



2015–2016
VOTER ASSISTANCE
ANNUAL REPORT
April 2016

*The Voter Assistance Advisory Committee
dedicates this annual report
to the memory of
Jane Kalmus.*



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VAAC advises the CFB on voter engagement and works to implement legislative and administrative changes to improve NYC elections.

The Voter Assistance Advisory Committee is made up of nine members:

- ⌘ two members appointed by the mayor
- ⌘ two members appointed by the speaker
- ⌘ one member appointed by the comptroller
- ⌘ one member appointed by the borough presidents
- ⌘ the public advocate
- ⌘ the executive director of the board of elections; and
- ⌘ one member appointed by the mayor in consultation with the speaker to serve as chair.

You can learn more about VAAC and its members at www.nyccfb.info/nycvotes.



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Welcome

As we publish our annual report for 2015-16, many New Yorkers are trying to understand why our elections are still prohibitively difficult to navigate. New York's presidential primaries in April 2016 will be remembered not for their results, but for the reports of widespread disenfranchisement and dysfunction across the five boroughs.

Every major election seems to reveal new cracks in our election system. Year after year, New York ranks among the least-engaged, lowest-turnout states in the nation. It is no surprise.

New Yorkers deserve better. Our city is a national leader in technology, design, and innovation. In our daily lives, we can connect instantly to news and information, to our friends and colleagues. Government is more accessible now than ever; leaders across the public sector are using technology to foster greater connectedness and provide more convenient access to the most basic city services.

It is long past time that our election system catches up.

Within this report, NYC Votes is proposing a series of basic reforms that will vastly improve the voting experience and remove barriers to participation.

We need to make voter registration a seamless and intuitive experience. In 2016, it is simply unacceptable that the overwhelming majority of New York's voters still use a pen and paper to register. All voters should be able to self-service their voter registration information via online and mobile. Universally accessible online registration is the only way to give all New Yorkers the confidence they will be able to cast a ballot on Election Day.

More voters must be allowed to participate in New York's closed primaries. Our rigidly partisan primary system is the strictest in the nation — New York is the only state that requires voters to affiliate with a party the year before an election in order to participate. This unreasonably early deadline locked out thousands of voters who gave their attention to the presidential election only as it heated up in recent months.

Voters deserve a more convenient experience at the polls. This starts by giving voters more than one day to vote. Thirty-seven states across the nation allow early voting. A proposal before the Legislature in Albany would establish 12 early voting days (including two weekends). Legislators need to pass early voting legislation, and the Governor — who supported this proposal in his State of the State address — should sign it.

We need to fix our ballots. The ballot — the most basic instrument of our democracy — should be intuitive and clear to every voter. Embarrassingly, our ballots are still designed for the antique lever machines we retired in 2010. Poor design is one reason nearly 46,000 ballots were thrown out across New York State in 2012.

This report contains information about how legislators can address these challenges with scalable and permanent solutions. This report also contains a catalog of the exhaustive efforts of our NYC Votes campaign to encourage New Yorkers to re-engage with elections. Significant successes this year are concentrated on youth outreach, cross-agency collaboration, nonpartisan GOTV efforts, and voter information resources. I encourage you to read the report for more details on this valuable work.

Our efforts will continue throughout this pivotal election year. I urge you to get involved by taking part in one or more of our programs. Help us build a more engaged New York, and join our work to give New York's elections a much-needed voter upgrade.



Art Chang
Chair, Voter Assistance
Advisory Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Art Chang', written over a light gray background.

Art Chang
Chair, Voter Assistance Advisory Committee

A Personal Note About Jane Kalmus

How does one adequately describe working with a person like Commissioner Jane Kalmus? Walking with a giant. I had the pleasure of working for her for 12 years, when she was the first Vice Chair and Commissioner of the Voter Assistance Commission, where she was a founding member in 1989, and then in her role as a founding member of the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee.

The biggest stand out was that she was unapologetically demanding and when she set a goal she was unmovable.

As a confidant to Mayors, Governors and, yes, Presidential candidates and their wives, it was an honor to pause, listen, and understand the truth behind her voice.

Jane (I would have never called her that in person) Kalmus had seen a lot. She was born to this work. She entered this world in 1920 — the same year the 19th Amendment granted suffrage to women — but she always looked towards the future. Whether we were attending voter-themed slam poetry competitions or preparing for a voter registration drive at Rikers Island, she was always prepared to pause, lend her ear and understand the truth of the new generation.

Her truth was democracy and equality. Whatever the community, her charge was rally the troops and go in. As the first female City Hall press secretary, she believed deeply in the power of the media to turn up voter engagement. Her devotion to finding solutions to, as she would say, “a broken system” directly led to many of the current VAAC initiatives and NYC Votes programs. Today and always we will honor the legacy and vision of Ms. Jane Kalmus.



Jane Kalmus
(1920–2016)

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Onida Coward Mayers".

Onida Coward Mayers
Director of Voter Assistance

2015–2016 Voter Assistance Annual Report

In this report:

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2. Voter Engagement
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5. Voter Advocacy/Recommendations for Better Elections
6. Case Study: Recommendations for the NYC Board of Elections

NYC Votes is the nonpartisan voter outreach campaign of the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). To meet its mandate of mobilizing local voters, the CFB deploys nonpartisan strategies to increase participation at and beyond the polls.



Onida Coward Mayers
NYC Voter Coordinator/
Director of Voter Assistance

The CFB's Voter Assistance Unit (VAU) coordinates multi-faceted programs under the NYC Votes banner—from voter registration events to distributing voter education materials to conducting get-out-the-vote efforts—aimed at helping NYC voters cast a well-informed ballot on Election Day.

CFB staff actively enlists the help of community, government, corporate, and youth organizations to ensure its programs promoting voter education and awareness permeate the city's diverse communities.

The Voter Assistance Advisory Committee (VAAC) is mandated by the New York City Charter to advise the CFB on its voter engagement efforts, including recommendations for legislative and administrative changes to improve NYC elections. The VAAC regularly hears public comment on ways to strengthen the electoral process and increase public participation. The VAAC holds four meetings and two public hearings each year.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration is the membership card of our democracy and the cornerstone of civic engagement. To be eligible to make a choice at the polls, a voter first must be registered. Even the most well-informed citizens cannot express their choice at the polls without an up-to-date registration.

National Voter Registration Day

NYC Votes joined with the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) to lead the fourth annual National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) campaign in New York. NVRD is a nation-wide day of outreach to increase awareness of voter registration opportunities across the country. Through NYC Votes and NYPIRG's combined efforts, over 4,000 New Yorkers were registered to vote in 2015, nearly double the number registered in 2014, earning the coalition *first place* among all participants nationwide.

NYC Votes kicked off the 2015 campaign on NVRD eve with a panel discussion on voting rights and the immigrant vote in the 2016 elections at Lincoln Center. Moderated by Lisa Evers of Fox 5 News, the panel featured

L. Joy Williams of the Brooklyn NAACP, Steven Choi of the NY Immigration Coalition, and Jaime Estades of the Latino Leadership Institute. Marc H. Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League, delivered the event's keynote address.

On NVRD itself, September 22, 2015, NYC Votes collaborated with over 30 local organizations to host 127 public voter registration drives and programs aimed at increasing the number of registered voters in NYC. Partners included the Department of Homeland Security (where NYC Votes began the day registering new citizens at a naturalization ceremony), Care for the Homeless, The City University of New York, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Parks and Recreation, Dominicanos USA, Health Plus, NAACP and the New York Institute of Technology.

The City's NVRD celebration ended with a performance of a new play about the effects of voter suppression, "When Truth is not Enough," written by playwright Susan Charlotte and directed by Antony Marsellis. It was performed on the evening of September 22nd at 125 Worth Street.

"The vote is the most precious right we have as Americans. Our brothers and sisters died to secure and defend that right, and we have a solemn responsibility to honor their legacy by making our voices heard."

– Marc H. Morial
President and CEO of the National Urban League

Student Voter Registration Day



For the second year in a row, Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD) brought NYC Votes into city schools to encourage eligible students to register and vote.

On March 18, 2016, SVRD programs all across the city engaged students in a conversation about the ways voting can impact their daily lives. By connecting with students at the moment they become eligible, SVRD seeks to start the voting habit as early as possible amongst New York City's youngest citizens.



NYC Votes (@NYCVotes) · Mar 18
At City Hall celebrating Student Voter Registration Day 2016 right next to @nyccouncil @nyccdc @nyccoe @nyccoe @nyccoe



SVRD is a collaboration between NYC Votes, City Council Member Helen Rosenthal and the New York City Council, the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), the Department of Education (DOE), the NYC Board of Elections, and several community based organizations (CBOs).

The NYC facilitated a selection process for nonpartisan CBOs to be paired with each SVRD school to gather registration forms from eligible students and present the civic engagement curriculum, which was created by NYC Votes in conjunction with the DOE. Members of the City Council helped present the materials to students in their local schools.

In 2015, the inaugural year of the program, 2,000 students were registered at 25 high schools. For 2016, Councilmember Rosenthal sponsored funding through the City Council that more than doubled the size and scope of the program. The SVRD coalition carried its message of voter participation and civic engagement to nearly 20,000 students at 67 schools citywide. By the end of the day, 8,500 students registered to vote, increasing the number of youth on the city's voter rolls by more than 50 percent.

Top media Tweet earned 2,560 impressions

NY will vote 4 times in 2016! Get registered to vote & ready to participate today!
#YouthVoteNYC #SVRD
pic.twitter.com/3ByF0fpZDI



20 14

View Tweet activity

View all Tweet activity

You Retweeted
Chhaya CDC (@ChhayaCDC) · 3h
Check out the curriculum 4 Student Voter Registration Day
bit.ly/1LKTE9W #YouthVoteNYC #SVRD16



20 14

Coalition SVRD took to social media to promote the event on and before the 18th. Using the hashtag #YouthVoteNYC, coalition members disseminated pictures, graphics and messages on Twitter and Facebook to raise the event's profile. Thanks to their efforts, the hashtag trended on Twitter for a portion of the day.

Participating Community-Based Organizations

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Delta Rho Omega
Arab American Association of NY
Atlas: DIY
BridgeRoots
Chhaya CDC
Chinese Progressive Association
Christopher Rose Community Empowerment Campaign, Inc. (CRCEC)
Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans (CIANA)
Citizen Action of New York
Citizens Union
Common Cause/NY
Dominicanos USA
Delta Sigma Theta
Empowerment Zone Inc.
Friends of Art and Design High School
Generation Citizen
Good Old Lower East Side, Inc.
Haitian-Americans United for Progress, Inc.
Immigrant Action
Indo-Caribbean Alliance
Jack and Jill of America, Inc.
Latin Women in Action, Inc.
Latino Leadership Institute
League of Women Voters of the City of New York
LiveOn NY
MinKwon Center for Community Action
NAACP Brooklyn Branch
NAACP Mid-Manhattan Branch
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Public Interest Research Group Fund, Inc. (NYPIRG)
Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition
NYU Lutheran Family Health Centers
Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Foundation
P.A.'L.A.N.T.E. Harlem, Inc.
Pearls and Ivy Foundation of Queens, Inc.
Phipps Neighborhood, Inc.
SCO Family of Services/Center for Family Life
South Asians for Empowerment (SAFE)
Staten Island Community Jobs Center
Street Corner Resources
The Black Institute
The Gathering for Justice
The Greater Ridgewood Youth Council
United Chinese Association of Brooklyn Inc.
University Settlement Society of New York
Women's City Club of New York

Agency-based Voter Registration (Local Law 29/Directive 1)

In 2000, Local Law 29 was enacted to provide New York City residents with nonpartisan, public access to voter registration opportunities through local government agencies. The Local Law 29 requirements supplement the work required of public assistance agencies, like the Human Resources Administration, by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA).

In 2014, the Mayor took the additional step of requiring LL29 agencies to report their voter registration activities to the Mayor's Office of Operations, requiring city agencies to make fulfilling that mandate a top priority. That same year, legislation was enacted (Local Law 63 of 2014) to expand the requirement to seven additional agencies.

As a result, the City Charter now requires 26 city agencies (plus the city's 59 community boards) to help register voters and increase public awareness about elections. It directs the CFB to issue guidelines for implementation, and establish training programs for employees of participating agencies. As amended by LL63, the Charter requires each agency to "provide the same degree of assistance with regard to the voter registration form as is provided with regard to the completion of its own form, if requested."

Throughout the year, the CFB's Voter Assistance Unit works closely with these agencies to help them meet these mandates. Materials created by the CFB and NYC Votes—including an online training video and an annotated registration form—in addition to in-person training sessions, assist agencies with implementation. Stewart Armstrong, Inter-agency Liaison, coordinates these efforts with the agencies and assists with developing agency-specific voter action plans.

In addition to the core mandates, agencies have publicized voting resources and voter registration information via their websites and social media channels, hosted public meetings on local voting issues, and held their own voter registration drives—67 across the five boroughs between 2015 and 2016.

In its 2015 annual report, the New York City Board of Elections announced it had received 9,798 voter registration forms from Local Law 29 agencies in 2015, up from 4,119 in 2014.

"Participation in the electoral process is the bedrock of democracy. Registering to vote is the prerequisite for participation. For many the barriers to voting are so substantial that they forgo the privilege of participation. By providing easy access to registration with every interaction between a potential voter and a City agency we can remove one barrier and provide the opportunity for greater participation by our citizens."

– Mayor Bill de Blasio
upon issuing Directive No. 1 on July 11, 2014

Voter Registration Agencies

Administration for Children's Services	Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Business Integrity Commission	Department of Homeless Services
City Clerk	Department of Housing Preservation and Development
Civilian Complaint Review Board	Department of Parks and Recreation
Commission on Human Rights	Department of Probation
Community Boards	Department of Records and Information Services
Department for the Aging	Department of Small Business Services
Department of Citywide Administrative Services	Department of Transportation
Department of City Planning	Department of Youth and Community Development
Department of Consumer Affairs	Department of Records and Information Services
Department of Correction	Fire Department
Department of Cultural Affairs	Human Resources Administration
Department of Environmental Protection	Taxi and Limousine Commission
Department of Finance	

Notable Programming

Several of the designated voter registration agencies go well beyond their obligations under the City Charter.

For the past four years, the Taxi and Limousine Commission has hosted Election Day surveys on Taxi TVs inside working vehicles. The survey, available in Spanish and English, was designed to provide a sense of New Yorkers' experiences at the polls. So far, 36,082 people have taken the survey. In 2015, survey takers indicated that the voting change they'd like to see most is the expansion of online voter registration, followed by same-day registration and having more than one day to cast a ballot.

In September 2015, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) began to pilot an online voter registration system with the help of the Mayor's Office, the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications and the NYC Board of Elections. While City employees are logged into their DCAS accounts to register for civil service exams, they are asked to register to vote. If they select yes, they proceed with completing an online voter registration form, a portion of which

pre-populates with personal information stored by DCAS. Once the form is completed, the BOE is notified and generates a unique barcode to be matched with a registrant's signed form, mailed in at a later time. Over 100 people have successfully registered using the system. Other agencies are currently working to implement their own.

NYC Parks had a particularly active year. Not only did it host voter registration drives at each of its recreation centers on National Voter Registration Day, on Election Day, November 3rd, 2015, it hosted a voting themed "Fall Field Day," in Upper Manhattan's Highbridge Park. The event, aimed at raising awareness around voting and Election Day, attracted over 3,000 people. Attendees had the opportunity to register to vote. The NYC Board of Elections provided an old lever voting machine for children to vote on their favorite park, snack or sport.

The Department of Consumer Affairs translated the "Register to Vote Here" signs, which the Campaign Finance Board distributed to LL29 agencies for use during elections, into Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Bengali.

Other Government Agencies

The Local Law 29 framework provides NYC Votes with a roadmap for engaging partners at every level of government—even those who are not mandated to do so—to increase voting and civic engagement in New York City.

NYC Health + Hospitals, the city's public hospital system, began its partnership with NYC Votes in 2012. On NVRD, five facilities within the network hosted voter registration drives.

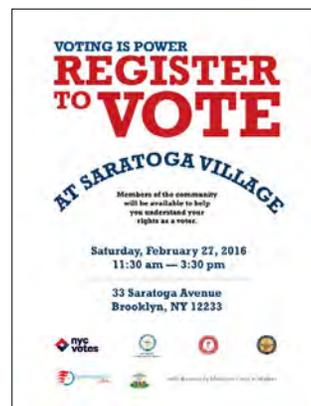
Department Of Homeland Security invited NYC Votes to conduct voter registration drives at 12 naturalization ceremonies throughout the year. The moment newly naturalized Americans take full ownership of their rights and responsibilities as citizens is the optimal time to encourage them to engage in the electoral process. Through its partnership with Homeland Security, NYC Votes worked with Dominicanos USA to register 1,473 newly naturalized citizens in 2015.

Community Partnerships

On February 27th, 2016, NYC Votes, the NYCHA branch of the NAACP and Brooklyn Assembly Member Latrice Walker led more than 50 volunteers and a coalition of local partners on a *Day of Action*

to register voters in two New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments in Brooklyn: Saratoga Village and Ocean Hill. Partners included NAACP Brooklyn, Dominicanos USA and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (East Kings County Alumnae Chapter).

Prior to the Day of Action, volunteers attended a training at the CFB, which covered the logistics of door to door canvassing, facilitating the completion of a voter registration form and voting rights.



VOTER ENGAGEMENT

NYC Votes' outreach work only begins with registration. More New Yorkers must make the commitment to embrace voting as a norm. Many voters need to be reminded how the act of voting can impact the quality of life in their communities and the issues important to them. NYC Votes tailors programming to New Yorkers at every step along the full spectrum of involvement—from those who are fully engaged, to those who need friendly reminders, to those who may be disengaged.

NYC Votes seeks to maximize its impact by building on existing community networks throughout the City. With Sabrina Castillo, Coordinator of Strategic Partnerships, at the helm, NYC Votes enlist civic groups and community based organizations with existing programs to build voter engagement activities into their work. Whether it be registering new voters, getting out the vote, building support for election reform in Albany, or highlighting opportunities to facilitate change, NYC Votes and its partners are on the ground disseminating information and enlisting participation.

NYC Votes conducted voter engagement work around each of the elections in New York City between the spring of 2015 and 2016, including special elections for City Council in the Bronx, Queens and Staten Island.

NYC Votes published online Voter Guides for each contest, disseminated election information on social media, registered new voters and organized GOTV activities such as phone banking and sending voters postcard reminders to cast their ballots. For the Council election in Queens, NYC Votes published and distributed printed Guides to voters in District 23 before the primary and general elections. (See below for more details on the Voter Guide and NYC Votes' GOTV outreach.)



2015 ELECTION DATES

May 5, 2015: Staten Island Congressional District 11

May 5, 2015: Brooklyn State Assembly District 43

September 10, 2015: Queens City Council District 23 Primary Election

November 3, 2015: Queens City Council District 23 General Election

November 3, 2015: Staten Island City Council District 51

February 23, 2016: Bronx City Council District 17

Youth Voter Engagement

The 2016 election year marks an important shift in the American political landscape, as younger voters play an increasingly important role in the electoral landscape. So-called “millennials” and baby boomers constitute an equal share of the voting-eligible population, each with about [31 percent](#). Yet, “share of eligible voters” does not mean the same thing as “share of the electorate.” Older voters still vote in higher numbers than their younger counterparts.

NYC Votes devotes significant time and energy encouraging younger voters to express their voices at the ballot box. Since its inception, NYC Votes has extended its nonpartisan message of civic engagement to thousands of youth through city schools and partner organizations.



Wilbur Childs
Youth Voter Coordinator

At the helm of NYC Votes’ youth engagement effort is Youth Voter Coordinator Wilbur Childs. In his first year as Youth Voter Coordinator, he led NYC Votes’ Student Voter Registration Day efforts and moderated a panel at the 37th

annual Council on Government Ethics Law Conference (COGEL) entitled, “The Youth Vote: Coming to a City Near You,” reviewing youth voter engagement models from across the country.

Wilbur and the Voter Assistance Unit work to deliver their voting and engagement message to young adults in a range of ways: NYC’s Youth Poet Laureate program, Student Voter Registration Day, the Street Team internship program, attending community events and fairs, classroom workshops and deploying message through multiple forms of media.

New York City Youth Poet Laureate Program

The New York City Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) program is a voting themed, spoken word poetry competition designed to rally NYC teens around civic engagement. The 2016 Youth Poet Laureate, Nkosi Nkululeko, won the 2016 YPL competition on December 19, 2015. Nkosi’s winning poem, “How to Squish a Cockroach,” is an extended metaphor about the powerlessness of disengagement.



Nkosi Nkululeko
2016 NYC Youth Poet Laureate



Crystal Valentine
2015 NYC Youth Poet Laureate

Crystal Valentine ended her highly successful year as the 2015 YPL in December.

Now in its 8th year, the program is a regular partnership between NYC Votes and Urban Word NYC that reaches over 20,000 young New Yorkers. This year the event was hosted by the 92nd Street Y.

NYC Votes Street Team

2015 marked the fourth year of the NYC Votes Street Team program, which recruits college students to work with CBO’s to develop and implement voter registration training programs.

The Street Team conducts voter registration at community events, establishes an NYC Votes presence at events throughout the city and delivers presentations to student groups of all sizes.

In 2015, the Street Team continued its collaboration with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Members attended 17 DYCD events, and collected 200 voter registrations from participants in the Summer Youth Employment Program.

NYC Votes Voter Guide

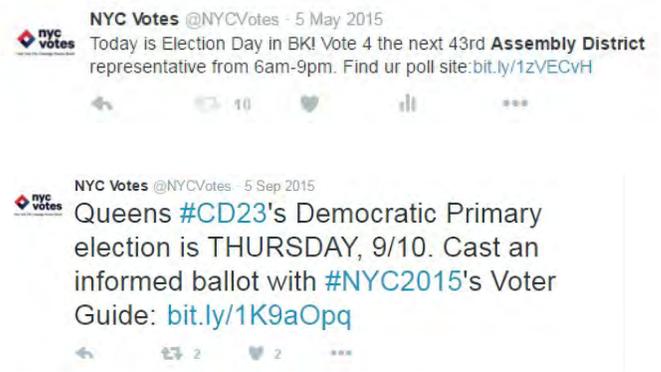
To help voters make informed choices at the polls, the CFB produces and distributes the NYC Votes Voter Guide for each city election. The Guide is a nonpartisan, multimedia election resource. It provides voters with information about candidates, proposals on the ballot and where and how to vote. While the City Charter mandates that the CFB produce guides for municipal elections, the agency has gone beyond that requirement to publish online guides for presidential, congressional and statewide primary and general elections.

NYC Votes' Voter Guides are available online for every election. In addition to English, general information and landing pages are accessible in Bengali, Chinese, Korean and Spanish, consistent with the federal Voting Rights Act. In most city elections, print versions of the Guide are also sent to voters' homes, including in languages designated for translation support. Candidate video profiles, a feature of the city guides, are filmed and aired on public television.

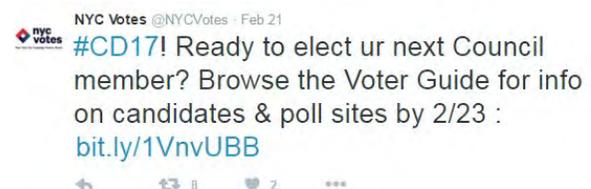
In 2015, the CFB produced Voter Guides for all five elections during the year. In May, an online guide was released for the elections in Congressional District 11 and New York State Assembly District 43.

In the fall, guides were produced online and in print for the off-year primary and general elections in New York City Council District 23 in Queens. NYC Votes partnered with Queens Public Television (QPTV) to produce and air candidates' video profiles in those contests.

For the September Primary, 48,729 hard copies of the Guide were mailed to the homes of District 23 voters, while the online version received 1,876 total visits. Later that fall, 49,214 copies of the General Election Guide were mailed to the homes of district residents, while the online version of the Guide received 4,507 total visits.



On February 23rd, 2016, there was a Special Election in New York City Council District 17 in the Bronx. NYC Votes published an online guide to the election and worked with a non-profit local television broadcaster, BronxNet, to produce and air the candidate video component. NYC Votes also co-sponsored a candidate forum with BronxNet and Nos Quedamos at the Pregones Theater in the South Bronx, to give voters an opportunity to get to know candidates and where they stood on issues that matter to them.



NYC Votes Awards

The fourth annual NYC Votes Awards were held at the VAAC's annual public hearing on December 15, 2015. Awards were given to NYC Votes partner organizations that demonstrated outstanding levels of commitment and support toward the advancement of voter engagement in 2015.

Five awards were presented:

Excellence in Community Outreach for a **city agency** was awarded to the City University of New York for their support of many programs, most notably National Voter Registration Day.

Excellence in Community Outreach for a **volunteer organization** was awarded to the Brooklyn NAACP for their continuous work throughout the year.

Excellence in Community Outreach for a **non-profit organization** was awarded to Dominicanos USA for their involvement and success in engaging New Yorkers in the civic process.

Excellence in Community Outreach for a **private sector company** was awarded to HealthPlus Amerigroup for their efforts on National Voter Registration Day.

Council member Helen Rosenthal received the **Jane Kalmus Award** for piloting Student Voter Registration day, a game-changing program for our New York City youth.

Tools and Resources

NYC Votes is committed to providing partners and concerned citizens with the tools they need to further its mission. It has distributed thousands of voter registration forms, created social media content publicizing important election information, and equipped agencies

and organizations to conduct voter registration and education events themselves. NYC Votes' signature voter registration workshop is called "Train the Trainer." This year, over 50 partners have undergone the training. Many of these resources were collected and made available to the public via the CFB's website, which was redesigned and launched in summer 2015.

The Jane Kalmus award is presented to a person or organization who has exhibited the highest level of commitment to grassroots efforts and building a lasting voting culture in NYC. Jane Kalmus was a founding member of the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee, who served as the vice chair of the Voter Assistance Commission for 20 of her 21 years involved. Kalmus also founded the National Nonpartisan Voter Registration Campaign, a non-profit organization that helped establish the 24/7 telephone helpline at the NYC Board of Elections. In 1961, Ms. Kalmus was appointed by then-Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. as his Communications Director.

GET OUT THE VOTE (GOTV)

Voter Registration is the first step in a process designed to get New Yorkers from filling out a registration form to voting on Election Day. Once voters have registered through an NYC Votes-sponsored program, NYC Votes follows up to keep newly registered voters engaged, issuing proactive reminders of important election dates and voting rights information. NYC Votes and its partners have used direct mail, email, phone banking and door-to-door canvassing to encourage newly registered and intermittent voters to get to the polls. Together, they work to excite and mobilize New Yorkers with both time-tested GOTV methods and new, creative strategies. With an important election year ahead, 2015 was a year of testing strategies and building capacity. NYC Votes hired a field coordinator, Sean O’Leary, to develop and implement the year’s GOTV plans.

Direct Mail

NYC Votes sent a “Thank you for registering with NYC Votes” postcard to newly registered voters reminding them about Congressional and State Assembly elections on May 5, 2015, and City Council primary and general elections on September 10th and November 3rd of 2015. The postcards directed recipients to where they could find more information about the candidates. They were customized with each voter’s election district and polling site and timed to arrive during the week before the election.

Door-to-Door Canvassing

NYC Votes continued working with organizations such as Dominicanos USA, Brooklyn NAACP, Nos Quedamos, NYU students, local Greek organizations and others to conduct door-to-door canvassing in public housing developments and other GOTV outreach.

Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool with which to communicate messages to large swathes of New Yorkers. NYC Votes has 16,000 followers on Facebook and almost 4,000 on Twitter. The agency deploys customized Twitter and Facebook advertisements to reach New York City voters with information about events, initiatives and elections.

Nov 2015 • 30 days

TWEET HIGHLIGHTS

Top Tweet earned 7,434 impressions

Calling all voters! Don't miss the chance to have your say this Election Day. Polls open now until 9pm. Go vote! bit.ly/1LINBxG

↩ 3 ↻ 25 ❤ 2

[View Tweet activity](#)

[View all Tweet activity](#)

Phone Banking

NYC Votes hosted a multi-day GOTV phone bank on and ahead of Election Day, November 3, 2015. Voters who registered with NYC Votes during the course of the year received a phone call informing them about their district races and poll site locations. Over the course of four days, CFB staff and volunteers made 1,444 GOTV calls.

The phone banks are largely staffed by volunteers who want to be more engaged with their city. NYC Votes provided these citizens with the opportunity to reach out to their fellow New Yorkers urging them to help shape the future of their communities by voting on Election Day. Sign-up to become an NYC Votes GOTV volunteer at volunteers@nycctfb.info.

ANALYSIS: GOTV MAILING

In the 2014 general election, NYC Votes conducted its first GOTV effort, targeting voters who registered on National Voter Registration Day. New voters who registered through NYC Votes received phone calls and postcard mailings, and showed higher turnout rates than new voters overall.

Based on that success, NYC Votes extended its pilot nonpartisan GOTV program into 2015, to further explore whether pre-election reminders can help spur higher turnout, and help inform the design of GOTV efforts for the crucial 2016 (federal) and 2017 (municipal) elections.

There were no municipal or federal elections in 2015, and many voters did not have competitive races on their ballots. Still, there were a number of special elections throughout the year.

A special election for Congress in the 11th District in Staten Island and Brooklyn on May 5th was followed by another special election in November for Staten Island District Attorney. Three Assembly seats had special

elections—District 29 in Queens, and Districts 43 and 46 in Brooklyn—as did a senate seat in Brooklyn’s District 19. There was a September primary and November general election in Queens City Council District 23.

NYC Votes sent postcards to randomly selected voters in each of these districts and later compared turnout results. In the special elections that occurred in Congressional District 11, Assembly Districts 29, 43, and 46, and the general election in City Council District 23, NYC Votes sent mailings to voters who had newly registered in 2014 and 2015.

In other races, NYC Votes targeted intermittent voters. In the Staten Island district attorney race, this included voters who had registered between 2012 and 2014, and last voted in either 2012 or 2014. In the Democratic primary election for City Council District 23, NYC Votes focused on voters who participated in federal elections but not the 2013 municipal election. In Senate District 19, only voters who had cast a ballot in 2014 received mailings.

Targeted Voters	Districts	Did Mailings Affect Turnout?
New registrants	Congressional District 11	Yes
	Assembly District 29	No
	Assembly District 43	No
	Assembly District 46	No
	City Council District 23 (general)	No
Intermittent voters	Senate District 19	Yes
	City Council District 23 (primary)	No
	Staten Island District Attorney	No

Conclusions

Relatively few voters are paying attention to special elections. Turnout in these elections was low across the board. In two races, the mailings from NYC Votes made a statistically significant difference. In others, the mailings potentially would have had a greater impact had they been targeted to those who voted in 2014, as was the case in Senate District 19.

With outreach, intermittent voters can be converted to regular voters. In every race, voters who participated in the 2014 midterms had significantly higher turnout than those who did not. This indicates the importance of ensuring that voters return to the polls each year, to keep them invested in the democratic process.

There is some evidence that repeated contact can be effective. In the election

where NYC Votes mail outreach made the most significant difference, voters who participated in the 2014 elections were randomly selected to receive one or two contacts. The turnout rate among voters who received two NYC Votes reminders was more than a third higher than voters who received none.

A more detailed description of selected races is below.

May 5th Special Election for Congressional District 11

There was a special election to fill a vacant seat in the 11th District after former Congressman Michael Grimm stepped down following his guilty plea for felony tax evasion. The race was closely watched, and Republican Dan Donovan won against Democrat Vincent Gentile, with 58.3% of the vote.

CONGRATULATIONS NEW VOTER!

**May
5**

Special
Election
Day



New York City Campaign Finance Board

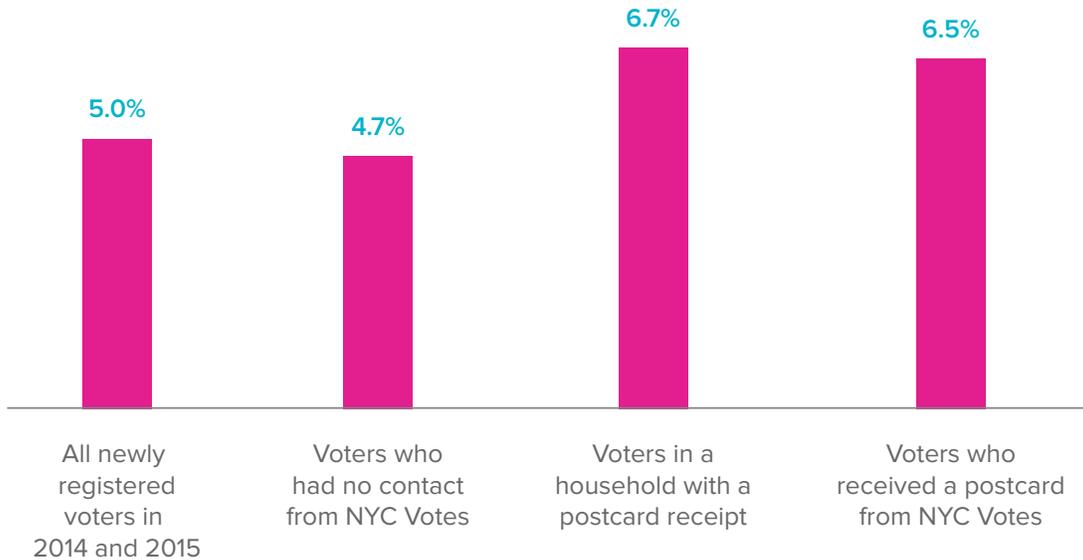
You recently registered to vote in New York City. Now, take the next step! Join your fellow New Yorkers at the polls on Tuesday, May 5th and make your voice heard in this special election.

Visit www.nycfb.info/voterguide for nonpartisan information about the candidates and ballot proposals so you can cast an informed ballot. Flip this card over for quick voting info you can carry to the polls. **Polls are open from 6 am to 9 pm.**

Connect with us at:  nycvotes  nycvotes



May 5th Special Election Turnout Congressional District 11



Voters cast 42,509 ballots in the race, resulting in a **11.3% turnout** among active registered voters and a 10.4% turnout among registered voters in the district overall. NYC Votes targeted a pool of 13,532 newly registered voters—those who had registered in either 2014 or 2015.

NYC Votes sent postcard reminders about the election to 3,500 voters who were randomly selected from the pool of new registrants. After factoring in postcards that were returned, 3,428 voters received the reminder and an additional 378 newly registered voters were in the same household as a postcard recipient.

This contact from NYC Votes had a small but statistically significant effect on the turnout of new voters:

- ✓ Among all new voters, **5.0% turned out to vote.**
- ✓ Of those who had no contact from NYC Votes, **4.7% turned out to vote.**
- ✓ Of those who received a postcard from NYC Votes, **6.5% turned out to vote.**

There was also a stark difference in turnout among those who had voted in 2014 and those who had not. Only 3.0% of voters who had not cast a ballot in the midterm turned out for the special election, compared to 21.7% of those who had participated in the 2014 general.

September 10th Primary Election in City Council District 23

In the 23rd Council District, Council Member Mark Weprin resigned his seat in June to take a job with Governor Cuomo’s administration. This triggered an off-cycle election, and a Democratic primary was held in September. Six candidates vied for the seat: Celia Devi Dosamantes, Bob Friedrich, Barry Grodenchik, Rebecca Lynch, Ali Najmi and Satnam Singh Parhar. Grodenchik won the primary by a margin of 309 votes.

Overall, 7,172 voters cast ballots in the race—a 13.4% turnout rate among registered Democrats eligible to vote in the primary. NYC Votes targeted a pool of registered Democrats who voted in federal elections but did not participate in the 2013 municipal elections. Of the total pool of 16,069 voters who sat out for the 2013 election, 12,288 (76.5%) had last voted in 2012, and 3,781 (23.5%) had last voted in 2014.

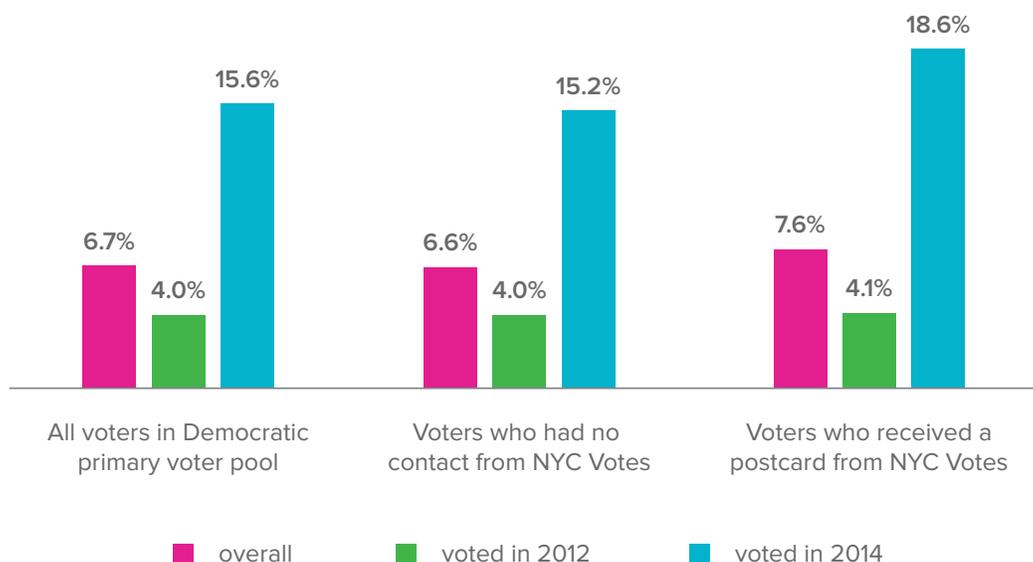
NYC Votes sent postcard reminders to 1,658 randomly selected voters among this group. Of those, 1,629 received a postcard. An additional 33 voters shared a household with a postcard recipient.

This postcard mailing did not significantly boost turnout among primary voters. Voters who received a postcard turned out at a rate of 7.6%, compared to the 6.6% rate among voters who had no contact from NYC Votes.

As with the special elections in May, those who last voted in 2014 had higher turnout rates than the voters who had last voted in the 2012 presidential election. Those who had last voted in the presidential election had a turnout rate of 4.0%, while those who last voted in the midterm election had a turnout rate of 15.6%.

Of those voters who last voted in 2014, 398 received a postcard from NYC Votes. Those postcard recipients had a turnout rate of

September 10th Primary Election Turnout City Council District 23



18.6%, whereas those who had no contact from NYC Votes had a turnout rate of 15.2%. While this group was too small to draw meaningful conclusions, this does suggest turnout might have been boosted had NYC Votes only targeted voters who last voted in 2014.

November 3rd General Election

City Council District 23

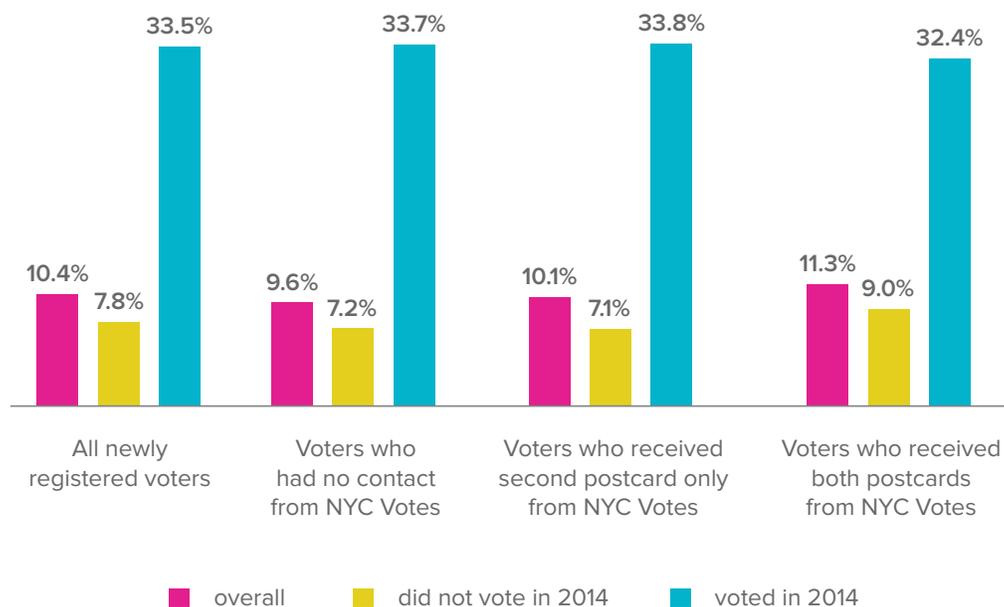
After winning the Democratic primary, Barry Grodenchik faced Joseph Concannon and Rebecca Lynch in the general election. He won with 58.2% of the vote. With 3,720 ballots cast in the race, the turnout rate among registered voters was only 4.3%.

Because of persistent low turnout for local and state elections, NYC Votes tested whether sending an additional election reminder to voters with a message of why local elections matter would boost turnout. To do this, NYC

Votes targeted a pool of 3,479 voters who had newly registered in 2014 and 2015. This pool of voters was further divided into three randomly selected groups. The first group received two postcard mailings: one sent in mid-October with a reminder about the upcoming election with a message on the back about how local elections connect to voters' everyday lives, and a second sent shortly before the election with a positive voting message and poll site information. The second group received only the second postcard shortly before the election. The third group did not receive any postcard from NYC Votes.

After accounting for postcard returns, 1,124 voters received both the first and second postcard from NYC Votes and 1,163 voters received the second postcard only. An additional 91 voters were in a household that received two postcards, and 83 voters were in a household that received the second postcard only.

November 3rd General Election Turnout City Council District 23



These mailings did not make a statistically significant difference in turnout. Voters who had no contact from NYC Votes had a turnout rate of 9.6%; voters who received the second postcard only had a turnout rate of 10.1%; and voters that received both postcards had a turnout of 11.3%.

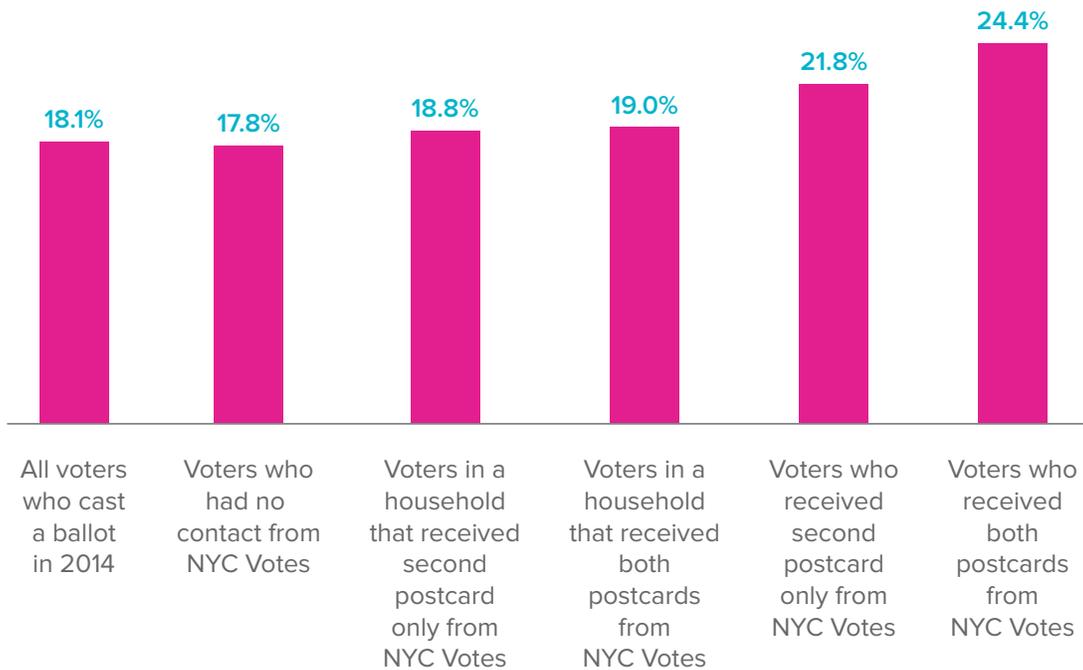
As was the case in previous races, voters who turned out in 2014 had higher turnout rates in 2015. The 358 voters who cast a ballot in 2014 voted at a rate of 33.5%, while those who did not voted at a rate of 7.8%. While the NYC Votes postcards did not make a difference among the 2014 voters, there were slight differences among voters who did not turn out in 2014. Those who received no contact from NYC Votes turned out at a rate of 7.2%, while those who received both postcards turned out at a rate of 9.0%.

Senate District 19

A special election was held in the 19th Senate District after former state Senator John Sampson was found guilty of corruption. There was a three-way contest between Roxanne Persaud, running on the Democratic, Independence, and Women’s Equality lines; Jeffrey Ferretti on the Republican ticket; and Elias Weir on the Conservative line. Roxanne Persaud won with 82.2% of the vote.

Voters cast 9,180 ballots in the race, which was a turnout rate of 5.0%. NYC Votes targeted voters who had voted in the 2014 midterm elections. Of these 39,010 voters, two groups of 1,040 voters were randomly selected for a similar experiment to the mailing in City Council District 23. One group received one election reminder with a positive voting message and

November 3rd General Election Turnout Senate District 19



poll site information; the second group received both a mailing in mid-October with a reminder of why state elections matter and the pre-election reminder with poll site information.

In total, 1,013 voters received both postcards, and 987 voters received the pre-election reminder only. An additional 512 voters were in a household that received only the pre-election reminder, while 499 voters were in a household that received both postcards.

This mailing made a statistically significant difference in voter turnout:

- ✓ Among all voters who voted in 2014, **turnout was 18.1%**.
- ✓ Among voters who had no contact from NYC Votes, **turnout was 17.8%**.
- ✓ Voters who received only the pre-election reminder had a **turnout rate of 21.8%**.
- ✓ Voters who received both the pre-election reminder and the message about why voting in state elections matters **turned out at a rate of 24.4%**.

VOTER ADVOCACY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER ELECTIONS

With the presidential election this year and competitive races on both sides of the aisle, the country's interest in voting is running high. But despite this national focus on elections and all of the work NYC Votes puts into engaging voters, there is still much work left to do. New York faces a voter participation crisis. The state consistently ranks near the bottom of national voter turnout rankings after each major election. In the 2012 presidential election, only 53.2% of citizens of voting age turned out to vote¹—putting New York at 42nd for turnout. The state dropped to 46th when only 29.1% of citizens of voting age turned out in the 2014 midterms.² Voter participation in New York City is even more abysmal—48.7% of citizens of voting age cast a ballot for president in 2012, and only 20.2% voted in 2014.

While the reasons for low voter turnout are complex, the reality is that New York has long lagged behind the rest of the nation when it comes to administering our elections. Other states have taken strides to lower the barriers to participation by making it easier for people to vote. In this year's presidential election, voters in 36 other states will be able to cast a ballot before Election Day, either by mail or in person at the polls. Yet voters in New York are only able to vote on Tuesday—unless they can present a valid excuse when they apply for an absentee ballot, well in advance of Election Day. California and Oregon have recently passed automatic registration through the

1 U.S. Election Assistance Commission 2012 report, http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/Page/990-050%20EAC%20VoterSurvey_508Compliant.pdf

2 EAC 2014 report

DMV, a proposal Governor Cuomo recently promoted in his State of the State address along with early voting. A number of states also allow voters to register when they go to the polls to cast a ballot—one reform that has been demonstrated to boost turnout.

We still register and vote in a system designed for the 19th century that is no longer in step with our 21st century lives.

It is long past time that state election law catch up with how we live today. New Yorkers deserve better elections that work for them so that they can make their voices heard. To that end, it is critical that New York’s legislators change state election law to ensure three things: that every voter who wants to register can do so conveniently; that everyone has more than one day to get to the polls; and that everyone can cast a ballot that counts.

Voter Day

For the past three years, NYC Votes has taken voter engagement beyond the voting booth by facilitating a campaign for these election reforms. Each year since 2014, NYC Votes has rallied a coalition of citizen advocates and good government and community groups around bringing New York’s elections into the 21st century. Months of outreach culminate in Voter Day, a day of action during which volunteers travel to Albany to urge legislators to pass common sense voting reforms. In 2015, 100 members of the public joined NYC Votes in the State capitol to share personal experiences that evoked the need for change with lawmakers.

In 2016, the campaign expanded to become a statewide effort and was re-branded as Vote



Better NY. The Vote Better NY coalition has been collecting signatures on a petition that includes this year’s policy agenda: better ballot

design, early voting and expanded electronic voter registration. At the time of this writing, NYC Votes and its partners have gathered over 5,000 signatures. On May 3, 2016, over 100 concerned citizens will continue the Voter Day tradition by travelling to Albany to talk to legislators about the importance of making voting and engagement easier for New Yorkers.

Upgrade voter registration

At a time when New Yorkers increasingly use Internet-connected devices for the most basic day-to-day transactions, the majority of voters still register to vote with pen and paper. They mail paper forms to the Board of Elections, where staff manually enter voters’ information. This process leaves registration vulnerable to lost forms or data entry errors. Voters who believe they successfully registered show up at the polls only to find their names are not in the poll book. Not only is this system cumbersome and costly, but nearly 1 million citizens of voting age in this city are not registered to vote.³

This system has grown outdated. We have the technology to register new voters and keep their registrations up to date by seamlessly integrating voter registration into everyday life. This will help to register more new voters and allow them to participate in the democratic process. It will also ensure that nobody will drop off the rolls when they move, a critical change in a city with high residential mobility. The Voter Empowerment Act, sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris and Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh, would provide for a comprehensive upgrade of the voter registration system, described in further detail below.

3 <http://www.nycctfb.info/media/blog/990776-reasons-why-we-need-universal-registration>

Implement electronic registration at government agencies

New York can modernize voter registration by implementing electronic registration at government agencies. This way, each eligible voter can register to vote whenever they do business with a state agency. The Voter Empowerment Act would require agencies offering voter registration opportunities under the National Voter Registration Act to electronically transmit voters' information to the state Board of Elections. Voters who are applying for public benefits, or enrolling at CUNY or SUNY, would be able to register to vote in one easy step. By allowing state agencies already collecting an eligible voter's information to seamlessly transmit it to the Board of Elections, New York can upgrade its system, eliminate duplicative transactions, and avoid errors caused by paper records.

Expand online registration for non-DMV customers

New York has online registration for anyone with a state driver's license or state-issued ID, which excludes eligible voters who do not interact with the DMV. This is a serious concern in a city that relies heavily on public transit. The Voter Empowerment Act would require the state Board of Elections to provide online voter registration through its website to every eligible voter, allowing voters without a DMV identification number to supply a Social Security number instead. (Senator David Carlucci and Assembly Member Kavanagh have also sponsored standalone legislation to accomplish universal online registration.)

Accept electronic signatures for voter registration purposes

Voters must currently supply a "wet signature" when they register to vote, meaning they have signed their name in ink on the form. There is an exception for voters who register through the DMV, which is a custodial agency for electronic signatures used for voter registration purposes. The BOE's refusal to accept electronic signatures is a major hurdle to modernizing registration. A number of states have begun to accept electronic signatures, and Delaware and Missouri accept finger-based signatures from touch screen devices, such as tablets.⁴ Assembly Member Walker's legislation would change state election law to accept an image of someone's signature.

Enact portable registration

Many voters do not realize they need to fill out a new registration form when they move in order to update their address. Over time, this leads to increasingly out-of-date and inaccurate voter records. The Board of Elections can use the information from the Postal Service's National Change of Address System to update a registration record when a voter moves, guaranteeing that no New Yorker will needlessly fall off the voter rolls. The Voter Empowerment Act would enable county boards to update a voter's registration whenever that voter moves anywhere within the state.

4 http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2015/05/ovr_2015_brief.pdf?la=en

Allow same-day registration

Even with a modern voter registration system, mistakes may still happen. Voters who should be on the rolls may fail to appear in the poll book. Enacting same-day registration would provide a safeguard to ensure every eligible voter's ballot will be counted. It also provides an opportunity for newly-eligible voters who may not have otherwise registered to still participate. Senator Gianaris and Assembly Member Kavanagh introduced legislation that would amend the state constitution to remove the requirement that a voter register at least 10 days before an election.

Allow pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds

Youth voters have the lowest registration and turnout rate of any age group, and may face unique barriers that prevent them from participating. Allowing voters to pre-register early so that their registrations become active when they turn 18 would help draw youth into the voting process early and encourage deeper civic engagement. It would ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds applying for driver's licenses could register to vote at their first interaction with the DMV, rather than requiring them to make a separate effort to register. High schools could also engage in voter registration activities, so they could teach their students to be fully engaged citizens. The Voter Empowerment Act and Assembly Member Walker's legislation would allow preregistration, as would standalone bills from Assembly Member Kavanagh and Senator Gianaris.

Transition to opt-out registration

Right now, we require voters to opt in to registration and take affirmative steps to register to vote. Adopting an *opt-out* system would make it the government's responsibility to register voters rather than put the onus on citizens themselves. As mentioned above, California and Oregon are moving to an opt-out system, which compares voter lists to the DMV database and automatically registers anyone who is eligible. Voters may indicate if they do not wish to be registered. The governor recently proposed an opt-out system in New York for DMV customers, which would get voters registered in a more efficient way.

Transition to electronic poll books

Currently, New York's state constitution requires that registrations be received at least 10 days before an election. The Board of Elections goes further, requiring forms to be received 25 days prior to an election. This additional two weeks is needed to process new registrations in time to be printed in the poll books. Electronic poll books would allow us to keep the deadline consistent with the state constitution, giving voters more time to register. Electronic poll books could be connected to a computerized statewide voter registration database so that poll workers could better assist voters by updating records in real time, or directing voters to the correct polling place if they show up at the wrong location.

Implement early voting

In the 2012 presidential election, nearly one in three voters nationwide cast their ballot before Election Day. Thirty-six states currently allow some form of early voting, and New York now lags behind most of the country. Early voting would allow voters more flexibility and convenience when it comes to casting a ballot, and give election administrators more time to operate poll sites and correct for errors.

Enact in-person early voting

New Yorkers still must go to the polls on Tuesday only, while voters in a number of other states can cast their ballot in the days, including weekends, before Election Day. Legislation by Assembly Member Kavanagh and Senator Stewart-Cousins would set a 12-day early voting period that includes the two weekends before the election. It would also set minimum requirements for the number of polling places for each county based on population size, with at least one polling location per 50,000 registered voters. Additionally, the bill stipulates a minimum number of early voting hours, and that some polling locations be open outside of standard business hours of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This legislation mirrors the recent proposals by the Governor in his State of the State address.

Expansion of absentee and mail voting

Currently under the state constitution, New Yorkers need a valid excuse to cast an absentee ballot. Changing the constitution to remove this requirement and allow no-excuse absentee voting would grant voters greater flexibility and allow them to plan ahead appropriately. It would also allow upstate counties with smaller population sizes greater flexibility to conduct early voting, by allowing more voters to mail their ballots.

Improve the voting experience

New York switched to new voting machines six years ago, but much of the voting process is still out of date. New Yorkers must vote at a polling location assigned by where they live, instead of where it is most convenient. They must wait in line, and mark their choice on a confusing, hard-to-read ballot. If we improve the voting experience to make it more user-friendly, voters will have more confidence in our elections.

Shift to a vote center model

In our current system, voters must appear at their designated polling place located near their registration address, regardless of whether the location is most convenient for them. With electronic poll books and ballot-on-demand printing technology, we have the ability to move away from the old voting precinct system. Vote centers allow voters to cast a ballot where it is easiest, whether that is near home, near work, or where they need to run errands.

Improve ballot design

As New York continues to adapt to the use of optical scanners, there is a real need to update archaic laws that dictate ballot design. The current law leads to confusing design, small fonts and readability issues, and a continuing problem with undervotes and overvotes. Nobody's vote should be thrown out due to poor ballot design.

The Voter Friendly Ballot Act, sponsored by Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh, would set clear and modern design standards to create more readable ballots. This would ensure that voters have a better experience at the polls and that their votes count.

CASE STUDY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NYC BOARD OF ELECTIONS

New York's Presidential Primary Illustrates the Need for the Board of Elections to Further Improve Communications to Voters

In the days before New York's presidential primary on April 19, 2016, it was reported that as many as 126,000 names were purged from the voter rolls in Brooklyn earlier this year. Outside investigators—and the city Board of Elections—are seeking to determine whether and how voters were improperly removed from the rolls. But it appears that even when it is conducted properly, the BOE's process for maintaining the voter list can place unnecessary and unwarranted obstacles before New York City voters.

According to state election law, active voters may not be purged from the voter rolls. The first step in the process of cleaning the voter list is moving voters from "active" to "inactive" status. Inactive voters may be removed from the voter rolls completely if they fail to vote in two subsequent federal elections.

When the Board of Elections sends its annual mailing to all registered voters, those whose mailings are returned as undeliverable are moved to the inactive list. While this can help BOE identify voters who have moved, it can also sometimes be the result of typographical errors. One example, from primary day coverage by Gothamist:

"Sometime this year, the agency sent a piece of mail to [Thomas] Williams to confirm his Flatbush address, but left off his apartment number. When the postal service returned the notice as undeliverable, someone at the Board changed Williams's registration to inactive, meaning his name would not appear on the list at his poll site."

A review of the voter rolls by NYC Votes shows that a large number of voters were changed from active to inactive status on a single day in January 2016, roughly three months before the first federal election on the calendar. Each of those voters should have received notification from BOE, and been provided with the opportunity to respond and keep their voter record active.

Voters who did receive the notice were not given clear directions to provide a prompt response in order to preserve their active status.

Voters who arrived at the polls only to find their names were not in the poll book were given the opportunity to vote by affidavit ballot; for inactive voters, their affidavit ballot returned them to active status. However, it seems obvious that much of the confusion on the day of the primary could have been eliminated with simpler, clearer communications before the election from BOE to voters.

Because the data also contained the date by which each registration was made inactive, it became apparent that large numbers of voters were being moved to the inactive list on a specific date at the start of each calendar year. A summary of those numbers is in the table below.

On March 16, the CFB inquired why 88,658 voters were made inactive. BOE staff explained

that when it sends its annual notice to registered voters each August, it flags voters for whom the mailing was returned. If those voters whose mailings bounced back do not vote in the general election, they are moved to inactive status and sent confirmation notices. This total includes some New Yorkers who—like the voter mentioned above—whose mail was returned by the postal service because of human error.

Date	Number Made Inactive
March 12, 2013	99,317
March 17, 2014	92,144
March 9, 2015	137,561
January 13, 2016	88,658

Recommendation: The BOE should provide clear, plain-language guidance to voters.

The notice sent to newly-inactive voters is printed on plain white paper, with the words “CONFIRMATION NOTICE” on the front. It is easy to overlook, and does not clearly indicate that a response is required.

The first page of the multi-page mailing fails to clearly explain that a voter received the notice because their registration was marked inactive, while the following page is written in legal language that is inaccessible to the average voter. There is also no deadline provided for when the voter needs to respond.

These mailings should be redesigned so that they stand out to voters and make clear at a glance that action is required. There should be a plain-language explanation of what inactive status means, and an easy-to-follow guide for what voters should do to change their registration back to active status and confirm their status.

