

Real Democracy

Community Votes Helped Direct Service Nonprofits Increase Voter Participation in 2016

It is important to democracy and fairness in our society that voting and other civic engagement include everyone, including low-income households, people of color, immigrants, youth, and others who traditionally participate at below-average rates.

Democracy is not served, for example, when, in the 2016 general election, only 36 percent of New York City eligible voters with incomes below \$20,000 actually voted, while 92 percent of those with incomes over \$150,000 did so.

Research shows that people are more likely to vote if contacted by someone they know. Community Votes provides training and funding to help community-based direct service organizations integrate nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) outreach into the contact they already have with residents through their existing activities.

Support from Community Votes encourages a culture change in these organizations to recognize that it will be increasingly difficult to fulfill their service mission as long as the communities they serve have little voice in decisions affecting public policies and budget and revenue priorities.

In 2016, Community Votes...

Trained 180 staff at 39 organizations on how to engage community members in the voting process. Post-training surveys showed that 97% of those trained said encouraging voting is important.

Helped five organizations implement programs that resulted in 1,048 voters being contacted. More than 44% of the voters reached would not be likely to vote without this contact, based on their voting history.

Helped three organizations make 2,447 voting reminder calls. These organizations – Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, and Phipps Neighborhoods – serve low-income, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the South Bronx, Queensbridge, Cypress Hills, and East New York.

Supported programs that involved young people and seniors in outreach to other community residents about the importance of voting.

Assisted in innovative outreach including a Community Votes art contest and a civics jeopardy game.

Achieved results as the voters contacted by the three partners working with Community Votes turned out in 2016 at a 7% higher rate compared to their neighbors – a significant difference during a national presidential election. (Researchers have documented that civic engagement programs have the most impact on voter participation during election years in which there is no presidential balloting. In 2014, for example, citizens contacted by Community Votes partners voted at a 13% higher rate than their neighbors.)

