Voting as a social work intervention
Our Mission: To increase the political participation and power of all social workers and the communities we serve

“Politics is social work with power”
Senator Barbara Mikulski, MSW
It is easier to spend a few months and some money electing the right people than to spend years and a lot of money trying to get the wrong people to do the right things.

—Senator Debbie Stabenow, MSW

Representation and participation matter in a healthy, inclusive democracy
A Democracy in peril

- White supremacy and anti-Black racism were built into the foundation of our democracy and persist.
- The pandemic has magnified the barriers, forcing many to choose between their health and their right to vote.
- All forms of disenfranchisement and suppression threaten the legitimacy of our democracy.

"The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have."

John Robert Lewis (February 21, 1940 - July 17, 2020)
The nonvote wins

- 100 million eligible age voters stayed home in 2016; 43% of the eligible electorate
- Nonvoters are more likely to be lower income, less educated, non-white, and unmarried
- Systemic barriers to voting feed engagement barriers and the myth that voting doesn’t matter
- Turnout for state and local elections—where policies like policing are made—is far lower

Knight Foundation: https://the100million.org/
The United States Election Project: http://www.electproject.org/
1. More accessible (more accountable)
2. Low turnout can mean those who vote or turn out votes get too much power. *Primaries critical in one-party areas*
3. Local policy can lead national change.

**Detroit Mayor (Vote for 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precincts Reported: 590 of 590 (100.00%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Times Cast</td>
<td>102,311 / 469,139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike Duggan</td>
<td></td>
<td>72,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman A. Young II</td>
<td></td>
<td>28,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Votes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>100,614</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unresolved Write-In</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voting and Registration Rates

2018 Voting Rate: 53.1%

Change from 2014: +25.4

2018 Voting Rate for all institutions: 39.1%
Engagement barriers… social workers can do this!

**BARRIERS TO VOTING**

Irrespective of voter registration status, young voters reported the following barriers to vote:

- 52% need to rearrange their work or school schedule
- 26% need help discerning truth vs. fake news
- 39% did not know where to vote
- 25% need to arrange a ride to the polls
- 26% need help with their questions about candidates, ballots and polling
- 16% need to find someone to cover their shift
Structural barriers that limit participation and support the intentional myth that voting doesn’t matter

- **Confusing and complicated rules**, deadlines and processes;
- **Suppression tactics** include: felony voting laws, strict voter id rules, purging voter lists, challenging student registrations, reducing poll locations, strict absentee rules, allegations of voter fraud, etc.
- “**Gerrymandering**” is the process drawing districts so maximize political power. Creates “safe” districts which contributes to divided politics, weakens centrist candidates and suppresses turnout when “vote doesn’t matter.”
Voting central to social work’s mission, professional mandate and impact

- **Social determinant of health.** Individuals and communities who vote are better off.
- **Human right.** Systemic barriers, voter suppression, felony disenfranchisement & gerrymandering designed by and for people in power.
- **Empowerment practice.** Voting is an act of power, individually and collectively.

Elected officials and candidates pay attention to people and communities that vote.


VotingIsSocialWork.org for citations
Voting as a social work intervention

Micro: Individuals need easy ways to register, information about how/when/where to vote, information on candidates and the encouragement to vote

Mezzo -- community: Voting leads to collective power in communities; relational and social behavior

Macro--fixing the systemic barriers: Voting is different in all 50 states; collective narrative that voting doesn’t matter and/or rigged; Advocate for voting rights and access; participate as election officials, poll workers and poll monitors.
Why don’t more organizations encourage people to vote?

- Concerns about partisanship, violating rules and/or funding loss
- Too busy
- Discomfort with politics
- Lack of training
- Don’t see voting as form of empowerment
- Don’t know that it’s legal (and in some cases required by law)
The Role of Clinical Social Workers on Voter Engagement Efforts

Cheryl Aguilar, LICSW, LCSW-C
Founding Director & Therapist
Hope Center for Wellness

National Association of Social Workers
Mental Health Specialty Section Committee Member

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work Policy
Board Member

Social workers are at the forefront of efforts that aim to engage and register voters, particularly in areas with high minority populations. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of social workers in voter engagement efforts, as they are uniquely positioned to address the needs of marginalized communities.

The diverse background of social workers in the United States enables them to address the unique challenges faced by communities, whether it be in urban or rural areas. Social workers can play a pivotal role in voter engagement efforts by connecting with community members, educating them on the importance of voting, and helping them overcome barriers to participation.

Although social workers often work at the micro-level, they are critical in addressing issues at the macro-level. They can facilitate conversations about the impact of political decisions on daily lives and encourage individuals to take part in the democratic process.

The engagement of social workers in voter engagement efforts not only amplifies their role in community development but also strengthens the voice of marginalized communities. By leveraging their expertise in holistic care and advocacy, social workers can create a more inclusive and participatory society.

It is crucial to recognize the role of social workers in voter engagement efforts, fostering a collaborative approach that empowers communities to make informed decisions and influence the policies that affect their lives. By embracing the potential of social workers, we can build a more robust and resilient democratic system with a greater representation of diverse perspectives.
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).

For more information on staying nonpartisan, go to: Votingissocialwork.org
Incorporating Voter Engagement into Field Education: Example Practice Activities

The Nine Competencies:
- C1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- C2: Engage diversity and difference in practice
- C3: Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice
- C4: Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- C5: Engage in policy practice
- C6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C9: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Practice Activity</th>
<th>Alignment with core competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research allowable nonpartisan voter activities for 501(c)(3) organizations and/or requirements for nonprofits in the 1991 National Voter Registration Act</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss ethical implications of not supporting clients and communities to vote in social work practice</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share information on voting and elections with clients, staff and or communities</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate voter registration into agency services (e.g., add question to intake form)</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the differential impact of voting policies on diverse populations</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run voter registration drive at agency or event</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite elected officials to agency for meetings or forum focused on advancing human rights issues</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help people with a prior felony conviction to register and vote (if eligible in your state) through public awareness and individual outreach in service delivery</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement changes advocate for voter engagement activity policy in field agency or community</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the importance of Census 2020 in your agency and or community</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess political power of community through voter turnout statistics by district</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with the census task force in your region/town</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify elected officials on the local, state, and federal level. Share contact list with agency staff and or clients</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train clients/staff on advocacy, government systems, and the importance of voting</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine what policies may deter voter turnout</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine strategies to engage organizations and communities in voting</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage clients to participate in the census</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use strategic planning objectives to measure effectiveness of agency voter registration drives</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify measurable outcomes of voter pledge card drives (e.g. compare against public records)</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
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</table>

Voting activities connect to all 9 CSWE core competencies and connect micro and macro practice
WE DIDN’T VOTE BECAUSE IT WON’T MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
What do we need to know to feel more comfortable engaging?

Levels of government – generally who can help you?

- **Federal:** Declare war, military, treaties, commerce between states and countries, post office, VA, IRS, federal highways, federal grants, transportation
- **State:** welfare programs, public health and safety, state constitution, voting rights, state taxes
- **Local:** property taxes, fire, police, public works, parks, schools, elections, local roads, trash, housing policy, zoning
Who represents you so you can get you the answers you need and deserve:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Term # and length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>Chris Murphy</td>
<td>(860) 549-8463</td>
<td><a href="http://www.murphy.senate.gov/contact">www.murphy.senate.gov/contact</a></td>
<td>2 (6 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S Senate</td>
<td>Richard Blumenthal</td>
<td>(860) 258-0940</td>
<td><a href="http://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/contact">www.blumenthal.senate.gov/contact</a></td>
<td>2 (6 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Rep</td>
<td>Joe Courtney</td>
<td>860) 886-0139</td>
<td>courtney.house.gov/contact/email</td>
<td>7 (2 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Ned Lamont</td>
<td>(860) 566-4840</td>
<td><a href="https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/Contact/Email-Governor-Lamont">https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/Contact/Email-Governor-Lamont</a></td>
<td>1 (4 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Senator</td>
<td>Paul Formica</td>
<td>1-800-842-1421</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Paul.Formica@cga.ct.gov">Paul.Formica@cga.ct.gov</a></td>
<td>3 (2 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Rep</td>
<td>Anthony Nolan</td>
<td>1-800-842-8267</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Anthony.Nolan@cga.ct.gov">Anthony.Nolan@cga.ct.gov</a></td>
<td>1 (2 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Michael Passero</td>
<td>(860) 447-5201</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mpassero@ci.New-London.CT.US">mpassero@ci.New-London.CT.US</a></td>
<td>2 (4 yr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Council</td>
<td>Efrain Dominguez, Jr. President</td>
<td>(860) 941-0134 (cell)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kbooker@newlondonct.org">kbooker@newlondonct.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRACTICE! To give you confidence that they work for YOU!
TAKE ACTION: GOTV and GOTC

1) 4 days left!! Encourage people to respond to the census

Checking to make sure you are counted in the 2020 census. The census takes only 10 minutes to complete and ensures our community gets the funding, investment, and political power it deserves.

There are three ways to participate:
1. Go to my2020census.gov to respond online
2. Call 844-330-2020 (English) or 844-468-2020 (Spanish)
3. Send in the form mailed to your home

For resources and facts, go to votingissocialwork.org

https://www.facebook.com/afcampadvocacy4kids/videos/3294367110603176
2) Register voters!

- Paper forms
- Digitally… text link to online registration system in your state or use a platform like Vot-ER (Turbovote)
- Send links in zoom chats and include in your email

Hi Mary. With everything that's been going on, I'm reaching out to people to make sure they have everything they need to vote safely in November. You can register to vote or request an absentee ballot application by texting 'vote sw' to 34444.
3) Educate and Engage

• The power of information:
  ✓ When and where to vote (don’t forget primaries!)
  ✓ How to vote, including by absentee ballot
  ✓ Who is on the ballot (copy of the ballot, links to candidate information, who represents them) and ballot issues
  ✓ The rules for special populations such as those experiencing homelessness, with a felony conviction, a survivor of violence, residents in long-term care, etc.
  ✓ Know the facts and dispel myths around voter fraud.

• The power of being asked…

Election Protection Hotline: 866-OUR-VOTE; or
The Latino Protect the Vote Hotline: 888-VE-Y-VOTA.
4) Remind and promote all elections – federal, state and local

- Being a trusted voice amplifies your effect:
  - Text/call your networks
  - Post online – websites, social media, blogs, letters to the editor
  - Send email reminders, include in your email signature
  - Promote in waiting rooms, chat rooms, visible spaces
  - Encourage people to make a plan for voting

Hey Sarah! I am reaching out to make sure that your vote and your voice are counted this election! If you stay home, so does our power for change. Make sure your registration is up to date by texting VOTE SW to 34444. You can also request an absentee ballot application! Let me know if you have any questions! Tanya
5) Advocate for voting rights and access
6) CHANGE THE CULTURE: support clients, colleagues and communities to vote

- Health care settings
- Schools
- Clinics
- Shelters
- Libraries
- After school programs
- Day care
- Food pantries
- VAs

**Social workers**

- Voting is a basic human right
- Encouragement to vote & participate in civic life
- How, when, where to vote

- Easy to find information on candidates and where they stand.
- Individuals who need accommodations are able to vote
Simple tools in one place.

VotingIsSocialWork.org
Inclusive democracy, better outcomes

Social workers & agencies support voting as indicator of health

Social workers & agencies register voters & address barriers

Voter turnout increases

More candidates, more accountability, better leaders, better policy

Better outcomes for communities
Thank you!

For voting resources and information: go to www.VotingIsSocialWork.org or contact me directly

Tanya Rhodes Smith, Instructor in Residence & Director
Nancy A Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work
University of Connecticut School of Social Work
Tanya.smith@uconn.edu