



# Five Steps to Improving Voter Registration in Public Agencies

## *A Requirement of the National Voter Registration Act*

*The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (“NVRA”) requires state public assistance agencies (such as those offering SNAP/Food Stamps, Medicaid, WIC, TANF, and services to the disabled) to offer clients voter registration applications and assistance during certain transactions. Investigations have found that agency managers and personnel are often unfamiliar with their legal obligations under the NVRA. In addition, staff members are sometimes found to have not been trained or not to have the necessary supplies to provide voter registration services.*

In recent years, several states have seen significant increases in the number of voter registrations originating from public assistance agencies after taking steps to improve delivery of this important service. Here are five things agency officials need to do to meet their responsibilities under the Act and to ensure public assistance agencies are providing the proper voter registration services to their clients:

**1. Know the NVRA’s public agency registration requirements.** Public assistance agencies must offer voter registration services to clients when they (i) apply for benefits, (ii) renew their application or recertify their eligibility for benefits, or (iii) inform the agency of a change in name or address. This requirement covers in-person and remote transactions, e.g. transactions via telephone or the Internet. In each of these covered transactions, the public assistance office must (i) distribute a voter registration application form and (ii) provide a “declination form” that asks the client if he/she would like to register to vote in language prescribed by the Act. Agencies are required to keep completed declination forms in their records.

**2. Provide training and support to agency personnel.** Agency personnel are required by the NVRA to assist clients with voter registration materials as they would any other agency form. It is not sufficient for agencies to simply have voter registration forms on hand: staff members must be able to properly assist eligible clients with completing voter registration applications and transmit them to elections authorities in a timely manner. Consequently, agency staff members need annual training from election officials on how to help clients complete the application. Agencies should also ensure that each office knows how to contact state and local election officials with any additional questions or training needs.

**3. Appoint an NVRA Coordinator at each office.** To facilitate consistent implementation of the NVRA, agency officials should appoint an NVRA Coordinator in each local office. The coordinator should be responsible for maintaining voter registration supplies, sending completed applications to election officials, and reporting NVRA data to agency and election officials. Most importantly, NVRA Coordinators should have sufficient training that they can orient new staff at their office in proper voter registration procedures.

**4. Collect registration data from public assistance agencies.** Agency officials cannot know if their offices are complying with the NVRA unless they monitor the number of registrations originating from each agency site. Web-based reporting systems that are easy to implement and easy to use are a promising tool for NVRA data collection. (Contact Project Vote for examples from various states.) Offices should regularly report data on the number of clients visiting the agency for transactions covered by the NVRA, responses to the declination form, and the number of completed voter registration applications transmitted.

**5. Monitor and evaluate office compliance.** Agency officials should regularly review registration data from their agency’s sites. In offices with a history of poor reporting, or which report a sudden downturn in the number of registrations, agency staff should work with those sites’ managers and NVRA Coordinators to ensure that staff are offering voter registration in compliance with the law. In addition, agencies should make NVRA responsibilities a part of regular office and employee evaluations.

For more information, or to obtain free technical assistance based on best practices in other states, please contact Sarah Brannon at Project Vote at [sbrannon@projectvote.org](mailto:sbrannon@projectvote.org). More information is also available by clicking on “Public Agency Registration” at <http://www.projectvote.org>.