



**OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES**

**2020**

**BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS**



NATIONAL LOW INCOME  
HOUSING COALITION



**TOOLKIT**

# OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES – AN OVERVIEW

The National Low Income Housing Coalition works to elevate affordable rental housing as a top priority for policy makers by supporting the nonpartisan work of local organizations to increase voter registration, turnout, and education amongst low-income renters and their allies, and by elevating the affordable housing crisis and its solutions in the 2020 presidential campaign.

## BACKGROUND

Federal housing policy disproportionately favors homeownership. For example, only 1 out of 5 low income households eligible for federal housing assistance actually receives it, while mortgage tax benefits are available to nearly every homeowner. These disparities in federal investment are at least in part the result of disparities in voter participation. In the 2016 general election, 67% of homeowners voted compared with a turnout rate of 49% for renters. Similarly, 74% of individuals with incomes above \$100,000 turned out on Election Day compared to 38% of those with incomes below \$20,000.

The past several years have also seen significant attempts to suppress the votes of low income people, people of color, students, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities. These groups are disproportionately represented amongst renters.

## OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES RESOURCES

The *Our Homes, Our Votes: 2020* campaign will provide various tools to assist organizations working to engage low-income renters in the upcoming 2019 and 2020 elections. Additionally, Our Homes, Our Votes is working with key partners in early Presidential primary states to be sure that housing affordability and homelessness solutions are a prominent feature in the presidential campaigns. Our Homes, Our Votes will continue to offer a comprehensive Voter Engagement Guide and Voter Engagement Plan, and will produce an extensive series of webinar trainings for early 2020. New this year is the *Our Homes, Our Votes* toolkit, which contains quick reference factsheets, guide materials, and templates for organizations engaging on elections.

## SPOTLIGHTING PARTNERS

Throughout the upcoming months leading to Election Day 2020, *Our Homes, Our Votes: 2020* will feature resources available through key national partners such as NonProfit VOTE, the League of Women Voters, Alliance for Justice, the Brennan Center, National Coalition for the Homeless, and many others. Additionally, *Our Homes, Our Votes* will spotlight notable local efforts and best practices that other organizers can consider bringing to their respective communities.

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# GETTING STARTED ★★★★★

## LEGAL DO'S AND DON'TS FOR 501(C)3 NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS |

Nonprofit organizations can, and should, engage in nonpartisan election-related activity, including voter registration, education, and mobilization. The basic rule is that 501(c)(3) organizations cannot in any way support or oppose particular candidates or political parties. Coordination with a campaign or a party is specifically and clearly forbidden. There many ways, however, that nonprofit organizations can legally engage with candidates to inform them on issues and to gather position statements to be shared with low-income residents and allies.

### **501(c)(3)s CAN**

- Register voters
- Educate voters
- Engage candidates on issues
- Endorse ballot initiatives
- Host election-related public events
- Get voters to the polls

**As long as all efforts  
and activities remain  
NON-PARTISAN!**

### **501(c)(3)s CANNOT**

- Make endorsements of any political candidates.
- Donate money, resources, or time to any particular candidate.
- Any staff engaged in partisan political activities **MUST** do so without representing the organization, **NEVER** on staff time, and **NEVER** using 501(c)(3) resources.

With regard to ballot initiatives placed before voters, 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations **CAN** take an official position as long as engaging on the ballot initiative fits within the organization's mission. Engagement on ballot initiatives is thought of as lobbying on a bill, but with the voters acting as the legislators.

Nonprofit organizations engaging on elections should be familiar with the Bolder Advocacy campaign of the Alliance for Justice. Bolder Advocacy works to ensure that nonprofit groups are current on rules governing lobbying and campaign involvement. Review their materials and sign up for upcoming webinars at [www.bolderadvocacy.org](http://www.bolderadvocacy.org). Bolder Advocacy also provides a legal support hotline at 866-NP-LOBBY.

Organizations with specific types of federal funding might have additional limitations on electoral engagement. For example, organizations that receive funding from Legal Services Corporation are strictly forbidden from any type of electoral participation. Organization staff paid through the AmeriCorps VISTA program cannot participate in any election work, including voter registration. Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) organizations can participate in elections, but not using any CSBG funds. Public Housing Agencies (PHAs), notably are allowed to register voters and use resources to mobilize them on Election Day, though these activities are best coordinated through resident councils

# CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT & TOWN HALLS ★★★★★

## OVERVIEW OF CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT |

Elections are a fantastic opportunity to get decision makers thinking about housing issues. Too often, affordable homes are ignored in the public debate leading up to elections. Raising housing on the national agenda will happen only when candidates for elected office understand that the issue of affordable housing is important to voters--and to do that, it is important to educate and engage candidates early and often.

Candidate engagement can take many forms: candidate forums, town hall meetings, candidate surveys, and candidate fact sheets. There are also opportunities to invite candidates to interact with residents or community members through meetings and site visits.

Asking candidates to fill out a questionnaire or inviting them to your agency can be a way to learn more about them while making them aware of your organization and the issues that are important to renters. You may also want to report the number of new voters your organization has been able to register. Candidates also learn what issues are important to voters by reading the letters to the editor page of the newspaper. Consider having clients write letters about issues that are important to them; letters can often be published as a response to a story in which candidates have discussed poverty issues.

**When educating candidates, be sure to stay nonpartisan. To do this, remember:**

### I. NEVER CRITICIZE CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

- But you can add perspective or correct the record

### II. DO NOT RANK OR RATE CANDIDATES

- Constitutes an endorsement

### III. LEGISLATIVE SCORECARDS

- Only for incumbent legislators
- These are distinct from voter guides

### IV. WHAT ABOUT NONPARTISAN CANDIDATE ELECTIONS?

- It's still not okay to endorse candidates or coordinate with campaigns

# QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FORUMS |

- I. **Keep it nonpartisan:** This means inviting all the candidates for an elected position, and not just the Democrat and the Republican. Inviting only the major parties shows partisan preference to those two groups.
- II. **Build a coalition:** You can generate a larger audience and guarantee more candidates accept your invitation by having more groups involved in hosting the event. Caution: one issue with having too many groups involved in hosting is you might not have enough time to focus specifically on housing.
- III. **Bring the cameras:** Do your best to get commitments from media outlets to broadcast the event or cover it in their publications. Use live-streaming options such as Facebook or consider posting recordings to your website or your blog. Let the candidates know the media has been invited.
- IV. **Follow-ups are essential:** Be sure to have a sign-in table where you can collect contact information of attendees. This table should also have voter registration forms for people who have not yet registered.
- V. **Materials and fact sheets:** Provide information to attendees and candidates in advance so that the conversation starts from an informed perspective with the most recent data available about the housing shortage and homelessness in your community.
- VI. **Curate the questions:** A fully open Q&A can often get off topic or even unruly. Ask attendees to write their questions on note cards as they arrive. Arrange for some of your volunteers to go through the cards to pick the ones that are most interesting, relevant, and timely.
- VII. **Give the candidates time:** The candidates for office are making time available during their very busy campaign schedule. Be sure to offer them time at both the beginning and end of the forum to discuss their vision and campaign in their own terms.
- VIII. **Make it easy to attend:** When organizing events where many attendees are likely to be low income, always consider barriers that can be addressed to get people in the room. Offer food or childcare services, which can often be coordinated through volunteers. If you have the capacity, organize carpools to the event to boost attendance.

# SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE |

## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES SERVE TWO PURPOSES:

- I. Collect information about candidates' views for voters.
- II. Inform candidates about the range of issues that are important to your organization.

Using open ended questions, a candidate questionnaire should ask questions on a range of important issues.

The questionnaire should go to all candidates and it should be publicly posted. Provide clear instructions to candidates including a word limit, a clear deadline, and instructions for how to submit. Give candidates a reasonable amount of time to respond and be sure to keep the survey brief to ensure a good response rate.

Develop a plan for how the answers will be shared, and indicate to candidates how you will distribute their answers. Do not modify candidate responses in any way.

Remind candidates ahead of the deadline to submit their responses--and let them know that "Did not respond" will be used if no response is received. It is completely acceptable to list "Did not respond" for their responses.

Offer the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire to **all** candidates. This is important to ensuring that your efforts are nonpartisan.

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## SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE |

[Print on Organization's Letterhead]

[Date]

Re: 2020 Affordable Housing Election Questionnaire

Dear [Name]:

Today, the affordable housing crisis continues to reach new heights. In our [city/county/state], [ # ] renters are cost-burdened and [ # ] people experience homelessness on the average night. Among those hardest-hit are low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness. These families must make desperate tradeoffs between keeping a roof over their heads and buying food or medicine. Recent reports show that nearly every community in our nation—in urban, rural, and suburban areas alike—is impacted.

As a nominee for [Elected Office], [Organization Name] invites you to complete the attached **2020 Election Questionnaire** on key affordable housing issues. The purpose of this questionnaire is to educate and inform communities on each candidate's stance on the housing issues directly impacting them. *It is not meant to serve as an endorsement of/for any particular candidate and/or political party.* All major nominees for [Elected Office]—regardless of party affiliation—have been invited to complete the questionnaire.

In [recent polling](#), by NLIHC's Opportunity Starts at Home campaign 76 percent of likely voters in the 2016 presidential election stated that they would be more likely to support candidates who made housing affordability a focus of their campaigns and a priority in government. Six in 10 likely voters called housing affordability a key issue for them in the upcoming elections. For many Americans, this issue is personal: almost half of the survey's respondents who identified as likely voters stated that an inability to meet rent or mortgage payments had been a problem for themselves or others close to them in the past 12 months.

**Please send your completed questionnaire to [Point of Contact] at [Email] by [Date].** Upon receipt, we will post your response on our websites at [website] and use social media to connect the public to your completed questionnaire.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



## 2018 ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

[Questions for ALL candidates; include local data where available]

### 1. The Availability of Affordable Housing

More than a third of all U.S. families are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Nearly 17 percent are severely cost-burdened and pay half their income on rent. In our [state/county/city], [#] renters are cost-burdened, and [#] pay more than half of their monthly income on rent. The lack of supply—especially for those with the lowest incomes—has only made this problem worse. **What would you do to encourage the production of more affordable homes for these families?**

### 2. Mobility and Discrimination

According to research from Raj Chetty, moving a poor child out of a high-poverty community to a more affluent community increases access to college, decreases their chances of becoming a single parent, and increases future earnings. Despite the benefits, many low-income families face barriers to moving to high-opportunity areas, including discrimination based on source of income and lack of access to housing assistance. **What actions would you take to encourage mobility and stop source of income discrimination?**

### 3. Revitalizing Distressed Communities

Many low-income neighborhoods often lack access to employment, good schools, thriving local businesses, healthy food, and healthcare. **How would you support public and private investments in housing development, preservation, and community development as part of a long-term strategy to revitalize distressed communities?**

### 4. Housing Intersections

Having an accessible, affordable place to call home is critical to improving education, health, and economic outcomes. **What housing-based strategy would you use to address the education, health, transportation, and economic needs of low-income families?**

### 5. Homelessness

On any given night, more than a half million people experienced homelessness—sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. A recent study of U.S. cities found that 25 percent of all requests for emergency shelter went unmet. **What will you do to end homelessness?**

## 6. Housing Challenges In Rural America

Although millions of rural families have trouble paying their rent or mortgage, rural housing issues are often overlooked. Moreover, resources used by rural communities have been cut significantly. **How would you prioritize the housing needs of our rural communities?**

[Questions for federal candidates only]

## 7. Housing as a Safety Net Program

Unlike other federal safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare, federal affordable housing assistance is not guaranteed, even if a family qualifies for the program. Today, just one in four households that are eligible get the assistance they need. **What specifically will you do to expand access to this assistance?**

## 8. Legislative and Regulatory Changes to Federal Housing Programs

Several proposals to change federally assisted housing programs have been introduced over the past sessions of Congress. **How, if at all, would you propose to change federally assisted housing programs that serve low-income households, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Section 8 housing vouchers, and public housing?**

## 9. Preservation of Affordable Housing

The preservation of existing affordable housing—including public housing and developments receiving project-based rental assistance—is a critical and cost-effective component in addressing the housing crisis. However, chronic underfunding has led to a more than \$30 billion backlog in deferred maintenance costs for public housing alone. Communities like [cities in the state] are in severe need of updates for public housing developments, as well as developments receiving project-based rental assistance. **What would be your plan to preserve this critical resource for the long-term?**

# TIPS FOR PARTICIPATING IN A TOWN HALL |

## Town Hall Meetings: Asking the Best Question

- Submit a question in advance
- Tweet your question before the event. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag.
- Sit near the microphone
- Ask direct questions
- Consider a question with two parts:
- A Yes/No aspect in the beginning
- An opportunity for the candidate to offer additional thoughts
- Include facts in a question
- Opportunity to inform the candidates
- Videotape the question and answer, and send it to [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) to be included in the [www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org](http://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org) website cataloguing all candidate comments on affordable housing. Share the video via social media using the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag.

## EXAMPLE QUESTIONS:

"In our community, more than one-quarter of all renters have an eviction on their record. Do you support a new law guaranteeing the right to an attorney for all renters facing eviction? Also, what will you do to decrease the rapidly increasing evictions in our neighborhoods?"

# BUILDING THE BEST AUDIENCE |

## Engaging and Empowering Low-Income Renters to Attend Candidate Events

The best way to get candidates to acknowledge the importance of low-income renters as part of the electorate is to provide opportunities for them to interact with people who have lived experience in the housing crisis. Hosting candidate coffees, town hall meetings, or inviting candidates to tour an affordable housing or shelter facility and meet with residents, can all be powerful community events. To maximize impact of these events, be sure they are well attended by people from the low-income communities we hope to see demonstrating an increase in voter participation.

### KEY STRATEGIES TO ENSURE GOOD TURNOUT FROM LOW-INCOME RENTERS:

- I. **Host the event near low-income renters.** Select a location central to your intended audience. Consider using the community room of a public housing building or the meeting room at a local neighborhood center.
- II. **Ask people to RSVP.** Build a list in advance of people who say they are interested in attending. You will generally want about twice as many RSVPs as your target number for attendance. Use the RSVP list to call people the evening before or email them day-of to remind them of the event.
- III. **Use social media.** Many low-income renters are active on Facebook or Twitter. Always create a Facebook event page to promote your event and request RSVPs. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag.
- IV. **Provide food!** Low-income renters might have to adjust their dinner or lunch plans to attend your event. Providing food and drink always builds a bigger crowd.
- V. **Provide childcare.** Low-income renters are less likely to have backup support for childcare. Oftentimes, in order to attend a community event, they will either need childcare provided on site or they will need the event to be kid-friendly.
- VI. **Have interpreters available.** Make your event as accessible as possible. If you have reason to believe there will be turnout from a large Latino or immigrant community, make it known that translation will be available. Having sign-language interpreters can be helpful in communities where many might have hearing disabilities.
- VII. **Send out reminders.** Frequently remind people the event through emails, and consider hosting a volunteer phone bank the evening before to remind people.



- VIII. Encourage people to bring new voters.** When doing reminder outreach, encourage attendees on your RSVP list to please bring a friend or neighbor.
- IX. Provide clear directions.** If you are not transporting low-income people to your event or hosting it at their facility, provide clear instructions on the address and mass transit options that can get people to the event.
- X. Post clear signs at the event facility.** If your event is hosted in a large building, make sure signs or volunteers are directing people to the correct room in a clear and simple manner.

# TIPS FOR PROPERTY MANAGERS HOSTING CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT EVENTS |

Elected leaders always start as candidates before they become policy-makers. Engaging candidates, whether incumbent or challenger, can be a great way to increase the visibility of your housing programs and the impact your work makes in peoples' lives. Here are some suggestions on maximizing the impact of your event.

- I. **Remember to invite all candidates.** Events that host several candidates such as "town hall" style meetings should include all candidates so that you are not engaging in a partisan way or favoring a particular candidate. It can be acceptable to establish criteria for the candidates you invite, such as only candidates who have met a certain polling threshold or who have raised a certain amount through contributions, but always consult with an attorney or review the [resources provided](#) by the Bolder Advocacy campaign.
- II. **Offer a tour.** In advance of your meeting with candidates or your moderated discussion, offer to show them around your facility, and perhaps to see one of the homes you provide. This will help them contextualize your work and your use of subsidy funds.
- III. **Provide a chance to hear from residents.** It's important for subsidized housing residents to hear from candidates, but candidates should also hear the concerns of residents. Having an opportunity for residents to share can be very valuable. If you're operating with a tight agenda, it might make sense to have residents submit questions in advance or to identify resident leaders to offer perspectives and lead the Q&A.
- IV. **Inform candidates about your work in advance.** When inviting candidates, let them know who you are, what mission you serve with your properties, who the eligible residents are, and basic information about the challenges you're facing. This will allow candidates to prepare statements and thoughts in advance of their visit.
- V. **Share about your event.** Highlight your event afterward in any newsletters, blog posts, or social media. Publicly demonstrating to candidates that you care about and appreciate their attention and time spent on the issue of housing affordability will only encourage them to remain further involved.
- VI. **Invite the media.** Send out a press advisory in advance of your event to traditional news outlets. Journalists often enjoy covering campaign events where real impacted people have an opportunity to interact with candidates. In order to attract TV journalists, produce large scale visuals or infographics to help create a setting suitable for filming.

# TOP 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK A CANDIDATE |

## 3 Questions to Ask on the Campaign Trail

Before you cast your vote, know where the candidates stand on affordable housing issues.

Here are three questions to ask candidates:

- I. What generally should be the role of government in addressing housing affordability issues, and what steps would you take to encourage the production of more affordable homes for families who are cost-burdened—those paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs?
- II. What specifically will you do to expand access to housing assistance to every household that needs it?
- III. What will you do to end homelessness?

Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag. Share the video with [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) for posting on the [www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org](http://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org) website.

# TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR QUESTION HEARD BY THE CANDIDATE |

## Tips for Getting your Question Heard by the Candidate!

- Be ready with a question and ask it directly, such as "What specifically will you do to expand access to housing assistance to every household that needs it?"
- Practice asking your question out loud in advance of the event so that you can clearly and quickly articulate it.
- If there is a formal Q&A portion of an event, you can ask your question then. But get in line early to make sure you have the opportunity to get your question heard.
- You can ask your question by respectfully approaching the candidate when they are entering or exiting or mingling.
- Position yourself in the decision-makers path, in a place where they are walking out, shaking hands and be ready to ask the question right away.
- Get there early and find a good seat. If there is a formal Q&A session, consider sitting near the microphone to be first in line.
- Go with a friend or colleague and have people positioned in different locations around the event.
- Use our phone to video tape the exchange and the answer (or have a friend tape you asking the question)--and use social media to lift up the question and response!
- Look for an opportunity to talk with the media, explain why you're there, what the candidate was asked and what their response was.
- Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag. Share the video with [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) for posting on the [www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org](http://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org) website.



# TIPS FOR CANDIDATE EVENTS: FORUMS & TOWN HALLS |

Candidate forums and town hall meetings are public events that allow candidates to have open discussion of topics and issues.

Forums tend to be more moderator-led discussion while town halls allow for larger audience participation.

- I. Be sure to invite all candidates and give equal effort to getting all to attend. If you set criteria to lower the number of invitations, be sure they are based on an impartial facts such as funds raised by a certain date, polling with voters at a certain percent, etc.
- II. Ensure the moderator is nonpartisan in both tone and facilitation.
- III. Set time limits for responses and give all candidates a chance to respond.
- IV. All candidate materials (signs, stickers, etc.) should be kept outside of the space where the event is taking place.
- V. If possible, screen audience questions ahead of time to get a diversity of viewpoints.
- VI. Set rules for the audience at the start of the event.
- VII. No applause, no partisan materials (buttons, stickers).
- VIII. Invite media.
- IX. Write up a recap of the event and share widely. Capture the exchange with video, audio or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag. Share the video with [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) for posting on the [www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org](http://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org) website.

# TIPS FOR CANDIDATE VISITS |

## MAKING THE MOST OF CANDIDATE VISITS

Candidates are allowed to visit your organization and/or any events being held by your organization.

### ALL CONTACT MUST FIT INTO THE FOLLOWING THREE TYPES:

#### I. As a public figure (elected official or field expert)

- Should not mention candidacy at any point, event should be free of all campaign materials or discussion.
- Can speak about legislative accomplishments.
- It IS appropriate to give an elected official an award, even in an election year. But it is a best practice that the award be given on a regular basis such as annually

#### II. As a candidate invited by the nonprofit

- Must invite all candidates and cannot give any indication of support or opposition
- No fundraising at these events
- Best practice – have residents or members lead these events, ask questions, and tell their stories

#### III. Of their own initiative and interest

- Candidates can attend nonprofit sponsored events
- Nonprofits should ensure that there is no endorsement of candidate implied or otherwise
- Do NOT give candidate opportunity to address the gathering unless it is clearly through another capacity and does NOT reference candidacy

Whenever possible, capture the exchange with video, audio or pictures, and use social media to share and amplify. Use the #OurHomesOurVotes2020 hashtag. Share the video with [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) for posting on the [www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org](http://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org) website.

# VOTER GUIDES ON CANDIDATE POSITIONS |

A voter guide seeks to provide voters with general information on each of the candidates and the offices they will fill.

Ballot initiatives should be discussed, and CAN include an organizational position.

## **Things to consider:**

- Include general candidate information such as name, photo, occupation, party affiliation, contact information, website, etc.
- Can include their responses from a questionnaire. (Do NOT coordinate with candidate on including this information)

## **Survey responses**

- The best candidate positions to include for your network are the ones that are provided from all candidates.
- Show responses in their entirety; picking and choosing quotes can be partisan.
- If providing websites or candidate flyers, make sure to include all candidates.

# VOTER REGISTRATION ★★★★★

## TIPS FOR VOTER REGISTRATION |

Voter turnout begins with nonpartisan voter registration. In order to cast a vote, a citizen must provide proof of residence and age prior to a given state's voter registration deadline. Low registration rates amongst low-income renters is a consistent barrier to better federal housing policy. Census data confirm that low-income voters are registered and vote at lower rates than higher income citizens. While 85% of people with incomes over \$100,000 were registered to vote in 2016 and 74% voted, just 60% of people with incomes below \$20,000 were registered, and only 38% actually voted (U.S. Census Bureau. [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016](#), May 2017).

This lack of representation at the polls has been [demonstrated](#) to affect public policy. Studies find that increased turnout among the rich leads to policies that reduce taxation on the wealthy, while increased turnout among the poor increases support for safety net programs.

**Here are some tips for effective voter registration efforts:**

### 1. Set Goals

Define who you want to register, and how many. Will it be increasing registration in a certain set of subsidized buildings? Increasing registration in a particular neighborhood? Targeting young voters? These are all examples of important considerations for structuring your efforts. Having clear goals will provide clarity for staff and volunteers working on the project.

### 2. Get to Know Your Local Board of Elections

Your local Board of Elections or County Clerk can be a wealth of information as you plan to register low income renters to vote. You will want to check in with them to learn the registration deadline for the general election in your state. Ask whether anyone can register voters in your state, or whether a person must first become deputized or meet other requirements. Request the voter rolls for your community, so you will know who in your target audience is already registered. Learn about identification requirements for registration and voting. Explore whether online voter registration is an option – this might allow your voter registration drive to be done on tablets or smartphones. Request enough voter registration forms to meet your registration goals. In many places, the role of the Board of Elections will be conducted out of the office of the County or City Clerk. Please contact NLIHC if you need help determining who the best local authority is for your organization.

### 3. Offer Registration Trainings

Residents and staff who plan to register voters will often benefit from receiving training on the process. You may want to bring in someone from the local Board of Elections or County Clerk's office who can explain the state's registration requirements and how voter registration forms must be filled out, whether online or in paper. It can also help to spend a bit of time role-playing so that people who are registering voters are not discouraged when confronted with apathy. It is also helpful to practice voter registration updates for renters who have recently moved.



## **4. Fit Voter Registration into Your Agency's Regular Contact with Residents**

A key best practice is to incorporate registration into day-to-day activities that already take place at your agency. Registration can usually be incorporated with few resources and little hassle into the intake process, training sessions, resident association meetings, and any other meetings of clients.

## **5. Plan Specific Voter Registration Activities**

Another way to think about registration at your organization is to plan special registration activities or campaigns. Many organizations have had success holding social or other events at which residents are encouraged to register to vote. Consider hosting an event for [National Voter Registration Day](#) which is September 24, 2019.

## **6. Organize a Door-To-Door Campaign**

The most effective way for larger organizations to systematically register clients is through a door-to-door campaign. If your agency is a housing provider or a resident council, such a campaign can be especially effective. In particular, resident leaders can volunteer to receive training and serve as 'building captains' or 'floor captains.' Captains can take on responsibility for registering, keeping registration records, and then turning out, all of the people in their building or on their floor. Such a system can be a great way to get residents or clients involved while ensuring that staff does not become overwhelmed with additional responsibilities. The key is to have personal and organized contact with potential voters by people they know or trust. Especially in this type of campaign, you will want to use the voter list from your county to see who in your buildings is already registered or whose registration needs updating. Voter lists may cost a small fee, but they are essential for tracking who is already registered.

## **7. Go Into the Community**

Finally, especially if you have a smaller membership or client base, you may also want to think about having your volunteers reach out into the community to register other low income, homeless or underrepresented people. Consider staffing voter registration and information tables at community events. Also, make sure to promote your voter registration efforts through your website and other social media platforms. Let people know they can come to your location or events to register to vote.

## **8. Full Participation from Your Team**

Do not forget to make sure everyone on your staff, in your membership, and on your board is registered!

# BEST PRACTICES FOR REGISTERING LOW-INCOME RENTERS |

There are numerous legitimate reasons that low-income renters are registered to vote at lower rates than higher-income households. Here are some tips for overcoming common challenges in registration drives.

- **VOTER APATHY** – Messaging matters. There have been numerous studies that indicate low-income people are more likely to register to vote and turnout on Election Day if they are engaged with a positive message. Always rely on an individual's personal experience and connect that to the process for social change and do so in a hopeful way. Never provide a message reminding voters of their tremendous daily challenges because this will bolster feelings of despair from already having seen the repeated failures of the lacking social safety net and other institutions. Instead, remind low-income renters that their vote is about a new future for their neighborhood, community, or family. Discuss opportunities for change. Be prepared to share reminders of recent very close elections where a small number of votes determined the difference, and remind them.
- **TURN FRUSTRATION INTO A PURPOSE** – Use an issue voters are frustrated with as a reason to continue to vote. Pivot to solutions to the problems, and remind the voter that their opponents are standing up and being counted when working in the opposite direction. If they are frustrated that all politicians are the same, that their candidates always lose, etc., you might tell them that you share the same concern and that is why you are registering voters to elect new leaders.
- **REMIND SUBSIDIZED RENTERS THEY HAVE SOMETHING AT STAKE** – If you are organizing in public housing or registering low-income renters in specific properties, you should encourage them to protect their housing program by voting. There can be three important aspects of this message:
  - I. Housing programs are always being threatened with budget cuts, and the voter's affordable home needs to be supported at the ballot.
  - II. Improvements to repair subsidized properties require better budget support, and elected leaders know who votes in high numbers. Seeing subsidized properties vote in high numbers will always produce better response from officials.
  - III. Discuss the number of people in a voter's family or community who aren't fortunate enough to have subsidized housing and suffer while on the waiting list. Remind the voter that housing programs need to be protected AND expanded.

# PARTNERS & RESOURCES FOR VOTER REGISTRATION |

## BOLDER ADVOCACY, AN INITIATIVE OF THE ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE

Bolder Advocacy promotes active engagement in both elections and lobbying by giving nonprofits and foundations the information to advocate with confidence. They work to demystify and decode advocacy and election engagement by giving organizations knowledge and tools. Bolder Advocacy makes it clear that nonprofits should not shy away from electoral activities. They lay out the differences in what organizations can and cannot do under IRS tax rules for nonprofits.

For more information, visit: <https://bolderadvocacy.org>

## NONPROFIT VOTE

Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. They are the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services. Their excellent library of online resources includes a Voter Participation Starter Kit and a Voting in Your State Guide, as well as helpful guides on planning a voter engagement program, engaging candidates, and staying nonpartisan in all activities.

For more information, visit: <http://nonprofitvote.org>.

## FAIR ELECTIONS LEGAL NETWORK (FELN)

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights, legal support and election reform organization whose mission is to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. FELN works to improve overall election administration through reforms. They also provide legal and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations. Their state-specific resources include information on voter registration deadlines, ID requirements for voting, and how to vote early or by mail in any state.

For more information, visit: <http://fairelectionsnetwork.com>.

## BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

The Brennan Center for Justice understands that voting is the foundation of our democracy. They fight to preserve and expand the right to vote for every eligible citizen. Through practical policy proposals, litigation, advocacy, and communications, the Brennan Center works to make sure that voting is free, fair, and accessible for all Americans. They track and publish analyses of voting rights policies in every state legislature across the country.

For more information, visit: <https://brennancenter.org>.

## VOTE411.ORG, A RESOURCE OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

VOTE411.org is an online voter education resource of the League of Women Voters and a "one-stop-shop" for election-related information. The site provides a voter registration tool, a nationwide polling place lookup, and ballot guides for voters in every state. The website will be updated and expanded in 2020, with information on ballot questions and candidates for office. This level of information will be available for every voter in America, down to at least the statewide level, for both primary and general elections.

For more information, visit: <http://vote411.org>.

## YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE, A CAMPAIGN OF THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

The You Don't Need a Home to Vote Campaign seeks to promote voting access by specifically engaging people experiencing homelessness in the democratic process. Online resources include a state-by-state breakdown of how homeless people can exercise their right to become a registered voter, how homeless service agencies can incorporate voter registration into their client intake process, and how homelessness advocates can facilitate both comfort at the polling site and familiarity in casting a ballot.

For more information, visit: <http://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/voting>.

## VOTE.ORG

Vote.org is a wonderful resource targeted to individual voters. The website provides opportunities to check voter registration status, register to vote, request absentee ballots, and sign up for election reminders. Vote.org additionally maintains state-by-state election center webpages with further state-specific information important to voters.

For more information, visit: [www.vote.org](http://www.vote.org).

## THE SENTENCING PROJECT

Founded in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration. They produce a comprehensive report on the state-level estimates of felony disenfranchisement.

For more information, visit: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/felony-disenfranchisement/>

## PROPUBLICA

ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit newsroom producing investigative journalism. They have a last-minute voting guide with information on how to read a ballot, find a polling place, what to bring with you, and how to check voter registration.

For more information, visit: <https://www.propublica.org/article/users-guide-to-democracy-last-minute-tips-for-figuring-out-your-ballot-and-making-sure-you-can-vote>



# VOTER EDUCATION ★★★★★

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL VOTER EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT |

### There are three primary components on educating voters:

- Election Day details
- Voters' rights
- Candidate positions on issues

### VOTING LOGISTICS

The date of the election, the hours that polls are open, and the polling locations are all basic elements to voting successfully. These very basic details are easy to overlook but remember that many low-income renters might be new to voting and need to be reminded. Always educate your targeted voters in advance about the basics, and make sure these details are included in your materials, mailings, campaign emails or other outreach:

- ☒ The date of the election
- ☒ Opportunities for early voting
- ☒ Polling location – If you are organizing your voter education efforts across many voting precincts, then include information such as [vote.org](https://www.vote.org) or [vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org) where voters can look up their polling location.
- ☒ Hours of polling locations
- ☒ Identification requirements

### RIGHTS OF VOTERS

Voters are often unclear on their rights, and many misinformation campaigns are designed to intentionally confuse low-income people so that they don't show up to vote. It's important to establish clearly what is and is not protected on Election Day. Here are some common concerns:

- **EVERYONE CASTS A BALLOT!** All voters who show up to the polls should cast a ballot. If there is a question about any person's identification or residency in the ward where they are voting, that voter should cast a provisional ballot that will be counted after the initial run of results. Provisional ballots should always be completed, especially as protection from "voter caging." Voter caging is defined by [The Brennan Center](https://www.brennancenter.org) as, "the practice of sending mail to addresses on the voter rolls, compiling a list of the mail that is returned undelivered, and using that list to purge or challenge voters registrations on the grounds that the voters on the list do not legally reside at their registered addresses." This practice largely targets low-income renters as they move at higher rates than homeowners. Make sure to keep updated databases on voter information to avoid anyone you have registered from being "caged."
- **YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE!** You might be surprised to learn that no state requires a resident to have a traditional address in order to vote. People who are homeless, including those who do not reside in a shelter, still have the right to vote. In most cases, the address is really needed to determine what districts a voter should be voting in for local office or state legislature, etc. Different states approach this in different ways, so this is another instance where getting

more information from your local Board of Elections or County Clerk is a best practice. In many states that require an address to register to vote, homeless voters should list any place where they reside, whether it is a shelter, street corner, or park. In some states with Election Day registration, voters who are homeless can arrive at the polls with another voter in a given ward or precinct who vouches for the homeless voter. See the National Coalition for the Homeless's [You Don't Need a Home To Vote](#) project for state-by-state information on voting laws for the homeless.

- **VOTING RIGHTS FOR THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED** – A common misconception is that people who have been convicted of a felony are permanently barred from voting. This is actually only true in the states of Iowa, Kentucky, and Virginia. In most states, people who have been incarcerated have their voting rights restored when their sentence is completed or when they are released. In the states of Vermont and Maine, people convicted of felonies never lose the right to vote, and can vote while incarcerated. For a state-by-state breakdown of these voting rights, see the map on felony disenfranchisement that the ACLU maintains at: <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights/voter-restoration/felony-disenfranchisement-laws-map>. Disenfranchisement based on convictions continues to rise as the incarceration rate remains unreasonably high. The Sentencing Project, [found](#) that 6.1 million Americans were forbidden to vote in 2016 due to felony disenfranchisement. This statistic has increased from 1.17 million in 1976, indicating the declining voting power of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. It is important to inform people with a prior conviction that their voting rights have been restored. After their sentence is completed. Check out ProCon's state felon voting laws [factsheet](#) for information on your respective jurisdictions, because often states that disallow ex-offenders to vote have formal voter restoration processes.

## CANDIDATE POSITIONS ON HOUSING ISSUES

Registering and turning out voters always has the strongest impact when those voters arrive at the polls with information about which candidates are committed to their values. Educating voters about candidates can be done in a non-partisan way, and the best method is to provide the candidate's own words. Consider these three voter education tools.

- **CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES** – Circulate to each candidate for office a simple and brief questionnaire asking for their solutions to homelessness and the affordable housing crisis. Your questionnaires can explore specific issues related to housing development, renters' rights, evictions, or whatever best fits the mission of your organization. The trick with questionnaires is getting candidates to actually respond to them, so keep your questions brief, and be clear about how you will broadcast and distribute their responses to your network.
- **HOSTING CANDIDATES TO MEET YOUR RESIDENTS** – Consider inviting candidates to your membership meetings or to "town hall" types of events where they can interact with your community. To do this in a way that is non-partisan and does not favor a specific candidate more than another, be sure to invite all candidates to these events or to meet your residents and advocates.
- **VOTER GUIDES** – A good resource is one that contains all of the essential voter education information suggested in the three phases of 1) Election Day details; 2) Voters' rights; and 3) Candidate positions. Producing a comprehensive voter guide for a mailing to voters and residents, or just producing one for your website, can be a helpful tool. It is difficult sometimes, to take on such a large project, and summarizing candidate positions can be difficult to do without seeming to endorse one or the other. A helpful practice is to partner with organizations already producing voter guides in your community such as the League of Women Voters. Work to include a question about affordable housing policy or to provide a synopsis of key housing issues for voters heading to the polls.

# VOTER MOBILIZATION ★★★★★

## TIPS FOR MOBILIZING LOW-INCOME VOTERS |

Many low-income voters face logistical challenges that prevent them from getting to the polls on Election Day. Less-flexible work schedules, more difficulty obtaining legal identification, mobility challenges, and exposure to misinformation campaigns can all combine to powerfully suppress voter turnout in low income communities. Here are some important tips for Getting Out the Vote (GOTV).

- **PROVIDE RIDES TO AND FROM POLLING LOCATIONS.** Recruit volunteers, or perhaps fundraise to rent vans for Election Day so that low-income residents with disabilities or mobility concerns can cast their ballots. Volunteers are often eager to help with this project.
- **BECOME A POLLING LOCATION.** It might be too late for the 2019 and 2020 elections, but your organization should connect with your local Board of Elections or County Clerk to begin the process of becoming a polling location. Low-income renters will have better turnout if they can vote in the community rooms of their buildings or if they need only go to a familiar neighborhood center or service agency.
- **ENCOURAGE VOTE-BY-MAIL AND EARLY ABSENTEE VOTING.** Rather than turning out the vote all on one day, encourage low-income voters with mobility concerns to request absentee ballots and vote-by-mail. Keep a list of absentee voters in your properties and neighborhoods, and contact them at least 10 days before Election Day to be sure that ballots are being put in the mail in time to be counted. If your community allows it, it can be very effective to allow volunteers to collect and deliver the ballots themselves so that the postal service is removed from the process.
- **ORGANIZE GROUP VOTING.** Many voters are more likely to make it to the polls if they are joined by their neighbors. Resident councils and other low-income peer organizing efforts should consider selecting times when groups of residents can walk or ride to the polls altogether, making it a community activity. People are more likely to vote when there are people expecting them to do so.
- **ASK VOTERS TO MAKE PLAN.** When contacting voters in the days up to Election Day, ask them how and when they plan to vote, and how they plan on getting there. Asking voters to express this plan can allow organizers to verify the polling location and hours with the voter and also learn if there are transportation issues that need to be addressed.
- **EDUCATE VOTERS ON WHAT TO BRING WITH THEM.** Make sure people know what is and is not acceptable identification and what is required in your community. Many low-income people have the correct identification, but they don't vote because they have been misinformed. A "What to Bring with You" sheet can be very helpful; this is information that should be shared on your GOTV materials leading up to Election Day. A "What to Bring with You" sheet can be very helpful.
- **PROVIDE CHILDCARE ON ELECTION DAY.** Consider recruiting volunteers to provide childcare at subsidized properties for residents who need flexibility to get to polls and cast their ballot.

# HOW TO FIND YOUR POLLING PLACES |

Vote411 has a very simple polling place lookup [tool](#) where a voter needs only to enter their address to get the address and hours of their polling location. In addition to providing the nearest polling place, it links to personalized information on the candidates and issues, and provides a sample ballot. Voters can also verify the status of their registration.

Knowing the location of a polling place is only the first step, as many people struggle to find transportation to their polling place due to cost, time, and distance. This matters, as a 2011 UC Berkeley [study](#) found that the consolidation of Los Angeles County polling places for the 2003 gubernatorial recall election produced a significant drop in turnout. Fortunately, there are several options for organizers to consider:

- Consider becoming a polling location at your facility or property.
- Many cities offer discounted public transit on Election Day, check to see if yours does.
- Recruit volunteers to provide rides on Election Day, or partner with groups who already do this. Many churches or community religious groups often will provide rides to the polls.
- In 2018 Uber and Lyft partnered with national and local organizations to provide free or discounted rides on Election Day and may do so again in future elections.

Make sure to exhaust all resources when determining transportation options as part of your voter efforts.

# EARLY VOTING |

Early voting is a great solution for turnout concerns among low-income voters, yet many states have made this practice much more difficult. It is a practice that is becoming more and more common, with early voting and vote-by-mail accounting for only 14% of all votes in 2000 but 31.2% of all votes in 2014 [according to the U.S. Census Bureau](#). There are many reasons this option is particularly important to low income voters.

- Low-income people often have inflexible schedules. They have rigid work hours, limited transportation options that often require catching buses or trains at particular times, and challenging childcare responsibilities. States have varying laws on whether workers can legally leave work in order to vote, but in even states who offer this protection, workers are often timid about using it. **Early voting offers more opportunities for people with inflexible schedules or limited transportation options.**
- Early voting usually provides for much **shorter lines** both at the early voting site AND at the polls on Election Day, because so many people will have already cast their votes. Long lines are a barrier to voting, and they are more common in voting precincts that are predominantly populated by people of color. When the Supreme Court repealed Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, this led to many states in the South closing polling locations intentionally to increase long lines at polls. This was most prominent in the 2018 election in Georgia. Reducing long lines matters tremendously because **3% of voters who face long lines at the polls will leave without voting**, according to the [findings of the Bipartisan Policy Center](#).
- The voting system is less stressed when the election takes place over several days. There is more time to address potential registration errors or discrepancies for voters who have recently moved.
- In states with rigid voter identification laws, early voting can provide voters who do not have the correct documents to retrieve them and return at another time to cast their vote. **Early voting can mitigate the effects of voter caging challenges that are common on Election Day.**
- Early voting also makes election workers and volunteers better at their jobs. The early polling sites provide opportunities for training and observation of how an election is administered. This contributes to a smoother experience on Election Day, which matters in low-income communities where the voting process is often perceived as intimidating.

## EARLY VOTING IS NOT ENOUGH! MOBILIZATION EFFORTS ARE STILL NECESSARY!

Significant data demonstrates that a state or community offering early voting does not all by itself increase voter turnout. Much like voter mobilization on Election Day, early voting requires an effective campaign for it to have the highest impact. Here is how voter turnout campaigns can best plan and execute efforts around Early Voting:

- Educate voters on their early voting options – be sure that voters know the location and hours early voting sites. Remember that early voting sites are usually different from Election Day polling locations. Be prepared for people who are skeptical based on years of voting at a different location.
- Recruit drivers who can transport voters to early voting sites. There will always be fewer locations for early voting than Election Day voting, which means the travel distance to the polling location will be longer. Providing rides to the polls will be important.
- Be sure to indicate to all voters what they need to bring with them to vote early, focusing on identification requirements. Also inform voters on how they can register to vote on site in places

where that option is available.

- Keeping a list of voters is always a best practice. Communities and states with early voting will often provide overnight updates on who has voted. This can allow turnout campaigns to eliminate potential voters who have already cast their ballot. This practice narrows the universe of target voters so that campaigners and volunteers aren't calling or knocking on doors of people who have already voted.

Check out Vote.org's early voting by state [guidelines](#) to see your state's early voting timelines



# 2019 PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES



**N**LIHC works with members of Congress, the Administration, affordable housing and community development organizations and advocates, residents, and other stakeholders across the nation to ensure that people with the greatest needs – including the lowest income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, people experiencing homelessness, and others – have an safe, affordable, and accessible place to call home.

Our policy priorities for 2019 include:

- Protecting, expanding and monitoring the implementation of the national Housing Trust Fund;
- Preserving and increasing resources for federal affordable housing programs serving extremely low-income families;
- Ensuring federal disaster recovery efforts are fair and equitable;
- Promoting equitable access to affordable housing; and
- Championing anti-poverty solutions.

## PROTECT AND EXPAND THE NATIONAL HOUSING TRUST FUND

The national Housing Trust Fund is the first new housing resource in a generation. It is exclusively targeted to help build, preserve, and rehabilitate housing for people with the lowest incomes. NLIHC, its members, and other stakeholders played a critical role in the creation of the Housing Trust Fund in the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. In 2016, the first \$174 million in HTF dollars were allocated to states. In 2017, \$219 million was available, and in 2018, \$267 million is available.

This is an important step, but far more resources are needed. NLIHC leads the [Housing Trust Fund Implementation and Policy Group](#), a coalition of national advocates committed to protecting and expanding this

new resource. In 2019, NLIHC will work with stakeholders to build Congressional support to increase funding to the Housing Trust Fund through the housing finance reform, investments in infrastructure, and other legislative opportunities. We will also work to protect the Housing Trust Fund from any administrative threats posed by a new director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which oversees Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

## PRESERVE AND INCREASE RESOURCES FOR FEDERAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMS

### Increasing Federal Budgets for Affordable Housing

Despite a proven track record, federal housing programs have been chronically underfunded. Today, just one in four families eligible for federal housing assistance get the help they need. In order to fully address our nation's housing affordability crisis, Congress must significantly increase resources for housing assistance and to build and preserve affordable homes.

NLIHC leads the [Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding \(CHCDF\)](#), a coalition of 75 national and regional organizations dedicated to ensuring the highest allocation of resources possible to build and preserve affordable housing and support community development. In 2019, CHCDF will work to lift the low spending caps required by the Budget Control Act of 2011. Since 2011, spending caps have only made it more difficult for extremely low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and people experiencing homelessness to access safe, decent, and affordable housing by squeezing federal budgets.

NLIHC advocates for increased funding for Housing Choice Vouchers, public housing,

project-based rental assistance, the HOME Investment Partnerships program, and homeless assistance grants, among many other programs.

## Opposing Efforts to Cut Housing Benefits

NLIHC opposes efforts to cut housing benefits by imposing arbitrary work requirements, time limits, and other restrictions. NLIHC also opposes proposals that deter eligible immigrant families from seeking housing benefits or that force immigrant families currently receiving housing benefits to forego that assistance. A safe and stable place to call home is the first step to helping people rise out of poverty, and arbitrary restrictions that prevent people from receiving the help that they need will only make it more difficult for them to climb the economic ladder. These so-called reforms are neither cost effective nor a solution to the very real issue of poverty impacting millions of families living in subsidized housing or in need. NLIHC will continue to educate members of Congress on proven solutions to ending housing poverty.

## Expanding and Reforming Resources in the Tax Code

NLIHC strongly believes that any new federal housing resources should be targeted to address the underlying cause of the affordable housing crisis – the severe shortage of affordable homes for people with extremely low incomes. NLIHC supports the creation of a new, innovative renters' tax credit to help the lowest income families afford a place to call home. Moreover, any expansion of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit should be tied to reforms to ensure that the program better serves families with the greatest needs. NLIHC believes that efforts to divert scarce federal resources to address the limited housing challenges faced by higher income households is wasteful and misguided.

## Increasing Safe, Decent Housing in Tribal and Rural Areas

Native Americans living in tribal areas have some of the worst housing needs in the United

States, with exceptionally high poverty rates, low incomes, overcrowding, lack of plumbing and heat, and unique development issues. Despite the pressing need for safe, decent homes, federal investments in affordable housing on tribal lands have been chronically underfunded for decades. In 2019, NLIHC will work with tribal leaders and advocates to increase housing resources for tribal nations with the greatest needs, improve data collection on tribal housing needs, and reduce federal barriers to housing development.

Specifically, NLIHC will work to reauthorize the Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) and secure additional competitive funding targeted for tribes with the greatest housing needs.

NLIHC will also work to preserve and expand affordable housing available in rural areas by supporting funding for USDA Rural Development programs and opportunities to preserve the agency's rental housing portfolio.

## National Housing Stabilization Fund

As NLIHC and its partners work to assist people who are already homeless or at risk due to housing instability, we must also act to minimize the number of people who fall into these perilous situations. To this end, NLIHC advocates for the creation of a National Housing Stabilization Fund to provide emergency assistance to low income households to prevent housing instability and homelessness. Temporary assistance can stabilize households experiencing major economic shocks before it leads to situations which require more prolonged and extensive housing assistance.

## ENSURE FEDERAL DISASTER RECOVERY EFFORTS ARE FAIR AND EQUITABLE

One of the top priorities after a disaster is making sure that all displaced families have a safe, accessible, and affordable place to live while they get back on their feet. Too often, however, the housing, infrastructure, and mitigation needs of the lowest income people and their communities are overlooked.

NLIHC leads the [Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition](#) of nearly 800 national, state, and local organizations, including many working directly with disaster-impacted communities and with first-hand experience recovering after disasters. We work to ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including the lowest income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and other at-risk populations who are often the hardest-hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover afterwards. The coalition also works to advance a comprehensive set of recommendations for [Congress](#), [FEMA](#), and [HUD](#).

## PROMOTE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

NLIHC believes in just communities, where all community members have access to economic and educational opportunities, as well as affordable housing. Evidence shows that access to stable, affordable housing in communities of opportunity has broad, positive impacts. It can lead to better health and education outcomes and higher lifetime earnings, especially for children.

### Advancing Fair Housing

2018 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enactment of the Fair Housing Act, barring housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, or disability and requiring communities take active steps to end racial segregation. NLIHC supports the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule issued in 2015 that helps communities better meet their fair housing obligations and promotes housing choice. NLIHC will continue to work to counter the current administration's efforts to weaken fair housing policies.

NLIHC strongly believes fair housing and civil rights advocates and affordable housing and community development practitioners can find common ground on policies that increase opportunities for underserved people in both high-opportunity areas and through

revitalizing urban neighborhoods. NLIHC supports increasing mobility opportunities through new allocations of special mobility vouchers, expanded mobility counseling, and regional mobility programs, as well as the continued implementation of HUD Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) in certain metropolitan areas that protect current and future tenants.

NLIHC also supports protecting and expanding the Fair Housing Act to bar discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and source of income.

## Achieving Criminal Justice Reform

The United States incarcerates its citizens at a shockingly high rate and nearly one in three Americans has a criminal record. As more formerly incarcerated individuals return to their communities, they face barriers to accessing affordable housing, which is already scarce in the low-income communities to which they return. Because of their criminal records, justice-involved individuals face additional barriers in accessing affordable housing, putting them at risk of homelessness and recidivism. NLIHC advocates for safe, stable, affordable and accessible housing for those who have been involved in the criminal or juvenile justice system. By eliminating the barriers to housing and supporting programs that help formerly incarcerated people successfully reintegrate into their communities, people with criminal records can make the most of their second chance. In addition, NLIHC advocates to end the criminalization of homelessness. Nationwide, homeless people are targeted, arrested, and jailed under laws that criminalize homelessness by making illegal those basic acts that are necessary for life. These laws are ineffective, expensive, and often violate homeless persons' civil and human rights.

## CHAMPIONING ANTI-POVERTY SOLUTIONS

Beyond ensuring access to affordable housing, NLIHC is strongly committed to enacting legislation and protecting resources that alleviate poverty. NLIHC supports efforts to protect vital safety net programs, including

heating and weatherization assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), unemployment insurance, Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Affordable Care

Act, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Moreover, NLIHC strongly supports efforts to increase wages and to target federal resources to communities with persistent poverty

## OTHER PRIORITIES

NLIHC monitors and advocates on other issues as well, including:

- HUD's anticipated proposed Section 3 rule to ensure that preference for some of the new jobs, training, and contracting opportunities associated with HUD-assisted projects go to low-income people and to the businesses that hire them;
- Housing protections in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The draft reauthorization bill includes language to bar landlords from screening out applicants or evicting tenants on the basis that the renter is or has been a survivor of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking; and
- HUD's Moving to Work Demonstration and Rental Assistance Demonstration to ensure that current and future public housing residents are not negatively impacted.



# HTF: The Housing Trust Fund

The national Housing Trust Fund (HTF) is the first new federal housing resource in a generation, and it is exclusively targeted to help build, preserve, rehabilitate, and operate housing affordable to people with the lowest incomes. In 2016, the first \$174 million in HTF dollars were allocated to states. This is an important first step, but far more resources are necessary to meet the need. NLIHC is committed to working with Congress and the administration to expand the HTF in order to serve more families with the greatest needs.

## About the HTF

The HTF is the only federal housing program exclusively focused on providing states with resources targeted to serve households with the clearest, most acute housing needs.

- **Rental Housing and Homeownership Opportunities.** By law, 90% of HTF dollars must be used for the production, preservation, rehabilitation, or operation of affordable rental housing. Up to 10% may be used to support homeownership activities for first-time homebuyers, such as producing, rehabilitating, or preserving owner-occupied housing, as well as providing down payment assistance, closing costs, and interest rate buy-downs.
- **Highly Targeted To Serve Those With the Greatest Needs.** The HTF is the most highly targeted federal rental housing capital and homeownership program. By law, at least 75% of HTF dollars used to support rental housing must serve extremely low income (ELI) households earning no more than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or the federal poverty limit. All HTF dollars must benefit households with very low incomes earning no more than 50% of AMI. In comparison, most other federal housing programs can serve families up to 80% of AMI.
- **Local Decision Making and Control.** Because the HTF is administered by HUD as a block grant, each state has the flexibility to decide how to best use HTF resources to address its most pressing housing needs. States decide which developments to support.
- **No Cost to Federal Government.** Because the HTF is funded outside of the appropriations process, it has no cost to the federal government. By statute, the initial source of funding for the HTF is a slight fee (0.042%) on Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae activity, only 65% of which goes to the HTF.

## Efforts to Expand the HTF

NLIHC supports efforts to expand the HTF through any infrastructure bill, comprehensive tax reform, housing finance reform, and other legislative avenues.

For example, the bipartisan Johnson-Crapo housing finance reform legislation of 2014 included a provision that would increase funding for the HTF to an estimated \$3.5 billion annually, making a significant contribution to ending homelessness and housing poverty without competing with other important HUD programs for appropriated funds. To continue to build bipartisan support for housing finance reform legislation, the HTF must be protected and expanded and the HTF provision included in the Johnson-Crapo bill should be the starting point for any future legislation considered by Congress.

## HTF Resources In Your State

To learn more about how HTF dollars are being used in your state, please visit: <http://nlihc.org/issues/nhtf/state-allocation-plans>.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT SARAH MICKELSON, NLIHC PUBLIC POLICY DIRECTOR AT [SMICKELSON@NLIHC.ORG](mailto:SMICKELSON@NLIHC.ORG) OR 202-662-1530 EXT. 228.**

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# Affordable Housing Infrastructure



**P**olicymakers from both sides of the aisle agree that a significant investment in infrastructure should be a top priority for the next Administration. To maximize the impact on long-term economic growth, any infrastructure package should include resources to increase the supply of affordable housing for families with the lowest incomes. Investing in affordable housing infrastructure—through new construction and preservation—will:

## 1. Bolster productivity and economic growth.

Research shows that the shortage of affordable housing in major metropolitan areas costs the American economy about \$2 trillion a year in lower wages and productivity. The lack of affordable housing acts as a barrier to entry, preventing lower-income households from moving to communities with more economic opportunities. Without the burden of higher housing costs, these families would be better able to move to areas with growing local economies where their wages and employment prospects may improve.

High housing costs constrain opportunities for families to increase earnings, causing slower GDP growth. In fact, researchers estimate that the growth in GDP between 1964 and 2009 would have been 13.5% higher if families had better access to affordable housing. This would have led to a \$1.7 trillion increase in income, or \$8,775 in additional wages per worker.<sup>1</sup>

## A COMPREHENSIVE INVESTMENT IN HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE SHOULD INCLUDE:

- An expansion of the national **Housing Trust Fund**, a new tool exclusively focused on increasing the supply of affordable homes for those with the greatest needs (\$5 billion); and
- Resources to rehabilitate **public housing** stock to preserve this asset for current tenants and future generations (\$15 billion).

## 2. Provide a long-term asset that connects low-income families to communities of opportunity and promote economic mobility.

Like roads and bridges, affordable housing is a long-term asset that helps communities and families thrive. Without access to affordable housing, investments in transportation and infrastructure will fall short of creating vibrant communities. Increasing the supply of affordable housing—especially in areas connected to good schools, well-paying jobs, healthcare, and transportation—helps families climb the economic ladder and leads to greater community development.

Groundbreaking research shows that access to affordable housing increases long-term economic mobility; children living in affordable housing in communities of opportunity earn 31% more as adults, are more likely to live in better neighborhoods as adults, and are less likely to become a single parent. Other research shows that children living in stable, affordable homes are more likely to thrive in school and have greater opportunities to learn inside and outside the classroom.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Support local job creation and increased incomes.

Each dollar invested in affordable housing infrastructure boosts local economies by leveraging public and private resources to lift resident earnings and local tax revenue, as well as to support job creation and retention. In fact, building 100 affordable rental homes generates \$11.7 million in local income, \$2.2 million in taxes and other revenue for local governments, and 161 local jobs in the first year.<sup>3</sup>

1. <http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/chang-tai.hsieh/research/growth.pdf>

2. [https://www.macfound.org/media/files/Affordable\\_Housing\\_Child\\_Enrichment\\_Stronger\\_Cognitive\\_Development.pdf](https://www.macfound.org/media/files/Affordable_Housing_Child_Enrichment_Stronger_Cognitive_Development.pdf)

3. [https://www.nahb.org/~media/Sites/NAHB/Economic%20studies/1-REPORT\\_local\\_20150318115955.ashx?la=en](https://www.nahb.org/~media/Sites/NAHB/Economic%20studies/1-REPORT_local_20150318115955.ashx?la=en)

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**OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES**

**2020**

BECAUSE HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS



**TOOLKIT**



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