

Let's Get Out the Adult Education Vote!

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The elections provide many teachable moments and raise critically important conversations in the classroom about democracy and civic engagement. There are plenty of authentic materials to choose from that build academic skills, such as reading comprehension, critical thinking, math, civics or social studies. As is evident from many of the student writings in this issue, voting can build students' sense of belonging to the community and can serve as a springboard for more sustained civic participation. Also, students registering to vote is a countable outcome under the National Reporting System.

For all these reasons, here in New England we are, once again, recruiting adult education programs to join the Voter Education, Registration and Action (VERA) campaign. VERA is a non-partisan effort aimed at adult learners and program staff in the New England states. Its goal is to educate adult learners about voting and the topical electoral issues, and mobilize them to vote. VERA is sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education. But you do not have to be in New England to get out the adult education vote. Below are some activities that have helped adult learners become informed voters and active community members.

Voting Matters

- ⇒ Voting is a civil right that people have fought and died for.
- ⇒ Elected officials' decisions affect our daily lives and well-being.
- ⇒ While there are no guarantees that voting will result in the outcome you desire, abstaining from voting guarantees that you have no effect on who is elected to represent you.
- ⇒ If no one voted, power would be even more concentrated than it already is.

Study the Issues

"We used the editorial page of the Boston Globe to read other people's opinions on the election. Students responded to the letters in three ways: First they underlined a statement that they agreed with. Then they circled a statement that they disagreed with. Finally, they chose one of the letters to respond to in writing."

~ Harborside Community Center, Boston, MA

- Watch a video about an issue that is important to students. Discuss it. Find out which level of government has primary responsibility for it.
- Have students write letters to candidates about three issues that are important to them and describe what they'd like to see happen.
- Have students watch the presidential debates as homework and discuss them in class.
- Study political cartoons in class.
- Create a bulletin board with newspaper clippings and comments about election issues.
- Use the past issues of *The Change Agent* from <www.nelrc.org/changeagent>.
- Use activities from the *Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook* online at <www.nelrc.org/expertise/civic.html>.

Learn About the Voting Process

"Our program director made up voter reminder slips for every student that included students' voting location. She also served as voter mentor to students who told their teachers they wouldn't vote. She engaged those folks one-on-one, got them to talk about issues they cared about, and got them to read the candidates' views on their issues."

~ Exeter Adult Education, Exeter, NH

- Arrange a trip to the Board of Elections/Town Clerk. View voting machines and try them out.
- Hold a mock election (using real ballots from your local election committee).

- Invite writing and open discussion about students' reluctance to vote, alienation, and sense of powerlessness.



Learn About U.S. Politics

"We conducted class discussions about people's families' voting histories and about prisoners' voting rights; wrote expository essays about community problems and proposed solutions; conducted a voting treasure hunt to gather information from peers about voting knowledge and experience."

*~ Hampshire Sheriff's Office
Adult Learning Center, Northampton, MA*

- Discuss different political parties in the U.S. and review their official web sites. (See p. 56.)
- Invite different speakers to class from groups like the League of Women Voters, the Secretary of State, the Elections Commission. (If you invite different political parties or candidates be sure to invite all who are running so as not to jeopardize your tax-exempt status. See p. 62 for more information.)
- Collect and analyze literature and ads from different political campaigns.
- Compare the U.S. political system to those of other countries. Start with your students' home countries.
- Make graphs of past voter turnout in your state or region. See the website of the Federal Election Commission <www.fec.gov>.

Register Voters

"A class made a wall of voter information from the Internet, candidate posters, current publications, voter registration, and location information. This wall became a resource for all adult education students to find out candidates' opinions on specific issues. We also held a candidates' forum with local state candidates that students prepared questions for. Social studies classes connected voting to lessons about branches of government and the Constitution. In English classes students wrote

essays on who you'd vote for and why."
~ Exeter Adult Education, Exeter, NH

- Organize a program-wide Voter Awareness Night. Include information about how to register to vote in your state, give out registration forms and provide assistance in filling them out. Set up an election booth so people can practice voting, invite guest speakers, and provide information on all the candidates and questions to ask in choosing one.
- Encourage students to register themselves and others from their families and communities.
- Hold a workshop for teachers and volunteers on how to register to vote.
- Attend a local voter registration drive.

Get out the Vote on Election Day

"We assigned the learners to watch the debates, and then we discussed them in small groups. We also did an electoral vote watch and count during election night and post-election mapping."

~ Read/Write/Now, Springfield, MA

- Have your class present information on voting and elections to other classes.
- Encourage your students to get to the polls on Election Day. Consider offering your Election Day class time as a time when your students can go out and vote.

Talk About Election Results

- Make graphs of election results in your local area.
- Stay in contact with the elected officials and hold them accountable for their campaign promises.

**If you are in New England, join VERA at
<www.nelrc.org/vera>.**