

BENEFITS FOR NONPROFITS

Voter engagement efforts build stronger nonprofits. Nonprofits whose communities vote have more access to elected officials, increased clout on issues, and are better positioned to advance their mission. Nonprofits reach people missed by traditional campaigns, contributing to more active citizenship and an electorate that more fully represents the communities we serve.

We create a more representative electorate.

Nonprofits disproportionately reach individuals who are younger, lower-income, and more diverse than the general public—groups that historically participate at lower rates. Because of our trust, personal relationships, and nonpartisan approach, the individuals that we serve are more likely to respond to our appeals to vote.

Candidates and campaigns seek out and respond to communities with higher voter registration and turnout rates and to organizations that care about voting.

Voter engagement boosts our advocacy.

Voter engagement gets us a seat at the table and enhances our ongoing advocacy efforts. Elected officials pay attention to who votes. When our staff and communities participate, we have more access to decision makers, increased clout for our organization, and a greater chance to have our issues addressed.

Voter engagement makes us relevant during elections.

Voter engagement raises our profile. Candidates and campaigns seek out and respond to communities with higher voter registration and turnout rates and to organizations that care about voting. While campaigning they're more likely to come to our neighborhoods, attend our events, respond to our questions, and listen to our concerns.

Voting gives power and voice to the people we serve.

By encouraging voting, nonprofits can help people become more active and engaged citizens. Compared to nonvoters, voters are more likely to talk to elected officials and connect to their neighbors. As community members are mobilized to vote, leaders from within the community often emerge, including those interested in seeking office.¹

We are effective.

Nonprofit VOTE's 2012 evaluation showed that voters contacted in-person by nonprofits during services voted at higher rates than other registered voters in their state across all demographics. Nonprofits had the biggest impact on turnout among least-likely voters—those that campaigns typically disregard based on low “voter propensity scores” assigned before the election to predict the likelihood that they will vote.²

¹ See “Benefits for Voters” factsheet, www.nonprofitvote.org.

² *Can Nonprofits Increase Voting Among Their Clients, Constituents, and Staff? An Evaluation of the Track the Vote Program.* 2012. www.nonprofitvote.org

BENEFITS FOR VOTERS

Voting is connected with a host of positive benefits for the individual voter. Compared to non-voters, voters are more likely to volunteer, contact their elected officials, and stay informed about local affairs. Voting is associated with:

Active Citizenship

Registered voters are more likely to engage in civic and political activities than those who are not registered. They are also more likely to talk to elected officials and be an advocate for themselves and their families. Voters are more likely to be active and engaged citizens who connect with their neighbors and participate in community activities.

Social Connections

Voters tend to have stronger social connections, leading to a greater quality of life and longevity. Census surveys suggest that registered voters are, compared to non-voters, more strongly connected with their neighbors and family members. They are more likely to discuss political issues with family or do favors for their neighbors.¹

Personal Agency

Voters have the satisfaction of knowing that they have expressed their opinions. Voting is a form of personal empowerment that gives you the opportunity to voice your opinion on issues that matter to you, your family, and your community.

Other Benefits

- **Better health outcomes.** Voters have higher levels of self-reported health and voting could also potentially boost mental health.²
- **Reduced unemployment.** Voting and other forms of civic engagement have been tied to lower unemployment rates.³
- **Lower recidivism rates.** Ex-offenders who have their civil rights restored are less likely to return to prison. The Florida Parole Commission reported that over a two year period ex-offenders who had their voting rights restored were three times less likely to end up back in custody.⁴

Even if the winner of an election was not their preferred choice, "people are happier with the outcome and they feel more in control of their lives, if they voted."

—*Psychologist Marc Zimmerman, professor at the University of Michigan's School of Health*

¹ CIRCLE. "Civic Engagement among Registered Citizens and Non-Registered Eligible Citizens," <http://www.civicyouth.org/civic-engagement-among-registered-voters-and-non-registered-eligible-citizens/>

² Huffington Post. "Voting and Health: Five Reasons Why It's Good For You," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/06/voting-good-for-health-election-day_n_2078569.html

³ NCoC. *Civic Health and Unemployment*. <http://www.ncoc.net/unemployment>

⁴ Florida Parole Commission. "Status Update: Restoration of Civil Rights Cases Granted 2009 and 2010," <https://fpc.state.fl.us/docs/reports/2009-2010ClemencyReport.pdf>

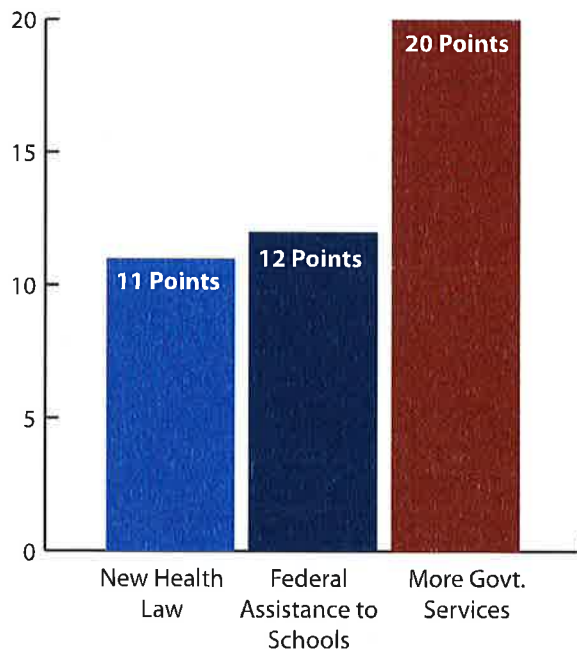
WHO VOTES MATTERS

Until recently, conventional wisdom held that those who vote on a regular basis and those who don't have similar views on most issues. However, new research shows that "nonvoters" – those who don't vote regularly or at all, and who are disproportionately lower income, younger, and new citizensⁱ – differ markedly on issues like the role of government and addressing inequality. The absence of nonvoters in elections has implications for public policy and many of the issues nonprofits care about.

Research conducted before the 2010 midterm electionsⁱⁱ found that, when compared to frequent voters, nonvoters:

- Favored health care reform by a margin of 11 points.

Favorability Margin: Nonvoters over Voters



"Given evidence that elected officials do respond more to voters than nonvoters, it is important to repudiate conventional wisdom that who votes does not matter."

—Janet Leighley and Jonathan Nagler,
Who Votes Now

- Favored restrictions on gun ownership by a margin of 15 points.
- Favored increased government services by a margin of 20 points.

More recent researchⁱⁱⁱ found that, when compared to frequent voters, nonvoters:

- Favored government jobs programs by a margin of 10 points.
- Favored providing more federal assistance to schools by a margin of 12 points.
- Favored increasing the minimum wage by a margin of 8 points.

Nonprofits serve and engage vulnerable populations, but our impact is diminished if the people we serve aren't voting or being heard by candidates. Because of our audience and mission, nonprofits have the opportunity to create a more representative electorate and support a more robust debate on a range of public policy issues.

ⁱ Learn more about the disparities in voting between members of different demographic groups in "America Goes to the Polls: Voter Participation Gaps in the 2012 Presidential Election" available at www.nonprofitvote.org.

ⁱⁱ Pew Research Center on the People & the Press. "The Party of Nonvoters." October 29th, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leighley, Jan E., and Jonathan Nagler. *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014. Print.

VOTING AND HEALTH: 5 Reasons It's Good For You

1. It Strengthens Social Ties

Voting helps to strengthen our social ties, and feeling part of a close-knit society is in turn linked with greater quality of life and longevity, according to Stanford researchers.

2. It's Linked With Reports Of Greater Health

A 2001 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* shows that people are more likely to self-report "fair" or "poor" health in states where there's below-average voter turnout. "Socioeconomic inequality in political participation (as measured by voter turnout) is associated with poor self-rated health, independently of both income inequality and state median household income," Harvard researchers wrote in the study.

3. It's Good For Mental Health

Among people who are at risk, voting could help to lower stress and even ward off future mental health conditions. Specifically, researcher Lynn Sanders, Ph.D., an associate professor of politics at the University of Virginia, noted that, "I think that people who are on the wrong sides of the disadvantage divide, measured according to anything -- health, income, quality of community, or job status -- those are the people who stand to benefit most."

4. It Sets A Good Example for Kids

Children may not be able to actually cast a ballot, but they can see their parents vote, which could help to open dialogue about issues affecting society today. "Parents don't realize that even though kids can't vote they can learn about the voting process and learn about how their parents think about different issues," said Marc Zimmerman, a psychologist and professor

at the University of Michigan. "There is also some evidence that talking about politics may help kids become better critical thinkers and help parents build communication patterns with their kids."

"Politicians and activists typically attempt to motivate ordinary citizens to participate in democracy on the basis of moral appeals or attempts to fix a problem. Our results suggest that it might also be worthwhile to highlight the internal rewards citizens can obtain from being politically engaged: A sense of satisfaction and the experience of pleasant emotions and of connection with others."

5. Political Activism Boosts Well-Being And Life Satisfaction

Being politically active is linked with greater well-being and life satisfaction, according to research conducted by Tim Kasser, Ph.D. and reported in *Political Psychology*.

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Healthy Living, 11/06/2013*