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2018 Reform Movement Civic Engagement Case Study Examples

As we dive into Every Voice, Every Vote: The Reform Movement's 2020 Civic Engagement Campaign, we know that past civic engagement efforts can provide a useful roadmap for Reform Jewish communities looking to get involved in this work. Below you will find stories of impactful civic engagement work from Reform communities during our 2018 campaign. We hope you will draw inspiration from these examples as you build out a civic engagement strategy to fit the vision and goals of your community.

Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, TX

In 2018, Temple Emanu-El of Dallas, TX launched their first civic engagement campaign with a focus on mobilizing their community to become a 100 percent voting congregation. As a congregation with typically high voter turnout, Temple Emanu-El decided to focus on collecting voter pledges to ensure turnout on election day. Drawing inspiration from the RAC's national pledge card, Temple Emanu-El designed their own civic engagement logo and pledge card to hand out to congregants, using the same design on other printed and virtual civic engagement materials (i.e. stickers, banner, business cards). The civic engagement team reached out to fellow congregants through tabling, phone banking, and text banking, finding that person-to-person conversations made a key difference in garnering pledges.

Understanding the importance of stakeholder engagement from key leadership, Temple Emanu-El's civic engagement leaders ensured early on that they had the support of their senior rabbi, director of early childhood education, and temple president. All three leaders sent out pledge-to-vote emails at different points in the campaign, significantly increasing pledge numbers. They also looked to diverse groups within the congregation, including the brotherhood, Women of Reform Judaism group, and preschool parents and formed an advisory council from these groups. A strong emphasis was placed on nonpartisanship throughout the campaign, which included rooting the campaign in Jewish values and providing volunteers with a script to ensure nonpartisan language.



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In total, 25 percent of voting age and eligible congregants pledged to vote, which equaled 1,200 pledges. Using their partnership with Faith in Texas (PICO), who had access to the Voter Activation

Network file, Temple Emanu-El found that, overall, 89 percent of voting age congregants voted in the 2018 primary election. This year, Temple Emanu-El is excited to expand their campaign, and is planning to partner with Dallas Area Interfaith (IAF) to delve into civic engagement efforts beyond the temple community.

Beth El Hebrew Congregation of Alexandria, VA

Led by Cantor Jason Kaufman, Beth El Hebrew Congregation of Alexandria, VA piloted their first civic engagement campaign in 2018. Two main pillars comprised the campaign: congregational engagement and community engagement.

Congregational engagement took the form of multiple efforts to ensure that congregants were not only registered to vote, but that they made it to the polls on election day. Several weeks before the voter registration deadline, Beth El set up tables in the synagogue lobby during peak traffic times, such as before Friday evening Shabbat services and during Sunday school. Volunteers assisted congregants by checking voter registration statuses, registering congregants, and providing election information. The weekend before the election, Beth El engaged 38 volunteers to phone bank. Utilizing a script to make the process as smooth as possible, volunteers called every member household to encourage them to vote. Volunteers then logged each call and its outcome, noting whether they had to leave a message so that follow-up calls could be made. Volunteers also made sure to reach out to college students and recent graduates, including sending voter information in the High Holiday packets that are sent out to their young adult members who may not be able to attend High Holiday services at home. The importance of voting was also highlighted during services; Beth El's cantor frequently spoke about civic engagement during services and the congregation also planned a voter Shabbat service.

Using many of the same tactics from their internal congregational strategy, Beth El engaged with the wider community with a specific focus on disenfranchised voters. Beth El partnered with organizations like The Poor People's Campaign and NAACP, which provided names, phone numbers, and scripts to encourage disenfranchised voters to check their registration status and, if needed, to register to vote. Beth El held eight phone banks during Hebrew school hours and one large scale phone bank before Shabbat services the weekend leading up to the election. Lay



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leaders also explored ways to provide voter registration assistance for disenfranchised voters, working with a local halfway house for women and with a local homeless shelter.

In 2019, the Beth El Civic Engagement leadership team created a state centered campaign for the Virginia off year election. Utilizing their gained experience, they created the [Virginia 2019 Civic Engagement Campaign](#) document, which was shared with Reform congregations around Virginia.

For the 2020 campaign, Beth El Hebrew Congregation is continuing their internal and external voting engagement work and will be introducing text banking led by synagogue youth.

Temple Emanu-El of Westfield, NJ

In 2018, Temple Emanu-El of Westfield, NJ set out to involve as many congregants as possible in their civic engagement campaign with the goal of becoming a 100 percent voting congregation. Temple Emanu-El used a variety of platforms to communicate with the congregation. The civic engagement team sent regular emails to all members with messaging about the importance of voting and early voting information, provided vote by mail applications and stamps to all college-bound congregants, and made sure eligible high school students were registered to vote. Temple Emanu-El also turned its civic engagement efforts outward, registering voters in downtown Westfield at the fall festival and other big events, and partnering with an African Methodist Episcopal church to register students at local community colleges.

To coordinate these efforts, Temple Emanu-El drew from a diverse pool of congregants to lead their civic engagement efforts, with everything from retired congregants leading voter registration efforts to high school students cross-checking the synagogue's membership list with voter registration rolls. The core leadership team was made up of four members and supported by a group of 20 volunteers who made calls, reached out to voters, and wrote emails to congregants about civic engagement opportunities. Volunteers also spread awareness about voting by stapling RAC pledge cards to bags handed out during High Holy Days for their food drive. In the days leading up to Election Day, volunteers called all congregants to ask about their voting plans and to see if they needed a ride to the polls.

In the end, Temple Emanu-El registered over 100 new voters and helped people apply for absentee ballots and change their registration information. Through their civic engagement



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efforts, Temple Emanu-El came very close to becoming a 100 percent voting congregation. They learned that getting started early, involving as many people in the campaign as possible, creating a civic engagement team with distinct roles, and communicating clearly and often were key components to their success.

Temple Beth-El of San Antonio, TX

In the 2018 midterm election cycle, Temple Beth-El aimed to become a 100 percent voting congregation. Both physical and digital pledge cards and social media played key roles in Beth-El's civic engagement strategy.

Before Friday night services and Sunday morning religious school, a pledge card table was set up to encourage congregants to vote and a deputized volunteer registrar was present to register congregants to vote. In partnership with their local National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) chapter, Beth-El congregants who were also NCJW members volunteered to register congregants to vote.

Through this effort, Beth-El discovered that most members of the congregation were already registered voters and discovered that voter registration efforts would be more effective focused on registering individuals outside of their community. By the end of the campaign, approximately 680 Beth-El members had either pledged to vote or had been registered as first-time voters. Digital versions of the pledge card were available on the Temple's website and the online pledge card version link was sent to every voting age eligible congregant. Information about the election, voting locations, and voter registration instructions were also available online.

Understanding the influence of social media and its important role in civic engagement campaigns, Beth-El encouraged congregants to share their selfies at the poll using the hashtags #TBEMitzVotes and #ReformJewsVote. They then shared those photos on Beth-El's social media accounts. Knowing that voting posed more of a challenge for some congregants, specific efforts were also made to reach Beth-El's high school and college-aged voters, and congregants over the age of 70. Beth-El contacted college-aged members, providing information about mail-in ballots. Voters over the age of 70 received a phone call and email asking if they were registered to vote, planned to vote, and if they needed a ride to a polling location. Also, key to Beth-El's success were the relationships formed through RAC Texas with other Texas congregations, which provided opportunities for these congregations to learn from one another.



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Since 2018, the Beth-El community has continued to remain civically engaged, running civic engagement campaigns for the San Antonio mayoral and runoff elections, statewide propositions, and the World Zionist Congress election, with congregants actively participating in each. For the upcoming election, Beth-El is looking to help register historically disenfranchised communities to vote and has formed a lay-led community organizing group that is currently focused on voter issues.

Temple Rodef Shalom of Falls Church, VA

During 2018, Temple Rodef Shalom's nonpartisan civic engagement project focused on combatting voter suppression and reaching out to disenfranchised voters through voter registration, phone banking, and post carding. Recognizing the value of partnership, Rodef Shalom worked with other northern Virginian faith groups, the Virginia's Poor People's Campaign, and the Center for Common Ground.

Rodef Shalom's civic engagement work was led by three lay leaders, and congregants of all ages contributed to these efforts. In late summer of 2018, Rodef Shalom held a voter registration phone bank and training that attracted 100 attendees. In partnership with the Center for Common Ground, volunteers called voters in communities of color outside of northern Virginia. Ten congregants also completed state registrar training, which enabled them to register voters at five foodbanks and at a job training program for low-income women called Together We Bake. Rodef Shalom also trained Together We Bake organizers on how to register their clientele to vote. In September, Rodef Shalom held a Get Out the Vote postcard party attended by 60 members. Using a list provided by the Center for Common Ground, participants sent 2,500 postcards to individuals who were unlikely to be registered or to vote. Looking outward, Temple Rodef Shalom spread the word about other groups' activities in line with their own, such as publicizing a League of Women Voters postcard party in October. Rodef Shalom also worked across synagogues, coordinating with Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation and Beth El Hebrew.

Through their civic engagement efforts, Rodef Shalom made an impact within and beyond their congregation. Internally, Rodef Shalom strengthened their sense of community and instilled a sense of pride in their community's civic engagement work. They also were met with enthusiasm and interest by the individuals they reached out to phone banking. Looking forward to this year's



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campaign, Rodef Shalom will continue to utilize the power of partnership, meeting with social action leaders from other northern Virginian Jewish communities to collaborate on getting out the vote activities



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