



VOTER REGISTRATION LESSONS FROM FLORIDA

www.projectvote.org

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Helping voters register in Florida is a complicated and exceedingly risky venture. For those organizations willing to face the risks, this memorandum provides some advice about helping voters register in Florida based on our recent voter registration program.

HAVA Matching

Florida requires that the information on a new voter registration application match information in another government database before the applicant can be registered, unless the applicant provided one of the forms of HAVA-approved ID when he or she registered. This matching requirement is a barrier to registration for significant portion of new applicants, especially those applicants who provide Social Security numbers instead of driver's license (or state ID) numbers.

It appears that the matching protocol for applicants who provide Social Security numbers often leads to the rejection of applicants who have multiple last names or unusual names. Many applicants also mistakenly reverse digits in their date of birth or provide an incorrect date. Any problems with this information will fail to yield an exact match.

Voter registration organizations can help their eligible applicants gain access to the voting rolls by:

- Instructing applicants to provide driver's license numbers, which have a more flexible match criteria, rather than Social Security numbers;
- Asking applicants if the name and birth date they provided corresponds exactly to the name they provided when obtaining their driver's license or Social Security number;
- Asking applicants to review their applications for accuracy; and,

- Following up with applicants who don't get on the rolls to help them respond to any notice letter and new application they may receive (which they should return with a photocopy of a HAVA-approved form of ID).

Correcting Incomplete or Deficient Applications

Occasionally a voter will fail to complete an application or make an error (scrivener's error). Common errors or omissions include: failing to provide a driver's license (or state ID) or Social Security number, failing to sign the application, and failing to check all the required boxes.

The applicant must correct any errors or oversights on an official voter registration application. The state Division of Elections has taken the position that voter registration organizations are not allowed to make corrections to an application before submission, even when requested to do so by the applicant. Corrections must be submitted before the close of registration in order for the applicant to be eligible to vote in the upcoming elections. If, however, election officials caused the error (magisterial error), the applicant may correct the registration up to the election and even during the canvassing period following an election.

"No Match Override"

Counties now have the authority to override a "no match" determination made by the state's voter registration system when an applicant who was improperly rejected presents evidence that the information on his or her form was correct. This usually requires the applicant to submit a copy of the

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driver's license (or state ID) or Social Security card to officials.

Voter Verification

Verifying applicants' registration status is a critical tool that helps us understand the extent to which we are meeting our registration goals. As its name suggests, verification is a step-by-step process to check on whether applicants become registered voters and, if not, why. Done correctly, with close attention to ferreting out the reasons some applicants do not get registered, verification allows us both to fine-tune our registration program and identify any barriers or problems in the processing of our applications by election officials.

Access to a computer at the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) is a necessary component of voter verification. SOE's have access not only to the records of registered voters (which can be obtained on a CD from the state at a cost of \$10.00), but also to the records of applicants who failed to make it on the rolls. This allows organizations to investigate the reason each rejected applicant was denied registration. Access to an SOE's terminal requires negotiations.

Keeping Good Records

Florida has a notoriously hostile climate for voting, including hostility towards programs to help Floridians register to vote. This environment includes a pervasive suspicion of voter registration activities by third party organizations, false allegations of wrongdoing, politically motivated investigations and frivolous litigation. Consequently, it is imperative that voter registration groups maintain thorough records of their activities.

Records a voter registration drive manager should keep include: (1) all training activities conducted for voter registration workers, (2) any investigations of, or disciplinary action taken against, voter registration workers, (3) logs tracking the submission of completed applications, and (4) notes on any interactions between the organization and election officials. Florida law permits organizations to

photocopy completed applications, and Project Vote recommends all voter registration organizations do so. Records should be stored in a secure location (and backed up). These records should be organized in a central location so that they can be easily accessed if needed.

Additional Resources

"Florida Voter Registration and List Maintenance Survey," by Project Vote. June 2006. Available at:

http://projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/pdfs/Florida_voter_registration_and_list_maintenance_survey_2006.pdf.

"Policy Brief 4: Ensuring Integrity in Voter Registration Drives," by Project Vote. October 2004. Available at: [http://](http://projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/pdfs/Project_Vote_Policy_Brief_4_Ensuring_Integrity_in_Voter_Registration_Drives.pdf)

projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/pdfs/Project_Vote_Policy_Brief_4_Ensuring_Integrity_in_Voter_Registration_Drives.pdf

"Florida Voter Protection Laws in a Nutshell," by The Advancement Project. June 2006. Available at: <http://www.advancementproject.org/reports/FLnutshell06.pdf>.

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