

2018 CANDIDATE AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

JCPA | JEWISH COUNCIL
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS



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The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the umbrella body of the Jewish community relations field, representing 125 local Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs) and 16 national Jewish agencies, including the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist movements. We advocate for a just and pluralistic America, global human rights, and peace in Israel.

On the cover: Buffalo Jewish Federation's "Great Buffalo Jewbilee". The Erie County (NYS) board of Elections staff was invited and many people were registered onsite. Source: Buffalo Jewish Federation.

INTRODUCTION

Participating in the democratic process is a core American Jewish value—a civic and religious duty. We must educate ourselves about critical issues and, most importantly, turn out to vote. The Jewish community has a rich and proud tradition of civic engagement and voter education.

Civic engagement is the bread and butter work of the Jewish community relations field. It ensures that the Jewish community has a voice in shaping our country's policies at every level of government. The Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs) play an important role in this arena by fostering relationships with elected officials, engaging the local Jewish community, and serving as a bridge between the two.

Important elections at the federal, state, and local levels are just months away, with vital issues—including civil rights, immigration, gun violence prevention, health care, criminal justice, and Israel—at stake. The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) strongly encourages JCRCs to organize voter education events and candidate outreach activities. We recommend partnering with local synagogues and other local JCPA member agencies.

This Candidate and Voter Engagement Guide offers resources, tools, and best practices for organizing candidate programs, voter education, and “Get Out the Vote” activities, both for the Jewish community and in conjunction with intergroup partners.

Before you get started, make sure to carefully review the **Nonprofit Election Programming Guidelines** (See page 5) that JCRCs must follow as part of their 501(c)(3) status. Remember to refer back throughout your programming to ensure you adhere to all the rules.

IRS GUIDELINES FOR NONPROFITS



Staying Nonpartisan: Permissible Election Activities Checklist For 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

The federal tax code contains a single sentence that defines the prohibition of partisan political activities by 501(c)(3) charitable organizations. It states 501(c)(3) organizations are “prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in - or intervening in - any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective public office.”

Whether activities are considered partisan political activity depends on the “facts and circumstances” in each situation. What is clear is that there’s still a lot a 501(c)(3) can do on a nonpartisan basis to promote voter and civic engagement as part of its charitable and educational mission during the election season.

Permissible Nonpartisan Activities - with common examples

The IRS affirmatively states that 501(c)(3) organizations may conduct voter engagement or connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. This includes encouraging voter participation, educating voters, and talking to candidates about issues. 501(c)(3) organizations may:

1. Conduct or Promote Voter Registration

- ☐ Conduct a voter registration drive at your nonprofit or in your community.
- ☐ Encourage people to register to vote in your communications, on your website or at events.

2. Educate Voters on the Voting Process

- ☐ Provide information on when and where to vote - such as finding their poll location, getting an absentee ballot or contacting their local election office for help.
- ☐ Remind people of registration or election deadlines and dates.

3. Host a Candidate Forum

- ☐ Sponsor a candidate forum with other community partners for all the candidates.
- ☐ Encourage your community to attend your forum or another candidate forum sponsored by a trusted partner.

4. Create a Candidate Questionnaire

- ☐ Submit questions to all the candidates in a race on issues of interest to your nonprofit.
- ☐ Publish the candidate’s full answers on your website or in a nonpartisan voter guide.

5. Distribute Sample Ballots or Nonpartisan Voter Guides

- ☐ Display or provide an official sample ballot that highlights state elections common to all voters in your state
- ☐ Distribute a nonpartisan voter guide from a trusted partner about what is on the ballot.

6. Continue Issue Advocacy during an Election

- ☐ Continue your regular advocacy or lobbying activities during the election period, as long as it is related to pending legislation on issues you have a history of working on and not timed or structured to influence how people vote.

7. Support, Oppose or Host a Community Conversation on a Ballot Measure

Unlike candidates for office, nonprofits may take sides on a ballot measure. IRS rules treat this as a lobbying activity, not electioneering.

- ☐ Educate the public on your position within your normal lobbying limits.
- ☐ Have your board take a position for or against a question on the ballot.
- ☐ Engage your community leaders and residents in a conversation about the issues at the county and state level.

Note: If you make a significant investment of staff and funds on ballot measure advocacy, you must track spending as lobbying expenses and check your state’s campaign spending disclosure laws for ballot questions.

8. Encourage People to Vote

- ☐ Send reminders to your staff, clients and constituents about voting in the next election and why voting is important.
- ☐ Nonprofits may conduct any type of get out the vote activity to encourage people to vote as long as it is about participating as a voter and not suggesting who to vote for.



NonprofitVOTE
www.nonprofitvote.org



Staying Nonpartisan: Permissible Election Activities Checklist For 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

The partisan prohibition means a 501(c)(3) organization or a staff member speaking or acting on behalf of the nonprofit may not:

- Endorse a candidate.
- Make a campaign contribution or expenditure for or against a candidate.
- Rate or rank candidates on who is most favorable to your issue(s).
- Let candidates use your facilities or resources, unless they are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value - such as a room commonly used for public events.

What does it mean to rank or rate a candidate?

Anything that indicates which candidates you think are better or worse on your issues could be seen as a partisan endorsement. This would include things like giving candidates letter grades (A, B, C, etc.), but even commentary that compares candidates' views to yours is a problem. Take, for example, a voter guide you create to publicize where candidates stand on an issue that also includes your organization's position on the issue. This would tell the voter which candidates you believe gave the "correct" answer. When you circulate or publicize a nonpartisan guide giving candidate positions, keep your opinion out of it. Let voters use the information presented to make their own decisions.

The main principle for being nonpartisan is to conduct voter engagement and education in the context of your educational and civic mission and not in a way intended to support or oppose a specific candidate. So if you hold a candidate forum or offer to brief the candidates on issues of importance to your organization, make sure you treat the candidates equally. When you do voter registration or remind people to vote, do it in the context of the importance of voting – encouraging active citizenship and giving voice to the communities you serve.

Resources

Nonprofits, Voting and Elections: A 501(c)(3) Online Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Engagement, www.nonprofitvote.org/nonprofits-voting-elections-online

Federal Funds and Voter Registration: for organizations receiving Community Service Block Grants or AmeriCorps/National Service programs, www.nonprofitvote.org/all-resources/

If you have a question, contact Nonprofit VOTE at info@nonprofitvote.org or Bolder Advocacy at advocacy@afj.org. Or visit online:

- Nonprofit VOTE – www.nonprofitvote.org
- Bolder Advocacy – www.bolderadvocacy.org

ELECTION ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

Use this timeline to help plan and schedule your programming.

September

- ❑ Plan a candidate debate or sequential for October. Extend invitations to all legally-qualified candidates as soon as possible.
- ❑ Plan “issue nights” to educate members in a non-partisan fashion about important policy issues, especially if your state is one with ballot initiatives.
- ❑ Secure cosponsors for the events.
- ❑ Begin Get Out the Vote campaign.
- ❑ Contact local college students to remind them to register at their new address or obtain absentee ballots.
- ❑ Send candidate questionnaires to all candidates. JCPA will send candidate questions.

October

- ❑ Hold a candidate forum near the end of the month and advertise it widely.
- ❑ Publish candidates’ positions in local newspapers and on your website.
- ❑ Place an ad/article in synagogue, community, and organizational bulletins or newsletters reminding people to vote.
- ❑ Organize youth movements and day schools to volunteer at local polling stations.
- ❑ Coordinate transportation to the polls.
- ❑ Plan a date to help your members who are homebound or in nursing homes complete their absentee ballots.
- ❑ Ask all local rabbis to give a sermon on the importance of civic participation and voting.
- ❑ Send out postcards and/or coordinate a phone bank to remind people to vote using community-wide Federation membership lists.

November

- ❑ Call community members, especially college students, on November 6th to remind them to vote.
- ❑ **VOTE ON NOVEMBER 6TH!**
- ❑ Host a community-wide **Election Night Watch Party**, where community members can socialize and watch election night coverage and results.
- ❑ Invite speakers to discuss policy implications of the elections.
- ❑ Plan a “Meet-and-Greet” with newly elected officials.

ELECTION PROGRAMS TO ENSURE AN INFORMED JEWISH COMMUNITY

The campaign season is the perfect time for JCRCs to engage with incumbents and candidates who may go on to be elected officials. While it is important to reach out to candidates for federal office, JCRCs should also actively engage state and local candidates, who play a central role in developing the policies that directly impact the community. Local elected officials often go on to seek higher office. Building strong relationships with these officials early in their careers can yield long-term benefits.

The months leading up to Election Day is a critical time for JCRCs to educate voters about candidates and issues, and to provide opportunities for voters to engage directly with those running for office. This section offers information, tips, checklists, and suggested formats for candidate forums, leadership meetings, and issue nights. In addition, JCRCs should partner with local Jewish press in their voter education efforts and make use of social media to ensure that candidates' positions on priority concerns are known to the community.

EDUCATING THROUGH JEWISH PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Work with the local Jewish newspaper staff to prepare a candidate questionnaire covering five to seven topics. All partners should publish the responses in print and online, as well as on social media. More and more people, especially younger generations, get their information primarily through social media, so it is critical to use online platforms as a component of your programming in order to reach your entire community and provide information on your priority issues.

Questionnaire Checklist

- ❑ Send your questionnaire to every candidate, with specific guidance on the maximum word count (around 200 words) and deadline for answering the questions. Explain how you plan to use the information.
- ❑ Provide at least three weeks for candidates to return the questionnaire and send a head shot.
- ❑ Ensure that someone has received the questions and will be responding.
- ❑ Post the paper's article covering the responses on your website and social media.

If only one candidate responds, be sure to publish that the other candidate was invited to participate so that it is clear that your efforts are not partisan.

CANDIDATE FORUMS

Hosting an in-person **candidate forum**, where candidates speak directly with voters and answer their questions, is one of the best ways to educate voters and form bonds with aspiring officeholders. Forums demonstrate the Jewish community's strong engagement and voice in public life to local civic leaders and those seeking elected office. Candidate debates tend to be high-profile, public events that unite community members and attract new participants to JCRCs, particularly young adults interested in politics.



*Debate held by the Baltimore Jewish Council of the candidates running for Baltimore County Executive.
Source: Baltimore Jewish Council.*

General Tips

- Invite all legally-qualified candidates, either through their campaign office or political party.
- If you are concerned about inviting a third party, the Internal Revenue Service offers additional guidance at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici02.pdf.
- Provide candidates with equal time to speak and interact with voters, either at the same session or through a sequential format.
- Schedule the debate to last between 60 and 90 minutes.
- Hold the forum at a Jewish facility: a local Federation office, Jewish Community Center, synagogue or other place of worship, or other nonprofit or Jewish agency.
- Consider partnering with another Jewish community group, such as the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women; synagogues; and Hillels in your area.

Getting Started

Before reaching out to candidates, JCRCs should meet with participating sponsors to determine the event's rules, format, and preferred location. Once this is confirmed it is important to invite all candidates to appear together. If they refuse, you can hold a sequential debate where each candidate appears directly after the other and answers identical questions in the same format. Typically, candidates are willing to pose for a handshake photo-op.

Prepare five to six questions and identify lay leaders who will ask the questions ahead of time. Keep in mind that questions should reflect a broad range of topics focused on the JCRC's priority issues. We recommend four domestically-focused questions and two on international concerns. Have golf pencils and cards ready for the audience to write down their questions. It is also important to have a moderator who will remain neutral at all times. Successful moderators have included JCRC Chairs, local reporters, and political science professors.

Structuring the Debate

Set rules governing the length of opening remarks, as well as the amount of time allotted for responses and rebuttals to questions. The organizers must agree to work with the candidates to determine the program format before promoting it. Below is a suggested structure:

- JCRCs open the forum with a brief overview of their mission and the Jewish community's commitment to voter education as the reason for hosting the forum. This is an important step as it frames the discussion for the candidates and the audience, and introduces them to your organization.
- Each candidate has three minutes for their opening statement. Remember to set the order in which candidates will speak ahead of time and ensure that each candidate is aware of the schedule.
- Ask the prepared questions. These can be asked by the moderator or by JCRC leaders. Question responses should be no longer than two minutes and candidates should take turns being the first to respond to questions. The opportunity for rebuttal is at your discretion, but should be no more than one minute.
- We encourage audience questions, but highly recommended that organizers have audience members write their questions on cards for a designated person or group to vet.
- Each candidate gets two to three minutes for their closing statement.

LEADERSHIP MEETINGS WITH CANDIDATES



*Interfaith gathering with Senator Chris Van Hollen.
Source: Baltimore Jewish Council.*

During election campaigns, JCRCs can organize a private meeting between Jewish leaders and candidates running for office to discuss policy priorities. These **leadership meetings** are an excellent opportunity to connect with candidates and future decision-makers in a more intimate setting with fewer legal restrictions than other types of election engagement activities, such as candidate debates. Hosting a leadership meeting is a means of demonstrating the organized Jewish community's civic engagement and power as a voting bloc.

Though each meeting will be with an individual candidate, it is imperative that you invite all candidates running for a given office and that the meetings with them have identical agendas.

Since this may be the candidate's first interaction with the community relations field, it is important to host the meeting at your own facility or another affiliated location, such as a local Federation, synagogue, or Jewish Community Center.

Leadership meetings are usually scheduled for an hour, and feature the following components:

- The JCRC or Federation leader provides an overall introduction to the Jewish community and its priority issues.
- The candidate gives an opening presentation (typically five minutes).
- Community leaders ask candidates five to six policy questions set in advance. Questions should be brief.
- At the end of the meeting, attendees present the candidate with a short packet offering general information about the JCRC and Federation, and an overview of the priority issues. Include a list of the meeting participants with titles and contact information. A best practice is to also have a digital copy ready that can be emailed to staff.

Attendees should also offer to be a resource to candidates and staff should they need any information pertaining to the Jewish community.

ISSUE NIGHTS

Issue nights are public meetings designed to raise awareness about specific issues facing the community and provide balanced educational resources about these issues. Issue nights are an effective way to highlight particular topics and engage in election activism without involving candidates and are especially useful for communities that will be voting on ballot measures.

Programs typically feature a panel of experts representing a broad range of views on a particular subject and are often modeled after town hall meetings. JCRCs may wish to cosponsor issue nights with other local organizations. This is an effective way to form new relationships and strengthen existing ones, particularly with issue-centric groups.

Issue nights are usually scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes, and feature the following elements:

- JCRC leadership introduce the program and welcome all of the participants.
- JCRCs may take positions on public policy issues. However, it is still important to state that the event is intended to be educational only and that the JCRC does not endorse any candidate. Nothing at this event should be construed as an endorsement of any candidate in any way. However,
- After the hosts' introduction, present the debate topic and panel.
- Each speaker gives roughly 10 to 15 minutes of opening remarks.
- Afterwards, speakers may pose questions to each other before proceeding to an audience question and answer period.



Lance-Chivacula debate. Source: Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest New Jersey

GET OUT THE VOTE



Get Out the Vote, or “GOTV,” is a critical component of civic engagement that is aimed specifically at increasing voter turnout. GOTV should start in the late summer and encompass a variety of activities like voter registration drives, phone banks, canvassing, and flyers reminding people to vote. These activities should be nonpartisan and geared toward turning out all eligible voters, not just those of a particular party or position.

The Jewish community has a stake in many issues, including the U.S.-Israel relationship, immigration, civil rights, criminal justice, health care, and religious liberty, that form the core of the debate this election year. By exercising the right to vote, we can have a say in charting the future course for our nation.

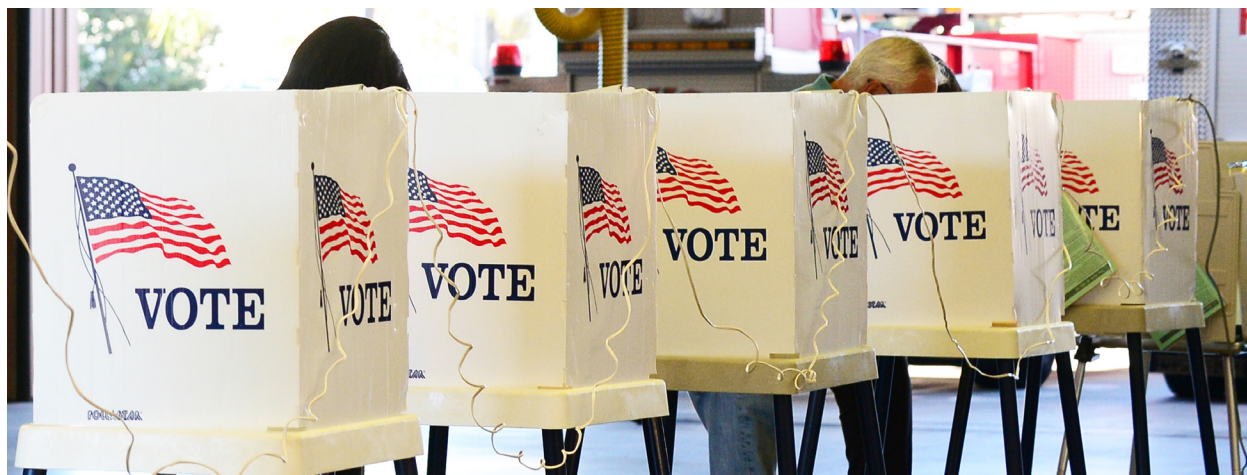
Though more people are registered to vote, unfortunately, voter turnout has steadily dropped in recent elections, which we will discuss more in the next section, “Voter Protection.” Almost 50% of eligible voters do not vote in presidential elections and even fewer do so during midterms and less prominent state and local elections. Legislators and political parties know that the Jewish community votes. To ensure that our voice continues to matter, it is important that we vote in all federal, state, and local races.

GETTING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OUT TO VOTE

JCRCs should encourage the Jewish community to vote. As in most election years, there has been talk about the effect of the “Jewish vote.” While Jews comprise less than 3% of the population, the Jewish community’s outsized influence in the political realm stems primarily from our high voter participation rates and concentration in states carrying a large number of electoral votes.

JCPA recommends that JCRCs participate in the following activities:

- Place “Get Out the Vote” ads in local Jewish papers and work with local Federations to email “Get Out the Vote” reminders to your Jewish community.
- Post user-friendly information on how to register to vote on your website. Hand out flyers with this information at all events leading up to registration deadline. Registering to vote is now easier than ever before with the advent of the National Mail-In Voter Registration form. It is now possible to register over the internet at a number of different websites including www.nass.org/can-i-vote, www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form, and www.rockthevote.org.
- If your JCRC or Federation has the capacity, consider hosting a few voter registration drives, which is a great way to provide volunteer opportunities to both leaders and young people. If this is not feasible, we encourage JCRCs to consider partnering with local organizations that are organizing such drives and/or inviting them to register people at JCRC and Federation events.
- Assist seniors and those with disabilities in exploring their voting options. Visit www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/elderly/ for more information.
- Collaborate with the local Hillel to encourage students to vote.
- Join or form a coalition with other community groups to engage in election integrity programs and to help marginalized populations vote.



WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO GET OUT THE NON-JEWISH VOTE

All communities have a stake in ensuring that the community turns out to vote, so there are many great opportunities to partner with local organizations and communities. Activities like voter registration and door-to-door canvassing can be effective methods for increasing voter turnout, as well as deepening cross-community relationships.

For voter registration, canvassing, and poll watching, consider working with local faith groups or civic nonprofits to reach non-Jewish populations. Canvassing is one of the best ways to motivate people to vote. Collaborating across racial, ethnic, and faith lines demonstrates that turning out to is more important than the factors that divide us and underscores the message that every vote matters.

Below are a few examples of possible partners:

- American Civil Liberties Union - www.aclu.org
- Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights – www.lawyerscommittee.org
- League of Women’s Voters - www.lwv.org
- NAACP - <https://naacp.org>
- Rock the Vote (youth voting) - www.rockthevote.org
- Voto Latino - <http://votolatino.org>
- Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) - <https://studentpirgs.org>

While the organizations on this list have local branches, there may also be independent groups working on these issues in your city or state.



NAACP-led voter registration training session that JCRC professionals and lay leaders attended in the greater Miami area. Source: Jewish Community Relations Council of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

VOTER PROTECTION

The Jewish community relations field has long worked to ensure that all eligible voters can cast a ballot and have their vote counted. Unfortunately, the systematic disenfranchisement of key segments of the voting population challenges the integrity of the elections process.

In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a critical Voting Rights Act provision requiring states with a history of disenfranchising minority voters to obtain U.S. Department of Justice preclearance before changing voting laws or procedures. Without this oversight, states quickly enacted dozens of restrictive voting laws previously blocked by the government. By Election Day 2016, 14 states had new laws restricting the right to vote, often through onerous voter identification laws and cutbacks to early voting, especially in low-income communities of color.

Voter identification laws are cause for particular concern. Acceptable forms of identification can be prohibitively costly and difficult to obtain. Many older people and immigrants do not have birth certificates or other documents. Importantly, studies repeatedly show that widespread voter identification fraud is a myth. A 2014 national study found just 31 possible cases of voter identification fraud out of one billion votes cast between 2000 and 2014.

These new voting laws often disproportionately and negatively impact communities of color. When one such voter identification law adopted by North Carolina was challenged in Federal court, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit overturned the law, saying its provisions “... target African-Americans with almost surgical precision.” In 2015, courts also overturned restrictive voting laws in Wisconsin and Texas.

Protecting the right to vote and ensuring that all eligible voters have their vote counted is crucial. In 2017, JCPA unanimously passed a resolution encouraging the JCRCs to work in partnership with impacted communities to protect access to voting and oppose measures with intent or effect of unfairly limiting the right to vote.

A SNAPSHOT: THE VOTING RIGHTS RESOLUTION

Adopted Unanimously at JCPA's 2017 National Conference

The Jewish people's commitment to voting rights is rooted in our sacred obligation to pursue justice, in our historical experiences, and in our commitment to cherished rights. Therefore, the Jewish community relations field should:

- Work in partnership with impacted communities to protect the right to vote for all eligible citizens;
- Engage with state election officials to ensure the integrity of access to voting and seek, as well, to address existing voting practices that limit voting access;
- Oppose measures that have the intent or effect of unfairly limiting the right to vote, for example through reduced locally accessible polling locations, onerous voter identification laws, curtailed early voting, or other measures; and
- In places where photo identification is required for voting, support measures to assist all eligible voters in obtaining necessary identification.

In addition to registering voters and providing transportation to polling locations, JCRCs also work to protect the vote by ensuring that voters know their rights and understand any applicable ID requirements or organizing a group to volunteer at the polls on Election Day. Below is a list of organizations to partner with for local events around voting rights.

- AFL-CIO – www.aflcio.org
- American Civil Liberties Union – www.aclu.org
- Brennan Center for Justice - www.BrennanCenter.org
- Common Cause - www.commoncause.org
- Demos - www.demos.org
- Fair Elections Legal Network - www.fairelectionsnetwork.com
- Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights – www.lawyerscommittee.org
- League of Women’s Voters - www.lwv.org
- National Bar Association - www.nationalbar.org
- National Action Network – www.nationalactionnetwork.net
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund - www.naacpldf.org
- NAACP – www.naacp.org
- National Coalition on Black Civic Participation – www.ncbcp.org
- People for the American Way – www.pfaw.org
- Skinner Leadership Institute - www.skinnerleadership.org
- Sojourners - www.Sojo.net
- The Advancement Project - www.advancementproject.org
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights - www.civilrights.org

To learn about the requirements in your state for registering, voting, early voting and more on the Election Protection website at www.866ourvote.org/state. The national, nonpartisan Election Protection coalition, run by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, offers numerous resources, including the 866-OUR-VOTE Election Protection Hotline, to help ensure that all voters an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

RESOURCES FROM JCPA MEMBER AGENCIES AND PARTNERS

Several of JCPA's member agencies and coalition partners across the faith and secular communities have developed valuable voter and candidate engagement materials. For a complete list, please visit www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/faithvote.

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

Elections Website: www.fcnl.org/elections

Candidate Questions: www.fcnl.org/updates/questions-for-candidates-1399

Lawyers and Collars

Voter Education and Protection Program Toolkit: <http://lawyersandcollars.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Lawyers-Collars-Voter-Education-and-Protection-Project-FINAL.pdf>

National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

2018 Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote Resource Guide: www.ncjw.org/act/action-resources/promote-the-vote-resource-guide

Religious Action Center (RAC) of Reform Judaism

You must fill out a form to access the resources so that they can keep track of where materials are going. All information is available at www.rac.org/cec, where you can find guides to voter engagement, candidate engagement, and ballot initiatives in select states.

United Church of Christ

Our Faith Our Vote Toolkit: www.ucc.org/ourfaithourvote/our-faith-our-vote-downloads.html



JCPA 2018 PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

DOMESTIC POLICY

Immigration



Informed by Jewish values and traditions, JCPA supports federal immigration and refugee policy that balance national security concerns with the protection of civil and human rights. We believe that effective enforcement can only be accomplished as part of comprehensive immigration reform that upholds American values of refugee protection, family reunification, and economic opportunity. We advocate for reforms that would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, especially those brought to the U.S. as children, while prioritizing more effective border security and enforcement that remains consistent with humanitarian values and protects civil, human, and workers' rights. Our immigration system should reflect the best of our national values: equality, fairness, due process under the law, and respect for human dignity.

Criminal Justice Reform



The U.S. currently incarcerates a quarter of the world's prisoners despite comprising only 5% of the world's population. Beginning in the 1970s, our prison population skyrocketed, disproportionately impacting people of color and contributing to poverty, income inequality, and family instability. We keep people behind bars at great social and financial expense even when the sentences are disproportionately lengthy or counterproductive. JCPA supports bipartisan legislation that would reduce mandatory minimums and allow for greater judicial discretion. We also support reforms that would promote community-based treatment for people with addiction disorders and reduce collateral consequences and barriers to successful reentry by expanding access to public assistance programs and helping returning citizens find stable housing and employment.

Poverty and Food Insecurity



JCPA is committed to building a more just and equitable society, especially as a growing number of middle- and low-income families face temporary and permanent poverty due to stagnating wages and increasing job insecurity. We strongly support raising the minimum wage, expanding eligibility for the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits. JCPA will also continue to advocate for policies that help empower older adults to live healthier, more independent lives free from poverty. We support a robust social safety net that includes important programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). To lift the next generation out of poverty, we also support full funding for child nutrition programs, such as the Summer Feeding Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Food insecurity is one of the most acute hardships many Americans, including children, face across the country.

Education



Education is one of the most important determinants of lifetime earnings, social mobility, and health outcomes. Yet our nation's public schools are chronically underfunded and underperforming, especially within low-income and rural communities. The problems that afflict our education system begin early, starting with the inaccessibility of affordable, high-quality preschools. Increasing the availability and affordability of early childhood education is one of the surest ways to close the achievement gap.

Voting Rights

The cornerstone of democracy is the election process and the right of every eligible citizen to cast a meaningful ballot for a candidate they choose. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, which weakened enforcement, allowing many states to adopt new, restrictive voting laws that disenfranchise segments of the voting population, particularly communities of color. JCPA is committed to ensuring fair and representative elections, advocating for measures that would expand early and absentee voting, protect against voter ID requirements, and restore voting rights to millions of formerly incarcerated people. We will also work to ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census, which determines political representation and apportionment.



Civil Rights

JCPA is committed to protecting and advancing civil rights for all Americans. We will continue to focus on protecting individuals from discrimination on the basis race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion. JCPA will also advocate for new policies to address bullying, including proactive measures to combat future incidents and create a safe environment. We will work with the executive branch to ensure that civil rights statutes—such as the Hate Crimes Prevention Act and updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act—are implemented and enforced



Religious Liberty

Religious liberty, and the relationship between religious institutions and the federal government, has been a priority for JCPA since its founding. Among our primary concerns is striking a balance between religious beliefs and civil rights. JCPA will continue to fight efforts to bring partisan politics into religious nonprofits and houses of worship, including efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. We are sensitive to questions of individual conscience, but are equally concerned about governmental policies that may lead to discrimination. JCPA will closely monitor legislation and regulations that relate to government funding for social services by religiously-affiliated organizations. Where such funding is authorized, it must have appropriate safeguards to prevent First Amendment violations and protect the religious freedom of employees without leading to discrimination or infringing on the rights of program beneficiaries.



Energy and Environment

Climate change is an international security threat and one of the greatest moral issues of our time. We will continue to advocate for legislation that promotes energy independence and reflects our values of protecting Creation. By supporting policies that promote renewable energy and other clean energy innovations, we can reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil while protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Central to this fight in the coming years is state implementation of the Clean Power Plan, which would help reduce the nation's greenhouse gas emissions and ease our transition to renewable energy.



Economic Growth

JCPA believes that Congress and the Administration can boost the economy by creating pathways to sustainable, long-term employment. The government should invest in infrastructure, schools, hospitals, renewable energy, and technological innovation in order to ensure long-term economic and employment growth. JCPA supports targeted employment and job retraining assistance to specific geographic regions and populations that may be struggling economically, including low-income individuals, women, people of color, people with disabilities, seniors, veterans, youth, and the long-term unemployed.



INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Israeli-Palestinian Peace



JCPA works to promote a strong, vibrant Israel that is committed to peace, and continues to encourage the U.S. government to pursue a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict through diplomacy. Our organization strongly advocates for two independent, democratic, and economically-viable states: the Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security. This vision can only be achieved through direct negotiations. Unilateral attempts to achieve Palestinian statehood through United Nations action—as well Palestinian efforts to achieve full membership in United Nations-affiliated bodies—are counterproductive.

International Humanitarian and Refugee Crises



JCPA supports the vigorous protection of human rights as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, especially situations involving genocide, mass atrocities, and sweeping population shifts due to displacement by war and violence. We will continue to speak out and call on Congress to take strong action against the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign the Burmese military is perpetrating against the Rohingya. JCPA also believes that the U.S. and the international community must respond to today's unprecedented refugee crisis, which has displaced over 65 million people. With the most sophisticated resettlement program in the world, the U.S. should increase annual admissions of refugees, particularly from Syria, while maintaining the rigorous security screenings that are integral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

International Terrorism



JCPA encourages Congress and the Administration to implement strong U.S. policies to counter international terrorism, including state-sponsored terrorism. The U.S. government must work with our allies to implement comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to terrorism, including freezing the assets of groups and individuals that have been linked to terrorism, strengthening international cooperation on weapons control, and halting nuclear proliferation

JEWISH TEXTS AND COMMENTARY

"This is the generation and those who seek its welfare" (Psalms 24:6). Rabbi Judah the Patriarch and the sages differed in this matter. One opinion was that the character of the generation is determined by its leader. According to the other opinion, the character of the leader is determined by the generation.

–Talmud, Arachin 17a

Commentary: A community with the opportunity to choose its own leadership makes a statement about its own character by virtue of the choice it makes. We are therefore responsible for creating a community that fosters the growth of good leadership and choosing wisely among the candidates who wish to govern. Both of the opinions in the passage from the Talmud quoted above express the belief that a leader's character is causally related to that of his or her generation. What we do, or don't do, on Election Day will define the character of our nation.

"The heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers" (Deuteronomy 29:9). Even though I appointed over you heads, elders, and officers, all of you are equal before Me, for the verse concludes, "All are the people of Israel."

–Tanchuma Nitzavim 2

Commentary: The beauty of democracy is that each citizen has an equal voice in the election process; we are able to make decisions for the future of our country based on the principle of equality. The Tanchuma teaches that each of the children of Israel has equal worth in the eyes of the Almighty. Though some may take on leadership roles and rise in visibility, our creator values each person's voice. We express that voice by voting.

Commentary: Humility is valued in the Jewish tradition. Self-confidence is also encouraged, but all people, even those individuals who have experienced successes, are warned to maintain a sense of fallibility. How then can any leader feel confident and empowered to make decisions in the interests of the community? He or she must be chosen by the members of the community themselves. This is the essence of democracy.

"Dina d'malchuta dina" (The law of the land is the law.)

–Talmud, N'darim 28a, Gittin 10b, Bava Kama 113a-b, Bava Batra 54b-55a

Commentary: Already in the period of the compilation of the Talmud, the rabbinic principle that civil laws must be recognized and honored had been developed. What an uncommon pleasure it is to comply with this mandate in a land whose legal code offers its citizens the opportunity to go to the polls and elect the officials who rule the land. This is a nation that in its founding documents prohibited religious tests for office and laws respecting establishment of religion, while guaranteeing free exercise of religion, which not only secured our freedoms, but ensured that our rights as citizens would not depend upon our religious identity or practices. In the United States, we have known unprecedented freedoms and opportunities. Exercising the right to vote is indispensable to ensuring our children also enjoy such freedom.

*Rabbi Yitzhak taught, "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted."
–Talmud, B'rachot 55a*

*Thus said the Eternal One, the God of Israel, to the whole community that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon... "Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Eternal in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper."
–Jeremiah 29: 4-7*

*Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy of Priests, would often say, "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, people would swallow each other alive."
–Pirke Avot 3:2*

Commentary: Wherever we live, it is probably Egypt. There is, there really is, a better place, a promised land. And there is, there really is, a promised time. And there is no way to get from here to there, from now to then, except by joining together and marching—and sometimes stumbling—through the wilderness, watching this time not for signs and wonders, but for an opportunity to act. -Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, adapted

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JCPA | JEWISH COUNCIL
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116 East 27th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10016
(212) 684-6950



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