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INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is part of a non-partisan initiative undertaken by the New York State Association for Affordable Housing (NYSAFAH) in partnership with the League of Women Voters, to help residents of NYSAFAH members’ affordable housing developments register to vote more easily.

This guide book is a reference for affordable housing property owners, managers and tenants and covers many aspects of the voter registration process, including overview of voter registration rules and forms, protocols for engaging tenants, and a summary of the voting process. This guide also provides recommendations for successful voter registration events in addition to answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

While NYSAFAH and the League of Women Voters will work closely with NYSAFAH member affiliates during the launch of this initiative, this guidebook is intended to serve as a resource for NYSAFAH member property managers to use in the long-term so that they can independently help tenants to register to vote.
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PURPOSE

Affordable housing providers are well positioned to help increase voter registration among their residents. Affordable housing developments often have robust community programming and organized activities that can be piggybacked with voter registration efforts. Importantly, affordable housing managers and staff also have multiple opportunities for direct interaction with tenants where voter registration can be promoted. These include during the lease-signing, new resident welcome sessions, and annual recertifications for those developments with income verification. In addition, property managers and service providers often know the families who live in the developments and can be in a position to identify informal leaders and influencers in the community and who may serve as resources and catalysts to encourage and promote voter registration.
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APPROACH

The NYSAFAH voter registration initiative is tailored to three categories of affordable housing residents:

1. NEW LEASES IN NEW BUILDINGS

This initiative can be very effective if it is incorporated as part of the lease-up process for new tenants in new buildings. Specific efforts to engage these large groups of new residents include:

- As a development prepares to open, **directly engage tenants with new voter registration forms or change-of-address forms** as part of their lease-signing and/or welcome package.
- **Pursue a formalized process of direct follow-up** with tenants within 30 days, as it is likely that these tenants may be initially overwhelmed with materials and not focused on voter registration.
- **Provide information packages** that encourage residents to register at their new address.
2. NEW RESIDENTS IN ESTABLISHED BUILDINGS

The process for engaging new residents who are signing leases in existing buildings is similar to engaging new residents in new buildings though it takes place only as new leases are signed.

✓ Provide new tenants with a welcome package that includes voter registration and polling place information.

✓ Establish a formalized process to ensure follow-up with new tenants shortly thereafter.

Note that for all new residents in a property, it is important to emphasize that, even if they believe they are registered to vote, they must change their registration to their new address or they will be required to travel to their old polling place to vote; this can be a major hindrance that suppresses voter participation.

3. EXISTING RESIDENTS IN ESTABLISHED BUILDINGS

For existing residents, it is essential to establish a long-term and sustainable process for engaging existing residents and encouraging both voter registration and participation on election day. This includes:

✓ Regular direct engagement as part of the annual recertification and income validation process.

✓ Regular outreach and voter registration drives that are coupled with programs and events; these may include:

Summer BBQs, Family/Community Days, Holiday Parties and other building events

Daycare programs

Community meetings

Miscellaneous building activities

✓ Additional innovative direct outreach efforts such as 18th birthday cards to residents that include voter registration forms and information.

Other outreach efforts may include text messaging and social media outreach.

✓ Engage informal tenant leaders and influencers at member properties to promote voter registration drives.

For regular and sustained outreach it will be essential to do the following:

✓ Identify the appropriate staff and volunteers who can lead voter registration efforts and develop the appropriate training materials and manuals.

✓ Hold regular training sessions for these staff members and volunteers, in coordination with the League of Women Voters and other partners.

✓ Explore opportunities for establishing a polling place onsite at affordable housing developments. This is an effective way to increase voter participation by tenants at NYSAFAH members’ properties.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL VOTER REGISTRATION INITIATIVE AND EVENTS

Each NYSAFAH member property that is participating in the voter registration initiative should have a designated voter registration coordinator who is responsible for managing the initiative at that property, overseeing staff and volunteers who are assisting in the initiative and answering any questions they may have regarding the process. Optimally, the coordinator at each property will have participated in a training session organized by NYSAFAH and the League of Women Voters.

The voter registration coordinator and his or her team of staff and volunteers will meet with new residents of the building and existing residents who are renewing their leases to distribute voter registration forms and discuss the voter registration process (see Section 5 for protocols when discussing voter registration with tenants). In addition the voter registration coordinators can facilitate ongoing voter registration promotions and events at each participating property.

In order to increase awareness, the voter registration initiative can be publicized in monthly bulletins, community newsletters and other outlets at each participating property. Property managers may also consider hanging display signs and posters in hallways and other common spaces to publicize the initiative. If the property has a website, Facebook page or other social media presence, the voter registration initiative can be publicized there as well.

In New York City, the designated voter registration coordinator can get voter registration forms from the appropriate borough Board of Elections office (addresses and phone numbers of each borough Board of Elections office are included in Attachment 5). Registration forms are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Bengali.
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PROTOCOLS FOR DISCUSSING VOTER REGISTRATION WITH AFFORDABLE HOUSING TENANTS

The NYSAFAH voter registration initiative’s principal objective is to register new voters among NYSAFAH members’ tenants. However, like any voter registration initiative, this is not the only objective. This is also an opportunity to have registered voters change their address or party affiliation or learn about dates for an upcoming election and any questions on the ballot or how to find out where they vote.

In discussing voter registration with affordable housing tenants, there are generally three initial questions that NYSAFAH members’ affiliates should ask:

- Are you currently registered to vote?
- Are you registered to vote at your current address?
- When did you last update your voter registration?

✔ Tenants may ask if they are eligible or are uncertain about eligibility requirements for voting. Designated staff and volunteers should be prepared with a list of voter eligibility requirements in New York State. These eligibility requirements are outlined in Section 6.1 below.

✔ The voter registration coordinator and other staff should avoid directly asking tenants if they are a US citizen as even documented immigrants can find this question threatening. Instead, designated staff and volunteers should simply inform tenants of the eligibility requirements as outlined in Section 6.1 of this guide.

✔ Tenants may be uncertain as to whether they are already registered or what their registration status is. Designated staff and volunteers should be prepared to help tenants look up their voter registration status, including the address where they are currently registered, at https://voterlookup.elections.ny.gov/
It is helpful for designated voter registration coordinator or other staff to **have black or blue pens available** when working with tenants to complete voter registration forms as blue or black ink is required on the form.

If a tenant completes a voter registration form and turns it into a voter registration coordinator or other staff member/volunteer, **the coordinator or volunteer is permitted to mail it in on behalf of the tenant** and check to make sure that the form is completed correctly. **It is important that the forms be mailed in or delivered to the Board of Elections office as quickly as possible** to ensure that the tenants who are registering to vote can vote in the next election without difficulties. Voter registration coordinators should **avoid holding onto forms and turning them in close to the registration deadline**, when the Board of Elections is overwhelmed and mistakes can be made.

If a tenant wants to take a voter registration form and mail it in themselves, that is fine, though the voter registration coordinator/staff member should point out the required document list on the upper right side of the voter registration form. It should also be noted that **mailed-in registration forms for first-time voters require identification**. If an identification number is not provided on the form or in response to a letter of request from the Board of Elections, then the voter will be asked to produce identification at the polling place the first time he or she votes.
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OVERVIEW OF NEW YORK STATE VOTER REGISTRATION RULES

1. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

A person is eligible to vote in New York State if they meet the following requirements:


- 18 years of age or older on Election Day or not later than December 31st of the calendar year in which you register.

- A resident of New York State and of the county or city (ie, New York City) where you will be voting for a minimum of 30 days before the election.

  NOTE: Those who do not meet the 30-day residency requirement, but meet all remaining criteria, will be permitted to vote by special ballot for president and vice-president.

  NOTE: A resident of one jurisdiction of New York State, such as New York City, will not be able to register and vote in that jurisdiction if they simultaneously claim the right to vote in another jurisdiction in the state.

- Not currently serving a jail sentence for a felony conviction.
2. 25-DAY REQUIREMENT FOR VOTER REGISTRATION

In New York State, voter registration forms must be received by the Board of Elections 25 days before the election in which the applicant wishes to vote.

Any change of registration, such as a new address or name, must also be received by the Board of Elections 25 days before the election.

The New York State Legislature passed a voting reform package in January 2019 that includes same day voting registration, but it must be passed again in another legislative session. The earliest it could become law is 2021.

✓ Exception to 25-Day Registration Rule: Any qualified person who has been honorably discharged from the military after the 25th day before a general election or has become a naturalized citizen after the 25th day before the general election may personally register at the Board of Elections in the applicant's county of residence and vote in the general election held at least ten days after such registration. A directory of county Boards of Elections across New York State can be found at https://www.elections.ny.gov/.

3. CHANGING PARTY ENROLLMENT

A registration form submitted to change enrollment from one political party to another, or from “blank” to a party designation, must be received by the Board of Elections 25 days before the preceding General Election in order for the voter to participate in their new party's next primary.

(For example, if someone wanted to change their party enrollment for the 2020 New York Primary Election on April 28, 2020 or the 2020 General Election on November 3, 2020 they would have to do so 25 days before the 2019 General Election on November 5, 2019.)

Note the exception that new voters or voters who are registering in New York State from out-of-state, can register and enroll in a political party 25 days before the New York Primary Election AND vote in the Primary Election of the party in which they enrolled.

In a General Election, a voter may vote for any candidate regardless of the party in which the voter is enrolled.

4. VOTER REGISTRATION ONLINE FOR DMV ACCOUNT HOLDERS

If an individual has a Driver's License, Non-Driver's ID Card, or Learner's Permit issued by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, he or she may register to vote or update their voter registration on the New York DMV website (www.dmv.ny.gov/mydmv).

✓ Upon signing into the MyDMV application, select Electronic Voter Registration Application to complete a voter registration form online.

✓ There will be four questions that are on the Board of Elections registration form, including the affirmation of an affidavit stating that the individual is eligible to register and that all of the information provided is truthful.

✓ The registrant will also be asked to agree to the New York DMV attestation which authorizes the DMV to send the Board of Elections the digital signature they have on file from the registrant's application for a Driver's License, Non-Driver ID, or Learner's Permit. The Board of Elections has agreed to accept that attestation as the legal equivalent of a handwritten signature.

✓ Note that the DMV does not approve or deny voter registration applications, it simply forwards the online applications to the appropriate Board of Elections office for processing.
5. **REGISTRATION ISSUES FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**College Students**

College students who have a permanent address at a NYSAFAH member property live part of the year in an on-campus dormitory or residence hall in New York State may register to vote at either their current college address or their home address. When considering whether or not to use their college address, students should consider whether they might be moving from dorm to dorm or to an off-campus address before the election as these moves could cause them not to receive the voting information they need.

**Individuals with a Criminal Record**

Individuals who have been convicted of a felony cannot register to vote if they are currently incarcerated.

Individuals who have been convicted of a felony may register to vote if they:

- Were sentenced to probation
- Were not sentenced to incarceration or their prison sentence was suspended
- Have completed their prison sentence
- Have received a pardon
- Have had their voting rights restored

There is no need to provide any documentation about criminal history in order to register to vote.
OVERVIEW OF THE NEW YORK STATE VOTER REGISTRATION FORM

The designated voter registration coordinators at each participating NYSAFAH member property should be prepared to walk tenants through the New York State Voter Registration Form and answer any questions they may have. This section is meant to provide voter registration coordinators and other initiative participants with an overview of the registration form.

The New York State Voter Registration Form is used for the following:

- Register to vote in New York City or New York State
- Change a voter’s name or address on their voter registration
- Become a member of a political party
- Change political party affiliation

VOTER REGISTRATION FORM: QUESTIONS 1 – 7

1. Are you a citizen of the U.S.? □ Yes □ No
   If you answer No, you cannot register to vote.

2. Will you be 18 years of age or older on or before election day? □ Yes □ No
   If you answer No, you cannot register to vote unless you will be 18 by the end of the year.

Your name

3. Last name
4. First name
5. Middle Initial
6. Suffix

More information

4. Birth date
5. Sex □ M □ F
6. Phone
7. Email

QUESTION 1

- Citizens of the United States are those born in the United States or naturalized.
- Persons born in Puerto Rico, Guam and the US Virgin Islands are US citizens.
- Persons born abroad to married parents, of which at least one is a US citizen who has lived in the United States are US citizens.

QUESTION 2

- The Board of Elections is currently registering 16- and 17-year olds. Their status does not change to active until the person turns 18.
Suffix refers to terms added after a last name, such as Sr., Jr., or III. Terms indicating professions or advanced degrees, such as MD, Esq., or PhD, should not be included.

Date of birth must be provided for the registration to be processed.

While these questions are optional, by providing a phone number or email address, a registrant will ensure that the Board of Elections has a way to contact them should the Board have any uncertainty about the registration.

Must be a physical address, not a PO Box.

As noted in Section 6 of this guide, college students can register at their college address in New York State or they can keep their registration at their permanent address in New York State.

Skip this question if the address stated in response to Question 8 is where the voter receives mail.

Must be an address where the Board of Elections can send a verification letter.
If the answer to Question 10 is Yes, then the applicant should try to enter a year in Question 11. If they cannot remember the exact year, then enter an approximate year.

These questions are not required to be answered, but they do help the Board of Elections staff to locate a person’s prior registration.

This question only needs to be answered if someone is already registered to vote in New York State and needs to change the name or address of their registration.

Registrants only have to provide the numbers from one form of identification.

A person can register without providing ID information.

If they do so, the Board of Elections will send them a letter to their mailing address asking for a copy of the ID (which could just be a phone bill).

If their ID is not verified before Election Day, new registrants will be asked to present ID the first time, and only the first time, they vote.
Voters can only select one political party.

To vote in a Primary Election, a voter must be enrolled in one of the listed parties.

Note that registering for a political party does not obligate a person to vote for that party’s candidate in the general election.

Note that the Independence Party is a political party. A person who wishes not to affiliate with any party should check “No party”.

Note that information regarding deadlines for changing political party enrollment are described in Section 6.3 of this guidebook.

Currently, under New York State law, absentee voting is only available to:

- Registered voters who cannot make it to their poll site on Election Day because they will be outside of their voting jurisdiction (ie, New York City) on Election Day, including General, Primary and Special elections.
- A person who is ill, disabled or in a hospital or long-term care facility may vote by absentee ballot.
- A person who is awaiting sentencing or is incarcerated for a misdemeanor charge may vote by absentee ballot.

The registrant must sign and date the form to indicate that all information is true and that they meet all the requirements to register to vote. The signature provided here will appear in the pollbook that needs to be signed when that person is voting.

Note: while voter registration coordinators and other affiliates of the NYSAFAH voter registration initiative may, with verbal permission, complete a voter registration form for someone else, only the voter can sign and date the form.

Registrants who would like to donate organs or tissues to the New York State Department of Health’s Donate Life Registry can fill out the form or register online. While it is important to encourage individuals to sign up to donate, it is also important to make sure they don’t think they’ve registered to vote just by filling out the organ donor form.
Once a voter registration form is filled out, review the form to make sure all required information is provided and the application is legible.

Remind the voter that they should receive an acknowledgement from the Board of Elections in four to six weeks. If they don't receive the acknowledgement, in New York City they should contact the Board of Elections at 212-VOTE-NYC. Elsewhere in New York State, voters should contact their local Board of Elections using the directory at https://www.elections.ny.gov/CountyBoards.html.

After allowing about two weeks for the registration to process, tenants can check their voting registration status online at https://voterlookup.elections.state.ny.us/.

In New York City, tenants can then find their polling site at https://nyc.pollsitelocator.com. Elsewhere in New York State, voters can look up their polling site at https://voterlookup.elections.ny.gov/.

The website of the League of Women Voters (NOT OF NYC) also provides links to how to find a voter’s polling place, voters’ guides and information about elections. In New York City, voters may go to (use website already in bullet); elsewhere in New York State voters may go to: https://my.lwv.org/new-york-state.

Voter registration coordinators should inform tenants in New York City that, before each regularly scheduled Primary and General Election, the Campaign Finance Board NYC Votes will send a guide with general voting information, a list of candidates for each office, their profiles and ballot proposals. For other jurisdictions in New York State, please contact your local Board of Elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Deadlines and Elections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Oct 11, 2019</td>
<td>Deadline to mail or drop off registration forms in time for a voter to vote in November 5th General Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, Oct 11, 2019</td>
<td>Deadline to change party enrollment for 2020 General Election or vote in 2020 Primary Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Oct 16, 2019</td>
<td>Last day to submit change of address for General Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Nov 5, 2019</td>
<td>2019 General Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, April 3, 2020</td>
<td>Deadline to mail or drop off registration forms to vote in April 28 New York Presidential Primary Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, April 28, 2020</td>
<td>New York Presidential Primary Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, June 23, 2020</td>
<td>New York State Primary Election (for state and local ballot)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Oct 7, 2020</td>
<td>Deadline to change party enrollment for Nov. 3, 2020 General Election</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 3, 2020</td>
<td>2020 General Election (Presidential Election)</td>
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

¿WHY DO WE NEED TO REGISTER IN ORDER TO VOTE?
To determine eligibility to vote and as a means of identifying voters. Note that your actual vote is always confidential.

¿ARE YOU HERE AS A REPRESENTATIVE FOR A CANDIDATE OR PARTY?
No, the NYSAFAH Voter Registration initiative is non-partisan and we do not represent any election campaign or party.

¿WHICH CANDIDATE OR PARTY SHOULD I VOTE FOR?
We are not endorsing candidates, we just want people to vote their voice and we believe tenants of affordable housing in New York should be heard.

¿WILL REGISTERING TO VOTE CAUSE ME TO BE CALLED FOR JURY DUTY?
New York State voter registration listings are only one of many databases that the State of New York uses to select potential jurors, including: all IDs issued by the NYS DMV, New York State income tax filers, recipients of unemployment insurance or family assistance or public benefits.

¿WHY SHOULD I ENROLL IN A POLITICAL PARTY?
In New York State, if you are enrolled in a political party, you may vote in that party’s primary election and help select the candidates who will run on that party’s ticket in the general election. You may sign party petitions to get a candidate on the ballot. At the General Election you may vote for any candidate of any party, regardless of your enrollment.

¿I DON’T PAY ANY ATTENTION TO POLITICS. WHY SHOULD I VOTE?
The decisions politicians make affect you directly every day. Locally, elected officials are responsible for routine trash collection, police patrols, plowed and paved streets, public transit, sewers, schools, healthcare and affordable housing. You pay the salaries for elected officials as a taxpayer. People are going to be elected to represent you whether you vote or not. If you don’t vote, you don’t have a stake in the decisions already being made for you. You are letting other people decide what is best for you.