OUR VOICE, OUR CHOICE

Why vote in local elections?

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Every year New Yorkers vote in an election. What are local elections? Who and what are you voting for? Why vote?

CUP and the New York City Campaign Finance Board collaborated with Teaching Artist Emily Young and students from Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in the Bronx to dig a little deeper into local elections. Students got out of the classroom and into the middle of local issues, from surveying community members to interviewing local government officials. This booklet is a guide to teach you about how to get your voice heard in local elections and what choices you have as a resident of New York City.
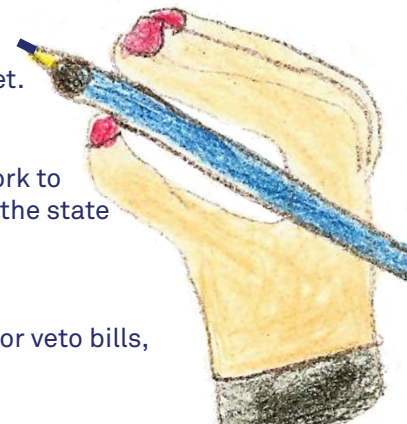
Local Government, Local Elections

Local government has an impact on everything around you, from your city to your state.

New York City elected officials oversee local schools, parks, libraries, police, and firefighters. Plus, they make sure your trash is picked up, fill the potholes on your street, and make decisions about things like affordable housing in your community.

New York State elected officials help set learning standards in schools, oversee public transportation, set the state's minimum wage, and make laws such as how how we vote on Election Day.

Who am I voting for in local elections?

☑ **Mayor of New York City**
The Mayor impacts the day-to-day lives of New Yorkers, from the city budget to city laws and policies, and has the power to sign or veto any bill proposed by the City Council.

☑ **City Council**
The City Council is the law-making branch of the city's government and works to negotiate the city's budget with the mayor, create and pass laws, and makes sure city agencies are serving the people of New York.

☑ **Public Advocate**
The Public Advocate is the people's representative and helps New Yorkers advocate for themselves. If the mayor is absent or unable to perform duties, the public advocate takes the mayor's place.

☑ **Comptroller**
The Comptroller monitors the city's finances, so that money from taxpayers is used effectively to serve all New Yorkers.

☑ **Borough President**
Each borough has a President that works to promote the best interests of their community.

☑ **District Attorney**
Each borough has a District Attorney that investigates and prosecutes crimes in their community.

☑ **State Assembly Member**
New York has 150 State Assembly Members that work to write and pass state laws plus approve the state budget.

☑ **State Senator**
New York has 63 State Senators that work to write and pass state laws plus approve the state budget.

☑ **Governor**
The Governor has the power to approve or veto bills, and enforces state laws.

How does voting work?

1

Register to vote
Any U.S. citizen who will be 18 years old or older during an election year can register to vote.

2

Learn about your candidates
Find out what's important to your candidates, and what they would do if elected. Do you agree with their ideas?

3

Visit your poll site
People are assigned different poll sites according to where they live. You'll only be able to vote at your assigned poll site!

4

Submit your ballot!
Remember: you must be 18 years old to cast a ballot in an election.

"New York used to vote using lever machines. With the Help America Vote Act of 2002, the federal government gives funds to each state to upgrade their voting system technology. Some states upgraded to touch-screen voting machines. New York was the last state to upgrade, where you still vote on a paper ballot but it's digitally counted by a machine."
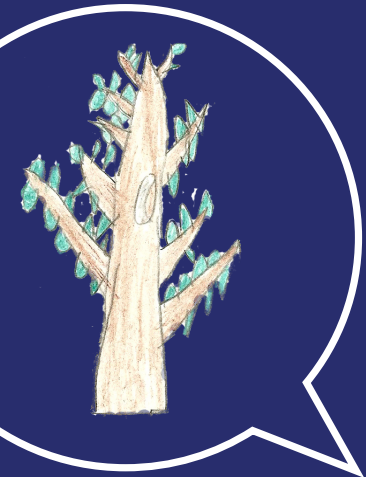
—Amanda Melillo,
Campaign Finance Board

Everything you need to vote in NYC is located at voting.nyc!

Visit the site to register to vote, learn about the local elections taking place in your community, and to locate your poll site.

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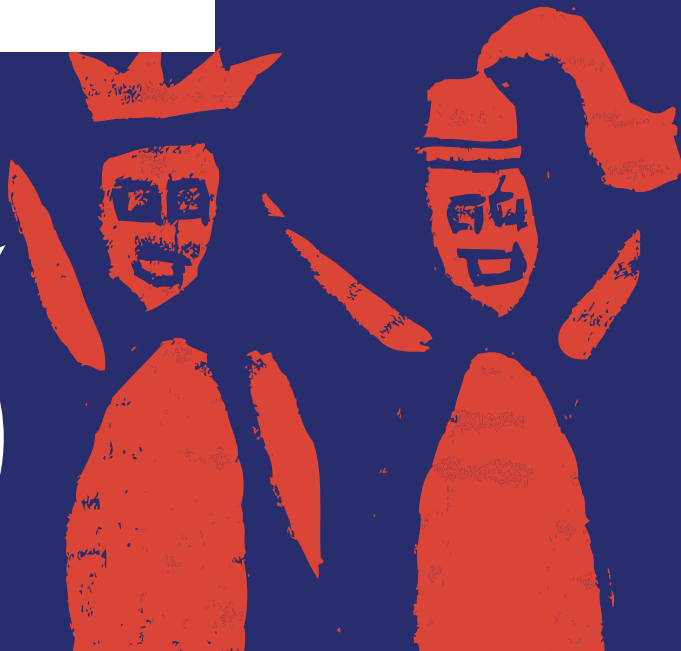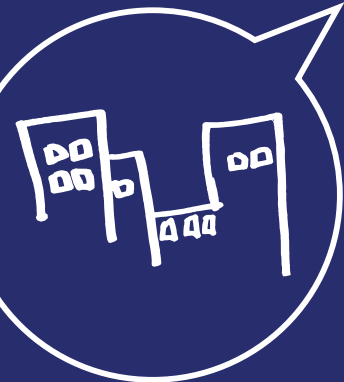"You as an individual citizen can push government to do more. You can also get organized folks together to push government to do more.

So your motivation as a rising, voting age-eligible person is to think about 'what are the issues you care about?' and then 'how are you going to effect change on those issues, to push candidates who are running for office to be responsive to those issues in order to get or earn your vote?'"

—DeNora Getachew, *Generation Citizen*

"I want to bring all the resources that Manhattan gets to my community without displacing people. Why can't we have an Apple store here, and have you be able to continue living in your apartment?"

—Rafael Salamanca, *New York City Council Member*

"You don't have to care about what it is I do, but if you do, if you involve yourself, if you do care and if you do engage, you can impact what someone like myself does. You can actually change my mind and therefore change my actions, and therefore actually impact your own life."

—Gustavo Rivera, *New York State Senator*

"You should vote in local elections to elect people that will help bring money to your community!"

—Bronx resident

LGBT

Why don't more people vote in local elections?

"In the district that I represent, back in 2010, there were **310,000** people living [there] when I got elected...only **9,033** individuals actually voted."

—**Gustavo Rivera,** *New York State Senator*

"We don't see national media and sometimes we don't even see local media really covering the elections that are happening in our communities for City Council, for Borough President, for District Attorney, for Mayor—the elections that actually impact your day-to-day lives."

—**DeNora Getachew,** *Generation Citizen*

"[A lack of] education can be an issue, around knowing when it's election time, or what they're voting for."

—**Rafael Salamanca,**
New York City Council Member

"A huge problem is the fact that we don't appeal to young voters in regular, local elections. "
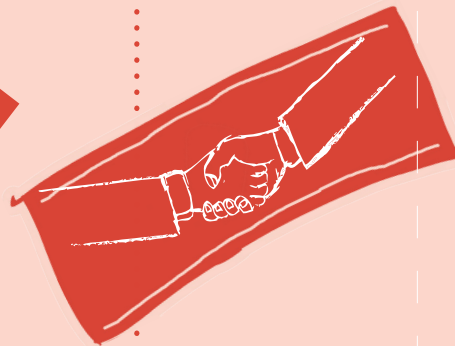
—**Isabel Luciano,**
The Participatory Budgeting Project

"People are busy, they have other things in their lives, so voting is not convenient. People are really still distrustful of the government and don't think they work for them. The government is there to help you, and to work for you."

—**Amy Loprest,**
Campaign Finance Board

"If you don't believe that government actions have an impact on your life, then you're not going to care. But if you know that the actions that we take have an impact on your life, then youre going to engage. To be able to do our work effectively [as politicians], people have to trust in me as an individual but in the institution as well. Trust is the currency of government."

—**Gustavo Rivera,** *New York State Senator*

The Youth

What is the future of voting?

"We live in a technologically advanced world. I could buy a car from my phone, but I couldn't register to vote. We really have to make that process easier. Some of the laws about voting, and registering to vote, have not caught up with the way people live today."

—**Amy Loprest,** *Campaign Finance Board*

"There are things happening all over the country that are making it harder for people to vote, making it less accessible for people to vote. And creating these barriers actually increases cynicism."

—**Gustavo Rivera,**
New York State Senator

"We know that the more barriers that exist, the less likely it is that someone will go cast a vote."

—**DeNora Getachew,**
Generation Citizen

Same day registration
On Election Day, eligible voters would be able to register to vote and cast a ballot at their poll site, all in one day.

Automatic registration
New Yorkers would be automatically registered to vote on their 18th birthday.

Early voting
Most states now give voters more than one day to vote. New Yorkers would be able to vote anytime in the two weeks before Election Day, including weekends!

Mail-in voting
In some states, voters don't even have to leave their homes to cast their ballots. New Yorkers would receive a ballot by mail, vote at home, and then mail it to the Board of Elections.

Improve elections in New York at votebetter.org!

How can I have a say?

Vote!

Post on social media and talk to your friends about voting.

Learn more about voting at **voting.nyc**

Set up a voter registration day at your school

call NYC Votes at **212-409-1800**

Volunteer with NYC Votes!

Sign up at **nyccfb.org/nycvotes**

Get involved with the Participatory Budgeting Project

at **participatorybudgeting.org**

Sign the Vote Better NY petition

at **votebetterny.org**

Get involved with your community board

at **nyc. gov**

Join a youth leadership council

at **nycservice.org**

OUR VOICE, OUR CHOICE

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities.

This project is one of CUP's **Urban Investigations**—project-based afterschool programs in which high school students explore fundamental questions about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP and Teaching Artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of arts and social justice. To learn more about CUP, visit **welcometoCUP.org**.

CUP
Teaching Artist: Emily Young
Project Leads: Christy Herbes, Jenn Anne Williams
Project Support: Christine Gaspar, Jazlyn Patricio-Archer

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School is one of the oldest, small public schools in the Bronx with the fundamental aim to teach students to use their minds well and prepare them to live productive, socially useful, and personally satisfying lives. The school's academic program stresses intellectual development and political and social involvement in our society. To learn more, visit **flhfhs.org.**

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School
Principal: Jeff Palladino
Assistant Principal: Nathan Larsen
Students: Jason Albayero, Francisco Dominguez, Stephanie Dugbartey, Jalen Edwards, Terrence Freeman, Carlos Mendoza, Adriana Mota, Jazlynn Parker, Cindy Ramales, Orlando Rodriguez, Mahamadu Sillah

This Urban Investigation is a collaboration with **NYC Votes**, the non-partisan voter engagement campaign of the New York City Campaign Finance Board. NYC Votes produces the city's official Debate program and the citywide Voter Guide and promotes voter registration, participation, and civic engagement through its many programs and partnerships. To learn more about NYC Votes, visit **nyccfb.info/nyc-votes**.