



## ***PHENND Training Series***

### ***Why Should I Vote?***

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Overview:	This workshop is designed for college students and other young people to help them think about the reasons one should vote. The workshop is specific to the U.S. and assumes that the participants are eligible to vote. The workshop is interactive and covers the history of the vote, reasons not to vote, and specifics of voting procedures.
Category:	Political Action, Civic Engagement
Level:	All
Type:	Structured activity suitable for an uninterrupted workshop format. Works best in a small to medium group settings (under 20-30 people).

#### **Goals of this Guide:**

At the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- Describe how various groups obtained the right to vote in the U.S.
- Persuade their peers to vote
- Understand the policies and procedures around voting in the U.S.

#### **Materials:**

- Post-it notes
- Enough pens for all participants
- Poster-size paper

#### **How to Prepare:**

Look over this workshop and make sure you understand what you are supposed to do. Prepare visuals (voting timeline on chart paper).

#### **Brief Outline:**

This 2-hour workshop has the following parts:

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1) Icebreaker & Introductions          | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 2) Discussion of Voting Rights history | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 3) Why Don't We Vote?                  | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 4) The Issues                          | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 5) How to Vote                         | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 6) Convince me to vote!                | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 7) Wrap-up                             | suggested time 10 minutes |

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### **Part 1) Icebreaker & Introductions**

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Facilitators should introduce themselves and give a basic overview of the workshop: History, low voter turnout in the younger population, the issues, and how to vote. Congratulate the group for participating and emphasize how important it is for EVERYONE to know their voting rights and participate ACTIVELY in this process.

As a warm-up, play the “Me Too” game—it’s easy. Facilitators will shout out a positive statement, like, “I like to dance!”—everyone in the room who also likes to dance should stand up and shout “me too!” Of course you’ll need to tell them that ahead of time. The facilitators should make the first few statements that will segue to the subject of voting. “I like to learn new things!” “I like senators who care about my interests!” Make up some of your own that you think your group will respond to.

Break your participants into four smaller groups. Have them introduce themselves and say why they’re here. Allow 5-10 minutes for this and then reconvene to review some voting history.

### **Part 2) Discussion of Voting Rights history**

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Briefly present the following information, using visual aides and handouts (see below).

#### **WHERE DID WE GET THE RIGHT TO VOTE?**

History

Review the following changes in voting rights. With each, ask students to explain the context of this change – why did this change happen? Who fought for it? Who fought against it? Refer to Constitutional Amendments Related to Voting Rights handout (see page 9)

1. Constitution grants states the authority to set election guidelines. All states allow only white men with property the right to vote.
2. Black men win the right to vote in 1870.

3. Women win the right to vote in 1920.
4. 18-20 year olds win the right to vote in 1971.
5. Who can't vote or who has diminished voting status? (do a brainstorm and fill in important missing responses) – see additional fact sheets for each answer below.
  - a. Non-citizens with exceptions
  - b. Felons
  - c. Residents of the District of Columbia
  - d. Puerto Ricans
  - e. Other residents of U.S. territories
  - f. youth

## **VOTER TURNOUT**

The U.S. has some of the lowest voter turnout of any industrialized democracy. See <http://www.fairvote.org/turnout/intturnout.htm>

Over the last ten years (1991-2001), the following countries had the following voter turnout:

Australia – 83%  
Canada – 60%  
Denmark – 83%  
Italy – 90 %  
U.S. – 45%

Only Switzerland (38%) and Guatemala (24%) had lower turnout for the same period of time.

Have students review turnout by age (see below). Discuss the reasons for low turnout among young people.

### **Part 3) Why don't we vote?**

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Return to smaller groups. Distribute a large sheet of paper and a marker to each group; designate a scribe and a spokesperson for each group.

Workshop leader will ask two questions and ask each group to discuss and list their answers. The leader should allow 5-7 minutes for each question.

1. Why *don't* we vote?

Wait until each group has written out 5-6 reasons. Then, ask:

## 2. Why *should* we vote?

Then, reconvene and invite group spokespeople to stand before the larger group. Reiterate the first question and have each spokesperson share his or her group's answers. Give a brief analysis of peoples' responses, emphasizing those that reference themes that will be discussed later in the workshop.

Establish a few points of focus in this discussion beforehand; if they are not raised by participants, be sure to talk about them. Some good examples would be:

- Every vote *does* count. If politicians see that the student voting population is turning out heavily on Election Day, they will *have* to pay attention to our concerns. You may not be into politics, but politicians are into you. And due to the peculiarities of the Electoral College, politicians are especially into you if you live in a "swing state" like Pennsylvania. Bush has visited Pennsylvania more than any other state over the course of his term. Kerry has also made an exceptionally high number of visits to Pennsylvania.
- As Americans, voting is our right. As citizens of the world, voting is our privilege. The actions of our government directly affect people in countries all over the world. If not for ourselves, we owe it to *the rest of the world* to vote for strong, visionary leaders.
- If you care about democracy, social justice, foreign policy, the armed forces, education, healthcare, social security, the environment, or pretty much anything else, you owe it to yourself, and everyone else who cares, to vote.

## Part 4) The Issues

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Ask the group: how do the **issues** of a campaign affect us?

On flip chart paper, divide a sheet in half by drawing a line vertically down the middle. On the left, brainstorm a list of the issues that seem to matter in this election. (ex. the War in Iraq, the economy, stem cell research, the candidates' war records) Then do a list of issues that your participants care about. How closely do these lists match? Why or why not?

Conventional wisdom is that young people often don't vote because they don't feel that the candidates speak to "their issues." How accurate is this statement?

Consider these issues:

Education is EXPENSIVE. What if you could elect a congressperson or president who is serious about lowering the cost of education, making expanding educational grants and student aid, helping students get out of debt?

Healthcare is EXPENSIVE. Do you have health insurance? If not, wouldn't you vote for a candidate who made it possible? If you do have healthcare, is it affordable? As a student, you may still qualify for coverage under your family's plan, but sooner or later, you will have to start paying for healthcare.

Have you completed any military service? Do you know anyone who is performing U.S. military service in Iraq or anywhere else in the world? How does the War affect your likelihood of voting for various candidates?

### **Part 5) How to vote**

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Now that everyone knows *why* they should vote, teach them *how* to vote. There isn't much to it, but voting laws differ from state to state, so be sure to check your state website (voting information is usually found on the Secretary of State website—the PHENND website offers a list of web addresses for each state in pdf form). See [http://www.phennd.org/index.php/initiatives/initiatives/urban\\_voters\\_campaign/](http://www.phennd.org/index.php/initiatives/initiatives/urban_voters_campaign/)

The model used here is for Pennsylvania. All dates are specific to the elections that will take place on November 4, 2008. Laws are all in effect as of this date. For voting laws in any other state, check the website for your secretary of state

## **THE GENERAL ELECTION IS ON NOVEMBER 4, 2008**

**In order to vote in the upcoming election in Pennsylvania, you must:**

- Be a U.S. citizen
- Be at least 18 years old on or before the day of the general election.
- Send your properly completed voter registration form to the Pennsylvania Secretary of State no later than October 6, 2008.

ALL students who live on campus during the academic year may register in or change their registration to the precinct on or closest to campus.

Tell participants where the nearest polling place is, giving them directions if necessary. Pennsylvania polls open at 7AM and close at 8PM. Contact your County Board of Elections (<http://www.votespa.com/CountyContactsandWebSites/tabid/89/language/en-US/Default.aspx>) regarding voting eligibility and polling places. If you live in the City of Philadelphia, you can also visit <http://seventy.org/cac> to find your polling place.

The federal election reform bill, the "Help America Vote Act of 2002,"

(<http://www.fec.gov/hava/hava.htm>) also known as “HAVA,” makes the following identification requirements on anyone who has registered by mail, or is voting for the first time. You must provide photo I.D. when voting for the first time, unless you provide your current driver’s license number or the last four digits of your social security number on the registration form. The identification information is either:

- Valid photo I.D. or a copy of a such
- A copy of a utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document showing name and address

For more information on HAVA, visit Demos (<http://www.demos.org>) or National Campaign for Fair Elections (<http://nationalcampaignforfairelections.org>)

### **Voting Absentee?**

In any state, you are eligible to vote absentee as a student. Some state sources spell this out, others do not. Regardless, the most important rule is that you are allowed to vote absentee if you know that you will be absent from your county or district on Election Day. State requirements for obtaining an absentee ballot vary—be sure to check the Project Vote Smart website ([www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)) for absentee info on each state. If you are in Pennsylvania or New Jersey, you can also download PHENND’s pdf files that contain all necessary information on voting absentee in either of these states.

Facilitators should use this time to talk about upcoming events on or near campus where candidates or campaign representatives will be speaking. Emphasize the value of learning about the candidates for local elections, and recommend some ways that students can find out more about those candidates and their interests.

### **Part 6) Convince me to vote!**

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Let’s do some role plays! Invite a pair of group members to the front. In each role play, one person will try to convince the other to vote. Prepare note cards with the following arguments *against* voting that the other person will refute. Feel free to offer brief commentary between role plays if you think that the pair has addressed a particularly important topic, or if they’ve brought the discussion into new territory.

- I’m not voting because politics doesn’t affect me because I’m rich. I have tons of money because: A. My family gives it to me. B. I still sell beanie babies on e-bay. C. I got a huge settlement when so-and-so hit me with his SUV (choose one.)
- I don’t like any of the candidates. The only person I would vote for is (Ani DiFranco, J. Lo, David Sedaris, Chris Rock, anyone else.)

- Politicians don't address the issues that I care about, like (any of the issues we've discussed.)
- My vote doesn't count; I'm only one person.
- The government controls the outcome of every election, so it won't matter who I vote for.
- It's too complicated. I have to fill out some form that I don't know where to get and I'm not sure who to vote for. I'd rather just not bother with the whole thing.

### **Part 7) Wrap-up**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Congratulations! You've finished your workshop. Be prepared to distribute info on absentee voting, voting laws in your state, and contact information for all county elections boards in your state as well as directions to the polling place(s) for your college (it may be on or off campus).

Another good way to keep in touch with students is to get their email addresses and send them reminders and information on scheduled voter education/motivation events. Also, see if you can make a page on your college website that is devoted to voting laws, issues, registration, and then spread the word, encouraging people to check it out.

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This guide was developed by Ellery Biddle, Summer Intern, in 2004 and was updated in 2008 by Hillary Aisenstein, Director, of the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND). Please feel free to distribute it widely and use it in any setting you feel is appropriate. However, if you do, please contact PHENND with any feedback. 215-573-2379 or [hillarya@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:hillarya@pobox.upenn.edu).

## Constitutional Amendments Related to Voting Rights

### **Amendment XV**

*Passed by Congress February 26, 1869. Ratified February 3, 1870.*

#### **Section 1.**

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

### **Amendment XIX**

*Passed by Congress June 4, 1919. Ratified August 18, 1920.*

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

### **Amendment XXIV**

*Passed by Congress August 27, 1962. Ratified January 23, 1964.*

#### **Section 1.**

The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay poll tax or other tax.

### **Amendment XXVI**

*Passed by Congress March 23, 1971. Ratified July 1, 1971.*

**Note:** The Fourteenth Amendment, section 2, of the Constitution was modified by section 1 of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment.

#### **Section 1.**

The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

See *U.S. Constitution*

([http://www.constitutioncenter.org/ncc\\_edu\\_Text\\_of\\_the\\_Constitution.aspx](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/ncc_edu_Text_of_the_Constitution.aspx))

**Voter Registration and Turnout in Federal Elections  
by Age 1972-1996**

*(Source: Election Assistance Commission, Voter Registration and Turnout in Federal Elections by Age 1972-1996, [http://www.eac.gov/clearinghouse/docs/voter-registration-and-turnout-by-age-1972-96.pdf/attachment\\_download/file](http://www.eac.gov/clearinghouse/docs/voter-registration-and-turnout-by-age-1972-96.pdf/attachment_download/file))*

YEAR	VAP	% Registered	# Voted	% Voted	% of Total US Vote
<b>1996 US TOTAL</b>	193,651,000	65.9	105,017,000	54.23	100
18-20 Years	10,785,000	45.6	3,366,000	31	3.21
21-24	13,865,000	51.2	4,630,000	33.39	4.41
25-44	83,393,000	61.9	41,050,000	49.22	39.08
45-64	53,721,000	73.5	34,615,000	64.43	32.96
65+	31,888,000	77	21,356,000	67	20.34
<b>1994 US TOTAL</b>	190,267,000	62.5	85,702,000	45	100
18-20 Years	10,258,000	37.4	1,707,000	16.6	1.99
21-24	14,924,000	46	3,343,000	22.4	3.9
25-44	83,006,000	57.9	32,689,000	39.4	38.14
45-64	50,934,000	71.7	28,878,000	56.7	33.69
65+	31,144,000	76.3	19,086,000	61.3	22.27
<b>1992 US TOTAL</b>	185,684,000	68.2	113,866,000	61.3	100
18-20 Years	9,727,000	48.3	3,749,000	38.5	3.29
21-24	14,644,000	55.3	6,693,000	45.7	5.87
25-44	81,319,000	64.8	47,389,000	58.3	41.61
45-64	49,147,000	75.3	34,399,000	70	30.21

65+	30,846,000	78	21,637,000	70.1	19
<b>1990 US TOTAL</b>	182,118,000	62.2	81,991,000	45	100
18-20 Years	10,800,000	35.4	1,990,000	18.4	2.43
21-24	14,031,000	43.3	3,082,000	22	3.75
25-44	80,541,000	58.4	32,766,000	40.7	39.96
45-64	46,871,000	71.4	26,138,000	55.8	31.87
65+	29,874,000	76.5	18,014,000	60.3	21.97
<b>1988 US TOTAL</b>	178,098,000	66.6	102,224,000	57.4	100
18-20 Years	10,742,000	44.9	3,570,000	33.2	3.49
21-24	14,827,000	50.6	5,684,000	38.3	5.56
25-44	77,863,000	63	42,018,000	54	41.1
45-64	45,862,000	75.5	31,134,000	67.9	30.45
65+	28,804,000	78.4	19,818,000	68.8	19.38
<b>1986 US TOTAL</b>	173,890,000	64.3	79,954,000	46	100
18-20 Years	10,740,000	35.4	1,994,000	18.6	2.49
21-24	15,685,000	46.6	3,788,000	24.2	4.73
25-44	74,927,000	61.1	31,003,000	41.4	38.77
45-64	44,825,000	74.8	26,305,000	58.7	32.9
65+	27,712,000	76.9	16,865,000	60.9	21.09
<b>1984 US TOTAL</b>	169,963,000	68.3	101,878,000	59.9	100
18-20 Years	11,249,000	47	4,131,000	36.7	4.05

21-24	16,727,000	54.3	7,276,000	43.5	7.14
25-44	71,023,000	66.6	41,492,000	58.4	40.72
45-64	44,307,000	76.6	30,924,000	69.8	30.35
65+	26,658,000	76.9	18,055,000	67.7	17.72
<b>1982 US TOTAL</b>	165,483,000	64.1	80,310,000	48.5	100
18-20 Years	12,075,000	35	2,390,000	19.8	2.97
21-24	16,748,000	47.8	4,749,000	28.4	5.91
25-44	66,881,000	61.5	30,343,000	45.4	37.78
45-64	44,180,000	75.6	27,491,000	62.2	34.23
65+	25,598,000	75.2	15,336,000	59.9	19.09
<b>1980 US TOTAL</b>	157,085,000	64.1	80,310,000	48.5	100
18-20 Years	12,274,000	44.7	4,387,000	35.7	4.71
21-24	15,864,000	52.7	6,838,000	43.1	7.34
25-44	61,285,000	65.6	35,958,000	58.7	38.63
45-64	43,569,000	75.8	30,205,000	69.3	32.45
65+	24,094,000	74.6	15,677,000	65.1	16.84
<b>1978 US TOTAL</b>	151,646,000	62.6	69,587,000	45.9	100
18-20 Years	12,161,000	34.7	2,443,000	20.1	3.51
21-24	15,517,000	45.1	4,072,000	26.2	5.85
25-44	57,536,000	60.2	24,775,000	43.1	35.6
45-64	43,431,000	74.3	25,428,000	58.5	36.54
65+	23,001,000	72.8	12,868,000	55.9	18.49

