NY/NJ NPFH Activity: Get out and Vote

Grade: High School

Background Info:

Starting on December 31, 2019, New York granted 16- and 17-year-old individuals the right to pre-register to vote. In New Jersey, future voters can pre-register at 17 years old. This is a monumental development for our young people as they prepare themselves to execute their constitutional right. **This does not mean that 16- and 17-year-olds can vote, but rather that they will be registered to vote by the time they turn 18.**

Research shows that there is a strong relationship between learning about voting in high school and becoming an informed, engaged voter. Students who had not received encouragement to vote from teachers in high school were more than twice as likely to believe "voting is a waste of time" compared to those who were encouraged. Similarly, a quarter of respondents who were not encouraged to engage in civic behaviors feel that they are too uninformed to vote. As concerns grow over voter suppression, legitimacy of voting, and foreign involvement in political elections, it is crucial we engage our students in these conversations and reinforce the importance of voting in federal and local elections, **untied to political party.**

Activity:

- (Optional) Use one of the lesson plans linked below under "Resources" to introduce the conversation about voting and elections with students.
- Ask students to research local elected officials, if/when they are up for re-election and who will be running against them. In a large group, ask students to reflect how the responsibilities of these positions impact their everyday life.
- Have further discussion using any of the following questions:
  - Are you registered to vote? Why or why not? Do you know the process for registering?
  - Do you think it is important to vote? Why or why not?
  - What do you know about voting? What are you hearing about it on the news, from friends, on social media?
  - Do you know how people in your area will cast their vote? - Especially in the age of COVID, how can you and others vote?
  - What makes it difficult to vote and why do you think these barriers exist?
  - How informed do you feel you are to vote? Please explain. What would you want to know more about before voting?
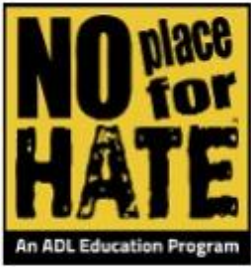
- When thinking about an elected official – local, state or federal – what qualities are you looking for them to possess? What issues are most important to you and why?
- Review the Voting Timeline. What did you find interesting? Did you learn anything new?
- Action Item: Conclude by summarizing the importance of voting and share ways students can register to vote (or if not yet eligible, how friends and family can vote). Encourage students to register by reminding them that democracy depends on ensuring that every voter has an equal and fair opportunity to cast a ballot, free from restrictions that have a discriminatory impact.

Follow Up:
- Share resources to encourage your students to pre-register to vote including links or handouts.
- Create a social media campaign encouraging the community to vote.
- Compare voting turnout rates across the globe.

Resources:
- Visual Timeline of Voting Rights
- FAQ: Voting During COVID
- FAQ: Student Voters
- Anti-Bias Education Tools & Strategies: Teaching About Elections
- High School Lesson Plan: Elections and Youth Vote
- High School Lesson Plan: How do Polls Inform, Influence, and Impact Elections?
- High School Lesson Plan: Women's Suffrage, Racism, and Intersectionality
- Table Talk: Let's Talk About Voting

Virtual Adaptation:
This activity can be done in person or virtually. You can use breakout rooms to have students discuss in small groups and then report out to the larger group.
- If you choose to delve into voter suppression, or particularly literacy tests, we encourage you to use the "poll" or "form" feature and see if your students can answer typical questions from a literacy test.
- In presentation or whiteboard mode, ask your students to identify major US events within the voting timeline visual guide to add context.