Voter Engagement in Clinical Social Work: Bridging Micro & Macro

Open Classroom/ISP
September 13, 2022

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Acknowledging the Land

- Wabanaki Confederacy
- native-land.ca
Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.
Voter Engagement: Bridging Micro & Macro

Individual Issues ➞ Social Issue

Individual Effects ➞ Structural Cause
Voter engagement involves social workers supporting others with voter:

- Registration
- Education
- Access
Nonpartisan voter engagement

What is it?

Partisan

- Activities that advance a specific political party or candidate

Nonpartisan

- Activities that engage voters without supporting or opposing any particular party or candidate
Nonpartisan voter engagement

What is it?

- Legal
- Empowering
- Beneficial
Nonpartisan voter engagement

Why is it important?

1. Barriers to voting
2. Populations served by social workers are less likely to vote
3. Voting improves outcomes
Nonpartisan voter engagement

How do we do it?

Collaborate with a nonpartisan voter engagement organization:

- Voter ER
- Nonprofit VOTE
- LWV of Maine
- Voting is Social Work
Nonpartisan voter engagement

How do we do it?
Nonpartisan voter engagement

How do we do it?
Voter Engagement Model

Community Partnerships
- Local nonpartisan civic organizations
- Local Registrar of Voters
- League of Women Voters

Institutional Buy-In
- Administration
- Faculty
- Community Stakeholders
- Field Instructors

Assignment and Curriculum Placement
- Embed in curricula
- Serve as signature or principle assignment
- Tie voter activities in field to CSWE core competencies

Materials and Training
- Permissible Activities
- Fact Sheets on Voting
- Training for Field Instructors, Faculty, Students

(Hylton et al., 2021)
Nonpartisan voter engagement

Research Findings

Evaluation Methods

Pre- and post-tests:
- students (Hylton et al., 2018; Hylton et al., 2021)
- field instructors (Lane et al., 2019)

Qualitative data:
- Students’ written course assignments (Hill et al., 2019)
Selected Findings

- 88% of students reported that voting was important or moderately important to their practice; an increase of 44% from pretests before training.
- The percentage of students who said they plan to vote always or most of the time in elections increased:
  - **STATE ELECTIONS**: 34% before training to 73% after project
  - **LOCAL ELECTIONS**: 23% before training to 60% after project
  - **FEDERAL ELECTIONS**: 65% before training to 90% after project.

### Likelihood of Voting in Future Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Training</th>
<th>After Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% n % n % n % n</td>
<td>% n % n % n % n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Federal</strong></td>
<td><strong>State</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>41 188 16 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the Time</td>
<td>24 110 18 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>10 45 19 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>4 19 14 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>20 93 33 145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previously Engaged in Activity</th>
<th>Plans to Engage in Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% n</td>
<td>% n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encourage others to register to vote</strong></td>
<td>74 339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help others with voter registration</strong></td>
<td>30 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encourage others to vote</strong></td>
<td>79 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help others with voting</strong></td>
<td>31 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educate others on voting issues</strong></td>
<td>50 226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Differences in before and after ratings were statistically significant p < .05

\(^{a}\text{N} = 455\)

\(^{b}\text{N} = 475\)
Assignment and Curriculum Placement

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• Serve as signature or principle assignment
• Tie voter activities in field to CSWE core competencies
Institutional Buy-In

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- Faculty
- Community Stakeholders
- Field Instructors
Voter Engagement Model

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(Hylton et al., 2021)
Interested in learning more about voting?

Voting Resources
• www.votingissocialwork.org
• www.turbovote.org
• www.ballotpedia.org
• League of Women Voters
• Contact your town/city Registrar of Voters

Contact me!
• jenna.powers@uconn.edu

You're "just not that into politics?"
Your boss is.
Your landlord is.
Your insurance company is.
And every day they use their political power to keep your pay low, raise your rent, and deny you coverage.
Its time to get into politics.
References


Voter Engagement, Equal Opportunity, and Justice

Social workers & agencies support voting as indicator of health

Social workers & agencies include voter engagement in service delivery

Voter turnout increases

Better leaders and more informed political decisions are made

Better outcomes for communities
Social worker: “Are you registered to vote?”

Client: “Yes.”

SW: Do you have a plan to vote in the next election? (Do you know when it is and how you’ll cast your ballot, such as in person or via absentee ballot?)

C: “Yes.”

SW: Okay, great! We can also go to turbovote.org if you’re unsure about when, where, or how to vote. You can also look up what will be on your ballot ahead of time at ballotpedia.org.

C: “No.”

SW: Great! Do you want to go to turbovote.org to look up when/where/how to vote, or look up what will be on your ballot ahead of time at ballotpedia.org/Sample_Ballot_Lookup?
Incorporating Voter Engagement into Field Education: Example Practice Activities

The Nine Competencies:

- C1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- C2: Engage diversity and difference in practice
- C3: Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice
- C4: Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- C5: Engage in policy practice
- C6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C9: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Practice Activity</th>
<th>Alignment with core competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research allowable nonpartisan voter activities for 501(c)(3) organizations and/or</td>
<td>C1  C2  C3  C4  C5  C6  C7  C8  C9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements for nonprofits in the 1993 National Voter Registration Act.</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss ethical implications of not supporting clients and communities to vote in</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social work practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share information on voting and elections with clients, staff and/or communities</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate voter registration into agency services (e.g., add question to intake form)</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the differential impact of voting policies on diverse populations</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run voter registration drive at agency or event</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite elected officials to agency for meetings or forum focused on advancing human rights</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help people with a prior felony conviction to register and vote (if eligible in your state)</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through public awareness and individual outreach in service delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement/change/advocate for voter engagement activity policy in field agency or</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the importance of Census 2020 in your agency and/or community</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess political power of community through voter turnout statistics by district</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with the census task force in your region/town</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify elected officials on the local, state, and federal level. Share contact list</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with agency staff and/or citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train clients/staff on advocacy, government systems, and the importance of voting</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine what policies may deter voter turnout</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use supervision to discuss and determine strategies to engage organizations and</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communities in voting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage clients to participate in the census</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use strategic planning objectives to measure effectiveness of agency voter registration</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>drives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify measurable outcomes of voter pledge card drives (e.g., compare against public</td>
<td>✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓     ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>records)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Organizations embed voting into their work with clients & staff
• Voter engagement is ongoing (vs one-time event):
  • Voter registration
  • Education
  • Access
  • Encouragement
Nonpartisan voter engagement

Why is it important?
Nonpartisan voter engagement

Why is it important?

- 700,000 social workers & 12,000,000 clients/day
- Special populations:
  - Felony convictions
  - Physical, cognitive, or other disabilities
  - Homeless
  - Active military
  - Non-English speakers
  - Survivors of intimate partner violence
- Communities who are less likely to vote:
  - Low-income
  - People of color
  - Young people

(www.votingissocialwork.org)
Nonpartisan voter engagement

Why is it important?

Voter engagement promotes health:

- Indicator of physical & mental health
- Voting → Power → Resources → Health
- Welfare policy & budget
- Improve schools, housing & nutrition