



Voting in New York City: **Frequently Asked Questions**¹

September 15th, 2012

United Neighborhood Houses promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. A membership organization rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy, and capacity building activities. United Neighborhood Houses is a nonpartisan organization that neither supports nor opposes political parties or candidates for office.

¹ This guide is part of UNH's nonpartisan voter mobilization campaign. Information in this document comes primarily from the NYC Board of Elections.

Am I eligible to vote?

To register to vote in New York City, you must:

- Be a citizen of the United States (Includes those persons born in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands);
- Be a New York City resident for at least 30 days;
- Be at least 18 years old on the date of the next election;
- Not be serving a jail sentence or be on parole for a felony conviction;
- Not be judged mentally incompetent by a court; and
- Not claim the right to vote outside the City of New York.

Does a felony conviction affect my right to vote?

If you were convicted of a felony, you *can* vote if you:

- Have been pardoned;
- Are on probation;
- Have served your maximum prison sentence;
- Have been discharged from parole; or
- Have not been sentenced or have had your sentence suspended.

You *cannot* vote if you are currently incarcerated or under parole supervision for a felony conviction.

*You *can* vote if you were convicted of a misdemeanor. If you are currently incarcerated for a misdemeanor or another non-felony offense, you may vote by absentee ballot.

How do I register to vote?

In Person:

You may register to vote in person at any NYC Board of Elections office:

<http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html>. Board of Elections offices are open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and on the weekend prior to Election Day.

By Mail:

To register to vote by mail, fill out a voter registration application in blue or black ink. Registration applications are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean on the Board of Elections website: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/register.html>. Registration applications are also available at public libraries, post offices, and motor vehicle offices.

If you would like a postage-paid registration application mailed to you, call the Board of Elections phone bank at 1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC. (You can also make this request by sending your mailing address to vote@boe.nyc.ny.us.)

Mail your completed registration application to:

Board of Elections in the City of New York
32 Broadway, 7 Fl
New York, NY 10004-1609

*Registration applications must contain original signatures. The applications cannot be photocopied or faxed.

What is the deadline to register to vote in New York?

Although you can register to vote any time during the year, registration applications must be postmarked or delivered **at least 25 days** before the date of the election in which you wish to vote. To vote in the 2012 presidential election, you need to have your registration postmarked or delivered by **October 12th, 2012**.

How do I maintain my registration?

Voter registration in New York City is permanent. In order to maintain your voting rights, however, you must notify the Board of Elections about any address or name changes by submitting an updated voter registration application. New York State law requires voters to notify the Board of Elections within 25 days of an address change and at least 20 days before an election.

If you are convicted of a felony, you must re-register to vote after completing your sentence. If you did not vote in the last two federal elections, confirm with the Board of Elections that you are still registered to vote.

How do I confirm that I am registered to vote?

To confirm your registration, call the NYC Board of Elections phone bank (1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC) or look up your registration on the NYS Board of Elections website at <https://voterlookup.elections.state.ny.us/votersearch.aspx>.

What are the benefits of enrolling in a political party and how do I enroll in one?

When you register to vote, you can chose to register as a member of a political party. Enrolling in a political party allows you to vote in primary as well as general elections. If you are not enrolled in a political party, you can only vote in general elections. Primary elections determine which candidates run on the party tickets; general elections determine which party's candidates become the elected representatives. In election districts where one party's candidates typically win general elections, voting in primary elections is very important. You can change your party affiliation by sending in an updated voter registration application.

*It is important to note that enrolling in a political party does not mean you have to vote for your party's candidates in general elections. In general elections, you can vote for candidates from any party.

What are the political parties in New York?

Voters in New York City and State may enroll in one of five political parties. The parties appear in the following order on New York City and State voter registration applications:

Democratic Party: <http://www.democrats.org/>; <http://www.nydems.org/>

Republican Party: <http://www.gop.com/>; <http://www.nygop.org/>

Conservative Party: <http://www.cpnys.org/>

Independence Party: <http://www.independencepartyny.com/>

Working Families Party: <http://www.workingfamiliesparty.org/>

Green Party: <http://www.web.gpnys.com/>

Where and when do I vote?

The poll sites for many New York City voters have changed due to redistricting.

Finding Your Poll Site Location:

There are poll sites across New York City, but you can only vote at your designated poll site location. The Board of Elections is supposed to send every registered voter a postcard containing information about the voter's poll site. You can also find your poll site location by using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator:

<http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>, calling the NYC Board of Elections voter phone bank: 1-866-VOTE-NYC, or sending your mailing address to vote@boe.nyc.ny.us.

Poll Site Hours:

New York City poll sites are open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Primary and Election Day.

Do I need to bring ID when I go to the polls?

You should not be asked for ID at the polls unless you are a first-time registrant whose identity has not been verified by the Board of Elections. When you initially register to vote, however, you must provide:

- Driver's license or non-driver ID number *or*
- Last four digits of social security number

If you do not provide this information on your registration application, you will have to present some other form of identification prior to voting. Acceptable forms of identification include a valid photo ID or a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document indicating your name and address. You can mail in a copy of one of these documents with your registration application or bring the document with you when you go to the polls.

*Although you should not be asked for identification at the polls, it is a good idea to bring some form of ID when you go to vote in case your name does not appear correctly on the list of registrants and you need to verify your identity.

When can I vote by absentee ballot?

If you are unable to go to your poll site on Election Day because you will be outside of New York City or because you are physically unable to go to the polls, you may vote by absentee ballot. You may also vote by absentee ballot if you are in prison for a non-felony offense.

How do I vote by absentee ballot?

In Person Absentee Voting:

You can fill out an absentee ballot in person as soon as the absentee ballots have been certified and sent to the Board of Elections Borough Offices. In person absentee voting is conducted at Board of Elections Borough Offices

<http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/html/contact/offices.shtml>

from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and on the weekend prior to Election Day. In person absentee voting ends the day before Election Day.

Absentee Voting by Mail:

To send an absentee ballot by mail, you must first fill out an absentee ballot application. These applications are available at Board of Elections offices and on the Board of Elections website (<http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/forms/boe/absenteevoting/absenglish.pdf> and <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/publications.html>). Absentee ballot applications must reach your Board of Elections Borough Office <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html> no later than **a week before Election Day**.

Once you receive your absentee ballot, complete the ballot and send it back to your Board of Elections Borough Office <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/offices.html>. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by **the day before Election Day** and must reach the Board of Elections no later than seven days after the election.

*If you are permanently homebound, you can request on the absentee ballot application to have absentee ballots automatically mailed to you for future elections.

How do I know what races and candidates will be on the ballot?

To view the list of races and candidates for an upcoming election, go to the NYC Board of Elections website: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/html/candidates/list.shtml>. You can look up your Political Districts using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator: <http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>.

What should I do when I get to the polls?

When you enter your poll site, go to the table for your Election District. You can look up your Election District using the NYC Board of Elections online poll site locator:

<http://gis.nyc.gov/vote/ps/index.htm>. You will be asked to sign next to your name to indicate that you came to the polls.

How do I use the voting machines?

1. When your turn comes to vote, part the voting machine's curtains and enter the voting booth. Once you enter the voting booth, you have three minutes in which to vote.
2. Pull the large red handle from left to right. Do not touch the handle again until you have finished making your selections.
3. To make a selection, turn down the lever next to the candidate of your choice. After you do this, an "X" should appear next to the candidate's name. Leave the lever down. If you make a mistake, move the lever back to its original position and try again.
4. When you have finished making your selections, leave the levers down and pull the large red handle all the way to the left. The levers should return to their original positions.
5. Part the curtains and exit the voting booth.

If the voting machines are not functioning properly, you will be given an emergency paper ballot and directed to a cardboard voting booth. Fill out the emergency ballot with a pencil or pen (blue or black ink only), fold the ballot, and deposit the ballot in the emergency ballot box.

Can I vote at the polls if I am disabled or visually impaired?

All but three of New York City's 1,369 poll sites are functionally accessible. The three poll sites that are not functionally accessible are PS 110 and PS 119 in Brooklyn and PS 2 in Queens.²

If your poll site is not accessible, call the Voter Registration Unit of your Board of Elections Borough Office <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/html/contact/offices.shtml> to request a poll site transfer. You must request a transfer at least 14 days before the election.

On Election Day 2008, every poll site in New York City will have at least one accessible voting machine, or Ballot Marking Device (BMD). BMDs do not count votes; they mark

² PS 110 is located at 124 Monitor Street in Brooklyn; PS 119 is located at 3829 Avenue K in Brooklyn; and PS 2 is located at 75-10 21st Avenue in Queens.

a voter's selections and print out a paper ballot, which the voter then deposits in the ballot box. Voters can make their selections using the BMD touch screen or Braille-enhanced keypad with audio controls. Voters with dexterity disabilities can make their selections using the BMD rocker paddle or sip and puff device.

How can I vote if I do not speak English as a first language?

The Board of Elections is required to provide written and oral language assistance to voters who speak Spanish, Chinese, or Korean. Spanish assistance is required in parts of Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Chinese assistance is required in parts of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Korean assistance is required in parts of Queens.

At poll sites with written assistance, all voting instructions and materials are translated into the appropriate language(s). Currently, all Board of Elections voting materials are published in English and Spanish, and most materials appear in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean.

At poll sites with oral assistance, interpreters are present to assist voters who do not speak English. Interpreters are available to answer questions and, if asked by a voter, can enter the voting booth to help translate the ballot.

Voters who do not speak English as a first language can also vote on Ballot Marking Devices, which translate ballots through visual and audio features into Spanish, Chinese-Mandarin, Chinese-Cantonese, and Korean.

Can I bring someone to the polls to help translate or physically assist me?

Yes. If you need language or physical assistance, you can bring someone with you to the polls as long as that person is not your employer or union representative. You may also request to have an interpreter or a bipartisan team of inspectors at the poll site enter the voting booth with you.

What can I do if my right to vote is challenged?

If your name does not appear on the list of registered voters, your signature is missing or does not match the one on record, or you fail to show identification before Election Day, you will be given an affidavit ballot (a paper ballot) and an affidavit envelope in which to seal it. Fill out the envelope and mark the ballot with a pencil or pen (blue or black ink only). Fold the affidavit ballot, place it in the affidavit envelope, and give the envelope to a poll worker.

If you wish to vote on a machine and not by affidavit ballot, you can request a Certificate to Obtain a Court Order at your poll site. Take the Certificate to your Board of Elections Borough Office, where you will find a Supreme Court Justice. Ask the Justice for a Court

Order. When you bring the Court Order back to your poll site, you will be allowed to vote on a machine.

If your vote is challenged at the poll site for some other reason, you will be asked to take a challenge oath (in which you affirm your right to vote) before voting on a machine.

Can I wear partisan paraphernalia in a poll site?

Distributing, wearing, or carrying political literature, posters, buttons, or other paraphernalia is prohibited within 100 feet of any poll site entrance. Soliciting votes within 100 feet of poll site entrances is also prohibited.

Who can I call if I have problems at the polls?

If you have problems at the polls, there are a number of voter protection hotlines you can call.

1. NYC Board of Elections phone bank: 1-866-VOTE-NYC or 1-212-VOTE-NYC
2. New York Public Interest Research Group/Common Cause New York Voter Hotline: 1-212-822-0282
3. Election Protection: 1-866-OUR-VOTE

What are some websites I can visit to learn more about candidates and elections?

NYC Board of Elections: <http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us/>

NYS Board of Elections: <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/INDEX.html>

Vote NY: <http://www.vote-ny.com/>

League of Women Voters Smart Voter: <http://www.smartvoter.org/>

League of Women Voters - Vote 411: <http://www.vote411.org/>

League of Women Voters in the City of New York: <http://www.lwvny.org/links.html>

Project Vote Smart: <http://www.votesmart.org/index.htm>

New York City Voter Assistance Commission:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/vac/html/home/home.shtml>

NYC Campaign Finance Board Voter Guide: http://www.nyccfb.info/public/voter-guide/about.aspx?sm=public_00

Election Protection: <http://www.866ourvote.org/>

Rock the Vote Election Center: <http://www.rockthevote.com/electioncenter/>

If you have any questions about this guide, please contact Gregory Brender at (917) 484-9337 or gbrender@unhny.org.