

## **The Rx: Vote Campaign: Overcoming Excuses**

### **Four Simple Steps to transform a “Not Interested” into a Registered Voter**

(Adapted from the “Overcoming Excuses” document prepared by the Los Angeles Coalition for End Hunger and Homelessness)

When a person doesn't wish to register to vote, it's often because they don't understand how voting can affect their lives. It's your job as part of the Rx: Vote Campaign to find out why they don't want to register, and then to help them see why it is important that they register and vote.

Here's how in four simple steps:

#### 1. Find out why he is saying “No”

Remember an excuse may hide a more basic reason. For example, a patient may say “I really don't have time” when, in fact, he really means, “I don't want to take the time to register because I don't believe voting matters.” Listen carefully. Is it a real reason or just an excuse? If it's an excuse, what question will you use to uncover the real reason for not wanting to register? (See next page for a list of common excuses and ways to respond)

#### 2. Agree with them.

Make the patient a friend, not an opponent. Let her know that you heard what she said and that you share her concern. What will you say to let them know you heard them and that you understand that they have a valid concern?

#### 3. Use the reason to convince him.

Given their valid concern, what's a great reason for them to register now? Explain how his concern is really a reason that he should register.

#### 4. Ask if you can help the patient fill out the voter registration form.

Let her know that you're a trained volunteer and can answer any voter registration questions that she may have. Sometimes people are embarrassed about not understanding the voting process. Try to make her feel at ease.

#### **FINAL STEP: Turn Registered Voters into Volunteers**

Once people are registered to vote, they represent your best prospects to become volunteers. So here's what you can say once you know someone is already registered or you've just finished helping them to register to vote.

“Great, congratulations on being a registered voter! You know we have a big election coming up on November 4<sup>th</sup>, and it will have a big impact on the future of what kind of health care, housing, jobs, and all kinds of issues that are important to you and me. Do you think you could work with us for a few hours?”

\*Collect their name, address, phone number, email and refer them to [www.RxVote.org](http://www.RxVote.org)

## **Common excuses and ways to respond**

Excuse: “I don’t have time”

Your response: “I know you’re busy. That’s why we’re here, to save you the time of going down to the registrar’s office. This way you won’t have to give up your right to vote, and it will take less than a minute. Can I help you fill out this form?”

Excuse: “ My candidates lose anyway” or “Politicians don’t change anything”

Your response: “I know what you mean. I’ve been really frustrated the same way. And then I found out that only about half of people without health insurance (or minorities, or the unemployed, or with high school degrees or less, or those between 18-24 years) didn’t vote in 2004. That’s thousands more people than it would take to win an election. In fact, some recent elections have only been decided by a couple hundred votes. So people like you and me who are fed up of not having our voices heard have gotten together. And we’re going to register 5,000 people right here in town. Can I help you fill out this form?”

Excuse: “I think I’m already registered”

Your response: Lots of people who think they are already registered have actually been taken off the registration rolls-usually because they moved. If you’re not sure if you moved or changed your name since the last time you registered, it takes less than a minute to re-register today and make sure that you can exercise your right to vote. Can I help you fill out this form?”

Excuse: “I’ve been convicted of a crime”

Your response: “Most people think that they can’t vote if they been convicted of a crime, but in some states, convicted felons can vote after completing parole.”

\*NOTE: Check with your local City/ County Elections Office about your state’s laws.

The Sentencing Project is another great resource.

[http://www.sentencingproject.org/Admin/Documents/publications/fd\\_bs\\_fdlawsinus.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/Admin/Documents/publications/fd_bs_fdlawsinus.pdf)

## **Overcoming Agency Resistance**

(adapted from: National Coalition for the Homeless, “You Don’t Need a Home to Vote!”  
Voter Registration Manual 2007-2008

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/projects/vote/index.html>)

**Excuse: “My agency is not allowed to do voter registration.”**

**Your response:** Non-profit, 501(c)(3) organizations can operate voter registration drives if they do so in a non-partisan manner. In fact, the National Voter Registration Act encourages all non-governmental entities to register their clients. As a non-profit, you cannot take a position on candidates, but you can register people to vote.

**Excuse: “My agency does not have the staff, volunteers or the time to do voter registration.”**

**Your Response:** If you are not in a position to conduct an actual voter registration drive, you can help register voters as part of your regular work and the Rx: Vote Campaign can help. Here are some ideas to conduct voter registration besides a drive:

- Incorporate voter registration into your intake or interview process
- Have registration forms readily available if not integrating it into your intake process.
- Partner with local student, labor, or volunteer organizations and ask them to help register voters at your clinic or health center
- Having a voter registration party after hours or for lunch is easier than conducting an intense voter registration drive throughout an afternoon or an entire day
- Combine a voter registration drive with a candidate volunteer day, which will also bring media coverage to your organization. Although this is time intensive, this will possibly bring a lot of publicity.

**Excuse: “Clients are not interested in the issues.”**

**Your response:** The experience of Rx: Vote Campaign is that clients want to vote and do vote if barriers to exercising this basic right are removed. Studies show that 70% of those registered to vote by volunteer efforts in welfare and food stamp offices actually go to the polls and vote in presidential elections. Our patients and clients are often disconnected from community life. Voting helps them reconnect with their community in a positive way.

**“OK, I am convinced. What else can I do?”**

**Your response:** Here are a few ideas. Call me if you want more information or assistance and visit [www.RxVote.org](http://www.RxVote.org).

- Let your homeless clients use your agency as a mailing address for their sample and/or absentee ballots.
- Call your City/County Elections Office and find out if your agency can become a polling site on Election Day.
- Provide transportation to a polling site on Election Day.
- Talk to your peers in other non-profits, and encourage them to involve their clients in the democratic process. Help us build a broad campaign for improved health and civic engagement for our patients and clients.