

# Five Steps to Improving Public Agency Voter Registration: *Requirements Under the National Voter Registration Act*

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*The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) requires state public assistance agencies to offer clients an opportunity to register to vote. Many states are failing to meet this responsibility. Research by Project Vote has found that agency personnel often are unaware of their legal obligations, have not been trained in providing voter registration services, or may not have the necessary supplies. The NVRA also requires state chief election officials to ensure their state's compliance with the Act.*

Here are five things state chief election officials can do to meet their responsibilities under the Act and ensure public assistance agencies are providing voter registration services to their clients:

**1 Know the NVRA's public agency registration requirements (NVRA Section 7).**

Public assistance agencies must offer voter registration applications to clients when they apply for benefits, recertify their eligibility, or change their address. This requirement extends not only to in-person transactions but also to remote transactions, e.g. phone and Internet. In addition, with each application, recertification, or change of address, clients must be given a special form (a "declination form") that contains language prescribed by the Act. Declination forms must be kept for at least 22 months.

**2 Communicate frequently with agency managers and staff.**

State election officials should regularly inform agency managers of their responsibilities under the NVRA and provide information on best practices. This helps ensure that, as agency management address the many important details of social service delivery, they do not lose sight of their voter registration obligations. Meet regularly with agency officials to ensure that offices have sufficient applications and that staff are trained in offering voter registration.

**3 Provide training and support to agency personnel.** Agency personnel benefit from detailed training from election officials on their responsibilities under the NVRA and how to provide voter registration services. States that have taken action to improve registration rates at public assistance agencies have written customized NVRA manuals, developed and presented training modules, and provided advice to agencies on their registration procedures.

**4 Monitor registrations from public assistance agencies.** Election officials cannot know whether their state is complying with Section 7 unless they monitor the number of registrations originating from each agency. In addition, election officials are required to report this information to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). Web-based reporting systems that are easy to implement and use are a promising trend in this area.

**5 Review agency registration performance and act on your findings.**

Election officials should regularly review information collected by their Section 7 monitoring program and inform agencies when offices are failing to report new registrations or are reporting counterintuitive results, i.e., low or no registration rates from populous counties. Election officials should work with agency management to review procedures in offices with a history of poor reporting or unusually low registrations.

In the past three years, several states have experienced significantly increased numbers of voter registration applications from public assistance agencies after taking steps to improve delivery of this important service. For more information or to obtain technical assistance for your state, please contact Project Vote at [nvra@projectvote.org](mailto:nvra@projectvote.org) or call (800) 546-8683.



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