# How Federal Agencies Can Serve their Stakeholders through Voter Registration Services

## Demos & ACLU

# Why Provide Voter Registration Through Federal Agencies?

Each day, federal agencies and and their partners provide programs and services to millions of Americans.
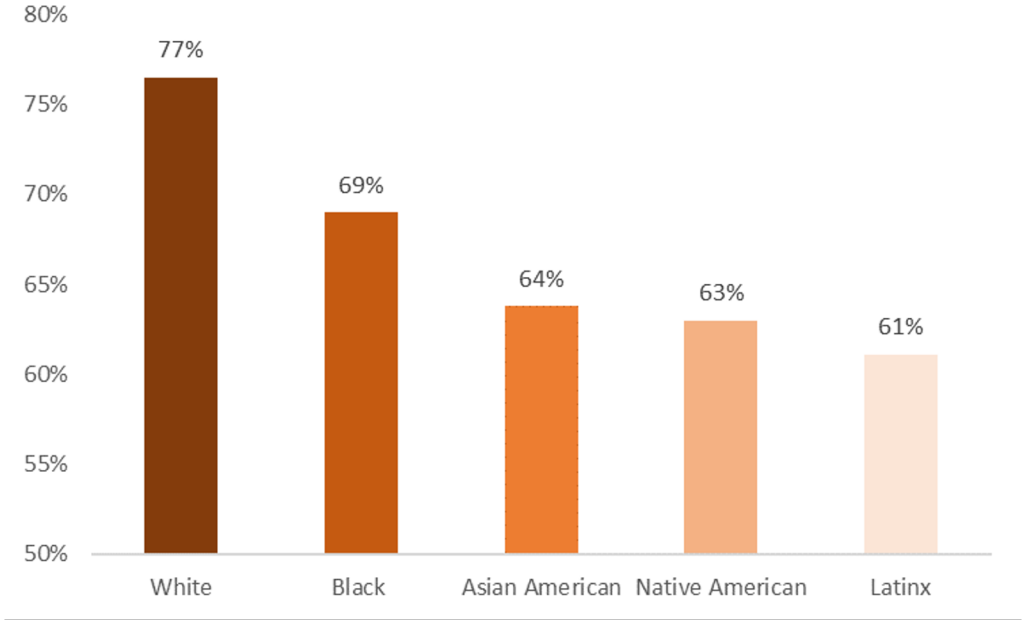
Many of these Americans are not registered to vote.

Low-income Americans and Americans of color are less likely to be registered to vote than higher-income Americans and white Americans.
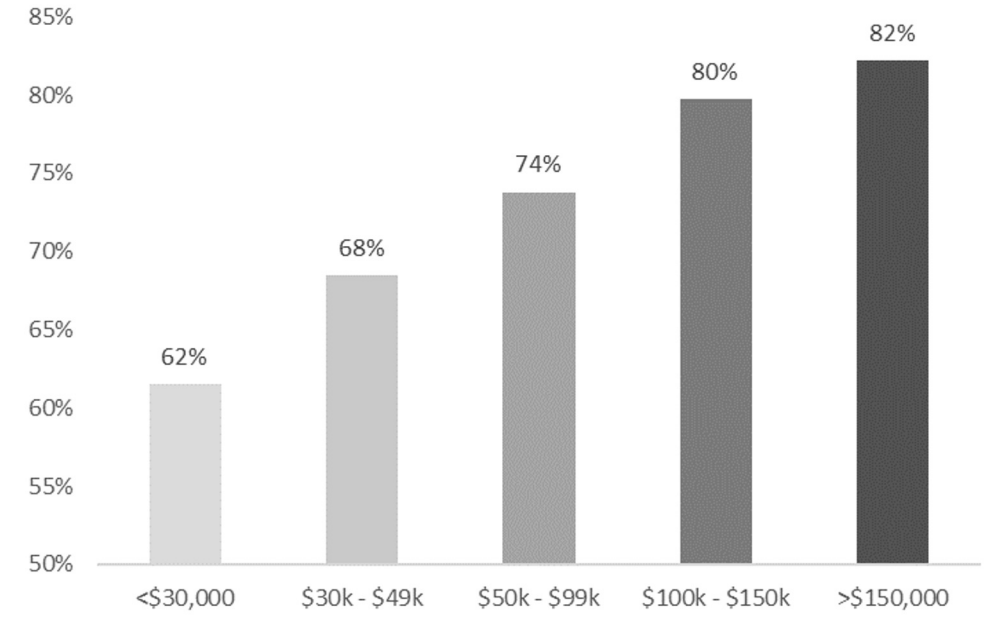
# 63 million

## Eligible Americans Unregistered to Vote

*Census Bureau, November 2020*

# Registration Rates by Race & Ethnicity



Census Bureau, 2020

Effective federal agency registration can help millions of additional eligible Americans become registered to vote and reduce income- and race-based registration disparities to ensure that all eligible Americans are able to participate in the democratic process.

Federal agency voter registration can be particularly impactful in programs that provide services, benefits, and public assistance.

# Potential Impact of Federal Agency Voter Registration

- **2.6M American Indians & Alaska Natives** served by federally & tribally-run Indian Health Service facilities

- **17.7M students** submitting FAFSA forms

- **3M mostly low-income Americans** served by the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program

- **800k+ new citizens** at USCIS naturalization ceremonies

- **8M+ Americans** applying for healthcare assistance through healthcare.gov, the vast majority whom are low-income

# How to Provide Effective Voter Registration Through Federal Agencies

# Many Types of Programs and Services Can Incorporate Voter Registration Opportunities

**Online application portals, i.e.**

- Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Applications for qualified health plans on healthcare.gov (through HHS)

**Programs run by 3rd parties (state / local gov'ts or non-profit orgs), i.e.**

- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs run by qualified non-profits with funding from the Department of the Treasury

**Direct interactions with the public, i.e.**

- Naturalization Ceremonies conducted by the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services

**Programs across agencies that serve Native American communities, i.e.**

- Indian Health Services facilities (part of HHS)
- Programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs & Bureau of Indian Education (at DOI)

# Elements of Successful Agency Registration

- Incorporate Effective and Accessible Voter Registration Services into **all Relevant Agency Transactions**

- Establish a System for **Collecting and Transmitting Completed Voter Registration Forms**

- Appoint a **Voter Registration Coordinator**

- Provide Robust, **Regular Training for Staff**

- **Collect and Report Data** on Agency Registrations

- **Obtain Guidance** from State and Local Election Officials and Community Groups

- Provide Accessible **Voter Education Materials**

# Present the Opportunity as Part of an Existing Transaction

- **Ensure all voter registration services are available** for transactions conducted in-person, online, by mail, by telephone, or by any other means.

- **Ask the applicant**, in writing, if they want to register to vote or update their voter registration.

- **Inform applicant in writing of their rights** to register, to privacy while registering, and to choose a political party.

- **Provide a voter registration application** to clients who want to register to vote.

- **Provide assistance** in completing the voter registration form.

- Provide voter registration **materials in all the languages available** for your own services, and in a manner **accessible to clients with disabilities**.

# Collecting & Transmitting Completed Voter Reg. Forms

- Maintain all completed voter registration forms in a **secure place**, until they are transmitted to election officials

- Determine **how completed forms will be transmitted** to election officials (by mail, in person, etc.)

  - Note that the National Mail Voter Registration Form provides an address for delivery of completed voter registration forms in almost all states

- **Designate and train** the person(s) responsible for transmitting completed forms to election officials

- Establish a **clear timeframe** for transmitting forms, so that all eligible voters are registered to vote by any applicable state registration deadlines.

  - The NVRA provides a good model: transmission within 10 days generally, or within 5 days as voter registration deadlines approach.

# Appoint a Voter Registration Coordinator

The coordinator for each applicable program, which need not be a full-time job, should:

- **Train all agency staff** engaged in providing voter registration services

- Maintain **voter registration supplies** (such as blank voter registration forms)

- **Monitor** voter registration services offered

- Ensure completed applications are **transmitted** to election officials

- **Collect and make public data** on voter registrations

# Provide Robust, Regular Training for Staff

- The **importance of effective voter registration services** at your agency

- **How to integrate** voter registration services into specific programs / transactions

- General information about **who is eligible** to register to vote in the state,

- The **fields** in the voter registration application, and how to ensure that the voter registration application is **completely filled out and legible**

- Answers to **commonly asked questions** about filling out the voter registration application and about voting

- Information on **how clients can contact state or local election officials** if they have additional questions about voter registration and voting

- The strict **prohibition on partisanship** and the strict rules around **confidentiality**

# Provide Accessible Voter Education Materials

- Information on **how** to vote and **where** to find one's voting location

- **Palm cards** with election dates and voting options

- Information on **election protection hotlines**

- Information about the **process for voting** in that state

- Voter education **materials in all the languages available** for your own services, and in a manner **accessible to clients with disabilities**.

# Collect & Report Data on Agency Registrations

- Set up a system to **track the number of voter registration applications** generated at the agency by program and location, which can serve to monitor the provision and quality of registration services, and can help measure the impact of integrating voter registration into an agency's programs and services.

- Only track and save **aggregate numbers** of total voter registration applications. Do not retain any personal identifying information about individuals who apply to register to vote.

# Obtain Guidance from State & Local Election Officials & Community Groups

- **Consult** with the Election Assistance Commission and/or state and local election officials about how best to provide voter registration services and to ensure registration applications are received by the appropriate election authorities.

- Consider contacting **representatives of the communities** your agency serves as you develop voter registration procedures, especially in thinking about language access

# Additional Benefits of Effective Agency Registration

In addition to helping millions of eligible, unregistered voters participate in the democratic process, effective agency registration that follows the best practices described above offers:

- Protections against registration of ineligible voters

- Protections for clients' rights and confidentiality
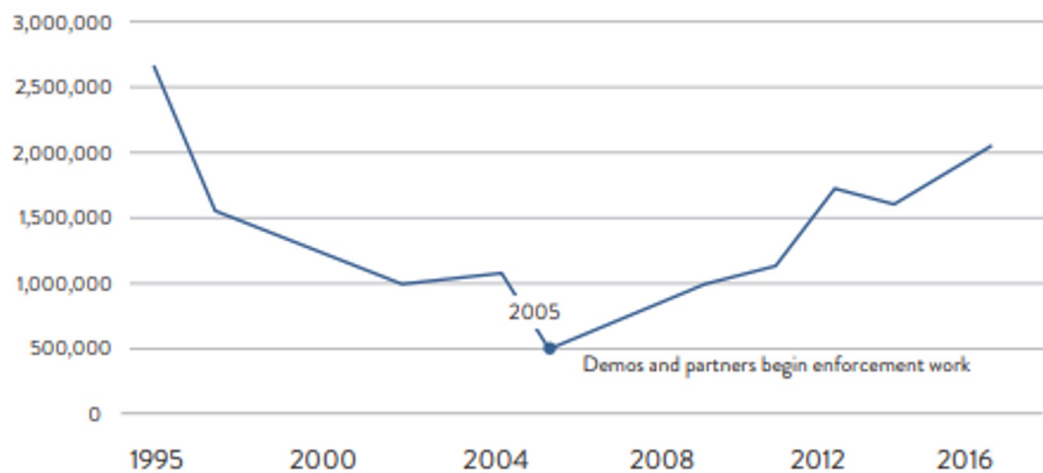
- Prevention of any appearance of partisanship

# How Do We Know Robust Agency-Based Voter Registration Works?

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) went into effect in 1995, requiring state public assistance agencies and DMVs to follow specific voter registration practices.

It was immediately effective--yet as compliance with its specific requirements diminished over time, voter registration applications at public assistance agencies dropped dramatically.

In 2006, voting rights advocates began to focus on enforcement through advocacy and litigation, demonstrating that adherence to best practices produces concrete results.

TOTAL VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FROM PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AGENCIES, 1995 -2016
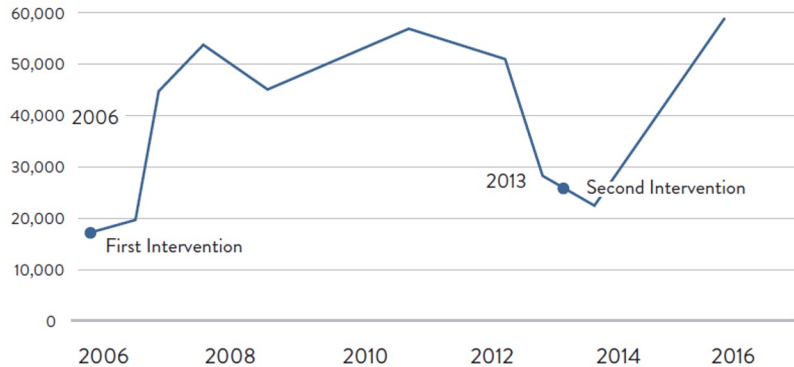
*EAVS, 2007 - 2016*

# 3+ Million

Additional voter registration applications generated between 2006-2018 thanks to a return to effective, NVRA-compliant voter registration services at state public assistance agencies (*Demos, 2018*)
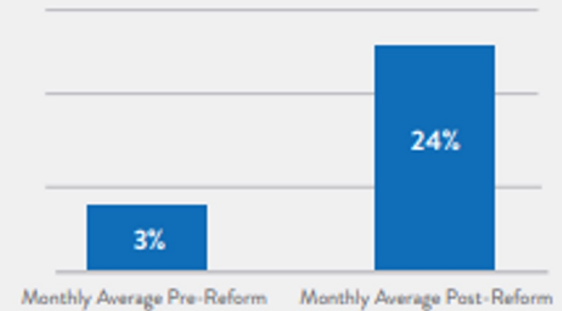
**Tens of millions more** register to vote every year at state departments of motor vehicles (DMVs), another site of effective agency registration (*EAVS, 2018*)

# Improvements in Public Agency Registration with Effective Registration Procedures



SECTION 7 REGISTRATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

2006 — First Intervention
2013 — Second Intervention



Registration Rates at Ohio Public Assistance Agencies Pre- and Post Enforcement

3% — Monthly Average Pre-Reform
24% — Monthly Average Post-Reform

816,500 new voter registration at Ohio Public assistance agencies

# Contact Us

for more materials, and to talk about whether and how voter registration can be integrated at your agency

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When done well, providing voter registration through federal agencies will be a convenient and effective way to serve the public and potentially add millions of eligible, previously unregistered voters to our voting rolls, helping to reduce voter participation disparities by race and income.