Voting as a social work intervention
Our Mission: To increase the political participation and power of all social workers and the communities we serve

“Politics is social work with power”
Senator Barbara Mikulski, MSW
Agenda

1. Why voting matters to healthy democracies
2. Nonpartisan voter engagement as a micro/mezzo/macro intervention
3. Integrating nonpartisan civic engagement into practice
4. Assignment for this class
5. National campaign and additional resources
The Voter Suppression Playbook
A Democracy in peril

• White supremacy and anti-Black racism were built into the foundation of our democracy and persist.
• The pandemic has magnified the barriers is forcing many to choose between their health and their right to vote.
• All forms of disenfranchisement and suppression threaten the legitimacy of our democracy.

“The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have.”
John Robert Lewis (February 21, 1940 - July 17, 2020)
The nonvote wins

- 100 million eligible age voters stayed home in 2016; 43% of the eligible electorate
- Nonvoters are more likely to be lower income, less educated, non-white, and unmarried
- Systemic barriers to voting feed engagement barriers and the myth that voting doesn’t matter
- Turnout for state and local elections—where policies like policing are made—is far lower

Knight Foundation: https://the100million.org/
The United States Election Project: http://www.electproject.org/
1. More accessible (more accountable)
2. Low turnout can mean those who vote or turn out votes get too much power *Primaries critical in one-party areas*
3. Local policy can lead national change.

Clean Water • Schools
Elections • Housing • Policing
Transportation • Roads • Trash
It is easier to spend a few months and some money electing the right people than to spend years and a lot of money trying to get the wrong people to do the right things.

—Senator Debbie Stabenow, MSW

Representation and participation matter in a healthy, inclusive democracy
Structural barriers that limit participation and support the intentional myth that voting doesn’t matter

- Confusing and complicated rules, deadlines and processes;
- Laws such as felony voting restrictions were racist in their intent and continue to be racist in their impact;
- Suppression tactics include: felony voting laws, strict voter id rules, purging voter lists, challenging student registrations, reducing poll locations, strict absentee rules, allegations of voter fraud, etc.
- “Gerrymandering” is the process drawing districts so maximize political power. Creates “safe” districts which contributes to divided politics, weakens centrist candidates and suppresses turnout when “vote doesn’t matter.”
Some reasons people don’t vote?

- Don’t like candidates or issues (25%)
- Not interested/vote doesn’t matter (15%)
- Too busy/lack of time (14%)
- Illness/disability (12%)
- Out of town (8%)
- Registration problems (4%)
- Forgot to vote (3%)
- Transportation problems (3%)
- Inconvenient hours/polling places (2%)


Voting as a social work intervention

**Micro:** Individuals need easy ways to register, information about how/when/where to vote, information on candidates and the encouragement to vote

**Mezzo -- community:** Voting leads to collective power in communities; relational and social behavior

**Macro--fixing the systemic barriers:** Voting is different in all 50 states; collective narrative that voting doesn’t matter and/or rigged; Advocate for voting rights and access; participate as election officials, poll workers and poll monitors.
Voting central to social work’s mission, professional mandate and impact

- **Social determinant of health.** Individuals and communities who vote are better off.
- **Human right.** Systemic barriers, voter suppression, felony disenfranchisement & gerrymandering designed by and for people in power
- **Empowerment practice.** Voting is an act of power, individually and collectively.

Elected officials and candidates pay attention to people and communities that vote.


VotingIsSocialWork.org for citations
The Role of Clinical Social Workers on Voter Engagement Efforts

Cheryl Aguilar, LICSW, LCSW-C
Founding Director & Therapist
Hope Center for Wellness

National Association of Social Workers
Mental Health Specialty Section Committee Member

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy
Board Member

Social workers use the techniques of behavioral therapy to help people change behavior. The element of social workers is that they are engaged in the process of helping people change. They use techniques such as motivational interviewing, behavioral activation, and cognitive-behavioral therapy to help people change their behavior. The techniques used by social workers often involve the use of behavioral therapy. Behavioral therapy is a form of therapy that uses behavioral techniques to help people change their behavior. Behavioral therapy is also used to help people change their behavior when they are undergoing treatment for addiction or mental illness. Behavioral therapy is also used to help people change their behavior when they are undergoing treatment for pain or illness.
Voting activities connect to all 9 CSWE core competencies and connect micro and macro practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Practice Activity</th>
<th>Alignment with core competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invite elected officials to agency for meetings or forum focused on advocating human rights issues</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help people with a prior felony conviction to register and vote (if eligible in your state) through public awareness and individual outreach in service delivery</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement change advocate for voter engagement activity policy in field agency or community</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote the importance of Census 2020 in your area and or community</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess political power of community through voter registration statistics by district</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner with the census task force in your region/town</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify elected officials on the local, state, and federal level. Share contact list with agency staff and or clients</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train clients/staff on advocacy, government systems, and the importance of voting</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine what policies may deter voter turnout</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine strategies to engage organizations and communities in voting</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage clients to participate in the census</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use strategic planning objectives to measure effectiveness of agency voter registration drives</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify measurable outcomes of voter pledge card drives (e.g. compare against public records)</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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Why don’t more organizations encourage people to vote?

- Concerns about partisanship, violating rules and/or funding loss
- Too busy
- Discomfort with politics
- Lack of training
- Don’t see voting as form of empowerment
- Don’t know that it’s legal (and in some cases required by law)
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).
Simple ways you can Amplify the Vote:

1) Encourage people to respond to the census

Why respond to the census?

$ for your family and your community.
The census determines how much we will get for needed services (schools, roads, Medicaid, food assistance, healthcare, housing and more) as well as our political power to shape our future.

How can my family be counted in the census?

✓ Online at www.2020Census.gov and fill it out online. Many languages available!
✓ Or Call 844-330-2020 and someone will help you.
✓ Or By mail if you received a paper survey to your home.

Is it safe to respond to the census?

Yes! By law, your answers to the census are protected and private and cannot be used for any reason by any government agency or tribunal—not the FBI, CIA, DCF, DHS, or ICE.

Where can I get help if I have questions?

- Census Protection Hotline (888) COUNT20 or (888) 268-6820
- Arab American Institute: (833) 333-6864
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice: (844) 2020-API or (844) 202-0274
  Available in English, Mandarin (普通语), Cantonese (国粵語), Korean (한국어), Vietnamese (Tiếng Việt), Tagalog, Urdu (اردو), Hindi (हिन्दी), and Bengali/Bangla (বাংলা).
- Háágase Contar: (877) EL-CENSO or (877) 352-3676
2) Register voters!

- Paper forms
- Digitally… text link to online registration system in your state or use a platform like Vot-ER (Turbovote)
- Send links in zoom chats and include in your email

Hi Mary. With everything that's been going on, I'm reaching out to people to make sure they have everything they need to vote safely in November. You can register to vote or request an absentee ballot application by texting 'vote sw' to 344444.

Acceda a la versión en español de esta página AQUÍ.

Questions about your registration process? Click here to access the text helpline.

(English & Spanish available!)
VotER: Lanyards and Badgebackers

- Free
- Track # of registrations as provider type
  - Social workers, physicians, medical students
- Track overall number of mail-in ballots requested
3) Educate and Engage

The power of information:

- When and where to vote (don’t forget primaries!)
- How to vote, including by absentee ballot
- Who is on the ballot (copy of the ballot, links to candidate information, who represents them) and ballot issues
- The rules for special populations such as those experiencing homelessness, with a felony conviction, a survivor of violence, residents in long-term care, etc.
- Know the facts and dispel myths around voter fraud.

The power of being asked…
4) Remind and promote all elections – federal, state and local

- Being a trusted voice amplifies your effect:
  - Text/call your networks
  - Post online – websites, social media, blogs, letters to the editor
  - Send email reminders, include in your email signature
  - Promote in waiting rooms, chat rooms, visible spaces
  - Encourage people to **make a plan** for voting

Hey Sarah! I am reaching out to make sure that your vote and your voice are counted this election! If you stay home, so does our power for change. Make sure your registration is up to date by texting VOTE SW to 34444. You can also request an absentee ballot application! Let me know if you have any questions!  Tanya
5) Advocate for voting rights and access in your town/state and push Congress to reinstate preclearance ("section 5") in the Voting Rights Act.
6) Change the culture: Integrate voter engagement to your practice, agency and community

- Health care settings
- Schools
- Shelters
- Libraries
- Outpatient clinics
- After school programs
- Food pantries
- VAs
6) Change the culture: Integrate voter engagement to your practice, agency and community

1. Using the provided “Organizational Assessment: Supporting clients and communities to vote, develop a plan for your field agency* to integrate nonpartisan voter engagement into the services and culture of your nonprofit, agency, organization, or school.
   * Notes: Think about this as a working document for your agency. You may submit this completed form as your plan. Include details as well as open questions that come up. **If you are not in field, choose an agency or organization with which you have personal or professional experience.** If you are in field, share with your supervisor and discuss.

2. Register at least three (3) people to vote. Note: You are not required to register people at your agency. You may choose any three people to register, including people in your personal network. **OPTIONAL:** Contact five (5) people to encourage them to participate in the 2020 census.

3. Write and submit a short reflection on this experience. **Go to VotingIsSocialWork.org for more information and resources.**
Voter turnout increases

Social workers & agencies support voting as indicator of health

Social workers & agencies register voters & address barriers

Voter turnout increases

More candidates, more accountability, better leaders, better policy

Better outcomes for communities
Thank you!

For voting resources and information: go to www.VotingIsSocialWork.org or contact me directly

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