

Module 19



Famous Voices

Elections Actions for Celebrities

Celebrities have always involved themselves in causes. Audrey Hepburn worked with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund for five years; Danny Kaye worked with UNICEF for 30 years and Humphrey Bogart led a 1947 group that protested the U.S. government's probe of communism in Hollywood. Jerry Lewis has hosted his Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon for 40 years. Paul Newman, through his Newman's Own line of food products, has raised more than \$200 million for charity.

High profile people are citizens, too.

The kinds of unique opportunities available to celebrities aren't limited to movie stars. Media talk show hosts, stand-up comics, community theatre groups, sports personalities and artists also have special skill sets that can help us take back our elections.

High profile individuals and people in the creative and communications industries have unique opportunities through networks of acquaintances and access to the media, speaking venues and other public settings. Here are some ideas to help high profile people capitalize on unique skills. This section also includes tips for citizens who may have access to celebrities.

Celebrity Citizens Guide

Goals:

Empower the citizenry. Capitalize on personal networks and communications opportunities to help motivate citizens to take back elections.

Celebrities open doors. In today's celebrity-obsessed culture, having someone famous show up to say, "This is important, and here is why" can breathe life into events and issues.

Obstacles

- Some perceive citizen oversight over elections to be a partisan issue, and many celebrities are not eager to become publicly partisan. This should be a non-issue. In fact, most citizens want fair and accurate elections no matter what political party they support. Celebrity involvement can easily sidestep partisanship by focusing on election oversight actions instead of election personalities.
- Celebrity involvement can provoke criticism of so-called self serving behavior or publicity seeking. In fact, celebrities are citizens too, and have every right – and obligation – to take civic duties seriously.
- Some worry that celebrities don't really understand the problem. That concern does have merit. Elections, especially now that they are computerized, are a complex, multifaceted beast filled with techno-babble and spin, so getting up to speed on the issues is challenging. But celebrities who don't want to go through the learning curve can still participate, and this module provides several options for low-intensity actions. Those that want more in-depth involvement can get up to speed on the Internet, at sites like BlackBoxVoting.org and others.

Organizations that cater to celebrity action

There are organizations that run workshops that teach celebrities how to be effective speakers, introduce them to other activist-minded celebrities and suggest causes in which they can get involved. For example, The Creative Coalition, based in New York, focuses on lobbying for arts-related issues.

Organizations like the ONE campaign take a great deal of time and trouble to make sure the celebrity is the right fit. Actor George Clooney reportedly signed up to the ONE campaign in the US, after much due diligence on both sides. As Clooney puts it: "You want to make sure the things you get into are the right ones."

- Talk with other celebrities and seek out activist-minded organizations; if necessary, network together with leading voices in the election integrity issue.

Low intensity celebrity actions:

- Especially when appearing in public during election season, have a T-shirt or button made and wear it in high profile situations. If appearing on TV, let the host ask you a question about the slogan on your shirt. To make it even easier for you, citizens from all over America have contributed ideas (some slightly tweaked here). The following slogans provide accurate sound bites for today's elections:

Is E-Voting Really *ME* Voting?

Contributed by Amy S. from Oklahoma

My vote is so secret, even I don't know how I voted

Contributed by Mike Myhre from Washington state

I voted. I think.

Contributed by Isaac Smith from California

E-Voting: We Do Not Consent

Contributed by Dave Berman from California

Show me the ballots!

Contributed by anwar adi from California

We're counting the votes. Get over it.

Contributed by Nancy Tobi from New Hampshire.
(make that):

We're counting ALL the votes. Get over it.

We only agree on a vote we can see

Contributed by Brian Lynch from New Jersey & Catherine Ansbro from Ireland

We'll trust the honor system for elections when banks trust it for money

Contributed by R.R.

It's Nov. 7th. Do you know where your votes are?

Contributed by Chris Jacek from Texas

No Ballot Left Behind

Contributed by John Pagakis from Arizona

A vote is a terrible thing to steal

Contributed by R.R.

Real Democracies Count All Their Votes

Contributed by Joshua Landess from Arizona

Oh goody. Elections are now corporatized, privatized, and secretized

Contributed by Gail J (tweaked)

Is democracy in the USA too fragile to survive a vote count?

Contributed by Joseph C. Ferguson from California

No more faith-based elections!

Contributed by Hamilton Richards from Texas

Just Count the Ballots

No, make that:

Just Count the F*ing Ballots

Contributed by Christy Sweet from Virginia

Vote by computer and abracadabra

Contributed by Sherry Noland from Nevada

Count the votes or suffer the consequences

Contributed by P Schlichting from California

How many electrons does it take to change a vote?

Contributed by Brian Lynch from New Jersey

Trust us with your votes. We're a huge multi-national company.

Contributed by Isaac Smith from California

Is America Over?

Contributed by Anne Gabriel from Massachusetts

I Think I Voted? (with flag sticker)

Contributed by Wakean Maclean from California

If your vote isn't counted publicly, you don't live in a democracy

Contributed by Joshua Landess from Arizona

Computerized voting: Don't COUNT on it!

Contributed by J. E. Quidam from Georgia

Invisible votes: Media should not report what cannot be proven

Contributed by Dave Berman from California

We're supposed to *VOTE* in secret, not *COUNT* in secret

Contributed by Sally Castleman from Massachusetts

Get your voting machine away from my democracy

Contributed by BD from Washington state

Oh Canada! Land of Paper Ballots!

Contributed by Sam G.

- Put your art or media skills to work: Convert a slogan into legal graffiti, yard signs or billboards.

High intensity celebrity actions

- You can hook up with one-on-one help through e-mail at any of the voting integrity sites. Google "electronic voting" or "election integrity" and you'll find contact information.
- Get up to speed. Arrange a meeting with a citizen who is experienced and knowledgeable about elections issues. Check the Internet or ask local activists for input or collaboration on your ideas.
- After getting a primer on the issues and solutions, here are some of the ways you can apply your talents:
- Narrate or appear in videos/documentaries that support meaningful election reform.
- Host a benefit event to fund local citizen's efforts.

- Reach out to your colleagues to inform them about elections problems, and encourage them to get involved in some way.
- Take part in an election reform conference.
- Show leadership: Give a nonpartisan statement for a press release on the importance of citizens having the right and ability to oversee our own elections.
- Contact any of your media contacts and urge them to have voting rights advocates as guests on their show.
- Act as a trustee or figurehead for a group of citizens taking action on elections.
- Do a publicity event with local citizens; For example, the event could involve taking a sledge hammer to a voting machine purchased on e-bay, or stage a Boston Tea Party tossing voting machines into the bay.
- Produce a commercial or a public service announcement about the issue.
- Write a song, work it into your stand-up routine, make a cartoon, look into doing a book, screenplay, or feature film capturing this issue.
- Host a nude fashion show to benefit elections. Feature real accessories with imaginary clothing. Call it "Black Box Fashion: The Emperor's New Votes"
- Convince your editor or producer to do a series of articles or shows on election problems and solutions.
- Pull together a group of influential friends and invite some citizens who are out there in the trenches working on election reform to a meet-up. Ask the citizens how you and your colleagues can help most effectively.

Financial support

Another low-intensity action you can take is, of course, financial support. Citizens are out there slogging through the mess that has evolved during four decades of ignoring our elections, and they need your financial help. The simplest things can make a big difference in citizen's ability to be effective. Things citizens need:

- To pay for public records
- To travel to hearings and testify
- To distribute educational materials
- Scanner with ability to convert public documents to pdf files to share them with others
- Video cameras
- Hidden cameras (a \$300 attachment available at "The Spy Store")

- Audio recorders
- Sponsorship of costs for town meetings (and a celebrity master of ceremonies certainly wouldn't hurt!)
- Donation of public theatre for a night to show election issue films to the public
- Contribution of a publicist to local or national citizen's group around election time, to help get the word out about how to protect elections and send up the red flag when problems are found.

The total annual budget for all election integrity citizen actions nationwide is *less than what a single celebrity recently pledged* to help former child soldiers around the world (Nicholas Cage, \$2 million pledge).

Action star Jackie Chan said he intends to dispense half his wealth - that's \$128 million to charity. How much is real citizen election oversight worth to you? Elections would be one place to start.

The elections industry is out scooping up \$4 billion in voting machine sales. How much is it worth to you to balance corporate efforts with real citizen oversight?

How can celebrities choose what groups to help?

- You can easily find the major nonprofit, tax-deductible groups on the Internet. BlackBoxVoting.org is one such group. But this is a situation where you shouldn't limit support to nonprofit 501c(3) groups.
- Ordinary citizens are doing heroic work on a shoestring, day in and day out. They often work alone or in small groups of 5-10 citizens. It makes no sense for them to undertake the infrastructure of a nonprofit group when perhaps all they need is a scanner and a few hundred bucks for public records. Forget your tax deduction this time: Find effective citizens and give them what they need.
- Check around your community, or contact Black Box Voting (crew@blackboxvoting.org) for recommendations on the most effective citizens and groups near you.

Whether you choose low-intensity or high-intensity efforts, get involved. As a celebrity, one of the best things you can do is motivate copycat behavior by others to help American citizens take back elections. Be the tide that helps raise all the boats.

For Citizens Who May Know a Celebrity

Citizens often express hope that a famous person will "become a spokesperson" for election integrity issues.

- If you want to persuade a spokesperson, be sure to provide consulting and expertise. Encourage them to view the issue as any citizen would, and provide the tools they need, which most likely will be information.
- It may be more realistic to get a celebrity to support election integrity actions by proposing a specific event, or asking for collaboration or a specific favor. Review the list of suggestions for actions celebrities can take and have a few ideas and proposals in mind before making an approach.
- Be considerate and professional in your approach to any high profile person. Celebrities may be advised to shy away from lending their names to a cause/issue, and this is understandable. High profile people are typically pulled in many directions at once, and are sometimes exploited.
- If you get a meeting, have a clear idea in mind for what the goal is, and have two or three different suggestions for how the celebrity can take action to help. Don't leave them wondering what you have in mind, and don't expect them to come up with all the ideas.
- Do not "drop names" or use a celebrity's coat tails without permission!
- The decision by a celebrity to become a spokesperson for any cause or issue must be viewed as a personal one and should be respected as such. Staying within these boundaries is key to persuading them to lend their celebrity to elections issues.

How to contact a celebrity

Agents and representatives:

How you contact your chosen celebrities very much depends on who they are.

- Most writers, musicians, singers and actors or actresses are contactable through their agents. Some have secretaries. The best way to find out who the particular agent of the figure you are interested in is to contact their publisher or record company.
- For actors' and actresses' agents search [Spotlight](#), the casting directory or [The Stage](#), the actor's publication. Both will be able to direct you to the appropriate person or organization. The publication 'Who's Who' is an excellent source for agents or contact addresses. All this can be found in your local library.
- Try to include celebrities from different parts of the political spectrum.

Write a letter:

- Write an effective letter outlining your cause/issue and its implications. Remember to stress why the support of the celebrity is particularly important and raise points specific to them that you have learned from your research.
- Don't waffle. You want to make your case briefly but effectively and you don't want to confuse them with too much detail. You can include a press pack with more information should they be interested.

- Make specific suggestions, and include a link to this Tool Kit Module.

Media actions

- Contact your local radio programs if covering anything that remotely deals with election reform and call in and get the conversation going on the issue.
- If you know any local media personalities, call and ask if they would like to participate at an event or a town hall meeting that is focusing on election reform and ask them if they would like to be one of the speakers.
- View high profile individuals as “access points” in drawing attention and raising awareness about the election reform issue. Because celebrities tend to be perceived as role models, gaining public participation.

As a citizen, engaging the interest and action of celebrities is a great way to apply your persuasive skills. Celebrities are articulate. Celebrities are media-savvy.

And celebrities vote.

Your Own Additions to the Famous Voices (Celebrities) Module

You can share your ideas by sending to crew@blackboxvoting.org



What worked well?

What new ideas did you come up with?

Was there anything that didn't work very well?
