The National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign

Voter turnout, political power and community well-being
Objectives for today

1. Why voting matters to all social work practice
2. Introduction of the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign
3. How schools of social work, agencies and NASW chapters can support clients, students, communities and staff to vote
Brief introductions

The National Voter Social Work Mobilization Campaign

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Our Mission
To increase the political participation and power of all social workers and the communities we serve so public policy reflects our professional values, knowledge and commitment to social justice.

“Politics is social work with power”
Senator Barbara Mikulski, MSW
The importance of an inclusive democracy
A democracy in which power is shared equally therefore it reflects and responds to the needs of all citizens.

Elected officials pay attention to people and communities that vote. Who votes in higher rates can tell an important story about power.
Culture of voting central to inclusive democracy

All people can vote at current address.

People know HOW, WHEN, WHERE to vote

People know who represents them, who is on the ballot AND who represents their interest.

VOTER ACCESS: Same day registration, early voting, mail-in ballots

VOTING RIGHTS: incarcerated, students, overseas, nonEnglish, hearing/reading/physical challenged

CULTURE: All people are encouraged to vote & participate in civic life

People have the tools, information and ability to participate in all elections.
Voting as **SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH**

Individuals and communities who vote are better off in important indicators of well-being.


**Note:** see last page for citations and VotingIsSocialWork. Org for more information.
Structural barriers are *designed* to limit participation and power.

- Confusing and complicated rules, deadlines and processes;
- Inconsistent election administration;
- Restricting who can vote through disenfranchisement and strict id rules; and
- Drawing barriers that dilute power.

Agencies and social workers have been reluctant to be seen as political. 
*Nonpartisan voter registration, education and outreach is legal, ethical and professional.*
Voting rights are central to civil rights

- Voting is power.
- Confusing felony voting laws differ by state, are punitive and disproportionately affect people of color.
- Native American populations continue to face access, language and other barriers to voting.
- Watch this powerful video from Atlantic Magazine [https://youtu.be/uDnKDjiP0_M](https://youtu.be/uDnKDjiP0_M)

1 of every 13 African Americans has has **lost their voting rights** due to felony disenfranchisement laws, vs. 1 in every 56 non-black voters.
It’s not just about the President and Congress.
The importance of local and state elections.

Education and schools ● Public transportation ● Housing
Roads ● Adult education ● Policing and community relations
Clean water ● Trash ● Elections ● Redistricting

1. Less than 1 in 4 people vote in local elections yet local officials usually most accessible and accountable to their communities. Lower turnout can lead to concentrated power and fewer candidates.

2. Local policy can lead national change (think minimum wage, marriage equality and gun laws).

3. State legislatures often responsible for drawing Congressional and state districts.
SOCIAL WORKERS CAN AND SHOULD SUPPORT CLIENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO VOTE

Social work education, including field and professional development can support all social workers and agencies to integrate voter registration, education and outreach into micro/mezzo/macro practice:

Registration: add voter registration/look up to intake; run voter registration drives

Education: when/where/how to vote and links to felony voting rights, elected officials and issues and candidates.

Advocate: against gerrymandering, for voting access and voting rights

Encouragement to vote: Reminders about elections, encouragement that their vote matters, help/info getting to polls.
Organizational culture and relationship with clients shifts from a helping model to an empowerment model by supporting public and political power.

Helping → empowerment

Voter turnout increases because of better leaders and more informed political decisions are made. Social workers and agencies support voting as part of practice and impact. Voting is part of culture: registration education & outreach, leading to better outcomes for communities.
Nonpartisan voter engagement is **legal**, **ethical** and professional and in some cases, mandated by law.

Nonprofits may conduct nonpartisan voter engagement activities designed to educate the public and help them participate in elections.

**A 501(c)(3) MAY NOT:**
- Make an endorsement
- Donate money or resources
- Rate/rank candidates on their positions

Organizations who sign people up for federal benefits may be required by law to provide voter registration opportunity (see 1993 Voter Registration Act).
About the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign

The Campaign seeks to:

• Raise awareness of the importance of voting to social work practice and social policy;
• Integrate voter engagement activities into class and field education for all micro and macro students;
• Provide information about voter mobilization skills and strategies to field instructors, students and faculty for use in agencies and the classroom; and
• Ensure that all the people served by social workers have access to the vote.

Organizational Endorsements include:
CSWE • North American Network of Field Educators and Directors (NANFED) • National Association of Deans & Directors (NADD) • Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work • Association for Community Organization & Social Action (ACOSA) • #MacroSW • Network for Social Work Management (NSWM) • Influencing Social Policy (ISP)
Ways social work can make a difference

- Ask about voter registration at agency/school intake
- Offer to check registration status at current address [VOTE.org](http://VOTE.org)
- Ensure people with a felony conviction know their right to vote in your state [VOTE.org](http://VOTE.org), [NonprofitVote.org](http://NonprofitVote.org)
- Help people find who represents them /post elected officials in public places [RocktheVote.org](http://RocktheVote.org), See worksheet on [VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.org)
- Share voting information and tools with clients [League of Women Voters](http://LeagueofWomenVoters.org), [NonprofitVote.org](http://NonprofitVote.org)
- Encourage people to vote in primaries and general elections [TURBOVOTE.org](http://TURBOVOTE.org) [RocktheVote.org](http://RocktheVote.org)
- Help people find polling place and post ride sharing numbers from both parities
Ways your school can join the movement

- Add voter training to curricula, including assignment in field for students to build confidence and skills
- Train field supervisors through SIFI, professional development for CEUs
- Add training to field/lobby days for students or workshops
- Suggest voter activities to educational contracts
- Host forums at your school/agency
Sample Assignments—BSW/MSW

• Ask students to develop plan to integrate voter registration, education and outreach into field organization’s service delivery/culture. Discuss with your field supervisor.
• Complete reflective essay on voter engagement assignments and training to CSWE advocacy and policy practice competencies.
• Register 3 people to vote.
• Look up the rules and deadlines for voting in your state (sample worksheet on VotingIsSocialWork.org)
• Find your elected officials at the local, state and federal level (worksheet on VotingIsSocialWork.org)
Find partners in your community

League of Women Voters
ACLU
Your State Election Board or Secretary of the State
Vote.org
NonprofitVote.org
Rock the Vote
What's one thing you will do to support voting in your practice?

Share your story with us at info@VotingIsSocialWork.org
References. For a complete list, go to VotingIsSocialWork.org


