

High School Voter Registration Materials

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:36-27, The High School Voter Registrations Law requires districts to provide eligible voters registration materials, a summary of voter registration eligibility requirements, materials describing the role of a citizen, and materials articulating the importance of voting to all eligible high school students. Please see below for this information.

Voter Registration Eligibility Requirements & Registration Information

To register in New Jersey, you must be:

- A United States citizen
- At least 17 years old, though you may not vote until you have reached the age of 18
- A resident of the county for 30 days before the election
- A person not serving a sentence of incarceration as the result of a conviction of any indictable offense under the laws of this or another state or of the United States.

The registrant must complete a Voter Registration Application and/or Party Affiliation Form. Mail or deliver the Voter Registration Application and/or Party Affiliation Form to the [County Commissioner of Registration or Superintendent of Elections](#) for your county.

You are not eligible to register to vote if:

- You are serving a sentence of Incarceration as a result of a conviction of an indictable offense under the laws of this or another state or of the United States.

The registration deadline to vote in the next election is 21 days prior to the election day.

Online Voter Registration

To register online, you will need your date of birth and one of the following forms of identification:

A current and valid Driver's License or a non-driver Identification Card (ID card) issued by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC) Your information will be provided to the MVC to validate identification, and to retrieve a copy of your digitized signature.

-or-

A Social Security number. To use your social security number, you must have the ability to sign on-screen or upload your signature to complete the registration process. If you are unable to provide a digital signature, you cannot register online. Click here to download the voter registration application for Essex County.

[Register to Vote Online](#)

Responsibilities of United States Citizens

<http://www.civics.ks.gov/index.html>

Citizenship Responsibilities

Citizenship is the state of being vested with the rights, privileges and duties of a citizen, but it can also be defined as the character of an individual viewed as a member of society. While U.S. citizenship provides many rights, it also involves many responsibilities.

The U.S. government, as established in the Constitution, protects the rights of each individual regardless of background, culture or religion. Although all U.S. citizens enjoy the freedoms, protections and legal rights that the Constitution promises, citizens also have the responsibility, or “civic duty,” to meet certain societal standards and guidelines.

Civic duties ensure that democratic values written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are upheld. Responsibilities include both those that are voluntary as well as those required by law.

Mandatory Duties of U.S. Citizens

Certain civic responsibilities considered central to the democratic philosophy of the country are required by law. U.S. citizens must comply with certain mandatory obligations, including:

- **Obeying the law.** Every U.S. citizen must obey federal, state and local laws, and pay the penalties that can be incurred when a law is broken.
- **Paying taxes.** All citizens must pay taxes in one form or another, including federal, state, local, Social Security, property and sales taxes. Each tax funds services and programs - i.e., schools, roads, police and fire protection, Medicare and national defense - that would be impossible to maintain without the support of tax payments.
- **Serving on a jury when summoned.** Whether a citizen or not, all persons have a right to a trial by jury made up of a panel of their peers. Jurors are drawn by lot from the general population of citizens in a jurisdiction, and once randomly summoned to jury duty are required to be available to serve. A citizen also may be summoned or subpoenaed to serve as a witness during a trial and, if called, has the responsibility to appear and testify under oath regarding information pertinent to a given event.
- **Registering with the Selective Service.** The Selective Service is a federal agency within the executive branch of government that exists to readily resume a draft, if necessary, to provide the number of men needed by the armed forces in the event of war or other national emergency. Federal law requires virtually all male U.S. citizens and male noncitizens who are ages 18 through 25 to register with the Selective Service. Men who do not register are subject to prosecution and, if convicted, may be fined up to \$250,000 and/or serve up to five years in prison. Registration for Selective Service also is required to be eligible for various federal programs and benefits, including student loans, job training, federal employment and naturalization.

Voluntary Responsibilities of U.S. Citizens

Other civic responsibilities, while not mandatory, are central to democracy. U.S. citizens are encouraged to exercise certain responsibilities and privileges, including:

- **Voting.** While voting is a right and privilege of citizenship, it is also a duty or responsibility. U.S. citizens have a responsibility to participate in their government by registering to vote and voting in elections. By

voting, citizens have a voice in their government and help ensure that the democratic representative system of government is maintained.

- **Staying informed.** Citizens have the responsibility to stay informed of the issues affecting their communities, as well as national and international issues, and to be active in the civic processes. This includes being well informed about the issues and candidates before voting in an election, getting involved in a political campaign or running for public office, or using their right to address the government through activism.
- **Community involvement.** Citizens also should contribute to the well-being of the community by recognizing where help or change is needed and by getting involved through offering their knowledge and talents to local organizations, committees and community projects.
- **Practicing tolerance.** With democracy comes diversity, and U.S. citizens have the responsibility to support and protect the rights of others and to respect the differences in opinions, religions, cultures and ethnic groups.
- **Passing it on.** It is the responsibility of citizens to pass along the importance of good citizenship to future generations. By teaching their children how to stay informed, to get involved, to obey the law, and the necessity of voting, parents and mentors demonstrate how to improve society.

The Importance of Voting

Why Voting Is Important

National Geographic Society

Monday, May 11, 2020

“Voting is your civic duty.” This is a pretty common sentiment, especially each November as Election Day approaches. But what does it really mean? And what does it mean for Americans in particular?

A History of Voting in the United States

Today, most American citizens over the age of 18 are entitled to vote in federal and state elections, but voting was not always a default right for all Americans. The United States Constitution, as originally written, did not define specifically who could or could not vote—but it did establish *how* the new country would vote.

Article 1 of the Constitution determined that members of the Senate and House of Representatives would both be elected directly by popular vote. The president, however, would be elected not by direct vote, but rather by the Electoral College. The Electoral College assigns a number of representative votes per state, typically based on the state’s population. This indirect election method was seen as a balance between the popular vote and using a state’s representatives in Congress to elect a president.

Because the Constitution did not specifically say who could vote, this question was largely left to the states into the 1800s. In most cases, landowning white men were eligible to vote, while white women, black people, and other disadvantaged groups of the time were excluded from voting (known as disenfranchisement).

While no longer explicitly excluded, voter suppression is a problem in many parts of the country. Some politicians try to win reelection by making it harder for certain populations and demographics to vote. These politicians may use strategies such as reducing polling locations in predominantly African American or Latinx neighborhoods, or only having polling stations open during business hours, when many disenfranchised populations are working and unable to take time off.

It was not until the 15th Amendment was passed in 1869 that black men were allowed to vote. But even so, many would-be voters faced artificial hurdles like poll taxes, literacy tests, and other measures meant to discourage them from exercising their voting right. This would continue until the 24th Amendment in 1964, which eliminated the poll tax, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ended Jim Crow laws. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920, when the long efforts of the women’s suffrage movement resulted in the 19th Amendment.

With these amendments removing the previous barriers to voting (particularly sex and race), theoretically all American citizens over the age of 21 could vote by the mid-1960s. Later, in 1971, the American voting age was lowered to 18, building on the idea that if a person was old enough to serve their country in the military, they should be allowed to vote.

With these constitutional amendments and legislation like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the struggle for widespread voting rights evolved from the Founding Fathers’ era to the late 20th century.

Why Your Vote Matters

If you ever think that just one vote in a sea of millions cannot make much of a difference, consider some

of the closest elections in U.S. history.

In 2000, Al Gore narrowly lost the Electoral College vote to George W. Bush. The election came down to a recount in Florida, where Bush had won the popular vote by such a small margin that it triggered an automatic recount and a Supreme Court case (*Bush v. Gore*). In the end, Bush won Florida by 0.009 percent of the votes cast in the state, or 537 votes. Had 600 more pro-Gore voters gone to the polls in Florida that November, there may have been an entirely different president from 2000–2008.

More recently, Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton in 2016 by securing a close Electoral College win. Although the election did not come down to a handful of votes in one state, Trump's votes in the Electoral College decided a tight race. Clinton had won the national popular vote by nearly three million votes, but the concentration of Trump voters in key districts in “swing” states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Michigan helped seal enough electoral votes to win the presidency.

Your vote may not directly elect the president, but if your vote joins enough others in your voting district or county, your vote undoubtedly matters when it comes to electoral results. Most states have a “winner take all” system where the popular vote winner gets the state's electoral votes. There are also local and state elections to consider. While presidential or other national elections usually get a significant voter turnout, local elections are typically decided by a much smaller group of voters.

A Portland State University study found that fewer than 15 percent of eligible voters were turning out to vote for mayors, council members, and other local offices. Low turnout means that important local issues are determined by a limited group of voters, making a single vote even more statistically meaningful.

How You Can Make Your Voice Heard

If you are not yet 18, or are not a U.S. citizen, you can still participate in the election process. You may not be able to walk into a voting booth, but there are things you can do to get involved:

- Be informed! Read up on political issues (both local and national) and figure out where you stand.
- Get out and talk to people. Even if you cannot vote, you can still voice opinions on social media, in your school or local newspaper, or other public forums. You never know who might be listening.
- Volunteer. If you support a particular candidate, you can work on their campaign by participating in phone banks, doing door-to-door outreach, writing postcards, or volunteering at campaign headquarters. Your work can help get candidates elected, even if you are not able to vote yourself.

Participating in elections is one of the key freedoms of American life. Many people in countries around the world do not have the same freedom, nor did many Americans in centuries past. No matter what you believe or whom you support, it is important to exercise your rights.



Hill Street Studios