

2014–2015 Voter Assistance Annual Report

SEC.17. Nothing in this Act shall be construed to deny, impair, or otherwise adversely affect the right to vote of any person registered to vote under the law of any State or political subdivision.

Voting Rights Act of 1965





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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.

* Newly appointed members. Virginia Wong also served during the period covered by this report; her term ended in December 2014.



VOTER ASSISTANCE UNIT

Onida Coward Mayers, *Director*

Stewart Armstrong

Sabrina Juarez

Chyann Sapp

2014 – 2015 VOTER ASSISTANCE REPORT TEAM

Editors/Writers

Onida Coward Mayers

Eric Friedman

Sabrina Juarez

Amanda Melillo

Karina Schroeder

Elizabeth A. Upp

Contributors

Stewart Armstrong

Chyann Sapp

Matt Sollars

Katrina Shakarian

Design/Formatting

Winnie Ng

Letter from the Chair

Thank you for taking a look at the Campaign Finance Board's Voter Assistance Report for 2014–15.

This is an exciting time to be a New Yorker. New technologies are connecting us more closely with our neighbors, making more information instantly accessible, and helping us move around the city more efficiently. New tools give us the power to shape our environment and project our voices more powerfully than ever before. The possibilities for technology to improve our lives are being realized all around us, every day.

Still, our most basic democratic functions sometimes feel stuck in an earlier age. Generations of New Yorkers are connected to the information revolution, yet many of the processes critical to the conduct of elections in New York are still based on pen and paper. At the same time, voter participation in New York is near an all-time low—and trending downward. The challenge is clear: the basic pathways of our political system feel disconnected from the busy, modern lives New Yorkers lead.

Through our NYC Votes campaign, the CFB is seeking to restore the connection, person-to-person and via technology. CFB's Voter Assistance staff and their volunteer partners have worked tirelessly during the last 12 months to register and engage new voters. They have sought to empower New Yorkers across the spectrum seeking a voice in the political process—reaching young people in the schools, new citizens at naturalization ceremonies, and thousands more through their work with city agencies.

The CFB and NYC Votes also connect voters with the information they need to cast a meaningful vote, through our Voter Guide and our unique online resource, NYCVotes.org. In this report, we can also share the results of our very first nonpartisan get-out-the-vote campaign aimed at newly-registered voters, conducted for the November 2014 general election. Our efforts were proven effective—voters contacted through our campaign were more likely to turn up at the polls, by a significant margin.

Even with our successes, it is likely our overall voter turnout statistics will continue trending downward until and unless we can reform our outdated, archaic election laws. We've proposed an ambitious agenda to modernize voter registration, ballot design, and election administration in New York. I hope you'll give it a look. If you agree with us, join us! Share this report with your friends, contact your legislators, volunteer with NYC Votes, and add your voice to our call for a democratic process that meets the challenges of our modern times.



Art Chang
Chair, Voter Assistance
Advisory Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Art Chang', written over a white background.

Art Chang
Chair, Voter Assistance Advisory Committee



New York City Campaign Finance Board 2014–2015 Voter Assistance Annual Report

This year, we mark the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. This historic legislation was the crown jewel of the Civil Rights era; an achievement built on the hard work of countless organizers, activists, and legislators who fought to ensure that no American would be deprived of his or her right to vote on the basis of race.

The law was a product of its time, designed to address the shameful, central flaw of a broken democratic process: the systematic, state-sanctioned exclusion of certain people from the full exercise of their fundamental rights on the basis of skin color.

For nearly five decades, this basic protection of the franchise enjoyed broad bipartisan support. The VRA was expanded and reauthorized six times and signed by both Democratic and Republican presidents. The House and Senate were nearly unanimous in their reauthorization of the law as recently as 2006. But after the Supreme Court invalidated a key component of the VRA in 2013, Congress has made no concerted effort to fix the law. Bipartisan consensus on protecting the right to vote no longer exists.

Even as broad congressional support for protecting the franchise has faded, fewer Americans are choosing to exercise this hard-won right. Fifty years after lawmakers finally opened access to the ballot box, civic participation has reached an all-time low here in New York City. In the 2014 election for governor, *fewer than one in five* eligible, voting-age New Yorkers decided who will run the state for the next four years.

This problem is larger than a passing wave of cynicism or waning commitment to civic values. Low voter participation has reached crisis levels.

Our democracy is built on a mutual responsibility. It is the responsibility of all citizens to exercise their civic duty and vote, and it is the responsibility of government to ensure that every citizen can register and cast a ballot that counts. The very foundation of our democracy is undermined by a government chosen by so few of the governed.

If we have a system that voters cannot learn to navigate—or fails to recognize the voters who do—then that system is broken. To redress this fundamental flaw, we need to re-envision voting rights for the 21st century. NYC Votes aims to achieve this 21st century vision, working to modernize voter rights, increase voter participation and empower voters to cast informed ballots.

NYC Votes is the nonpartisan voter outreach campaign of the New York City Campaign Finance Board. The CFB's Voter Assistance Unit (VAU) and other staff coordinate multi-faceted programs under the NYC Votes banner—ranging from voter registration events, distributing voter education materials and conducting get-out-the-vote efforts—aimed at helping NYC voters cast a well-informed ballot on Election Day.



Onida Coward Mayers
NYC Voter Coordinator/
Director of Voter Assistance

To meet its mandate of mobilizing New York voters, the CFB identifies groups historically underrepresented on the voter rolls, developing nonpartisan strategies to increase their participation both at and beyond the polls. The VAU actively enlists the help of community, government, corporate, and youth organizations to ensure its programs promoting voter education and awareness reach voters living throughout NYC's diverse communities. The Voter Assistance Advisory Committee is mandated by the New York City Charter to meet six times a year and advises the CFB board and staff on ways to encourage and increase voting and voter registration in New York City. Chaired by Art Chang, the VAAC regularly hears the public comment on ways to strengthen the electoral process and increase public participation. The VAAC holds two public hearings each year; one after the November election, and another after the publication of its Annual Report. The VAAC's public hearing to discuss this report will be held May 5, 2015. (For more details on VAAC meetings, please contact the CFB's Voter Assistance Unit at 212-409-1800.)

RECAP OF 2014

In 2014, NYC Votes continued its focus on increasing civic participation and voter turnout. The campaign recruited a diverse cross-section of community organizations to incorporate voting and civics into their mission and messaging. NYC Votes' partnerships enabled a broad range of programming.

Advocacy — NYC Votes assembled a diverse coalition to seek reform in New York State Election Law that would make it easier for New Yorkers to cast a timely, clear, and informed vote.

Public Outreach — NYC Votes actively solicited and identified groups to partner with its goals for each election, creating unique programs and opportunities.

Youth Voter Programs — NYC Votes created programming and outreach efforts to encourage youth and young adult voter participation.

Education and Tools — The CFB provided support and developed tools to create a better voter experience. Through NYC Votes, the CFB provided timely and useful information that helped more New Yorkers take part in the democratic process as informed voters.

Getting Out The Vote (GOTV) — For the first time, NYC Votes conducted a nonpartisan GOTV campaign for the November elections. Using direct mail, electronic messages, and phone banking, NYC Votes encouraged newly registered voters to cast a ballot, setting the stage for a lifetime of participation.

New Yorkers look to the CFB as a source of reliable, nonpartisan information. Fifty years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the CFB must continue to ensure that voters have the tools and education necessary to exercise their rights at the voting booth. NYC Votes' messages must evolve to retain voters' attention and engage them to remain active members in our democracy.

This report will serve as a living document that can be used as a resource by New Yorkers who are looking to become informed voters and those who are looking to become engaged and active in the NYC community.

PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAMS

To successfully achieve its mandates, the CFB produced vital civic education resources, implemented new outreach programs and expanded existing outreach efforts.

With its partners, NYC Votes registered over 37,000 people to vote in 2014, a 150 percent increase over the previous year.

In addition, NYC Votes' ongoing outreach campaign aimed to create and develop programming to keep New Yorkers engaged and excited about voting in the midterm elections. NYC Votes strengthened voter engagement through strong working relationships with community, educational, private sector, and government partners.

Advocacy Day

In May 2014, the NYC Votes campaign organized a broad coalition of partners to advocate for election reforms in the state capitol. NYC Votes' inaugural delegation to Albany met with legislators in support of changes to the election laws that will make it easier for every New Yorker to cast a timely, clear, and informed vote.

NYC Votes was hosted in Albany by State Senator Kevin Parker, Senator Michael Gianaris, and Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh.

Representatives from Generation Citizen, Lincoln Center, New York Organ Donor Network, Every Vote Counts, New York Public Interest Research Group, Transport Workers Union Local 100, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Delta Rho Omega Inc., Youth Civic Leadership Academy, Alliance of South Asian American Labor, and City University of New York joined NYC Votes to meet with state lawmakers and advocate for the following reforms:



- ✦ Establishing early voting
- ✦ Improving ballot design
- ✦ Modernizing voter registration
- ✦ Adopting instant runoff voting
- ✦ Allowing pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds

National Voter Registration Day

On September 23, 2014, NYC Votes led the City’s efforts for National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) for the third year, hosting nonpartisan voter registration drives, events, and programs to increase the number of registered voters in NYC. NYC Votes kicked off the day registering newly-naturalized citizens with the Department of Homeland Security.

NYC Votes hosted more than 60 registration drives throughout the day. Organizations including Care for the Homeless, Harlem United, the Alliance of South Asian American Labor, the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation, and the City University of New York held voter registration drives in neighborhoods throughout the city. Six agencies covered under Local Law 29 went beyond their mandate to participate and hold drives at their locations. CitiBank and JP Morgan Chase held additional voter drives at their offices.

NYC Votes hosted three signature events: the League of Women Voters’ “Just Say Yes to Voting” event at City Hall Park; the New York Organ Donor Network’s Washington Square Park Voter Jam, and the Brooklyn Voter Jam in partnership with Catholic Charities Brooklyn + Queens, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Rho Omega, and the office of the Brooklyn Borough President. With all these events, NYC Votes mobilized over 200 volunteers and registered 2,180 people in one day. National Voter Registration Day was solidified as a national holiday with the help of thousands of volunteers, hundreds of organizations, and a presence in all 50 states.

Celebrate Brooklyn

On July 11, 2014, NYC Votes partnered with BRIC and Celebrate Brooklyn on a special event entitled *Vote, It Ain’t Illegal Yet!* Produced by author/filmmaker/journalist Nelson George, this event honored the 50th anniversary of the landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 with a combination of film, music, and spoken word.

NYC Votes promoted participation in this landmark event, and conducted voter registration efforts throughout the evening.

NYC Votes’ efforts were supplemented by volunteers from Head Count, NYC League of Women Voters, Brooklyn NAACP, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Rho Omega, and Rock The Vote. The night also featured a special performance by the 2014 NYC Youth Poet Laureate, Ramya Ramana.

NYC Votes increased its outreach for this event by combining on-the-ground operations with a social media campaign.



NYC Votes Street Team

2014 marked the third year of the NYC Votes Street Team program. Street Team is a grassroots internship program that teaches college students how to establish relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs) and train them to conduct voter registration drives. Street Team members also register new voters directly at community events.

For the second year in a row, the internship program kicked off with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). The street team registered over 200 young citizens enrolled in DYCD's Youth Summer Employment Program. Over the following 12 weeks, the street team registered an additional 1,100+ people, partnering with Department for the Aging, Food Bank for New York, Brooklyn Technical High School, DYCD, Health and Hospital Corporation, New York Organ Donor Network, and Department of Homeland Security.



Partner Highlights

NYC Votes could not have done its work without the efforts of an extraordinary group of partners. The NYC Votes Awards recognized organizations that demonstrated an outstanding level of commitment to voter education, awareness, participation, registration, and engagement. Six organizations were honored in 2014:

- ✦ Dominicanos USA received the Jane Kalmus Award for “Commitment to Building a Voting Culture.” They were recognized for registering the highest number of voters—more than 30,000 NYC residents. NYC Votes trained Dominicanos USA’s volunteer task force through its Train-the-Trainer program, and they attended nine naturalization ceremonies. Dominicanos also assisted NYC Votes’ GOTV initiative by conducting phone banking and door-to-door outreach. The award was named after the founding member of the Voter Assistance Commission, Jane Kalmus, who served over 20 years.
- ✦ New York Organ Donor Network (NYOD) [now known as “Live on NY”] received the award for Innovation in Engaging Constituents. In April, NYC Votes and NYOD partnered to commemorate “Donate Life Month” with “Vote Like Your Life Depends On It”, a voter awareness campaign at participating Health and Hospital Corporation facilities. Through its campaigns and outreach, the New York Organ Donor Network registered over 2,800 new voters.
- ✦ Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens (CCBQ) was recognized for “Excellence in Community Outreach by a Nonprofit Organization.” CCBQ enlisted as a lead partner for NVRD and hosted the Brooklyn Voter Jam at Brooklyn Borough Hall.

- ⌘ Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Rho Omega Chapter was recognized for Excellence in Community Outreach by a Volunteer Organization. Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Rho Omega enlisted its members to volunteer and host voter registration drives throughout the year. It enlisted over 20 volunteers for voter drives at Celebrate Brooklyn and HELP USA Woman’s Shelter. It was a co-sponsor of the NVRD Brooklyn Voter Jam. Its members also trained for Advocacy Day and participated in the phone banking for the GOTV efforts.
- ⌘ JP Morgan Chase was recognized for “Excellence in Community Outreach by a Private Company.” JP Morgan Chase hosted four voter registration drives for their employees in two locations, and also served on our Advocacy Day planning committee.
- ⌘ City University of New York (CUNY) was recognized for “Excellence in Community Outreach by a City Agency.” CUNY hosted a get-out-the-vote rally at Baruch College, registering 800 new students in one day. It enlisted 14 campuses to participate in NVRD, and coordinated a voting themed campaign—CUNY Votes—throughout 20 campuses.

Other partners who contributed consistently throughout the year:

Food Bank for New York

Food Bank for New York ran voter registration drives with NYC Votes’ summer street team.

Citi Bank

Citi Bank joined the NYC Votes campaign for the first time this year, hosting an NYC Votes Train-the-Trainer program. It participated in NVRD, shared a voter spotlight on its website, and sent companywide emails to employees reminding and encouraging them to vote on Primary Election Day.

East Kings County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc (EKC)

The sorority continued its long-lasting commitment to NYC Votes with its members volunteering and hosting voter registration drives throughout the year. It sent email blasts to members about voter registration protocols, social media guidelines, and voter registration deadlines. It also shared an NYC Votes voter spotlight on its website and participated in NVRD, registering people at train stations in Brooklyn and hosting an event in East New York.

Local Law 29

Local Law 29 of 2000 (LL29), administered by the CFB, requires 19 city agencies to help register voters and increase public awareness about elections. The VAU worked closely with these agencies to help them meet their mandate, providing trainings, support, and monitoring. Since Mayor Bill de Blasio took office in January 2014, VAU has been in contact with the LL29 agencies and their newly appointed commissioners for a continuation of the work they are mandated to do and to build beyond that work. NYC Votes held two large group information sessions; one for LL29 agencies on June 3, and another for community boards on August 19. Participation in these informational sessions was the highest it has ever been, and results followed. Seven agencies piloted a new multilingual voter spotlight that provided election deadlines in all five languages required by the language provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Nine agencies participated in voter registration drives on NVRD, and several community boards followed up with voter registration drives of their own.

On July 11, 2014, the Mayor issued Directive No. 1, to strengthen agency-based voter registration and implement formal reporting from LL29 agencies on the number of voter registration forms distributed, completed, and transmitted to the Board of Elections. Directive 1 requires LL29 agencies to incorporate the distribution of voter registration forms into their in-person and online interactions with their clientele and provide assistance with completing them upon request.

Working closely with the Mayor's Office of Operations, the CFB designed a voter registration training presentation to train staff in the responsible agencies. This presentation included a web-based component. The training consisted of two parts: (1) a training for coordinators, which covered the operations, public interface, and promotion of agency-based voter registration; and (2) a training for the front-line staff who will be assisting with voter registration. The CFB collaborated with the Mayor's Office of Operations to create materials to support these trainings.

On February 10, 2015, Local Law 63 amended the City Charter to add seven new agencies to the agency-based voter registration law:

- ⌘ Department for the Aging
- ⌘ Department of City Planning
- ⌘ Department of Cultural Affairs
- ⌘ Department of Records and Information Services
- ⌘ Department of Human Resources Administration
- ⌘ Fire Department

Beyond Compliance

LL29-covered agencies frequently go beyond the obligations of the Charter by using their resources in innovative ways. The Taxi and Limousine Commission have hosted Election Day surveys on Taxi-TV for the past three years. The survey was designed to provide a snapshot of New Yorkers' experiences at the polls, and has had more than 20,000 participants. In 2014, the survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

LL29 Agencies held 41 voter registration drives from April through October, registering hundreds of New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs.

Train-the-Trainer Workshops

January 20, 2015

19 attendees from DCAS, DOT, TLC, and Parks

January 21, 2015

16 attendees from DHS, DOHMH, DOC, DOP, DCA, DEP

January 26, 2015

35 attendees from DOF, ACS, SBS

January 29, 2014

Administration for Children's Services

September 18, 2014

Department of Housing Preservation and Development

September 19, 2014

Department of Transportation

September 22, 2014

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Coordinator Training

December 10, 2014

19 attendees from 15 agencies: ACS, DCAS, DCA, DOC, DEP, Finance, DOHMH, DHS, HPD, Parks, DOP, SBS, TLC, DOT, DYCD

Other Government Agency Partners

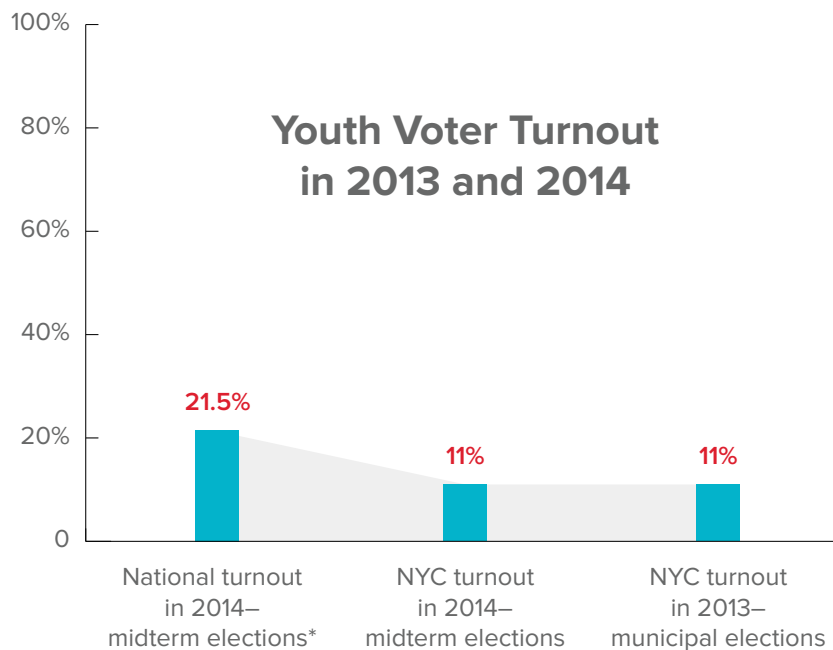
The agencies below are not covered under LL29, but their outstanding efforts in 2014 are still deserving of recognition.

Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) joined NYC Votes in 2012 as a major partner and enlisted for the third year in 2014. They hosted 28 voter registrations drives, enlisted 21 volunteers, and registered 209 New Yorkers.

Department of Homeland Security invited NYC Votes to conduct voter registration drives at 10 naturalization ceremonies. Altogether, NYC Votes registered 1,473 newly naturalized citizens—including one ceremony at which every new citizen was registered.

NEXT GENERATION-ENGAGING YOUTH

NYC Votes extended its nonpartisan message of civic engagement to thousands of youth through city schools and participating organizations.



* Source: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)

With the 2016 presidential elections approaching, NYC Votes’ advocacy efforts focused on proposals that have the potential to improve youth voter registration and turnout. Early voting, pre-registration, and modernizing voter registration are common-sense reforms that can help. Youth leaders and partner groups helped NYC Votes bring this reform message to Albany; NYC Votes continued to engage the greater NYC youth community to share their ideas for reform through social media and other means.

NYC Votes Youth Voting Workshop

The NYC Votes Youth Voting Workshop is an interactive session that engages students in critical discussion about the issues that affect them, their communities, and their futures, and connects these issues with the role of government. Within the workshop, students have the opportunity to register to vote, and are provided the tools they need to analyze the immense power they have as young voters in impacting change and influencing legislation.

Over the past two years NYC Votes' Youth Voter Coordinator has brought this workshop to 50 high schools and colleges across the city, as well as to youth groups at city agencies including the DYCD and Administration for Children's Services. Over the past year, NYC Votes held 30 workshops and registered over 1,000 new voters, 110 poll workers, and 70 organ donors.

Participating high schools:

1. Achievement First Brooklyn High School
2. Brooklyn Technical High School
3. East Side Community High School
4. Felisa Rincon del Gautier Institute for Law and Public Policy
5. Health Opportunities High School
6. John Adams High School
7. High School for Law and Public Service
8. Herbert H. Lehman High School
9. School of the Future
10. St. Joseph High School
11. Queens Vocational and Technical High School
12. William Cullen Bryant High School
13. Frederick Douglass Academy IV Secondary School

NYC Votes' efforts to engage and inspire civic participation among younger New Yorkers, helped build the foundation for New York City's first Student Voter Registration Day in 2015.



Chyann Sapp
Youth Voter Coordinator

Student Voter Registration Day

The first annual Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD) was held this year on March 20, 2015. SVRD was created to build upon the great work already happening in NYC schools to educate students about the importance of voting and civic engagement, and to provide students with the opportunity to register to vote in school.

SVRD was the product of a collaboration between a coalition of City Council members, led by the Council Member Helen Rosenthal, the Campaign Finance Board, the Department of Education, and several partners in the civic non-profit community.

The initiative received the support of 15 City Council members and Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who each nominated high schools from their respective districts to participate in the day. The SVRD coalition secured 25 schools across the city to participate, and registered over 2,000 students to vote. NYC Votes worked in partnership with 21 organizations, agencies, and unions that volunteered staff members to facilitate the NYC Votes Youth Voting Workshop at the participating schools.



Participating Council Members and Schools

1. Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito: Park East High School
2. Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo: Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports, New Explorers High School, Bronx Leadership Academy High School
3. Council Member Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.: Boys and Girls High School
4. Council Member Laurie Cumbo: Brooklyn Technical High School
5. Council Member Daniel Dromm: Newtown High School
6. Council Member Vincent Ignizio: Tottenville High School, St. Joseph by-the-Sea High School
7. Council Member Ben Kallos: Eleanor Roosevelt High School
8. Council Member Mark Levine: Community Health Academy of the Heights, Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts
9. Council Member Steven Matteo: Susan E. Wagner High School



NYC Votes coordinator at St. Joseph-by-the-Sea High School in Staten Island

10. Council Member Daneek Miller:
Humanities & Arts Magnet High School
11. Council Member Antonio Reynoso:
High School for Enterprise, Business and
Technology; Progress High School for
Professional Careers; School for Legal
Studies
12. Council Member Donovan Richards, Jr.:
George Washington Carver High School
for the Sciences
13. Council Member Helen Rosenthal: Frank
McCourt High School, Global Learning
Collaborative, Innovation Diploma Plus
High School
14. Council Member Ritchie J. Torres:
Belmont Preparatory High School,
KAPPA International High School
15. Council Member James Vacca: CUNY Prep, Herbert H. Lehman High School



Council Member Rosenthal at Frank McCourt High School in Manhattan

New York City Youth Poet Laureate Program

The NYC Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) program, now in its 7th year, is a voting-themed program designed to energize NYC teens through spoken word poetry. Through outreach and partnerships with Lincoln Center and Urban Word NYC, the program reaches over 20,000 NYC teens each year.

Crystal Valentine won the competition to become the 2015 YPL after reciting her featured poem, "[A Voter's Problem](#)." A Bronx native, Crystal is studying creative writing and adolescent mental health at New York University. She is a member of the 2014 Urban Word slam team, as well as NYU's current Grand Slam champion.

*"When we stay away from the polls,
our issues are not heard. If we raise our
voices in protest, but fail to speak out on
Election Day, we'll never see the changes
we need in our communities."*

–Crystal Valentine

Crystal's tenure as YPL began January 2015. She has already used her platform to project a strong message to her peers about the need to be involved in civic life. Crystal penned an [op-ed on youth voting for the Daily News](#), published on Martin Luther King Day. She was invited to appear as a guest and perform her poem in a number of high profile settings:

- ✦ WNYC's MLK Day celebration at the Apollo Theater
- ✦ [MSNBC's Melissa Harris-Perry Show](#)
- ✦ [WNYC's Brian Lehrer radio show](#) and Brian Lehrer Live on CUNY TV



Crystal Valentine appears on the Melissa Harris-Perry Show

The 2014 YPL, Ramya Ramana, a junior at St. John's University, was invited during her tenure to participate in over 80 performances, interviews, and appearances across the city and the nation.

Ramya's performance highlights included:

- ✦ Brooklyn Academy of Music
- ✦ Celebrate Brooklyn
- ✦ Ford Foundation benefit
- ✦ Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
- ✦ Tribeca Film Festival

EDUCATION AND TOOLS

The NYC Voter Guide

The CFB is mandated to produce voter guides covering municipal candidates and local ballot proposals. Since 2012, the CFB has gone beyond this requirement and published online Guides covering presidential, congressional, and statewide primaries and general elections. While the CFB does not print and mail these guides to all registered New York City voters (as they do for municipal elections), these online Guides provide similar resources for voters, including campaign website and social media links, as well as general voting information. In 2012 these Guides were published in English only.

For the 2014 elections, the CFB focused on enhancing these online Guides to ensure all voters could quickly access the CFB's nonpartisan information about the candidates and issues on the ballot. In addition to English, the CFB provided the general voting information and election landing pages in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Bengali—the languages requiring translation support according to the Voting Rights Act. For the general election, the CFB also provided translations of its extensive coverage of the three statewide ballot proposals.

The CFB developed a “find your candidate” function to allow voters to rapidly drill down to information about candidates appearing on his or her own ballot. To help make casting an informed ballot easier, the “find your candidate” results page also provided users with election district and other voting information.

These improvements were a hit with voters: The 2014 online Guides received twice as many visitors compared to 2012. As the CFB looks forward to the 2016 presidential election, it will continue working to expand awareness of its online Guides and to enhance the experience for those who use them.

NYCVotes.org (mobile application)

NYC Votes relaunched its mobile web application to help voters connect with vital election information when they are on-the-go. Voters could use the app to find their poll site and learn about the candidates on their ballot. NYC Votes relaunched the application in late October, just in time for the general election. More than 1,000 voters accessed voting information using this tool.

NY1 Debates

NYC Votes partnered with NY1 for a live taping of a debate between the candidates for Congress in District 13 at Lehman College in the Bronx on Wednesday, June 11, 2014. NYC Votes coordinated and managed outreach, promotion, press, and audience development and logistics to bring this important discussion between the candidates to the public.

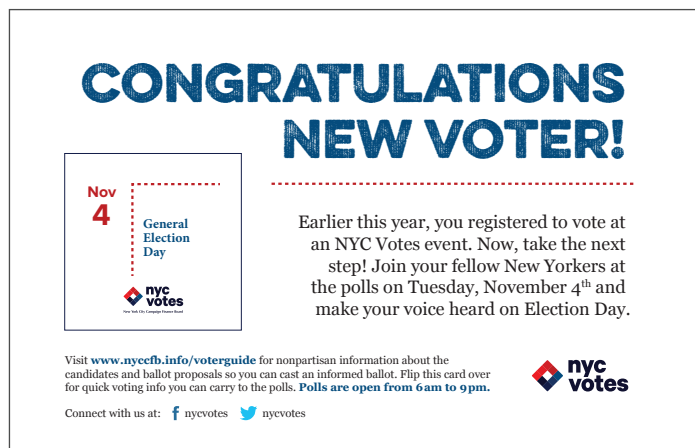
GETTING OUT THE VOTE

GOTV Campaign

For the first time, NYC Votes and its partners conducted a get-out-the-vote campaign aimed at newly registered voters, using direct mail, email, phone banking, and a door-to-door canvassing campaign to reach their desired audience.

Direct Mail

NYC Votes sent a “Thank you for registering with NYC Votes” postcard to newly registered voters reminding them about the November 4th election and where they could find more information about the candidates and ballot proposals. These postcards were customized with each voter’s election districts and polling site and timed to arrive during the week before the election.



Phone Calls

The CFB hosted a phone bank at its offices on November 3rd, the day before the election. Manned by CFB staff and volunteers from partner organizations, the phone bank reached 566 voters who were newly registered by NYC Votes.

Social Media

- ✦ NYC Votes sent GOTV social media guidelines to partners, encouraging them to send voter spotlights and Election Day reminders to their contact network.
- ✦ NYC Votes created Twitter and Facebook advertisements aimed at New York City voters, encouraging them to engage their friends and promote the GOTV message.

Email Reminders

NYC Votes emailed a GOTV thank you message to everyone who filled out a registration form with them and reminded them to vote.

Canvassing

NYC Votes worked with Dominicanos USA and other partners to conduct door-to-door canvassing and other GOTV outreach.

“I Voted” Stickers

NYC Votes carried on the tradition of providing an “I Voted” sticker to everyone in New York City who cast a ballot at their poll site during each of the elections held in 2014. With the generous cooperation of the New York City Board of Elections, more than 1.5 million stickers were delivered to and distributed at poll sites across the city.

Voter turnout results from the GOTV campaign

An analysis conducted by the CFB shows clearly that the NYC Votes GOTV drive had an impact.

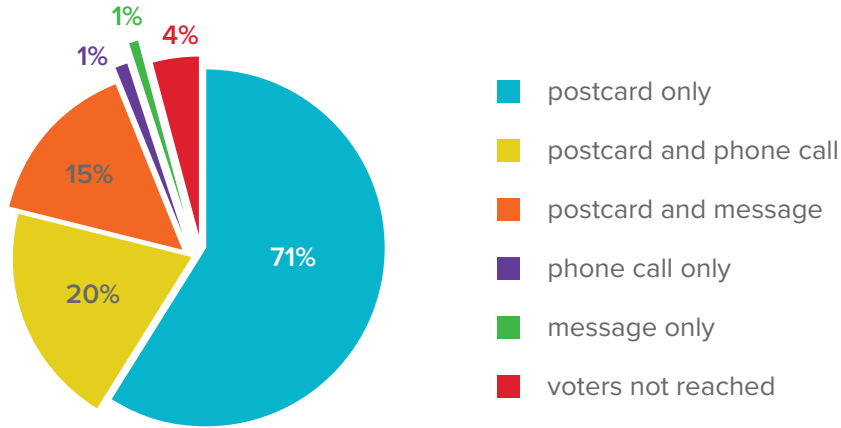
Generally, turnout was low; only one-fourth of registered voters turned out to cast a ballot in the 2014 general election. The participation rate among newly-registered voters was even lower. During 2014, 121,077 new voters were added to the voter rolls in time for the general election; only **18.9%** of the new registrants cast a ballot. Among the 32,906 New Yorkers who registered at the very last minute—on September 1st or later—turnout was slightly higher; **24.3%** made it out to vote on November 4th.

NYC Votes improved on those numbers. Of the 1,006 voters who were added to the voter rolls in time for the election, NYC Votes made at least one point of contact with 969 of them: 949 received a postcard, 214 received a phone call, and 158 received a voicemail message. Of this voter sample, 35% had two points of contact (204 voters received a postcard and a live call; 148 voters received a postcard and a voicemail.)

New voters who were contacted by NYC Votes voted at a higher rate than the overall voter population. Among the NYC Votes registrants, 27.5% turned out to vote.

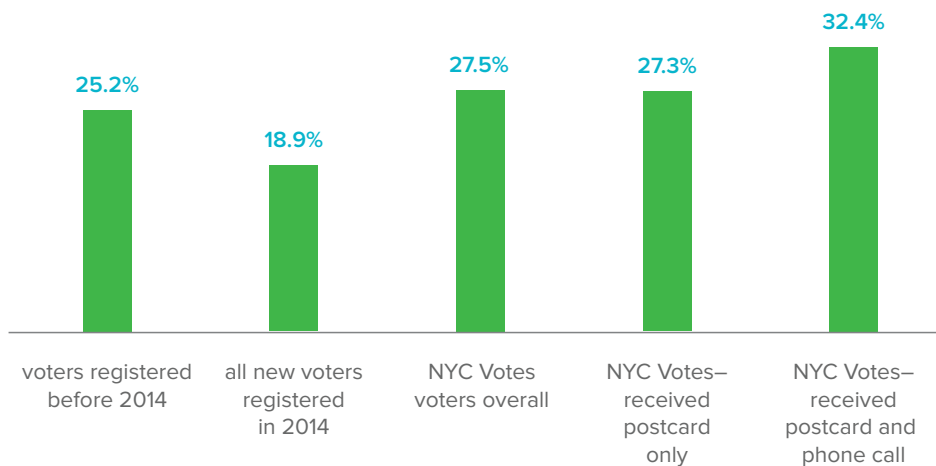
- ✦ Of the 597 voters who received a postcard but not a phone call, **27.3% voted**.
- ✦ An additional 204 voters received a postcard *and* spoke to a volunteer on the phone. Of those, **32.4% voted**.

Method of Voter Contact for NYC Votes Registrants



For comparison, the turnout rate among voters who also voted in the last presidential election in 2012—so-called “prime voters,” most likely to receive appeals from the candidates and return to the polls—was 39.5%. With two points of contact during the crucial last week before the election, NYC Votes’ GOTV effort helped encourage new voters to become reliable voters.

2014 Turnout Rate Among Voter Types



These encouraging outcomes, even with a limited sample, can be used to inform future GOTV efforts.

In addition to the phone calls and the postcards, NYC Votes' social media, email, and canvassing efforts further encouraged voters to make their voices heard at the polls. The stickers, distributed to people who already voted, promoted civic pride and encouraged voters' friends and peers to participate as well.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the extensive efforts of NYC Votes and its partners, overall voter turnout in NYC remains incredibly low. Fifty years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, New York needs to continue reimagining its voting system to meet the needs of all voters and address this turnout crisis.

First, New York needs a voting system that is accessible, responsive, and user-focused. It needs to harness the power of technology to register voters proactively, and keep their registrations current, so that no voter is prevented from casting a ballot due to a problem with their registration.

New York must move towards a more flexible model of election administration that accounts for the demands on voters' lives by expanding its elections beyond the first Tuesday in November. To do this, the state can implement in-person early voting and loosen restrictions on absentee and mail voting.

State election law must evolve to meet the realities of the modern world. With current technology, voters shouldn't have to be tethered to a specific poll site; a modern model would provide voters the opportunity to cast a ballot at a voting center most convenient to them. Modern design principles can help administrators build a better ballot that will leave voters feeling confident their votes were counted.

Modernize voter registration

New York remains stuck with a 19th century voting system that relies on pen and paper. Voters must fill out paper registration forms and put them in the mail to the Board of Elections. After they are received, BOE employees manually enter information from each form into the voter database. Each step in this process introduces the possibility of data entry errors or lost forms.

In the 21st century, it is inexcusable for any New Yorker to be denied their right to vote due to a typo or a misplaced registration form. With current technology, we can register new voters and keep their registrations up to date by seamlessly integrating voter registration into everyday life. This will help to bring new voters into our democratic process, and ensure nobody drops off the rolls when they move. This is a critical first step in ensuring that everyone can cast a ballot that counts and make their voice heard. The Voter Empowerment Act, sponsored by Senator Michael Gianaris and Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh, would provide for the key components of a fully modernized voter registration system for the 21st century, discussed in greater detail below.

Expand online registration

New York currently has online registration for anyone with a state driver's license or state-issued ID. This is a positive first step, but the current system excludes eligible voters who do not interact with the DMV. Pending legislation sponsored by Senator David Carlucci and Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh would require the state Board of Elections to provide online voter registration through their website. Voters who lack a DMV-issued identification number could supply a Social Security number instead, ensuring that everyone who is eligible can register online.

Implement electronic registration

New York can modernize voter registration even further by implementing electronic registration at government agencies. This way, each eligible voter can have the choice to register to vote whenever they do business with a state agency such as the DMV or a veterans' benefits office. 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.

Enact portable registration

Many voters fail to realize they have to update their registrations when they change their address. The Board of Elections can use the information from the Postal Service's National Change of Address System to update a voter's registration when that voter moves, guaranteeing that no voter will needlessly fall off the voter rolls.

Allow same-day registration

Even with a more fully modernized system of voter registration, there may be instances where voters who should be on the voting rolls do not appear. Enacting same day registration would be a safeguard to ensure that nobody will lose their right to vote if they show up at the polls only to find that their name is not on the voter list. 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

Allowing voters to pre-register early would help encourage young people to participate more fully in our democracy. 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.

Transition to electronic poll books

Electronic poll books are a necessary element for a modernized registration system. These poll books have the entire voter file on a laptop or tablet, which allows poll workers to check voters in electronically and direct them to the correct polling location if they appear at the wrong place. Transitioning away from the use of printed poll books would allow election officials more flexibility with entering new voter registrations when they spike just before each election. They would also provide for a fully computerized voter registration database, and election officials could update voting records and correct for errors in real time.

Implement early voting

In the 2012 election, nearly one in three voters nationwide cast their ballot before Election Day. Thirty-five states allow some form of early voting. In this area, New York lags woefully behind. Early voting has a number of benefits. It allows voters more flexibility and convenience in casting their ballots, ensuring that voters have more time to get to the polls. It also relieves pressure on election administrators, who are overburdened with having to set up and administer poll sites, tabulate votes, and certify results in a one-day time period.

Enact in-person early voting

A two-week voting period including the Saturday and Sunday before Election Day would ensure that voters have ample time to cast a ballot and correct for any errors. A well-designed early voting system will also establish minimum numbers of polling locations and voting hours for populous cities while also allowing flexibility for upstate and rural counties with lower numbers of registered voters and fewer resources. As of press date, there are multiple early voting bills pending in Albany.

Expansion of absentee and mail voting

Under the current system, New Yorkers need a valid excuse to cast an absentee ballot. Changing state law to remove this requirement and allow for no-excuse absentee voting would allow voters greater flexibility in how to cast their votes and allow them to plan ahead appropriately.

Improve the voting experience

During the last few elections, New York City voters have learned to cast their ballots on scanning machines. At the same time, too many facets of the Election Day experience feel old-fashioned and outdated. Voters still must report to their local school, wait in line, and cast their vote on a confusing ballot. Improving the democratic experience for voters will provide clarity, boost confidence in the election process, and ensure they return to vote in the future.

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. Several states have begun to abandon the precinct system of polling place designation in favor of vote centers. With vote centers, voters can appear at any location that is most convenient to them—whether it is near their home, workplace, or where they need to run errands. Electronic poll books plugged into a computerized voter database allow poll workers to mark who has voted, and that information is updated either in real time or at the end of each day. Technology to allow on-demand printing of ballots would allow a voter to get their ballot even if they were in a different neighborhood or borough.

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.

CONCLUSION

While these issues remain unaddressed in state government, NYC Votes continues to engage and empower New York City voters to make their voice heard. Over the past year, NYC Votes has increased its capacity to inform, educate, and encourage meaningful participation in the democratic process.

Change is always incremental. NYC Votes continues seeking opportunities to engage the public in shaping their destiny. Fifty years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, NYC Votes is hard at work building pathways to the ballot that are more secure, more accessible, and more available to more New Yorkers. By making the voting process easier for all, New York can foster an active, engaged electorate that works for all its citizens.

Looking for more information?

Visit www.nycvotefb.info/public/VRC/VAAC-report/report-2014.aspx for a breakdown of how New Yorkers voted in the 2014 elections, borough by borough, district by district.

To explore partnerships with our NYC Votes campaign, contact the Voter Assistance Unit by email at nycvotes@nycvotefb.info or by telephone at (212) 409-1800.

