



Project Vote is the leading technical assistance and direct service provider to the voter engagement and civic participation community. Since its founding in 1982, Project Vote has provided professional training, management, evaluation and technical services on a broad continuum of key issues related to voter engagement and voter participation activities in low-income and minority communities.

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## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

America's election system is a patchwork of laws, rules, and practices that, whether from indifference or hostility, creates barriers for low-income and minority citizens. Project Vote's Election Administration Program works to ensure that historically disenfranchised citizens can register to vote, stay on the voter rolls and cast their ballots with confidence that they will be counted.

### REGISTRATION

#### **Simplify the State Voter Registration Application**

Many state voter registration applications are cluttered with unnecessary questions, stilted language and confusing signage. As a result, it is all too easy for applicants to complete the form incorrectly. Designing a new voter registration form offers states a tremendous opportunity to create a user-friendly, clear, and simple application. Project Vote recommends that states should involve literacy and graphic design experts in the design process and that the form should clearly present which information is required in order to accept and process the form.

#### **Standards for Accepting Applications**

States should require applicants to provide no more than the minimum information necessary to determine eligibility for voting. State standards for the definition of a complete registration application should be consistent with the National Voter Registration Form created by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) and amended by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). Additional information, such as gender, race, or prior registration status, while useful, is immaterial for determining an applicant's eligibility. This standard should be clearly communicated to all local jurisdictions.

#### **Improve Voter Registration in Public Assistance Agencies**

Section 7 of the NVRA requires that state public assistance agencies offer voter registration opportunities to clients and applicants at several points, including application, recertification or renewal, and change of address. Unfortunately, this mandate is increasingly ignored. A recent report by Project Vote, ACORN, and Demos found that registrations declined 59% over the ten-year period since states implemented NVRA, from 2.6 million to barely 1 million. Recommendations to improve public agency compliance include:

1. Agency staff should verbally ask clients and applicants if they want to register to vote at the beginning of any discussion.
2. Agencies should track "yes," "no," and blank declinations as well as voter registration forms submitted to elections officials in order to assess compliance.

739 8th Street, SE  
Suite 202  
Washington, D.C. 20003

2101 South Main Street  
Little Rock, AR 72206  
1-800-546-8683

[www.projectvote.org](http://www.projectvote.org)

### **Public Access Portals**

Public Access Portals are state-sponsored websites where citizens can determine whether they are on the voter registration rolls, where the polling location is for a specific address, and other Election Day information. They are simple for voters and efficient for election officials. For voters, it's as simple as logging on to a secure website, typing in your name and birth date, and finding out all you need to know about Election Day. For elections officials, portals save time, money, and resources by dramatically reducing the volume of calls from voters seeking information on their registration status and polling locations.

## **STATEWIDE DATABASES**

HAVA requires every state to have a statewide voter database as of January 1, 2006. This raises a myriad of issues related to how, when and by whom names are added and removed from the list.

### **Verification of Applicant's Information**

HAVA requires each voter registration applicant to provide a driver's license number if she has one or, if she doesn't, the last four digits of her Social Security number. States must then attempt to "verify applicable information" by matching information from the application with either the state's department of motor vehicle database or the Social Security Administration (SSA) database. HAVA provides no guidance in instances when a match is unsuccessful. Project Vote believes, based on an analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice, that states may not refuse to register an applicant because a match was not made. Rejecting applicants who cannot be matched violates both HAVA and the Voting Rights Act.

### **Inclusion of Incomplete Applications in the Voter Database**

Each state must establish uniform procedures to handle applications that are missing information. All applications, including those rejected or deemed incomplete, should be entered into the statewide voter registration database, and should include the reason for rejection or suspension. This list should be available to the public in the same manner as all voter list-related names are available. As an example, several counties in Washington State use a "pending" file to enter incomplete applications and then code those applications according to the problem, e.g. missing signature, problem with address, or missing birth date.

### **List Maintenance**

Names are removed routinely from voter registration lists in many jurisdictions, either one at a time for reasons such as address change, death, or felony conviction, or en masse as part of a list maintenance program. States must establish and follow safeguards to ensure eligible voters are not wrongly removed. Project Vote recommends that:

1. All voters to be removed must receive notification in writing as required by the National Voter Registration Act.
2. Voters should be made aware of (a) why their names are being removed from the voter list, (b) what notices or records precipitated their removal and (c) an appeal process.
3. A removal should take place only when EXACT match occurs between the voter's record and the record that initiated the removal, such as a death or felony conviction notice.
4. Records of voters removed from the rolls should remain in the database in the event that problems arise after an election.

## **VOTING**

### **Statewide Pollworker Training**

Poll workers are the interface between voters and the election system. Poorly trained workers are one of the leading causes of Election Day barriers to voting. Pollworker training should be developed at the state level to ensure accuracy, uniformity and comprehensiveness. This will also result in a direct cost savings to each local elections jurisdiction. Statewide uniform pollworker training should include:

1. Provisional ballot information, such as who is offered a provisional ballot, whether potential voters have an opportunity to correct registration deficiencies after Election Day, and how to determine the correct polling place for casting a provisional ballot;
2. Who may provide assistance to voters in the polling booth;
3. How to use new voting machines.

### **Provisional Ballots as Voter Registration Applications**

Provisional ballots should simultaneously serve as voter registration applications. This would eliminate from future elections the most common reason for rejecting a provisional ballot in 2004 — an unregistered voter. A simply designed application that serves simultaneously as a provisional ballot and a voter registration application would have helped, without any additional effort, to register hundreds of thousands of people in 2004.

### **Statewide Jurisdiction for Provisional Ballots**

The second most common reason for rejecting provisional ballots in 2004 was because they were cast in the wrong precinct. With statewide databases, there is no reason why any state could not count them countywide, and we recommend states consider counting them statewide. Of course, the only votes which are counted from the ballots are those which the voter is eligible to cast – based on the address where she is registered to vote.

### **Voter ID Requirements for Voting**

Project Vote opposes ID requirements for voting because they raise barriers to voting while failing to solve any existing problem. While the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requires first-time registrants who register by mail to show ID before voting, several states now require all registered voters to show ID before voting. Some even require photo ID. While typically the stated motivation is to prevent voter fraud, the reality is that voter fraud is exceedingly rare. Cases of individuals impersonating a registered voter in order to vote at the polls—the only kind of fraud that an ID requirement would help to prevent—are unheard of in recent times.

The arguments against ID requirements are straightforward:

1. They are not needed. ID requirements do not solve any real voter fraud problem.
2. They can be prohibitively expensive for low-income people, especially strict photo ID requirements, which may amount to a poll tax, as was the recent case in Georgia.
3. Voter ID discriminates against minorities, rural voters, the homeless, Native Americans, low-income people, the elderly, people with disabilities and persons in large households, all of whom are less likely than white or affluent voters to have ID.

***Project Vote's Key Recommendations to Improve Election Administration  
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