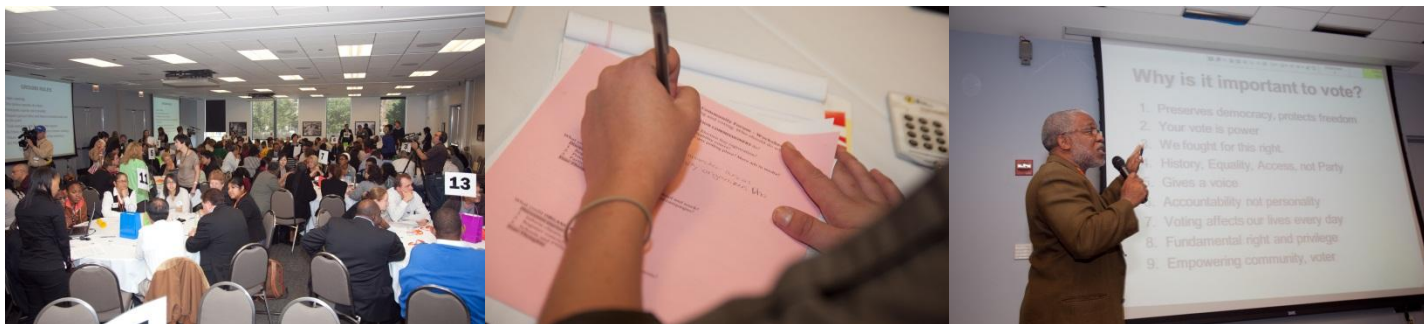




Voter Engagement 2012: The Community Forum

*A Community Forum to shape the agenda for
long-term election reforms*

Presentation and Keypad Polling Results



Introduction

In the City of Chicago alone, there are more than 400,000 voting-age citizens not registered to vote. The Pew Center estimates there are 51 million voting-age citizens who are not registered nationwide. How do we grow voter registration, turnouts and engagement - for 2012 and beyond?

This report details the results of an ambitious outreach program organized by the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago. The goal of the program was to meet with a diverse group of Civic and Community Leaders to build a plan for comprehensive election reforms to boost registrations and turnout - for 2012 and beyond.

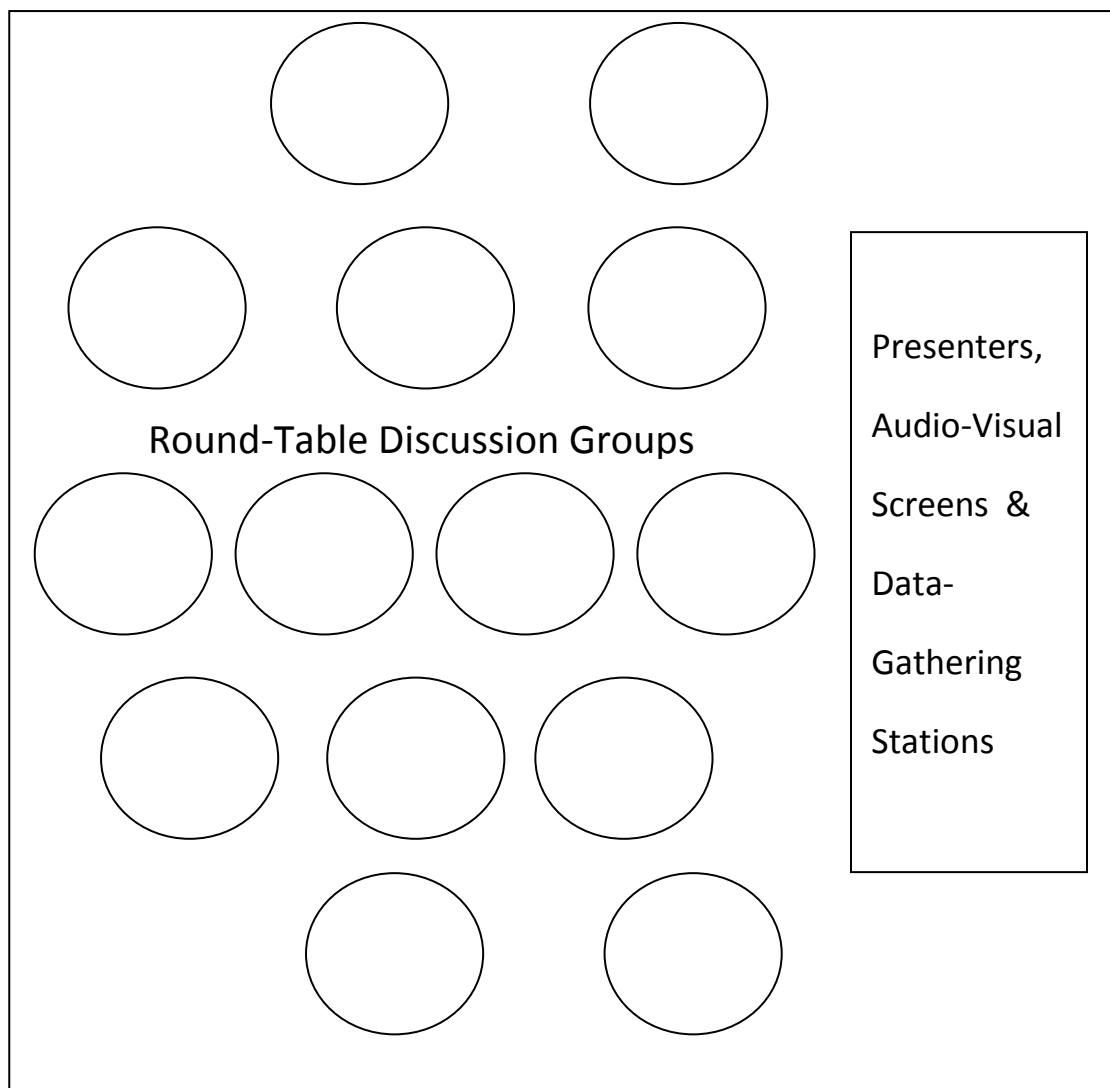
“We made contact with dozens of organizations and from there, we organized a collaborative setting that we called the ‘Voter Engagement 2012 Community Forum,’ ” said Lance Gough, Executive Director for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners. “The Forum was our biggest effort ever to bring together a variety of voices from all over the community to think about and tell us how we might be able to manage elections differently and better.”

At the Community Forum, more than 120 participants joined round-table discussions on a variety of targeted topics: motivations to vote, barriers to voting, and specific concepts for potential reforms. The round-table groups shared their ideas and reported recommendations to the entire gathering. From there, all participants then used hand-held devices to vote on every concept that was discussed.

The results of this program were that a variety of Civic and Community leaders provided ideas and goals for possible changes to election systems, but also valuable insights into how the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners can shape its message to appeal to those currently not engaged in the electoral franchise.

Community Forum – Structure

The Community Forum was structured to allow for optimum collaboration among participants at each table, and then, in turn, among all of the attendees. Small groups of 10 participants were created, and among them a computer savvy participant entered the ideas discussed at the table into a laptop, ensuring all ideas were captured. After each topical discussion, participants were asked to register their responses using hand-held keypads. The use of keypads allowed for results to be captured, summarized and immediately shared with attendees – while also providing demographic information about what was most important to different age groups, different geographic sections of Chicago and different racial/ethnic groups.



Community Forum – Agenda

Goals for Session

- **Goal #1 – Review the state of voter registration and turnouts – in Chicago and around the country**
- **Goal #2 – Discuss and evaluate the barriers to registration and participation**
- **Goal #3 – Discuss the shared values and priorities surrounding voting**
- **Goal #4 – Report a list of possible reforms and activities, all aimed at increasing registrations and turnouts, for 2012 and beyond**

10:30 am	Registration
11:00 am	Program Introduction
	Table Discussions: “What do you consider is important about voting?”
12:00 pm	Presentation: Current State of Voting and Voter Registration in Chicago
12:10 pm	Table Discussions: What are the Barriers to Registration and Voting”
12:30 pm	Determine the TOP Barriers to Registration and Voting (Lunch Served)
12:45 pm	Table Discussions: Who Tackles the TOP Barriers to assure more voter participation, more registrations and higher turnouts?
	What reforms should the CHICAGO BOARD OF ELECTIONS do?
	What can you do?
	What can OTHER ORGANIZATIONS in Chicago do to motivate higher voter interest/engagement?
1:15 pm	Complete Building Consensus and Reporting Out Recommendations
1:35 pm	Keypad polling on Top Recommendations
1:50 pm	Evaluation & Conclusion – Next Steps
2:00 pm	Adjourn

The Community Forum – Summary of Results

Overall, participants in the Voter Engagement 2012 Community Forum identified most closely with these concepts and ideals:

- Voting represents “power” and “protection,” both for individuals and their communities.
- The biggest barriers to citizens registering to vote are: a lack of knowledge about the system, a lack of motivation, and political frustration.
- The most significant barriers to actual voting are: apathy, a distrust of whether voting will make a difference, and a lack of knowledge.
- The participants believe the top reforms the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners should pursue are: Same-Day (Election Day) or Online voter-registration options; Universal Voting Centers like those in Early Voting; and, Online/Phone Voting.
- The steps individuals believe they should take are: working with family and friends to promote a culture of voting, including registering and organizing people they know to vote; and, encouraging civics education for youth.
- Participants said other civic and community organizations need to: advocate for civics education; promote the voting process; and inform voters about different offices and candidates.

This report provides information on the results in three sections:

Section 1: Results of Keypad Voting at the Community Forum

1.1 – About the Attendees

1.2 – Voting Knowledge

1.3 – Ideas and Recommendations for Reform

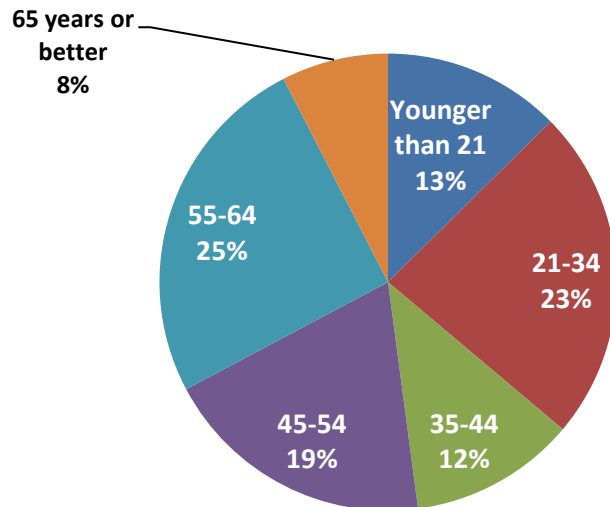
Section 2: Notable Cross-Tabs

This section provides the top priorities and ideals, where different age groups, genders, geographic sections of the City of Chicago, and racial/ethnic backgrounds might have set different priorities. These data are important for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners to use in shaping messages in outreach, public-service campaigns and in sharing concepts from this project with City, County, State and Federal officials.

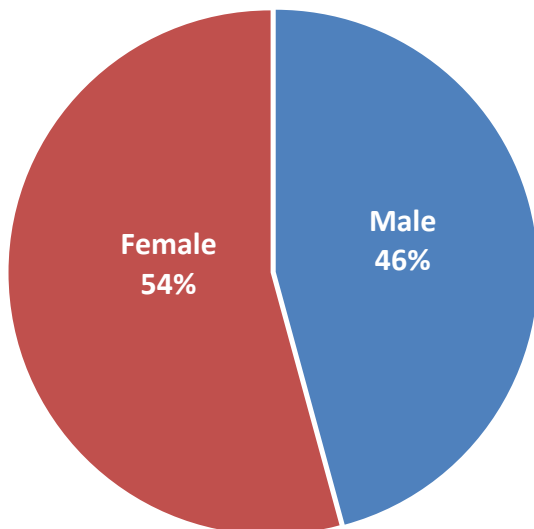
Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Section 1.1: About the Attendees

What is your age?

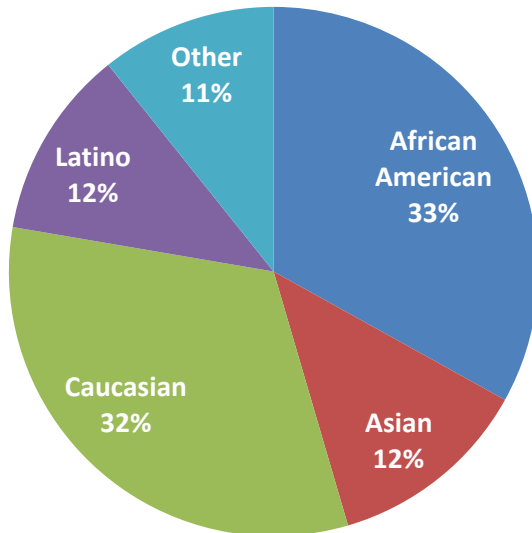


What is your gender?

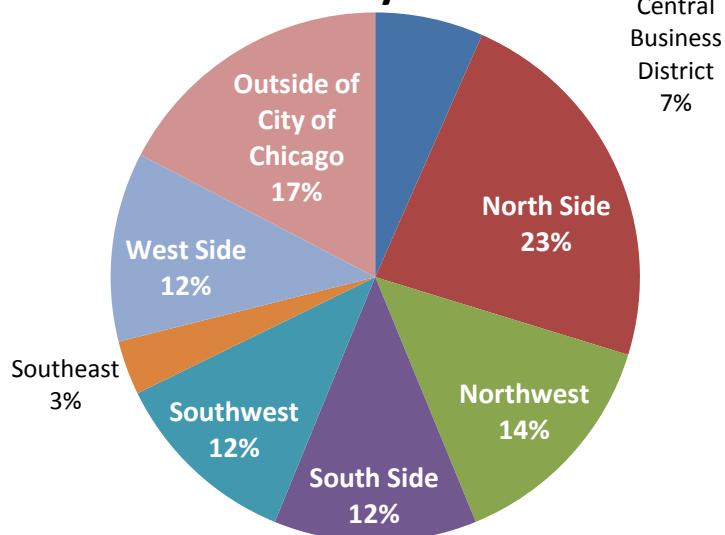


Section 1.1: About the Attendees

What ethnicity do you identify with?

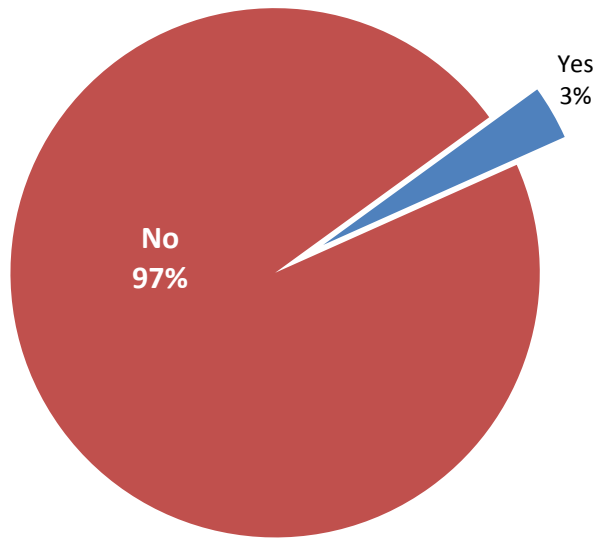


Where do you live?

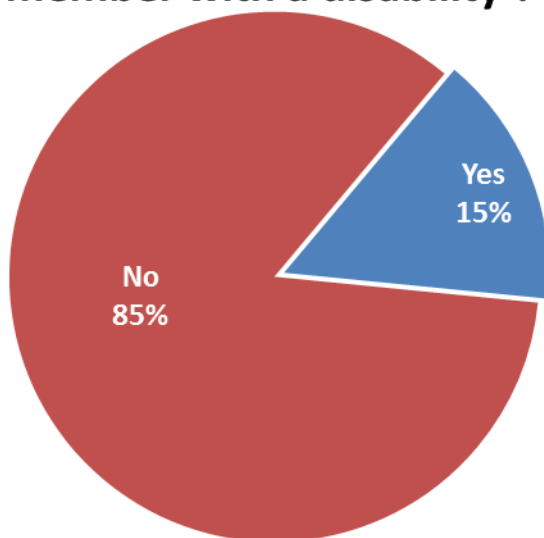


Section 1.1: About the Attendees

Do you have a disability that ever complicated voting?

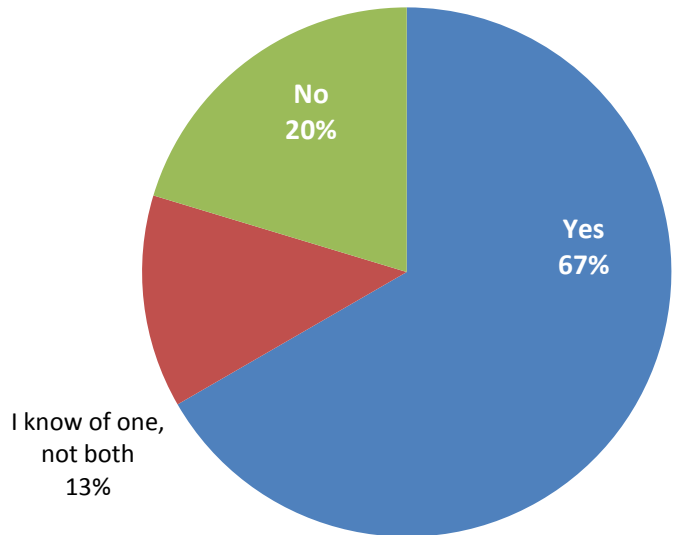


Do you have a voting-age family member with a disability ?

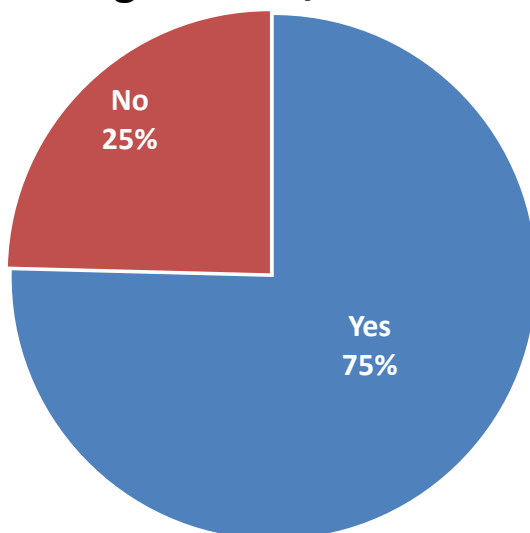


Section 1.2: Voting Knowledge

Do you know who your U.S. Senators are?

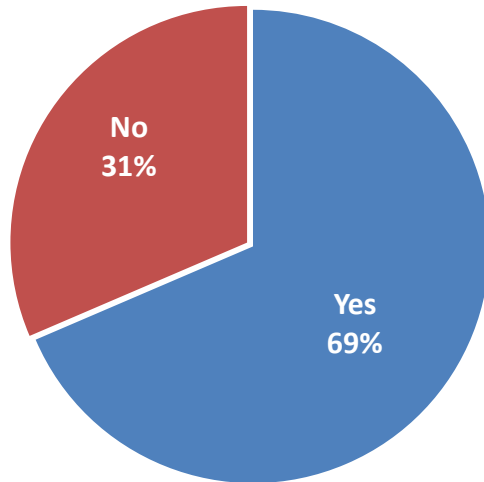


Do you know who your U.S. Congressman/woman is?

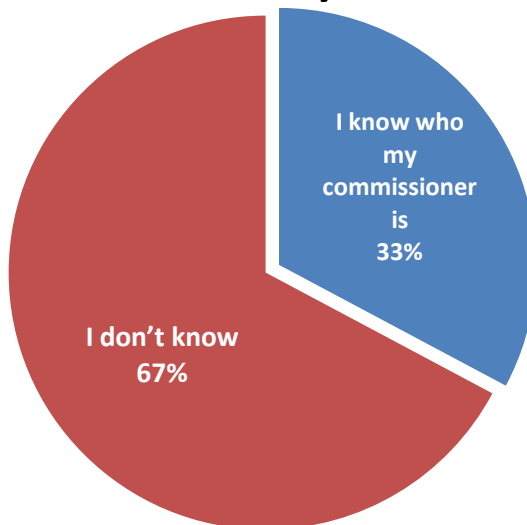


Section 1.2: Voting Knowledge

Do you know who the County Board President is?

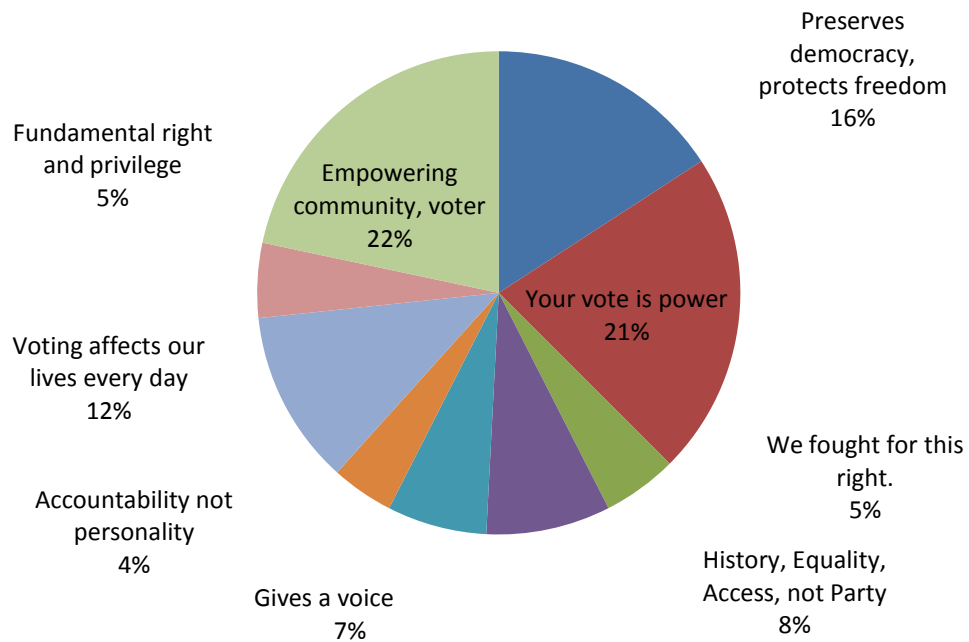


Do you know who represents you on the County Board?

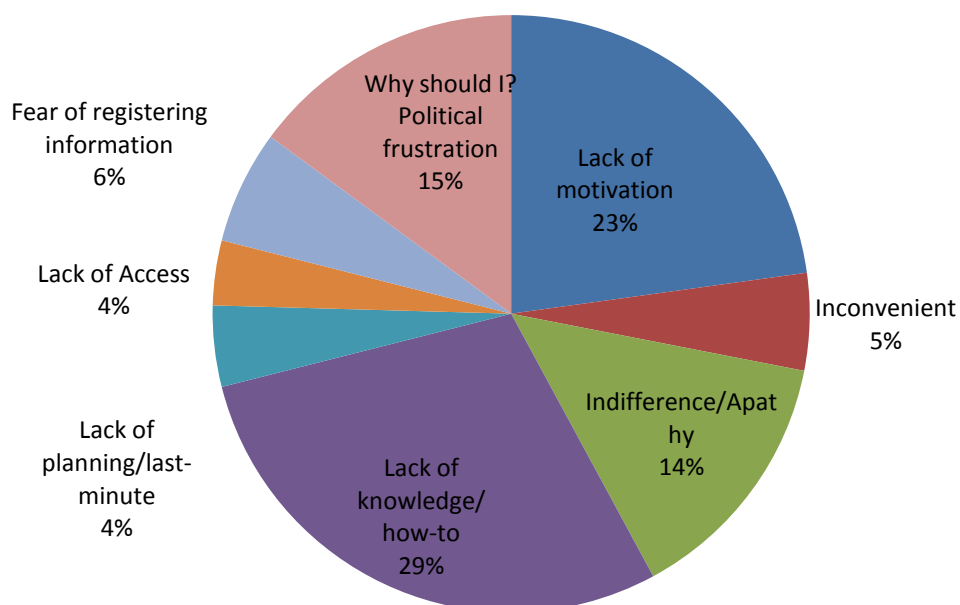


Section 1.3: Ideas and Recommendations for Reform

Why is it important to vote?

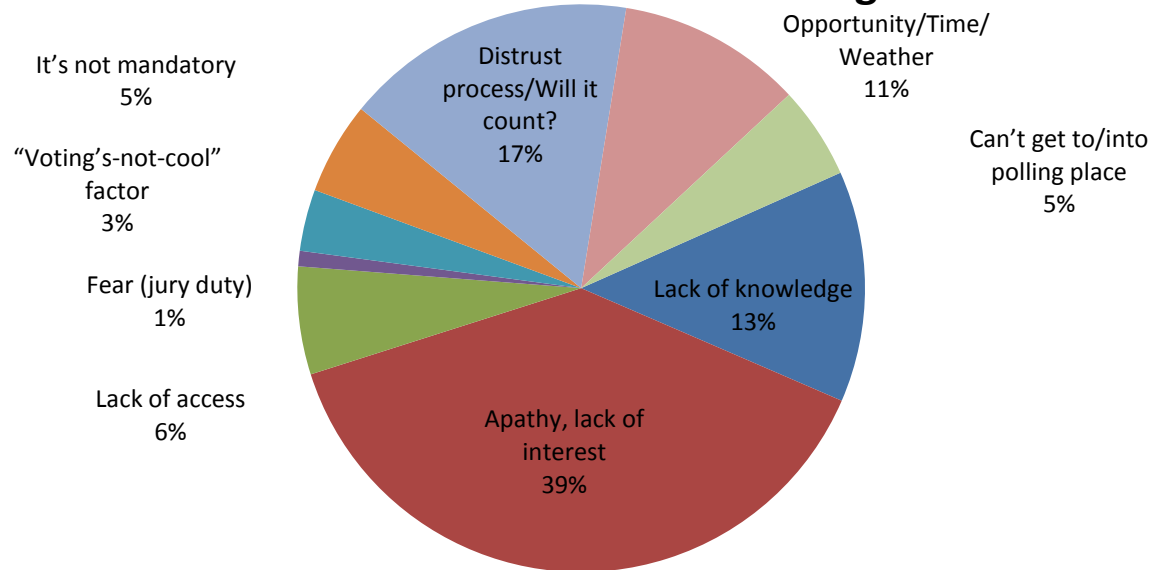


What are the barriers to voter registration?

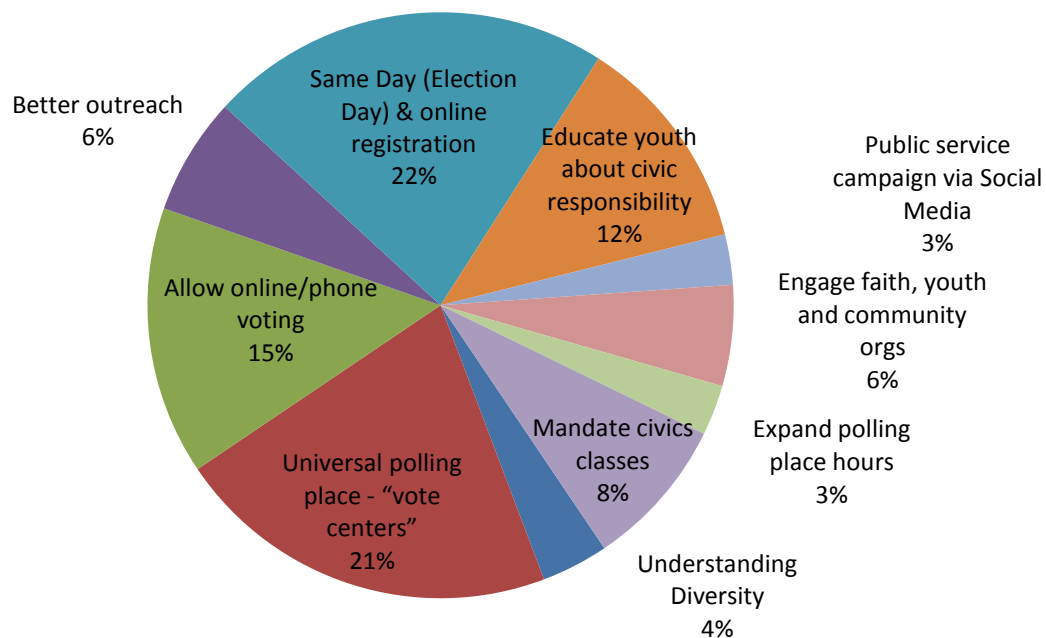


Section 1.3: Ideas and Recommendations for Reform

What are the barriers to voting?

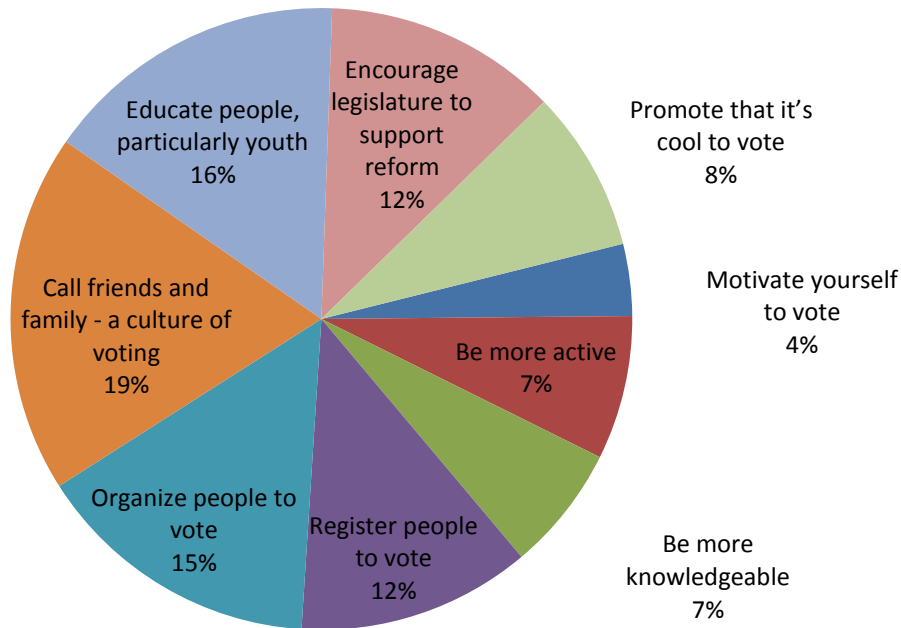


What reforms should the CBOE pursue?

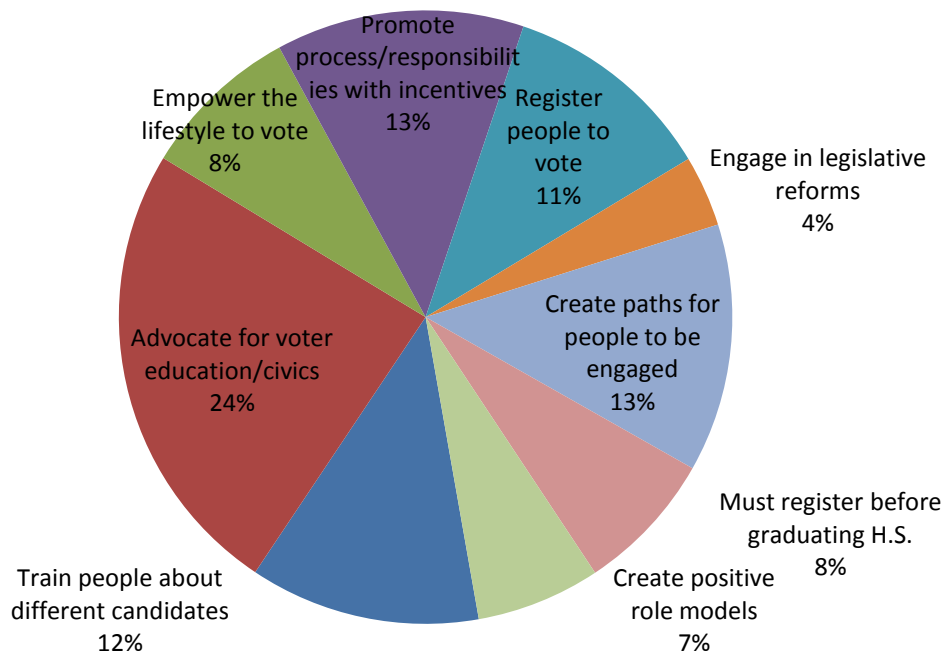


Section 1.3: Ideas and Recommendations for Reform

What can YOU do?



What can ORGANIZATIONS do?



Section 2: Notable Cross-Tabs

This section provides the top priorities and ideals for potential election reforms – as identified by different age groups, genders, geographic sections of the City of Chicago, and race/ethnicity reported by the participants. These data are important as they can help the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners consider different messages to target the audiences where there may be the most significant opportunities to build voter registration and turnouts for 2012 and beyond.

Notable cross-tabs on recommendations for reforms the CBOE should pursue to increase registrations and turnouts

Age 16-20

Same-Day/Online Registration – 29%

Civics Education – 21%

Age 21-34

Universal Voting Centers – 36%

Same-Day/Online Registration – 24%

Age 35-44

Universal Voting Centers – 27%

Online/Phone Voting & Outreach Programs – tied at 18% each

Age 45-54

Civics Education – 37%

Same-Day/Online Registration & Online/Phone Voting – tied at 16% each

Age 55-64

Same-Day/Online Registration – 28%

Universal Vote Centers & Civics Education – tied at 20% each

Age 65 and Better

Same-Day/Online Registration & Civics Education – tied at 28% each

Females

Universal Voting Centers – 28%

Same-Day/Online Registration & Civics Education – tied at 19% each

Males

Same-Day/Online Registration – 27%

Civics Education – 18%

Notable cross-tabs on recommendations for reforms the CBOE should pursue to increase registrations and turnouts (cont'd)

Greater Loop/Downtown

Same-Day/Online Registration – 38%

Universal Voting Centers – 25%

North Side

Vote Centers & Civics Education – tied at 23% each

Same Day/Online Registration & Online/Phone Voting – tied at 21% each

South Side

Universal Voting Centers – 26%

Civics Education – 22%

West Side

Same-Day/Online Registration – 30%

Civics Education – 20%

Suburban

Same-Day/Online Registration – 28%

Universal Voting Centers – 22%

African-American

Same-Day/Online Registration – 21%

Universal Voting Centers & Civics Education – tied at 18 each%

Caucasian

Same-Day/Online Registration – 33%

Universal Voting Centers & Civics Education – tied at 21% each

Asian-American

Same-Day/Online Voter Registration – 29%

Universal Voting Centers – 21%

Latino/Hispanic

Universal Voting Centers – 44%

Civics Education – 22%

(Cross-Tab information continued on next page.)

Notable cross-tabs on what the participants could do to increase registrations and turnouts

In this category, there was general consensus among different geographic sections of the City of Chicago and among different subgroups based on race and ethnicity. However, there was considerable divergence between the different age brackets in terms of the top activities the participants themselves could do to increase voter registration and turnouts. Specifically, younger participants focused on networking with others, but older participants were more likely to urge more civics education, specifically for their younger counterparts still in school.

16-20

Communicate with friends and family to promote a culture of voting
Promote that it's "cool" to vote

21-34

Communicate with friends and family to promote a culture of voting
Promote that it's "cool" to vote
Organize others to register and vote

35-44

Organize others to register and vote
Promote more civics education, particularly for youth

45-54

Support legislative reforms
Promote more civics education, particularly for youth
Organize others to register and vote

55-64

Promote more civics education, particularly for youth
Support legislative reforms
Organize others to register and vote

65 and Better

Promote more civics education, particularly for youth
Support legislative reforms

(Cross-Tab information continued on next page.)

Notable cross-tabs on what civic, neighborhood and community groups and other agencies might do to increase registration and turnouts

Community Forum participants were asked what they think governmental agencies, civic groups, neighborhood associations and other community organizations could do to increase voter registration and turnouts.

No matter which subset was examined (age group, race/ethnicity, gender or geographic section of the City), groups said non-election civic, government and community organizations should increase civics education, particularly for younger citizens.

Community Forum participants' second-favorite choices were nominally different based on their age group.

16-44

Increased civics education, particularly for younger citizens
Promote the process of registering and voting

45-54

Increased civics education, particularly for younger citizens
Promote the process of registering and voting, tied with training people about candidates and issues

55-64

Increased civics education, particularly for younger citizens
Promote the process of registering and voting

65 and better

Increased civics education, particularly for younger citizens
Register voters

Section 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

An Overview of Voter Registration Trends

In 2008, record numbers of younger voters between the ages of 18 and 44 led the way in the surges of last-minute voter-registration activity ahead of the 2008 Presidential Primary and then again ahead of the 2008 Presidential General Election. In fact, there was so much activity among these voters that the City voter rolls shifted – from having a majority of voters who were 45 and older to having a majority of voters who were 44 and younger.

In the years since 2008, the mobility rate of these younger voters appears to have contributed to a reversal of that trend. A comparison of Chicago Election Board data from November 2008 and February 2012 indicates the largest reductions in voter registrations have occurred among the following age brackets: 18-24, 25-34 and 35-44, in that order. These also tend to be the age groups who are at the most mobile stages of their lives, changing residency with changes in their education and employment status, and not necessarily updating their voter registration when they re-locate.

One factor in the decrease in registrations is where we are in the four-year voter-registration cycle. Historic trends have been for the registrations to reach their highest peaks just ahead of the Presidential General Election, and then steadily trend downward toward their lowest numbers in the following three years. The registrations then tend to pick up strongly again in the months ahead of the Presidential General Election.

A second factor is the ongoing work the Chicago Election Board performs to update the voter rolls. In the fall and winter of 2011, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners completed a citywide voter canvass. That canvass helped to identify outdated records and reduce the number of active voters. In recent years, the CBOE also has worked closely with the Illinois State Board of Elections on new efforts to eliminate duplicate registration records between different election authorities. Additionally, the Chicago Election Board has worked with the Illinois Department of Public Health to streamline access to death records for the purpose of canceling those registrations.

Community Forum Recommendations on Voter Registration

Same-Day or Election Day Registration

The Community Forum participants' top recommendation with regard to a potential reform for voter registration involved Same-Day (Election Day) and Online Registration options.

Illinois law currently requires voters to file their registration (or their update) 28 days before the election. A "grace period" allows voters to come in person to the election authority's offices to register and cast a ballot until 7 days before an election. Same-Day (or "Election Day") registration would require new legislation. Legally and administratively, it also may require the adoption of safeguards to prevent voter fraud and to avoid inconveniencing the voters who were registered before Election Day. Considerations include, but are not be limited to:

- Providing regional locations, separate from the local polling place, for Same Day or Election Day registration and voting.
- Requiring same-day registrants to cast a provisional ballot.
- Mandatory identification for Same-Day registrants, such as that required during the Grace Period program.
- Electronic poll books to assist those who are already registered – and to prevent attempts to double-vote.

Online Voter Registration

Online Voter Registration also was recommended by participants in the Community Forum. Currently, many agencies, including Chicago, offer a downloadable form on the Internet, but not a process that does not require the use of a printer and mail or hand-delivery of an original form with a "wet" signature. By contrast, in Indiana, prospective voters may launch the voter-registration process off a laptop, hand-held device or other computer without a printer – and then show identification before they vote at their polling place on Election Day. Moving to a system like Indiana's would require a change in legislation. The Chicago Election Board supports legislative initiatives to bring about online registration.

Until such legislation passes, Chicago and other jurisdictions do have the option to simplify the process – while improving security and accuracy. Chicago has worked to begin developing a system by which voters could launch the process entirely via the Internet, without needing a printer. The prospective voter would submit her data to the Board, and the Board would then mail out a pre-registration form for the voter to sign and return. No voter registration or data entry would occur until and unless that original signed form is returned by the voter. This would improve security and accuracy in processing a new registration, because the Election Board would be able to test the legitimacy of an address before entering data, instead of after. Additionally, the voter's data would be captured electronically, eliminate the manual process of reading and keying information from the form. Currently, the Board must enter all of the voter's data and create a voter registration before mailing a card to test the validity of the prospective voter's information. Development of this system is currently at the test stage.

Community Forum Recommendations on Voting

Universal Voting Centers

Under current Illinois law, voters may use any Early Voting location within their jurisdiction, regardless of where in that jurisdiction they reside. However, on Election Day, voters may cast ballots only in the precinct polling place designated for those voters' home precinct.

The concept of universal voting centers provides an option that would reduce the restrictions on when and where voters may cast their ballots; however, it would require new legislation and a close examination of administrative procedures. Considerations would include, but not be limited to:

- The need for Electronic poll books, such as those used in Early Voting, so that a voter's participation is logged immediately upon signing his or her application for ballot.
- Providing ample locations so that voters are able to easily reach a polling place not too far from their homes. This would be a concern particularly for voters who lack mobility or who rely on public transportation, or who can vote only early in the morning or just before polls close.
- Whether to employ touchscreens or ballot-on-demand systems so that every ballot style is available at every universal voting center. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to stock a site with the hundreds of varieties of paper ballot styles that might be available in a given election.

Given the legislative and administrative hurdles, the Chicago Election Board should continue to explore new, inexpensive ways to inform voters. One of those currently under development is the capacity of the voter to text the registration address on a cell phone and receive a text message in return that identifies the precinct and polling place, as well as the voting districts for that address.

Internet Voting/Voting by Phone

Even before the Community Forum, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners began working to introduce the option of receiving and marking a ballot online for Military/Overseas Voters. In January 2012, the Pentagon's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) issued a grant and funding to the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners to finance this project. As a result, the CBOE already has implemented a system by which Military/Overseas Voters are able to receive and mark a ballot using an on-line system. The Military/Overseas Voters still must print out their ballot and submit it via mail with a signed certification, consistent with the rules and safeguards for domestic absentee ballots. The voted ballot is not transmitted electronically.

The Board also has lobbied the General Assembly for a change in state law that also would allow Military/Overseas Voters the option to submit their ballot by facsimile machine. This option was tried successfully under federal court orders during the truncated schedule for the Fifth Congressional District Special Election in 2009 in Chicago and Cook County, as well as in the Fourteenth Congressional District Special Primary in 2008 in the collar counties.

The concepts of submitting voted ballots over the Internet or by phone, however, continue to raise security concerns. These include, but are not limited to, the possibility of voter impersonation, system hacking, denial-of-access attacks or vote-selling. Because of these concerns, the U.S. Department of Defense mandated that no funds under the recent grant could be utilized toward implementing any system that included the electronic return of voted ballots.

Voters value the concept of individual and collective “power”

Participants at the Community Forum were asked to identify the values they most closely associated with voting and why they believe voting is important. Their discussions and recommendations, followed by their group votes, all indicated that the words that resonated most were “power” and “protection.”

Different round-tables issued a variety of recommendations on why it was important to vote. The other leading ideas put forth from the more than dozen round-table discussions included: how Americans have fought for the right to vote; how history, equality and access are more important than political parties; how voting gives individuals and neighborhoods a voice; how voting provides for accountability over personality; how voting affects our every-day lives; how it is a right and privilege to live in a nation governed by the people.

However, three other recommendations captured the most votes by the entire audience. Notably, the three recommendations were parallel threads around power and protection:

- Your Vote is Power (22%)
- Voting Empowers the Community and the Voter (22%)
- Voting Preserves Democracy and Protects Freedom (16%)

Although each is distinct, the combined vote of 60% of the Community Forum participants indicated that the concepts and imagery of “voter empowerment” would be the most likely to be successful in voter-outreach public service campaigns going into the 2012 Presidential Election.

How the individual voter can help

Another key conclusion can be drawn from looking at the results of the question of what the individuals believed they could do. Notably, the round-table recommendations tended not to focus on working with organizations or government – but instead with their friends and neighbors. The top activities the group recommended all fell into the same category:

- Call friends and family to promote a culture of voting (19%)
- Educate people, particularly youth on the value of voting (16%)
- Organize people to vote (15%)
- Register people to vote (12%)

Together, these represent 60% of the participants in the Community Forum, and suggest the opportunity for the Chicago Election Board to have a secondary message that encourages people to urge those around them to register and vote.

Civics Education

The Chicago Board of Election Commissioners takes pride in leading the country in the employment of student judges of election on Election Day. Chicago Election Board Chairman Langdon D. Neal has repeatedly expressed the belief that “there’s no better lesson in real democracy than for a student to work in a Chicago polling place on Election Day.”

To that end, it was unanimous that a call for growing the curricula for civics education, especially in our elementary and high schools, was the top recommendation among participants in the Community Forum. Given that the Board of Election Commissioners cannot affect education policies in public and private schools, this finding should be shared with Educators at the local, state and national levels, as well as political leaders.

However, the Board also has the opportunity to build a traveling museum so that young voters could see, feel and observe how elections work using the actual touchscreen and ballot scanners employed in our polling places.

Acknowledgements

The Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago appreciates the participation of a variety of organizations in the Voter Engagement 2012 project.

Specifically, the Board recognizes the planning, programming and contributions of StanHope Consulting. The Board also thanks the Mikva Challenge and Executive Director Brian Brady and Elections In Action Administrator Cristina Perez, who gathered and trained high school students to participate in the Community Forum discussions. The students, from Al Raby High School on Chicago's West Side, facilitated the gathering of results and computer transmission of the results from round-table discussions to the computer operators at the front of the Community Forum.

The Board also would like to acknowledge *AmericaSpeaks* for the model used in these dialogues. *AmericaSpeaks* is a national nonprofit organization, which was founded in 1995 to respond to the increasing disconnect between the American people and their government. The organization's mission is to enable citizens to participate more directly, and with greater impact, in the policy-making that deeply affects their lives. Over the course of 15 years, *AmericaSpeaks* has engaged more than 165,000 people in deliberative forums to impact policy-making across the country. It serves as a non-partisan convener who advocates for a core component of our democracy: citizen involvement in decision-making.



Langdon D. Neal, Chairman
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Lance Gough, Executive Director
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James P. Allen, Communications Director



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