The Urgency of Now and Always: Electoral Activism and Civic Engagement!

National Association of Deans and Directors at CSWE
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Introductions

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National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign
What Is Voting is Social Work (VISW)?

Voter Mobilization & Civic Engagement

- We mobilize faculty, students, field work directors, and field instructors to register clients and constituents to vote, especially those targeted by voter suppression and gerrymandering laws.
- We promote voting as a social work intervention and ongoing civic engagement in social work education and practice.
Today’s Objectives

1. Today’s troublesome context: Democracy at Risk
2. The importance of civic engagement to Social Work’s mission, ethical mandate and IMPACT
3. Why Deans and Directors are essential leaders in giving students the information they need to vote and empower clients.
4. Suggested strategies to engage your school community
Social work’s history in expanding voting rights and access
Overview: Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaigns

• **1985: Human Serve Campaign** asked Social Service Agencies to register clients and constituents.

• **1993: The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA)**, also known as the “Motor Voter” Act requires federal agencies and some state agencies to offer opportunities to register to vote. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (social worker) along with thousands of social workers and allies across the country led the campaign for the legislation, signed by President Clinton.

• **2016: National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign (VISW)**, mobilizes faculty, students, field work directors, and field instructors to register clients and constituents to vote. Ensure that people get to the polls and cast their votes, especially those targeted by voter suppression.
President Bill Clinton signing the national voter registration act of 1993 (“Motor Voter Act”) as Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven stood behind him.
Voting is the right on which all others sit.

The health of society depends on a healthy Democracy. Social work cannot sit on the sidelines.

Social movements played a key role.
"Yeah. When I was a senior, we had people come and register us. We filled out the registration form and everything. But they didn't really, from what I remember in our US Government class, they didn't really go into like why voting's important. So I didn't. Back then I was like, "Yeah, I'll register, whatever." Like, "It's cool." But like, I can remember I went back home and was like, "Oh, Mom, I can register to vote." And she's like, "Oh, okay, whatever." But you know, now it's... six, seven years later, I'm like, "No." Like, "I can vote now." ... I wish that I had this knowledge back then as a 17, as a 18 year old. Like... did I understand my, the importance of voting? Probably not. Do I think that if we--if I--had this presentation back then, would that change my mind? Maybe. You know, I was younger, and maybe like, "Oh, whatever, it's just voting." I probably would've been bored. But now it's like, it's important. So I think that's something like a conversation that we could also have, that like, how can we get the younger people like to understand? 'Cause we recognize the importance of it now. I didn't realize how important it was until I was 21, you know, in my Policy class. Like, how can we encourage this? And this is a conversation that like, you know, I, I don't know where it could happen, in schools, or anything, but I think it's important to.. know. We all walked away from this project and the presentation from Tanya, like all very informed. Like, how do we continue this conversation to get the younger people who are gonna vote, who are ready to vote, you know, to have to understand.
Our Democracy, institutions, and rights are in crisis.
It’s not just Congress, state and local elections are the new battle ground for rights and policy.
The Risks are Growing and Spreading

- **Election subversion**: Intentionally interferes with the administration of elections and overrides the will of the voters
- **Election deniers** on the ballot and leading in Congress
- **Gerrymandering / redistricting**
- **Banning books** and censoring education curriculum and access
- **Less independent and underfunded press** – especially locally
- **Less trust in government**

*Race, class, and gender inequalities continue to nourish anti-democratic forces.*
Structural barriers feed engagement barriers

50 states, 50 sets of deadlines, rules and policies
Hyper-local.
Misinformation & lies
No standards for candidates
Drop in civic education
Hyper-partisan

Intentional Myth: Voting doesn’t matter
Civic Engagement and Social Work
Civic Engagement Matters to Social Work’s mission, ethical mandate and impact.
Nonpartisan does not mean nonparticipation

- **Hatch Act**: IRS is clear that agencies and nonprofits can help people to register and to vote
- **Public Agencies**: at State and Federal level it is encouraged, and in some cases, required to provide voter registration opportunities forms and more.

1993 National Voter Registration Act mandates most state agencies and nonprofits registering people for federal benefits to offer voter registration

Know the nonpartisan facts!
TURNOUT MATTERS!
But not everyone Votes
Elected officials prioritize the needs of voters.

Studies confirm strong correlations between voter turnout, resource allocation and policy priorities at the federal, state and local levels.
Low Voter turnout in local elections in cities is a problem across America

The cost is enormous.

• Turnout in 10 of America’s 30 largest cities was less than 15%.
• City residents 65 and older were 15 times more likely to cast a ballot than younger residents between the ages of 18 and 34.
• Turnout varies dramatically impacting resources, investments and outcomes.
Voter turnout tells a story about power and resource allocation.

Studies show that communities that vote at higher rates get more attention and more resources, especially on the local level.
The Voting power of Senior Americans: Turnout by age 1964 - 2020
Young people are not apathetic but they need to know WHY voting matters and HOW to do it.

America’s youth have strong beliefs, and they want to see those beliefs represented in government.

This isn’t news: in the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections, 69% of National Exit Poll respondents between the ages 18 and 29 stated that a candidate’s positions on issues was more important than leadership/personal qualities. Today, youth voters are passionate about a number of issues facing their communities.

Only 1% of survey respondents did not feel strongly about an issue.

https://civicinfluencers.org/mobilizing-the-margins/

https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/poll-young-people-believe-they-can-lead-change-unprecedented-election-cycle
Voting, health and power
Healthy Democracy, Healthy Community

• AMA declared voting a social determinant of health.

• Communities and individuals who vote are better off in important and numerous measures of well-being.

• Voting in late adolescence and early adulthood is associated with decreased risky health behaviors, higher socioeconomic status in adulthood, more years of education and higher personal earnings. (Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachucki, 2018)

• Voting is associated with higher earnings, education and health and lower rates of recidivism rates (Florida Parole Commission study, 2010; Uggen & Manza; 2004)
Health and Democracy Index
https://democracyindex.hdhp.us/

OVERALL FINDINGS:
More Voting Access, Better Health Outcomes
States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation are healthier.
Voting is POWER for our profession, our students and the communities we serve.

It’s a violation of our code NOT to support the political power, capital and voice of groups whose power has been intentionally suppressed.

- “engage in social and political action” to “expand choice and opportunity”
- “promote policies and practices that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people”
Fixing inequality (and any problem) must include shifting power to those most impacted.
Tested strategies
1. Give students the WHY and the HOW of voting and basic civics

- At an all-school event (with civic partners)
- In all required micro and macro course(s) and field
- Through a skills lab

Voter engagement skills are best learned by doing!
2. Tie voter engagement activities to all 9 CSWE Core Competencies

- Include in educational contracts for micro and macro
- Give field credit for running voter engagement activities on campus

Incorporating Voter Engagement into Field Education:
Example Practice Activities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Nine Competencies:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2: Engage diversity and difference in practice</td>
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<td>C3: Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice</td>
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<td>C4: Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>C5: Engage in policy practice</td>
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<td>C6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities</td>
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<td>C7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>C8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>C9: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Practice Activity</th>
<th>Alignment with core competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research allowable nonpartisan voter activities and lobbying rates for 501(c)(3) organizations and/or requirements for nonprofits in the 1993 National Voter Registration Act</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss ethical implications of not supporting the political power and voice of clients and communities through voting and civic participation</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Share information on voting, elections, and basic civics with clients, staff and/or communities</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrate voter registration and</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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3. Create a culture of civic awareness

- Share information about all elections with students, faculty and field agencies
- Promote upcoming elections and important dates
- Provide links for registration and nonpartisan resources
- *Allow students election day to vote and engage others to vote*
- *Give field credit for volunteering or serving as election officials.*
4. Support innovations in practice

- Share voter activities for educational contracts with field instructors in orientation, supervision and training.
- Provide free CEs to field supervisors on nonpartisan voter engagement and/or basic civics

*Philanthropy funds programs that build civic engagement and community power. Go for it!*
5. Create opportunities for political social work

- Expand student placements in civic organizations, political offices and campaigns.
- Create civic engagement units with BSW and MSW students
- Send students to the Campaign School for Social Workers
The Voter Engagement Model. It works!

**TRAINING: WHY voting connects to SW outcomes and practice, including voting as social determinant of health**

**CLASSROOM:**
- Civics training module (1 – 2 class periods)

**FIELD INSTRUCTORS**
- Short overview included in field instructor orientation, including voter activity ideas for Educational Contract

**CONTINUING EDUCATION**
- Free CEs for Civics and Voter training

**FIELD EDUCATION:** Assignments in field build efficacy and awareness for students and field agencies. *Student-driven innovation in practice.*

**SAMPLE STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS**
- Register 3 or more voters
- Conduct agency assessment to embed voter activities into services
- Discuss training and assignments with field instructor; write reflection

**Short Term Outcomes**

**INCREASES IN:**
- Registered voters (thousands to date) including students
- Students’ plans to vote in all elections
- Attitudes about the importance of voter engagement to social work practice
Deans and directors are essential

- **Promote** social work’s unique role in supporting Democracy and the political voice and power of our clients
- **Ensure** basic civic skills are in the curriculum to uphold NASW Code of Ethics
- **Connect** voting rights to the profession’s commitment to racial and social justice
- **Debunk** the myth that voting doesn’t matter
- **Share** information about all elections, including special elections, primaries, and local elections. *It’s more than a specific election.*
- **Actively support** faculty and students to lead voter engagement efforts in the classroom, field, and community.
Technology makes engaging voters safe* in all states and keeps voters informed about upcoming elections.

Citizens in any state can register, verify or update their registration with these tools.

- In states without online registration, forms will be mailed.
- After connecting with the platform voters receive reminder text messages before every election.
- *Voters who use TurboVote platform are technically registering themselves.
Amplify Social Work’s Impact!

Build a culture of civic responsibility and voter engagement in your school community.
Additional resources:

- Votingissocialwork.org
- Organizational Assessment Checklist
- Voting Rules in CT
- Build your civic skills: Add voter and/or political activities to your Educational Contract. This worksheet has examples of voter activities that tie to Social Work’s 9 core competencies and as well as ideas for political action.
- CT SOTS Civics Toolkit with Vote local messaging
- Get easy answers about Democracy with Rock the Vote’s Democracy Explainers
- Or listen to Civics 101 Podcast wherever you get Podcasts
- Go to Vote411.org for information on voting and candidates
- Read how activists helped direct funding to fix mold and neglect issues for one Queens public housing complex.
- Read Allysha Bryant’s NYC Op-Ed: Voting: Health, the Homeless and Community
Thank you

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