

Become a 2020 Voting Ambassador

Lesson Packet #23 from The Change Agent



A Voting Ambassador is an adult student who takes on the role of educating community members about:

- how to register to vote,
- how to learn about the candidates and the issues, and
- how to vote and stay engaged afterwards.

This lesson packet provides materials that you can use to train students in your program to be Voting Ambassadors. It includes excerpts from the “Stand Up and Be Counted” issue of *The Change Agent*, as well as supplementary teaching materials.

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How to Use this Packet

Cynthia Peters

Purpose

This packet is designed to help people become Voting Ambassadors (VA) by giving them:

- background on voting and why it matters
- information about how to vote and how to stay engaged after you vote
- an opportunity to air concerns about the 2020 election, given the pandemic
- strategies for being an effective Voting Ambassador and a model for tracking and reflecting on the experience

What Is a Voting Ambassador?

A Voting Ambassador is someone who has learned some of the basics about voting procedures and issues, and is willing to share this information with other people in his or her community. During any election, but especially one being held during a pandemic, it can make a difference to have peer-based conversations about voting procedures and issues. People are facing intense challenges in all areas of life. Voting Ambassadors can help encourage people to keep the elections in mind even in the midst of these challenges.

What Does This Packet Include?

We've included multi-level articles (grade-level-equivalent 4-9) written by adult education students and allies. The materials are designed to inspire and instruct students about the power of engagement in the elections. Each article has "Before you read" and "After you read" activities. And on pp. 9-10, there are some tools you can use with your student Voting Ambassadors to help them plan and track their work.

Steps for Using the Packet

1. Start by sharing the introductory paragraph on the first page of this packet. Ask students to

share their own thinking about why elections matter and what the particular issues might be around holding an election during a pandemic. Explain that whether they decide to be a Voting Ambassador or not, they will learn a lot of skills by completing this training, including reading, writing, speaking and listening, knowledge of U.S. government, and digital literacy.

2. Proceed by teaching the articles on pp. 3-8. If some articles are too advanced, pick key sentences or paragraphs for students to focus on.
3. Then use the organizers on pp. 9-10 to help students plan and track their activities as Voting Ambassadors. They might turn these pages in so you can assess their understanding. You could also use live role-plays to assess what they've learned.

College and Career Readiness Standards

This packet addresses important College and Career Readiness Standards for reading, writing, and speaking and listening, including determining the main idea, pointing to evidence in the text and using evidence in your own writing, using multiple sources, learning vocabulary and knowledge of history and U.S. government, as well as presentation skills, listening, and verbally responding to questions.

Sources:

For more program and classroom resources, see <<https://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/vera/>> Also, check out <https://mass.pbslearning-media.org/collection/election-collection/> for more teaching materials and videos that explain the election process in the United States.

Fight Like Hell for the Living

Art Ellison

BEFORE YOU READ: Look at the title, the headings, and the photo of the author. What do you think his perspective will be? Why?

People Died for Our Right to Vote

We vote because we want a better community, state, nation, and world for ourselves but more importantly for our children. People throughout the centuries in this country have fought for the right to vote so that their voices could be heard.

People throughout the centuries in this country have fought for the right to vote so that their voices could be heard.

The men who founded our country limited the right to vote to white males who owned property. After the Civil War, Black men got the right to vote, but racism created barriers (poll taxes, literacy tests, and terror from

groups like the Ku Klux Klan), which often prevented them from voting. It wasn't until 1920 that women finally won the right to vote. And it wasn't until the 1960s that people of color gained true voting rights. During both the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, people died to ensure access to the ballot box.

Every Vote Counts

We should keep in mind that even one single vote can make a difference. I am a member of the New Hampshire House of Representatives. During our last session, we had a vote to override the Governor's veto of the bill to abolish the death penalty in our state. In order to successfully override his veto, we needed a minimum of 247 votes (two-thirds of the House). The final vote had exactly 247 in favor. If we had lost a single vote, we would not have been successful. The New Hampshire Senate



Art Ellison is the former New Hampshire State Director of Adult Education. He currently is a member of the NH House serving on the Education Committee.

also overrode the veto so that the bill abolishing the death penalty became law.

But Don't Just Vote

While voting is at the very core of letting our voices be heard, we should be willing to amplify those voices by helping our friends to vote and to work for the political candidates who support our philosophies and beliefs. Meanwhile, we keep in mind the words of the famous labor organizer Mother Jones who said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does Art Ellison feel about voting? How do you know?
2. Explain in your own words what happened in the "Every Vote Counts" section.

Voting Is My Obligation... to Past, Present, and Future

Sheila Mailman

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does “obligation” mean? Try using it in several sentences.
2. What obligations do you have? To whom are you obligated?

It wasn't until 1954 that Native Americans in the state of Maine were allowed to vote in federal elections. As a full-blooded Native American (Cheyenne, Maliseet, and Penobscot) woman, I see voting as an obligation both to my ancestors and to generations to come.

I want to make a difference by exercising my right to vote and helping others do the same. In

My first voting experience was a result of a group effort in our ABE class.

my neighborhood, I volunteer to help those who can't read that well, so that they too have the opportunity to vote. I help shut-ins get their absentee ballots, and I campaign

for my choices for Congress and governor. I also met our State House representative at the soup kitchen last fall.

My first voting experience was a result of a group effort in our ABE class. We decided to become active participants in the voting process. In class, we talked with some of the candidates. All of the students in the class voted except for one who is not a U.S. citizen yet. For some students, their votes were the first in the history of their families. Some of them have lived for two or three generations here in Aroostook County. These students have broken the non-voting trend for themselves and their families.

I love to vote. I like the excitement, the rush of people entering and exiting booths, and friends

coming and going. It is times like these that I look back and see how far our nation has come. Gender, nation of origin, and financial status no longer can be used to determine who can vote. For me, “To vote or not to vote,” is not even in question. It is my obligation to the past, present, and future generations – and I do it proudly.

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Sheila was born in Bangor, ME. Her Native name is Sleeping Bear. She learned about her Native American heritage from her maternal grandparents, who taught her how to gather and prepare native herbs, spices and tree bark for treating a variety of ailments and how to predict weather patterns. Sheila currently resides in Caribou, ME, has two adult children and two grandchildren, is an active volunteer at the community soup kitchen, and serves as secretary of the social club. This article was reprinted from the “Democracy in Action” issue of The Change Agent, March 2008.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. Why does Sheila feel obligated to vote?
2. How does she show her commitment to voting?
3. What role did her ABE class play in the election? What are some ways your ABE class could get involved?

Not a Citizen?

There's Still A Lot that You Can Do

Dieuseul Camille

BEFORE YOU READ: Brainstorm some ideas about how non-voters could be involved in the election even if they can't vote.

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you might think that you can't participate in a U.S. election. Actually, you can! How?

There are various ways to get involved. You can engage in debates and discussions. You can set up little meetings with friends and talk about the issues that are important to you. You can set up meetings at school, at church, or at work.

Also, you can try to motivate your friends who are U.S. citizens to vote. At my job, I have many friends who can vote, so I will organize a meeting with them to convince them to vote for candidates that I think will do a good job. I will make sure they register to vote and they know where to go to vote.

Voting is an obligation for all citizens! Even if you are not eligible to vote, there is still a lot you can do. I suggest you help educate people about the issues and make sure that everyone around you votes!

Dieuseul Camille is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. When he finishes studying, he hopes to get his GED. He is from Haiti, and he came to the U.S. in 2014. He thinks that voting is important because he has seen how many bad things can happen in the government and believes that voting helps people choose a good leader who will do the right things.



AFTER YOU READ: Collect ideas from the brainstorm (above), from Dieuseul's article, and from the box (right). Which ones could you try?

More Ideas

Support your candidate or issue:

- If you convince even two voters to support your candidate or issue, you've had twice the impact of someone who just votes once.
- Be a letter writer! Tell candidates, newspapers, and party leaders how you feel about the issues or the campaigns.
- Call TV and radio stations to praise or criticize campaign issues.
- Volunteer to work on a campaign.

Support the elections:

- Encourage and assist others in registering to vote and getting to the polls on Election Day.
- Volunteer to promote fair elections at <https://protectthevote.net/> or <https://www.workelections.com/>. Volunteers are trained to assist voters and record problems on Election Day.

Turn up the heat in between elections:

- Stay engaged after the election. Politicians often respond to pressure, and they need to keep hearing from you after they are in office.
- Find creative ways to make your voice heard.

Register, Learn, Vote, Stay Engaged!

Cynthia Peters

So, you decided you want to vote! What do you need to do to cast your vote or support someone else to vote? Here are the steps:

1. Register to Vote

Every state in the U.S. (except North Dakota) requires you to register to vote if you want to vote. To register to vote in the U.S., you need to be a citizen and at least 18 years old on election day. Find out how to register to vote in your state. Don't miss the deadline (which is different in every state)! Ask someone who knows or look it up online. Here are some websites that help you figure out if you're already registered, and, if not, how to register:

- <https://www.vote.org/>
- <https://www.rockthevote.org/how-to-vote>

2. Learn the Issues

Now that you are registered, how will you vote? Do you have a preference for a certain political party, and will you vote based on the candidate's affiliation with that party? Or will you study the candidates and vote on the one who is most aligned with you on the issues? Here are some ways to learn more about the political parties and who is running for office and what they stand for:

- <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>
- <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections>
- https://www.diffen.com/difference/Democrat_vs_Republican

3. Vote

Learn how your state is voting. Will polls be open? If you are voting in-person, think ahead about how you can do so safely. Wear a mask. Sanitize your hands before and after. Can you vote by mail? If so, how? (You may need to apply for a mail-in ballot.) If you are voting by mail, don't wait until the last minute to send in your ballot. Support others to get their ballot in the mail or to go to the polls on election day. If it is safe to do so, give rides to the polls or volunteer at the polls. Use your phone and social media to remind people to vote and to connect them with resources they might need to be able to vote.

4. Stay Engaged

Voting *should not* be something we do every few years and then forget about it. Once candidates are elected, they need to keep hearing from their constituents. You can be sure that in between elections, they will be hearing from special interest groups and lobbyists who will try to convince them vote one way or another on legislation. You, too, should put ongoing pressure on your elected officials to vote the way you want them to. Stay engaged by:

- contacting your legislator and letting them know how you feel about an issue,
- joining a community-based organization that is working on an issue you care about,
- participating in actions and protests that show how you feel about an issue.



Voting in Times of Uncertainty

Maegan Morris

BEFORE YOU READ: What have you heard about the elections this year? What do you think might be different?

Do you know how to vote during the Covid-19 pandemic? It may come as a surprise that even something like voting will be affected by the coronavirus. Just like grocery shopping and using public transit, the way we cast ballots may need serious changes to protect your health and that of your community. In this article, we'll address what's staying the same and what's changing for this election.

Is an Election Even Possible?

As rumors circulate about a delayed or even postponed election, many people are confused about whether there will even be a vote this November. The likelihood of this happening is *very* low. In the 244 years since the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. has never delayed a federal election, even during the Civil War, the Great Depression, or the Spanish Flu. In fact, there are many safeguards in

the U.S. Constitution that protect elections from being postponed or canceled.

First, the Constitution grants the power of selecting the day and time of election to Con-

gress. (It cannot be changed by executive order.) The only way to delay or move a federal election is through new legislation, a process that takes a lot of time. To delay or postpone the election, our government would have to follow these steps:

1. The House drafts and approves a bill to move the election.



A member of Kentucky's National Guard sanitizes a voting station. Photo by Capt. Cassandra Mullins.

2. The House version of the bill goes to the Senate for possible modification and approval.
3. The House and the Senate agree on the same version of the bill.
4. The president signs the bill into law.

What happens if Congress agrees to delay the election? According to the Constitution, the President and Vice President still must be out of office by January 20th after the election.¹ Even if an election were postponed until after this date, the current President and Vice President are finished with their terms on January 20th. The Constitution provides very specific, if complicated, guidelines on who will replace the President and Vice President in case this occurs.

Voting During a Pandemic

This will not be the first year the U.S. will hold elections during a global pandemic. Voters and poll workers effectively used social distancing and face masks during the 1918 elections, which hap-

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pened at the height of the Spanish Flu pandemic. However, like today, state governments' policies varied from place to place, meaning election procedures were not uniform. Nowadays, we have already seen differences in how states responded to Covid-19, both in locking down and opening back up. Some states have been more aggressive than others in their efforts to stop the spread of coronavirus. Likewise, states will make different decisions about how voting will work.

Many states have updated their voting procedures temporarily to allow voters to register

As Thomas Jefferson said, “We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

online and mail-in their ballots. This year it is estimated that more than 50% of the voting population lives in areas that will permit all-mail elections.² However, if you do not reside in Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, or Washing-

ton, then it is likely you are unfamiliar with elections done entirely by mail. In fact, for many of us, this will be the first time we vote by mail.

What does it mean to vote by mail? It's basically the same as absentee voting. In some states, absentee ballots are given to people who have qualifying excuse for not voting in person. Voters fill out these ballots, return them by mail, and their vote is counted just like anyone else's. While most states are not permanently changing to voting by mail, many are allowing voters to request absentee ballots this year. And you do not need a qualifying excuse; Covid-19 is the qualifying excuse.

Fear of Fraud

Some people might worry that with mail-in voting, there is more chance of ballots being miscounted, lost, or tampered with. Or, as President Trump tweeted on June 20, 2020, ballots could be printed by other countries and mailed in.³ Indeed, there are isolated incidents of fraud associated with

mail-in voting, but with millions of people voting, these incidents represent a very small percentage of the whole. According to a 2017 study, voting fraud is extremely rare in the U.S. — between 0.00004% and 0.0009%. In 2018, a quarter of all ballots were mailed in, so the U.S. does have significant experience making absentee ballots work.⁴

What Can you Do?

First, find out how the pandemic has affected voting procedures in your state. Visit your state's election division website. And then, vote! If it's by mail, vote as early as possible. If it's in person, figure out how to vote safely. Wear a mask, keep social distance, and sanitize your hands before and after. Voting is a privilege and a responsibility. We are in a time of uncertainty, but it is still possible to make our voices heard via the voting booth. As Thomas Jefferson said, “We in America do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

Sources: 1. Const. amend. XX. Sec. 1. [Article] U.S. Const. art. 2. sec. 3. cl. 1; 2. Brian Hinkle Wendy Underhill, “Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and Other Voting at Home Options,” Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options (NCSL, 2020), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>; 3. <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/22/881598655/fact-check-trump-spreads-unfounded-claims-about-voting-by-mail>; 4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53353404>.

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AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look at the four subheadings. Two are questions and two are not. Turn the two that are not into questions. Work with a partner and write down all four questions and then answer them based on the information provided in the text.
2. Make your own plan for voting. How will you vote? What are key dates you should have in your calendar? If you can't vote, think of someone who can and make a plan to share information about voting with them.

Become a Voting Ambassador

If you agree that the voting is important, what could you do to spread the word?
Use this grid to organize your ideas. Take notes in the space provided.

How can I learn about voting in my area? List sources of information:

Here is a list of individuals I could talk to about voting:

Here is a list of groups (classes, places of worship, community organizations) I could talk to about voting – safely, using a virtual tool like Zoom, or socially distanced:

What do I want to say to people? Here are some of my talking points about how to vote and/or be engaged in the election:

Here is a list of some of the questions they might have:

Try It Out! And Reflect on Your Experience

After you complete the readings and activities in this packet, it's time to try out being a Voting Ambassador! You can do this in a whole range of ways – from very modest to more ambitious. Try it out at whatever level you feel comfortable.

Start by doing role-plays with classmates. Then practice by talking about the election with your family and friends (in person if you can do so safely, or by phone). As you feel more comfortable, consider speaking in front of a community group. Take into account that you will need to do this safely! Keep social distance, wear a mask, and sanitize your hands. Or present virtually to a group using Zoom or another platform.

Keep a log like the one below to bring questions back to your class or your cohort of Voting Ambassadors.

Update your resume, noting that you are a volunteer Voting Ambassador, and list the tasks and skills that it involves.

Voting Ambassador Tips

Be a good listener. Take people's concerns seriously. Your job is to encourage people to vote, but some people have reservations. Listen and respond thoughtfully.

You don't have to be an expert. You have learned a lot about the voting, but it's okay to say, "I don't know," if someone asks you something you're not sure about.

Don't tell people what to do. Share your opinions and your passion about the topic, but respect the fact that people may feel differently than you do.

Remember why this matters! If you feel nervous about starting, review the reasons why you became a Voting Ambassador.

Voting Ambassador Log

Keep track of the work you do as a Voting Ambassador on a chart like this one.

Date	Person(s) you spoke with	Questions that came up