

NONPROFIT GUIDE TO Voter Registration in Louisiana

Democracy is not a spectator sport. In order to be a part of democracy, people must get off the bench and participate. One key way of doing so is by voting. Nonprofits can play a critical role in registering community members to vote. Every organization should understand the rules first.

Online Registration

As with most states, residents must register to vote prior to Election Day. Louisiana provides an online portal that makes registering easy and even helps ensure the application is delivered to the applicant's correct parish. Most third-party voter registration drives prefer to use the state's online system over paper applications to help ensure timely delivery of applications to correct parishes and avoid human error reading handwritten applications. Nonprofits can set up computers, laptops, or even use tablets that are connected to the Internet to submit near instantaneous voter registration applications. The system can be reached here: <https://voterportal.sos.la.gov/VoterRegistration>

In order to register online, prospective registrants must:

1. Have a Louisiana Driver's License or Louisiana Special ID card (issued by the Office of Motor Vehicles);
2. Be able to read the Audit Code on that License or ID in order to access the system (the "Audit Code" is a 4-digit code found on the front of a license or ID with a signature. At this time, Louisiana Mobility Impaired cards do not have audit codes or signatures, and the legislature has determined they are not eligible to be used for online voter registration); and
3. Have a physical address that they consider to be their domicile (if they claim a Louisiana Homestead Exemption, it must be this address).

ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION	
Pros	Cons
Can be done up to 20 days before the election	Must have a Louisiana Driver's License or Special ID Card
Quick and easy; no need to mail or drop-off forms	Must have Internet connection
Can print registration documents for verification	Must have computer equipment to print and/or save

Paper Registration

If using the online system is not feasible, there are paper registration applications that can be completed and mailed or dropped off to local registrar of voters. The forms *must* be mailed or dropped off to the registrar for the parish in which the individual claims as their address.

The state form is available for download here: <https://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/PublishedDocuments/ApplicationToRegisterToVote.pdf> This form contains the addresses for the parish registrar of voters for mailing or in-person delivery of the forms.

Louisiana also accepts the National Mail Voter Registration Form which can be found here: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form/> Keep in mind that the forms must still be mailed to the addresses listed for each parish registrar of voters.

Paper forms must be signed by the registrant. If the registrant is unable to sign and can only make a mark (like an X), there must be two witnesses who see the registrant make their mark and must sign at the time that person makes the mark.

Delivering Applications To Applicant's Parish

The most important element of conducting voter registration drives with paper forms is that the forms **MUST** be submitted to the parish registrar of voters within 30 days of receiving the paper application from the registrant. Failure to submit these applications within 30 days can subject the person who collects these forms to fines and jail time ([La. R.S. 1461.7](#))

PAPER VOTER REGISTRATION	
Pros	Cons
Can be used by applicants who lack a driver's license or only have a state mobility impaired card	Must deliver to correct parish
Can be used anywhere without internet connection	Must mail or hand-deliver no later than 30 days before election
Allows applicants to take the form with them with a pre-stamped and pre-addressed envelope to fill out on their own or family members	Prone to errors, handwriting hard to read, incomplete, etc.

Must Know Items to Conduct a Voter Registration Drive in Louisiana

Q How old must someone be in order to register to vote?

A Third-party voter registration drives can help Louisiana residents as young as 17 complete a voter registration application. However, residents as young as 16 can register to vote in-person at a Registrar of Voters Office or a Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles. Voters must be 18 years old by election day in order to vote.

Q Can third-parties, such as nonprofits, pre-fill in information on a voter registration application?

A No, it is specifically prohibited by statute: “Registration applications are to be completed and signed by the applicant and no person shall forge, alter, add to, deface, take, destroy any voter registration application in violation of R.S. 18:1461.2(A)(6).

Q How soon after collecting completed voter registration forms must our organization deliver the forms to the Registrar of Voters?

A Louisiana state law requires those conducting a third-party voter registration drive to deliver completed voter registration applications to the appropriate parish office no later than 30 days from the date of receiving the completed voter registration application from the applicant or face criminal prosecution. This is one reason using the online voter registration portal is preferable for voter registration drives.

Q May third-parties photocopy or reproduce an applicant’s voter registration application?

A Louisiana’s statute makes it a crime “[f]or purposes other than fulfilling the person’s duties relative to registration of voters as provided by law, (to) copy or reproduce a voter registration application that has been submitted by an applicant.” Anyone who violates this provision can be fined not more than two thousand dollars or be imprisoned for not more than two years, or both, for the first offense. [LA R.S. 18.1461.2\(A\)\(9\) and \(B\)](#).

Third-parties need to take care in making a photocopy or reproduction of an applicant’s voter registration application as the applications contain private information and criminal penalties may attach. Groups should consult with counsel before obtaining consent and collecting information from a voter’s applications.

Q May third-parties pay people to conduct voter registration drives?

A Organizations may pay people by the hour but shall not pay them for each completed application. Care should be taken to properly train individuals as the organization may be held liable for its representatives actions.

Q Can third-parties, such as nonprofits, assist a voter with disabilities complete a voter registration application?

A A voter with disabilities may ask a third-party or family member to help them complete the voter registration form at the voter's direction. The voter would then make their mark as they are able in front of two witnesses, and the two witnesses would sign the application.

Q What are the rules on those with felony convictions registering and voting in Louisiana?

A Those who are currently awaiting trial in jail and have not yet been convicted, are eligible to register and vote. Louisiana does allow returning citizens who are no longer incarcerated following a felony, with or without supervision (ie, parole or probation) to vote provided they have been out of prison for more than five years. They are eligible to register to vote prior to reaching their five year period provided that the next election will be held after they have been out of incarceration for five years. (See LA R.S. 18:102 and 18:177, New in 2019). Those who have ever been convicted in Louisiana of a felony, including certain election offenses, check [Restore Your Vote](#) online program of the Election Law Center to determine when you are eligible to register and vote or call the Secretary of State's Office, Commissioner of Elections at 225-922-0900.

Q What are the registration deadlines?

A Paper voter registration forms must be postmarked **30 days prior** to the date of the election or received at the registrar's office no later than 30 days prior to the election if dropped off in person.

Voter registration applications submitted online must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. local time **20 days before an election.**

Q Where is an applicant's residence?

A If a registrant does not claim a homestead exemption and resides at more than one place in the state with an intention to reside at more than one place indefinitely, that person may choose to register only at one of the places at which he or she resides. There is an exception for any person who resides in a nursing or veterans' home; they may register and vote at the address where the nursing or veterans' home is located, even though they claim a homestead exemption on their residence.

Best Practices to Remember

BE NONPARTISAN

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, endorsing or showing support for a particular candidate or party is not allowed. Employees and volunteers soliciting registrations on behalf of the organization cannot wear any shirts or buttons that show a preference for any candidate. While individuals certainly have the right to support candidates on their own time, the organization should be cautious about voter registration events appearing to be partisan or candidate-specific in any way.

DOCUMENT YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION PROGRAM

In Louisiana there may be groups that object to voter registration drives and may try to “catch” an organization violating either state voter registration law or federal IRS law. Organizations must have a clear plan for their voter registration drives and be able to demonstrate fidelity to the registration process in order to protect the work of the organization. Having a volunteer attorney assist the organization in preparing for and conducting a voter registration drive can ensure that the organization’s mission is protected.

Organizations may best be able to comply with the registration process by having a specific person responsible for ensuring the registration forms get to the proper parish registrar. The paper forms will have to be sorted by parish and carefully submitted either via mail or in person. Nonprofits should have a specific plan about how registration drives will be conducted, how forms will be sorted and submitted, and how voters will be assured that their registration form is being submitted.

When individuals register, whether online or via paper registration, the local registrar of voters may conduct a verification via postal mail to ensure that voter is actually residing at the address given. Another best practice is to remind those who register that they should make sure they respond to any requests for verification from the registrar of voters by mailing back the information they receive.

This publication was written by Susan East Nelson, JD, Executive Director of the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families with Special Thanks to the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families.



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