



# CAN NONPROFITS INCREASE VOTING

## AMONG THEIR CLIENTS, CONSTITUENTS, AND STAFF?

***AN EVALUATION OF THE TRACK THE VOTE PROGRAM***

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PART II : CASE STUDIES

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Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. We are the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

## 1 Introduction

### CASE STUDIES

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\* An affiliate of the National Association of Community Health Centers, their voter engagement work was supported by the Latino Empowerment and Advocacy program of the National Council of La Raza.

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Twenty-five of the 94 Track the Vote program participants were selected for interviews, as well as two additional agencies that participated in similar voter engagement programs managed by Nonprofit VOTE partners.

Fifteen of those interviews became the basis for the following case studies, designed to illustrate how a diverse group of nonprofit organizations conducted voter engagement in 2012. Each case study includes descriptions of voter outreach activities, challenges that arose, and concrete takeaways from their experiences.

## Case Study Contents

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- **Organizational Overview:** Description of the organization’s mission and work as well as the population served. It also includes the number of voter contacts tracked for the program, as well as the organization’s 2012 totals, if different.
- **Background Summary:** Explanation of why the organization participated in the Track the Vote program, any prior voter engagement experience, information on their voter engagement partner(s), training, and how they got started with the program.
- **What They Did:** Description of the specific activities and strategies used to engage voters, including a discussion of challenges and successful tactics.
- **Additional Voter Engagement:** Description of work that fell outside the voter registration and pledge collection parameters of the Track the Vote program—including get-out-the-vote efforts, voter education, candidate engagement, and rides to the polls.
- **Lessons Learned:** Summary of key lessons that emerged from the nonprofit’s participation in the Track the Vote program.

These case studies are intended to reflect the unique experiences of each nonprofit profiled. Thus, some of the “lessons learned” may be more relevant to particular nonprofits than to others, as successful tactics may vary widely depending on the type of organization and community served. These case studies are not meant to present a set of rules, but to provide a richer context for nonprofit voter engagement, inspiration for developing or refining your own voter engagement plan, and guidance for avoiding common pitfalls. By considering the detailed experiences of these many organizations, we hope that any nonprofit can assemble a voter engagement plan tailored to its programs, population, and capacity.

We conclude with a case study from the Minnesota Participation Project, which managed the Track the Vote program in their state. Given the critical role that partner organizations played in supporting participating agencies, we wanted to share their experiences. Moreover, the perspective of a larger organization and how it supported voter engagement among its affiliates can help guide other groups looking to encourage efforts within their networks.



### **Mission and services:**

AltaMed is one of the largest independent Federally Qualified Health Centers in the United States and provides services in medically underserved areas. Their mission is to eliminate disparities in health care access and outcomes for Latino, multi-ethnic, and underserved communities in Southern California by providing superior quality health and human services through an integrated delivery system. AltaMed provides an array of comprehensive services, ranging from primary care to senior services, dental care, prenatal and infant care, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, youth services, substance abuse treatment, pharmacy services, and more.

### **Population served:**

AltaMed serves over 155,000 patients annually during 930,000 visits at their 43 sites in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Over 80% of their patients are Latino, 9% are white, 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% are African American.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

1,700 voter registrations.

## **AltaMed Health Services Corporation**

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

### **Background**

AltaMed has conducted various types of voter engagement for more than ten years. During the 2004 election cycle, AltaMed staff served as “registration captains” who managed voter registration tables at clinic sites. Employees were encouraged to register to vote and asked to register two additional friends or family members. In some cases, voter registration forms were also left in the waiting rooms of AltaMed primary clinic sites. Additionally, the Government Relations team conducted targeted outreach with eligible 18-year-olds by distributing voter registration forms to several high schools in the area. However, in 2012 AltaMed employed a more robust plan that involved extensive participation of staff, interns, and volunteers.

AltaMed’s 2012 voter engagement efforts began in mid- to late May, but most of the work was carried out toward the end of summer and into the fall. Kristie Hernández, Manager of Legislative and Advocacy Affairs in the Government Relations department, was the project leader for AltaMed’s voter engagement work, supervising two policy analysts as well as three interns. Together, this relatively small group of staff members was responsible for conducting voter engagement at AltaMed’s 43 sites and in the community. As project leader, Hernández was sensitive to staff burnout and only assigned each staff member to voter engagement duties a few days a week, allowing them time to focus on other work-related responsibilities. Most of the Government Relations team participated in the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/ County Clerk Deputy Voter Registration Training to ensure they were well prepared to register voters, answer questions, and engage AltaMed’s clients and community.

AltaMed’s voter engagement efforts had the support of their President and CEO, as well as senior and department leadership. This support was communicated organization-wide through an email message from the President that notified all employees of the voter engagement initiative. Hernández found the support of AltaMed’s leadership critical in persuading employees—who might otherwise be hesitant about voter engagement—to participate. This buy-in was key because the headquarters-based Government Relations staff were “visitors” at agency sites and needed the support of on-site staff to organize and execute their voter registration efforts.

AltaMed’s voter engagement work was supported and partially funded by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) through their LEAP Program. NCLR hosted trainings for its grantee organizations, which Hernández attended on behalf of AltaMed. She also participated in weekly check-in calls with an assigned NCLR staff member to discuss the organization’s progress. While NCLR’s support helped offset some of the staff time costs, the Government Relations budget provided substantial funding, dedicating six full-time staff to voter engagement for almost five months.

AltaMed also joined a local voter engagement coalition headed by the California Participation Project, which originally came together for National Voter Registration Day. Some of the other groups involved included the Los Angeles League of Women Voters, the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, and AARP. The connections AltaMed made through the coalition proved particularly useful on National Voter Registration Day and during the get-out-the-vote and voter education stages of their work.

## **What They Did**

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In order to avoid disrupting daily clinic operations, Government Relations staff were predominantly responsible for registering voters. They conducted voter registration:

- **With staff at the clinics:** Government Relations staff kicked off their voter engagement efforts by first approaching staff at the various clinic sites and registering eligible employees.
- **With patients at the clinics:** The bulk of AltaMed’s voter engagement was with patients at the health centers. A Government Relations staff member or intern would visit a designated site and talk to patients in the waiting rooms. This one-on-one approach proved to be very effective. Government Relations staff spread their efforts throughout AltaMed’s sites, visiting each one several times.

- **At AltaMed events:** The Government Relations team conducted voter registration at AltaMed-hosted events. For example, they staffed a table at an AltaMed-organized 5k run/walk at a local community college, distributed forms at the grand opening of a computer lab for their Youth Services department, and participated in a Mother's Day event for their teen pregnancy and parenting program. When the AltaMed marketing team went to local supermarkets to promote the agency's services, Government Relations staff accompanied them to register voters.
- **At partner sites and community events:** AltaMed conducted voter registration at a few local high schools, usually through a government or history class in which the teachers were already engaged. Because AltaMed has sites in Orange County, they were inspired to approach the Angels baseball stadium about registering voters outside the facility prior to home games. They contacted stadium representatives who supported the idea and provided a space for tabling, allowing AltaMed to talk with attendees.

Hernández let all staff know that the Government Relations team was available to answer any voting related questions, and a number of employees stopped by the office with voting and election inquiries. The team also left voter registration forms at the reception desk of the Corporate Headquarters—where the Government Relations department is housed—since it was convenient for them to collect completed forms and answer any questions. However, they opted not to leave forms at other locations because they did not want to burden clinic staff who were unfamiliar with the registration form and process and were not trained to answer related questions. This also ensured that every form they collected was filled out correctly.

Voter engagement efforts extended to all AltaMed sites in both Orange and Los Angeles Counties, and Government Relations staff visited each clinic at different times of the day and on different days of the week. While they made sure to visit each site a number of times, they also targeted clinics with more foot traffic. AltaMed's project leader was mindful of maintaining a presence at all clinics regardless of size, while also being strategic about where the team could make contact with the greatest number of potential voters.

AltaMed found that face-to-face contact with voters was the most productive method, but Hernández also learned that it can be draining to the staff making the contact. Thus, maintaining staff motivation was an important aspect of AltaMed's work. Hernández took an active role in managing voter engagement staff. She developed the plans and calendars that mapped out the team's work and designated sites. She also helped staff set goals for each day so that they had a concrete objective to work towards. These daily voter registration goals were adjusted based on the location, anticipated foot traffic, and other considerations.

Hernández monitored and frequently checked in with staff, providing motivation and encouragement as needed. Throughout the project, Hernández provided moral support to individuals while also motivating the team. She created a visual thermometer to illustrate how many registrations they had collected and placed it where everyone could see the group's progress and success. Ultimately, AltaMed doubled its initial goal of 850 registrations, registering over 1,700 people to vote.

This kind of sustained outreach would not have been possible if their department leadership had not given them specific permission to focus a vast majority of their time on voter engagement. Nevertheless, there were times they had to focus on other departmental goals and deadlines. Hernández noted that in a normal work schedule they would not have had this kind of substantial time to devote to voter engagement.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* After the registration deadline passed, AltaMed focused on distributing California Easy Voter Guides (in English, Spanish, and Chinese), which were particularly popular among employees. During those outings they also conducted educational outreach by reminding people about the election and passing out pledge cards to people who wanted an election reminder. Unlike the registration forms, they did leave some voter guides in reception areas since they required no explanation or assistance. AltaMed also called about 500 voters in the three weeks leading up to Election Day to offer election reminders and provide polling place information.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Look for internal opportunities.** AltaMed is a large organization with a variety of services and programming, including many community events. Voter engagement staff members were able to identify and take advantage of these opportunities to distribute voter registration forms and talk to program participants, staff, and stakeholders at these organized events.
- **Set reasonable expectations and monitor voter engagement staff.** AltaMed only had a handful of staff responsible for voter engagement at their 43 sites. This constant outreach work can be draining, so the project leader was careful about managing staff schedules to avoid burnout. She also provided support and encouragement—giving frequent updates on their overall progress, as well as helping individual staff members set manageable and reasonable daily goals.



- **Leadership buy-in helps prioritize voter engagement.** AltaMed designated a team of staff to conduct voter outreach by visiting their various locations. However, in order to be effective, these staff members needed to have the support of on-site employees. This was made possible through an email message from the President that notified all employees of the project and made it clear that the organization's leadership supported the work. Leadership support helped legitimize the initiative and ensured that voter engagement was possible at all locations.
  - **Find local partners and tap into local networks.** AltaMed found that the relationships and connections forged through a local voter engagement committee were particularly helpful during the get-out-the-vote and voter education phases of their work. For example, AARP provided physical copies of the Easy Voter Guides for AltaMed to distribute—an in-kind donation that reduced their voter education expenses. AltaMed also forged a new relationship with the Angels baseball stadium because they were willing to approach a new partner. Finding ways to collaborate with other community-based organizations can advance the work of all groups involved.
  - **Choose locations and partner sites strategically.** In addition to their clinic registration work, a number of groups also invited AltaMed to register voters at their sites. However, because Government Relations staff members were responsible for voter registration at all sites, choosing to register voters at one location meant that they were not registering voters at another. Thus, they had to strike a balance between offering voter registration at as many sites as possible while also maximizing efforts in high-population areas.
  - **Seek out staff training opportunities.** Successful voter engagement depends on the efforts of staff. As a result, staff training is critical to effective voter outreach. AltaMed's project leader attended a training offered by NCLR and sent her staff to the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk Deputy Voter Registration Training to help them feel more comfortable and confident when talking to potential voters about registering.
  - **Staff communication is key.** AltaMed is a single organization with 43 unique sites in two counties. Each site has its own individual culture, and understanding and respecting that culture proved critical for the Government Relations team in determining how to best approach staff and patients. The voter engagement team regularly discussed their experiences and were encouraged to share personal best practices with one another.
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### **Mission and services:**

Arizona Bridge to Independent Living (ABIL) provides programs and services designed to empower people with disabilities to live independent lifestyles within the community—including independent living, personal assistance, and employment services. ABIL's programs provide people with the skills and resources needed to thrive at home, at work, and within the community.

### **Population served:**

ABIL impacts over 3,700 lives each year and works with all ages and types of disabilities, from physical to vision, hearing, cognitive, emotional, and more.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

223 unique voter contacts: 12 voter registrations, 180 voter pledges, and 31 voter registrations and Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) sign ups.

# Arizona Bridge to Independent Living

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

## **Background**

Many of the programs and services Arizona Bridge to Independent Living offers are government funded. Without that funding some of ABIL's clients would no longer have access to services, and therefore the organization and its constituents have a vested interest in civic engagement. ABIL recognizes that voter participation is a powerful tool for influencing the funding and policy decisions that impact their programs, services, and community. Voter engagement also complements ABIL's mission of empowering people with disabilities to live independent, self-determined lifestyles within the community.

ABIL had done some voter engagement in the past, mostly get-out-the-vote efforts like phone banking and election reminders. However their work in 2012 was more comprehensive than anything they had done before. David Carey, ABIL's Advocacy Specialist and Track the Vote program coordinator, had weekly check-ins with staff from Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition (PAFCO), their primary voter engagement partner. PAFCO provided structure to the work and frequent opportunities to have questions answered. Working with the staff at PAFCO helped Carey tremendously with developing a structure and setting goals, both of which kept the program moving forward.

PAFCO organized regular meetings for agencies doing voter engagement, which served as important peer-learning opportunities for ABIL staff. ABIL utilized a number of PAFCO resources, including a weekly roadmap of voter engagement activities and suggestions, as well as training materials and manuals. For ABIL, working with PAFCO was a major benefit of the Track the Vote program because their expectations were clear, they answered questions quickly, and they provided information and resources for any issues that came up.

## What They Did

ABIL engaged their clients and community by:

- **Approaching clients during services:** ABIL staff members were instructed to offer voter registration, pledges, and PEVLs to clients. They also provided information on the upcoming election and various voter education events.
- **Involving staff at all sites:** All staff members were involved at some point with get-out-the-vote efforts and talking about voter registration during services. In addition to their main site, ABIL has several satellite offices and at one of those locations staff organized a competition among themselves to see who could register the most voters. The winner registered 13 people and won a \$40 prize. This was particularly exciting for Carey because staff were taking ownership of the program and getting creative about voter engagement.
- **Hosting community events:** For ABIL, hosting events was one of the most effective ways to engage their constituents. On National Voter Registration Day, ABIL invited various speakers to explain the propositions on the ballot as well as representatives from the secretary of state's office to talk about voting. Staff from the Maricopa County elections department brought a touch screen voting machine and demonstrated how to use it. This allowed voters to practice on the voting machine, see how it worked, and establish a level of comfort to ensure they would be confident when heading to the polls. Hosting guest speakers gave community members the opportunity to ask questions that mattered to them and helped to put voting in a broader social context. ABIL also talked about voter engagement at their annual Technology Exposition in early October, which 300 to 400 people attended.

Completed registration forms were collected from staff and mailed directly to local elections offices or given to PAFCO staff to submit.



Figure 1: Ed Myers from the Arizona Center for Disability Law tests out a voting machine at an ABIL event.

## Arizona Bridge to Independent Living

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*Continued*

Most of ABIL's voter contacts were pledge cards. Their constituency is already civically active because they understand the impact that voting can have at the policy level—which explains why much of the ABIL community was already registered to vote. Despite this high level of engagement, ABIL still encountered voter apathy.

With 223 contacts, ABIL fell slightly short of their voter contact goal of 250. ABIL viewed timing as the most significant challenge. Staff only began talking to voters in September, closer to the voter registration deadline than Carey would have liked, particularly because ABIL's front line staff are very busy and needed time to adjust to voter outreach. Carey believes that if they had started sooner, voter engagement could have been better integrated into the organization's ongoing work. Although an earlier start may have made things easier, working with PAFCO provided ABIL with a firm foundation for their efforts, helping them successfully reach out to hundreds of Arizona voters.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* ABIL used all of their communications channels to educate the community about the election: they ran a phone bank, used their Facebook page and other social media outlets to remind people about election deadlines, and published voter registration information in their newsletter and emails. ABIL also mailed out 2,200 get-out-the-vote reminders to members and employees. Finally, they distributed "Vote November 6" buttons and stickers and hung registration and election posters throughout all their facilities.

ABIL hosted a candidate forum for District 9, which was an extremely competitive district in 2012. Although both candidates were invited, only one was able to attend. Nevertheless, the event gave ABIL constituents the opportunity to meet (now) Congresswoman Sinema and better understand how her policies would impact the lives of people with disabilities. The forum was well attended and provided an opportunity to register voters, in addition to keeping them engaged and excited about voting.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Collaborate with local and state elections offices.** ABIL invited representatives from the county elections department to demonstrate voting equipment, describe the voting process, and help their constituents practice on voting machines. This type of interaction with elections offices can ease potential voter fears, while also adding credibility to nonprofit efforts.
  - **Take advantage of community events.** For ABIL, hosting events that brought community members to them was an effective voter engagement strategy. The Track the Vote program mini-grant allowed ABIL to host several events where they talked to their audience on a larger scale and in different contexts. Having guest speakers and hosting a candidate forum helped further engage the community by allowing attendees to ask questions about issues that mattered to them.
  - **Structure and planning are critical.** Working with PAFCO provided ABIL with the structure needed to help with goal setting, monitoring progress, and making adjustments—all of which kept the program on track. Carey checked in weekly with PAFCO staff to talk about the work and report ongoing results. He found that an external check-in and outside reporting added a layer of accountability and helped keep the program from floundering.
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### **Mission and services:**

The Association for Supportive Child Care (ASCC) works to enhance the quality of child care for children in Arizona. Through their 15 diverse programs, ASCC meets a unique set of needs within the child care and early education field—from accreditation programs to training and education, helping parents find child care, and linking employers with job seekers.

### **Population served:**

ASCC is a statewide agency that serves all income ranges and all demographics, including a substantial refugee population. They work with 18,500 child care providers and 18,000 parents, impacting 286,000 children annually.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

For Track the Vote: 5 voter registrations, 117 voter pledges, and 31 Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) sign ups. 2012 totals: 121 voter registrations and 175 voter pledges.

## **Association for Supportive Child Care**

TEMPE, ARIZONA

### **Background**

The Association for Supportive Child Care is engaged in communities throughout Arizona and understands that their organization can be a driving force to make change in the state. Because ASCC works hand-in-hand with both providers and families on a daily basis, voter engagement is a natural extension of their work. ASCC had done some prior voter engagement, but their 2012 work was more extensive than ever before.

Although ASCC had some election engagement experience, it was still fairly new for most staff. As a result some staff members were hesitant about the work and ASCC needed to ensure that they not only understood the role they could play, but also felt comfortable with what they could and could not do. ASCC partnered with Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition (PAFCO), and their trainings were critical to answering those questions and addressing staff concerns. Thus, despite some initial hesitancy, ASCC was able to push ahead.

Dawn Henry, Program Manager and ASCC's Track the Vote program lead, felt that the support from PAFCO made it much easier to stay engaged and to keep things moving forward, rather than letting voter engagement be pushed to the back burner. Frequent check-ins kept the work on pace and added an extra layer of responsibility. PAFCO also provided resources and expertise and was easily accessible when questions arose. In addition to distributing physical materials like posters and factsheets, PAFCO provided in-person trainings that ASCC found extremely valuable because they offered external validation about the importance of voter engagement.

ASCC's Executive Director was a driving force for participating in the Track the Vote program and encouraged staff participation. Because Henry was personally interested in voter engagement, she was asked to lead the program. Henry chaired a 12 person voter engagement committee which included representatives from each of ASCC's programs—as requested by the Executive Director. Attending PAFCO trainings and conferences kept committee members involved and motivated. It also gave them a chance to ask questions and bring back information to the entire group.

## **What They Did**

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ASCC staff attended the four PAFCO planning conferences which began in October 2011 and inspired some initial brainstorming. ASCC submitted their planning document to PAFCO in mid-April and became active in early summer—around May. However, most of the work was done towards the end of summer and the beginning of fall when voters tended to be more serious about the election. Each of ASCC's programs utilized different approaches to conduct voter outreach, including:

- **At the front office:** There was a voter registration station in the front office that included both paper forms and a laptop for online registration. Everyone who walked through the door was asked about registering to vote.
- **Staff-wide pledge collection:** Staff were encouraged to collect voter pledge cards. ASCC hosted an agency-wide “Pancakes for Pledges” breakfast toward the end of their campaign with the purpose of getting people to commit to voting. All program staff were asked to reach out to those they worked with and encouraged to bring in the pledges they collected. Staff that brought in pledges were entered into a drawing for an American Express gift card.
- **During off-site visits:** Staff took voter registration cards with them when they went to meet with child care providers, attend community events, oversee site visits, or conduct other outreach. In addition to registration forms, staff also distributed a list of frequently asked questions and information on how to find polling locations.
- **During trainings:** ASCC was able to effectively engage groups of child care providers during trainings. Once one or two attendees showed an interest in filling out a registration form, the entire group quickly became engaged.

Completed registration forms were mailed to election offices as soon as they were received.

Because each ASCC program is different, they all set individual voter engagement goals based on what they could do. Due to the nature of some programs, it was a challenge to incorporate voter engagement agency-wide, but ASCC worked to find ways to have all programs participate. For example, some of their assessment programs, like the Quality First Assessment Team, conduct environmental observations which prohibit staff from talking to potential voters during those visits. Because members of this team were unable to talk to clients, they instead approached their professional peers.

Across the various program approaches, having face-to-face interactions and someone to answer questions made it a friendly, non-intimidating process. When engaging voters, staff were challenged by some of the questions they faced. Due to voters' different backgrounds and personal histories, staff did not always have the correct answers on hand and there were a number of special cases that they did not feel fully equipped to address. But generally, they had helpful handouts and were able to get answers from PAFCO fairly quickly when needed.

For ASCC, it was generally easier to collect pledge cards although there was some initial hesitation because of confidentiality and questions about who would use the data and where it would go. However, once its purpose was explained, voters were comfortable completing a card. ASCC found that it was helpful to be prepared with another ask if people were already registered to vote.

ASCC still faced the everyday challenges of competing priorities and conflicts with regular work, but Henry found ways to keep staff motivated and engaged. She was surprised at the number of people in the nonprofit community that had not realized the importance of voter engagement to the work they do every day. Henry thought that the Track the Vote program was great for the organization: it was a learning experience for the entire ASCC team and there was more interest and engagement than ever before, which provided momentum for forwarding the work and expanding it in the future.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* Members of the voter engagement committee made phone calls and two to three emails were sent out. ASCC also designed their own postcard which had a blank section for voters to write down their reasons for voting—these postcards were mailed back to voters so they had a reminder along with the election date and other information. ASCC also used social media to remind the community about the election.



## Lessons Learned

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- **Work with staff to address concerns and ensure they have a clear understanding of voter engagement dos and don'ts.** Most of ASCC's staff were new to voter engagement and many were unsure about what was allowed. ASCC took advantage of PAFCO trainings not only to ensure that staff understood what they could and could not do, but also to ensure that they were comfortable with it. It is critical that the individuals reaching out to voters understand why it is important to the organization and are adequately prepared and supported. This kind of support and training can help ensure that voter engagement is a positive experience for everyone involved and can create a strong base for future work.
  - **Create a system for accountability.** For ASCC, frequent check-ins with their partner organization helped keep the work on track and added an extra layer of responsibility. This moved the program forward in addition to providing opportunities to ask questions and reevaluate progress. Having set goals and established check-ins—even if they are just internal—can help ensure that voter engagement efforts are on pace.
  - **Be creative.** Not all of ASCC's programs were a natural fit for voter registration. However, when the type of work prohibited client interaction, ASCC brainstormed other ways to make voter engagement part of their work by targeting a different group. Voter engagement will not fit in perfectly with every program but thinking creatively about ways to engage various constituents, communities, and networks can yield great results.
  - **Find a partner to assist with complex questions.** ASCC staff were equipped with handouts that addressed many frequently asked questions about voting and elections. Nevertheless, they still encountered a number of challenging questions due to different voter backgrounds and personal histories, and relied on PAFCO when they were unable to answer a question. Make sure staff are as prepared as possible with appropriate materials (and information relevant to any special populations you may serve) and identify a partner that can address more complex queries.
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### **Mission and services:**

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis serves those most in need. With the vision of “Poverty for No One; Opportunity for Everyone.” they work to solve poverty, create opportunity, and advocate for justice in the community. Their programs range from shelters and food pantries to child care and immigrant integration services. Catholic Charities has more than ten residential sites and several additional locations that house various programs.

### **Population served:**

Catholic Charities’ 550 employees serve 32,000 low-income individuals annually, regardless of faith.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

289 unique voter contacts: 267 voter registrations and 22 voter pledges.

## **Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis**

ST. PAUL/MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

### **Background**

Led by its Office for Social Justice, Catholic Charities has a long-standing commitment to advocacy on poverty issues that is part of the organizational culture. In fact, volunteers active with the Office for Social Justice who had prior voter registration experience initially suggested to staff the idea of promoting voter participation in the 2012 election.

Catholic Charities partnered with the Minnesota Participation Project (MPP), an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, that provided a stipend, initial training and materials, and ongoing support through bi-weekly calls and monthly in-person cohort meetings. During their Track the Vote program work, Catholic Charities also collaborated with the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless.

Catholic Charities’ Public Policy Organizer, Ana Ashby, coordinated their Track the Vote program efforts, though most of the work was carried out by volunteers from local Catholic parishes. Ashby devoted about 75% of her time during the fall to voter education and outreach, including their work against a proposed constitutional amendment that would impose new photo ID requirements at the polls. (Note: Since 501(c)(3) nonprofit work for or against a ballot measure is a form of lobbying not electioneering, it is a permissible activity for nonprofits.) Catholic Charities’ position against the constitutional amendment gave them a specific issue to tie to their voter outreach, which made participating in the election and its outcomes seem more relevant and tangible to the voters they contacted, their staff, and their volunteers.

## **What They Did**

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Volunteers worked with Ashby on voter registration and get-out-the-vote activities, including the creation of an initial plan for the months leading up to the election. Activities occurred at a dozen different service locations—nine of which were residential, ranging from emergency shelter to longer-term transitional housing. Registrations and pledges were collected through:

- **Kick-off events:** Each of the 12 participating sites held a small kick-off voter registration and election engagement event.
- **Ongoing group meetings at their sites:** Voter registration and education was generally offered during group meetings hosted at any Catholic Charities site, like bi-weekly parent meetings at their Northside Child Development Center. Initially, Catholic Charities wanted to limit the time for voter engagement to 10 or 15 minutes. However, clients were so engaged in the first discussion that it went well beyond the allotted time. These discussions covered the upcoming election, including what was on the ballot and how it might affect them, past voting experiences, and questions about the voting process.
- **Tabling:** Catholic Charities staff did limited tabling. One day they handed out voter registration information in the lobby of Higher Ground, a Catholic Charities building housing a shelter and affordable apartments. Since many residents of Higher Ground had recently moved, staff reminded residents to update their registration with the new address. People passing by were also asked if they were registered to vote.
- **Using Election Day Registration:** Because Minnesota allows voters to register or update their registration on Election Day a lot was done on November 6th to get out the vote. Catholic Charities took advantage of Election Day Registration to get additional people to the polls that were not yet registered. At some of the shelters, staff used Catholic Charities vans to provide rides to the polls.

Incorporating voter engagement into the regular meetings taking place at their service locations worked well. Catholic Charities found that this was easiest to do when they could identify a staff member at the site who was interested in voter outreach and could be a reliable contact throughout the fall election period.

## Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis

*Continued*

Ashby was able to spend the majority of her time on voter engagement efforts and benefitted from dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers who found their interactions with voters inspiring. However, she could have used additional internal staffing support since utilizing external volunteers required a great deal of coordination. While direct service staff were very supportive and interested in seeing clients register to vote, Ashby still felt the agency could have used more time to get buy-in from staff working at the residential and other sites.

Catholic Charities benefited from the ongoing support of both MPP and the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, including materials like one-page factsheets for volunteers on voter registration in Minnesota and how to take advantage of same-day registration.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* Catholic Charities conducted a great deal of additional voter education and get-out-the-vote work. They decided to take a position against a statewide ballot measure on new voter ID requirements because of its potential to disenfranchise many clients who are eligible voters but lack the required ID. Their advocacy around the ballot measure not only turned into great conversations with clients but also led to several house parties with Catholic Charities supporters and people beyond their immediate service audience.

Additionally, in the lead up to Election Day, Catholic Charities staff and volunteers called the voters they contacted as well as others they served. Callers had the Secretary of State website up and used its poll finder tool to help voters find their polling location. Some of their calls involved advocacy on the voter ID ballot measure. On Election Day, many sites provided rides to the polls for residents, including those who were unregistered or who needed to update their registration at the polls.

Finally, Catholic Charities conducted some voter education with staff. All Catholic Charities staff received a memo in August with information about the election and the importance of staying nonpartisan, and another memo near the election about Election Day Registration.



*Figure 2: Catholic Charities program participants pose in front of a voter mobilization poster.*

# Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis

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## Lessons Learned

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- **Allow space for organic conversations about voting and elections.** Catholic Charities initially sought to limit the time spent on voter registration during their groups and classes for clients. However, they found that clients were excited to talk about the election, ballot content, and voting issues. Research shows that people who discuss politics are more likely to vote, so providing an opportunity to discuss concrete election issues may help boost turnout. Let client interest dictate how much time you devote to voting discussions.
  - **Same-day registration increases accessibility.** Same-day registration allows voters to register or update their registration information before casting a ballot. This is particularly helpful for highly mobile populations, such as people currently experiencing homelessness, who sometimes find it difficult to vote because they lack a permanent address. Catholic Charities offered rides to the polls on Election Day where, because Minnesota offers same-day registration on Election Day, their clients could register and vote at the same time. If same-day registration is available in your community during early voting or on Election Day, encourage your clients and constituents to take advantage of the streamlined process.
  - **Tie voter engagement to an issue in your community.** Catholic Charities' work on a ballot measure increased interest in the election among volunteers, staff, and clients. Having a stake in the election not only motivated their constituents to vote, but also encouraged participation in the larger political process, such as the ballot measure campaign.
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## Crisis Assistance Ministry

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

### **Mission and services:**

Crisis Assistance Ministry's mission is to provide assistance and advocacy for people in crisis and help them toward self-sufficiency. They focus on preventing homelessness and preserving the dignity of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's working poor. Crisis Assistance Ministry is the lead agency for rent and utility bill assistance in Mecklenburg County and operates a furniture bank and "free" store where low-income residents can access free clothing, furniture, and household goods.

### **Population served:**

Crisis Assistance Ministry serves low-to moderate-income individuals and families in Mecklenburg County—about 52,000 individuals per year.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

For Track the Vote: 416 unique voter contacts: 313 voter registrations and 103 voter pledges. 2012 total: 815 voter contacts.

### **Background**

Crisis Assistance Ministry's voter engagement work began in 2011 with the decision to hire Daniel Valdez as Advocacy Program Manager. Although the organization had always done advocacy work, Valdez was their first full-time advocacy manager. His task was to build Crisis Assistance Ministry's advocacy efforts into a more robust, focused program. Valdez came to Crisis Assistance Ministry with extensive local political experience and a vision for how voter engagement could strengthen the agency's advocacy work: "I helped them to see how voter engagement translates into getting the things we need for the people we serve."

As the primary provider of financial assistance in North Carolina's largest city, Crisis Assistance Ministry has no shortage of clients waiting in its lobby to receive help. In the past it was a popular site for outside organizations to visit and register voters, but efforts lacked centralized oversight and coordination. Indeed, Crisis Assistance Ministry rarely had any advance notice about which organization was coming to register voters and never received information about the results.

Starting in January 2012, Valdez began planning for Crisis Assistance Ministry's first-ever agency-driven voter registration effort. With the understanding that incorporating voter engagement into day-to-day agency work requires a multi-year strategy, Valdez decided to start small. He focused on training a key group of staff to do voter registration: Benefit Bank counselors. To enhance organizational capacity beyond the Benefit Bank counselors, Valdez scheduled multiple voter registration drives in conjunction with partner organizations. Crisis Assistance Ministry's voter engagement efforts officially kicked off in June 2012.

Since 2012 was a foundation-laying year for the organization's voter engagement efforts, finding ways to measure success was important and participating in the Track the Vote program offered an easy way to determine outcomes.

## **What They Did**

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Crisis Assistance Ministry decided to improve upon their past voter engagement efforts by opting to work with only two on-site voter registration partners and expanding their work through new tactics. Specifically, they:

- **Coordinated on-site registration drives with partners:** Crisis Assistance Ministry partnered with the League of Women Voters of Mecklenburg County and the Center for Community Change to schedule registration drives from June to October. Instead of allowing outside organizations to dictate the registration schedule, Crisis Assistance Ministry made strategic decisions about when outside registration efforts would complement their own work and register a greater number of clients. The only challenge was sticking to the calendar that was developed in early 2012. As deadlines got closer, partner organizations were eager to add additional dates for registration drives, but doing so required an official administrative process. Valdez worked to manage the expectations of partner organizations, while ensuring that the relationships remained strong.
- **Integrated voter engagement into services:** When individuals seeking financial assistance come to Crisis Assistance Ministry, they are referred to a Housing and Financial Stability case manager. Given the high level of need in Mecklenburg County, clients may wait for hours to see a case manager. Benefit Bank counselors help to screen clients for social services eligibility while they are waiting to see a case manager. Starting in June 2012, Benefit Bank counselors began asking clients if they wanted to register to vote in addition to accessing other services.

The Benefit Bank counselors were highly motivated and took the lead in the agency's voter engagement work. Perhaps most importantly, voter engagement was an easy fit with their normal workload: the web-based Benefit Bank software the counselors use to determine eligibility for public benefits can also be used to register voters. Since an individual's personal information is stored in the system, the Benefit Bank counselors simply had to check a box to automatically populate the voter registration form with the correct information.

Benefit Bank counselors also used materials provided by Democracy North Carolina to educate voters about their rights. Valdez recounts, “We had one client who thought he couldn’t vote because he had a felony conviction. When our Benefit Bank counselors shared the materials with him and he found out he could vote, that really changed him.”

Because of their heavier workload, the Housing and Financial Stability case managers found it more challenging to integrate voter engagement into their day-to-day work. Valdez found that the key was keeping case managers motivated and providing ongoing training to help them feel comfortable answering client questions.

Crisis Assistance Ministry was very pleased with the outcome of their inaugural voter engagement effort, which exceeded their expectations. Initial concerns that staff lacked capacity to incorporate voter engagement into their regular workload were addressed by the strategic use of partners and focusing on integrating voter outreach into the work of a select group of staff.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* Crisis Assistance Ministry distributed a nonpartisan voter guide produced by League of Women Voters of Mecklenburg County and Democracy North Carolina to clients in their lobby. The Center for Community Change also conducted get-out-the-vote phone banking with voters that they registered at Crisis Assistance Ministry.



## Lessons Learned

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- **Start small.** Begin attempts to integrate voter engagement with a small, highly motivated group of staff—like the Crisis Assistance Ministry Benefit Bank counselors. Try to identify subsets of or individual staff who can easily incorporate voter engagement into their regular duties. This can help voter engagement take hold and pave the way for larger and more ambitious outreach in the future.
  - **Choose partners strategically.** Crisis Assistance Ministry chose to partner with organizations that addressed specific needs. The Center for Community Change and League of Women Voters provided volunteers for voter registration drives, while Democracy North Carolina and Nonprofit VOTE provided an array of information and materials.
  - **Give yourself plenty of time.** Valdez’s planning for 2012 voter engagement efforts began early in the year, so that Crisis Assistance Ministry was ready to hit the ground in June. “We had a really good calendar that allowed us to have a big chunk of time to do the work. I knew we were going to turn it up a notch the last two weeks, but we had to have a consistent engagement piece the whole time,” Valdez recalled.
  - **Make voter engagement a long-term, organizational goal.** Almost a year before the 2012 election, Crisis Assistance Ministry made incorporating voter engagement into all aspects of their face-to-face client interaction a long-term goal. Making voter engagement an organizational priority meant that it received the full-time, dedicated staffing and support from senior leadership required for success.
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### **Mission and services:**

EXCELth is a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides comprehensive, quality primary care services in underserved areas of New Orleans, in addition to mental health services in Baton Rouge. Their mission is to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, and provide excellence in community-based health care that increases access. EXCELth operates two fixed health centers, a family dental center, and several mobile units with the goal of being a “medical home” for patients, regardless of income or other barriers.

### **Population served:**

EXCELth’s patient population mirrors the general demographics of New Orleans which is 60% African American. Their typical patient is black, female, and between the ages of 20 and 50. EXCELth works with diverse and underserved communities: 10% of patients are Hispanic and they serve substantial Asian and Middle Eastern populations.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

275 unique voter contacts: 24 voter registrations and 251 voter pledges.

## **EXCELth, Incorporated**

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

### **Background**

While EXCELth’s social services staff frequently register voters during Medicaid enrollment, 2012 was the first time all clinic staff were engaged in voter outreach. Mary Crooks, EXCELth’s Community Relations/Special Project Coordinator and Track the Vote program lead, noted that EXCELth’s interest in voter engagement seems to be part of a growing trend among community health centers across the country as many have started conducting voter outreach. She added, “As a community health center we realize that people who are more involved in their community, who take the initiative to be involved in their community, and who are active participants are healthier.”

For EXCELth, participating in the Track the Vote program was particularly appealing because it provided hands-on training and support. EXCELth partnered with both the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO) and the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC). LANO staff checked in frequently to provide materials, as well as motivation and support for the program. Crooks attended trainings organized by both LANO and NACHC and sought out additional information at the parish voter registration office to clarify facts and prevent misinformation—particularly around ex-offender voting rights and voter ID—to ensure that EXCELth was providing proper and accurate assistance.

Crooks was especially interested in learning about what other organizations in the area were doing. LANO organized a meeting between EXCELth and the Micah Project for peer learning and to share strategies. Although the organizations do very different work, both were reaching out to voters and the opportunity to

share their ideas gave the two groups a better understanding of what was going on in the community. After learning about the Micah Project, Crooks was inspired to personally volunteer with them during one of their registration days. She also attended a NACHC training with representatives from other health centers where she was able to learn first-hand about the voter engagement efforts at other health centers, an experience that really “fired her up.”

## **What They Did**

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EXCELth staff were notified of the program via email and word of mouth so everyone was informed and engaged. Although not all staff members were talking to patients about voting, many wore “Vote November 6” buttons and posters were hung in exam rooms and administrative offices. Crooks provided informal training to staff and reviewed the pledge cards and voter registration forms with them so they were equipped to answer questions. EXCELth used a number of strategies to engage their community. They reached out to voters:

- **In waiting rooms:** Voter registration centers were set up in clinic waiting rooms and included pledge cards, voter registration forms, envelopes, and informational cards. Front desk staff were trained to register voters and person-to-person contact was critical to the program; but if staff members were busy with other duties the registration centers were designed to be navigated without assistance. These independent registration centers helped ease the burden on staff. EXCELth was also able to occasionally utilize an extern from Job Corps to help register voters.
- **With computer kiosks:** EXCELth placed computers in waiting rooms so that visitors could go online and register to vote or look up their polling places while they waited. However, Crooks found that unless there was someone showing patients what to do, the computer kiosks were generally left unused. She speculated that younger people have smart phones, and that older people might be intimidated by a computer in the waiting room—thus, paper forms and cards seemed more approachable and self-explanatory.
- **During services:** Health care providers were asked to discuss registration with patients, although it is unclear how many of them actually did. While there may have not been conversations in every exam room, there were many visual reminders like the posters.
- **At off-site events:** In August during National Health Center Week, EXCELth took advantage of several off-site health fair events to register voters.

Crooks picked up and returned registration forms to the parish offices. Visiting the various health centers to pick up and deliver cards every week allowed Crooks to check in with and motivate the staff. Crooks was impressed with how many questions patients were asking and how engaged front desk staff were in helping them find answers.

EXCELth's voter engagement started in July and everything was up and running by August in time for National Health Center Week. However, in August Hurricane Isaac shut down one of their sites—forcing them to work out of temporary units where they had to re-engage and restart some of their services, somewhat disrupting voter engagement there. Nevertheless, they continued to talk to voters about the election. Things were running smoothly again by September and then revved up into November.

Crooks thought the program would have benefited from having another staff person or volunteer who could have been at the clinics daily to further engage patients, even for just a few hours. She commended staff while noting that they also had to focus on their other job(s). She thought that additional staff could have been used to answer questions or to pick up and deliver cards and might have led to larger registration numbers. Nevertheless, Crooks was pleased that EXCELth was able to widely engage staff in the Track the Vote program. She was pleasantly surprised with how much staff engagement there was and that they wanted to participate and make a difference as individuals. When Crooks visited one site, for example, the staff recounted the story of registering a 70-year-old patient for the first time in his life.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* EXCELth hired a part-time staff person for the three days before Election Day to work outside one of the clinics to remind voters about the election, distribute amendment summaries, and answer questions—like looking up polling locations, polling hours, identification requirements, registration status, and more. EXCELth also added a polling place lookup tool to their website and distributed voter information cards provided by a local sorority.



Figure 3: An EXCELth community member fills out a voter pledge card.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Link voter engagement to your mission.** EXCELth is dedicated to improving the health of underserved communities by providing quality, affordable primary care services and including patients and their families as key players in their health care decisions. Recognizing that active community participants tend to be healthier, it is only natural that EXCELth is working to engage their patients in voting and elections.
- **Tap into larger networks.** At the NACHC conference, Crooks was able to see what other community health centers were doing and learn from their efforts. Crooks appreciated the opportunity to differentiate health center voter engagement from general nonprofit voter engagement, noting that “those health centers were doing wonderful things! That said to me that we could do this.” Seeing health centers across the country becoming more engaged in advocacy and voter outreach motivated Crooks, and she found that the work was easier when it was part of a larger movement and there were other organizations to talk to and learn from.
- **Staff buy-in is critical.** Mary Crooks noted that staff often see community relations as “Mary’s thing” but were more receptive to voter engagement. Although Crooks led the project, board members were engaged and there was staff-wide participation—both of which were encouraging and contributed to the success of the program. Crooks found that staff members were extremely dedicated to helping voters find the information they needed and that staff wanted to make a difference. Staff buy-in can help make voter engagement part of the organization’s culture.
- **Choose strategies that work for your organization.** EXCELth had the flexibility to execute the Track the Vote program the way they wanted. They were able to do voter engagement their way, which allowed for greater program ownership and the ability to decide what would (and would not) be effective in their communities.
- **Expect the unexpected, but do not let it stop you.** Hurricane Isaac was a particular challenge for EXCELth because it impacted their entire operation as well as their patients. The hurricane shut down one of EXCELth’s sites and forced them to work out of temporary units. They had to re-engage and restart some services, which disrupted voter engagement at that location. But that did not stop their voter registration activities and staff continued to talk about voting despite the issues they were facing.
- **Do not underestimate personal impact.** Participating in the Track the Vote program inspired Crooks to become more personally engaged. On the weekend she went out and volunteered with the Micah Project to register voters—something she would not have done had she not learned about their work through the Track the Vote program. She was also able to share her enthusiasm with friends, family, and the clinic staff.



### **Mission and services:**

Harbor Health Services, Inc. (HHSI) provides comprehensive health care in urban Boston neighborhoods, the South Shore, and Cape Cod, regardless of the ability to pay. In addition to primary care, Harbor Health offers community programs including the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program, an all-inclusive care for the elderly (PACE) program, a food pantry, dental care, behavioral health services, eye care, and substance abuse treatment.

### **Population served:**

Harbor Health Services serves about 40,000 people annually. They work with a diverse patient population and offer patient-centered, culturally competent care across the lifespan, from pediatrics to geriatrics.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

287 unique voter contacts: 132 voter registrations and 155 voter pledges.

## **Harbor Health Services, Inc.**

MATTAPAN, MASSACHUSETTS

### **Background**

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Harbor Health Services, Inc. has a long tradition of giving a voice to underserved communities. They own and operate what was the first community health center in the nation, the Geiger Gibson Community Health Center (formerly the Colombia Point Health Center), which started the community health center movement. Today there are over 1,250 community health centers across the country serving more than 20 million Americans. According to HHSI, “The community health center movement has been successful because of communities coming together, making their voices heard and advocating for the services they need.” It was in this tradition that HHSI started its 2012 voter engagement campaign to register and educate its staff and patient populations.

There were a few key factors that came together in 2012 for HHSI’s voter engagement work. First, Senior Policy Analyst, Kate Audette, had a strong commitment to encouraging HHSI patients to become more civically involved. Audette joined HHSI in 2010 after working as the Government Relations and Political Action Associate at the National Association of Social Workers Massachusetts Chapter. She has a strong personal and professional interest in making sure that people are educated about the electoral process and able to make their voices heard. She provided the skills and vision necessary for implementing a voter education and registration program in a large health care system, and her efforts were supported by Harbor Health’s consumer Board of Directors and several partner organizations.

At the same time, two of HHSI's partner organizations, the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) and the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers (MLCHC), both prioritized civic and voter engagement in their 2012 work plans. Both strongly encouraged their members to work on voter mobilization in the 2012 election.

In addition, HHSI partnered with MassVOTE and the Massachusetts League of Women Voters, organizations that helped HHSI carry out the work encouraged by NACHC and MLCHC. As part of the Track the Vote program, MassVOTE provided HHSI with two mini-grants totaling \$2,000 which paid for: postage on voter registration applications; supplies, including pens, clipboards, food, and promotional materials in several different languages, and; a few giveaways to drive participation. MassVOTE also offered trainings and technical assistance. The Massachusetts League of Women Voters provided volunteers to help with registration efforts in HHSI's Cape Cod service area.

## What They Did

Harbor Health's voter mobilization strategy focused on three main HHSI audiences: their patient population, the larger communities that they work within, and their consumer Board of Directors and staff. HHSI ran voter registration efforts at multiple locations and conducted outreach through their programs and services, including:

- **Community events:** To reach out to the larger community, Audette teamed up with the HHSI marketing team that is responsible for hosting and attending community events, such as Family Fun Day with Seniors and a community "beach party." At these events, HHSI marketing staff would either walk around with clipboards and voter registration information or set up a table with voting information and registration forms.
- **At their food pantry:** Community programs and client services staff, along with social work interns, set up an informational table at their food pantry where clients could register to vote or simply get information on the voting process.



Figure 4: A Harbor Health staff member explains the voter registration form (photo © Kelly Creedon).

- **Intake services:** Audette and HHSI attempted to integrate voter registration into their everyday patient intake process. Whenever a patient visits HHSI for health services they go through an intake process where they provide personal information like name, date of birth, insurance information, etc. Although HHSI attempted to ask patients if they would like to register to vote during the intake process, this approach had limited success.
- **Through PACE:** HHSI registered voters in its Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), where staff had regular access to and strong relationships with seniors and their families. Clients in PACE are frail elders and many have mobility or serious health issues that prevent them from voting in person, requiring absentee ballots instead. Additionally, some of the PACE seniors transition in and out of skilled nursing and assisted living facilities regularly, resulting in frequent address changes. In one instance the daughter of a woman who used the senior day center was in tears because she felt guilty that she would not have the time to take her disabled mother to the polls. Harbor Health ensured that the mother could participate in the election by helping her request an absentee ballot.
- **With their staff and board:** Harbor Health reserved the pledge cards solely for outreach to staff members, most of whom were already registered to vote. They also sent regular emails to their board and staff about the election.



Figure 5: A get-out-the-vote poster designed by Harbor Health in partnership with the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers.

Audette took primary responsibility for the important task of returning completed voter registration forms. After each event, she required that staff return the registration forms to her that day. Once she collected the forms she hand delivered them to the post office, and in some cases, took them directly to the city election department.

Harbor Health attributes their successful voter registration efforts to several factors. First, strong support from partner organizations enabled them to take on the program without having to hire extra staff. The Massachusetts League of Women Voters provided much needed volunteer support by helping collect voter registration forms on National Voter Registration Day, when HHSI ran drives at six separate sites. Second, Harbor Health felt that their reputation as a trusted community member helped open the door to conversations with their patients about voting. This trust was an asset in the voter registration process and HHSI believes that patients were more willing to provide their staff with the personal information required to register than they would have been with a third party. This was especially true for their Elder Service Program where they see patients daily in the same setting.



*Additional Voter Engagement:* In addition to voter registration drives, HHSI undertook several other voter education projects. In partnership with the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers, HHSI developed a marketing campaign to appeal to potential voters who frequent the pediatrics department. They developed signage and posters in English and Spanish that provided reasons to vote. For example, one poster depicted a child and read, “I can’t vote but you can vote for me.” Another featured pregnant women of different backgrounds and read, “I’m voting for my unborn child and their future.” Harbor Health hung these posters and signage in the pediatrics department and other targeted areas to encourage parents and caregivers to vote.

Harbor Health also utilized their social media presence to talk about the election. They used Facebook and Twitter status updates to promote voting and occasionally posted videos about voting on their website. They also blogged about their efforts on Harbor’s Edge Blog and included information on how to register to vote on their website. For their get-out-the-vote efforts, they utilized their patient portal (a secure website that allows patients to communicate with their doctor, view medical records, schedule appointments, etc.) to send out reminder messages to patients a week before the election and the day before the election, including information on poll locations and ballot choices.

Harbor Health also provided support to ensure that voters received registration confirmation or their absentee ballots. For example, when one senior did not receive her mail-in ballot for the 2012 primary, she turned to Audette for help. Audette called the Braintree Town Clerk on the woman’s behalf and found that the town’s records showed that they had sent out the ballot, though she had never received it. Once they determined what happened, the Town Clerk was able to re-send the ballot so that the senior was able to cast her vote.

Finally, Harbor Health hosted a legislative breakfast for their Women Infants and Children (WIC) program where Congressman Michael Capuano gave the keynote. The breakfast also included a voter registration drive. (This breakfast was part of HHSI’s ongoing civic engagement initiative with WIC participants, not officially part of the Track the Vote program.)

## **Lessons Learned**

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- **Personal contact is key.** For HHSI patients that were eligible to vote, the personal voter outreach efforts that occurred in waiting rooms were especially helpful. Patients often told HHSI staff things such as, “Thank you for doing this, I knew I had to take care of this but didn’t know where to go,” or “I love that you are doing this here, it saved me a trip.” People found it convenient and helpful especially when they were sitting waiting to be seen. Many HHSI patients liked chatting about the ballot questions, learning about candidates, and getting information that they could use to feel empowered when they voted.
  - **Timing matters, especially for young people.** HHSI found that for younger people, the voter registration drives that took place closer to the election were more successful than those they held earlier in the year. Interest among young voters peaked as the election drew near, but they found that elderly people were receptive as early as August because they were already motivated voters.
  - **Partners can provide valuable resources.** Partner organizations provided funding, training, and volunteers to help HHSI achieve their voter engagement goals. Groups like the Massachusetts League of Women Voters provided much needed temporary staffing: Their volunteers collected voter registration forms on National Voter Registration Day, when HHSI ran drives at six separate sites.
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### **Mission and services:**

The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) works to improve the lives of Portuguese-speaking individuals and families in Massachusetts with the goal of helping them become contributing, active participants in American society while maintaining a strong ethnic identity and sense of community. MAPS is a multi-service health and social service organization that provides a variety of services to increase access and remove barriers to health, education, and social services through direct service, advocacy, leadership, and community development.

### **Population served:**

MAPS works out of six offices in the Metro West, Boston, and Lowell areas serving Brazilian, Portuguese, Cape Verdean, and other Portuguese-speaking communities. In 2012, they served over 6,500 individuals.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

330 unique voter contacts: 45 voter registrations and 285 voter pledges.

# **Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers**

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

## **Background**

The Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers conducts voter engagement on a year-round basis through their Citizenship Assistance services, which includes citizenship classes and individual citizenship application assistance. This involves both orienting clients around voting and civic engagement, as well as providing registration assistance. During major election cycles, MAPS often holds or collaborates with partners around voter registration drives. MAPS is a member of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition and has participated in their registration and outreach work.

Voter outreach and registration relates closely to the mission and goals of MAPS, and are efforts that many staff and board members often volunteer to help with. MAPS has worked with MassVOTE for a number of years, including partnering during the 2010 Census. This relationship made it easy for MassVOTE to approach MAPS about participating in the Track the Vote program. MAPS had complete support from their leadership, and Deolinda Daveiga, the Administrative Manager, was assigned to lead the project by the Executive Director. Daveiga had done similar work in the past so between her individual attributes, skill set, and availability, she was tapped to lead the program. MAPS' participation in the Track the Vote program was discussed with staff during meetings and in emails.

# Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers

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## What They Did

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MAPS started their Track the Vote program efforts in July, but the majority of outreach was done in September and October. Although MAPS started in the summer, Daveiga thought they could have used additional time. Daveiga devoted two to three hours each week to voter engagement in August, but in September and October it was closer to two to three hours every day, in addition to her weekend work which included voter outreach in Portuguese-speaking communities. MAPS utilized a number of strategies including:

- **Community outreach:** MAPS had preexisting relationships with a number of churches, social clubs, and businesses in the Portuguese-speaking communities they serve. Daveiga leveraged these relationships to conduct voter outreach, a strategy that seemed to be particularly effective. For example, after contacting a church for approval, she would distribute information to parishioners and assist them with registering or signing a pledge card after services. Daveiga conducted similar voter education and registration outreach at local businesses.
- **At the front desk:** Staff working the front desk at MAPS offices had registration forms and pledge cards and asked people who came in about registering to vote.
- **During services:** Immigrant Integration Services case managers provide immigration and citizenship assistance, including helping clients find affordable housing, employment, and health care. They routinely help people fill out voter registration forms. While all case managers were told about the Track the Vote program, they were nevertheless given discretion to decide if it was appropriate to bring up with their clients. In addition to contacting clients through Immigrant Integration Services, MAPS also offered voter registration at their Senior Center and during other class offerings.
- **At events:** MAPS took advantage of both internal and external events to engage voters. MAPS made forms and information available at the Brazilian Independence Day Festival in Boston in September but found that it was not a particularly effective method of reaching large numbers of people. They speculated that attendees were there to have fun and were not interested in talking about voter registration. However, they also brought forms to their annual meeting, where people were more receptive to the topic. Lastly, on National Voter Registration Day, MassVOTE provided volunteers to register voters at MAPS.

Completed registration forms were collected at each site and then sent to Daveiga who returned them in batches to the appropriate city or town elections office.

## Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers

*Continued*

Although MAPS collected more pledges than registrations, they nevertheless found it more difficult to convince voters to sign pledges. People were wary of potential junk mail, were too busy to fill one out, or did not want to provide their personal information. Still, community interest was heightened because Massachusetts had a high-interest election with multiple ballot issues and a high profile senate race—as well as the presidential contest.

Staffing their voter engagement efforts presented a capacity challenge: MAPS has a small administrative staff and lacked the funds to hire additional help for voter engagement. They did utilize volunteers, but it was challenging because there was less accountability than with paid staff. MAPS could have benefited from more consistent volunteer staffing, such as a high quality intern. Instead, voter engagement was frequently added to the existing staff workload and although it was something most staff were happy to do, they still had to balance it with other projects. Simply adding voter engagement to the regular workload caused something of a time and staff crunch, which resulted in some staff resistance to having additional tasks added. Nevertheless, everyone pitched in to raise awareness and Daveiga's efforts were effective.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* MAPS has a Rock the Vote registration tool on their website year-round to encourage voter registration and participation. In the lead up to the November 2012 election, MAPS posted deadlines and information on their website and social media sites, placed signs in their windows, and promoted the election during meetings and community events. Daveiga also worked with MassVOTE which did some follow up phone calls to individuals reached through the Track the Vote program.

MAPS distributed a number of press releases in both English and Portuguese to mainstream and Portuguese-language newspapers, radio stations, and web-based media outlets. They highlighted different ways community members could seek voter registration assistance from MAPS, the importance of voting, and key dates and election information.

MAPS also worked with the Portuguese American Citizenship Project—an organization whose goal is to encourage Portuguese Americans to become U.S. citizens, register to vote, and vote. The Portuguese American Citizenship project provided funding to mail postcards with information on registering and voting to a targeted list of 25,000 voters in Suffolk and Middlesex counties with Portuguese surnames.

# Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers

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*Continued*

## Lessons Learned

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- **Know your population.** MAPS serves a fair number of noncitizen clients, so they wanted to be sensitive about eligibility issues. As a result MAPS let each staff member decide if and when it was appropriate to talk to their particular clients about voter registration and the 2012 election.
  - **Identify appropriate staff.** MAPS selected Deolinda Daveiga to head up the project because she had done similar work in the past and is an effective manager. MAPS ensured the program's success by identifying someone whose personality and work ethic was well-suited to voter engagement work.
  - **Coordinate closely with partners and know what is happening in the community.** In 2012, MAPS observed some overlap with community voter engagement efforts, particularly in certain communities and locations. This concentration of outreach made their work feel somewhat duplicative because many of the people they approached had already been contacted. By actively communicating with partners and other community groups, organizations can make strategic decisions about where to focus their voter outreach work.
  - **It is never too early to start (planning).** Even though MAPS got started in July, they still thought that they could have used more time. Making plans in advance allows organizations to make adjustments, develop systems, and be prepared before things kick into high gear—even if the actual work has not started yet.
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### **Mission and services:**

Neighborhood Service Organization (NSO) is a nonprofit human service organization that works with populations who are often turned away from other organizations. They provide diverse services, from basic needs like food vouchers and assistance with utilities and clothing, to peer-to-peer support around drugs and violence, homeless services, and continuing education for human service professionals.

### **Population served:**

NSO works with vulnerable neighbors, including the homeless, the elderly, children and adults with developmental disabilities, families struggling with addiction and mental illness, people contemplating suicide, as well as young people preparing for success in school or in life. They serve 100,000 people each year in their homes or at their five locations.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

239 unique voter contacts: 212 voter registrations and 27 voter pledges.

## **Neighborhood Service Organization**

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

### **Background**

NSO is a diverse human service agency that reaches out to people, empowering them to improve their lives—and supporting voter and civic engagement is part of that. They believe that voter education and coordinated voter engagement can help people have their voices heard. Moreover, NSO's President/CEO believes strongly that voting is a responsibility and that NSO has a duty to spread the word among their clients. While NSO has done some voter engagement work in several past elections, 2012 was definitely a growing year.

Patricia Verrill, NSO's Training Director, headed up their Track the Vote program work and collaborated with staff leads in various units. She distributed step-by-step instructions to all staff and was the point person for training and orienting the volunteers who conducted voter outreach. Verrill attended Nonprofit VOTE webinars and shared the takeaways with the staff volunteering on the project.

NSO worked with the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) and typically had check-ins with them every two weeks. Two days before the registration deadline the Secretary of State's office refused some of the completed forms NSO had collected, and MNA was able to step in, report the activity, and deliver them to another site. MNA was there in NSO's time of need and was able to answer questions throughout the process.



*Figure 6: A Neighborhood Service Organization volunteer staffs a voter registration table.*

## What They Did

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NSO kicked off their voter engagement efforts in the middle of September. When they were still gearing up in August, the local NAACP staffed a voter registration table during their community resource festival. NSO was also listed as a voter registration site through a local radio station. NSO's Track the Vote program strategies included outreach:

- **During services:** Senior staff supported the effort by hosting registration at their divisions or by including registration in their department's daily processes. The divisions which serve youth, people currently experiencing homelessness, and developmentally disabled children and their families included the question, "Are you registered to vote?" in their usual intake process in an effort to reach more individuals.
- **On-site:** NSO set up tables at four different sites to register voters, outside of regular service provision. They also used this as an opportunity to answer general questions and help people find their polling locations. On National Voter Registration Day they added decorations and refreshments to these registration efforts.
- **At a new transitional housing unit:** NSO recently purchased and converted a building in Detroit to house 155 people, many formerly homeless individuals. With the goal of helping them become more self-sufficient members of the community, NSO stressed voting as part of their efforts to help new residents settle into the building. In addition to registering residents, NSO helped them find their polling location and did more extensive voter education (and encouragement) than with their other client groups. On Election Day they provided transportation to and from the polls and hosted a celebration at the building.

The point person at each site delivered completed registration cards to Verrill's location and she returned the forms to the appropriate elections office.

NSO did not collect many pledge cards—people were wary of sharing their personal information and did not want to be called or have people knocking on their door. On the other hand, voter registration seemed to be a fairly easy ask. When people saw the signage many stopped and registered without being first approached. Verrill thought the face-to-face aspect of their work was critical because staff needed to be sensitive in how they approached constituents. Outreach was often more than just registration: It included information on ballot issues and clarification around the rights of ex-offenders and other voting myths.

Because much of NSO's work is based on a "fee for service" model where the organization is reimbursed, it was somewhat difficult to get employees to volunteer to staff the registration tables or do other non-paid



# Neighborhood Service Organization

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voter engagement work. Verrill thought a superior staffing model for NSO would be to pull from a pool of volunteers from the community or partner organizations that could focus solely on voter outreach work without distractions or competing priorities.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* NSO organized rides to the polls from two of their sites in Wayne County. They set up a system beforehand and let people know when vehicles were heading to specific polling sites so that NSO could consolidate trips and reduce travel time for voters. NSO was particularly proud of this program, as it worked out quite well and was very organized.

Voter education was a key piece of NSO's efforts—Verrill distributed sample ballots and proposal summary sheets that voters could use to mark their decisions and take with them to the polls. In October, NSO conducted a series of voter education sessions throughout the community targeting different groups. For example, one session for 17-year-olds discussed the history of voting and what to expect on the ballot.

NSO also sent out voter information to their staff of more than 300 and asked them to forward it to friends and family.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Consider your constituents.** The face-to-face aspect of the project was critical: NSO felt that with their population it was particularly important to approach voter engagement in just the right way, which included not only helping voters fill out the registration form, but also describing what was on the ballot.
- **Voter engagement is more than registration.** Voter education is just as critical. It gives voters confidence when they head to the polls. NSO's voter education received extensive and positive feedback from community members. They identified clarity around ballot measures, explanations of the rights of ex-offenders, and information on other voting misconceptions as particularly valuable.
- **Have someone to turn to.** When NSO had issues with the secretary of state's office, their state partner, the Michigan Nonprofit Association, was able to intervene and help them navigate and work through the problem. Having a partner with voting and election experience can help address any problems or questions that may arise.
- **Consider alternative staffing arrangements.** Because NSO works off of a "fee for service" model, it was hard to pull staff away from their primary role to staff a registration table. However, because the tables were separate from services, NSO could have used volunteers or other community members—rather than NSO staff—to engage and register voters.



### **Mission and services:**

The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH) is a regional advocacy organization. Their mission is to organize and empower homeless and at-risk men, women, and children to break the cycle of poverty through public education, advocacy, and the creation of nurturing environments.

### **Population served:**

NEOCH serves people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Their client population is largely African American (78%), extremely low income (97%), and includes a substantial number of persons with disabilities (30%).

### **Number of voter contacts:**

For Track the Vote: 251 voter registrations. 2012 total: 618 voter registrations.

## **Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless**

CLEVELAND, OHIO

### **Background**

The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless has worked for decades to protect access to the ballot box for homeless people and went into the 2012 election with a clear goal: Register everyone who enters a shelter or permanent supportive housing in Cuyahoga County to vote. NEOCH believes that participation in the democratic process is critical for those struggling to find a home and over the years they have worked closely with county officials to ensure that homeless residents have access to the polls. Today, Cuyahoga County is one of only a few communities in the United States that require each publicly funded homeless shelter to submit a voter registration plan in order to receive county funding.

NEOCH's 2012 efforts were led by Brian Davis, who is a Community Organizer for NEOCH and the chair of the Civil Rights Commission for the National Coalition for the Homeless. Davis brought a wealth of experience and energy to NEOCH's efforts and worked closely with NEOCH volunteers and several partner organizations. They worked with various partners in the community, including the Coalition for Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO), the County Board of Elections, and Greater Cleveland Congregations.



*Figure 7: Attendees at a vote rally outside the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections office.*

## What They Did

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NEOCH waited until the summer to kick off their voter registration efforts. This was a strategic decision based on when the highly mobile populations they serve would likely be residing at their current address during early voting and on Election Day. Once they started, NEOCH focused on:

- **Registering at shelters during intake:** They provided training and materials for staff at all homeless shelters in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County. NEOCH ensured all shelters had the forms to register clients during intake services, picked up completed registration forms every Friday, and delivered the forms to the county board of elections.
- **Targeting permanent supportive housing:** Going beyond emergency shelters, NEOCH volunteers and staff approached the resident councils of supportive housing buildings and talked about the importance of voting. NEOCH sought to register 100% of the residents at seven permanent supportive housing buildings and succeeded at three of the buildings. The other four successfully registered at least 90% of eligible residents.
- **Facilitating registration during early voting:** NEOCH focused their efforts on “Golden Week,” a week just before the voter registration deadline when people can register to vote and cast an absentee ballot at the same time. They found that this voting process reduced barriers to voting for their homeless clients because they could both correct residency information on the registration form and vote at the same time.

Building on their experience registering voters in prior elections, NEOCH customized their registration process based on shelter type. They chose to register clients in transitional facilities using each location’s address because residents would be living there for at least the next four months. On the other hand, clients entering emergency shelters were registered at one of three different community mailing addresses where NEOCH clients can receive mail.

Several factors drove the program’s success. One key factor for NEOCH was having a solid contact at each shelter or subsidized housing facility that they worked with. Focusing on early voting, in particular the “Golden Week” when people could register and vote at the same time, was also critical since it reduced many of the unique barriers that people currently experiencing homelessness face when voting. This flexible process allowed the extra time necessary to verify voting eligibility through alternative documents—generally something other than a driver’s license or property bill.

## Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless

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Despite their prior experiences, NEOCH did face some challenges in registering homeless clients during the intake process. In the past, each shelter was responsible for registering their clients, but in 2012 the county transitioned to a central processing system, moving away from having shelter staff conduct intake (and thus registration). The central processing staff were more focused on client intake and less invested in the voter registration piece.

Another challenge that NEOCH faced was figuring out how to position their work so it was not duplicative with competing voter registration groups like campaigns, parties, and other nonpartisan efforts. Because NEOCH works in a battleground state, there were a number of other groups trying to register their client population and voters were often asked to register multiple times by multiple groups.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* NEOCH provided rides to the polls for 220 people during early voting and for 37 people on Election Day. They set and advertised different pick up times for the shelters and residences. Unfortunately the vans—provided by the Greater Cleveland Congregations—lacked wheelchair lifts which meant that they were unable to transport some senior building residents to the polls.

NEOCH sent weekly updates to their volunteers and staff contacts at the shelters and permanent supportive housing buildings. They also had a special election section on their website and a blog dedicated to homeless voting. Efforts to do nonpartisan education on candidates within the shelters had more limited success given competing priorities.

NEOCH was actively involved in voting rights advocacy. NEOCH joined a lawsuit against the state of Ohio regarding voter ID, seeking to limit the impact on voters who lack identification, such as people currently experiencing homelessness. Davis notes that, “Without us suing to protect those without ID, all the other [voting] activities [we engage in] would not matter.” NEOCH also led and joined coalitions to protect the fair opportunity to vote, including opposing cutbacks on early voting and restrictions on voter registration and improving provisional voting.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Experience counts, but everyone has to start somewhere.** NEOCH has been working to register homeless voters for over a decade and has learned a great deal in that time. Through the years, NEOCH has had the opportunity to try different strategies and tactics gradually improving their methods and refining their approach. Moreover, knowing the state voting laws and the local landscape of services for the homeless has helped NEOCH craft effective voter registration strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of their clients.
  - **Take advantage of early voting.** Early voting is often more convenient for all voters, but NEOCH found it was especially helpful in eliminating barriers to homeless voting. Voting on Election Day can be a challenge for people currently experiencing homelessness since they may be unsure of their polling location or lack the typical “proof of residency” documents required for voting, such as a driver’s license or property bills. By voting early there is more time to verify a person’s eligibility with alternate forms of identification. Getting to a polling place is often easier during early voting since you can often vote at any designated voting site within the city or county, making it more accessible for voters without reliable transportation.
  - **Work with your County Board of Elections.** The Cuyahoga County Board of Elections was enormously helpful in training shelter staff and helping the homeless population vote early. Through working with NEOCH, they have become a reliable ally and can ensure that all of their early voting staff are well trained in how to help the homeless and those in transitional housing vote.
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### **Mission and services:**

Open Access Connections (OAC) facilitates communication services to encourage self-determination and stronger community connections for people in need. A foundation of OAC's work is active involvement of their participants and enabling clients to take control of their own lives. OAC provides communications technology like voice mail and cell phones so their participants can access housing, employment, health care, safety resources, and more.

### **Population served:**

OAC serves no- or very low-income Minnesotans. They provide free voice mail to around 4,600 people annually and have about 2,200 people on their voice mail system at any given time. About 80% of individuals served are unemployed and close to 80% are homeless. Fifty-two percent are African American, 20% are white, 9% are Native American, 4% are Hispanic, 1% are Asian American, and 5% are multi-cultural. Over 90% of clients live in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

314 unique voter contacts: 232 voter registrations and 82 voter pledges.

## **Open Access Connections**

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

### **Background**

For OAC, voter engagement is directly tied to its mission of promoting self-sufficiency and empowering clients. OAC first started doing voter engagement work in 2004 and has participated in some way in every major election since then. However, finding dedicated funding to do voter engagement work has been an ongoing challenge for the group but with the Track the Vote program mini-grant, OAC was able to significantly expand their voter engagement work in 2012.

In Minnesota, the November 2012 ballot included a constitutional amendment that would have required all voters to show photo identification at the polls. The issue was of special concern to OAC, since the majority of their clients are unlikely to have photo identification or the documents required to get one. OAC decided to take a formal position against the ballot measure and incorporated education about the amendment and its potential impact on clients into their voter engagement work. (Since ballot measures are a form of direct lawmaking by voters, taking a position for or against one is a form of lobbying permissible for 501(c)(3) nonprofits, and is not considered electioneering.)

OAC partnered with the Minnesota Participation Project (MPP), an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, to train their staff and clients in voter registration, pre-registration, and voter eligibility. They also invited speakers from Take Action Minnesota and Common Cause to speak to staff and clients about the constitutional amendment and voting rights.

## What They Did

Their main program is a free voice mail system, which provides a phone number that clients can put on job and housing applications, medical forms, or give to friends and family. OAC also operates a shelter hotline that provides information about area shelters and transitional programs, a netbook lending library (as an alternative to traditional computer labs), a Grassroots Outreach program, and a 50+ Generation group (composed of older adults who are homeless or recently housed).

OAC's primary tactic was to involve participants in the Grassroots Outreach program and 50+ Generation group in voter engagement, motivating them to reach out to their peers in the community—generally other homeless and very low-income individuals. Mark Erpelding, Project Specialist and OAC's staff lead for the Track the Vote program, saw his role as that of a facilitator, helping educate specific individuals and then letting them do the work. Specifically, OAC:

- **Added voter engagement to the Grassroots Outreach team's regular work:** Through its successful Grassroots Outreach program, OAC trains active voice mail users to distribute voice mail services at targeted social service locations in the Twin Cities. All outreach workers receive a small stipend for their work and are community leaders that have experienced homelessness or are currently homeless. Beginning in August, outreach workers distributed information on voting and the constitutional amendment during every outreach shift (at least 3 per week) and to people they came into contact with on the streets.
- **Involved 50+ Generation group in voter engagement:** OAC's 50+ Generation group is a member-led group of older OAC participants that advocate for the needs of low-income older adults and assist each other with accessing needed services. The group has a roster of 100 members and regular attendance of around 40 people at their monthly meetings. 50+ Group members distributed information about voting at their apartment buildings and also joined outreach workers in street-based voter engagement on National Voter Registration Day and on Election Day.

There were also some members of the 50+ Generation group that voted for the first time in the 2012 election, suggesting decades of political disengagement and apathy. According to Erpelding, "A lot of that was because their peers were doing it, and because we made every attempt to make it easy for them to get involved and vote."

At all of the 50+ group meetings, OAC passed out small giveaways that helped strengthen the members' connection and commitment to the work. For OAC Executive Director Marcie Shapiro this is a fundamental tenet of their work with this highly marginalized group:

One of the things we do with our 50+ group is to really give them something. They live a life where they don't have anything, so giving them something really matters. One meeting we'd have stickers, another meeting we'd have buttons [that said 'Vote No on Voter ID'], then we had these really fancy postcards. A lot of the people who got a button wore it very proudly, like 'I'm part of this group, I'm part of this issue.' The button was much more important to them than the [partisan] campaign buttons. Some people are still wearing them.

OAC found that adding voter engagement to the Grassroots Outreach team's regular workload was their strongest strategy. Pairing it with the team's normal voice mail outreach was a good, natural fit that resulted in a robust, positive response from the homeless and low-income Twin Cities community. Shapiro recounts an incident she found particularly inspiring, "One of the places we do outreach is in a shelter in Minneapolis. It's one of the hardest hit shelters, serving the neediest of the needy. At one point we had eight people signing up to register to vote at once! It really motivated me and renewed my faith in democracy that these folks wanted to be heard."

Moreover, it had a transformative effect on the individuals doing the work. Shapiro adds, "Doing voter engagement led to a great change with the outreach workers. They really took it to heart. They were really motivated, really excited to reach out to their peers and get them registered to vote."

After the election, OAC took all the outreach workers and some of the 50+ Generation group members out to lunch and gave them a framed certificate as a thank you for their work. This was not only a way to recognize their good work, but also a way to encourage their future participation in voter engagement efforts.

OAC's primary capacity challenge was a lack of funding for voter engagement. Even with the mini-grant, OAC still had to piece together staff time to carry out the work. OAC has only one full-time staff person, a Jesuit volunteer who started working with them in August 2012, and five part-time staff. With more staff time to dedicate to voter engagement, OAC is confident they could have doubled the number of voter contacts.



## Open Access Connections

*Continued*

*Additional Voter Engagement:* OAC's voice mail system allows them to leave a "broadcast" message for all voice mail participants and they often use this feature to publicize available resources, upcoming events, or important issues to participants. The system even allows participants to respond to the message with follow-up questions, if needed. For their voter engagement work, OAC sent eight broadcast messages to current voice mail participants about voting deadlines, where to get a registration form, the constitutional amendment, election laws, felon re-enfranchisement, and the importance of getting out the vote.

OAC also co-sponsored and distributed about 500 voter guides produced by the Main Street Project, and proofread the voter guide prior to printing to make sure that the language was accessible to their participants.

To assist their clients with Election Day Registration, OAC provided their clients with zero-balance bills for the voice mail service, which the Minnesota Secretary of State approved in 2006 as an acceptable form of identification.

Finally, outreach workers went to ten different shelter locations the day before the election and on Election Day to get out the vote and urge people to vote "no" on the constitutional amendment. According to Shapiro, "On the day before the election and on Election Day, the outreach team worked nonstop. With the group of folks we're talking about [contacting] it's best to do the outreach right before the event." OAC also made get-out-the-vote calls to around 50 people who signed voter pledge cards.



Figure 8: Open Access Connections outreach workers staff a voter registration table.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Small amounts of dedicated funding can yield substantial results.** OAC had voter engagement experience, a strong commitment, and the relationships needed to connect with a notoriously difficult-to-reach population. But without the \$950 mini-grant through the Track the Vote program they would not have had the capacity to do the work. Even a small amount of money in the hands of the right organization can have a major impact.
  - **Addressing ballot content energizes clients.** Instead of shying away from a sensitive issue of importance to their participants, OAC opted to take a position against the November 2012 constitutional amendment that would require voters to provide photo identification. Doing so gave clients a real-time example of how voting impacts their lives and brought a sense of immediate purpose to OAC's voter engagement work.
  - **Peer outreach breaks through voter apathy.** Voter apathy was the main challenge that OAC faced in their outreach to homeless and low-income residents. For Shapiro, peer engagement was the best way to break through that apathy: "I think having the peers doing the outreach was very effective in motivating folks who are so out of the mainstream and so beaten down that they're just not that interested in going to vote."
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### **Mission and services:**

Piedmont Health provides high quality, affordable, comprehensive primary health care to medically underserved populations in rural areas of central North Carolina. They primarily provide outpatient primary care, but also offer on-site pharmacy, dental care, nutritional counseling, disease management, WIC, and Senior Care programs in addition to supportive services like education, translation, and transportation.

### **Population served:**

Piedmont has six locations that serve 14 counties in the Piedmont region. Piedmont has approximately 40,000 registered patients, evenly split between male and female, and predominantly Latino and African American.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

1,471 unique voter contacts: 412 voter registrations and 1,059 voter pledges.

## **Piedmont Health**

CARRBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

### **Background**

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In the past, Piedmont attempted to register voters during major elections, but never had a long-term, comprehensive strategy for mobilizing their patient base. In 2012, Piedmont made a decision to increase its voter mobilization efforts and integrate voter registration into its daily operations. In their view, the unique, community-based nature of health centers and the relationships they have with patients makes them an ideal vehicle for voter engagement.

Teaming up with community health centers around the nation organized by the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), Piedmont developed a plan to mobilize voters at their six community health centers. Their effort were led by Tamala Flack, the Voter Engagement Coordinator, and Amy Rix, Project Manager. They partnered with Democracy North Carolina and the North Carolina League of Women Voters.

## What They Did

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Piedmont Health reached out to voters in three main ways:

- **At clinics:** One of Piedmont's main goals was to integrate voter registration into patient intake. All front desk staff were instructed to ask patients about registering to vote when they signed in for their doctor's appointment. Additionally, Flack and Rix visited each site at least once a week to set up a voter registration table in the waiting room and to speak to patients.
- **At community events:** Piedmont also participated in community health fairs across the state. At these fairs, they would set up tables with voter registration forms and voter information, along with the other health-related services they were providing—e.g., blood pressure checks and access to nutritionists. Staff were present to answer questions about registration and the voting process.
- **Through partner organizations:** Piedmont's community outreach included offering voter registration at a number of local churches and at Project Homeless Connect, a community event where the agency provides general check-ups for homeless or low-income individuals. With the help of the League of Women Voters of North Carolina, Piedmont also set up a table in the lobby and other high-traffic locations at University of North Carolina Hospital, where they send many of their patients that require specialty care. Lastly, Piedmont partnered with a University of North Carolina service-learning class to register voters at a transitional housing organization. Flack prepared materials, trained the group of students, and accompanied them to register voters. Though there were only about a dozen attendees, at least half of the group registered and everyone filled out a voter pledge card.

The agency found that having a dedicated staff person available to answer questions about voter registration and actively engage clients in the process was very helpful. Their Siler City site was the most successful location, in large part because a highly motivated staff member took ownership of the project and made sure that voter outreach was integrated into the regular workload.

Piedmont's efforts to integrate voter registration into patient intake were not as successful as they had hoped. Through this initial effort, they learned that more training was necessary to enable clinic staff to answer the full range of patient questions and concerns about registering and voting. However, Piedmont will be conducting additional training throughout the year with the goal of fully integrating voter registration into the organization's daily activities.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* Piedmont's Senior Care facility and health centers offered rides to the polls during early voting and also compiled a list of other groups (political parties, churches, etc.) that voters could contact if they needed transportation to the polls. They also made announcements and provided reminders about the election on Facebook and via email, and advertised NACHC's poll locator text messaging service.

## **Lessons Learned**

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- **Partners help.** Piedmont Health partnered with several organizations that had established and successful voter outreach programs. Their largest partner, NACHC, provided monetary support and materials to implement their programs. Democracy North Carolina shared state-specific training and outreach materials, while the League of Women Voters helped facilitate Piedmont's access to some off-site locations.
  - **Face-to-face conversations give voters an opportunity to have their concerns addressed.** Having someone in the waiting room to actively talk about voter registration and voting was extremely effective. Staff often found that talking to voters gave them a chance to ask questions, have their concerns addressed, and made them more comfortable.
  - **Integrating voter engagement into daily operations takes time.** As Piedmont Health learned, effective agency-based voter outreach may not happen overnight. Their initial attempts to involve front-desk staff in voter engagement were not as successful as they had hoped, but did provide them with a base of experience to build on. In the future, they plan to provide staff with the additional training needed to answer questions from voters, but expect the new process to take some time to unfold.
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### **Mission and services:**

Salud Family Health Centers provides quality, integrated primary health care services to improve the health of the individuals, families, and communities in their service area. They operate nine health clinics and a mobile unit in six different counties throughout Northeast Colorado. Their services aim to improve access and reduce barriers to care and are designed to reduce health disparities.

### **Population served:**

Salud sees 75,000 patients a year during 300,000 patient visits. They work with medically underserved families and individuals, including migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Most patients are below the poverty line, 60% are uninsured, and many are on Medicare and Medicaid.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

1,751 unique contacts: 430 voter registrations, 1,203 voter pledges, and 118 filled out both.

## **Salud Family Health Centers**

FORT LUPTON, COLORADO

### **Background**

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Salud's leadership cares about and strongly supports the organization's advocacy work and appreciates the need for engagement and participation. In 2012, Salud was approached by the Colorado Community Health Network, which represents Colorado's community health centers, about registering voters and tracking their contacts. Because Salud is already politically savvy in terms of advocacy and connecting to legislators, they saw this as an opportunity to strengthen that work by adding a voter registration piece. Salud thought it would be a great opportunity to see how they could register patients, particularly because their patient population is often underrepresented in elections.

In the past, Salud has had a few different voter registration groups come in and register voters for a single day. While it was helpful in the moment, it did not reap serious rewards outside of that day and that handful of registrations because it was based on the availability of outside groups rather than integrated into Salud's culture. Because Salud does Medicaid enrollment, they are required to offer voter registration to those patients, so when the Colorado Community Health Network approached them about doing more extensive voter outreach, Salud saw it as an opportunity to implement a system that could work organization-wide.

Jennifer Morse, Vice President of Development, was in charge of getting Salud's 2012 voter engagement off the ground. Once it was in process, Salud involved additional staff in voter outreach. Salud worked closely with the Colorado Participation Project who provided training and ongoing support. While Salud can be wary of bringing in outside agencies to work with their staff, they had a great working relationship with the staff of the Colorado Participation Project.

When the project kicked off, a staff member from the Colorado Participation Project conducted a training for clinic managers as part of a train-the-trainers model in which managers trained the staff at their respective sites. During team check-ins via the phone—designed to share success stories, set goals, and troubleshoot challenges—it became clear that the train-the-trainers model was not working and that Salud needed on-site training for the front desk staff, caseworkers, and other site-based employees. Each of the clinic business managers arranged for staff from the Colorado Participation Project to provide additional training on voter engagement best practices and voter registration rules, as well as side-by-side support to Salud staff.

Although front desk staff frequently interact with patients and ask sensitive questions, they were unfamiliar with this kind of engagement—particularly given the political climate in Colorado. Running through dialogues with someone from the Participation Project and having access to personalized coaching boosted staff confidence levels, helped keep the project in the front of their minds, and made staff more comfortable with the work. The initial manager training took place in May, but the project really started to pick up in August and Salud saw a large increase in the number of voter contacts after the on-site trainings.

### **What They Did**

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Salud made an effort to register or collect pledges from patients:

- **At health fairs:** The Colorado Participation Project deployed staff to register voters at two different health fairs in Fort Collins and Longmont.
- **At the front desk:** Salud's front desk staff were instructed to ask patients about registering to vote. If a patient was already registered, they then offered a voter pledge card, explaining that it would be used to mail out a reminder postcard before the election.
- **Through call center agents:** Salud uses a centralized call center to book appointments and answer various administrative questions. An on-site Participation Project staff member met regularly with Salud staff to discuss possible integration opportunities and proposed that during these calls, call center agents could inform patients that they would have the opportunity to register to vote or complete a pledge card when they checked in for their appointment. Together with the call center manager, they developed a script, addressed confidentiality challenges, and supported the call center staff. Call center agents were also able to take pledges and fill out the cards over the phone.

Although staff were not targeted through specific activities, Salud did encourage them to complete voter registration forms and sign pledges. Because registration forms were being collected at various sites, one staff member at each of the clinics collected and sent them to Morse every Friday. She then scanned the registration forms, sorted them according to county, and sent packets of completed forms to the appropriate offices.

The work started off slowly due to the training challenges and because Salud was adding a new project to the front desk staff's workload while simultaneously trying to determine appropriate approaches for talking to patients. Salud chose to focus on utilizing their front desk staff because they check patients in, but were wary of overloading them. However, with direct on-site training from the Colorado Participation Project and a little time, Salud had tremendous support from all staff.

Salud operates nine different locations, each one with different patient demographics, geographic considerations, and other factors to consider, which can influence expectations, effectiveness, and success. For training purposes, the Colorado Participation Project treated each site as its own separate "organization" and as a result made a strategic decision not to send anyone to the Estes Park clinic because it is not a high-traffic site and because it was out of their geographic range.

Salud was able to collect pledges through their call center because unlike registrations, pledges do not require a signature. Approximately 10% of Salud's 2012 voter engagement was conducted through their call center initiative, despite the fact that it was implemented later in the process. Overall, Salud collected about twice as many pledges as voter registrations, easily surpassing their goal, with a total of 1,751 unique voter contacts.

There was some initial discomfort among staff around addressing documentation and citizenship status. Because Salud does not inquire about citizenship in other situations, some staff initially felt that the question was intrusive or inappropriate. Although it was not a huge barrier to the project, it was a reminder that there was a need for sensitivity given Salud's population.

The voices of the 85 providers in Salud's network have weight and value, so one of the missing pieces is getting providers involved in talking about voter registration. Because of the many changes to health centers during the previous year, providers were already being asked to do a lot during patient visits and Salud was reluctant to add voter outreach as an additional task. Nevertheless, Salud did inform providers about their voter engagement efforts, and although participation was not required, many chose to talk to patients about voting. Providers do talk to patients about other non-medical topics—like reading to children at home—with great results, so Salud thinks this strategy could be effective if implemented widely.



Although Salud registers voters through Medicaid enrollment on an ongoing basis, they would like to see voter engagement continue agency-wide. The value of a major election cycle is that there is high interest from the general public, which makes the front desk a good place to engage voters. However, without a meaningful upcoming election, front desk voter engagement might not be as effective. Instead, there may be another point of service delivery where it would make more sense to have that conversation. Although Salud has not made any determinations yet, it seems likely that voter registration will become part of their general enrollment process.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* In addition to encouraging staff to fill out voter registration forms and sign voter pledges, Salud also posted election information on their internal intranet. Salud sent polling place information to staff and posted that information at the front desk in their rotating information stands. They also advertised a number that voters could text to find their polling location, and on Election Day Salud hosted celebrations at their various health centers.

### Lessons Learned

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- **On-site training from a partner builds staff confidence and moves the work forward.** In hindsight, Salud felt they lost time with their train-the-trainers model and should have instead conducted individual training with front desk staff from the start. Having Colorado Participation Project staff on site was particularly helping in getting voter engagement off the ground because they were able to talk to each of the front desk staff, run through dialogues with them on how to talk to patients, and boost staff confidence levels. Overall, training, team-building, and collaborative goal-setting were key to their success.
- **Voter engagement work varies by site.** Because Salud works in six counties through three larger and six smaller clinics, location is an important consideration. For example, because Salud's Estes Park location had less foot traffic and was further away, they chose to prioritize the work at other sites. Although Salud is one agency, in many ways conducting voter registration at the various sites was like conducting registration at nine different agencies because each one works with a different community, has different demographics, and is geographically separate. Clinic size and location determine foot traffic which can influence success, training opportunities, and more. Thus it is important to address each site on its own to make adjustments and temper expectations as needed.

## Salud Family Health Centers

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*Continued*

- **Consider your programs and start innovating.** Through regular meetings to brainstorm and discuss integration opportunities, Salud realized there was a voter outreach opportunity in their call center work. By thinking critically about their programs and systems, Salud was able to take advantage of client interactions outside of in-person service provision, which boosted their reach, raised patient awareness of the election, and increased the number of voter pledges they collected.
  - **It takes time for things to come together.** Salud's high-volume daily patient traffic gives them constant access to potential voters. Although Salud started fairly early, their numbers increased dramatically later in the project. Some staff reported that people were dismissive when they brought up voter registration, but over time, as front desk staff were more extensively trained and became more familiar with voter registration they were able to better approach patients, offer explanations, and feel confident answering questions. One of Salud's most innovative practices—using call center agents—was not even implemented until much later. And of course, there was greater interest as the election approached.
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### **Mission and services:**

Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers, Inc. (SJFMC)'s mission is to provide and promote effective high quality primary and preventative health and dental care services to uninsured and underserved residents and migrant/seasonal workers of Southern New Jersey, regardless of their ability to pay. SJFMC operates seven full-service community health centers in addition to two mobile medical units. Their comprehensive services range from internal medicine to pediatrics, family planning, case management, translation, outreach, transportation, health education, and more.

### **Population served:**

SJFMC sees 52,000 patients annually during 160,000 patient visits.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

1,620 voter registrations.

## **Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers, Inc.**

HAMMONTON, NEW JERSEY

### **Background**

SJFMC's 2012 voter registration efforts were inspired by an informational packet they received from the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC). SJFMC was primed to get involved: they had recently received a federal grant for a new facility, but their plans for expansion were vulnerable to changes in government funding. According to CEO Linda Flake, "Realizing what was at stake, we knew it was important to get the community engaged and voting because government programs and funding directly affect their health and services."

SJFMC had done some voter engagement in the past, but, in Flake's words, "the results were abysmal." The tactics that they had used—hosting voter registration drives and adding registration to the regular duties of front desk staff—were ineffective. In 2012 they tried a different approach.

Their planning started in July, shortly after they received the NACHC packet. SJFMC convened a meeting of top management staff to form a planning committee. Recognizing that staffing was their biggest capacity challenge, the planning committee decided to use extra program income to hire six dedicated voter engagement staff: one for every clinic location except the two Atlantic City sites which shared a staff person.

Voter engagement staff were in place by mid-August and they worked full time during regular operational hours, generally weekdays and some evenings. Site managers supervised voter engagement staff and were also responsible for collecting and submitting completed forms to the county elections office.

## What They Did

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SJFMC used the following tactics to register voters and drive their voter engagement efforts:

- **In clinic waiting rooms:** Voter engagement staff were stationed in waiting rooms at each health center during regular clinic hours with flags and other decorations to attract clients' attention. SJFMC also put signs in their clinic windows so that community members passing by would know that voter registration was available inside.
- **Outreach to corporate and call center staff:** Voter engagement staff from the nearby Hamilton clinic came to the SJFMC corporate office to register employees. They also registered staff at their call center.
- **Internal competition between sites:** SJFMC incentivized voter registration by offering a free lunch to the site with the most registrations. Regular reports on each site's numbers were circulated to foster a sense of competition. In December, awards were given to the site with the most registrations: The Atlantic City 1 location won with 510 registrations.

Having dedicated voter engagement staff was key to SJFMC's success. However, getting those dedicated staff in place took longer than anticipated. Initially, they tried to recruit staff from their marketing and outreach department, but found that many of them were unprepared for voter engagement work. Instead, SJFMC hired voter engagement staff from outside their internal staff pool, which delayed implementation. If they had been able to get started earlier, SJFMC is confident they could have contacted more voters.

SJFMC's numbers were low in the beginning, but picked up when the CEO pushed for better results and as voter engagement staff became more comfortable in their roles. The numbers were an important measure of success to SJFMC leadership. As a result, voter engagement staff had a strong sense of personal accountability, since they knew that the results were being reviewed regularly.

All of SJFMC—from leadership to front line employees—was invested in the project. Flake set an organizational goal of 5,000 voter registrations and monitored progress reports closely. SJFMC also explicitly linked civic engagement and education to their advocacy goals, which was essential to getting staff buy-in and moving their efforts forward.

## Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers, Inc.

*Continued*

Community excitement around the election was high, which added momentum and meaning to SJFMC's efforts. Flake recalls, "Patients were excited about voter registration at SJFMC. We even got a letter from a patient who thanked us for making voter registration available. People took pictures in front of the flags we hung." The general excitement around the election served to further reinforce staff commitment; they were proud that SJFMC was doing this work and excited to be a part of it.

SJFMC plans to continue doing voter registration in 2013, when New Jersey will choose a governor and members of the state legislature. They will likely use the model of dedicated voter engagement staff again (either hiring or designating someone to focus exclusively on voter registration), rather than making it an additional responsibility of front-line staff.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* SJFMC found that voter education was a critical element of their registration efforts. Many first-time voters were confused and intimidated by the process, while others had heard rumors or misinformation that kept them from registering. Voter education was needed among staff as well as clients. Flake noted one instance where an eligible voter had not registered because she was afraid to endanger undocumented relatives that were living with her.

SJFMC also distributed information on how to find the right polling place. Because New Jersey voting districts are small and confusing, SJFMC opted to direct patients to official polling place location resources rather than risk giving patients incorrect information.

They also designed their own poster and "Your Vote Counts" buttons. Posters were placed throughout the clinics, while buttons were worn by employees and made available to patients at the front desk.



*Figure 9: Staff celebrate National Voter Registration Day at Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers' Pleasantville location.*

## **Lessons Learned**

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- **Successful voter engagement starts at the top.** CEO Linda Flake and the rest of SJFMC's leadership team were intimately involved in their voter engagement efforts. Their decision to hire dedicated staff and closely monitor and incentivize agency progress sent a clear message to SJFMC staff about the value and importance of voter engagement.
  - **Begin with voter education.** SJFMC found that providing voter education was integral to the voter registration process. Answering questions helped reassure new voters and address misconceptions that had previously prevented eligible citizens from voting.
  - **Dedicated voter engagement staff improve results.** Hiring staff whose only job was voter registration and engagement made SJFMC's 2012 work more effective than previous efforts, when they attempted to incorporate it into an already lengthy list of front-desk staff responsibilities.
  - **Encourage a healthy sense of competition among sites or divisions.** For large organizations with multiple divisions or multi-site organizations, fostering friendly internal competition is a way to encourage participation and connect voter engagement efforts throughout the organization.
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### **Mission and services:**

A project of Catholic Social Services in Washtenaw County, Washtenaw Prisoner Reentry (WPR) is a six-month, transitional program for individuals who have been released from prison to Washtenaw County on parole or probation. WPR works to prevent recidivism by providing collaborative case management and connecting recently released individuals to housing, behavioral health services (including family counseling), and employment opportunities.

### **Population served:**

WPR serves about 150-250 men per year and only individuals who are released into parole supervision. (In Michigan, the majority of individuals returning from prison are released on parole.) WPR's clients are 60% African American, 37% Caucasian, and 3% other ethnic minorities. The average age range of their clients is 30s to early 40s, although they serve individuals of all ages.

### **Number of voter contacts:**

93 unique voter contacts: 33 voter registrations and 60 voter pledges.

## **Washtenaw Prisoner Reentry**

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

### **Background**

WPR first learned about the Track the Vote program in late July through a Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) newsletter. Driven by an enthusiastic AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, WPR decided to apply for a mini-grant, and in the process found research showing that engaging justice-involved individuals in voting could help reduce recidivism. Although they had no previous voter engagement experience, WPR decided this was the perfect opportunity for them to get involved, using their AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer to coordinate the effort.

However, shortly after receiving the grant, WPR learned that AmeriCorps volunteers and funding cannot be used for nonpartisan voter engagement. Disappointed, Mary King, WPR's Community Coordinator who was supervising their voter engagement work, contacted MNA to tell them that WPR would have to return the mini-grant: Without staffing from their AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, WPR felt that they did not have the capacity to participate in the Track the Vote program.

Ultimately, with MNA's help, WPR was able to use the mini-grant to hire a voter engagement intern, Aaron Kinzel, to coordinate their efforts. But, by the time their new staffing plan was in place, there were only eleven days left before the Michigan voter registration deadline.

## What They Did

Although Washtenaw Prisoner Reentry got a late start, they found a number of ways to reach out to their clients, including:

- **Outreach at WPR constituency meetings:** Kinzel reached out to clients at WPR’s weekly meet-and-greets and spoke about the importance of voting for justice-involved individuals at one of WPR’s Advisory Council’s monthly meetings. (Many of the Advisory Council members have children who are currently or were formerly incarcerated.) He also conducted outreach at weekly meetings of the Job Club, a county workforce development program.
- **Canvassing housing program participants:** WPR provides transitional housing for clients who are homeless or are having difficulty finding housing. Kinzel recognized this as another opportunity to reach out to clients who might not attend the weekly meet-and-greets or other meetings. He went door-to-door talking to clients in the transitional housing about voting and offering them a chance to register. However, this tactic was not simply a cold call—Kinzel knew some of the clients from prior work he had done with them, which made the canvassing easier and more successful.
- **Engaging students at local community colleges:** To supplement WPR’s small population pool, Kinzel also did outreach at a couple local community colleges where he got a very positive response. Most of the students were already registered (in contrast to WPR’s clients), so the pledge cards were very popular. He thinks that he could have collected more pledge cards if he had more people helping him.

Despite the condensed timeframe, WPR was pleased with what they were able to accomplish. King gives the credit to Kinzel: “Having a specifically designated person who was super motivated and could hit the ground running—and he was sprinting!—made this work possible.” Kinzel believes that with just a couple more people to assist him, WPR could have made their target of 250 voter contacts.

In addition to staffing hurdles and a significant time crunch, the population WPR serves is small and turns over slowly. They attempted to reach a broader group of potential voters by providing voter engagement materials to parole offices, but were thwarted by a blanket prohibition on voting activity in Michigan’s parole offices. Perhaps most challenging, many of WPR’s clients mistakenly believe that they cannot vote. In Michigan, justice-involved individuals only lose their right to vote when serving a prison or jail sentence. Once released from confinement, their right to vote is restored.



## Washtenaw Prisoner Reentry

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Apart from the challenges they faced, WPR learned a great deal from their first voter engagement effort. They found that one-on-one contact with clients at the meet and greets—right after their release from confinement—was the most effective outreach strategy. Next year Kinzel plans to pursue a peer-based outreach strategy, providing training and materials to WRP participants so that they can reach out to their own social networks.

*Additional Voter Engagement:* Misinformation about voting for people with criminal convictions is widespread, so setting the record straight was critical for WPR. They modified materials from the League of Women Voters and the ACLU of Michigan to spread the word. “The vast majority of people we talked to were under the impression that they were not allowed to vote due to rumors they had heard in and outside the institutions. They thought that because they had lost so many other civil rights, they lost that right too. Once clients learned that they could vote, they were very encouraged and wanted to be part of the process,” said King.

WPR held a small voter education event for clients where they provided breakfast and went over the very long (and potentially confusing) ballot. They also recruited volunteers to provide rides to the polls and offered them a \$25 gas card for volunteering; though only a handful of voters ended up needing a ride.

Kinzel believes that WPR’s voter education work may have had a larger influence than their voter contact numbers suggest: “One young Latino who had grown up in inner-city Detroit said a lot of people in his [predominately Latino] neighborhood didn’t know that you could vote with a felony conviction. I encouraged him to get the word out and he was very pumped up about it and talked to his friends and family. Other people may have voted from that, but we couldn’t track it.”

## **Lessons Learned**

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- **Identify funding restrictions early.** WPR lost time because they were initially unaware of the AmeriCorps funding restrictions on voter engagement. Double-check your staffing plans against the fine print. Even though your voter engagement work is nonpartisan, there may still be limitations on how or what your agency can do.
  - **Voter education is critical when working with justice-involved populations.** With different laws in each state, it is not surprising that many justice-involved individuals are confused about their right to vote. Well-meaning service providers, correctional staff, or peers can also inadvertently perpetuate misinformation. As WPR learned, nonprofits have an important role to play in disseminating accurate information in the community so that formerly incarcerated people and people with criminal convictions can exercise their right to vote.
  - **Utilize client networks to spread the word.** Peer outreach is often one of the most effective ways to reach marginalized populations, including people with criminal convictions. By equipping clients with the correct information and encouraging them to spread the word, your agency can reach many more affected people and communities, empower clients, and plant the seeds for future participation among populations that are less likely to be engaged.
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## MINNESOTA PARTICIPATION PROJECT

An initiative of  
the Minnesota Council  
of Nonprofits

### **Mission and services:**

The Minnesota Participation Project (MPP) is an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN), a state nonprofit association with over 2,000 nonprofit members. MPP aims to support and expand the capacity of Minnesota's 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations to effectively engage in permissible nonpartisan voter engagement efforts like voter registration, education, and mobilization. MPP provides nonprofits with training, materials, coaching, and occasional mini-grants to promote voter engagement activities. Although the theme of nonprofit voter engagement remains constant, the details of MPP's work vary from year to year, depending on available funding, election cycles, and the state and/or local electoral landscape.

### **Population served:**

MPP works with around 150-200 Minnesota nonprofits annually.

# Minnesota Participation Project

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

## **Background**

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MPP was created in 2004 by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits to focus exclusively on supporting nonprofits interested in doing voter engagement work. MPP reflects MCN's long-standing interest in encouraging civic engagement among Minnesota nonprofits. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and MPP are founding partners of Nonprofit VOTE.

Jeff Narabrook, Policy Associate at MCN, staffed MPP and led all of their 2012 voter engagement efforts, with support from Susie Brown, the Public Policy Director. In 2012, MPP also participated in a sister project to the Track the Vote program, the SPaCE project.

## **Recruitment**

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MPP's initial planning for the Track the Vote program began in late 2011, but most of their pre-launch work occurred from February to June 2012. The official program was launched with a kickoff event held in conjunction with the Minnesota Secretary of State on June 13, 2012. MPP/MCN advertised the kickoff via email to their members and on their website. At the event, MPP described the Track the Vote program and provided a short application for interested groups.

# Minnesota Participation Project

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Narabrook also reached out to a handful of organizations that he thought were well-suited for the program. These were groups that had the capacity to be successful or that were providing services to a population of lower-turnout voters MPP was interested in reaching—such as students or recently naturalized citizens.

MPP selected 25 groups in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area to participate in the Track the Vote program, five more than planned. Organizations were notified that they had been selected for the program in early July. Their participation in the program was finalized when the executive director of each organization signed a memorandum of understanding with MPP that included voter contact goals and outlined other program requirements, including being nonpartisan. Each group received a mini-grant of \$950 for staffing and materials.

All participants were given a minimum voter contact (registration and/or pledge) goal of 250 voters, but were also invited to set their own, higher voter contact goals. When they registered a voter, participating groups also filled out a pledge card for each one to ensure they had a way to provide follow up information closer to the election.

Track the Vote program participants returned completed voter registration forms to local election officials directly, which helped to ensure that the forms were submitted within the 10-day window required by Minnesota law.

## Training and Support

MPP provided participants with structured training and ongoing support throughout the Track the Vote program. Key features of their training and support model were:

- **Using a cohort model:** Rather than work with participating organizations individually, Narabrook opted for a cohort model. This is a model that MCN has used often in previous training and capacity-building programs and it seemed like a good fit for the Track the Vote program as well. According to Narabrook: “I knew that we’d have a wide range of experience among the members and wanted to give them a way to share expertise. I also wanted to give the groups a sense that they were part of something bigger. As individual organizations many of them were contacting relatively small numbers of voters, and I wanted to give them a sense that they were part of a project that was contacting enough voters in total to make a real difference.”

The cohort had five in-person roundtable meetings over the course of the program. Each meeting included time for check-in and a discussion about what was and was not working for participants. Additionally, each meeting focused on a specific voter engagement theme: training and orientation (July), voter education (August), get-out-the-vote (September), election protection (October), and celebration and debrief (November). Attendance at cohort meetings was high; out of the 25 participating agencies, 18 to 20 groups attended regularly. Narabrook attributes high attendance rates in part to the mini-grants: “The mini-grants formalized our partnership and created a mutual sense of accountability, much the same way a foundation grant might.”

In addition to regular cohort meetings, Narabrook also provided one-on-one coaching to participants who contacted him and went in-person to collect pledge cards from each participating site two or three times during the program.

For Narabrook, cohorts are a useful management tool for keeping people engaged and things on track. However, he notes that the cohort works best for groups working in a targeted geographic region. (All of MPP’s Track the Vote program participants were in Minneapolis and St. Paul.)

- **Training and materials:** At the beginning of the program, each participant received a welcome packet that included a 20-page guide about the program, expectations, a timeline, voter registration logistics,

key dates, details about Election Day Registration, and information about registering people with unique challenges (e.g., people currently experiencing homeless, those with a felony conviction). The guide was MPP's main document for the Track the Vote program participants.

Additionally, Narabrook provided mini-trainings at each cohort meeting focused on the topic at-hand (e.g., voter education, GOTV), followed by a group discussion.

Finally, since pledge cards were the main data collection tool, he tried to make them as appealing and multi-functional as possible. That meant customizing them with each organization's name and inserting a line where voters could indicate their preferred language.

- **Centralized data entry:** Narabrook handled all data entry. It not only allowed the participating organizations to focus exclusively on voter outreach, but it also ensured more consistent and accurate data entry. Agencies sent the pledge cards to Narabrook who entered the information required for tracking voters into a database and then destroyed the original pledge card to ensure privacy.

MPP signed on a large, diverse cohort of organizations that work in different neighborhoods, have different missions, and serve various populations. Many were new to voter engagement. While surpassing the group goal of 5,000 voters for the purposes of the program (6,368 voters registered or pledged to vote), only 10 of the 25 participating groups were able to meet their minimum goal of 250. Numbers varied widely by organization: two groups had almost 1,000 voter contacts, while one group only made 30. Being unable to meet their minimum goals was frustrating for many groups. "They felt bad that they made a promise and fell short," said Narabrook.

Of the groups that did not make the minimum goal, Narabrook identified limited foot traffic, lack of previous voter engagement experience, and inadequate organizational buy-in as the primary challenges: "Some of the groups, upon reflection, didn't have enough of the public coming through their doors. Others had a lot of public traffic, but the project lead was only one person in a really large agency and couldn't get the word out to others. I also realized in retrospect that groups who haven't done this before may not meet their goals the first time they try. In general, reaching the numbers was hard."

He continued, "If I could do it again, I would do more to help each group work through their plan. Maybe even have a meeting with the executive director. Given how big some of these groups are, having an in-person meeting with the ED might have given the staff person the leverage and authority they needed to get other folks involved."

# Minnesota Participation Project

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For Narabrook the mini-grants were a key element of the Track the Vote program: “I think it shows that we’re really serious and that we expect them to be.” In his experience, the mini-grants were particularly important for groups that were new to voter engagement: “I think often there’s someone on staff who really wants to do this and they’re typically not the ED, so for them to show that they can bring in money helps get the initiative approved, even if the money isn’t enough to completely cover staff time.”

Although he is a big advocate of the mini-grant model, as the lone MPP staff member Narabrook found it difficult to attend both to the needs of the 25 Track the Vote program participants and also provide meaningful support to MCN’s other member organizations across the state. “In the future we would need to have more staff or probably scale things back with fewer groups receiving mini-grants and tracking their voter contacts. We’d also do a better job next time of working to connect our MCN member groups with other civic engagement organizations in their cities, so that they could access more resources through them. In general, I thought the model was something I’d like to try again,” he said.

## **Follow Up and Get-Out-the-Vote**

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MPP offered Track the Vote program participants four options for get-out-the-vote follow-up to the individuals they had contacted: phone call, mail, email, and text. However, relatively few emails were gathered and most groups simply did not want the individuals they registered to be contacted four times. Almost all groups opted for just two contacts via phone and mail.

MPP partnered with an MCN member to make follow-up phone calls to English-speaking voters using their state’s Voter Activation Network (VAN), and collaborated with Track the Vote program participants to make calls to non-English speakers. [The VAN is a database of voters available for use by nonprofit organizations for a fee. Many nonprofits gain access to the VAN by partnering with another nonprofit.] The Minneapolis Highrise Representative Council agreed to make calls to Somali-language speakers; MPP provided a small amount of money (\$800) for them to recruit and pay high-rise residents to make the calls themselves. Tamales y Bicletas called Spanish-speakers and a third-party group contacted Hmong speakers.

## Lessons Learned

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- **Customize voter contact goals.** MPP learned that asking all groups to meet the same minimum number of voter contacts may inadvertently set them up for failure. Instead, consider customizing goals to match agency capacity and experience. Setting realistic expectations at the outset makes it more likely that agencies will feel excited and energized about their voter engagement efforts, rather than demoralized.
- **High numbers require many groups.** At the beginning of the outreach process, it can be difficult to discern which groups will perform well and which will struggle. Given the diversity of outcomes, MPP found that working with a large number of groups was the best way to ensure a high number of total voter contacts.
- **Consider a cohort.** Many of the participating agencies reported that the cohort was a useful resource. Hearing about other groups' challenges and successes helped to put their own work in perspective and gave a broader context to their efforts.
- **Mini-grants as catalyst.** For groups that are new to voter engagement, a mini-grant may make the difference. As MPP learned, mini-grants cannot guarantee high numbers, but they are likely to activate an organization that may be on the fence about voter engagement and ensure that they feel committed to the work.
- **Ensure buy-in and ongoing support from leadership.** It is difficult to integrate voter engagement into the day-to-day work of a large service provider without buy-in from agency leadership. Make sure that the staff person you are working with has thought through the process and has the resources they need to make their case to senior staff. That may mean a meeting with the executive director or providing data that shows the broader community benefits that come with voter engagement. In many cases, leadership will not only have to sign off on the concept, but also communicate to appropriate managers and staff that their participation in the project is required.



# Appendix A

## Voter Engagement Resources

Well-researched<sup>1</sup> and designed materials give nonprofits the know-how and confidence to carry out effective nonpartisan activities that engage their communities in voting. Below is a partial list of Nonprofit VOTE's current resources—most are available in both Spanish and English.

### National Webinar Series

- Plan Ahead: Creating a Voter Engagement Plan for your Nonprofit
- Being Nonpartisan: 501(c)(3) Guidelines for Nonprofit Voter Engagement
- Ready, Set, Register: Nonprofit Voter Registration
- Taking a Stand: Ballot Measure Advocacy for Nonprofits
- Engage Candidates and Build Clout: Hosting a Candidate Forum
- What Nonprofit Staff Can't Do
- Nonprofits Get Out the Vote: Countdown to Election Day

### Guides and Toolkits

- A Voter Participation Starter Kit for Nonprofits and Social Service Agencies
- A Nonprofit's Guide to Hosting a Candidate Forum
- A Voter Registration Toolkit for Nonprofits and Social Service Agencies
- Nonprofits, Voting & Elections: A Guide for 501(c)(3) Organizations on Nonpartisan Voter Participation and Education

### Factsheets

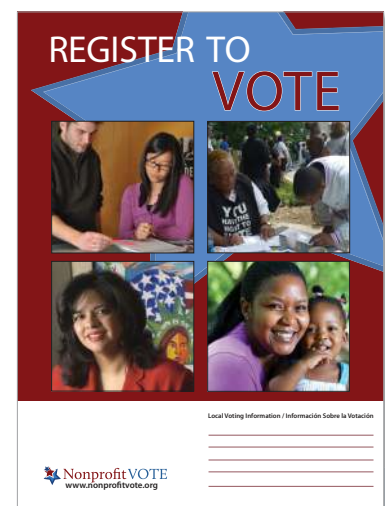
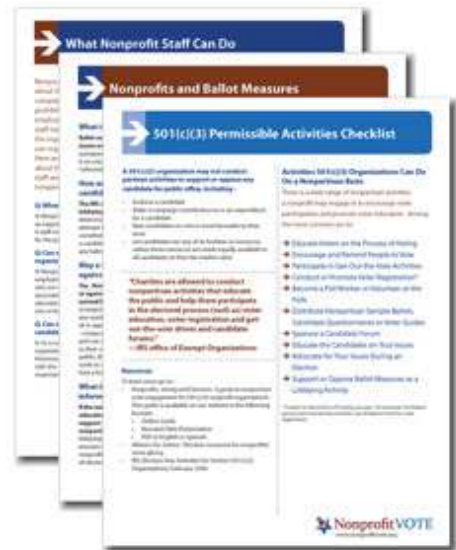
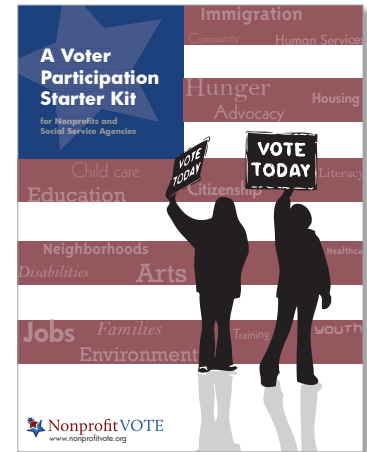
- Nonprofits and Ballot Measures
- 501(c)(3) Permissible Activities Checklist
- Candidate Appearances at Your Nonprofit
- State Felon Disenfranchisement Laws
- Federal Funds and Voter Participation
- What Nonprofit Staff Can Do

### Checklists

- Getting Started With Voter Engagement
- Seven Reasons to Do Voter Registration at Your Nonprofit
- Seven Principles of Getting Out the Vote
- 10 Things to Do Before Election Day

### Other Resources

- Voting in Your State – 50 State Guide
- Posters
- Web Badges



<sup>1</sup> All Nonprofit VOTE materials are carefully researched, sourced, and updated based on the latest guidance from the IRS and partners like Bolder Advocacy, the National Association of Secretaries of State, Independent Sector, and the National Council of Nonprofits.