

Name of Project: Voting Rights Project Under the UUCCWC Justice Action Council

Church: Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Washington County (UUCCWC)

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Brief description:

UUCCWC members, friends, neighbors and collaborating organizations work together to write by hand and mail at the designated optimal times, postcards and letters that encourage people to vote.

When representing our church we work only with not-for-profit, non-partisan groups who select populations the most likely to have voter suppression aimed at them. We never tell people for whom to vote, but we encourage them to vote their conscience for issues that matter to them and candidates who support their issues.

Names and addresses we use often identify sex or gender preferences or title preferences when they are available and advisable to use for culturally-preferred reasons (e.g. Miss, Mr. Mrs in some southern states). Sometimes postcard messages are written in both Spanish and English. Staff and board members at Common Ground who provide names and addresses recommend the precise language to use on postcards (i.e. Reclaim Our Vote). For Vote Forward you receive suggestions for your personal message to be written in the empty spaces of pre-printed letters. Some people work on Vote Forward all year and gather 500 to 1000 letters to mail at the designated time.

Every time during the year when we work as a team together on Reclaim our Vote postcards, we engage about 50 of our church members (church of about 115 at present). Different members participate each time, but there is a core common active group. Members, friends and others outside the church write from 20 to 400 postcards, depending on their time and ability.

Time period:

Year-round we keep abreast of voting rights and voter suppression activities in media sources that we trust to keep informed about what states and counties are in the most need of help, including in Oregon. If there is partisan information to share, we do that as individuals off of church official newsletters and online sources.

Vote Forward letter writing happens all year long when we learn of special needs to get out the vote in primaries, special elections, or fall general elections; mostly members work on their own from home without any help from us when they learn of needs for letter writing. We let each other know of critical times those are needed.

We are the most active as a group when we learn of Reclaim Our Vote postcard campaigns from the Center for Common Ground. Common Ground has democratic centers in southern states and at college campuses for year-round activities like voter registrations, town hall or student meetings to educate and learn about community needs that the democratic centers aim to fulfill. Voters feel their needs are heard and addressed; they are not just contacted to vote and forgotten the rest of the year.

UU and United Church of Christ churches as well as organizations that encourage black and brown voters to participate in the voting democratic process are among the strongest groups of writers. Common Ground's Board is predominately comprised of BIPOC voting rights leaders. UU's are among the top volunteer leaders and postcard writers across the country.

Tips for success:

Collaborate to bring in neighbors, friends, other churches, and Indivisible Groups so you can purchase Reclaim Our Vote postcards at a lower rate and expand effective activities beyond your church.

Share some information about how meaningful the postcards are to people who receive them with data about how many people voted who received postcards, when that is available. Report how recipients were able to connect with county registrars' offices for accurate voter info and voting locations which can change in a voter suppression climate. We write out the county offices info or put stickers with this information on the postcards.

Fundraise to purchase supplies and stamps (largest expense at \$.48 per postcard and \$.63 per Vote Forward letter sent, unless your church can provide a budget line item each year anticipating this expense).

The more Reclaim Our Vote postcards we purchase the more the price goes down (e.g. \$.02 per postcard if 2,000 are purchased at a time). There are several sources for the postcards which are shared when you sign up for a campaign. The postcard art and the messages created to write on postcards are designed to appeal to people of color and college students who are the primary recipients. "Vote Your Power" postcards are our churches' favorite art choice. Individuals and collaborating organizations also help with hefty stamp costs. Postcard writers are told how to donate for supplies online or with checks sent to the church. Those unable to contribute can still participate.

Provide paper bag kits that people can work on at home. The kits contain everything needed to write the postcards. Offer to deliver kits to home-bound people.

Set up group sessions where all supplies are provided and people can gather to socialize around a table as they write postcards together.

Challenges:

Cost of postcard stamps and letter stamps costs have increased over time.

Some states do not have as much ready access to names and addresses as a state like Georgia which is very well organized. Common Ground/Reclaim Our Vote depends on county officers who will share names and addresses or the work of voting rights organizations and attorneys who gather names and addresses and share with Reclaim Our Vote.

We encourage texting and phoning with UU the Vote for people with the technology skills to follow those instructions. Other organizations provide sophisticated tech opportunities for “curing” activities (e.g. connect with people who report problems and help solve the issues. Problems include that their names were eliminated from the rolls, they went to the wrong voting place because of changes or not understanding their location, they were granted a provisional status for some reason, or their signature does not exactly match the original in the opinion of a voting worker.) Curing often requires use of two computers simultaneously.

Voter suppression activities have also increased to provide barriers to voting: removing drop boxes, not allowing drinks and food to be brought in where there are long lines, having fewer voting machines or workers to help with paper ballots, making registration more complicated, removing people from the voter rolls if they did not vote last time or finding excuses to throw out names if they live in a district that is predominately BiPOC.