



The National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign  
Voter turnout, political power and  
community well-being

**UCONN** | SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

NANCY A. HUMPHREYS INSTITUTE FOR  
POLITICAL SOCIAL WORK

## Objectives for today

1. Why voting matters to all social work practice
2. Introduction of the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign
3. How schools of social work, agencies and NASW chapters can support clients, students, communities and staff to vote



## Brief introductions

### **The National Voter Social Work Mobilization Campaign**

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# Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work

## Our Mission

To increase the political participation and power of all social workers and the communities we serve so public policy reflects our professional values, knowledge and commitment to social justice.

“Politics is social work with power”

Senator Barbara Mikulski, MSW

**Voter Registration**

**=**

**Social Work**

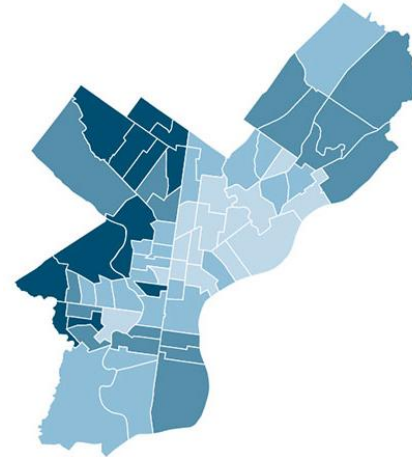
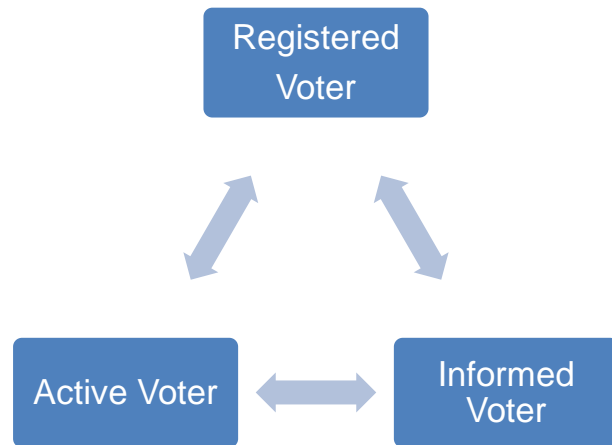
**Register Your Clients Today**

Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work:  
Advancing Political Social Work

University of Connecticut | School of Social Work  
VISIT US IN ROOM 320 | CALL US 860-570-9262 | EMAIL US POLITICALINSTITUTE@UCONN.EDU

# The importance of an inclusive democracy

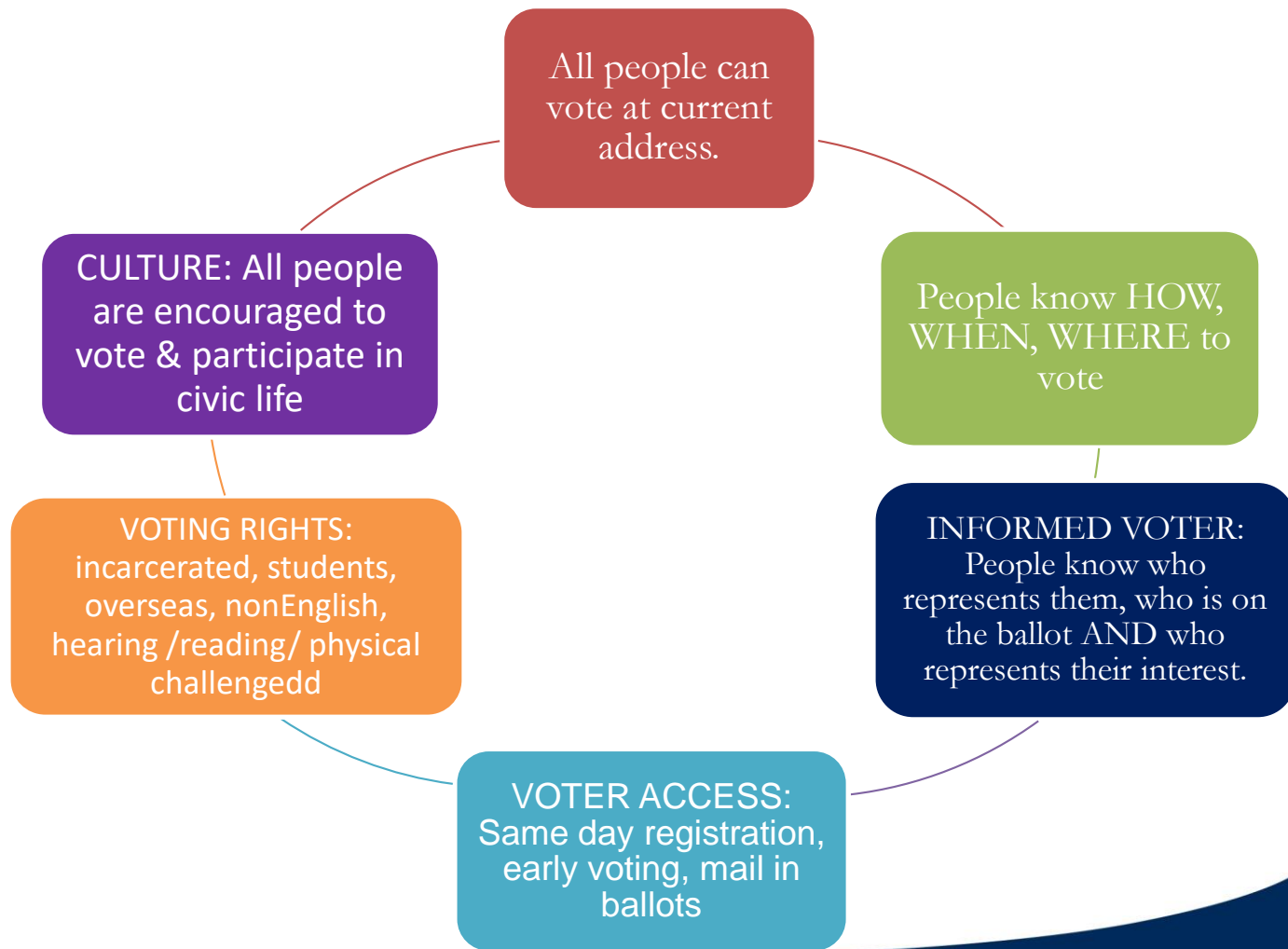
A democracy in which power is shared equally therefore it reflects and responds to the needs of all citizens



Elected officials pay attention to people and communities that vote. Who votes in higher rates can tell an important story about power.

# Culture of voting central to inclusive democracy

People have the tools, information and ability to participate in all elections.

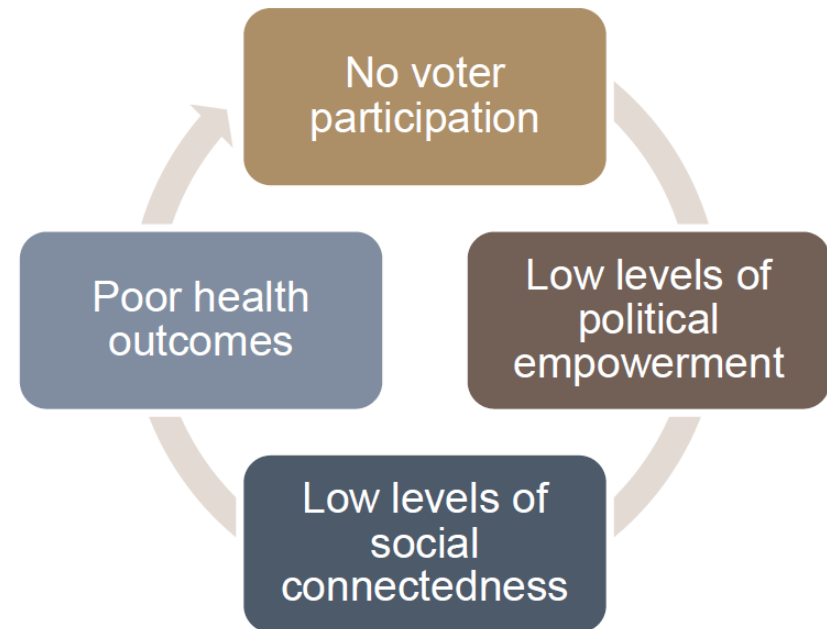


# Voting as **SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH**

Individuals and communities who vote are better off in important indicators of well-being.

Ballard, Hoyt & Pachucki, 2018; Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2011; Kansas Health Foundation, Civic Health Index, 2016; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Leighley & Nagler, 2013; Martin, 2003; Martin & Claibourn, 2013; National Conference on Citizenship, Civic Health & Unemployment, 2011; Sanders, 2001.

**Note: see last page for citations and [VotingIsSocialWork.Org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.Org) for more information.**



Alemeda County Department of Health

## Structural barriers are *designed* to limit participation and power.

- Confusing and complicated rules, deadlines and processes;
- Inconsistent election administration;
- Restricting who can vote through disenfranchisement and strict id rules; and
- Drawing barriers that dilute power.

Agencies and social workers have been reluctant to be seen as political.  
*Nonpartisan voter registration, education and outreach is legal, ethical and professional.*





## Voting rights are central to civil rights

- Voting is power.
- Confusing felony voting laws differ by state, are punitive and disproportionately affect people of color.
- Native American populations continue to face access, language and other barriers to voting.
- Watch this powerful video from Atlantic Magazine [https://youtu.be/uDnKDjiP0\\_M](https://youtu.be/uDnKDjiP0_M)

**1 OF EVERY 13** African Americans has **LOST THEIR VOTING RIGHTS** due to felony disenfranchisement laws, vs. **1 IN EVERY 56** non-black voters



# *It's not just about the President and Congress.*

## The importance of local and state elections.

Education and schools ● Public transportation ● Housing  
Roads ● Adult education ● Policing and community relations  
Clean water ● Trash ● Elections ● Redistricting

1. Less than 1 in 4 people vote in local elections yet local officials usually most accessible and accountable to their communities. Lower turnout can lead to concentrated power and fewer candidates.
2. Local policy can lead national change (think minimum wage, marriage equality and gun laws).
3. State legislatures often responsible for drawing Congressional and state districts.

# SOCIAL WORKERS CAN AND SHOULD SUPPORT CLIENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO VOTE

Social work education, including field and professional development can support all social workers and agencies to integrate voter registration, education and outreach into micro/mezzo/macro practice:

**Registration:** add voter registration/look up to intake; run voter registration drives

**Education:** when/where/how to vote and links to felony voting rights, elected officials and issues and candidates.

**Advocate:** against gerrymandering, for voting access and voting rights

**Encouragement to vote:** Reminders about elections, encouragement that their vote matters, help/info getting to polls.

Organizational culture and relationship with clients shifts from a helping model to an empowerment model by supporting public and political power.

Helping → empowerment

Hanrahan, M., Matorin, S., & Borland, D. (1986). Promoting Competence Through Voter Registration. *Social Work, 31*(2), 141.

# Impact of Voter Engagement

Social workers and agencies support voting as part of practice and impact



Voting is part of culture: registration education & outreach



Voter turnout increases



Better leaders and more informed political decisions are made



Better outcomes for communities

# Nonpartisan voter engagement is legal, ethical and professional and in some cases, mandated by law.

Nonprofits may conduct nonpartisan voter engagement activities designed to educate the public and help them participate in elections

## A 501(c)(3) MAY NOT:

- Make an endorsement
- Donate money or resources
- Rate/rank candidates on their positions

*Organizations who sign people up for federal benefits may be required by law to provide voter registration opportunity (see 1993 Voter Registration Act).*

**501(c)(3) Permissible Activities Checklist**

**A 501(c)(3) organization may not conduct partisan activities to support or oppose any candidate for public office, including -**

- Endorse a candidate
- Make a campaign contribution to or an expenditure for a candidate
- Rate candidates on who is most favorable to their issue
- Let candidates use any of its facilities or resources, unless those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value

**"Charities are allowed to conduct nonpartisan activities that educate the public and help them participate in the electoral process (such as) voter education, voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives and candidate forums."**  
—IRS office of Exempt Organizations

**Resources**

To learn more go to -

- Nonprofits, Voting and Elections: A guide to nonpartisan voter engagement for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. This guide is available on our website in the following formats:
  - Online Guide
  - Narrated Slide Presentation
  - PDF in English or Spanish
- Alliance for Justice, "Election resources for nonprofits," [www.aj.org](http://www.aj.org)
- IRS, Election Year Activities for Section 501(c)(3) Organizations, February 2006

**Activities 501(c)(3) Organizations Can Do On a Nonpartisan Basis**

There is a wide range of nonpartisan activities a nonprofit may engage in to encourage voter participation and promote voter education. Among the most common are to:

- Educate Voters on the Process of Voting
- Encourage and Remind People to Vote
- Participate in Get-Out-the-Vote Activities
- Conduct or Promote Voter Registration\*
- Become a Poll Worker or Volunteer at the Polls
- Distribute Nonpartisan Sample Ballots, Candidate Questionnaires or Voter Guides
- Sponsor a Candidate Forum
- Educate the Candidates on Your Issues
- Advocate for Your Issues During an Election
- Support or Oppose Ballot Measures as a Lobbying Activity

\*Subject to restrictions of funding sources. For example, the federal government sometimes prohibits use of federal funds for voter registration.

**NonprofitVOTE**  
[www.nonprofitvote.org](http://www.nonprofitvote.org)

# About the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign

The Campaign seeks to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of voting to social work practice and social policy;
- Integrate voter engagement activities into class and field education for all micro and macro students;
- Provide information about voter mobilization skills and strategies to field instructors, students and faculty for use in agencies and the classroom; and
- Ensure that all the people served by social workers have access to the vote.

## **Organizational Endorsements include:**

CSWE • North American Network of Field Educators and Directors (NANFED) • National Association of Deans & Directors (NADD) • Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work • Association for Community Organization & Social Action (ACOSA) • #MacroSW • Network for Social Work Management (NSWM) • Influencing Social Policy (ISP)

## Ways social work can make a difference

- Ask about voter registration at agency/school intake
- Offer to check registration status at current address **VOTE.org**
- Ensure people with a felony conviction know their right to vote in your state  
**VOTE.org, NonprofitVote.org**
- Help people find who represents them /post elected officials in public places **RocktheVote.org, See worksheet on VotingIsSocialWork.org**
- Share voting information and tools with clients **League of Women Voters, NonprofitVote.org**
- Encourage people to vote in primaries and general elections  
**TURBOVOTE.org RocktheVote.org**
- Help people find polling place and post ride sharing numbers from both parities



## Ways your school can join the movement

- Add voter training to curricula, including assignment in field for students to build confidence and skills
- Train field supervisors through SIFI, professional development for CEUs
- Add training to field/lobby days for students or workshops
- Suggest voter activities to educational contracts
- Host forums at your school/agency

## Sample Assignments—BSW/MSW

- Ask students to develop plan to integrate voter registration, education and outreach into field organization's service delivery/culture. Discuss with your field supervisor.
- Complete reflective essay on voter engagement assignments and training to CSWE advocacy and policy practice competencies.
- Register 3 people to vote.
- Look up the rules and deadlines for voting in your state (sample worksheet on [VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.org))
- Find your elected officials at the local, state and federal level (worksheet on [VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.org))



## Find partners in your community

League of Women Voters

ACLU

Your State Election Board or Secretary of the State

Vote.org

NonprofitVote.org

Rock the Vote



**A CALL TO ACTION**  
Social Work Education's role  
in turnout

**VOTING** is  
Social  
Work

What's one thing you will do  
to support voting in your  
practice?

Share your story with us at  
[info@VotingIsSoicalWork.org](mailto:info@VotingIsSoicalWork.org)

**Voting IS Social Work!**

Central to social work's values and social justice mission. Gives individuals and communities the power to voice their opinions and effect change. Non-partisan voter registration, education and outreach are *legal, ethical and professional.*

**VOTING = A Human Right**

Strenuous efforts exist to restrict access to voting. Not unlike the old poll tax, they include strict voter ID laws, purging voter rolls and intimidation by political parties and even those in charge of elections.

Over 20 million people have felony convictions, nearly 6 million of which have unfairly lost the right to vote--disproportionately from communities of color (38%). In the 4 worst states, more than 1 in 5 African Americans have lost the right to vote.<sup>16</sup>

State by state rules have created widespread confusion with most assuming they can't vote even when they can.

**Voting rights are *protected* for many groups, including:**

- Persons who are homeless;
- Victims of domestic violence;
- The disabled, including those with language and reading barriers; and
- Those in pre-trial detention.

**VOTING = Better Outcomes**

Individual and communities that vote report better health, employment and other important outcomes; receive more resources from elected officials; and develop stronger community connections.

*Voting builds power!* It maximizes the capacity to influence public policy and can offset some of the negative effects of oppression and discrimination. <sup>1,3,5,8,9,10,14</sup>

**Yet BARRIERS Still Exist**

- Confusing registration and ID requirements;
- Not knowing where, when and how to vote;
- Lack of transportation;
- Long lines;
- Lack of information on candidates and issues;
- People believing their vote doesn't matter. <sup>12,13</sup> ; and
- Wrongly thinking that voter registration is partisan, illegal, unethical and unprofessional.

*The Humphreys Institute is a proud partner of the*  
**NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK  
VOTER MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN**

[www.VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://www.VotingIsSocialWork.org)

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For more information, email  
[info@votingissocialwork.org](mailto:info@votingissocialwork.org)

**SCHOOL/PROGRAM-WIDE  
ACTIVITIES**

- Inform faculty and students.
- Hold a forum or public event inviting all candidates on the ballot to speak about relevant social issues.
- Offer training and CEUs to field supervisors on voter engagement.
- Add voter registration links/info to school registration processes.
- Hold registration drives; inform students about election dates and resources; and encourage them to vote.

**FACULTY**

- Can bring content on voting into the classroom and the field to build student political efficacy and connect voter engagement to social work's impact.
- See [VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.org) for classroom resources and training ideas.
- Create experiential learning assignments such as registering voters, looking up Voter ID rules, finding polling sites, checking registration status, reviewing registration and absentee ballot forms, and running registration drives.
- Invite guest speakers to class (e.g., League of Women Voters or local registrars).
- Assign students to look up who represents them at all levels of government and/or meet with one of their elected officials.
- Ask students to partner with their field instructors to design ways to integrate voter engagement into agency services.

## References. For a complete list, go to [VotingIsSocialWork.org](http://VotingIsSocialWork.org)

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