Ending the Epidemic: Why is 2012 So Important?

January 10, 2012 By Paul Kawata

2012 is going to be a big year and we are going to need everyone in top form, if we are going to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

You have no idea how much I like saying “we’re going to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic!” It’s a dream come true. I am **so** ready to make this vision a reality. I know it will take years, but every big transformation has to start somewhere. This is our watershed moment and I hope we’re up to the task.

The importance of this year’s election cannot be overstated. The last two years have been marred by partisan gridlock and rancor. Elections have consequences, and now is the time for our constituents’ voices to be heard. For our community, this election is important for another reason. The populations who are most likely to be disenfranchised - minorities and the poor - are also the same populations that are most severely impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We work every day to give voice to these communities and ensure that their needs are met. This election is their chance to speak up for themselves: at the ballot box. We should do everything we can to help them do so.

Voting is fundamental to our democracy; however, too often CBOs don’t want to get involved. They’re concerned about their 501(c)3 status. While their trepidation is understandable, their participation is critical. As nonprofits, we must all be careful to remain nonpartisan, **but we can and should encourage voting**, whether through registering new voters and/or organizing transportation to the polls.

Nonpartisan Voter Registration

At every fundraiser, health fair, support group, coalition meeting, our movement needs to register voters. In most states it’s a simple process. To figure out how, go to http://register-vote.com.

Not only is voter registration important for our democracy, but organizations that register thousands of voters become important to mayors, city councils, governors and federal legislators. Not only are you doing your part for democracy, but you’re also building “political capital.” You never know when this will come in handy, especially as we need additional funds to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Why This Election Is Important

Constituents, donors and clients need to know why it’s important to vote. You can’t tell them who to vote for, but you can certainly educate them about our issues. You can also share with candidates why health care reform is important. Talk about our shared vision to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

NMAC is here for support as you put together briefs for candidates on the issues that impact your community. We have already planned a series of issue papers that you can modify to meet your needs.

Contact Kali Lindsey (klindsey@nmac.org), NMAC's Director of Legislative and Public Affairs or Daniel Montoya (dmontoya@nmac.org), NMAC's Deputy Executive Director if you need assistance as you develop your organization's strategy or simply want to know ways you can make a difference.

Organize Transportation
We all know that access to a doctor is meaningless unless you have transportation to get to the appointment. As a result, our community has developed systems to get folks to their medical appointments. Constituents, donors and clients need to understand that voting is similarly important and your agency can help arrange transportation to get to the polls.

Please note: You cannot use government money to organize transportation to the polls. This is why it is vital that organizations establish diverse funding streams to sustain their mission and work. Organizations that have a mix of government and private support are more likely to succeed than organizations dependent on government money alone. Organizing transportation is a great way to create "new private donors" for your agency. Private donors understand the value of voting. I'm available to help strategize if you'd like: pkawata@nmac.org.

Continue to Support the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)
While this year's election is important, it's also critical that we keep our eye on the ball in terms of health care reform. We must continue to support the ACA in Congress and oppose any efforts to undermine its full implementation. This being an election year, it's possible that the ACA will become an even more aggressive target for those looking to score political points. We must work to ensure that the health of millions of Americans, including the 1.1 million individuals living with HIV or AIDS are not held hostage by political gamesmanship.

2012 is a big year. We have to a lot of work to do to get ourselves positioned to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. No one said ending the AIDS epidemic would be easy. It's a struggle that will test our character and commitment. But I have no doubt our movement is up to the challenge.

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