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Keeping Our Republic: The Roles of Charitable Nonprofits

Benjamin Franklin famously quipped, “A republic, if you can keep it,” in response to a question of what kind of government the constitutional convention had created. As we see it, keeping our republic is a fundamental function of what nonprofits do – working in the center of public service, promoting civic engagement, and solving community problems. Indeed, every day hundreds of thousands of charitable nonprofits work in nonpartisan ways to keep our republic and protect our democracy so everyone has a voice in their own future.

A prime example of working to make democracy work for everyone is the [League of Women Voters](#). The League’s tag lines pretty much say it all: “The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization working to protect and expand voting rights and ensure everyone is represented in our democracy. We empower voters and defend democracy through advocacy, education, and litigation, at the local, state, and national levels.”

But let’s review a little more. The League was officially founded in Chicago in 1920, just six months before the 19th Amendment was ratified and women won the vote. It was instrumental in the establishment of the United Nations in the mid-1940. In the Fifties, it created the Education Fund to encourage the active and informed participation of citizens in government. The charitable nonprofit has been a leading

advocate for voting rights, including passage of the *National Voter Registration Act* (NVRA), also known as the “motor-voter” law, and the *Help America Vote Act* (HAVA), which established provisional balloting, requirements for updating voting systems, and the Election Assistance Commission. The League has also provided a dedicated website for voter information throughout the internet age, establishing the next generation of online voter education with VOTE411.org, a “one-stop-shop” for election-related information.

To summarize, the League of Women Voters is dedicated to all citizens having access to the information they need to be knowledgeable voters

Another noteworthy example of a charitable organization dedicated to keeping our republic is [Nonprofit VOTE](http://NonprofitVOTE.org). Founded within the network of state associations of nonprofits in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America’s nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. In operations, that means the nonprofit has become the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

Why nonprofits? Nonprofit VOTE explains that “nonprofits are uniquely positioned to engage the people that they serve in the democratic process — especially during a local election year which can hit closer to home than general elections.” Nonprofit engagement is also important in advancing equity. The nonprofit explains, “Voter participation gaps along the lines of race, age, income, and education level distort our democracy and the policy debates that flow from it. By working to bring underrepresented voices to the table, nonprofits can ensure a more equitable and inclusive democracy.”

Its resources on how to engage on a nonpartisan basis are as ample as they are helpful. Here is a sampling:

- [Nonprofit Power: Engaging Voters For a More Inclusive Democracy](#)
- [Seven Reasons to Do Voter Registration](#)
- [The Benefit of Voting](#)
- [GOTV \(get out the vote\) Phone and Text Banking](#)
- [Working with Candidates – On a Nonpartisan Basis](#)
- And [regularly scheduled webinars](#) covering all of the above material and more.

In addition to these stellar examples of how charitable organizations contribute to a fully functioning democracy, state associations of nonprofits throughout the country

actively engage their nonprofit members and the public in nonpartisan voter education and participation in voting. Recent examples of their activities that have been featured in this section of our newsletter – Advocacy in Action – include candidate questionnaires, candidate forums, and voter registration drives. See recent examples:

- [In Praise of Nonpartisan Electioneering.](#)
- [Nonprofits Take Note: The Elections Are Coming! The Elections Are Coming!](#)
- [Nonprofits, Democracy, and Voting: They Go Together So Well](#)

It is fitting that America's charitable nonprofits show respect for the vision of one of our earliest charitable leaders – Benjamin Franklin – by working every day to serve the public and keep our republic alive, vibrant, and free.