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Data Driven Civic Engagement for Congregations – 2022

Have you ever wondered if everyone is registered to vote in your congregation? Does everyone regularly vote? People of faith in a democracy have an opportunity and a responsibility to register, learn about issues, and vote based on their values. Congregations can play important roles in encouraging and protecting civic participation in our democracy. Here are some best practices to follow:

Recruit a Civic Engagement/Voter Rights Team: A few people working together can make a huge difference. Involve at least a few teenagers and young adults on your team, if possible.

Use Data to Guide your Work: Congregations that are most effective in voter registration and Getting Out the Vote (GOTV) use data to drive their work. By working with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP), you can get your congregation's membership analyzed for the information about who is registered and who isn't, and who is registered but doesn't vote regularly (called low-propensity voters). You can also find information about your members' legislative districts that can help you in advocacy work.

VICPP ***does not*** keep your lists, but simply facilitates running the lists against the state voter files. VICPP can offer this service because VICPP is a member of the Virginia Civic Engagement Table (VCET). The voter files are all public information. The information is returned to you so that you can use the information to be more targeted in your outreach. VICPP will send you a simple Microsoft Excel spreadsheet showing the information that is needed (or desired) for data matching. Your congregation's administrative professional can export your records with these fields (with as much information as you have) into an Excel spreadsheet and your list will be data matched against the voter files. Please allow two weeks for this matching. Your membership list will be returned with the following information detailed for each person:

- **Voter registration** – whether or not they are registered
- **Voting history** – basically, whether they regularly vote (so that you can encourage those who often miss voting to vote)
- **Congressional District**
- **State House District**
- **State Senate District**

You can also get lists of registered voters within a radius around your congregation so that you can help get unregistered people registered and encourage those who don't frequently vote to go to the polls.

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) advocates racial, social, and economic justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action. VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of more than 750 faith communities working for a more just society.

Make an Outreach Plan: Once you have the data, focus on reaching those who are not registered and encouraging those who don't always vote to make arrangements for getting to the polls. Your plan can include:

- **Pledge cards for all registered voters.** Pledging to show up increases the likelihood that people will go to the polls.
- **Preaching.** Your religious leader can preach and encourage registration (before the registration deadline) and actual voting before the elections.
- **Personal contact.** Talk to those who are not yet registered. Ask if they need help. Assist as much as needed. If you have people who are registered but often don't vote, discuss their plans for getting to the polls or getting an absentee ballot.
- **Rides.** Some people need rides to the polls.
- **Special concerns.** If your voting place has long lines, can you plan for water and food for those in line? If there are problems about people being allowed to vote, do you need to recruit poll watchers?
- **Host an event.** You might host a Registration Sunday or another event to raise awareness and interest in registering and voting.

Expand to your Neighborhood. In addition to making sure everyone in your congregation is registered and votes, you can also “claim” the community around your congregation. VICPP, through VCET, can provide you lists of registered voters in a region around your congregation, so that you can canvass the neighborhood and make sure everyone is registered to vote. You can also canvass to encourage people about when and where to vote.

Many canvassers focus on low-propensity voters – people who only vote 40 to 80 percent of the time. The lists developed for you can identify how likely people are to vote. Talking directly with low-propensity voters is proven to increase voter participation.

You can also help people register to vote. This can be done three ways:

- 1) You can **distribute information** telling people where and how to register.
- 2) You can **carry a tablet device** and help people register online on the spot.
- 3) You can **carry registration forms** and work with people to complete the forms. If you plan to register 25 or more people, someone in your group must take the training for being a certified voter registration group. Be sure to review the state guidelines at these two links for the same Virginia Department of Elections webpage:

<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/veris-voter-registration/voterregistrationdrives/2022-Guidelines-for-Voter-Registration-Drives.pdf>

OR

tinyurl.com/vrguidelines

Keep VICPP abreast. Be sure to keep VICPP informed about your congregation's civic engagement work so that we can promote your efforts and encourage other congregations to get involved. Thank you. Your advocacy matters.