



June 2015

RE-AMP Network Organizing Hub Voter File Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is the voter file?

The voter file (also called the voter roll) is a list of voters in each state collected by the agency in that state which governs elections, such as the Secretary of State or the State Board of Elections. Information included in the voter file varies state to state but generally includes the following types of information:¹

- Name
- Address
- Polling location
- Voting history (when they voted, not what they voted for)
- Date of registration
- Political affiliation (if the state is a party registration state)

This data is usually made available to organizations and political candidates for a fee. Fees vary by state and may be a flat rate or based on the number of voter records obtained. In Wisconsin, a statewide list would cost about \$12,500². In South Dakota a statewide electronic file would cost \$2500³. In Iowa, a statewide voter list would cost approximately \$1,500⁴, while a statewide list of Minnesota voters would cost a mere \$46⁵.

2. What is list enhancement?

List enhancement is a process which combines an organization's supporter or member lists with additional information, usually from the voter file, but also from other sources, which may include commercial data. Enhancing your list can tell you, for example: current addresses for those who have moved and filed a change-of-address form; the state legislative and congressional district in which each of your members resides; which of your members are high frequency voters; which are likely to vote by absentee ballot; and which of your members who live in a particular area are likely to read their mail or vote in an upcoming election. In Minnesota enhancement can also provide the name of the electric service provider for each of your members.

¹ Maximize Your Grassroots Power: Legal Guide to List Enhancement and Citizen Contact, League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, 2000

² <http://gab.wi.gov/clerks/svrs/voter-data>

³ <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/assets/VoterFileRequestForm.pdf>

⁴ <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/voterreg/voterlistrequests.html>

⁵ <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=1827>



3. How do we enhance our lists?

The best option to enhance your list of current supporters, and also get access to potential new members and supporters of your work is to use the Voter Activation Network which uses Catalyst modeling and other consumer data.

It may be tempting for some groups to enhance their lists in-house by purchasing the voter file from their state agency, but the cost of the purchase combined with staff time and resources to clean up and cross-reference the information makes this unfeasible for most groups. Additionally, the voter file does not include consumer data, information from other allied organizations or modeling capabilities.

4. What is Catalyst?

Catalist is an organization that works to support progressive nonprofits and other organizations by compiling, enhancing, storing and updating data on adult members of the US population. The Catalist data file is a database that contains updated voter data, address changes, phone numbers and consumer data. Catalist combines an individual's voter file data demographic data and commercial data such as data collected from frequent buyer cards at stores into one record. In addition, Catalist generates predictive models to help groups identify, understand and communicate with potential supporters, such as a voter's likelihood to be supportive of renewable energy. It synthesizes all of this data and makes it available for purchase to groups working on behalf of progressive causes.

5. What is the Voter Activation Network?

The Voter Activation Network (VAN) is the interface by which groups can access Catalist data. It is a web-based tool that makes the data, such as Catalist data, usable and accessible. Through the VAN, groups can generate lists for canvassing or mailing to connect with voters and potential volunteers or supporters. Lists can include demographic data, address, voting history (when they voted) and more. The VAN also can generate voter lists for phone banking, create maps for canvassing, help groups manage volunteers through a suite of volunteer management tools, and can interface with personal devices such as smartphones and iPads to allow canvassers to upload data in



real-time when talking to people on their list.⁶ The VAN is considered the leading technology provider to Democratic and progressive campaigns and organizations.

6. How can my organization access the VAN?

A national network called State Voices offers progressive nonprofits access to the Voter Activation Network, and hence the Catalist data file, at low or no cost. In the 22 states where State Voices has an affiliate (state table), access to the VAN is through the state table. In the remaining states, access is available through State Voices' Tools for All program. State Voices also provides training and technical assistance to groups to help them use the data and tools in the VAN effectively to win shared policy and civic engagement victories, and to build long-term power.

7. What is a state table?

State Voices supports and coordinates 501(c)(3) state tables in the following 22 states: Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. California lacks a state-wide table, but has a regional table called Engage San Diego.

These tables have the goal of “engaging and empowering historically underrepresented communities so that they can build the power needed to eliminate barriers to civic participation and guarantee that policy-making is guided by the public interest, not the special interests.”⁷

8. How do I gain access to the tools in a State Voices Table?

In order for your organization to access the tools in a State Voices Table, you must contact the state table director in your state. You will have to explain the nature of your work and make sure that your program complements the Tables statewide plan. After which you will need to sign a partner agreement which clarifies how data can be used and accessed.

⁶ New Organizing Institute, VAN 101 webinar, accessed 3 July 2014. <http://neworganizing.com/toolbox/training/van-101/>

⁷ State Voices publication: Tools for All: Frequently Asked Questions, 2014.



In Minnesota, the Minnesota Environmental Partnership assists organizations with list enhancement, and has eased the enhancement process of more than 20 organizations by briefing nonprofit leaders and staff about the benefits and process of list enhancement, answering questions not addressed elsewhere, arranging VAN trainings and demonstrations, and acting as a liaison to the Minnesota Voice (State Table) staff on behalf of MEP Members and the Clean Energy & Jobs Campaign. Minnesota organizations interested in list enhancement should contact Minnesota Environmental Partnership by emailing Matt Norton at mattnorton@mepartnership.org or by calling (651) 789-0651.

In the four RE-AMP states with a state table, contact information is below:

<p>MICHIGAN</p> <p>Michigan Voice Cyndi Roper, Executive Director cyndi@statevoices.org 517.490.1394</p>	<p>OHIO</p> <p>Ohio Voice Deidra Reese, Director deidra@statevoices.org 614.236.3413</p>
<p>MINNESOTA</p> <p>Minnesota Voice Kelly Beadle, Executive Director kelly@statevoices.org 651.647.2649</p>	<p>WISCONSIN</p> <p>Wisconsin Voices Alexis Anderson-Reed, Executive Director alexis@wisconsinvoices.org 414.226.4288</p>

9. My state doesn't have a state table. What should I do?

Through its Tools for All program, State Voices offers access to Catalist and VAN to groups in all 50 states. Currently due to generous support, the tools are provided by State Voices to selected members of the 501(c)(3) community at no additional cost. State Voices reviews requests for access to Tools for All based on the following criteria⁸:

- Compliance with rules and legal restrictions governing 501(c)(3) organizations.
- Compliance with terms and conditions of Catalist and VAN agreements.
- In states with tables, organizations must discuss their program with the state table directors and sign a State Table Partner Agreement.

⁸ Ibid.



- Use must be consistent with State Voices’ values and mission, which can be found here: <http://www.statevoices.org/about-us/>

If your organization is interested in accessing the VAN and Catalist and is not in a state table state, contact State Voices. Email requests to be part of Tools for All should be directed to State Voices Senior Program Manager George Christie at George@statevoices.org.

To review the Tools for All Orientation Packet, Memorandum of Understanding, State Voices Policy on Exporting Data, data access agreement or the Tools for All: Frequently Asked Questions document, contact Melissa Gavin at RE-AMP’s Organizing Hub at Melissa@reamp.org.

10. What kind of data is available to my organization?

Through VAN and Catalist, your group can access data in the voter file such as names, addresses, birthdates, polling places, etc. You will also be able to access census tract data, including median household income, unemployment rates, rates of home ownership, education level and poverty rates for given areas. You can also create lists based on income level, education level, home-ownership, etc. The data is complemented by consumer data as well.

11. What models are available to my organization?

Catalist and VAN have created predictive models to generate “synthetic data.” These models predict likely behavior, including:

- Vote propensity
- General activist
- Religious engagement
- Likelihood to lack health insurance
- Race and ethnicity

Other models might be available to your group as well. Ask the VAN manager in your state what is available. In addition, in 2011 RE-AMP provided funding to the Minnesota Environmental Partnership to conduct polling and modeling to develop clean energy scores in Catalist for Michigan Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. These models are available to groups in those states.



12. Where can I go for more information?

- For general information on the voter file and list enhancement, contact Melissa Gavin at RE-AMP's Organizing Hub, Melissa@reamp.org or (609) 251-7020 ext 25.
- If you are in a state without a state table and would like information about accessing these tools, contact George Christie at george@statevoices.org
- If you are in one of the four RE-AMP states with a state table, contact your state voices affiliate (<http://www.statevoices.org/tables/our-network/>)
- For technical assistance on Catalist and the VAN, contact your [State Voices affiliate](#) or attend one of State Voices regular trainings (contact George Christie at george@statevoices.org for trainings for non-state table states.)
- To learn more about the polling and modeling conducted by Minnesota Environmental Partnership to assign clean energy scores to voters, contact Steve Morse at stevemorse@mepartnership.org
- For Minnesota nonprofit organizations interested in exploring list enhancement, contact Matt Norton at mattnorton@mepartnership.org or at (651) 789-0651.