



# BEYOND BELIEF NETWORK

## **Beyond Belief Network Guides: Social Justice and Race**

Combatting inequality and injustice is especially important for secular humanists, as we do not believe that a god or higher power will do it for us. While we have made progress in terms of racial inequality, [racial minorities are still disadvantaged](#) in terms of wealth and income, criminal justice outcomes, education, and voting rights. This February and during the rest of the year, we encourage you to take action to fight injustice in your communities.

### **Fighting discrimination in the criminal justice system**

People of color are [more likely to be searched during a traffic stop](#), are [disproportionately arrested on drug charges](#), [make up a hugely disproportionate percentage of the incarcerated population](#), [are more likely to be sentenced to death](#), and are [less likely to be pardoned](#). Of death row inmates exonerated as a result of DNA evidence, the [majority were minorities](#), which may mean that minorities are also more likely to be falsely convicted. Even Black children are [more likely to be expelled or suspended](#) than their peers.

1. [Innocence Project](#) performs DNA testing on death row inmates believed to be convicted as a result of faulty eyewitness testimony, coerced confession, forensic pseudoscience, or government misconduct. You can [volunteer with a chapter in your state](#), or donate. Innocence Project of Texas was a [FBB beneficiary](#) in 2011 and 2013.
2. Financial inequality contributes to racial disparities in the legal system. Without the ability to post bail or afford legal representation, people of lower socioeconomic status are at a significant disadvantage. Public defenders offices are often understaffed and funded. If you have clerical or legal experience, you may be able to volunteer at your local defenders office.

### **Fighting educational inequality**

Even with desegregation, our schools remain very much stratified by race and social class, resulting in a [gap in achievement](#) and [persistence](#). Lower income schools often [lack access](#) to new textbooks, technology, well-stocked libraries, and tutors, make unequal outcomes very likely. The achievement gap hurts all of us: [McKinsey & Company](#) liken it to a permanent recession in our national economy. Barring significant changes to the funding of public schools, we can take action to help improve education in our communities.

1. [United Way](#) is a good place to find opportunities to volunteer to tutor or mentor children in your area, and you can have your members [pledge to volunteer under your group's name](#). [Reading](#)

[Partners](#) also has programs in several large cities. We also covered mentoring in our January guide.

2. Simply [giving books](#) to lower-income children has been shown to prevent the so-called “summer learning gap,” which is one contributor to the achievement gap. A [book drive](#) is one of the easiest events your team can hold. Chicago residents can hold book drives for [Bernie’s Book Bank](#). For non-Chicago residents, contact a school district, go to the [School Library Exchange](#) website, [Better World Books](#), or a library in your area. Please consider volunteering to staff the school or public library, too, as it is likely they’re understaffed.
3. Of course, schools don’t just need books. You can work with former [FBB beneficiary Adopt-a-Classroom](#) to provide supplies or funds to a classroom in your area. Adopt-a-Classroom is able to provide an incredible \$12 in donations for every \$1 donated!
4. Incarcerated citizens have even more difficulty in getting a quality education. If you have a college, professional, or advanced degree or special certification, please consider volunteering with a prison educational program. [Prison University Project](#) was a former FBB beneficiary in California. Post-secondary programs can be found in [this directory](#) from the [Prison Studies Project](#). There is also a directory for [contact information for correctional education offices by state](#) at the U.S. Dept. of Ed website.

### **Fighting disenfranchising of minorities: Voter registration drive\***

Restricting voting rights to prevent voter fraud, whether intended to or not, often has the consequence of affecting poor and minority voters. Early voting and absentee voting makes it easier for hourly workers, people without reliable transportation, and people working multiple jobs to vote without losing wages or incurring other hardship. However, there has been recent pushback to limit early voting and absentee voting, which is especially problematic in overcrowded precincts, which tend to be in inner city neighborhoods. Additionally, some states have started requiring photo I.D., which many poor people do not have or cannot afford, particularly in inner cities where driver’s licenses are unnecessary. A full list of recent changes to voting laws can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Your voter registration drive can help educate voters about the requirements to vote in your state, register first-time voters, and allow registered voters to change address or declare a political party.

1. Before planning a registration drive, contact your state board of elections or your county clerk’s office ([list of state election resources](#)) about becoming a deputy registrar and about any rules or regulations that you need to follow. They might also be aware of other groups holding registration drives with whom you could collaborate.
  - a. You may not discriminate against anyone for any reason. If a person is eligible to vote, you must register them.
  - b. You may not endorse a candidate or political party. You may provide information relevant to voter registration or deadlines for upcoming election.
2. Preparing for the event
  - a. Make sure that your volunteers are familiar with the instructions for the [National Voter Registration Form](#) and your State’s instructions. Pay special attention to 1) who is allowed to register and 2) the additional ID requirements for first time voters.

- b. Choose a location or strategy. You can set up a booth on a campus or at a well-traveled public space or you can canvass door-to-door. To specifically combat race-related disenfranchisement, consider partnering with a minority advocacy organization and setting up a booth at a community center.
3. Necessary forms
  - a. Make copies of the [National Voter Registration Form](#), which is available in multiple languages on letter-sized paper.
  - b. Post or make handouts of the General and State Instructions for the Application (included with the Voter Registration Form).
  - c. Post a sign or have a written notice that states : Our voter registration services are available without regard to voters' political preference.
  - d. Consider an additional handout for first time voters that explains the identification that they will need to provide in person when they vote the first time. Most places will take a government-issued photo ID or a utility bill with name and address as proof of ID.
  - e. Some states allow citizens to register to vote online. You can provide small cards with the link to your state's Voter Registration Form for people who do not have time or do not wish to register on site.
  - f. You should also consider providing links to the local election board, how to find their polling place, deadlines for registration, early voting and absentee voting options, etc.
4. Submitting the forms
  - a. Answer any questions that people may have and do your best to make sure that forms are filled out correctly.
  - b. Depending on your funds, manpower, and location, you have several choices for submitting the forms.
    - i. You could provide envelopes and mailing instructions, with or without postage
    - ii. You could collect the forms and mail them as a bundle or individually to your local election office, paying for postage.
    - iii. You could collect the forms and deliver them in person to your local election office.
5. Your display
  - a. You can list your organization, but you cannot endorse a party or candidate.
  - b. You cannot provide any inducement to people to register to vote by giving something of value. Postage does not fall under the prohibition of inducements.
  - c. Check with your state election board or local election office about any additional requirements.

\* Important note: if you are a registered 501(c)(3) charity organization, it is illegal for you to collect signatures, campaign for, or endorse a candidate or party. You may register people to vote, advocate for causes, or inform the public about candidates' positions on issues.

## Fighting poverty

African Americans (and Native American, Hispanic, and other minority groups) are more likely to [live in poverty](#) than White or Asian families. Poverty is closely related to the other issues listed in this guide as both a cause and consequence. Children are more likely to be living in poverty than adults; Black (and Hispanic) children are [especially likely to be poor](#).

1. One way to help poor people is to hold a food drive or volunteer at a local [food bank](#), [women's shelter](#), or [homeless shelter](#).
2. [Helping Hands](#) is a Beyond Belief Network program which allows secular humanists, atheists, and other nonbelievers to [apply for assistance](#) (or nominate someone else) finding resources and services in their area. We also put applicants in touch with groups in their area, who may raise money if they choose. While FBB will not raise money for individuals directly, we are happy to provide event planning assistance and promotion to groups helping a member of their local community. We have also put together a guide to providing money to individuals while minimizing the likelihood of scams. [Modest Needs](#) allows low-income workers to apply for crowd-funded grants online. Applicants must submit quite a bit of paperwork to verify their need, so you can be confident that the applicants are genuine.

## Social Justice Resources

1. [The Sentencing Project](#) provides research, publications, and advocacy addressing sentencing policies, racial discrimination in the U.S. criminal justice system, felony disenfranchisement, and collateral damage to children and families.
2. [Human Rights Watch](#) is an independent organization that investigates, documents, and publicizes human rights violations all over the world, including the U.S.
3. [American Civil Liberties Union](#) defends rights of Americans to free speech and other first amendment guarantees, equal protection under the law, due process, and privacy. They are champions particularly for groups that have been historically denied their rights.
4. [Brennan Justice Center at NYU School of Law](#): Nonpartisan think tank focusing on voting rights, government and court reform, money in politics, national security, and criminal justice.
5. [National Education Association](#) is an organization for educational professionals, but is a great source of research and resources related to guaranteeing great public schools for every student in the U.S.. They have special sections on [gaps in academic achievement](#) and other [issues](#).
6. [Education Next](#) is a scholarly journal covering research and policy relevant to primary school education in the U.S. It is a peer-reviewed journal available without a paywall.
7. [National Center for Education Statistics](#) collects and analyzes data on education. They conduct research and publish reports on the state of education in the United States. The reports and statistics they generate are available to the public. Of interest to this guide is their comprehensive report on the [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities](#).
8. [National Poverty Center](#) is a nonpartisan research center at the University of Michigan conducting and publishing multi-disciplinary research on causes and consequences of poverty.