



Launching a Successful Voter Empowerment Campaign

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ABOUT NCSTAC (THE NATIONAL CONSUMER SUPPORTER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER)

NCSTAC (the National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center) is a project of the National Mental Health Association. We aim to strengthen mental health organizations by providing trainings, informational materials, and technical assistance.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is a voter empowerment campaign?

A successful mental health voter empowerment campaign leads to increased voter registration among the consumer/survivor/ex-patient community but its impact doesn't end there. Voter empowerment also involves the formation of a mental health constituency that is knowledgeable about relevant policy issues, mobilized to help get out the vote, and documented as a voting force. The National Mental Health Association's (NMHA's) model for launching an effective voter empowerment campaign calls for those involved to:

- 1) form an advisory committee,
- 2) collect and maintain records and a database,
- 3) register voters and enroll supporters,
- 4) educate registrants,
- 5) bring registrants to the polls, and,
- 6) tally voters.

This executive summary provides a brief description of each of these steps. In addition, a sample campaign time-line at the end of this section provides an overview of the various activities that are typically conducted during a large voter empowerment campaign.

Step 1) Forming an advisory committee

For a mental health voter empowerment campaign to be successful, it must be a collaborative effort between the various mental health stakeholders – consumer and family groups, service providers, civil rights organizations – in your community. Only with a broad coalition of supporters will your organization be able to: find the funding you need, gain access to mental health consumers and win their trust, provide adequate public education, and get out the vote. As a first step, you need to form an advisory committee to oversee the management of your campaign.

Step 2) Keeping records: maintaining a database

Without a carefully organized record-keeping system, a voter empowerment campaign can quickly collapse into chaos. As a campaign manager, you will need to keep track of the people you register, volunteers, candidates and political boundaries. A sample database to help you conduct this record-keeping, *Vote-Track*, is included in this manual.

Step 3) Registering voters and recruiting volunteers

Voter registration and volunteer recruitment should go hand in hand. When you ask people whether they want to register to vote, you should also ask them to volunteer to

help with your campaign. You may have to approach people several times before they decide to register or volunteer, so you should plan on conducting registration and recruitment efforts throughout the year.

Step 4) Educating registrants

Public education should also be conducted on an ongoing basis and should have two major thrusts: (1) teaching registrants about civil procedure, and (2) keeping registrants informed about the issues. Your campaign should aim to provide information, but not advice or recommendations. *You are never, under any circumstances, to endorse a specific party or candidate.*

Step 5) Bringing registrants to the polls

Some of the people your campaign registers may not vote on election day but it's your job to encourage as many as possible to do so. To encourage full participation, your organization can arrange for absentee voting, set up polling places at mental health facilities, and arrange to bring people to the polls.

Step 6) Tallying voters

To measure the effectiveness of your voter empowerment project, you should tally the number of registrants who vote on Election Day. By publicizing these results, you can attract potential funders, new registrants, and media attention. Statistics on the number of voting consumers can also help you to stress to policy makers that mental health consumers and advocates are influential constituencies that should not be overlooked.

A Word about Electioneering and Nonprofits

The IRS specifically prohibits nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations from trying to determine an election's outcome ("electioneering"). If yours is a nonprofit organization, you must ensure that all your voter empowerment activities are strictly nonpartisan and do not overlap with any of your lobbying activities.

Sample Campaign Time-line

Year-round:

- Conduct voter registration.
- Conduct public education.

100 days before election:

- Secure additional computers.
- Organize volunteers' schedules and responsibilities.

Six weeks before registration cut-off:

- Increase registration opportunities by, for example, throwing registration parties.
- Invite candidates to a candidates' night.

(Note: registration deadlines vary from state to state.)

Two months before election:

- Mail out reminders to vote.
- Mail out candidate surveys to candidates.

Six weeks before election:

- Host meet-the-candidates event.
- Compile and distribute candidate surveys to registrants.
- Arrange for voting booths to be placed in inpatient facilities.

One month before election:

- Plan to provide transportation for registrants who need rides to the polls.
- Make door-to-door literature drops.
- Educate consumers on how to fill out ballots or use voting machines.

Two weeks before election:

- Mail reminders to vote.
- Arrange to provide assistance for those needing assistance in voting booths.

Five days before election:

- Call registrants – remind them to vote.

Day before election:

- Go door-to-door – remind people to vote.

Election Day:

- Offer transportation to and from polls.
- Offer voting booth assistance and educational materials.
- Tally the number of voters among the people you registered.

Post-Election Day:

- Tally the number of voters among the people you registered.

2. A WORD ABOUT ELECTIONEERING AND NONPROFITS

According to the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Elections Commission, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization may not engage in activity which is deemed “electioneering.” Electioneering means attempting to influence the outcome of an election.

Because most consumer supporter organizations are nonprofit, they must be careful when conducting voter empowerment activities not to engage in any activities that might be construed as electioneering. Here are some guidelines that nonprofit organizations must follow when they conduct voter empowerment campaigns:

- If your advisory committee includes any member of a political party, it must include members of all major parties.
- If you distribute public education materials about any party or candidate, you must also provide materials about all parties and candidates who are participating in the election.
- If your organization engages in any lobbying activities, you may use your database of registrants only for the voter empowerment campaign.
- If you organize a meet-the-candidates event or conduct a candidate survey, then you must invite all candidates to participate.
- While registering voters, you may never endorse a particular party or candidate. You may not reveal which candidate you plan to vote for even if you are asked directly to reveal this information.

The IRS prohibits nonprofits from “electioneering,” that is, attempting to influence the outcome of an election.

3. FORMING AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Your voter empowerment campaign's advisory committee should include members who can help you to reach the largest number of people. The committee should bring together the various elements of the mental health and civil rights community who can contribute a range of services to the campaign.

A strong campaign advisory committee should include:

- representatives from the various mental health advocacy organizations in your community, both peer and non-peer run,
- representatives from day-treatment and inpatient facilities,
- officials from the election governing body in your community,
- representatives from voter registration and education organizations such as the League of Women Voters,
- one or more attorneys who have expertise in dealing with election and civil rights issues,
- representatives from each major political party, and
- people who are well connected enough to have fund-raising clout.

Your committee should have one representative from each major political party, to ensure your campaign remains nonpartisan.

Select active, engaged people for your advisory committee who are willing to provide support throughout the voter empowerment campaign. Committee members should be willing and able to participate in such activities as:

- planning,
- fundraising,
- setting up registration sites at mental health facilities,
- recruiting volunteers,
- providing objective information on candidates and issues,
- organizing public education events,
- obtaining practice voting booths,
- establishing polling sites at mental health facilities, and
- addressing other problems as they arise.

NCSTAC's technical assistance manual, *How to Establish and Maintain a Consumer Advisory Board*, includes further helpful information on board and committee development.

4. KEEPING RECORDS: MAINTAINING A DATABASE

A voter empowerment campaign requires extensive record-keeping, and a well maintained computer database is an absolute must. You will use this electronic tool to keep track of each consumer you register, draw effectively upon your volunteer base, and provide timely information to these groups.

Information that you should keep track of includes:

1) *People you have registered to vote.* When you register consumers, also ask if you may include their information in your database. You can then send them public education materials, reminders of when and where to vote, alerts when their registrations are about to expire, and invitations to campaign events. For all people you register, keep track of:

- their contact information: address, phone number, and e-mail,
- the date their registration expires,
- when they last voted,
- whether they have previously voted, and
- their ward and district numbers (your state or local election authority can provide you with these political boundaries).

2) *People who have volunteered to work with the campaign.* Ask potential volunteers to fill out the Volunteer Recruitment Form provided with this manual's diskette to determine what types of activities they are willing to perform to support the campaign.

3) *Candidates.* Keep track of everyone who is running, their contact information, their wards or districts, and their party affiliations. You can share this information as part of your public education efforts. You'll also use this background information to invite candidates to participate in candidate surveys and meet-the-candidate events.

Hardcopy Forms

Ideally, you should use a database to manage your campaign. If this is not possible, you may collect hardcopy information on candidates, registrants and volunteers using the following forms which are included in the diskette that accompanies this manual:

- Candidate Information Form
- Registrant Information Form
- Volunteer Recruitment Form

Using *Vote-Track*

This manual includes a copy of a sample database, *Vote-Track*, designed in Microsoft Access format. It is intended for people who have a basic knowledge of Access. *Vote-*

Track allows you to organize and store all of the information described above, create mailing labels, and run reports. *Vote-Track* is not copyrighted, and you may adapt it in any way you wish to meet your campaign needs.

When you first open *Vote-Track*, an Access control panel will appear that lists “Objects” on the left hand side. The objects that you will use to manage this database are “Queries,” “Forms” and “Reports.” More information on each of these functions follows:

(Forms: entering data)

You will enter information into the *Vote-Track* database through two data entry forms: “Candidate Information” and “Registrant Information.” Samples of these forms are shown on page 11. To access these forms, select “Forms” from the Access control panel’s “Objects” column.

Double click on the “Candidate Information Form” menu item to open this form. This form allows you to enter details about candidates’ contact information, titles, wards or districts, party affiliations, elections in which they are competing, and offices they hope to fill. Two sample candidate records – Jane Doe and Sam Sample – have been included as examples of how to use this form.

From the Access control panel, double click on the “Registrant Information Form” menu item to open this form. This form allows you to keep track both of people you have registered to vote and people who have volunteered to help with your campaign. Two sample registrant/volunteer records – Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse – have been included as examples of how to use this form.

(Mailing labels)

With *Vote-Track*, you can print mailing labels for everyone who has either registered to vote or volunteered to help with your campaign. You can use these labels to distribute public education materials. In the Access control panel, select “Reports” from the left-hand “Objects” list.

Double-click on the “Registrant Mailing Labels” report to produce labels of all people you have either registered to vote or recruited as volunteers.

The database also generates mailing labels for all of the candidates. From the Access control panel, select the “Candidate Mailing Labels” report. You can use this function to provide candidates with public education materials as well as to invite candidates to attend special events or to participate in surveys.

Vote-Track Data Entry Forms

Registant Information Form : Form
_ □ ×

Registant Information

ID:

Title: <input type="text" value="Mr."/>	Is s/he registered to vote? <input type="checkbox"/>	
First name: <input type="text" value="Mickey"/>	Registration valid until: <input type="text" value="1/10/02"/>	
Last name: <input type="text" value="Mouse"/>	When did s/he last vote? <input type="text" value="1/1/00"/>	
Organization: <input type="text" value="Disney Studios"/>	Was it the first time s/he voted? <input type="checkbox"/>	
Address 1: <input type="text" value="1234 Main Street"/>	District number: <input type="text" value="12"/>	
Address 2: <input type="text" value="Suite 400"/>	Ward number: <input type="text" value="8"/>	
City: <input type="text" value="Orlando"/>		
State: <input type="text" value="Florida"/>		
Zip: <input type="text" value="12345"/>		
Phone: <input type="text" value="888-555-1212"/>	E-Mail: <input type="text" value="mickey@disney"/>	
Fax: <input type="text" value="888-888-2121"/>	Web: <input type="text" value="www.mickey.org"/>	

Volunteer Information:

Would s/he be willing to:

- help us by working from home?
- make phone calls from home?
- help with our office work?
- help with voter education and outreach?
- research/ develop educational materials?
- drive registrants to the polls?

How else can s/he help?

Good with public relations, experienced with newsletters.

Record: 1 of 2

Candidate Information Form : Form
_ □ ×

Candidate Information

Title: <input type="text" value="Senator"/>	Incumbent? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
First name: <input type="text" value="Sam"/>	Running on what date? <input type="text" value="4/29/66"/>
Last name: <input type="text" value="Sample"/>	Candidate running for: <input type="text" value="President"/>
Address 1: <input type="text" value="1234 Main Street"/>	Candidate running for, other: <input type="text"/>
Address 2: <input type="text"/>	Candidate's party: <input type="text" value="Other"/>
City: <input type="text" value="Anywhere"/>	Other party: <input type="text" value="Independent"/>
State: <input type="text" value="US"/>	District: <input type="text"/>
Phone: <input type="text" value="555-1212"/>	Ward: <input type="text"/>
Fax: <input type="text" value="555-1234"/>	
E-mail: <input type="text" value="candidate@usa"/>	

Record: 1 of 2

(Reports)

Vote-Track produces three reports. To access these reports, select “Reports” from the “Objects” menu on the left-hand side of the Access control panel.

The “Candidate Information” report is simply a list of all candidate who are running for office, what offices they are seeking, their contact information, and in which election they are running.

The “People Willing to Help” report pulls up information on potential voter empowerment campaign volunteers. The report includes their contact information and what type of work they are willing to do.

The “Registrations Valid Until” report lists the voter registration expiration dates for the people you have registered. You can use this information to send reminders to people when they need to renew their registrations.

Confidentiality of Records

As you register consumers to vote and recruit volunteers, you must assure each person that the information you collect about them will be used only for your voter empowerment campaign. This is necessary to win their trust and encourage them to register. And, as has already been discussed in Section 2, if your organization is a nonprofit and conducts any lobbying activities, use of registrant information for any purposes other than your voter empowerment campaign could jeopardize your tax exempt status.

For these reasons, although your organization may already have a computer, it is best to keep your voter empowerment campaign information on a separate computer. If this is not possible, then store your database on a diskette rather than on your hard drive.

Look for computer donations. Computer retailers may give away new equipment, and large businesses who are upgrading will sometimes part with used equipment.

5. REGISTERING VOTERS AND RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

A Word on Volunteers

Running a voter empowerment campaign requires a large time commitment, but fortunately, volunteers can conduct much of the work. While registering consumers to vote, ask them whether they would also be willing to help you with your campaign. It can be helpful to provide people with a written list of questions to obtain their contact information and learn what type of work they are willing to perform.

Below is a sample volunteer recruitment form. An electronic version of this form, both in Microsoft Word and as a text file, is included in the diskette that accompanies this manual.

<i>Join Our Voter Empowerment Campaign!</i>	
Name:	_____
Address:	_____
Phone number:	_____
E-mail:	_____
Would you be willing to: (please check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	help us by working from home?
<input type="checkbox"/>	make phone calls from home?
<input type="checkbox"/>	help with our office work?
<input type="checkbox"/>	help with voter registration and outreach?
<input type="checkbox"/>	research and develop educational materials?
<input type="checkbox"/>	drive registrants to the polls?
How else would you like to participate? What special skills do you have?	

The *Vote-Track* database provided with this manual allows you to input the answers to these questions and then run a report of people who are willing to help with your campaign.

NCSTAC's technical assistance manual, *Working with Volunteers*, provides further helpful information on this topic.

About Election Procedures and Laws

(State procedures)

Election procedures vary from state to state. Contact your state election authority to find out about:

- registration deadlines,
- party enrollment guidelines,
- residency requirements,
- requirements for registering homeless voters,
- what registration forms to use, and
- procedures for helping people to fill out their registration forms.

Most state election boards distribute voter guides containing this information. Your local League of Women Voters may also have information about election procedures in your state.

(The National Voter Registration Act)

Changes in federal law have made it easier to register people with mental illness to vote. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (also known as the Motor Voter Act), requires that all state funded agencies providing services to people with disabilities also provide voter registration services. This allows you to approach any publicly funded institutions in your area – including inpatient units – and ask either that they allow you to set up a registration table or that they themselves register their clients to vote.

(Who has the right to vote?)

Most states have laws on the books prohibiting voting by the “insane,” the “mentally incapacitated” or those who are “of unsound mind.” Despite these old statutes, typically, unless a person has been specifically adjudicated incompetent by a court, he or she will be allowed to vote.

With this in mind, NCSTAC recommends that voter empowerment campaign workers register any consumer who wishes to vote: Complete the registration forms, send them to the state election authority, and leave it to the authority to notify those they deem ineligible.

No person is prohibited from voting simply because he or she been subjected to civil commitment

(Who may register people to vote?)

In most states, anyone who is eighteen or older may register other people to vote. Regulations, however, can vary throughout the country so check with your state or local election authority.

Targeting Consumers

You should register consumers where they live, work and socialize. With your advisory committee, devise a list of the key organizations that serve consumers in your area.

Your list might include:

- clinics,
- clubhouses,
- day treatment programs,
- family groups,
- housing programs,
- peer advocacy groups,
- peer advocacy organizations,
- psychiatric hospitals,
- psychiatric wards,
- self-help organizations,
- shelters,
- supported education programs,
- supported employment programs,
- VA hospitals, and
- vocational rehabilitation programs.

(Hard-to-reach consumers)

Some populations, such as homeless consumers, people in home care, or inpatients in private hospitals, may be particularly difficult to reach. But when you are targeting these communities, a strong, diverse advisory committee can come in handy. Use your committee contacts to coordinate registration with organizations that serve the homeless, family groups, and private inpatient hospitals.

It is also important to conduct outreach to consumers from various minority groups and particularly to those who do not regularly congregate in English-speaking venues. The web site, www.usavotenet.com, provides information on organizations across the country working to get out the vote in minority communities. Contact the appropriate organizations near you for foreign language materials and for advice on how to reach the various minority communities in your area.

Sample Calendar of Voter Registration Activities

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 11:00 – 2:00 Do Drop In Clubhouse (Joe, Maria)	2 9:00 – 5:00 Ridley Hospital (Maria, Becky)	3 11:00 – 2:00 Do Drop In Clubhouse (Joe, Maria)	4	5 8:30 – 12:00 Woodley Supported Housing (Lynn, Cliff)
6 8:30 – 12:00 Woodley Supported Housing (Lynn, Cliff)	7 5:00 – 7:30 Martha’s Soup Kitchen (Lynn, Maria)	8 5:00 – 7:30 Martha’s Soup Kitchen (Lynn, Maria)	9 5:00 – 7:30 Martha’s Soup Kitchen (Maria, Becky)	10 5:00 – 7:30 Martha’s Soup Kitchen (Joe, Becky)	11	12 9:00 – 5:00 Ridley Hospital (Joe, Becky)
13	14 8:30 – 12:00 Woodley Supported Housing (Becky, Cliff)	15 11:00 – 2:00 Do Drop In Clubhouse (Joe, Maria)	16	17 11:00 – 2:00 Do Drop In Clubhouse (Becky, Cliff)	18	19
20	21	22	23 7:00 – 9:00 Candidate Night, All Souls Church (whole team)	24	25	26
27 1:00 – 3:30 Outreach Picnic, City Park (whole team)	28	29 11:00 – 2:00 Do Drop In Clubhouse (Joe and Maria)	30			

The Registration Drive

The preceding page shows a one-month calendar for a sample registration drive. It lists times, dates and locations for various registration events, and shows which members of the voter empowerment team will be staffing these events. Your campaign should prepare a similar calendar for each month of your registration drive.

When planning your registration drive, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- 1) *Prepare your registration team.* Review the “Guidelines for Registration Workers” (on the following page) with your staff. Make sure they are completely comfortable with these guidelines and thoroughly familiar with the registration forms.
- 2) *Obtain voter registration forms.* These are available from your state or local election authority.
- 3) *Build trust.* Conduct registration more than once at the same site to help people become familiar with your campaign. You should also use consumers to register consumers.
- 4) *Organize special events.* Meet-the-candidate events, registration picnics, and registration parties can help stir up interest among potential voters. The New York City Mental Health Voter Empowerment Campaign, for example, regularly organizes a “Picnic for Parity.”
- 5) *Use the media.* Invite local reporters to attend your special events. Also let them know about your regular registration efforts and keep them apprised of important milestones; for example, registering your 100th consumer may merit the issuing of a press release. NCSTAC’s technical assistance manual, *How to Work with the Media*, provides more information on this topic.

A note about jury duty:

Registering to vote makes an individual eligible for jury duty. Explain to consumers who are worried about being called for jury duty that they can often be excused for health reasons.

Guidelines for Registration Workers

DO

- Encourage every person with mental illness you can to register to vote, even those who believe they may not be eligible.
- Inform people that they will receive notices from their state voter registration authorities about the status of their applications.
- Inform people that their benefits and services will not be affected by a decision to register.
- Display strict neutrality with respect to candidates and party affiliations.
- Provide step-by-step help in completing the registration form – you may even complete the form for the applicant if necessary.
- Give people the option of completing the mail-in-registration privately.
- Inform people that they need to re-register whenever they change their address of record.
- Check voter registration forms for completeness.
- Ask the newly registered voters for permission to send them public information materials.

DON'T

- Don't attempt to influence anyone to join any political party. (But inform people that they must join one if they wish to vote in a primary.)
- Don't discuss a party or candidate preference, even if you are asked.
- Don't discourage anyone from registering. Let the state election authority determine who is or isn't eligible to vote.
- Don't suggest to anyone that they are required by law to register.

6. VOTER EDUCATION

The Need for Public Education

While you are conducting your registration drive, also request permission to send people public education materials. Public education is an indispensable part of a voter empowerment campaign and should have two main thrusts (1) informing voters about civil procedure, and (2) informing voters about the candidates and issues.

In terms of civil procedure, registrants may need information on what district they vote in and where their polling place is. They may not understand the differences between various types of elections such as primaries, general elections or referenda. Finally, they may need guidance in how to use a ballot card or a voting booth.

You must also provide voters with information on the candidates and the issues so that they have the information they need to make intelligent decisions at the polls. As always, the information you disseminate must be impartial and non-partisan.

It is okay to share information that reflects badly on a candidate. If, for example, a local official makes a derogatory remark about people with mental illness, sharing that quote constitutes appropriate public education. But if you editorialize by, for example, saying to someone “don’t vote for that jerk,” then you violate the law.

Elements of a Public Education Campaign

Your organization can keep consumers informed in a variety of ways. Here are a few possible strategies you can adopt:

- 1) *Establish a voter empowerment campaign telephone number.* All campaign flyers and mailings should list this number. Even if you cannot staff this line full-time, maintain a voice mail system and return calls promptly.
- 2) *Set up a voter empowerment web site.* Some internet service providers (such as Yahoo) offer web hosting either free or at minimal cost. A voter empowerment site is an easy, convenient forum for posting information on candidates, issues and election procedures. Be sure to include your web address on any of your written publications.
- 3) *Obtain resources from your advisory committee.* Committee members may be able to provide you with materials on candidates and issues that you can pass along directly to your voters. You can also use these materials as resources for developing your own publications.

4) *Prepare issues mailings, e-mail messages and faxes.* Quick, one-page releases on hot topics such as the opening of a new treatment center or the governor's decision to support involuntary out-patient commitment can be disseminated on an *ad hoc* basis.

5) *Regularly distribute a newsletter.* A substantive newsletter need only be one double-sided page and could include issues articles, general information on voting rights, and a schedule of campaign events.

6) *Prepare a candidate survey.* Ask candidates for their opinions on key mental health issues and disseminate their answers to the people on your mailing list. NCSTAC's publication *How to Conduct a Candidate Survey*, provides detailed information on this topic.

7) *Organize meet-the-candidates events.* Bringing candidates and consumer/recipients together to discuss politics and governance can be educational for both groups.

8) *Distribute materials to the people you register.* Have copies of your newsletter, issues mailings, candidate surveys, and materials from your advisory committee available when you register consumers.

9) *Organize a "practice voting day".* Obtain voting booths or ballot cards from your local election authority and provide training on how to use this equipment.

7. GETTING VOTERS TO THE POLLS

Many people who are registered to vote fail to cast their ballots on Election Day, sometimes because of logistical problems, such as difficulty in reaching voting stations, and sometimes because they feel hesitant about casting their vote. Your campaign must focus on encouraging the consumers you have registered to get to the polls. Below is an ambitious countdown schedule for getting out the vote. Your organization may not be able to conduct all of these activities, but try, at a minimum, to implement absentee ballots, mail out reminders, and offer rides to the polls.

Countdown for Get out the Vote Activities

Two months before Election Day:

- Mail out reminders to vote to everyone on your mailing list.
- Mail in absentee ballots; the exact procedures and deadlines vary from state to state.

Six weeks before Election Day:

- Arrange with your local election authority for voting booths to be placed in inpatient facilities.

One month before Election Day:

- Plan transportation for registrants who need rides to the polls.

Two weeks before Election Day:

- Mail reminders to vote.
- Arrange to provide help for those who need assistance in voting booths.

Five days before Election Day:

- Call registrants – remind them to vote.

Day before Election Day:

- Go door-to-door. Remind people to vote and leave written reminders for people who aren't home.

Election Day:

- Offer transportation to and from polls.
- Offer walking groups to the polls for people who don't wish to go alone.

8. TALLYING VOTERS

To measure the effectiveness of the your voter empowerment campaign, you should keep a tally of registrants who vote on Election Day. These statistics promote your campaign's success to potential contributors, new registrants and the public at-large. There are three main ways of tallying voters:

- 1) *Government reporting.* Your local election authority compiles a list of everyone who voted on Election Day, and this information is a matter of public record. Your organization can obtain this list and compare the names of participating voters with the names of your project's registrants. This method is very labor-intensive, but it's also the most accurate.
- 2) *Counting at the polls.* Because volunteers frequently help voters to reach polling places, the volunteers can keep a running tally of the voters they bring to the voting stations.
- 3) *Phone reporting.* With the help of the phone company, you can set up a system that allows voters to call in to an automated system to report that they have voted.

9. CONCLUSION

Typically, consumers who have never cast a ballot will give two reasons for not participating in this basic function of our democracy: Either (1) they mistakenly believe they are not allowed to vote, or (2) nobody has ever asked them to vote. A successful voter empowerment campaign must confront these two barriers. Members of the consumer/survivor/ex-patient community need to know that they are allowed to vote and that their votes are important.

Each year, 44 million Americans will experience a diagnosable mental health problem. If even a fraction of these individuals were mobilized, they could form a powerful voting bloc. An educated, voting mental health constituency could help inform policy decisions in areas such as mental health funding, involuntary outpatient commitment laws, seclusion and restraint standards, privacy rights, employment rights, and much more. Indeed, without the backing of voters, many mental health advocacy efforts are bound to fall short.

NCSTAC hopes that by following the steps in this manual, your organization will be able to contribute to the building of a national mental health constituency. With a robust advisory board, a corps of volunteers, an ongoing registration drive, and non-partisan public education, you can help the consumer/survivor/ex-patient community to participate in our great democracy and to shape our society's priorities and goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ACORN

39 8th Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003
Phone: 202-547-2500
Fax: 202-546-2483
E-mail: accornnews@acorn.org
Web: <http://acorn.org>

ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), the nation's largest community organization of low and moderate income families, provides public education materials on poverty-related issues.

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

1819 H Street, N.W.
Suite 330
Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone: 202-457-0046 (V/TTY)
Phone: 800-840-8844 (V/TTY)
E-mail: aapd@aol.com
Web: www.aapd.com

AAPD's Disability Vote Project monitors developments in federal election law pertaining to voters with disabilities.

Empowerment Project

Kay Schriener, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
University of Arkansas School of Social Work
105 Old Main
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Phone: 479-575-6417
E-mail: kays@uark.edu

The Empowerment Project is a federally-funded project that conducts legal research and provide technical assistance on voting rights issues for people with disabilities.

Federal Election Commission

999 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20463
Phone: 800-424-9530
Phone: 202-694-1100
Phone: 202-219-3336, TTY
E-mail: www.fec.gov

This is the official source on federal election regulations. The site also has a downloadable version of the National Mail Voter Registration Form, which is accepted in all states.

Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Washington Headquarters Services
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1155
Phone: 800-438-8683
Fax: 703-588-0108
E-mail: vote@fvap.ncr.gov
Web: www.fvap.ncr.gov

FVAP focuses on helping uniformed and overseas citizens to vote, but its site also contains information on regular absentee voting and has links to state election authorities.

League of Women Voters

1730 M Street, N.W.
Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20036-4508
Phone: 202-429-1965
Fax: 202-429-1965
E-mail: lww@lww.org
Web: www.lww.org
Democracy Net: www.dnet.org

The League of Women Voters encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government. Visit their website to find a local affiliate in your area. Their Democracy Net web site, <http://www.dnet.org>, provides information on candidates and issues.

National Coalition for the Homeless

1012 Fourteenth Street, N.W.
Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005-3471
Phone: 202-737-6444
E-mail: info@nationalhomeless.org
Web: www.nationalhomeless.org

The National Coalition for the Homeless can provide information on ways to get out the vote among homeless citizens in your area.

National Mental Health Association

2001 North Beauregard Street, 12th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
Phone: 800-969-NMHA
Fax: 703-684-5968
Web: www.nmha.org

The National Mental Health Association provides briefings and position papers on key issues in mental health policy. Contact its affiliate in your area to learn about local advocacy initiatives.

Project Vote

88 3rd Avenue
Third Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
Phone: 800-546-VOTE (8683)
Web: www.projectvote.org

Project Vote registers and mobilizes low-income and minority citizens to vote.

Project Vote Smart

One Common Ground
Philipsburg, MT 59858
Phone: 406-859-8683
Phone: 888-VOTE-SMART
Fax: 406-859-8680
Web: www.vote-smart.org

Project Vote Smart conducts research and provides information on candidates and elected officials.

WomenVote

1211 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Suite 504

Washington, D.C. 20036

Phone: 202-835-3713

Fax: 202-466-6195

Web: www.usavotenet.com

WomenVote works to increase turnout among women and particularly women of color. Its Web site, USAVoteNet, provides tips on effective voter outreach as well as information about many voter outreach organizations throughout the country.