

Communicating and Encouraging the Right to Vote: A Voter Education Program

Residents of nursing homes have the same rights as all United States Citizens. That includes the right to vote and to participate in the political process. Informing residents about election issues also involves them with the community. In addition, staff and families may benefit from learning about concerns directly affecting residents.

*This activity takes on special significance because it is a
Presidential Election Year - the first of a new century!*

Planning a voter education program is easy. Ask a candidate to give a speech or presentation at your facility, or invite a speaker to discuss issues important to residents.

Workplan for setting up a candidates forum*:

- Pick a date and time for the forum. Set it far enough in advance to allow adequate publicity and to insure that candidates will be able to attend.
- Decide which issues the candidates will discuss.
- Invite candidates to attend the forum. Let them know what issues you would like them to address.
- Write an informational fact sheet for the people that attend the forum.
- Get other groups to help out with planning, organizing, and drawing in more attendees to the forum. Contact religious, civic, or volunteer groups.
- Write an agenda for the participants.
- Publicize the event. Resident councils may do this by posting flyers and posters in the nursing home, advertising in the nursing home newsletter, and announcing the event to employees, family members, and residents. Inform the community about the event through fliers and posters in clubs and religious facilities. Send out a press release and talk to your aging issues or health specialist with the local paper(s).

- Find a room in the nursing home to host the forum. Make sure it is large enough to house the amount of people you expect to attend.

- Check with the Administrator to reserve the room, if possible.

- Secure a microphone and speakers for the event if the equipment is available and you expect a large crowd.

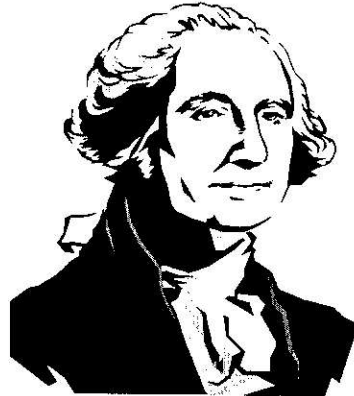
- Confirm that staff can set up the room on the day of the event, refreshments will be available, and that there will be staff and resources available for producing all written materials.

One nursing home set up a “senior forum” which allowed staff and residents to learn about issues and voice their concerns.

It is important to discuss what needs to be done, appoint a committee to carry out the plans for the project, set deadlines, and include as many members in the nursing home as possible. Advertise in the nursing home and in the community before and after the event, and evaluate the project afterwards. Also, recognize the people that participated in the project. Most importantly, make the project enjoyable and engaging!

*Modified from the 1996 Residents' Rights Week Packet and -Toward More Effective Resident Councils,-and -Resident Councils in Action- by the Minnesota Alliance for Health Care Consumers.

For residents who are less able to participate or choose not to participate in a candidates' forum, a history activity might be successful. With history books from a library and/or pictures, have residents reminisce about the first time they voted or share memories of an interesting election.



For more help, call the League of Women's Voters at (202) 429-1965 or American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) at (202) 434-3731. AARP presents useful nonpartisan information in its "Presidential Voters' Guide" including the candidates positions on a variety of issues such as long term care, tax reform, Social Security and campaign finance reform.

Lastly, all residents should have the opportunity to vote. Facilities can involve residents with the community by escorting them to the polling booths. If a resident cannot travel to a polling booth, he or she should have access to absentee ballots. A facility may also be a good place to set up a community polling booth.