

THE PA VOTES INITIATIVE: BE THE VOICE, BE THE POWER



PA Votes

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania
January 2021





I have said this before, and I will say it again – the vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy.”

– John Lewis, 2019

Voting is the ultimate power held by the United State populous. As was made evidently clear in the 2020 presidential election, **EVERY VOTE MATTERS**. Unfortunately, our democracy has wide gaps in voter participation tied to race, income, age, and disability. When large portions of a community do not vote, their needs, including the basic need of shelter, are often disregarded.

Community organizations can play a significant role in narrowing these participation gaps. Effective community organizations work hard to develop trusting relationships with the citizens in their communities. It is through these relationships that community organizations can encourage greater civic participation in policy decisions that impact the lives of those in their communities.

The Housing Alliance joined Nonprofit VOTE's *Engaging New Voters 2020* initiative as the Pennsylvania state anchor. The PA Votes Initiative brought together 20 partners. Through the PA Votes Initiative, along with our community partners, we reached over 2,000 voters and had conversations with many others on the importance of voting.

Pennsylvania's citizens represent a wide range of incomes, cultures, political affiliations, and demographics. Given the importance of Pennsylvania to our national political landscape, we must explore new ways to engage people who have often been left out from voting.

The Housing Alliance will continue to find the most meaningful ways to engage people who have experienced homelessness, those with housing instability, and those with lower incomes and encourage them to vote and to tell their stories. We need to build public support to achieve more equitable representation and policies that meet the needs of all people, especially people of color and those with lower incomes.

The PA Votes Initiative demonstrated to low-income individuals and disenfranchised communities that **THEIR VOICES MATTER** in elections. The PA Votes Initiative is helping break down decades long barriers to voting. In addition, it educated both new voters and our community partners on meaningful civic engagement.

PA VOTES Initiative Results

Voter engagement included educating and helping individuals in communities across Pennsylvania with:

- Paper and online voter registrations
- Voter registration confirmations and updates
- Paper and online voting pledges/voting reminder cards
- Paper and online mail-in ballots and absentee ballot applications



Arab American CDC staff working together to engage voters at an outdoor event

Along with our community partners, we engaged 2,143 voters:

Voter Registrations

- ✓ 389 paper registrations and 603 online registrations and registration verifications

Ballot Applications

- ✓ 188 paper mail-in ballot applications and 67 online mail-in ballot applications

Voter Reminder Cards / Voting Pledges

- ✓ 367 paper voting pledges and 529 online voting pledges

Successful Voter Engagement Strategies

Despite the challenges of a pandemic and virtual work settings, community partners successfully engaged voters. Our community partners engaged voters virtually, over the phone, and through safe and socially distant in-person activities. Some of the successful and/or more creative voter engagement efforts included:

- Door to door canvassing
- Phone banking
- Group text messages
- Staffing voter resource tables at a housing authority's apartment buildings
- Installing billboards
- Following up with clients who had recently moved to make sure voter registrations were up to date
- Reaching out to graduating high school seniors with voter registration cards
- Including voter registration forms with free food distribution to high school seniors and senior citizens



One of Ability in Motion's billboards promoting voting diversity



Keena Minifield from the Housing Alliance (top right), participating in an informative voter education tv episode of Living the Legacy with the National Council of Negro Women

Community Partner Testimonials

PA Votes validated our belief that civic engagement belongs in our service model.

We are in a swing county and we have had amazing participation by unregistered citizens. Over 85% of our mail in requests have had their votes recorded. Almost all of these are new registrations.

Getting our feet wet with voter engagement was great.

We have always engaged consumers with information about voting, but after this experience, we will put forth additional effort to be sure that everyone is engaged and feels supported.

The voting initiative helped consumers realize that there were multiple ways to vote and provided the tools needed for everyone to have the opportunity to vote if they so choose.

We received positive feedback from some of the community members we had called. They thanked us for doing this work.

The impact was huge and meaningful – people felt included and that their input mattered. Some folks were able to volunteer to help and this helped with issues associated with isolation.

Our voter outreach efforts educated folks who were struggling to stay abreast of changing deadlines and procedures with voting this year. It also was a touchpoint that helped maintain a sense of community while most of our programs are operating virtually.

A Big THANK YOU to All of Our Community Partners!

Abilities in Motion, Reading
Alleghenies United Cerebral Palsy
Allentown Housing Authority
Anthracite Region Center for Independent Living, Hazelton
Arab-American Development Corporation, Philadelphia
Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center, Allentown
Center for Independent Living South Central PA
HACE CDC, Philadelphia
Hunger Free PA, Statewide
League of Women Voters of Erie

League of Women Voters of Philadelphia
Mental Health Association of North Western PA
Pennsylvania Health Access Network, Statewide
Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network
Rankin/Mon Valley/Pittsburgh Section of the National Council of Negro Women
Self-Advocates United as 1, Greenville
Third Street Alliance, Easton
Uptown Partners, Pittsburgh
Voices for Independence, Erie



Third Street Alliance staff engaging contacts at an outdoor event



The Rankin/Mon Valley/Pittsburgh Section of the National Council of Negro Women teaming up with another organization to empower minority voters