

## The “Why Vote?” Initiative

### Increasing Voting Rates in Low-Income Communities in 2020 and Beyond

#### A critical problem for our democracy

Voting rates in low-income communities are much lower than in higher-income communities.

#### Why don't more people vote?

Past negative experiences with a range of public agencies discourage people from even considering the idea of registering to vote. They are reluctant to engage with yet another public bureaucracy — a voting system that has its own set of requirements for documentation, registration, protocols, and its own criminal penalties. They often express fears such as, “What if I make a mistake?” or, “Will I be penalized?” Many people with limited time for dealing with public institutions have to focus their “public engagement” efforts on more urgent matters: navigating complex systems to ensure health, income, housing, or other services for themselves and their families.

#### What's the solution?

There is no simple solution to this complex problem, but the Right Question Institute (RQI) can make a unique contribution to help address it. RQI has demonstrated in a wide range of communities, and across many fields, the power of well-designed educational tools that allow people to feel a new sense of urgency and begin to advocate for themselves. We have created the “Why Vote?” Tool. It fosters a strong sense of urgency for people who do not regularly vote to see voting as a self-advocacy role they can and want to play. The “Why Vote?” Tool allows people to:

1. See the connection between specific public services they rely on and decisions elected officials make.
2. Name for themselves why they want to vote once they see that connection.
3. Ask questions about the actual process of registering and voting.
4. Connect with efforts that will help them register and vote.

#### Promising evidence

RQI has piloted a nonpartisan voter engagement strategy in ten states around the country using key elements of the “Why Vote?” Tool. Data from work with adult literacy students in Arizona showed that after going through RQI's program, 93 percent of participants who had never voted before said they felt more prepared to vote, and 87 percent said they felt more interested in voting. Angie, a young mother in Concord, New Hampshire, said, “It's at the welfare office that we learn our voice doesn't count. But [after RQI's workshop], I see that our voices do count ... and we need to vote.”

#### Share the Tool

We are providing technical assistance and materials to support use of the “Why Vote?” Tool by staff in direct service programs — including food banks, shelters, early childhood and youth programs, and community and civic organizations — in states all around the country.

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