

Social Service Agencies and Voter Registration

Five Common Concerns & Five Concrete Answers

"My agency is not allowed to do voter registration." Non-profit, 501(c)(3) organizations can operate voter registration drives if they do so in a non-partisan manner. In fact, Section 1b of the National Voter Registration Act encourages all non-governmental entities to register their clients. As a non-profit you can register people to vote, but you cannot take positions on candidates,

"My agency doesn't have the staff or volunteers to do voter registration."

We're all strapped for time, but you can make it easy. Here are some ideas:

- Appoint one person, either staff or volunteer, to be a coordinator.
- Make it part of your intake or exit interview process. Add to your forms: "If you are not registered where you now live, would you like to register today?"
- Put up signs announcing that people can "Register to Vote Here."
- Have outreach workers do voter registration.
- Get volunteers and clients to help.
- Pay clients to register other clients — contact your local City/County Elections Office to find out how to do this.

"We don't know how to register voters." Call us – we can help! We are happy to provide training, technical assistance and materials.

"Clients are not interested in the issues."

Our experience is that clients want to vote and do vote, if barriers to their exercising this basic right are removed. Studies show that 70% of those registered to vote by volunteer efforts in welfare and food stamp offices actually go to the polls and vote in presidential elections. Low-income people are no more or less interested in politics than you or I. Please don't let your attitude be a barrier. Our clients are often disconnected from community life. Voting helps them reconnect with their community in a positive way.

"OK, I'm convinced. What else can I do?"

Here are a few ideas. Call us if you want more information or help.

- Let your clients use your agency as a mailing address for their sample and/or absentee ballots.
- Call your City/County Elections Office and find out if your agency can become a polling site on election day.
- Organize a candidates' forum and ask the candidates to address your issues.
- Help clients to get to a candidates forum in your community.
- Talk to your peers in other non-profits, and encourage them to involve their clients in the democratic process.