



Voter Registration Guide

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Overview of Voter Registration

Voter registration will be a key element of our work over the next two years. We need to ensure that as many Democrats as possible are on the voter rolls, registered at their current address, and equipped with all of the information that they need to turn out on Election Day. This is all the more critical as Republicans in many states are doubling down on their efforts to make registering and voting harder.

How will we register voters?

During door-to-door canvassing and high traffic voter outreach, we will ask voters if they are registered at their current address, and provide them with more information about how and where they can register. Using Rock the Vote's simple online voter registration tool, we can help voters begin the process of registering and collect valuable data so that we can follow up as we get closer to the election.

Voters can register on their own phones by texting "SWINGLEFT" to RTVOTE (788-683). They can also register on your phone or tablet at www.swingleft.org/register, but their personal phone may speed up the process by pre-filling personal information into the form.

Because we are starting outreach early, we have a unique and exciting opportunity to follow up with voters to make sure that they have completed the registration process and successfully made it onto the rolls.

Why aren't we using paper?

There are specific local laws around voter registration drives using paper forms, so for now we are only using the online Rock the Vote tool. Later we may partner with local organizations and offer state-specific voter registration training in order to supplement our outreach with paper registration.

If you have experience registering voters, and choose to organize your own Voter Registration activities (i.e. using paper forms rather than the Rock the Vote tool), make sure to read the [state-specific guides](#) we've provided. You can also check out the legal guides on your state's voter registration page – some states have training requirements, others require you to register the drive with the state, and more.

If you are coordinating with another organization to organize a Voter Registration drive, please let us know by posting details in our calendar tool, so that other Swing Left volunteers see it and can join your event.

How the Rock the Vote tool works

Currently, 34 states (plus the District of Columbia) offer online voter registration (OVR). Online voter registration systems work for people who have state-issued driver's licenses or identification cards, although a few states provide online access for other potential voters as well. In these states, the Rock the Vote tool collects a few basic pieces of information from the voter (so that we can follow up with them later) and then directs them to the state system. The voter will be able to complete their registration fully online.

In states without OVR or for citizens without proper ID, the Rock the Vote tool will help the voter fill in their information and then will email their completed form to them as a PDF. The voter will then need to print and return their form to their appropriate election official in order to complete the registration. It is extremely important to be clear with the voter that filling out the form through Rock the Vote is only the first step in the process. **Never allow a voter to walk away thinking that they are registered, if they have to print and return a paper form.**

Getting Ready in 5 Steps

The best thing about voter registration is that you can get started right now! Here are the first 5 steps to planning your Swing District activity.

1. Pick a date, time, and location.

Pick a date for your first group activity. Since you are all gathering together now for house parties, we'd recommend something during the last week of March or first week of April. That will give you some time to prepare and focus on Step 2: Recruitment. See the section below for more information about finding a good location for high traffic canvassing.

2. Recruit more volunteers to join your team

Publicize your activity on the Swing Left calendar to invite new volunteers. Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, we will also help you spread the word. Sending an email to a group of friends, colleagues, or family, and then picking up the phone to follow up is another surefire way to get more volunteers helping out.

3. **Make sure that everyone in your group feels prepared**

Starting mid-March Swing Left will begin hosting a series of webinars to answer questions and review our Voter Registration plan. If you can't make any of the webinars in the series, you can always listen to the recording online. For more training resources, contact your [nearest League of Women Voters chapter](#) or local Board of Elections.

4. **Get Supplies**

Gather supplies in advance in order to have a streamlined, fun activity. Here are some things you'll need:

- Smart phones and/or tablets (just in case a voter can't sign up on their personal phone)
- Clipboards with volunteer sign-up sheets
- Lots of black/blue pens – you'll probably need more than you think!
- Posters, banners, and signs that say "Register to Vote Here" (if you have a tabling location)
- Democratic stickers or buttons that highlight your values, but don't push or promote a particular candidate.
 - Pro tip: consider asking everyone on your team to wear the same color shirt on the day of your activity so that you can easily keep track of one another.
- Snacks for your group! It's always great to have water bottles and some granola bars on hand to keep everyone in high spirits.

5. **Confirm Your Logistics**

The day before your activity, make sure to confirm the logistics with your group. Assign someone in your group to call and confirm attendance the day before you are scheduled to meet. Take one more look at your District Guides and check your supplies box.

Finding a good location for high-traffic canvassing

You can register voters in high-traffic areas or during a door-to-door canvass. In general, it is good to focus on traditionally disenfranchised communities, with historically low-turnout and registration. These communities include young people, people of color, frequent movers and low-income citizens.

When looking for a good high-traffic area, use the tips below to identify a good location:

1. **Your table is your base, not your fortress:** People who need to be registered to vote will rarely self-identify – you need to meet them where they are. If you are using a table, get out from behind it and stay active and energetic. Use a table as a central place to meet, train volunteers, and hold supplies.
2. **Steady not crowded:** It's counterintuitive, but very crowded places are not always the best. Once someone declines to register to vote in a crowded location, the other onlookers are more likely to ignore you as well. Try to find a location where there is a steady stream of traffic, but not too crowded.
3. **Strollers:** Identify places where the patrons are likely strolling and not marching with a purpose. Think parks, the mall on a college campus, or a local square. If you try to approach students while they're rushing to class, they are more likely to blow you off. If they are stopping by the cafeteria for dinner they are more likely to have some spare time.

4. **Track, track, track:** your rates will generally be 1-2 voter registrations per hour. However, please be diligent about tracking your success rates on a location-by-location basis. Over time this information can help you identify the best locations and will be good feedback to share with other Swing Left volunteers.

Voter Registration Best Practices

Have the right expectations

- We'll usually register 1-2 people per hour in a high-traffic area or knocking on doors.
- Don't get discouraged if you don't have swarms of people approaching you to ask for help.
- Take nothing personally. If somebody is rude to you, shake it off and move on.

Be the kind of person you'd want to talk to.

- Smile lots.
- Talk like a regular person. Don't be a robot and read directly from the script.
- If you're tabling, don't stand behind the table. Move around, be assertive and friendly and let everyone see how much you are enjoying this.

Have a conversation, rather than talking at people.

- Ask questions and listen to the answer. Tailor your message to the individual.
- Find your own pitch. Experiment and figure out what works best for you.
- Connect voting to their lives and the issues they care about.
- Stress the importance of THEIR action. Tell them why they should vote.

Stay on message.

- You're not telling them who to vote for, just helping them register!
- Registering voters is a positive way to celebrate civic engagement.

Be persistent

- Always make the ask: "are you registered to vote?" If you can, put the clipboard in their hand while you're talking to them, so that they can look at the volunteer sign-up sheet and see what Swing Left is all about. You'll be amazed at how many people start filling it out.
- Don't backtrack. Once you ask them to register, wait for their response.
- "I'm already registered" is often an excuse. Ask follow up questions:
 - "Are you registered at your current address"
 - "Have you moved since last registering?"
 - For students: "Are you registered at your school address?"

Ask everyone to register

- Don't just talk to people who look like you or who approach you.
- Talk to everyone you see. The next person could be amazing!
- In most states we can talk about Democrats or Trump while approaching or registering people, but we're legally required in all states to register anyone who asks to register.

Ask everyone to volunteer with Swing Left

- Ask each person you have a conversation with, “would you like to help out with upcoming activities to register and talk to voters?” and hand them the volunteer sign-up sheet.
- Keep it simple by saying “we’ll keep you in the loop about Swing Left events” and make sure to get their email address.

Messaging Do’s and Don’ts

Do keep things simple

Ask each person who walks by “hi, are you registered to vote?” or “good morning, can I register you to vote today?” Keep it simple and wait for their response.

Don’t push for or against a candidate

While our ultimate goal is to take back the House in 2018, this is not the time for us to aggressively persuade voters. Remember: Voter registration is all about democracy. This is a chance to help people find their voice - and hear what they have to say.

Don’t pick a policy fight

In addition to not advocating for a particular candidate, steer clear of heated policy debate. Door knocking and high traffic outreach with Swing Left are opportunities to listen to voters and their concerns, not to promote a specific policy agenda. Remember: our end goal is to get voters to support Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party is a big tent.

Do stay positive

There’s enough bad stuff in the news - don’t spend your whole conversation with a voter talking about how the world is coming to an end. This is an opportunity to inspire people to get involved and fight for the changes they want to see in the community. Ask a simple question like, “what changes would you like to see in our country,” in order to engage with them.

Voter Contact Script

Hello! How are you doing today? My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am volunteering with a new grassroots organization called Swing Left. We are here listening to voters opinions about the past election and helping register people to vote.

Are you a registered voter?

IF YES – That’s great! Have you moved or changed your name since the last time you voted?

IF NO – Thats great! Did you vote in the last election? [Use this as an opportunity to start a conversation. *Remember:* Our goal is to engage and listen to the voter, not persuade him or her to support a particular candidate or policy platform.]

IF YES (I'VE MOVED/CHANGED NAME) – In that case you will need to update our voter registration. It will only take a minute, and it will ensure that you're able to vote on Election Day. Just text "SWINGLEFT" to RTVOTE (788-683) and I'll help you get started.

IF NO – Oh well it's quick and easy. Just text "SWINGLEFT" to RTVOTE (788-683) and I'll help you get started. You can also register at www.swingleft.org/register-to-vote.

CLOSING – Thanks so much. And one last question, "would you like to help out with upcoming activities to register and talk to voters?" [hand them the Swing Left volunteer sign-up sheet.]

Thanks, and remember to verify your registration status within the next few weeks to make sure that you are on the voter rolls.