

PREREGISTRATION OF 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS

One way to improve voter participation for young people is to welcome them into the democratic process early. Sixteen states have some form of preregistration that allows youth to “preregister” when they reach 16 or 17 in preparation for voting when they turn 18. Preregistration lets young people register while living at home or still in high school, where they can talk about voting with their families and friends.

How it Works

- States enable 16 and 17-year olds to fill out a registration form and be able to vote as soon as they turn 18. While most states start preregistration at 16, some start at 17.
- Pre-registration is available by all methods – paper, online, or at motor vehicles and other public agencies.
- For states that already allow a 17 year old to vote who will turn 18 by the election, adds 17 year olds not eligible to vote until the follow year.

Turnout Impact

- A recent study found the likelihood that youth will vote increases in states with preregistration laws by an average of 2 to 13 percentage points, depending on the model used for their analysis.¹³
- A Florida study found preregistrants 4.7% more likely to vote in the 2008 election compared to youth who waited until 18 to register.¹⁴
- In California, more than 100,000 citizens ages 16 and 17 preregistered to vote in the first eight months of 2018.

Benefits and Attributes

- It welcomes teens to the political process and increases their likelihood of staying registered and voting when they turn 18.¹⁵
- Many 16- and 17-year-olds visit the DMV for the first time well before they’re 18. Preregistration allows them to use that visit to register, especially when coupled with AVR.
- It creates opportunities for young future voters to register in high school and through a broad range of other youth-oriented community and civic activities.

Recommended Practices

- State and local officials recommend that implementing preregistration through “close partnerships between elections officials, government institutions, schools, and community organizations that are trusted by youth, parents and student volunteers are critical components of a successful preregistration program”.¹⁶
- More publicity about preregistration to make high schools, youth organizations, and organizations doing registration drives at youth-oriented events aware of this option.

Resources

- National Conference of State Legislators, Preregistration for Young Voters, ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/preregistration-for-young-voters.aspx
- Path to the Polls: Building a More Inclusive Democracy by Preregistering California's Youth, 2016, frontiergroup.org/reports/fg/path-polls

States with Preregistration

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|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| • California | • Hawaii | • Nevada | • Rhode Island |
| • Colorado | • Louisiana | • New Jersey | • Utah |
| • Delaware | • Maine | • New York | • Washington |
| • District of Columbia | • Maryland | • North Carolina | • West Virginia |
| • Florida | • Massachusetts | • Oregon | |

¹³ Holbein and Hillygus, “Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout,” American Journal of Political Science, 2016, <file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/SSRN-id2483860.pdf> cited in “Do preregistration laws improve voter turnout among young adults?”, Journalist’s Resource, 2016 journalistsresource.org/studies/politics/citizen-action/voter-turnout-registration-teen-youth

¹⁴ Michael McDonald, Voter Preregistration Programs, http://www.cses.org/plancom/2009Toronto/CSES_2009Toronto_McDonald.pdf

¹⁵ 15 High school students can pre-register to vote, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article218994780.html>. Sacramento Bee, September 25, 2018