

TEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL REGISTRATION DRIVE

Set Your Goals

Set an achievable numerical goal from the beginning, to inspire volunteers and serve as a guide for evaluation. Select a time period, target a group, pick sites, etc. Focus on groups of citizens most likely to need help with voter registration, such as those who are newly eligible to vote, have low incomes or are minorities.

Know the Law

Become familiar with the federal, state and local laws that govern voter registration in your community. Voter registration practices—methods, deadlines, permissible sites, and the role of volunteers—differ from state to state and often vary among local jurisdictions in the same state.

Federal laws, such as the Voting Rights Act, Voting Access for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, and the Help America Vote Act protect the rights of minorities and other citizens to vote. Seek legal assistance if you believe that state or local registration practices violate citizens' voting rights. Be sure to keep registration drives nonpartisan.

Work With Election Officials

Make sure local election officials know about your plans. In some places, you will need their help to get voter registration forms, to register voters at special sites or to train and deputize volunteer registrars. In other places, only official registrars may be allowed to register voters.

If you will need large numbers of forms or deputy registrar, inform election officials as early as possible and in writing, so they can make necessary arrangements. If election officials are uncooperative or do not provide assistance allowed by state election laws, and you have made a good-faith effort to work with them, seek legal assistance.

Form a Coalition

Coordinate your effort with other organizations planning voter registration drives, and share information about scheduled activities to avoid duplication. Take advantage of each organization's special strengths.

Select Your Sites

Site selection and careful timing are critical elements of an effective registration drive. Use your resources efficiently by providing voter registration opportunities where there are large numbers of unregistered citizens who have the time to sign up.

Consider festivals, fairs, sporting events, schools, colleges, public transit stops, public assistance offices or downtowns and shopping centers. Select your site to make the best use of volunteers and schedule volunteers for peak attendance times.

Visit sites ahead of time, and select the most visible and accessible places to station volunteers. Consider the needs of disabled people. Get whatever permission is necessary to register at a privately owned site.

Recruit, Train and Assign Volunteers

Impress volunteers with their responsibility to protect the right to vote of the citizens they are registering by filling out the forms correctly and returning them promptly to election officials. Include training in techniques for approaching potential registrants and in messages that will motivate citizens to register.

“Sell” Voter Registration

Use the media—editorials, articles, talk shows, PSAs—to promote voter registration. Provide information about registration deadlines and requirements. Advertise your voter registration drive, including the sites and times where voter registration will take place. Stage an event—a celebrity appearance, band concert or remote broadcast—to attract a crowd. Don’t be afraid to get out from behind a table and work the crowd.

Keep Good Records

Volunteer registrars should keep track of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of everyone they register by using tally sheets or photo copying registration cards, where this is permissible by law. This information will help if forms are lost or there are other problems. Use this information to get the new registrants out to vote by doing such things as alerting them of candidate debates and reminding them of Election Day.

Publish Your Results and Celebrate

Show the world that your voter registration drive made a difference. Public officials and candidate will take note. Volunteers will feel positive about their hard work.

Reward volunteers. A well-timed expression of appreciation will help persuade your volunteers to work on the get-out-the-vote effort and to volunteer for the next registration drive.

Follow-Up and Evaluate

Contact the new registrants—by mail, phone or at their homes—and remind them to vote. Find out if they need information or assistance.

Evaluate your efforts, and decide what works best. Keep this information, with the names and phone numbers of your volunteers, for your organization’s next voter registration drive.