

EVERY ONE  
**VOTES**



A Toolkit to Ensure People Experiencing  
Homelessness Can Exercise Their

**RIGHT TO VOTE**

## ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) is a leading voice on the issue of homelessness in the U.S. The Alliance analyzes public policies to develop and deliver pragmatic, customized, cost-effective, and implementable solutions. It collaborates with organizations and providers in public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build state and local capacity, leading to more effective programs and solutions that help communities achieve their goal of ending homelessness. The Alliance provides data and research to policymakers and elected officials to inform policy debates and decisions and educate public and opinion leaders nationwide. Through its Center for Capacity Building, the Alliance helps communities turn policies and proven best practices into viable, sustainable, on-the-ground programs. To learn more visit: [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org).

## ABOUT EVERY ONE VOTES

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. This toolkit provides guidance and strategies for providers to support clients and consumers to register to vote, and to encourage voter turnout. For additional resources, visit [www.endhomelessness.org/voting](http://www.endhomelessness.org/voting).

## Acknowledgements

The National Alliance to End Homelessness would like to thank the following organizations for their contributions and resources included in this toolkit:

[Nonprofit Vote](#), [VoteRiders](#), [U.S. Vote Foundation](#), [Vote.org](#), [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#), [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), [Campaign Legal Center](#), [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#), [National Voter Registration Day](#), [Vote Early Day](#), [Rock The Vote](#), [National Association of Secretaries of State](#), and the [National Disability Rights Network](#)

### LEGAL DISCLAIMER

*This toolkit provides helpful information and guidance regarding voting in the United States, but the information and guidance should not be construed as providing specific legal advice about your right to vote. You should consult with legal counsel and/or local and state election office about specific activities or questions.*

# WHY ENGAGE in Voter Registration and Encourage Voter Turnout?

Voter registration and voting can be complex for any person, and may be even more so for people experiencing homelessness. This process has become even more difficult because of COVID-19 and changes in methods of voting. All these factors make it critically important for providers to encourage and assist people experiencing homelessness to register and to vote.



People who are homeless have a right to vote, including those sleeping in shelters and those who are unsheltered.

Being aware of eligibility and access requirements will decrease barriers to voting for people who do not have homes, including those who have criminal records, disabilities, and are people of color. It will also help reverse the effects of voter suppression. These barriers include:

- › Residency and mailing address requirements for voter registration
- › ID requirements for both registration and voting
- › Registration restrictions, including early deadlines
- › Systemic disenfranchisement, including mass purging of voter lists and felony disenfranchisement



## RESOURCES

[Engaging New Voters – Nonprofit Vote](#); [Inform and Help Citizens to Secure Their Voter ID – VoteRiders](#); [Restore Your Vote: I Have a Felony Conviction](#); [Voting as an Ex Offender – Nonprofit Vote](#)

# Step-By-Step Guide to Assist Clients with Voter Registration and Getting Out the Vote

The process of ensuring that your clients are supported to register and vote has many elements and can seem complicated. The best way to approach it is to create a plan that addresses how you will collect all the relevant information, set up a process to engage clients and help them meet the requirements of registering and voting, assist them to get any information they want on candidates and ballot issues, and finally making sure they are easily able to vote.



# Getting the Information

## RESOURCES

[Getting Started with Voter Engagement: A Checklist – Nonprofit Vote](#)

[Making a Voter Engagement Plan: Questions to Consider – Nonprofit Vote](#)

[Voter Engagement Timeline – Nonprofit Vote](#)

**Appoint a staff person/s or volunteer/s to contact the appropriate state or local election office to provide you with the information needed to complete the following steps:**

- Obtain guidelines for registering voters.
- Verify guidelines and rules to follow for assisting clients with registration, including handling and submitting registration forms and completing registrations online.
- Obtain voter registration forms and confirm the web address for online registration.
- Find out eligibility, address, and identification requirements.
- Confirm the registration deadline, including whether your state has same day registration and voting. This will be helpful in planning your efforts to register clients to vote.
- Check on your state's voting by mail and/or absentee voting policies and any requisites or deadlines to such voting.
- Confirm the locations of in-person polling places, ballot drop boxes, etc.

To access the information listed above, your election official, and state voting requirements visit the [U.S. Vote Foundation](#).

## PRO TIPS:

- ★ Use volunteers and interns to help manage your voter engagement to relieve staff.
- ★ Engage with partner providers in your area, so that they can either: register your clients if they have already established a system to do so; help you with your efforts; or send their clients to you for registration.
- ★ Find out whether your local election office can send a representative to your organization to register clients.
- ★ Discuss with your local election office the possibility of using your organization as a polling site.

# STEP 2

## ENGAGING WITH YOUR CLIENTS AND Helping Clients Register to Vote

### RESOURCES

[Check Your State  
Registration Deadline —  
U.S. Vote Foundation](#)

[How to Vote Early —  
Vote Early Day](#)

[Get Out the Vote Toolkit —  
Nonprofit Vote](#)

**In accordance with the protocols and guidance from your state or local elections office, assist your clients in gathering the information required to determine their eligibility and ability to vote, and educate and engage your clients to vote.**

**Be familiar with the following requirements.**

#### 1. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

- U.S. citizens<sup>1</sup>
- Those who meet their state's address requirements. More on this below.
- People who will be 18 years old on or before Election Day. In almost every state, you can register to vote before you turn 18 if you will be 18 by Election Day.
- Those who are registered to vote by their state's [registration deadline](#).
- Some people with felony convictions; this requirement varies by state. Check here for [felon voting rights](#).
- Some people who are mentally incapacitated. Rules vary by state.



<sup>1</sup> You must be a citizen to vote in a federal election. However, some cities have made exceptions for voting in local elections, therefore you should check with your local office regarding rules for voting in local races.

**THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A VOTE THAT DOESN'T MATTER. IT ALL MATTERS.**

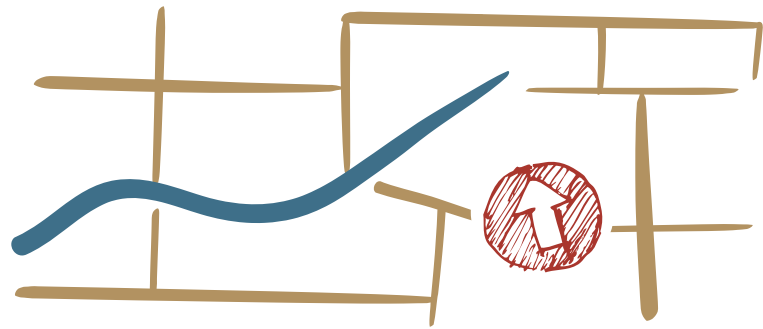
—Barack Obama

**2. WHAT ARE THE ADDRESS REQUIREMENTS?**

- All 50 states require a physical address and mailing address. Check with your state for specific requirements.

**Physical Address or Place of Residence**

- The purpose of providing a place of residence is to ensure the person is registering to vote in the proper district and to assign the voter a polling place.
- A traditional dwelling or physical residence is not required, and one may list the place one considers their residence, or where they sleep at night, which can include a shelter, bench in the park, or even under a freeway.
- 28 states allow voters to draw a map or diagram of where they live. Some states have specific language declaring this option be available for rural voters.



- Some states have special instructions for people experiencing homelessness. For example:



In Colorado, the voter registration form includes a checkbox for voters experiencing homelessness. People who check this box can list a location where they commonly sleep.



In Iowa the registration form instructs voters without an established address to “describe where you reside.”



Ohio allows people without a fixed location for permanent habitation to list “shelter or other location” as a residence.



- In some states, there is no solution to not having a traditional residence on the registration form. However, those states usually have further instructions regarding where a person physically resides. For example:
  - › Delaware provides instructions on in-person registration that requires two pieces of paper with the person's name on it, at least one of which must have the address that will be used on the registration form, even if the address is a shelter.
  - › Minnesota provides instructions on registering with a described sleeping location but adds that voters without an address will be asked to swear under oath at the polling location that their address is correctly listed. ([Our Homes Our Votes, 8/19/2020](#))

#### **Mailing Address**

- In most states, a mailing address is required in order for the jurisdiction to send voter ID and election-related materials. However, this address does not have to be the voter's actual residence. For clients, this can include any location willing to accept the mail on the client's behalf, including shelters, or a provider's place of business.

#### **! PRO TIPS:**

- ★ **Voting related address requirements may most easily be handled by having your organization agree to collect mail on behalf of individual clients.**
- ★ **Your organization will also need to establish a policy on how to get mail to clients, even if they have moved to another facility or provider.**



### 3. WHAT ARE THE IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS?

- Each state has different requirements. Remember to check with your state or election office concerning what proper form of ID is accepted for registration and to vote, especially for your clients who may not have any ID.
  - › Look up your state's identification requirements [here](#).
- Most state registration forms ask the applicant to provide an identification card number or social security number.
- If your client does not provide an identification number or SSN, they can still register; however, they will be required to show a form of identification or proof of residency the first time they vote or submit the information to the local election office before election day.
- If your client needs help to get identification, including obtaining underlying documents like birth certificates, and pro bono legal help go to [VoteRiders.org](#)
  - › Obtaining the underlying documents required for an ID can be a lengthy process, so be sure to plan accordingly.



**THIS RIGHT TO VOTE IS THE BASIC RIGHT WITHOUT WHICH ALL OTHERS ARE MEANINGLESS. IT GIVES PEOPLE, PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS, CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN DESTINIES.**

—Lyndon B. Johnson



#### 4. HOW DO YOU COMPLETE VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS?

##### ■ Online Registration:

Utilizing your state's online voter registration page is the quickest way for your clients to verify whether they are already registered, whether they need to change or update a registration due to moving, or whether need to register to vote.

- As of August 2020, a total of 40 states plus the District of Columbia offer online registration, and one other state (Oklahoma) has passed legislation and is currently phasing in implementation of their online registration. See the [table](#) below for details.
- Clients should be encouraged to check their registration status and/or to register online by providing them with internet access, computer access, and assistance if they request it.

##### ■ Paper Forms:

Most states offer downloadable PDF registration forms online on the state's voter website. You can also access the [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#) and follow the state-specific instructions listed.

#### ! PRO TIPS:

- ★ Contact your local election office to determine whether you can collect the forms and submit them on behalf of your clients.
- ★ If you need to assist your client with registration in-person, you may assist them with completing the paper form or registering online. Remember you may not influence your client's political preference or party registration.

**THE VOTE IS  
PRECIOUS. IT'S  
ALMOST SACRED. IT IS  
THE MOST POWERFUL  
NONVIOLENT  
INSTRUMENT OR  
TOOL THAT WE HAVE  
IN A DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIETY, AND WE  
MUST USE IT.**

—*Representative  
John Lewis*

## 5. HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH YOUR CLIENTS ABOUT VOTING?

- During your regular check-ins or during the intake process, some questions you can ask include:
  - Would you like information about voting?
  - Are you registered to vote?
  - Would you like assistance with registering to vote?
    - [Click here for more guidance on new voter engagement scripts.](#)
- For those operating shelters or other in-person activities, engage by:
  - Posting signs around the building and/or service area
  - Setting up a table with information about voting in your state and community.
  - Passing out voter information along with the food or other items you may be handing out.
  - Schedule discussions about the needs and causes of homelessness in your community and remind your clients that their voice matters in elections.
- Develop text and email campaigns to inform clients of their right to vote and the organizations ability to help them through the process.
- Due to COVID, in-person engagement can be difficult, please remember to follow safety and social distancing guidelines.

## 6. REGISTRATION SCENARIOS

- What if a client wants information and wants to vote, but is unsure of their registration status?
  - Check to see whether your client is registered.  
<https://www.vote.org/am-i-registered-to-vote/>
    - Please note, you will need to provide the client's name, an email address, and the address the client most recently used to vote, if applicable.
  - Your client is not registered in your state, what now?
    - Assist your client in registering online.  
<https://www.vote.org/register-to-vote/>
- What if your client is registered but needs to update their registration?
  - If the client has moved within the state, needs to change their name, or needs to update their political party affiliation, go to [your state online registration website](#) and assist them in updating their registration.
  - If the client has moved permanently to another state, assist them in registering to vote in the new state.  
<https://www.vote.org/register-to-vote/>

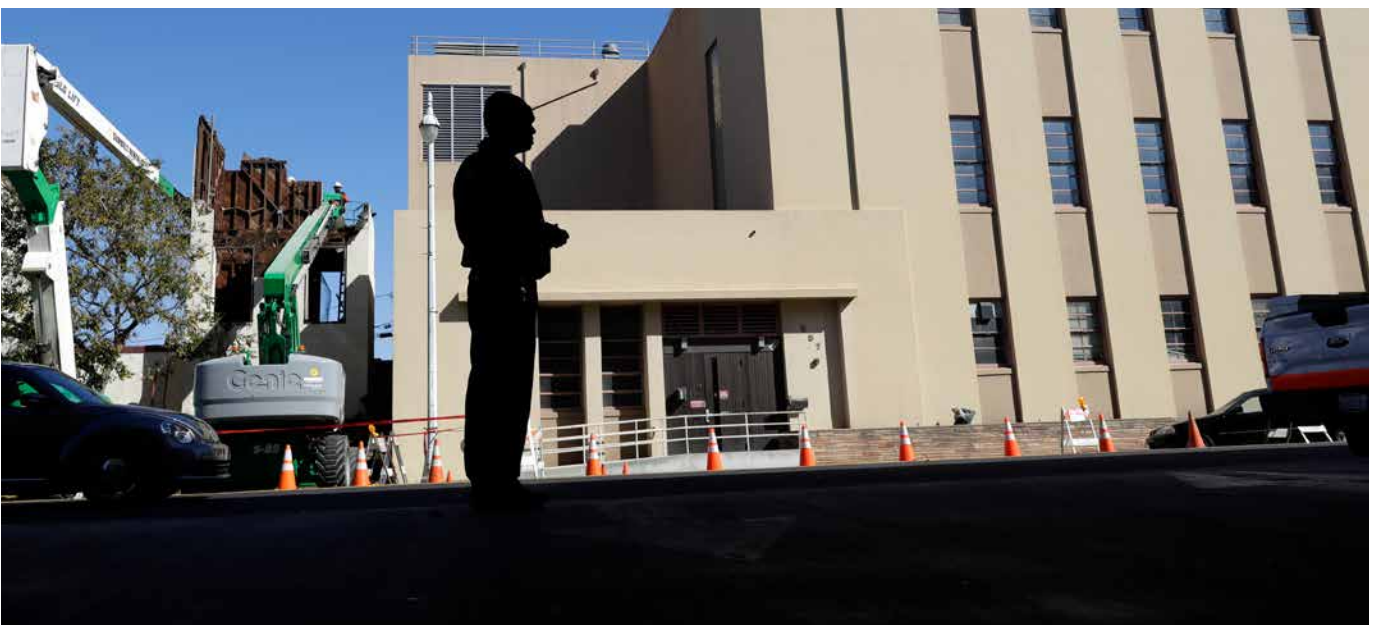
## 7. WHEN TO BEGIN VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS?

- Begin as soon as possible. No time is too early to register.
- Figure out the deadline to register in your state and back out the time you need to engage clients, collect all the relevant information and documents they will need to register, and submit their registration.
- Please note that [National Voter Registration Day](#) is September 22, 2020 – a great starting day for your efforts.

## 8. HOW TO EDUCATE CLIENTS ON CANDIDATES OR BALLOT ISSUES?

- The IRS states that “501(c)(3) organizations may take positions on public policy issues, including issues that divide candidates in an election for public office.”
- It is permissible to educate clients on what is on their ballot, but this must be done in a nonpartisan way.
- Create candidate questionnaires that your organization can submit to the candidates that elicit their policy stance on issues that are relevant to the organization and your clients.
- Conduct voter guides to educate your clients on the issues that they care about, including housing and homelessness. Make them short and easy to print.
- Host small events such as candidate forums to engage with your clients.

For more information and further guidelines on permissible voter engagement activities visit [NonprofitVote.org](#).



# Getting Out the Vote

## RESOURCES

[Find Your Polling Place — National Association of Secretaries of State](#)

[Voters with Disabilities — National Disability Rights Network](#)

[What IDs are accepted when Voting — VoteRiders](#)

## Tips to encourage clients to vote:

- Make sure your clients know whether they will be voting by absentee ballot, mail ballot in the mail, mail ballot in a ballot drop box, or in person at the polls.
  - Many states use the terms absentee ballot and mail-in ballot interchangeably.
  - You should be sure your clients know what type of voting they can, or wish to, engage in.
    - › In the states where there is in-person voting and absentee voting, the latter under certain specific conditions, make sure you know what those conditions are and have given your clients that information in advance so that they can request an absentee ballot if need be and if they are eligible.
    - › In those states where there is primarily mail-in voting, make sure clients know when they need to mail their ballot, or know where ballot drop boxes are located. These states generally send ballots through the mail to all registered voters, so you should check with your client to make sure they have received a ballot if they intend to vote by mail or drop box.
    - › To find out more information about your state mail-in or absentee ballot status and deadlines visit [Rock the Vote](#).
    - › Make sure clients know where their in-person polling place is.





- Make sure that clients know what to expect when they go to the polls: ID requirements, check-in, use of machines versus paper ballots, confidentiality requirements, provisional ballot provisions, etc.
  - In particular it is VERY important to make sure your client knows what, if any ID they will need to present in order to vote, and to provide any assistance you can, in advance, to make sure they have proper ID. Being denied the privilege of voting at the polling station can be unpleasant and upsetting.
    - Also be sure clients are aware of their rights to cast a provisional ballot if need be. A provisional ballot is a special ballot designed to ensure that all voters have a chance to cast a ballot even if their eligibility to vote is uncertain. After the election, the ballots are investigated to determine if they will be counted ([National Conference of State Legislatures](#), 8/26/2020)
- Encourage your clients to vote early. To learn about your state's both in-person and by-mail options to vote early visit [Vote Early Day 2020](#).
- Make personal calls utilizing case managers, outreach workers, and others to discuss clients' plans to vote.
- Have readily available information on polling locations and times of operation, and on the location of ballot drop boxes, so that figuring this out isn't a last-minute barrier to voting.
- Provide these free, [wallet size voter information cards](#), that list acceptable forms of identification and voter help line numbers. Clients can use the card to show polling place workers or others who may not correctly understand the voter ID law.
- Encourage and assist clients to form groups to go to the polls and vote, as voting with family and friends increases the chance of people exercising their right to vote. And being in a group gives people more confidence and support at the polls.
- Offer transportation assistance and remember to adhere to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines.

**NEVER DOUBT THAT  
A SMALL GROUP  
OF THOUGHTFUL,  
COMMITTED CITIZENS  
CAN CHANGE THE  
WORLD: INDEED, IT'S  
THE ONLY THING  
THAT EVER HAS.**

—Margaret Mead

## Early Voting

- Some states allow you to vote early, either by mail or in-person at the local election precinct office.
- [Early voting](#) is an option that is sometimes more accessible.

## Voting In-Person

- Find out if and under what circumstances your client is required to bring ID to the polling place.
  - Have available the latest information on [your state's voter ID laws](#).
  - If you need help or encounter any issues while registering or voting contact VoteRiders by [email](#), call or text their Voter ID Helpline: [844-338-8743](#), or [chat](#).
- What to know about voting in person.
  - Identify precinct locations.
    - Some states are closing precinct locations due to COVID-19 among other reasons, so you should advise your clients to anticipate long lines and to STAY IN LINE.
  - Anticipate and develop solutions to transportation issues around getting to and from the voting precinct location.
  - Every precinct should adhere to ADA regulations. Call ahead to the precinct if a client has disabilities. Arrange transportation and other accommodations to assist the client in voting.
  - If the voter has issues with address, identification, or other requirements, they should be advised that they can cast a provisional ballot. Advise the client not to leave the polling place without casting a provisional ballot.
  - Warn clients to adhere to CDC recommendations, including social distancing guidelines and mask regulations/guidelines.
  - There are election protection hotlines that can assist voters with any issues they experience while trying to exercise their right to vote. Advise clients to program 866-Our-Vote in their phones or have the number handy.

### ! PRO TIP:

- ★ Waive any curfew or waiting in line practices on election day and replace with tickets or shelter reservations to eliminate stress and disincentives to vote.

# FAQS

## FOR PROVIDERS

- **Can providers assist in voter registration?**
  - Yes, the National Voter Registration Act encourages “all nongovernmental entities” to assist in registering their clients to vote. This includes homeless shelters, drop-in centers, food pantries, soup kitchens, day care centers, child welfare agencies, and community health centers. Non-governmental entities must remain strictly non-partisan when helping clients, however, and should not try in any way to influence their vote.
- **Can providers register clients to vote?**
  - Technically you may not register another person to vote in the sense that you may assist a person in completing their registration, but they must sign it themselves. For online registrations, your client must give permission and must be able to review and consent to what is being entered in the voter registration system.
- **How can I help my client get the required identification?**
  - Be sure that you thoroughly understand the ID requirements for voting.
  - If a government-issued identification is required, be sure you know all of the possible options and whether or not expired IDs can be used.
  - Be prepared to assist your clients to order birth certificates, solicit letter communication from government agencies, or obtain drivers’ licenses or non-driver ID cards. There may be fees attached that you will need to cover.

## FOR CLIENTS/INDIVIDUALS

- **Am I eligible to vote?**
  - In most states you must be a citizen, 18 years of age or older on or by the election date, and a resident of the state.
- **What if I am a convicted felon?**
  - States have different laws concerning whether a convicted felon can vote. [Check your state for voting rights for ex-offenders by state.](#)
- **When can I register to vote?**
  - To participate in an upcoming election, you must register [by the deadline established by your state.](#)
- **If I do not have access to the internet, how can I register to vote?**
  - You can get assistance from a service provider in your community or use a computer at a library to register to vote.
  - In many instances, you may be able to register in person at your [local election office.](#)
- **Where can I access a voter registration form?**
  - You can request a voter registration form by visiting a local election office, or by mail.
  - You can also download the [National Voter Registration Form](#) here. It is available in 15 languages.



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