



# Election series: Encouraging non- partisan voter engagement

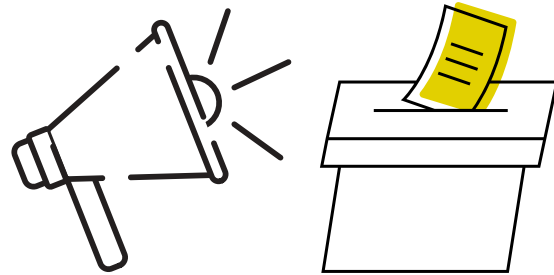


ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK



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An important and long-standing way nonprofits can meaningfully engage in elections is by encouraging non-partisan voter engagement.



Nonprofits are trusted, credible messengers on civic resilience. We have the opportunity - and responsibility - to ensure our communities know about, and can activate, their civic power. Nonprofits can normalize voting as part of community life, framing it as a shared responsibility which is not about telling people who to vote for, but rather reminding communities that their vote matters, while working to counter disinformation and misinformation. Even with limited resources and capacity, during elections, nonprofits can step up.

According to [U.S.-based research](#), voting reinforces a positive cycle of community engagement as compared to nonvoters, voters are more likely to volunteer. According to [Nonprofit VOTE](#), prospective voters contacted by nonprofits about voting are 10 percentage points more likely to vote than those who are not. That effect is further amplified in equity-denied groups, with young voters, low-income voters, and racialized voters experiencing even higher turnout gains. Encouraging non-partisan voter engagement is increasingly important for protecting and activating a healthy democracy.

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# About non-partisanship and elections

## Rules of engagement

Did you know that nonprofits can participate in advocacy? We can, even during election seasons. And now more than ever, we need more nonprofits [leaning into their role](#) in protecting and activating democracy.

Depending on the jurisdiction of the election (federal, provincial, municipal), different rules apply. Learn the rules around advocacy in three relevant areas:

1. Canada Revenue Agency Regulations (for registered charities only) and;
2. Lobbying rules in the jurisdiction the election is taking place
3. Third-party Advertising rules in the jurisdiction the election is taking place

## Voter turnout trends downwards at all levels of elections

Voter turnout matters. Authoritarian-leaning movements tend to grow when voter participation is low and disengagement is high. Democracy thrives when participation is broad, inclusive, and informed. Voting is the key to keeping our democracy intact. It is a civic ritual and the primary defense against political overreach, which is why trusted institutions like nonprofits are critical.

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# Voter turnout trends downwards at all levels of elections (cont'd)

Many factors can contribute to low voter turnout. For example, eligible voters may miss information about the election or may not completely understand how Ontario and Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system works.

Low voter turnout is a serious issue during elections, and lack of representation, especially from equity-denied communities, means a diversity of voices often go unheard.

Federal election: The 2008 federal election had the worst-ever turnout with 58.8 per cent of eligible voters casting a ballot. The rates in 2021 were the fourth-lowest for a Canadian general election, with 62.6 per cent of eligible voters casting a ballot.

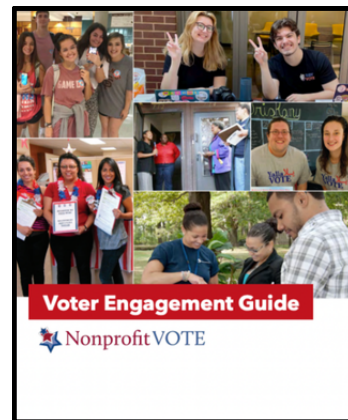
Provincial election: The 2025 Ontario snap election had a voter turnout, 45 per cent, that was marginally better than the lowest voter turnout ever recorded in the province's history during the 2022 election (43.5 per cent). Prior to this, the last time voter turnout was below 50 per cent was in 2011, when just 48 per cent of Ontario residents voted.

Municipal election: Voter turnout in municipal elections is usually significantly lower than provincial and federal elections. On average, the voter turnout for 2022 municipal elections in Ontario was 32.9 per cent, a continuous decline from 35 per cent in 2018.

# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections

## Provide educational information on civic engagement and elections

- Create interactive [tools](#) to help your communities test their knowledge on [how governments work in Canada](#).
- Create an election [guide](#) to help explain the election process, including information about how to vote by mail, where to vote, how to vote at the polling station, and more. [The Nonprofit Vote includes a toolkit](#) on voting with the nonprofit sector in mind. Make sure your guide or toolkit includes information about accessible voting. For example, during the 2020 Saskatchewan election, Spinal Cord Injury Saskatchewan created a page sharing information on [accessible voting](#). [Elections Ontario](#) has a guide to accessible voting, and CNIB Foundation has recommendations for [ways to make elections more accessible](#).



SNAP ELECTION SERIES  
Election Advocacy



# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections

## Leverage organizational communications tools to talk about elections

- Invite staff, clients, and community members to share their voting stories and spotlight them in your communications to motivate others.
- Promote a get-out-the-vote push with daily countdown messages on social media. Add election reminders to social media posts, newsletters and emails to your members.

**THE ONTARIO ELECTION IS OVER BUT ADVOCACY DOESN'T STOP**

- ✓ REACH OUT TO NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS (MPPS, CABINET MINISTERS, PARLIAMENTARY ASSISTANTS) TO INTRODUCE YOUR ORGANIZATION AND ITS WORK.
- ✓ MAKE YOUR ASKS CLEAR, HIGHLIGHT KEY ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS, OR AMPLIFY THE IMPACT OF THE NONPROFIT SECTOR.
- ✓ STAY ENGAGED, JOIN ADVOCACY EFFORTS, AND KEEP COMMUNITIES INFORMED.

**IT'S ONTARIO ELECTION DAY**

Encourage friends and family to vote.  
Every ballot helps shape Ontario's future.

**SOME REMINDERS:**

- If you received a voter information card (VIC), bring it along with one piece of ID showing your name to your voting location.
- You can still vote if you do not have a VIC, but your name may not be on the register. Bring one piece of ID showing both your name and home address to register and receive a ballot.
- Know your voting hours. You're entitled to three consecutive hours off work to vote. Check the Elections Ontario website for your voting station and its hours.

**2025 Ontario Election**

**1 Day Left!**

Tomorrow is election day! A strong democracy depends on active participation - when communities vote, they help shape policies and funding that support nonprofits and the essential services they provide.

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# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections

## Organize voter engagement events

- **Set up mock voting stations.** Help people practice the voting process with mock voting stations with voting screens, ballots, and pencils. Instead of ballots with candidates' names, you can ask participants to vote on which issue is most important to them. **Never organized a mock voting before? Don't worry!** The Democratic Engagement Exchange has a [free Vote Pop-up kit](#) organizations can order, which includes everything needed to create a simulated polling place and a guide describing best practices!
- Incorporate voter education as part of **informal community gatherings and hangouts**. Are you hosting a community barbecue or a community karaoke? These community events create a welcoming space and foster informal relationship building. Talking about voting in these informal settings can help make voter education more fun and engaging.
- Hold voter registration drives to assist members, clients and/or service users, and community members with voter registration.

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# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections (cont'd)

## Organize voter engagement events (cont'd)

- Talk about the importance of voting. People who are disenfranchised and who face systemic barriers often lose faith in the electoral system. Nonprofits, especially the ones who provide services to local residents, can host webinars or set up a desk in an office, community centres, or religious spaces to talk about the importance of voting. Try to draw connections between successful public policy changes that have come out of elections. It might also be helpful to explain what the provincial government makes decisions about and how those decisions impact Ontarians.
- Host candidate forums. A candidate forum is a public event where candidates from all political parties are invited to express their positions on a wide range of issues. They are an excellent opportunity for local communities to learn more about the candidates running to represent them.
- Provide election day help and support. Support and/or coordinate ride-sharing or carpools to help communities get to the polls.

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# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections (cont'd)

## Encourage and support voting at workplace

- Give staff time off to vote.
- Have the executive director and/or board chair send a motivational message to staff about the importance of civic participation.
- Showcase a why vote tool/video/resource during staff meetings and/or lunch and learn to connect voting to nonprofit missions and impact.
- Encourage staff, volunteers, or program participants to become poll workers or election day helpers.

### **North York Harvest Community BBQ**

North York Harvest held free community barbecues for both the [2025 federal election](#) and the [2023 Toronto mayoral byelection](#). The community barbecues featured free food, games, raffles, face-painting, live music, as well as information on how to vote. Tables were set up where people could make signs about issues they care about. Free transportation was also provided to take attendees to the polls to cast their vote.

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# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections (cont'd)

## **Ottawa Inner City Health + Shepherds of Good Hope soup kitchen**

Ottawa Inner City Health [set up a registration clinic](#) in the soup kitchen for the first time in 2019. Case workers were able to register people coming to the soup kitchen as voters. Inner City Health also put together a primer on party platforms, and the shelter invited candidates to come by the soup kitchen during the election. On election day, peer support workers from the shelter walked groups of people over to the polling stations to help them cast their ballots.

## **Toronto Drop-in Network**

Drop-in service users often have no fixed address or have limited ID, which creates barriers to registering to vote. During the 2022 provincial election, the Toronto drop-in network created a [toolkit](#) to guide and encourage drop-ins to register as 'Authorized Administrators' and provide participants who lack a permanent address with a temporary residence form called a 'Certificate of Identity and Residence'. This certificate allows participants to vote in an election. Shelters and drop-ins in Toronto are also eligible to be a registered address to conduct mail-in voting for their participants.

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# Nonprofits can encourage voter engagement in big or small ways in all elections (cont'd)

## **Project 51 by Pillar Nonprofit Network**

In September 2022, Pillar Nonprofit Network launched a municipal voter engagement initiative, called [Project 51](#), with the goal of increasing municipal voter turnout in London, Ontario to greater than 50 per cent. The project collaborated with other local community organizations to encourage and support them to run voter engagement pop-up events for their clients, residents and communities. Through these events, organizations also got to have conversations with community members about issues they care about and encourage clients to shape their community through their votes.

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# Additional resources

- [Administrative Resources for Homeless Electors](#) (Elections Ontario)
- [AMO Healthy Democracy Project](#) (Association of Municipalities of Ontario)
- [Democracy Needs You: 5 Steps Nonprofits Can Take to Support Free and Fair Elections](#) (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- [Elections Ontario](#)
- [Engaging Voters with Disabilities](#) (Nonprofit Vote)
- [How Nonprofits Can Mobilize Voters](#) (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- [Many Newcomers Have Never Voted in Ontario Elections. These Groups Are Trying to Change That](#) (CBC)
- [Registering Voters in Communities Served by Nonprofits](#) (Independent Sector)
- [Speak Up! Show Up!](#) (The North Grove's Community Action Office)
- [The Benefits of Voting](#) (Nonprofit VOTE)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Canadian Election Buzzwords, Demure Edition](#) (New Majority)
- [Toolkit for Election Offices](#) (National Voter Registration Day is managed by Nonprofit VOTE)
- [Voter Engagement Guide](#) (Nonprofit VOTE & National Council of Nonprofits, 2024)
- [What Makes Someone Vote?](#) (Apathy is Boring)
- [What's Scary About Voting?](#) (Apathy is Boring)
- [Voting When You're Unhoused](#) (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness)

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# About ONN

ONN is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders and other stakeholders.

