



## **VOTER REGISTRATION: A POTENTIAL MACRO PROJECT FOR INTERNS**

The social work profession and social work education have a tradition going back at least to the 1980's regarding empowering citizens in low income communities by conducting voter registration drives. With a very important election coming up in 2016, this is an excellent time for social work interns to learn and use macro practice skills by helping agencies implement voter registration projects.

An article in the *Journal of Community Practice* described the agency-based voter registration project of the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, which can be used as a model by other schools. This article, which is available at the School of Social Work web site <http://socialwork.sdsu.edu/field/> covers the history of voter registration in human service agencies and the rationale for social workers being involved with voter registration. It presents examples of successful voter registration projects in a supportive housing project, domestic violence shelters throughout the state, and a congregate meal program. Voter registration drives in public areas at an agency, such as waiting rooms, entrances, reception areas, communal areas and cafeterias, have been successful strategies. The authors noted that "over the years, some agency staff have raised concerns that voter registration is 'too political.' Training materials must emphasize that voter registration is legal, ethical and essential to social work's social justice purpose. By law, all voter registration must be 'non-partisan' and, therefore, perfectly appropriate for agency involvement."

Basically, an agency wanting to offer students a macro experience doing voter registration would consult some of the resources on the back of this page and take these general steps:

- ✓ Get approval from the agency's executive and perhaps board, informing them of the legal, nonpartisan nature of the project and showing how it is aligned with social work principles of empowerment and social justice and with the agency's mission and values.
- ✓ Have the student learn about voter registration drives (see the link below).
- ✓ Assign the student to work with selected agency staff to brief them on the opportunity and discuss how it could be implemented in the agency. This could be as simple as having trained staff person at a table in a public area in the agency with materials for voter registration.
- ✓ The student may also engage in other community-building activities with clients and community residents to help them get informed and excited about voting, such as monitoring City Council, Community Advisory Board, Community Council, or Board of Supervisors meetings and perhaps doing advocacy.
- ✓ Keep track of numbers of voters registered and lessons learned from the project. Report accomplishments periodically to the agency staff, the Field Office, and the SDSU Student Social Action Committee.

## Here are some links to other resources:



- UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT VOTER REGISTRATION PROJECT:  
<http://ssw.uconn.edu/our-community/centers-institutes-projects/nancy-a-humphreys-institute-for-political-social-work/voter-registration/>
- VOTER PARTICIPATION STARTER KIT AND TOOLKIT:  
<http://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2010/08/a-voter-participation-starter-kit.pdf>  
<http://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2011/09/a-voter-registration-toolkit.pdf>
- OTHER EXCELLENT RESOURCES FROM NONPROFIT VOTE:  
[http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/?tax\\_gs\\_topics%5B%5D=getting-started&tax\\_gs\\_topics%5B%5D=voter-registration&wpas=1](http://www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/?tax_gs_topics%5B%5D=getting-started&tax_gs_topics%5B%5D=voter-registration&wpas=1)
- VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES AND FORMS: <https://cavotes.org/vote/drive>

For additional information, field instructors and/or students can contact Tom Packard, the Faculty Advisor for the Social Action Committee, at [tpackard@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:tpackard@mail.sdsu.edu) or Rebecca Schade, the Social Action Committee President, at [rebeccajac21@yahoo.com](mailto:rebeccajac21@yahoo.com).



*“No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a voice in the election of those who make the laws under which, as good citizens, we must live.”*  
*Wesberry v. Sanders, 376 U.S. 1, 17 (1964)*