



National MS Society
“Get-Out The-Vote” Discussion Guide for Self-Help Groups

Discussion Topic: Voting is the keystone of personal advocacy and engagement in the political process. The November 2012 election offers Americans and MS activists the opportunity to vote and participate in our democracy. **This Self-Help Group discussion guide offers topics to prepare for Election 2012.**

As a 501 (c)(3), the National MS Society may not and does not support or oppose a candidate for public office. However, “the nonprofit community is increasingly raising awareness of its issues and spurring citizen engagement in the election process. Organizations are making the most of campaign periods by educating the candidates about the issues that are important to them and possibly gaining the candidates’ commitment on those issues.”¹ The National MS Society, like many nonprofit organizations, is nonpartisan and does actively encourage:

- Voter Registration
- Voter Education
- Get-out-the-Vote Efforts

Talking about politics can be challenging in a group setting. This toolkit is designed to be non-partisan and is not designed to deal with talking about political issues. The purpose of your discussion should be on preparing to and casting an informed vote. However, if your group begins debating political issues, you may need to remind your group members of your ground rules, including treating everyone with respect and reserving judgments. Many groups have agreed not to talk about “hot topics” and so your group may decide to end a discussion about political issues. Make sure that everyone in your group is comfortable and engaged in the conversation, or you may need to change the topic of discussion.

This Discussion Guide includes several sections:

- Section 1: American history trivia quiz
- Section 2: Trends in voter turn-out among people with disabilities
- Section 3: Readiness to vote
- Section 4: Individual Activities
- Section 5: Group Activities
- Section 6: Resources

¹ [Independent Sector](#)

For the group:

Section 6, Resources, may be useful as a handout to group members. This will allow group members to have ready access to the numerous websites and references you may discuss during your meeting. Please feel free to print out Section 6 and make as many copies as you need for your group.

Under certain sections, questions that may prompt group discussion are noted in italics.

To effectively guide your self-help group conversation, please anticipate questions and find answers. Pay particular attention to Section 3, 4 and 5 of this Discussion Guide to prepare. For instance, in Section 3, you will want to find answers to these questions for your state:

Questions²

1. When is my state's voter registration deadline?
2. Are any new Voter Identification laws established in my state? If so, what are the requirements?
3. Does my state have early voting?
4. What are my options if my polling site is inaccessible?
5. What are my transportation options?

² [nonprofit Vote](#)

Section 1: American History – Trivia for Fun (** indicates correct answer)

1. Who was called the “father of the constitution”?

- George Washington
- James Madison**
- Benjamin Franklin
- Thomas Jefferson

2. Who presided over the Constitutional Convention?

- George Washington**
- James Madison
- Benjamin Franklin
- Thomas Jefferson

3. Which of the following famous founding fathers did not sign the Constitution?

- George Washington
- Thomas Jefferson**
- Benjamin Franklin
- James Madison

4. Which two presidents died on the July 4, 1826, exactly 50 years after the United States declared independence from Great Britain?

- Thomas Jefferson**
- John Adams**
- Benjamin Franklin
- James Madison

5. What was our country’s first Constitution called?

- The Articles of Confederation**
- The Declaration of Independence
- The “Federalist Paper”
- The Emancipation Proclamation

6. Laws of the United States are made by:

- The President
- The Senate
- Congress**
- Supreme Court

7. The longest possible time a person can serve as the President is:

- 4 years
- 8 years
- 10 years**
- 12 years

8. The President is elected if he:

- Wins a majority of the electoral vote**
- Wins most of the country’s vote
- Wins all of the states’ votes
- Wins most of the states’ votes

Section 2: Trends in voter turn-out among people with disabilities

Our Civic Responsibility – Opportunity 2012

- 220 million Americans are eligible to vote
- 51 million are not registered to vote
- 24 million need to update their address

You can vote if:

- You are a United States Citizen
- You are 18 years or older today
- You meet the residency requirements of your state

Turn-Out at the Polls – Who Doesn't Vote? (From [Nonprofit VOTE](#))

Over the last three decades new regulations and systems have been enacted to increase opportunities for those with a disability to successfully register to vote and cast a ballot on or before Election Day. However, data on the topic has been limited.

The 2008 Current Population Survey was the first time the Census included questions about voting behavior among those with a disability. Future data will allow us to better track and more fully understand these gaps, while painting a fuller picture of what it means to vote with a disability in America. The 2010 survey reveals some stark gaps and at least one surprise.

- Turnout among those with a disability was 3 points lower than for those with no disability.
- Voters with a cognitive, self-care or independent living difficulty seem to face the greatest challenges, turning out at rates far lower than those with other disabilities.
- People with disabilities represent 12% of the citizen voting age

As an Individual, what do you need to know?

- Are you registered?
- Voter registration deadlines.
- Voter ID laws.

Section 3: Voter Readiness

Be Part of the Solution

- 9 out of 10 registered voters will turn out to vote in a presidential election
- Voter registration is the first step on the road to becoming an active and engaged voter
- Registered voters are more likely to join neighborhood activities, contact elected officials and be active citizens

Visit: [Voting in your State](#), sponsored by Nonprofit VOTE. And, look for the drop-down box on the left to anticipate and find answers to your group's likely questions.

Here, you will find detailed, state-specific information. Remember to research those questions you'd like to discuss and answer with our group. Find info on:

1. Registering to Vote
2. Checking your Registration
3. Election Day Registration
4. Finding your Polling Place
5. Viewing a Sample Ballot
6. Learning about Voter ID
7. Voting Absentee by Mail



What to Know?

1. Getting to the polls.

Not surprisingly, political parties have a vested interest in getting people to the polls. You can contact the political parties in your county or local jurisdiction, or a campaign, and request a ride to the polls. They should provide you with a ride without asking about your voting preferences.

The League of Women Voters in your area may also be a resource for transportation options. <http://www.lwv.org/>

And remember, you can always contact an MS Navigator at 1-800-344-4867 to brainstorm transportation options.

2. How do I report polling place problems?

If you run into problems at the polling place, call the Election Protection hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE. The Election Protection coalition has over 100 local, state and national partners who are available to assist voters seeking information about voting as well as those who are facing challenges at the polling place. There is also an app you can download to your smartphone. You can find that here: <http://www.866ourvote.org/>

If you prefer to report your problems locally, a good first-step is to contact your State Elections Board. Bring the phone number with you to the polls so you can immediately report any problems

The Disability Vote Project associated with the American Association of People with Disabilities may also run a voter hotline to report problems. Check with them closer to the election- www.aapd.com

Section 4: Individual Activities

1. Tell people about National Voter Registration Day on September 25th.

On September 25th, people across the country will be focused on getting people registered to vote. Share the information with those in your immediate circle, on your social networks or join an in person voter registration effort. For more information, please visit www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org. For day of voter registration, direct people to www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org or www.nationalmssociety.org. On September 25th, one of the flash panels on the home page of the Society website will feature information about National Voter Registration Day and links on how to register.

Through www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org, you can find local voter registration events in your area under "events". Enter your zip code and rsvp to attend or help work at a voter registration event.

2. Check the accessibility of your polling location and discuss alternative options if preferred.

Do you want to vote in person on November 6th? If you have accessibility needs, consider a visit to your polling location to make sure it meets your needs. While the Help America Vote Act, a federal law, requires an accessible polling machine be available at each location, the law does not cover the accessibility of the physical polling site. Schools are common polling locations and many were built decades ago. If you do a pre-election day visit, look for things like steps at an entrance, narrow doorways and think about checking out the bathroom as well. Resources are available to help you do a basic or full accessibility check of your polling location: <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/government-affairs-and-advocacy/election-2012/index.aspx>

Group Discussion:

What are the most important accessibility features for you for your polling location?

If a polling site is not accessible, what are the options for individuals to vote? What are thoughts on each of these options?

- If your polling site is not accessible, a poll worker could bring a ballot to your car. What are your thoughts on this? Are you comfortable with this as a possibility? Is this an appropriate alternative for the voting experience?
- Voting absentee. Remember to find out about these deadlines, and request a ballot in sufficient time.
- Early voting. Some jurisdictions have early voting. Find out where early voting takes place and explore the accessibility of that location.
- Request a change of your polling location. If you know your polling site is not accessible, contact your local Board of Elections and see if you can change your polling location. This will likely require substantial advance notice, so start the process early.

3. Learn about the candidates.

Follow the local news. Are there any candidate forums to attend locally?

To find out how the presidential and many congressional candidates feel on health and medical research issues, please visit: <http://www.yourcandidatesyourhealth.org>

You can enter your zipcode or state to find out if candidates in your area have answered the questionnaire from *Your Candidate- Your Health*. This is a voter education initiative sponsored by Research!America and various partner organizations, including the National MS Society.

www.vote411.org, an initiative of the League of Women Voters, is another option to research candidate positions and find out who is running in your jurisdiction.

Group Discussion:

What are additional ways to educate yourself about the candidates?

4. Don't forget those ballot initiatives

With the focus on the candidates, we sometimes forget that we may see ballot initiatives, or referendums, when we get to the poll. A ballot initiative is a proposal to change or create a law at a local or state level. These can sometimes be complex issues, so think about putting in some research time before you head to the polls. Learn about the initiatives on your ballot:

http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/2012_ballot_measures

5. Volunteer as a poll worker.

For those who want to be more involved on Election Day, they should consider becoming a poll worker. Poll workers are those people you have seen at your polling location helping to verify your voting status and directing people at the polls.

To become a poll worker, contact your local election office. If you need help finding your election office, visit www.nonprofitvote.org and go to the "Voting in Your State" page. Once you find your state, you should see an option for "Become a Poll Worker"

Poll workers help prepare the polling location, greet voters, verify registrations and provide ballots. At the end of the day, poll workers close the precinct and prepare election materials for delivery to the Elections Office.

It is best to apply 1-2 months before the election to become a poll worker. Some areas with high needs continue to take applications up until the week before Election Day. Poll workers may receive stipends. While some poll workers work a full 12 hour shift, your state may offer half day shifts. Call to find out if being a poll worker sounds like a fun way to spend your Election Day!

Section 5: Group Activities

Partner with the chapter advocacy staff and Government Relations Committee on any of the below, or any other ideas the group develops.

Group Discussion:

As a group, would we like to get more involved in voter engagement/education?

1. Polling Place Accessibility Checks as a Group Project

Is the group looking for a fun community service project? Consider doing accessibility checks of all the polling sites within your self-help group territory. Work with the advocacy staff at your chapter to see if others can help, and how to distribute your findings to people in the area. Resources are available to help you do a basic or full accessibility check of your polling location: <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/government-affairs-and-advocacy/election-2012/index.aspx>

2. Host a Candidate Forum.

Are members of the group interested in hearing directly from those running for office? Discuss hosting a candidate forum. Work with the advocacy staff at your chapter to arrange a forum. Think about partnering with other self-help groups in your area so the candidates have a larger audience to interact with. There are a few rules to follow and be aware of because the Society is a nonprofit organizations. The most important one is that all candidates running for office must be invited to participate- think of as an equal opportunity for all. For more info, check the resource section at the end of this guide.

3. Host or Participate in a National Voter Registration Day Event

September 25 is National Voter Registration Day and voter registration events will be happening that day, and in the weeks leading up to September 25. As a group, consider joining a planned event, or hosting one of your own. Through www.nationalvoterregistrationday.org you can find local voter registration events in your area under "events". Enter your zip code and rsvp to attend or help work at a voter registration event.

Group Discussion

Is the group interested in planning its own voter registration event?

What would that look like?

Is there a chapter event or program to attach to? A well-populated local area?

Section 6: Resources

- 1. How do I register to vote? Find out about absentee or early voting?**
 - a. Visit the Voter Engagement section of the National MS Society website
You will find links to information on voter registration deadlines, voter identification laws, absentee ballots, accessibility of polling sites and National Voter Registration Day.
<http://www.nationalmssociety.org/government-affairs-and-advocacy/election-2012/index.aspx>
 - b. Nonprofit VOTE
Nonprofit VOTE is the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services. It has a webinar series and a wealth of information about voting, Election Day and National Voter Registration Day, all presented in a nonpartisan way.
www.nonprofitvote.org

- 2. Does my state have a voter identification law? If so, what do I need to know?**
 - a. Visit the National Conference of State Legislatures site for an interactive map and table of current voter id laws and requirements.
<http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/elections/voter-id.aspx>

- 3. How do I conduct an accessibility check of my polling place?**
 - a. Visit the Voter Engagement section of the National MS Society website. The blue box on the right provides links to information about conducting accessibility checks.
<http://www.nationalmssociety.org/government-affairs-and-advocacy/election-2012/index.aspx>

- 4. How do I learn more about the candidates and ballot initiatives?**
 - a. Find out where candidates for federal office stand on health and research issues at Your Candidates-Your Health, a voter education initiative by Research!America.
www.yourcandidatesyourhealth.org
 - b. www.vote411.org is an initiative of the League of Women Voters.
 - c. http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/2012_ballot_measures

- 5. How can I report problems I encounter on Election Day?**
 - a. Election Protection coalition hotline: 1-866-OUR-VOTE. If you have a smart phone, consider downloading the app available at <http://www.866ourvote.org/>
 - b. Disability Vote Project through the American Association of People with Disabilities
www.aapd.com Check for a toll free number closer to Election Day.

- 6. What do we need to know about hosting a candidate forum?**
 - a. <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/engage-candidates.html> at Nonprofit VOTE
 - b. http://www.independentsector.org/election_rules_and_resources