MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2020
Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition

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INTRODUCTION

The Wisconsin election on April 7 demonstrated the chaos that can ensue when decision makers are not prepared for unexpected challenges. In their [2020 Spring Election Report](#), the Wisconsin Election Protection Coalition and the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin consolidated self-report survey responses from over 700 Wisconsin voters. While many people shared positive experiences from Election Day, overall, the report found, "shifting and overly stringent rules, overwhelmed clerks and frightened voters and poll workers created, in many communities, a dangerous and chaotic atmosphere."

No doubt, many of these problems were closely related to the challenges of administering an election during a global pandemic. However, many are also part of a much longer history of needless and discriminatory barriers to the ballot that disproportionately impact historically marginalized communities. While statewide action confronting these issues would be ideal, **a strategic local approach may be the most viable avenue for change.**

Elections are highly decentralized in Wisconsin, and there are 1,850 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks in the state. Municipal clerks have most of the responsibility for running the operations of Wisconsin elections. This includes voter registration, recruiting and training poll workers, polling place operation, purchasing voting machines, distributing absentee ballots, and overseeing vote counting. County clerks do not have much responsibility on Election Day but have some role before (e.g. getting ballots approved and printed) and after (e.g., transmitting county-level election results to the Wisconsin Elections Commission).

Given the barriers that voters could face this fall, and given that municipal clerks have many of the tools needed to mitigate those barriers, **advocacy at the municipal level is critical to ensuring free, fair, and accessible elections**. While every decision maker must do their part to help eliminate discriminatory barriers to the ballot, municipal clerks are particularly well positioned to ensure that every Wisconsin voter can register to vote, cast a ballot, and have that ballot counted. Additionally, municipal clerks are well positioned to secure options for *how* people cast their ballot—whether by mail, through in-person early voting, or at the polls on Election Day.

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide background, strategies, and tactics for municipal advocacy. In this document you will find a **step-by-step guide on how to engage with your municipal officials** from setting up meetings, getting press coverage, and organizing social media actions. Additionally, you'll find detailed explanations about the policies you can be advocating for so you can feel confident when you meet with your elected officials.

It's not too late to make sure our August and November elections are free, fair, and accessible for *all*. But to make necessary changes, **we need *you*** involved in this advocacy. We hope that this toolkit is useful in driving the grassroots power needed for long-term change.

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OVERVIEW OF MUNICIPAL POLICY ASKS

Since municipal clerks handle most of the execution of elections, they have an immense amount of power over the experience of voters. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, we need to ask clerks to enact some very straightforward policies to ensure that no Wisconsin voter has to choose between their health and participating in democracy.

- **Absentee Ballot Access:** Clerks should encourage voters to vote absentee to reduce the risk of in-person crowding, implement absentee ballot tracking, and begin to prepare to process an increased number of absentee ballots.
- **Safe & Accessible In-Person Voting:** Clerks should maintain an adequate number of safe and accessible in-person polling locations without lines or lengthy wait times.
- **Expanded Early Voting:** Clerks should provide numerous early voting sites that are open for extended hours, including nights and weekends, to reduce crowding on Election Day.
- **Drop Boxes:** Clerks should set up drop boxes so that voters can return their absentee ballots without adding to crowding at polling places.
- **Poll Workers:** Clerks should ensure that there are enough poll workers to staff in-person polling locations.
- **Cure Process:** Given the expected increase in first-time absentee voters and the potential for making errors in submitting absentee ballots, clerks should plan to contact voters who may have made mistakes on their absentee ballot, and allowing them an opportunity to "cure" their mistake to have their ballot counted.
- **Voter Education:** Clerks should do extensive voter outreach to ensure that voters are aware of their voting options.

More details on each of these policy asks can be found in the [policy background](#) section of this toolkit.

HOW TO INFLUENCE YOUR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Your municipal clerks have the authority to enact the policies in this toolkit to ensure that Wisconsin voters have every opportunity to vote safely in November. However, they might need some nudging and advocacy from members of their own community to compel them to implement these policy changes. Below we've outlined the steps you can take to advocate in your own municipalities for these changes.

Step 1: Find out who the decision makers are in your municipality

The key decision makers in your municipality will be your municipal clerk, mayor, and governing body (i.e. city council). The first step is to find out who these people are and their contact information.

Clerk
Municipal clerks are in charge of elections for your city, town, or village. Your municipal clerk handles voter registrations and absentee ballots for voters in their municipality.

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Your municipal clerk is determined by where you live. It is very easy to find your clerk, along with their phone number and email address, on the MyVote website.

➢ **FIND MY MUNICIPAL CLERK!**

Mayor & City Council
Your mayor and city council also have some influence over the election process (and are often in charge of hiring the clerk).

➢ **FIND MY ELECTED OFFICIALS!**

Step 2: Collect information on what your municipality is planning
Municipal clerks are rapidly preparing for the upcoming elections and it is possible that your municipal clerk may already be planning to make some of the policy changes recommended in this toolkit. To ensure that you are making the most relevant requests for your municipality, you should first try to collect some information about what your clerk is already planning to do.

Call or email your clerk
To collect some basic information about your clerk's plans, you should either call or email them to get some answers to some questions about their plans. Below is a sample script / email.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX A FOR SAMPLE EMAIL TEMPLATE / CALL SCRIPT**

Step 3: Determine which changes you want to advocate for in your municipality
Based on the answers provided by your municipal clerk, you will need to determine which specific policies to advocate for in your municipality. If a clerk's plans are not satisfactory, you should plan to advocate for those policies with your clerk. We have put together a handy checklist that can help you make that determination.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX B FOR A POLICY CHECKLIST**

Step 4: Write a statement to your municipal clerk about the changes you want
Once you have determined what policies you are advocating for, you should outline your advocacy policies in a simple 1 page letter, co-signed by other community organizations in your municipality, that you can send to your clerk before you set up a meeting. Below is a sample statement. **You should remove any of the policies in the list that you are NOT advocating for**.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX C FOR A SAMPLE STATEMENT LETTER TO CLERK**

Step 5: Set up advocacy meetings with your municipal clerk, city council members, and mayor

Meetings are an essential tactic for influencing an elected official. They give you an opportunity to make your case directly to your elected official or their staff and signal that this is an issue that's important to you and your community. Most importantly, these meetings get results—elected officials want to hear what their constituents think, and a face-to-face conversation (even over Zoom!) can be especially powerful. Because Wisconsin has such a decentralized election system, there is a lot of power at the local level to make things work a little better for voters.

Setting up meetings

Try to find a time as soon as possible to meet with your municipal clerk, and then reach out to your city council members and mayor's office as well. We need to encourage clerks to adopt these changes early to help the most voters. It may take more than one call and even some emails to secure a time—persistence is key! Ask for times that will work for most of your group and if you need help with Zoom or a conference call number, ask the clerk if they have one to use.

> ➢ SEE **APPENDIX D** FOR A DRAFT EMAIL / CALL SCRIPT TO SET UP A MEETING

Recruiting attendees for meetings

There is power in groups! Try to work in partnership with other organizations and activists from your community to form a coalition that would support your goals. Ask your friends, family, and neighbors who live in the municipality to join the meeting. The night before the meeting, call everyone who has signed up to attend and remind them of the time and how to access the meeting.

If you can, schedule a planning session with your team in advance to ensure that everyone feels confident about the goals and agenda of the meeting. You should run through the agenda, practice making the asks for support, and give an overview of who you're meeting with.

Prepare for the meeting

Be prepared with knowledge about the policies you want to discuss in the meeting by studying the more detailed policy background sections at the end of this toolkit. Prepare stories about how these policies would affect you and others in your community.

Assign a member of your group to prepare and address each talking point or story. Also assign a timekeeper and a notetaker. Divvying up roles helps make the meeting flow smoothly and involve everyone in attendance. Plan in advance who is going to make the 'hard asks' about which of these procedures your clerk will commit to.

Send your statement letter to the staffers ahead of your meeting.

Hold the meeting

Have everyone introduce themselves -- each attendee should give their name, their neighborhood and profession (if they are comfortable sharing), and one or two sentences on their personal story and why voting is important to them personally.

Talk about why we are concerned about voting at this moment and then talk through the specific policies you are advocating for. For each policy, you should talk about why it is important and then make a specific ask. If your group has personal stories related to these policies, make sure to talk about those as well! Split up these different pieces of the agenda among your group.

> ➢ **SEE APPENDIX E FOR SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA**

Follow up after the meeting

After the meeting, make sure to take at least 15 minutes with your team to talk about what you learned from the meeting. Take note of anything new or surprising, and then **FILL OUT THIS SURVEY** to report back on your meeting.

Send a quick thank you note to your meeting attendees.

You should also send a follow up to the elected official or staffers who were in the meeting with a recap of your asks and the relevant fact sheets for the policies you are advocating for.

> ➢ **SEE APPENDIX F FOR FACT SHEETS**

Step 6: Get some media for your efforts

A great way to get the attention of elected officials is to get some press coverage of your advocacy efforts. There are two main tools we can use to earn media: letters to the editor and op-eds. Both can help you convince election officials in your own words, but they do so in different ways.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor, or LTEs, are short persuasive pieces that respond to a news or opinion article that a newspaper has printed. They usually cover one core point, either in contrast to the original article or highlighting an issue that was overlooked. These short articles are generally between 150 and 200 words, they're personal and local. LTEs can be written by anyone, but they need to be submitted quickly, ideally within 24 hours of a piece getting published.

Google "Letter to the Editor" + the name of your local paper (e.g. "Letter to the Editor Milwaukee Journal Sentinel"). Generally the first response will take you to a page with submission guidelines as well as a form to submit directly or an appropriate email address. Be sure to read the instructions carefully and include any necessary information such as address or phone number.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX G FOR A SAMPLE LTE**

Op-eds

Op-eds are shorthand for "opposite the editorial page." These are longer-form pieces, usually between 500 and 800 words. They run in the opinion section of the newspaper, but they are written by individuals who are not a part of the newspaper's staff. Op-eds are a great way to make a more in-depth argument, give a personal perspective, or present new information. The most compelling op-eds have one core message clear and outlined at the top of the article with a supporting narrative. Op-eds don't need to have a big name to get published, but someone with unique expertise or firsthand experience can be especially convincing.

You can find the correct contact and the submission guidelines for most papers at the Op-ed Project. If that list comes up short, just Google the name of your paper and "editorial page editor" (e.g. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editorial page editor) for the appropriate person to email.

While most opinions run between 500 and 800 words, you should check with your paper's submission instructions for the best length. You can also take a quick look at recently published op-eds to see if your issue has recently been covered. Your opinion piece should be just that — yours! It needs to be in your own voice and include anything you find important.

If you are emailing your opinion piece, don't attach it! Cut and paste the op-ed text directly into the email after a brief note.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX H FOR A SAMPLE OP-ED & SUBMISSION EMAIL**

Step 7: Use social media to your advantage

You can use social media to bring additional attention to your advocacy efforts. Look up the twitter handles of your clerk, city council members, and mayor and make sure you tag them in your posts. Send some sample posts and graphics below to your members and friends to encourage them to post as well. Use the hashtag #WIVote!

➢ **SEE APPENDIX I FOR SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS & GRAPHICS**

Step 8: Drive calls and emails to your elected officials

Continue to ramp up the pressure on your elected officials by asking members of your organization, friends, neighbors, and other community groups to sign an email petition and drive calls into your elected officials office.

➢ **SEE APPENDIX J FOR SAMPLE PETITION EMAIL**

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➢ **SEE [APPENDIX K](#) FOR SAMPLE CALL SCRIPT TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS**

➢ **SEE [APPENDIX L](#) FOR SAMPLE CALL SCRIPT TO ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Step 9: Continue following up
Check in with your municipal clerk regularly (every couple of weeks) with more phone calls or virtual meetings to gauge their progress on your policy asks. Continue to emphasize the importance of these changes. If they have technical questions that you can't answer, try to direct them to state or national experts who might be able to help:
- [National Vote At Home Institute](#)
- [Center for Tech and Civic Life](#)
- [Center for Civic Design](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice](#)

MESSAGING GUIDANCE
Voters are deeply concerned about the effect COVID-19 will have on the 2020 elections. Americans largely agree about the urgent need to adapt the nation's elections to prevent voters from having to choose between exercising their right to vote and protecting their and their community's health and safety. Two-thirds of voters in a new [national poll](#) (April 16-28) from Voting Rights Lab and CSME indicated that we should begin making changes now so that there is enough time to execute the November election properly. The poll found that 83% of Americans want to see changes in how the country conducts its elections in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Below are recommendations for messaging when speaking about the need to adapt election systems during this pandemic.

1. **Start with shared perspectives:** Even if there are hesitations about the solutions we propose, the vast majority of people recognize that at least some changes are needed in response to coronavirus. There is also broad agreement on urgency, which should be a central part of the message: the need to act quickly so municipalities can plan and execute this properly.

   o *In response to the pandemic, we need to proactively take steps to protect the health and safety of voters. Nobody should have to choose between their health and their constitutional right to vote.*

   o *Making these necessary changes will make voting more accessible to the people who are most vulnerable to coronavirus like seniors and people with serious chronic medical conditions.*

2. **Cite Wisconsin's primary:** Messages that cite the chaos of the Wisconsin primary election as a reason for why we need to make changes now are generally convincing. 76% of voters in the Voting Rights Lab poll found this message convincing:

o *Wisconsin's election in early April shows the danger of failing to make changes in response to coronavirus: 97% of Milwaukee's polling places closed as poll workers quit, leaving voters to risk their health waiting in line for hours and voting in crowded places. Thousands more simply were not able to vote at all. We can't let this happen again in November.*

3. **Emphasize feasibility:** Reinforce that we have held elections during difficult times in the past and use a solutions-oriented frame, while highlighting the consequences of inaction. 76% of voters in the Voting Rights Lab poll found this message convincing:

o *This country has held elections during wars, depressions, and pandemics: We need to make common-sense accommodations to allow people to vote safely despite the coronavirus outbreak, because we simply cannot postpone or cancel this election.*

4. **Don't skip the basic explanation.** First explain the need for each policy proposal in simple, understandable terms, and then demonstrate expertise by sharing the concrete recommendations proposed in this document. Be sure to be clear about the proposals in question, but don't get lost in the weeds or technical details. Your job is to convey the need for these changes and basic ideas about these recommendations, but it's up to the municipal clerk to figure out the logistical details of how to implement them.

5. **Frame the election changes in terms of providing <u>options</u> for voters to cast their ballot safely without risking their health; be careful to stress that we should move as many people toward absentee as possible but also that in-person voting should be available and safe for voters who cannot vote by mail** (e.g. voters who need assistance voting, voters without a home address, transient voters, voters living on tribal lands, voters who prefer to vote in person or distrust the mail system)**.** Numerous recent public polls have asked voters about an "all-mail election" or vote-by-mail as an "alternative to in-person voting." Such wording is not only an inaccurate representation of the system we desire, but also generates far lower support from voters. We should be clear that while we want as many voters to vote absentee as possible, we must retain robust in-person voting so that in-person voters do not face risk from lines or crowding.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Wisconsin has no-excuse absentee voting, but the primary on April 7 demonstrated the chaos that can ensue without adequate preparation. While statewide action would be ideal, a strategic local approach may be the most viable avenue for change. Municipal clerks are responsible for the actual execution of elections, so below we have detailed the policy changes that you can advocate for at the local level.

Prepare for a surge in absentee ballots

Allowing voters to vote via absentee ballot is critical to ensuring a safe election this November. Voters who may be sick with coronavirus, vulnerable to the illness, or who are unable or

unwilling to vote in person must be provided with an opportunity to cast their ballot at home. Shifting more voters to absentee voting also lessens the load on in-person voting, reducing the risk of crowds and congestion on Election Day.

Simply having no-excuse absentee voting is not enough to make absentee voting accessible to everyone. Election officials must prepare for a likely surge in absentee ballot usage and take steps to encourage voters to request absentee ballots while also making it easier for them to do so.

Encouraging Voters to Request Absentee Ballots

In Wisconsin, a voter must request an absentee ballot once per year. The Wisconsin Elections Commission is planning to mail an absentee application to all registered voters in the first week of September. However, municipal clerks can go further by ramping up education and outreach efforts.

Ideally, any mailing to voters should be sent with a prepaid postage return envelope, as prepaid postage is known to increase return rates. Municipal clerks have a choice to either send the mailing to all registered voters in the municipality, to all households, or to low-propensity voters or vulnerable communities.

Ballot Design & Tracking

Clerks should refer to best practices in absentee ballot envelope and packet design from the [Center for Civic Design](#) to ensure that ballot envelopes are designed in a user-friendly and accessible manner that makes it less likely that voters will make mistakes. In addition, clerks should set up ballot [tracking](#) and intelligent mail barcodes to help voters and clerks track absentee ballots from the time they are mailed out until they are returned. Ballot tracking services can also increase voter confidence since voters can track their progress.

Plan For an Increase in Absentee Ballots

Mailing a greater volume of ballots takes considerable planning. Municipal clerks should consider the partnerships with their procurement office, designers, envelope and mail ballot print vendors, the United States Postal Service (USPS), and mail fulfillment centers.

- **Procuring Supplies:** Clerks should work with their municipal Purchasing Department to determine whether their city participates in a cooperative purchasing alliance. They should begin holding meetings as soon as possible with state and local government partners and move quickly to define new or changed specifications, such as new ballot storage racks or increased envelopes counts. Within the confines of procurement requirements, municipal clerks should begin working with vendors as soon as possible.

- **Coordinate with the USPS**: USPS divides the country into regions, and each region has an election lead and supporting staff. Municipal clerks should establish a relationship

between their office and the USPS now by determining your local representative and meeting with him or her as soon as possible

- **Consider outsourcing some functions:** In jurisdictions with significant voter counts, lots of ballot styles, and/or more volume than they have managed before, vendor support on outbound mailing can be valuable to help scale up the operation. Some ballot printers also have outbound mail operations and are full service. Otherwise, finding a mail fulfillment center is an option. Contracting with a [vendor](#) to print ballots and accompanying mail ballot materials and handle the packaging, preparation, and mailing of ballot packets could lessen the burden on the local election office. It may also provide the most feasible option for quickly scaling up mail ballot delivery. However, it is critical that any outside contracting allow for clerks to double-check the mailing and work of vendors to ensure that voters are not being mailed ballots or other materials with mistakes or incorrect information, as has recently happened in both Georgia[1] and Maryland.[2]

Maintain and expand in-person voting to reduce crowding on Election Day

Particularly during the COVID-19 outbreak, expanding in-person polling sites and hours is critical to ensuring that voters are able to vote safely. No voter should have to wait in long lines or face crowded polling locations in order to cast their ballot. By providing more polling locations and days/hours, municipal clerks can spread out in-person voters across a longer time period and more locations so that no single location faces the risks of lines and congestion on Election Day.

Election Day Polling Place Locations

Particularly in urban areas, the typical way that people move around a city varies by racial identity. In their 2017 report "To Move is to Thrive," Demos found that compared to white workers, Asian Americans and Latinx workers are twice as likely to not have a vehicle.[3] Black workers are three times as likely not to have one. Additionally, when compared to white workers, Latinx workers commute via public transportation three times as much, and Asian Americans and Black workers commute via public transportation four times as much.

Based on these data, elections administrators should be particularly thoughtful when organizing polling places in communities where there is a large proportion of people of color. In these spaces, it is particularly important to locate polling places along transit routes. This may mean working with city administrators to temporarily extend transit opportunities in the week ahead of an election.

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[1]
https://www.11alive.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/absentee-ballot-date/85-00a96b86-4549-408c-a5ea-3ff22c053e94

[2]
https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/elections/bs-md-pol-maryland-primary-ballot-election-date-wrong-20200505-wky22ocirzdfpiuwrsjyu75acu-story.html

[3] https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Public%20Transit.pdf

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Early Voting Hours and Locations

Early voting is critical for individuals who may face barriers to voting absentee or in-person on election day. Particularly under COVD-19, we must ensure expanded early voting hours and opportunities for individuals who rely on this option.

The Brennan Center's (2013) report on "Early Voting: What Works" is a great place to start for guidance on establishing opportunities to vote early. It recommends beginning early voting *at least* two weeks ahead of an election, including weekend hours, establishing a consistent amount of minimum hours for each day that extend beyond regular business hours, using private and public facilities (e.g. libraries, universities, long-term care facilities), equitably distributing locations, regularly updating poll books, and educating the public on these options.[4]

Note: Equitably distributing locations does not mean evenly distributing locations, but rather distributing locations based on situational concerns amidst COVID-19 and other factors. For example, in Milwaukee's Black[5] and Brown[6] neighborhoods where people have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, it is critical that the city pays extra attention to early voting opportunities that can help limit long lines on Election Day.

Ensuring equitable access to in-person voting
In-person polling places provide critical access for voters with disabilities, voters with limited internet access, voters who are experiencing homelessness, and voters who need language assistance.

Access for Voters with Disabilities

Accessible polling places are a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Despite this requirement, a 2009 report from the United States Government Accountability Office estimated that only 27.3 percent of polling places in the 2008 general election were actually accessible without impediments to voting.[7]

The Election Assistance Commission's election management guidelines include detailed procedures on how to ensure equitable polling place access for people with disabilities. Specifically, page 83 outlines, "10 Steps to Achieve Accessible Polling Places." Location decisions should pay close attention to parking opportunities for people with disabilities, proximity to bus stops, and accessibility routes into the building.

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[4] https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report_VotingReport_Web.pdf

[5] https://www.wuwm.com/post/black-residents-are-most-impacted-covid-19-milwaukee#stream/0

[6] https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2020/05/30/coronavirus-cases-hit-latino-neighborhoods-milwaukees-south-side/5287499002/

[7] https://www.gao.gov/assets/300/296294.pdf

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It is crucial that elections administrators not only follow these steps, but also provide resources to voters with disabilities so that they know their rights and understand what to expect on Election Day. Elections administrators should follow the lead of nonpartisan voting rights organizations like the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition to provide helpful resources like this Know Your Rights Guide. These resources should also be used to train poll workers on how to ensure polling place accessibility. This accessibility voting training video from the Disability Vote Coalition and the Wisconsin Elections Commission is a great place to start.

Note: Wis. Stat. § 6.82(1) requires that curbside voting must be made available to those who cannot vote inside their polling place due to a disability.[8] This option must be readily available for voters on Election Day, but it should also be an administrative priority for every in-person absentee voting location. Despite the critical role curbside voting plays for voters with disability in general, and for voters with disabilities under COVID 19 in particular, there were multiple reports of curbside voting accessibility issues during the April 7, 2020 election.[9] Here is a quick guide to facilitating curbside voting from the City of Madison.

Access for Voters With Limited Internet Access

Wisconsin is one of the worst states in the nation for broadband speed in general, ranking 49 among the 50 states and Washington, D.C.[10] Moreover, about 28% of rural Wisconsinites lack access altogether.[11] For these individuals who may have a difficult time requesting an absentee ballot via the MyVote system, in-person voting opportunities are critical for ensuring access to the ballot.

Access for Voters Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

In-person polling places are critical for voters experiencing homelessness. These voters may not have an address at which they can receive an absentee ballot. In many cases, their proof of residence may be listed as a community shelter. For this reason, it is good practice to ensure that polling places are located near shelters. The National Coalition for the Homeless provides this toolkit for supporting voters who may be experiencing homelessness.

Access for Voters Who Need Language Assistance

Another accessibility concern is language assistance. Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act affirms that voters who need language assistance may elect an individual to help them cast their ballot.[12] This individual may *not* be their employer, an agent of their employer, or a

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[8] https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/6/III/82/1
[9] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VaVDxfiiAr-UrVYzZ2DExeuAwCbviTha/view
[10] https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-broadband-speed-among-worst-nation
[11] https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt-and-politics/covid-19-pandemic-exacerbating-wisconsin-s-rural-broadband-problem/article_4f6f6c36-e726-5a5b-abfc-260c4ffe5b62.html
[12] https://www.justice.gov/crt/statutes-enforced-voting-section

representative of their union. APIA Vote has great resources and FAQs for voters who may be included in this category.

Set up drop boxes so that voters can easily return ballots

Drop boxes allow people to securely return their absentee ballots while alleviating pressure on the postal service and reducing crowding at in-person polling places. This option is especially important as Wisconsin prepares to conduct its August primary and November general election.

Additionally, recent polling conducted by the polling firm Fabrizio Lee found 74% of voters nationally support establishing secure drop boxes for voters to drop off their absentee ballots.[13] Drop boxes should not be used as a substitute for traditional polling locations. Instead, strategically placed drop boxes can be used alongside polling places to make absentee voting work for more people. Research indicates that reducing time and distance to drop boxes increases voter turnout, so it is critical that drop boxes be placed so as to ensure equitable access.[14]

Drop boxes are also an essential part of ensuring voters from traditionally disenfranchised communities have an option that is comfortable and accessible. Polling indicates that Black voters are less likely to have voted by mail in previous elections and are concerned that using this option may mean their vote won't be counted.[15] Access to drop boxes can help alleviate this concern and give Black voters another safe option to cast their ballot. This is critical in 2020 as COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color—especially Black Wisconsinites who represent only 6.7% of Wisconsin's population yet comprise 26% of its COVID-19 cases and 29% of deaths.[16]

Choosing Drop Box Locations

In addition to the clerk's office, drop boxes that are tamper-proof, permanently affixed, and available 24 hours per day should be placed within communities, especially those with historically low absentee ballot usage. Additional considerations include:

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[13] https://www.axios.com/absentee-voting-trump-pollster-fe3d77d7-4233-443c-8def-65c78dea5d20.html

[14] "Do Drop Boxes Improve Voter Turnout? Evidence from King County, Washington." Election Law Journal 17, no. 1 (2018): 58-72, and McGuire, William, Benjamin O'Brien Gonzalez, Katherine Baird, Benjamin Corbett, Lawrence Livermore Lab, and Loren Collingwood. "Evaluating the Impact of Drop Boxes on Voter Turnout," n.d., 41.

[15] BlackPAC. (2020). *Poll: BlackPAC Survey Shows Black Voters Think Neighbors Are Handling Covid-19 Better Than Trump.* Retrieved from:
https://blackpac.com/poll-blackpac-survey-shows-black-voters-think-neighbors-are-handling-covid-19-better-than-trump/. See, also: "The California Voter Experience: Why African-American Voters Choose to Vote at the Polls or Vote-by-Mail, and How They Perceive Proposed Changes to California's Voting System." California Civic Engagement Project Policy Brief Special Series:The California Voter Experience Study, Issue 2 (2016)

[16]
https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2020/05/09/daily-as-covid-19-testing-increases-racial-disparity-remains-stark
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- <u>Proximity to traditionally disenfranchised populations</u>—Wisconsin must prioritize placement of drop boxes near populations who have historically been more reluctant to vote by absentee mail ballot and who are more likely to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes prioritizing placement in precincts most impacted by polling place closures during the April 7 primary.
- <u>Proximity to public transportation, population centers, and communities with low rates of household vehicle ownership</u>—Wisconsin should prioritize placing drop boxes in communities where there are concentrations of voters with limited access to their own transportation and must ensure that the actual locations are easily accessible by public transportation. Whenever possible, drop boxes should be placed at locations familiar to voters, such as libraries, community centers, and grocery stores; election officials should never place drop boxes at places like courthouses and police stations.
- <u>Accessibility</u>—drop box locations must be easy and safe for voters to access, especially voters with disabilities, and comply with applicable state and federal laws.
- <u>Parking and traffic patterns</u>—voters should be able to safely, legally, and conveniently access drop boxes by car or on foot.

Community members and organizations should be consulted about drop box placement. Ideally, voters should be able to return their ballot to any drop box, regardless of the location.

Deciding on the Number of Drop Boxes

Almost two-thirds of ballots cast in Wisconsin's April 7 presidential primary were done by absentee ballot, where just over 27% of voters did so by absentee ballot in the 2016 general election. Given the likelihood of increased absentee voting in November, Wisconsin should place drop boxes throughout the state, rather than just at each county clerk's office.

If Wisconsin plans to reduce the number of polling places, the Wisconsin Election Comission should also consider setting a floor for the number of drop boxes in order to ensure that counties are providing sufficient access, such as ensuring there is a drop box in every ward that loses a polling place. For example, Washington, which has adopted universal vote-by-mail, requires at least one ballot drop box per 15,000 registered voters in the county and a minimum of one ballot drop box in each city, town, and census-designated place in the county with a post office.

Hours of Drop Box Availability

Wisconsin should offer outdoor drop boxes that are accessible 24 hours a day. However, if election officials choose to also utilize indoor drop boxes or otherwise restrict drop box hours, it should ensure that these restricted locations have evening and weekend hours. Drop boxes should be accessible during the early voting period prior to the election through Election Day.

Drop Box Security

To ensure that voters feel confident about the integrity of the election system, drop boxes should be locked, tamper resistant, and anchored to the ground in well lit, highly trafficked

areas. The Wisconsin Elections Commission should issue guidance on collection methods and chain of custody that considers pandemic related staff shortages.

Voter Education

Drop box policies should be determined early enough to include the information with the absentee ballot. Information about drop boxes, along with other changes to the voting process, should be widely publicized across multiple mediums and in multiple languages. Wisconsin should provide mandatory ballot tracking so voters can see that their ballot was received and counted.

Set up a cure process so that voters with ballot deficiencies are notified and allowed an opportunity to fix the issue to have their ballot counted

As states rapidly expand mail-based voting systems in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increased risk that ballots may be rejected. Indeed, evidence shows that absentee ballots are rejected at a rate nearly twice as high as in-person ballots,[17] often due to inadvertent mistakes or omissions on absentee ballot envelopes. It is therefore essential the voters be given an opportunity to correct (or "cure") these deficiencies.

Wisconsin must develop a uniform process for notifying absentee voters of problems with their ballots, such as a missing signature or a date of birth written on the wrong line or insufficient identification. Voters must be notified of these errors, and given a chance to correct them. At least 15 states[18] have a statutory process to notify voters about problems with their absentee or mail ballots and give them an opportunity to correct those problems. Other states, such as Kentucky, have recently established cure processes as part of their effort to expand absentee voting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Timely processing of ballots and notification to voters

Local election officials must inspect absentee ballot envelopes as they are received for any errors or omissions that would result in rejection of the voter's ballot. Upon inspection, election officials should notify voters within 24 hours of identifying an improperly executed ballot. Voters should first be contacted as quickly as possible via telephone, text message, and/or email, if this contact information is available to election officials, to ensure that voters have as much time as possible to resolve errors. Election officials should also send a written notice to the voter's

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[17] According to the 2016 Election Assistance Voting Survey 1.2% of absentee ballots were rejected ((318,728 "rejected" + 77,511 "other")/ 33,378,450 ballots returned) compared to 0.67% of ballots cast in person ((615,528 provisional ballots completely "rejected" + 96,010 "other")/ 106,736,052 ballots cast). See Overview Tables 2 and 3 of the Election Administration and Voting Survey 2016 Comprehensive Report: A Report to the 115th Congress, accessed online at https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/2016_EAVS_Comprehensive_Report.pdf

[18] AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, HI, KS, MN, MT, NV, OH, OR, TX, UT, WA. Michigan's Bureau of Elections recently issued similar guidelines to local election officials. Iowa and Massachusetts also have statutory processes for notifying voters of ballot deficiencies, but only voters who return their ballots early are given an opportunity to fix the problem.

mailing address. Mailed notices should include instructions on how the voter may correct the problem, as well as any forms, replacement ballot envelopes, replacement certifications, replacement ballots, or other documentation necessary for the voter to complete the cure process and ensure their ballot is counted. Whenever possible, election officials should provide voters with return envelopes that include prepaid postage.

In addition to clerks ensuring that there are an adequate amount of envelopes for absentee ballot requests, Wisconsin may need to update its ballot envelope design or ballot processing procedures in order to facilitate timely and effective notification to voters.

Time to cure

States must establish a uniform deadline that gives all voters reasonable time to complete the cure process after they have been notified of a deficiency. Voters should be permitted to cure deficiencies up until the final county canvass or certification of the election. In Wisconsin, absentee ballots must be canvassed by 10 p.m. on Election Day.

Method of cure

Voters need as many options as possible to complete the cure process. This is especially important because all absentee ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day, including those that are cured with deficiencies. This means that most voters will have a very short time window in which to fix a mistake after receiving notice.

At a minimum, voters should be able to cure any deficiencies either in person or by mail. In instances where a ballot contains a missing voter or witness signature or required photo I.D. copy, voters should be able to send a scanned or photographed copy of their signature or photo I.D. to election officials via email. In the case of missing information, however, voters should also be able to cure mistakes or omissions by providing such information via phone or email.

Ensure that there are adequate poll workers to staff in-person polling locations

April 7 poll worker shortages[19] demonstrated the importance of having backup poll workers available to help run our elections. Particularly with the potential for COVID-19 to reemerge in the fall,[20] it is imperative that election officials actively recruit poll workers for August and November. Having an adequate number of poll workers for in-person voting opportunities provide critical support for voters who rely the most on in-person voting.

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[19] https://www.wpr.org/majority-wisconsin-municipalities-facing-poll-worker-shortages-amid-pandemic
[20]

https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/harvard-epidemiologist-beware-covid-19-s-second-wave-fall

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2020
Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition

Emergency Plan for Poll Workers

Emergency planning should be on every election administrator's mind. Particularly in November, a pandemic isn't the only thing Wisconsin elections administrators may need to worry about. Things like snow storms, accidents, and transit issues can all impact staffing polling places on Election Day. Fortunately, the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) provides six tips for contingency and disaster planning. Tip five is specific to planning for potential staffing shortages. The EAC provides tips for recruiting standby poll workers, seeking additional funding (if necessary), cross training, encouraging preventative measures, and more. A few more specific considerations follow.

Recruiting City Employees from Other Departments

During the April 7, 2020 election, 639 of 1,245 poll workers (51%) in the City of Madison were serving for the first time. This didn't just happen. As reported in *The Capital Times*, Madison City Clerk Maribeth Witzel-Behl credits the city for its commitment to adequately staffing polling places.[21] According to her, Madison's emergency operations center and planning staff were central to filling poll worker shifts across the city. This can happen in more places throughout Wisconsin, but municipal elections administrators must first advocate for their needs and work closely with other municipal decision makers to fulfill those needs.

Recruiting and Paying Poll Workers for Early Voting

Under COVID-19, expanding in-person polling sites and hours is critical to ensuring equitable access to the ballot. This is particularly important for those who may find it difficult to vote absentee and difficult to vote and the polls on Election Day, such as some voters with disabilities, voters without internet access, voters who are experiencing homelessness, and voters who need language assistance. Currently, in-person absentee voting before Election Day occurs either at the municipal clerk's office, or at another place designated as such. However, current law requires that in-person absentee voting only be staffed by clerks and their staff, and do not rely on poll workers. In order to expand in-person absentee voting, or early voting, as much as possible, Wisconsin may need to amend its law to allow for poll workers to staff early voting locations.

Recruiting Younger People (16 year olds)

Recruiting younger people is a great way to teach more generations about our elections, fill poll worker shortages, and protect older adults who are at a higher risk of becoming sick during a pandemic. When new technology is introduced at polling places (e.g., Badger Books), young people can also provide technological expertise while learning from older adults about other

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[21]

https://madison.com/ct/news/local/govt-and-politics/madison-has-66-polling-sites-on-election-day-milwaukee-has-five-whats-the-deal/article_8868bacf-6697-5cf4-aa4f-d85fb37cf846.html

aspects of election day. In Wisconsin,16 and 17 year old students qualify to serve as poll workers if they meet a set of requirements laid out on the Wisconsin Elections Commission's [Become a Poll Worker webpage](). Consider connecting with community engagement representatives at high schools and universities to build an ongoing program to get young people involved.

Considering Diversity

Where possible, it is good to be mindful that recruited poll workers reflect the diversity of the wards in which their serving. In her 2018 piece on *Medium*, Dr. Bridgett King demonstrates why diversity at polling places matters.[22] Her results indicate that Black voters who primarily interacted with a Black poll worker on Election Day were more confident that their ballot, ballots within their jurisdiction, and ballots across the state would be accurately counted. This is likely to have long term beneficial impacts on voter confidence and civic engagement. A best practice is to also be thoughtful with regard to diversity surrounding age, ability, gender, and other identities.

Ensure Being a Poll Worker Does Not Jeopardize Unemployment Benefits

One day of work does not necessarily jeopardize unemployment benefits. For more information, visit the Department of Workforce Development's [frequently asked questions]() page. But, this should be made more clear. To this end, the Wisconsin Department for Workforce Development should propose administrative rules that explicitly exclude income earned as a poll worker does not count against unemployment benefits. You can also find more details about reporting and withholding elections work compensation via the [IRS Election Workers]() webpage.

Ensure that in-person voting is conducted safely

For those voters who need to or choose to vote in person, election officials must make every effort to ensure that in-person polling locations minimize risk to voters. In addition to making efforts to reduce crowding by expanding opportunities to vote in person, election officials should also ensure that polling locations follow public health guidelines for social distancing and sanitization and order enough supplies to ensure that poll workers and voters are protected.

Polling Place Sanitization

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued [guidance]() for preventing transmission of COVID-19 at polling places, including that poll workers should stay home if they are sick, clean frequently touched surfaces, disinfect potentially contaminated surfaces after cleaning, wash hands frequently, and clean and disinfect voting machines and other equipment.

Voters should be provided with disposable pens to mark paper ballots or encouraged to bring their own pens. If there is limited supply of pens, they should be sanitized between uses. For

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[22] https://medium.com/mit-election-lab/descriptive-representation-in-election-administration-d223dec82f94

voting machines, election officials should consult with their machine vendors to determine whether Q-tips or other disposable devices can be used to mark votes, instead of voters using their fingers.

Personal Protective Equipment

Polling places should be equipped with soap, water, and an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Poll workers should be required to wear masks and gloves and check-in stations should have some type of barrier between voters and poll workers to minimize direct contact. Voters should also be encouraged to wear masks when entering polling locations.

Social Distancing

To comply with social distancing recommendations, polling places must ensure adequate space (at least 6 ft) between voting booths and poll worker check-in stations. Additionally, all steps should be taken to reduce the possibility of lines (by opening more in-person locations for longer hours), but if any lines do form, voters should be asked to stand 6 ft apart while in line.

Educate voters about any changes in voting options

It is critical to make plans to educate voters about all of the options available to them to vote, and also to ensure that they are quickly informed about changes that may occur. The April 7 primary demonstrated that the election landscape might change, and there is a need to make sure the information provided to the voters is up to date.

Websites

Many clerks do not have easy access to update the municipal website, but this is often the first place individuals will go to find out current information about polling places, drop boxes, or early voting locations. Clerks should work with their tech support staff to determine a process for keeping the website current.

Voter-facing communications

Many municipalities don't have huge advertising budgets to create television, print, or radio ads, but media outlets might be willing to work with clerks to create and share public service announcements to keep voters up to date with important information. Additionally, if social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter are used to communicate with voters, the information being shared must be helpful, timely, and allow voters to make their plan to vote in advance.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Sample email / call script to clerk to learn about their plans

Hello, my name is <u><NAME></u> and I am <u><TITLE / ORGANIZATION></u> and a resident of <u><MUNICIPALITY></u>. During the coronavirus crisis that our country is facing, it is very important to me that our upcoming elections are administered successfully and that all votes are able to vote safely without unnecessary barriers. I am very interested in understanding what your plans for ensuring the success of our upcoming elections and am hoping that you can answer a few questions for me:

- *How many in-person polling locations are you planning to have for the upcoming elections? How many have you secured already? Can you provide me with a list of the polling locations you are planning to have?*
- *How many early voting locations are you planning to have? What days and hours will they be open?*
- *Are you planning to set up drop boxes for absentee ballots? How many? Where will they be located? Are you facing any challenges in setting these up?*
- *What criteria are you using to choose in-person locations?*
- *Are all in-person locations and drop boxes ADA accessible?*
- *What challenges are you facing in securing in-person polling locations?*
- *Are you facing any challenges in poll worker recruitment?*
- *Are you facing any challenges with absentee ballots?*
- *If a voter makes a mistake on their absentee ballot (e.g. forget to sign it, forget the witness signature, forget their photo I.D. copy), do you attempt to contact them and allow them to fix the mistake?*
- *Will you be able to order the necessary amount of PPE for in-person polling to be conducted safely?*
- *What are your plans to educate voters on how they can cast their ballot in the upcoming elections?*

Thank you so much for taking the time to discuss your plans with me. I am excited to work with you to ensure that our elections go smoothly this November!

➢ ***Back to step 2***

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Appendix B: Policy Checklist

Question	If….	Then ask for...
How many in-person polling locations are you planning to have for the upcoming elections? How many have you secured already?	fewer than the number of polling places from 2018	more in-person polling locations
Can you provide me with a list of the polling locations you are planning to have? Are they in places with the highest in-person rates in the primary?	polling places are distributed inequitably	more polling locations to be placed in neighborhoods of color
How many early voting locations are you planning to have? What days and hours will they be open?	too few OR inadequate hours	more early voting locations to be open for longer, including nights and weekends
Are you planning to set up drop boxes for absentee ballots? How many? Where will they be located?	no plans for dropboxes	Drop boxes to be set up in multiple locations
If a voter makes a mistake on their absentee ballot (e.g. forget to sign it, forget the witness signature, forget their photo ID copy), do you attempt to contact them and allow them to fix the mistake?	no attempts to contact voter	a formal cure process where voters are contacted and allowed an opportunity to fix mistakes
What are your plans to educate voters on how they can cast their ballot in the upcoming elections?	no significant plans to outreach to voters	significant voter outreach efforts across multiple types of media and languages

Appendix C: Sample Statement Letter to Clerk

<u>\<MUNICIPAL CLERK\></u>
<u>\<ADDRESS\></u>

Dear <u>\<CLERK NAME\></u>

We write as concerned citizens of <u>\<MUNICIPALITY\></u> who want to work closely with you to ensure that our upcoming elections run safely and smoothly. In response to the pandemic, we need to proactively take steps to protect the health and safety of voters. Nobody should have to choose between their health and their constitutional right to vote. Making these necessary changes will make voting more accessible to the people who are most vulnerable to coronavirus like seniors and people with serious chronic medical conditions.

Wisconsin's primary election in early April shows the danger of failing to make changes in response to coronavirus: 97% of Milwaukee's polling places closed as poll workers quit, leaving voters to risk their health waiting in line for hours and voting in crowded places. Thousands more simply were not able to vote at all. We can't let this happen in <u>\<MUNICIPALITY\></u> in November.

We believe that our municipality must swiftly prepare to make the following proactive changes for our upcoming elections in order to ensure that voters can cast their votes in a safe and secure manner.

1. **Voter Outreach:** Provide educational materials to eligible voters in <u>\<MUNICIPALITY\></u> (e.g., via social media outreach, email, mailers, information on curbside voting options); Make sure those voter education materials are in <u>\<RELEVANT LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH\>.</u>

2. **Equity:** Expand registration and voting opportunities in spaces where eligible voters historically have faced the most barriers to the ballot; particularly those that may face barriers under COVID. This includes:
   a. <u>\<UNIVERSITY IN YOUR MUNICIPALITY\></u>
   b. <u>\<JAIL IN YOUR COUNTY\></u>
   c. <u>\<RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES IN YOUR MUNICIPALITY\></u>
   Plans should include changes that provide more options for voters (e.g., providing proof of residence by email). Plans should also include details on how to recieve language assistance.

3. **Safe Options:** Ensure multiple options for casting a ballot:
   a. Ensure one polling place is organized for every _____ voters.
   b. Ensure one early voting location is organized for every _____ voters.

    c. Ensure that early voting locations are open for as long as possible, including nights and weekends.

    d. Include one ballot dropbox for every _____ voters.

4. **Poll Workers:** Proactively recruit more poll workers and provide updated training requirements that speak to important considerations under COVID-19.

5. **Absentee Cure Process:** Develop a ballot curing process, aimed specifically at complications that may arise from an influx of absentee ballots.

It is the responsibility of the <MUNICIPALITY> clerk to protect the right of every eligible voter in our municipality to have their voice heard in our elections. In this unprecedented public health crisis, we urge you to protect all pathways for safe and secure elections.

Sincerely,
    <NAMES / ORGANIZATIONS>

➢ ***Back to step 4***

Appendix D: Sample Email to Set Up a Meeting

Dear <NAME>,

In this current moment where we are in the middle of a pandemic, it is crucial to ensure that we make solid plans for our August and November elections so that every eligible member of our community can cast their ballot and have it be counted.

I am <TITLE/ ORG>, and I live in <MUNICIPALITY> and I am hoping I can meet with you to share some ideas for safely ensuring everyone in our community's right to vote. Could you give me some days and times that might work for you to meet with my group?

Thanks in advance for your time.

➢ ***Back to step 5***

Appendix E: Sample Meeting Agenda

MEETING WITH <OFFICIAL NAME>
Date of meeting:
Attendees:

Roles:
- Facilitator:
- Time keeper:
- Note taker:

Agenda:
- Thank them for making the time to talk to them (facilitator)
- Introductions
  - Name
  - Neighborhood
  - Profession
  - Why voting important to them
- Why we care about voting in this moment (speaker)
  - Wisconsin made national news for our primary debacle
  - <Specific anecdote about how primary went in your municipality>
  - We want to ensure that no Wisconsin voter has to choose between protecting their health and participating in our democracy.
  - We must start preparing now to ensure that voters can cast their votes safely without any unnecessary barriers.
- Feedback on their plans (speaker)
  - We spoke with your office about your upcoming election plans and first wanted to provide some feedback.
  - Thank yous
    - <Thank them for anything that they are doing that you like>
  - But we are concerned that there are a few items missing from your plans that are necessary to ensure a successful election.
- Policy request 1 (e.g. setting up dropboxes for absentee ballots) (speaker)
  - Why the policy is important
    - Drop boxes allow people to securely return their absentee ballots, while alleviating pressure on the postal service and reducing crowding at in-person polling places.
    - Given the increase in expected absentee ballots, it is critical that voters have a safe and secure place to drop off their ballots.
  - Voter story (if available)
    - E.g. For the primary, I received my absentee ballot the day before Election Day so there was no time for me to mail it back before the deadline. So I had to go to my polling place to drop it off, where there

were huge lines. I wish there had been a secure drop box where I could have dropped off my ballot without having to expose myself to huge crowds of people.
- ○ Hard ask - Will you commit to setting up at least _____ drop boxes in our municipality for the November election?
- Policy request 2 (speaker) - use the above example to develop agenda for other policy asks
  - ○ Why the policy is important
  - ○ Voter story (if available)
  - ○ Hard ask
- Policy request 3 (speaker)
  - ○ Why the policy is important
  - ○ Voter story (if available)
  - ○ Hard ask
- Wrap up & hard asks (facilitator)
  - ○ To summarize, we want to work with you to make suer that our upcoming elections are as successful as possible.
  - ○ Can you commit to <policy hard asks>?
  - ○ Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us! We will follow up with some more information and hope to continue these conversations.

APPENDIX F: Fact Sheets

- Links here to pdf designed fact sheets

APPENDIX G: Sample Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

As the coronavirus outbreak continues, I'm worried it could threaten November's election.

Wisconsin's primary in April was a preview of what could happen if state leaders don't make sure the election is safe and secure. We can't let it happen again. Our health isn't negotiable—and neither is our democracy.

The <u><YOUR MUNICIPALITY></u> clerk needs to ensure there are safe voting options for everyone. First, <u><CLERK NAME></u> should send absentee ballot applications to every registered voter. Voters should be given access to secure drop boxes to return their ballots. And when mistakes happen on absentee ballots, because they will, voters need to be given the opportunity to fix them.

But in-person voting will still happen, and <u><CLERK NAME></u> needs to make sure it is also safe. That requires ample early voting days to reduce crowds on Election Day, and extended voting hours. There need to be enough polling sites so that social distancing can be practiced, and safety protection should be provided to all poll workers.

These changes will take time. <u><YOUR MUNICIPALITY></u> officials need to act now so that we are never forced to choose between exercising our right to vote and protecting our health.

APPENDIX H: Sample Op-ed & Submission Email

To the Editor:

Please find below an opinion piece I'd like you to consider on the need to make voting easier and safer in Wisconsin.

I am a Wisconsin voter <ADD ANY OTHER IMPORTANT CREDENTIALS HERE>, and this is an issue I'm especially concerned about during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
<YOUR NAME>
<ADDRESS>
<PHONE NUMBER>

Wisconsinites Should Not have To Choose Between Health and Voting in November
By <NAME>

This year's election is crucial, and we need to make sure that every eligible voter has access to the polls. But I'm worried the coronavirus could have a dangerous effect on what happens on November 3 in Wisconsin.

We got a preview of what could happen if our leaders don't make sure the election is safe and secure for everyone. During our April primary, voters were forced to stand in line for hours at the height of the coronavirus epidemic. Individuals who requested to vote by mail didn't receive their ballot in time and had to head to crowded polls instead. Thousands more simply were not able to vote at all. Poll workers worried about their safety and quit en masse, leaving polling sites understaffed and forced to consolidate.

Increased exposure like this is especially dangerous for Wisconsinites aged 65 and older as well as those with underlying health conditions who are at increased risk for illness from COVID-19. Many accounts found that overcrowding at the polls led to coronavirus spread.

We can't let it happen again. Our health isn't negotiable—and neither is our democracy. Municipal election officials should act now to ensure that voters have options that reduce crowds and congestion on Election Day.

The first step is to encourage as many people as possible to vote by mail. Without question, this will be the safest option in 2020, and <YOUR MUNICIPALITY> clerk should ensure everyone has this option. This can be done by sending all registered voters an absentee ballot application.

Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition

But, as we saw in the primary, a big increase in mail voting also has its own problems without preparation.

Clerks can also help alleviate pressure on the postal service by establishing drop boxes that allow people to securely return their absentee ballots. Strategically placed drop boxes can be used alongside polling places to make absentee voting work for more people.

And when mistakes happen on absentee ballots, because they will, voters need to be given the opportunity to fix (or cure) them.

But voting by mail isn't accessible for all voters, particularly voters with certain disabilities who require accommodations to vote independently and those without reliable access to the postal service. That's why <YOUR MUNICIPALITY>'s clerk must also work to ensure that voters and the workers at polling locations are safe.

The primary safety measure should be an effort to reduce crowding at polling locations. In addition to shifting as many voters to mail voting as possible, we can ensure safety at polling places by expanding and encouraging early voting. Increasing the number of days voters have to cast their ballots and opening locations on nights and weekends will reduce the strain on polling locations on Election Day.

Clerks must also establish safe social distancing at the polls, but this isn't possible if polling sites are consolidated.

CDC safety measures should also be closely followed. All poll workers should be given protective equipment like N-95 masks and gloves. Voting machines should be sanitized before each person votes, hand sanitizer should be widely available, and each voter should get their own pen to use.

To enact these measures and protect the health and safety of Wisconsinites, <YOUR MUNICIPALITY>'s clerk needs to prepare for upcoming elections now.

➢ ***Back to step 6***

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APPENDIX I: Sample Social Media Posts & Graphics

It has never been more important for voters to have multiple ways to cast their ballots. Voting rights advocates have called on election officials to make a range of reforms to ensure that every Wisconsin voter has equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote. #WIVoter

Our health isn't negotiable – and neither is our democracy ☐ . We need expanded vote by mail AND safe in-person voting to ensure Wisconsin elections are safe, free, and fair for all. Ask your municipal leaders what they're doing for your health and rights this election season.

Wisconsin's April 7 election endangered public health ☐ and undermined democracy . Our leaders must do more to ensure voting is safe, secure and open to all. Local clerks should make sure that everyone who requests an absentee ballot gets one, and there is safe in-person voting.

People must be able to vote without putting their health at risk . Here's a few of the reforms we're asking for:
✉ Mail an absentee ballot application to ALL registered voters
⏱ Early voting to allow social distancing
😷 Maintain safe in-person voting

Never again should Wisconsinites be forced to choose between their health and their vote. Take action to demand the reforms we need to make our elections safe, free, and fair for every eligible voter.

Municipal clerks have a lot of authority over how elections are conducted in different voting districts. Here are some ways you can reach your clerk and ask them to ensure that voting is safe, secure and open to all:
☎ Call or email them
✍ Write them a letter
🤝 Plan a meeting

In April, the lack of polling places and safe in-person voting options made voting a daunting task for people with disabilities and others who needed to vote at the polls. Wisconsin must have viable in-person voting so all voices are heard. #WIVoter

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2020
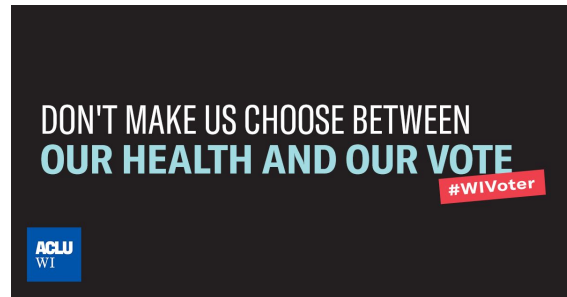*Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition*

[Download]	**[Download]**
[Download]	**[Download]**
[Download]	**[Link to folder with all graphics (unbranded versions available]**

➢ *Back to step 7*

APPENDIX J: Sample Petition Language

Too many Wisconsin voters were forced to choose between their health and their right to vote in the April primary election. We saw the results of a system that was not prepared for the challenges of running an election during a pandemic. But it didn't have to be that way. We have the time and resources to make sure that November's election doesn't force anyone to make that choice.

We need our elected officials to act now to make sure that voters who request absentee ballots receive them on time and that they have enough time to return them. Our elected officials must make sure that those who need or want to vote in person can do so safely.

<ELECTED OFFICIAL> needs to hear from constituents like you asking him/her to work with the municipal clerk and other officials to make voting safe and accessible in November. They need to commit to:

- Making sure everyone that wants to vote absentee receives their ballot
- Processing absentee ballots in a timely and secure manner
- Setting up drop boxes so voters can return their ballots without adding to crowding at polling places
- Maintaining an adequate number of safe and accessible in-person polling locations without lines or lengthy wait times
- Providing numerous early voting sites that are open for extended hours, including nights and weekends, to reduce crowding on Election Day
- Ensuring there are enough poll workers to staff in-person polling locations
- Contacting voters who may have made mistakes on their absentee ballot, and allowing them an opportunity to fix their mistake to have their ballot counted
- Doing extensive voter outreach to ensure that voters are aware of their voting options

Sign now to demand safe and accessible elections in <MUNICIPALITY> this November.

➢ ***Back to step 8***

APPENDIX K: Sample Call Script for Recruiting Volunteers for Advocacy Calls

Hi, my name is <u><NAME></u> and I'm calling from <u><ORGANIZATION></u> to ask you to help us make sure that all registered voters can vote safely in our next election in <u><MUNICIPALITY></u>.

No one should have to choose between their health and being able to exercise their right to vote. We know that's what happened to a lot of Wisconsin voters in April. Fixing this means we'll have to increase everyone's ability to get an absentee ballot while making it safer to vote in-person for those who want or need to use that option.

Can you help us by calling <u><ELECTED OFFICIAL></u> to ask them to make sure we have safe and accessible voting this November?

If YES:

Great! You can reach <u><ELECTED OFFICIAL></u> on <u><PHONE NUMBER></u>. You should ask <u><ELECTED OFFICIAL></u> to work with the municipal clerk in <u><MUNICIPALITY></u> to:

- Make sure everyone that wants to vote absentee receives their ballot
- Process absentee ballots in a timely and secure manner
- Set up drop boxes so voters can return their ballots without adding to crowding at polling places
- Maintain an adequate number of safe and accessible in-person polling locations without lines or lengthy wait times
- Provide numerous early voting sites that are open for extended hours, including nights and weekends, to reduce crowding on Election Day
- Ensure there are enough poll workers to staff in-person polling locations
- Contact voters who may have made mistakes on their absentee ballot, and allowing them an opportunity to fix their mistake to have their ballot counted
- Do extensive voter outreach to ensure that voters are aware of their voting options

Can I text or email this to you so you have it in front of you when you talk with <ELECTED OFFICIAL>? What's the best way for me to send this to you?

Great! I'll send this to you now. Your call is going to help keep Wisconsin voters healthy and help them exercise their right to vote!

If NO:

I'm sorry you're not able to help with this right now. I want to make sure that you're able to vote safely in November. If you haven't already done so and if you don't need to go in person to vote, please request your absentee ballot today. You can do that by going to myvote.wi.gov

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2020
Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition

APPENDIX L: Sample Call Script for Elected Officials

Hi, my name is <u><NAME></u> and I am a voter in <u><MUNICIPALITY></u>. I am calling about our upcoming elections. During the coronavirus crisis that our country is facing, it is very important to me that our upcoming elections are administered successfully and that all votes are able to vote safely without unnecessary barriers.

Specifically, it is important to me that voters have multiple different options to be able to vote in a way that works for them that is safe so I would like your office to ensure that voters have access to absentee ballots and robust in-person voting early and on Election Day. Can I count on you to set up <u><YOUR SPECIFIC MUNICIPALITY POLICY ASK></u>?

➢ ***Back to step 8***