporters who believe
nonprofits deserve clear, trusted
guidance,

Nonprofit VOTE offers free webinars,
tools, and resources, and your gift helps
keep them accessible for all.

Q&A