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NC Conservation Network Tip Sheet #7: Get Out the Vote & Build Your Organization

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Get Out the Vote & Build Your Organization

As we all know, the next few months will be an exciting time in the political world with a major election this November. There are many ways that non-partisan, non-profit organizations can take advantage of opportunities around election season. Below are some insights and tips on how your organization can create a meaningful civic engagement plan that will help build your organization this year.

Why should your 501C3 organization have a civic engagement plan for 2008?

There are a number of reasons that you will want to have a civic engagement plan around elections, but we'll give you our top three:

- 1) Members and activists who vote more often are also likely to be more active in your organization.
- 2) Research has also found that people who vote frequently are much more likely to be financial donors to your organization.
- 3) Turning out your members for elections is a part of the cycle of accountability with our elected officials. When candidates see your members registering voters or asking questions at forums, they take notice. We've found that officials and candidates who are in the midst of an election campaign are much more responsive and attentive to public opinion than during non-election times.

But you don't have the time, staff, or money to make a civic engagement plan.

There are many simple, cost effective (or cost nothing) ways to get your members to vote that every organization can do. Nearly every organization communicates with its members via newsletters and email updates. This doesn't have to be complicated and can be effective. We'll provide you with some achievable ideas and resources below.

All our members vote anyway, right?

No. Recent studies of North Carolina non-profit groups' members found that they vote at about the same rate as the general public.

Why don't people vote?

One of the top reasons most people don't vote is lack of information. If you've never voted before then the process can seem overwhelming and confusing. Many are simply intimidated by the process or have jobs and families that severely limits the times that they can vote. A US Census survey found that "too busy" was the number one reason that registered voters did not vote in the 1996 Presidential Election. Also, many people don't feel that they can get candidate information from a source that they trust. In all of these cases, your organization can help in some way.

What can your organization do?

Commit to do one or more of the following:

- 1) Send out at least one email/newsletter reminder on registering to vote and how.
- 2) Send out at least one email reminder to vote during early voting.

- 3) Send out at least one email reminder about election day with polling information.
- 4) Send out at least one email/newsletter with non-partisan information on candidates.
- 5) Include voter registration forms at all your events and outreach efforts.
- 6) Urge your members to write, call, and meet candidates and ask them questions about the issues your organization cares about.
- 7) Provide access to non-partisan information about candidates and important issues.

What the NC Conservation Network can do for you:

We can provide you with easy to use templates with all the information you need to engage your members. With these templates, you need only include your organization's information where appropriate. We can give you:

- * A template email (or newsletter blurb) to remind your members to register before the deadline.
- * A template email (or newsletter blurb) to remind your members to vote including links to precinct times and locations.
- * A suggested timeline for when to send out reminders to members.
- * Links to resources including election protection hotlines, non-partisan voter websites, and a non-partisan voter guide for North Carolina.
- * Ideas and examples of ways to engage candidates on the top environmental issues.

Suggested timeline for registration and voting reminders this fall:

- * *August through Election Day (November 4):* Give members sample questions to ask candidates on the issues you care about. Ask members to contact candidates about these issues through online campaigns, phone calls, or in person at events.
- * *October 1:* Registration reminder. Ten days left to mail in registration forms.
- * *October 20:* Early voting information, candidate info, and weekend voting.
- * *October 27:* Last week to vote early, vote on the weekend, or register at early voting locations.
- * *November 3:* Vote tomorrow with precinct location finder.

Other resources:

Please [email](#) Peter Walz, Organizing Director, if you'd like assistance on creating your organization's civic engagement plans and/or for more information.

If you have any ideas for future Tip Sheets, please [email](#) Nicole Stewart, NC Conservation Network.