

Electoral Advocacy & *Opportunity* in the Age of COVID-19



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The COVID-19 global pandemic is revealing what most ACS newsletter readers and partners already know: a large number of Americans live on the margins and live paycheck to paycheck. Many of you work every day with and on behalf of our nation's

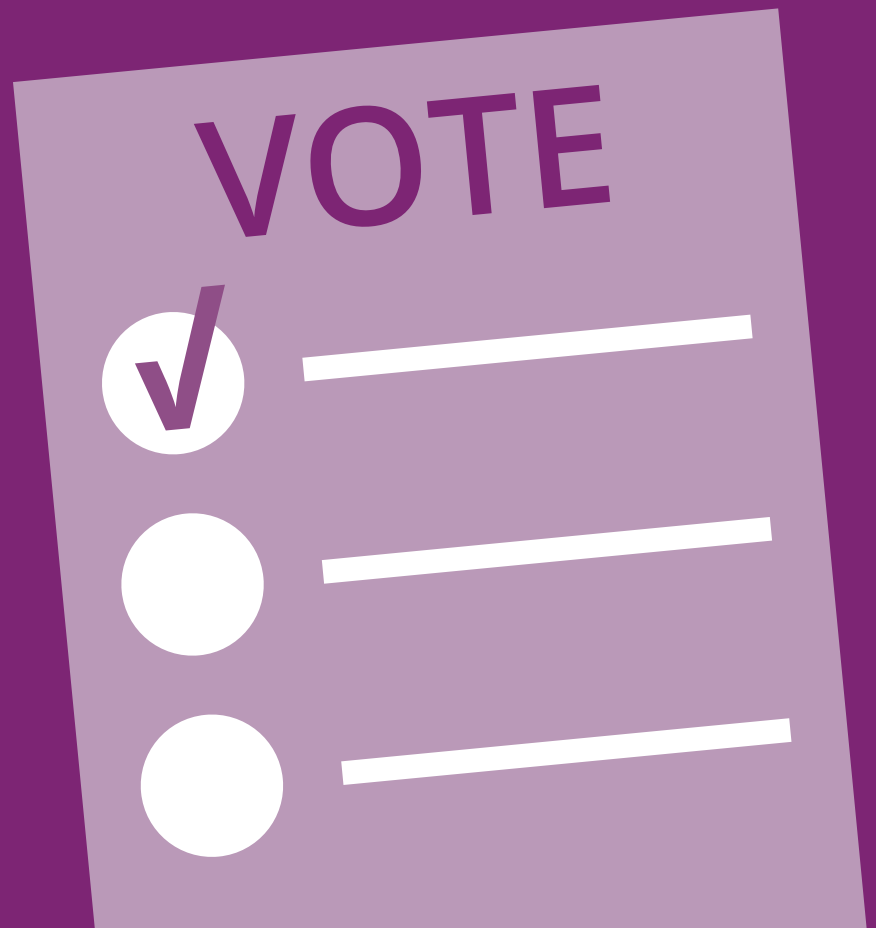


most vulnerable and understand this challenge well. The age of COVID-19 has pushed many public officials, community leaders, government, and philanthropy just to name a few, to think beyond the traditional bounds of service to others—to find more creative and ‘outside the box’ ways in which to elevate the need among many. This need is now more urgent and gaps in the system are that much more apparent. As we adjust to this new reality emotionally, physically, and psychologically, we must also recognize that we have an **opportunity!**

Opportunity? What? Really? How?

We are in an election year and we have the opportunity to hold our leaders accountable and provide direction on the priorities we've worked years to advance but are now even more critical. It's more important than ever for voters to feel educated and empowered, and for candidates to understand the issues on which they will lead. You play a critical role in that work.

It won't be easy and we will no doubt be distracted but we must maintain focus. This newsletter outlines ways to elevate your priorities during an election year within the age of COVID-19. Thank you for the work you have done and continue to do – we will do this together and it will make a difference!



You Have the Solutions

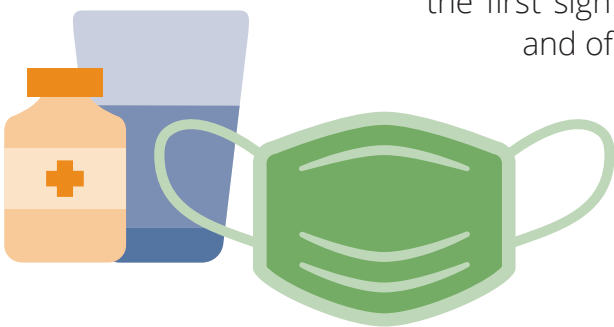
Many of our clients and partners have focused on issues that are now highlighted by COVID-19, including healthcare affordability and access, nutrition, minimum wage and worker protections.

Many of you have identified policy solutions to protect our most vulnerable communities, and **this is the time to make those solutions known among voters, elected officials, and candidates.**

Paid family and medical leave is an illustrative example. When most people think of paid family and medical leave (PFML), they think of time off to welcome a newborn baby. But PFML also protects workers' jobs and economic security when facing their own illness or caring for other loved ones. In other words, PFML helps lessen the economic impact on employees who contract COVID-19 and must be isolated for two weeks, or who must miss work to take care of an infected family member. Unfortunately, only 40 percent of Americans have access to personal medical leave, and only 19 percent to paid family leave. The coronavirus already has laid bare the consequences of these

missing policies: Too many employees cannot afford to stay home at the first sign of a cough or fever, endangering their colleagues and often, their own health. PFML advocates worked hard

to expand paid family and medical leave within the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#), signed into law on March 18. While the final bill fell short of advocates' hopes for a long-term, national paid leave plan, it opened the door to



additional conversations and made clear legislators' stance on the issue. Local, state, and national advocates now have salient messages about the importance of PFML that may resonate more strongly among those who may not have been ready to hear or act before, and which is sure to arise during candidate debates later this year. Check out ACS' tool [*Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum*](#) for more tips on this tactic.

Another example is within K-12 education, where families have felt the effects of widespread school closures – including the implications for food security for students and families who depend on school-provided meals. The Ohio 8 Coalition, comprising the superintendents and union leaders of the state's eight urban school districts, went to bat at the state legislature to ensure they could safely continue providing meals to students when schools were closed. The Ohio 8 also began highlighting early on that if schools were directed to provide instruction digitally, the disparity in access to the internet would only deepen gaps between students with and without it. Many school districts had to use all available staff and resources to print paper copies of materials on a moment's notice for all students so no one would be left out. Superintendents from around the state have been diligent in ensuring students with special needs (i.e. English Language Learners or those on individualized education plans) are still able to participate in the learning process. In a time of such uncertainty, contact with beloved teachers online, by phone, or even a wave as they drive by is helping to ease some of the anxiety gripping students. Schools, students, and families will feel the effects of this public health crisis for months (or even years) to come, and it will almost certainly be a central theme of candidates' campaigns at all levels of government this summer and fall. How can you get young people involved in electoral advocacy on issues like these? Check out [*20 Ways to Impact Policy for Youth*](#).



Getting the Word Out

While many Americans are in crisis management mode, there may be a unique opening to share well-placed, empathetic messaging about policy and civic engagement. After all, many Americans are coming face to face with the personal consequences of public policies—and many are more engaged with the news than they have been in a long time. With most of us homebound for at least the next month, consider the following strategies for engaging in electoral advocacy*:

Amp up your digital presence. Now is a great time to create short educational videos, hone your social media messaging, and position your organization as a trusted digital voice on your issues. Consider adding a dedicated webpage about the relationship between the pandemic and your policy agenda to help people understand the connections and stay up to date. Check out [Leveraging Social Media](#) for more ideas.

Go “old school.” Consider a handwritten postcard campaign or letter-writing effort with information about your issues to key stakeholders, including candidates and all elected officials across the political spectrum. As you begin this electoral advocacy journey, make sure to check out [Do’s and Don’ts of Electoral Advocacy](#)

Continue to engage policymakers and candidates from both sides of the aisle with information about your issues. Sponsor a virtual “town hall” and invite candidates to discuss their plans to protect your community’s economic



security and public health. Publish and share candidate responses to questionnaires about important policy issues. Check out ACS' tool [Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum](#) for more tips on this tactic.

Connect with your local voter engagement organizations and start planning your voter registration and voter engagement effort for the next seven months. In some states, like Ohio, primary deadlines have been moved due to the pandemic, so you may want to conduct a campaign to encourage primary voters to complete the mail-in application and vote remotely. Find more ideas for your efforts in ACS' tools [Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort](#) and [Get Out the Vote \(GOTV\)](#)

Review ACS' online tools such as [Building an Effective Electoral Strategy](#) to flesh out a short- and long-term electoral advocacy plan for your organization.

** **Keep in mind:** While nonprofit organizations can't endorse or support a particular candidate or a ballot measure during an election, you can still get your messages out there!*

Need more ideas and information? ACS is here to help! Find information on electoral advocacy and more in our new book, [Influence on All Cylinders: Inspiring Others & Changing the World for the Better](#).

Want more?

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