

Voter Registration

- A. **Definition** – Voter Registration, is the process of having one’s name placed on a list of those eligible to vote in an election by making proper application in their state. The fifteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the “right” of all US citizens, including African Americans, to vote.
- B. **Qualifications for Registration** – To register to vote, one must:
1. Be a citizen of the United States and a legal resident of the state and county in which he or she seeks to vote.
 2. Be at least 17 ½ years of age (at least 18 years on voting day to vote).
 3. Not be serving a sentence for a conviction of a felony involving moral turpitude; and
 4. Not be judicially declared mentally incompetent.
- C. **Types of Voter Registration** – The right to voter means nothing if citizens are not registered. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) makes voter registration more convenient and accessible. Under NVRA, voters cannot be purged, or removed from the rolls simply because they were inspired, or were unable to vote in previous elections. The NVRA also seeks to increase voter registration through the following ways:
1. **Motor Voter Registration** – Frequency referred to as, Motor Voter registration allows citizens to register to vote while they apply for their driver’s license between Januarys 1995 and November 1996, 20 million citizens utilized Motor Voter to register to vote. Section 5 of the NVRA requires that States offer voter registration opportunities at State motor vehicles agencies. September 1, 2016.
 2. **Agency-Based Registration** – The NVRA allows U.S. Citizens to register to vote at public assistance agencies (AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps, WIC, Social Security and Vocation Rehabilitation). This is significant when one considers the fact that less than 40% of low income and unemployed Americans were registered to vote in 1992.
 3. **Mail-in-Registration** – One of five Americans changes their addresses every year, making the opportunity to register by mail very important to U.S. Citizens. Mail-in-registration is also the best tool to register voters, whether you are conducting a door-to-door canvas or an on-site registration. You can register people at shopping malls, churches, schools, and ballgames – whoever there are groups of people. You collect completed forms and mail them to your local register’s office. Your voter registration office can be located in your local telephone book under “County Government”.
- D. **Forms** – Voter registration forms can be obtained from your county Voter Registration Office. Contact the Secretary of State’s office if you need large quantities for massive registrations. The Secretary of States’ office can be located in your local telephone book under “State Government.”
- E. **Where Can One Register?** - Usually, one can register at banks, libraries, schools, and other places frequented by the public and assessable to the handicapped. Also, under NVRA, citizens can register at public assistance and government offices.

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) - is a federal program that reformed aspects of the U.S. election system, budgeting nearly three billion to US states to: replace punch card voting systems. Creating the Election Assistance commission (EAC) to assist in the administration of Federal elections. HAVA has four components, including:

- A. Budgeting nearly three billion dollars to U.S. states to: replace punch card voting systems.
- B. Creating the Election Assistance commission (EAC) to assist in the administration of Federal elections.
- C. Providing assistance with the administration of certain Federal election laws.
- D. Establishing minimum election administration standards.

How to Conduct A “Non-Partisan” Voter Registration Drive

Since Blacks In Government, Inc. (BIG) is a non-profit organization, you must know what you and other non-profit organizations can and cannot do under the federal and state election laws. The tax status of the non-profit determines what is allowable by law. According to federal election law, “any such organizations are strictly prohibited from engaging in **partisan** political activity.” **That means that any non-profit group with the tax status of 501(c)(3), cannot work with a political party’s (Democrats, Republicans, Independents, etc.) voter registration drive.** Parties can run their own drive however, and work with you for larger non-partisan registration purposes.

Under the federal election law, **your Region/Chapter cannot endorse a political candidate.** You must limit your effort to informing the public on the importance of voting. Your drives must be neutral and non-partisan in targeting your efforts. Drives based on party affiliation or past voting preferences are unlawful. However, targeting low-income, minority, low-turnout, women, homeless or student populations is lawful.

A. **Develop a Written Plan** – The key to a successful voter registration drive is putting your plan on paper and focusing on the details. Remember, you can always change it later. The key is to get the plan on paper. The more details now, the fewer surprises later. Key questions:

1. Setting Goals – How many citizens do you plan to register? What are your targeted precincts or areas?
2. Knowing the rules – What are your state’s rules? What are your state’s deadlines for registrations? Where are your election board and registrar’s offices?
3. Determining methods and tasks- How can you make Motor Voter laws work for your drive? What organizations should you contact? Who should serve on your steering committee? How will you coordinate with other efforts?
4. Organizing your drive – How many volunteers will you need to reach your goals? Who will you recruit for volunteers? Who will coordinate your volunteers? How will you monitor your progress?
5. Budgeting the costs – What is your budget?