

Conducting a Voter Registration Party

A simple and fun way to register voters is to throw a voter registration party. Simply put, hosting a voter registration party involves inviting clients, candidates, and staff (as well as anyone else) to a party such as an ice cream social or a cookout. During this party, impress upon the crowd the importance of voting and offer registration to those who are currently not registered to vote. You cannot offer anything in exchange for registering to vote (such as money or gifts). The party must be open to everyone whether or not they are registered to vote or are going to register to vote.

Organizationally, a voter registration party requires people to plan not only the registration but also the party. Appoint one individual or group to coordinate the registration effort and appoint another individual or group to plan the party. Those in charge of coordinating the registration aspect should be responsible for obtaining registration forms and turning in completed forms as well as checking with the county elections office to determine the local rules for voter registration. Reference the “Conducting a Successful Voter Registration Drive” section on page 13 for more tips on organizing the registration aspect of the party. Below are some helpful guidelines for how to run your voter registration party.

• PLANNING:

- Contact other service providers and enlist their support and assistance.
- Identify a central location to hold your event, where both clients and residents in your community congregate.
- Be inventive and creative with your party ideas. Perhaps target the mothers at the shelter by having a party for the kids so that the mothers can take that time to register.
- Write a leaflet that is not too wordy, but talks about all of the elements of the event. Emphasize the fun or upbeat aspects. List the menu, entertainment, etc. Then deliver what you promise!

• FOOD:

- Plan on serving food. Ice cream socials are fun in the hot weather months. Hot dogs, chips, and sodas are nice when the weather is cooler. Whatever you serve, it will be crucial to attract lots of people.
- Invite local food distributors to participate. (e.g., ice cream usually has a “pull date” long before the food becomes unsafe to eat. Ask dairies for their leftovers.) Give donors plenty of positive publicity in your news release and during the program to promote a good and potentially ongoing relationship.
- Provide more food than you think you will need. You can always use the leftovers at another time.
- Have more than one food line so there is less time to wait and more time for enjoyment. Plenty of food and shorter lines will help to avoid the “shortage mentality” that can lead to unpleasant situations that might ruin your event.

• LOCAL PERSONALITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT:

- Candidates/Politicians want to meet registered voters. Invite candidates to attend and “say a few words.”
- Provide entertainment—either a disc jockey or live music. There are usually local bands looking for exposure. An adequate sound system will be important to accommodate them in either case.
- Invite one or more local celebrities (*e.g.* radio or television personalities, athletes) to serve as the moderator for the event, sign autographs, or just speak.

• VOTER REGISTRATION:

- Although this is a party, try not to make it too loud or crowded so that registration cannot be conducted.
- Make sure that the registration forms are easily accessible and noticeable since this is the most critical part of the voter registration party. Some ideas are:
 - Put registration forms at each seat so that when people get their food and sit there is a registration form ready to be filled out.
 - Hand registration forms out as people enter the party or have a pile set up near the food lines for people to pick up.
 - Have a registration table at the entrance to the party.