



The Vital Role of Nonprofit Voter Engagement

The Issue

[Research](#) indicates that nonpartisan voter engagement and education campaigns conducted by charitable nonprofits during the 2020 election were integral in increasing voter turnout in communities with longstanding barriers to access and participation. Each election cycle, millions of Americans find themselves deterred from the democratic process due to easily solvable issues. As their community's most trusted institutions, nonprofits play a vital role in developing an informed and representative electorate. However, the newly released [The Retreat of Influence](#) research report commissioned by Independent Sector found only **13.2% of 501(c)(3) organizations report conducting nonpartisan activities to help people vote.**

The Facts

1. Educating constituents about voter registration options, requirements, deadlines, and procedures makes voting more likely, especially for voters who are new to the process or are impacted by historical patterns of exclusion and disenfranchisement. Nonprofits' frequent engagement and unparalleled reach with staff, donors, volunteers, and constituents make our institutions highly effective in helping people vote. Despite having these unique skills, **only 4.7% of nonprofits report registering people to vote.**
2. Equipping voters with reliable and nonpartisan education resources is a first and requisite step toward advancing long-term civic participation. In fact, not only are voters more likely to volunteer, give, advocate, and trust nonprofit organizations, but they are also more likely to stay informed about local issues and be sought out for input by future candidates and elected officials. Despite this significant return on investment, **only 8.2% of nonprofits provide voters with information.**
3. Elections have a direct impact on fundamental issues related to the quality of life for communities nationwide and nonprofits' ability to pursue our charitable missions. These issues encompass everything from economic mobility to the availability of funding for community supported programs, to investments in civic infrastructure, and the staffing of public agencies. Although encouraging voter participation empowers communities served by nonprofits and increases our organizations' impact, **only 7.7% of nonprofits engaged in nonpartisan get-out-the-vote activities.**

The Ultimate Outcome

Not only does nonprofit voter engagement establish a viable pathway for constituents to educate decision makers, but it also helps to ensure policy solutions come from the perspectives of communities who are impacted.



Nonprofit voter engagement produces impacts that extend far beyond the outcome of a single election.¹ When the communities we serve are unable to vote, policymakers are less likely to prioritize the needs of nonprofit constituents, as well as the policy priorities of nonprofit organizations that serve them.

The Solution: Leave No Power on the Table

Without collective action, nonprofits face the grim prospect of people in our communities losing their voices, and nonprofits losing our policy influence, donors, and volunteers. Robust nonpartisan voter engagement is the sector's best defense to ensure nonprofits have a seat at the table to inform the policy decisions that impact our organizations and the communities we serve.

Opportunities for Action

Develop and Implement a Nonprofit Voter Engagement Plan

Nonprofits' ability to advance our missions hinges upon our stakeholders' ability to cast their ballot and hold elected officials accountable. Nonprofit institutions have long been a trusted source of objective and nonpartisan election information.

If not the nonprofit sector, who will step in to help? If not now, when is a more appropriate time to ensure our constituents can access the ballot box? Implementing a voter engagement plan today can be the difference in whether the communities you serve can make their voices heard tomorrow. Use the [Nonprofit Voter Empowerment Playbook](#) to seamlessly integrate nonpartisan activities into your organization's existing services and programs. To learn more about nonpartisan voter engagement strategies visit the [It's On Us: Nonprofit Voter Empowerment Project website](#).

Invest in Change

Since its inception, the charitable nonprofit sector has met community needs with innovative solutions. But nonprofits cannot do it alone. The historic participation rates during the 2020 census and election would not have been possible without the partnership of foundations who engaged in responsive philanthropy by investing additional and flexible funding to address civic needs that were exacerbated during the global pandemic.

Philanthropy, through its words and actions, can either stifle or boost a nonprofit's capacity and interest in engaging communities in voting and democracy. This [Philanthropy for Voter Engagement Toolkit](#) provides examples and best practices for community and private foundations to support or activate local communities to conduct voter engagement.

¹ [The Nonprofit Voter Empowerment Playbook](#) (2022). Independent Sector.



Use this [resource guide](#) to learn how your organization can partner with a broad group of peer funders to develop strategy, create alignment, and dedicate pooled resources to support nonprofit voter engagement programming.