

### By Sheree Thaxton Vodicka, CEO NC Alliance of YMCAs

In the lead-up to the 2024 election, our YMCAs can play a pivotal role in fostering civic engagement in the communities we serve. Our YMCAs are uniquely positioned to [encourage voter participation](#) in a nonpartisan, inclusive way. Here's why it matters.

Our mission extends beyond our buildings. One of the most powerful ways to strengthen communities is by empowering people to engage in civil dialogue with one another and to vote. Voting is a foundational way to ensure that all voices are heard and represented. By engaging in voter outreach and education, our Ys help ensure that every person, regardless of background, has the information and support they need to exercise their right to vote. ([Resources on LINK](#))

Unfortunately, [barriers to voting still exist](#), particularly for marginalized communities. By actively engaging in voter education and registration efforts, our Ys can address these disparities. Our role can be as simple as providing voter information, helping individuals register, or offering transportation to polling places. These small acts make a big difference, particularly for first-time voters, seniors, or those in underserved areas.

While the Y remains nonpartisan, civic participation is essential to building healthy, vibrant communities. Public policy directly impacts the issues that YMCAs care about, and we actively advocate for policies that align with our mission to create environments where everyone can succeed. And, when people engage in civic activity, whether it is voting or volunteering, for example, it supports both their physical and mental health by giving them a sense of purpose, building resilience and social connectedness.

When young people see their communities actively participating in the electoral process, they are more likely to value their role in shaping the future. Our programs can incorporate discussions about civic duty, voter education, and leadership ([Youth & Government](#) is a great place to start!). Teaching young people about the importance of voting not only prepares them for future elections but also cultivates a lifelong sense of civic responsibility.

We are known for being a welcoming and inclusive space where people from all walks of life can come together. In a time of increasing polarization, we can offer a platform for respectful conversations about the issues that matter most. (Check out [Team Up](#) to see how Ys are engaging community in dialogue.) Whether through hosting forums, providing voter guides, or simply being a trusted source of information, we can foster an environment where individuals feel informed and empowered to make their voices heard.

Our involvement in voter engagement isn't just about one election—it's about building a culture of active citizenship that strengthens communities for generations. By encouraging informed and equitable voter participation, we reinforce our mission of bringing people together to create lasting change. For a better us, every vote matters.