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8 A Practical Guide to Encouraging Student Voting

While much of this book focuses on battles over the right of students and others in college communities to vote, that right is not meaningful unless it is realized. This chapter synthesizes the best practices and frameworks for how college communities address student voting. Here you will find practical step-by-step guidance on building a voting action plan that embeds the work of voter registration and voting within a campus culture of democratic engagement and learning. The recommendations are drawn from voter action plans used by colleges and universities and recommendations from national organizations. I also highlight the activities and strategies employed by the campuses featured in this book: Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University (NC A&T), Tuskegee University, and Bard College.

The 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 requires institutions to make a “good faith effort to distribute a mail voter registration form ... to each student enrolled in a degree or certificate program and physically in attendance at the institution, and to make such forms widely available to students at the institution.”¹ Institutions often interpret the “good faith effort” as minimal engagement with voter registration that might simply include an emailed link to students or the distribution of hard copy registration forms in designated areas on campus. This chapter draws instead from “Institutions as Citizen: Colleges and Universities as Actors in Defense of Student Voting Rights,” where Jonathan Becker and I argued that “institutions need to expand (or create) strategic voter action plans for elections” to move institutions from “passive action” typical of a “personally responsible citizen” to “participatory” or “justice-oriented” active engagement with students and the protection of their rights.² A well-developed voter action plan grounds voter registration, engagement, and protection in the institution’s civic mission, moving an institution from a ‘passive citizen’ approach (simply making voter registration available) to ‘participatory’ (linking voter registration to administrative processes, leading get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns, transporting students to polling sites, promoting voter education campaigns), or ‘justice-orient-

1 Jonathan Becker and Erin Cannan, “Institution as Citizen: Colleges and Universities as Actors in Defense of Student Voting Rights,” *The Rutgers University Law Review* 74, no. 5 (2022): 1884; *Higher Education Amendments of 1998*, Public Law 105–244, Sec. 489.

2 Becker and Cannan, “Institution as Citizen,” 1891.

ed’ (actively protecting student voting rights by monitoring and challenging attempts to disenfranchise student voters, actively promoting on-campus poll sites, and advocating for legislation which promotes student voting).

Without institutional support and planning, the responsibility for promoting voting and protecting student voting rights is informally left to student groups or community organizations. This ignores the explicit links between voting, voting engagement, and the democratic purpose of higher education, as well as the powerful learning associated with early engagement with voting. This chapter is directed at students, faculty, and administrators who are advancing engagement on their own campuses, and seeks to answer three questions: What is a campus voter action plan? What are core elements for successful planning? And, how can institutions actively engage with students to encourage participation and learning? I conclude the chapter by exploring the role of campus coalitions and senior leadership, and highlighting key considerations when advocating for institutional resources.

1 What is a Campus Voter Action Plan?

1.1 Institutions as Citizens: Moving to a Justice-Oriented Model

One of the challenges related to youth voting is that many young people register and/or vote for the first time when they are enrolled in college. As with any new experience, they are more likely to successfully navigate the voter registration process with help. What that help looks like depends on the local ecosystem and requires universities to understand the local structural and informational barriers experienced by students, whether they are voting in person at a campus address, in the local community as a resident, or by absentee ballot. Having a plan that anticipates potential challenges to the voter registration process can combat restrictions to the franchise while addressing logistical and motivational barriers to student participation.

Since the passage of the 26th Amendment, youth voting, defined either as 18- to 24-year-olds or 18- to 29-year-olds, has consistently lagged behind other demographics. Voter registration rates for this group trail older voters, and the yield rates for youth voters have remained low with under 40% of Gen Z voters (age 18–28) registering compared with almost twice that for Boomers (age 60–89).³

³ Julian Ramos, “Voter Registration Rates by Generation,” Berkeley Initiative for Young Ameri-

However, not every young voter who sits out an election does so on purpose. What impacts the successful engagement of young people? Voting rules themselves are barriers for many youth voters and disproportionately impact youth of color who report the lack of access to transportation, proper ID, and long lines as barriers.⁴ First, there are ‘experience’ and ‘information’ gaps. Most high school students are eligible to register to vote before they graduate. Although there is little data available, The Civics Center, an organization focused on registering high school students across the country, estimates that very few high school students encounter voter registration before graduating and that proactive policies in schools and states increase registration numbers.⁵ This leaves many students entering college with little understanding of the process despite being eligible to register prior to matriculating into college.

The call to action for institutions is to facilitate the process to make it as accessible as possible as soon as possible. According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement’s (CIRCLE’s) Alberto Medina and Katie Kilton, youth voter turnout rates correlate to the accessibility of voter registration in a given state. The easier the voter registration process, the more likely a young person will successfully cast a vote.⁶ Once a registration form has been completed and a successful vote has been cast, the more likely a new voter will become a consistent voter because voting behavior is habitual and best established as a young person.⁷ As Eric Pulzer says, “A citizen’s voting history is a powerful predictor of future behavior.”⁸ The barriers faced by young people can delay the development of that voting habit and demotivate them from participating in other areas of democracy.

cans Democracy Policy Lab, April 23, 2024, <https://youngamericans.berkeley.edu/2024/04/voter-registration-rates-by-generation>.

4 Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Why Youth Don’t Vote: Differences by Race and Education,” August 21, 2018, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/why-youth-dont-vote-differences-race-and-education>; Movement Advancement Project and The Civics Center, “A Silenced Generation: How the Power of the Youth Vote Collides with Barriers to Voting,” January 2024, <https://www.mapresearch.org/file/MAP-2024-Youth-Voting-Report.pdf>.

5 Movement Advancement Project and The Civics Center, “A Silenced Generation”; The Civics Center, “The Importance of High Schools,” <https://www.thecivicscenter.org/why-high-school>.

6 Alberto Medina and Katie Hilton, “New Data: Nearly Half of Youth Voted in 2024,” Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, April 14, 2025, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/new-data-nearly-half-youth-voted-2024>.

7 Eric Plutzer, “Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood,” *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 1 (March 2002): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055402004227>.

8 Plutzer, “Becoming a Habitual Voter,” 43.

What gets in the way of registering to vote? Many young people who did not register in the 2024 election indicated that they did not know how to register or experienced problems with completing forms, ran out of time, or missed critical deadlines.⁹ Students often assume that they can register through apps or online and are not aware of registration deadlines, ID requirements for first-time registrants, restrictions on absentee voting, or minutiae like proper campus addresses or finding the appropriate postage. Many students are living away from home for the first time, and have fewer resources and unpredictable schedules.¹⁰ The ‘information or experience gap’ makes it easier for young people to make mistakes in the registration process, yet at the same time it is becoming increasingly difficult for third parties to register voters.¹¹ The likelihood that students have moved from their home communities where social networks are more readily available contributes to this gap.

Voting action plans developed with these barriers in mind can operationalize how institutions choose to place resources both human and financial. Without a plan, even well-intentioned institutions are likely to struggle to sustain student voting over time or understand what barriers are preventing students from successfully casting a ballot.

Campus voting action plans can range in specificity, sophistication, and responsibility. Minimally, a plan should identify the goals (e.g., reach 100% participation of eligible voters), strategies, and actions for student voter registration, voter education, and a GOTV campaign. Institutions striving for more ‘participatory’ or ‘justice-oriented’ goals can use the voter action plan to more explicitly link participation to the role education plays in democracy and the advancement of civic learning while also preparing to protect students’ right to vote, if threatened. Planning establishes the infrastructure and identifies responsible campus units and coalitions who lead and monitor registration and voter participation from year to year. Organized coalitions can more easily identify localized challenges, improve voter registration and voter turnout over time, and link the work to educational goals and pedagogical objectives in order to establish campus constituent buy-in to make the work sustainable over time.

9 Alberto Medina, Kelly Siegel-Stechler, Sara Suzuki, Ruby Belle Booth, and Katie Hilton, “Young People and the 2024 Election: Struggling, Disconnected, and Dissatisfied,” Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, January 15, 2025, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/2024-poll-barriers-issues-economy>.

10 Movement Advancement Project and The Civics Center, “A Silenced Generation,” 4–6.

11 Brennan Center for Justice, “Voting Laws Roundup: 2024 in Review,” January 15, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-2024-review>.

Since 2012, national partners like ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Vote Friendly Campus, Campus Vote Project, Fair Election Center, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE), and Students Learn Students Vote Coalition (SLSV), among others, have offered institutions guidance on how to build a plan and developed iterative rating systems to provide direct feedback to institutions to improve planning. Each offers resources and tools that can be incorporated into the planning process. In the case of ALL IN, an individualized, iterative process includes ongoing feedback with “structure (program design and accountability), support (consultation, training, resources, and networking), and recognition (awards and accolades),” which help with long-term success.¹²

Post-election resources, like those available through Tufts’ National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), report data that examines over 1,000 U.S. institutions’ voter registration and turnout rates to understand and improve student voting turnout.¹³ CIRCLE, under which NSLVE is situated, closely follows youth voting trends. The investment in using these resources for planning works. Campuses that were considered highly engaged with ALL IN had 2022 voter turnout rates that were an average of five percentage points higher than other campuses.¹⁴

Partnerships can support the advocacy work that might be necessary if an institution needs to protect and/or expand student voting rights. In the case of Bard, regional partnerships not only helped with the various challenges to voting rights, but were also integral in helping pass New York State legislation requiring, with the institution’s approval, the establishment of polling sites on campuses with more than 300 registered voters living on campus. These regional or statewide coalitions can improve access to the polls and challenge restrictive rules that make it difficult for students to vote.

Without a plan or appropriate partnerships, institutions are left to guess year to year how many and which students are successfully casting a ballot and what barriers might be preventing other students from voting. The how and why of a plan moves institutions towards ‘participatory’ or ‘justice-oriented’ action as resources are committed to help track data, facilitate voter registration and voting, and build protections to overcome efforts to suppress student voters. Voter protec-

12 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, “The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge,” April 4, 2025, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/ALL-IN-Theory-of-Change.pdf>.

13 Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, “National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) Data Portal,” <https://nslve.tufts.edu/research/national-study-learning-voting-and-engagement-nslve/nslve-data-portal>.

14 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, “2024 Annual Report,” January 2025, 13, <https://allinchallenge.org/impact/>.

tion establishes an institution as ‘justice-oriented’ and communicates to the campus and local/regional community that efforts to interfere with voting rights will be challenged. The more a plan moves beyond logistics and links the work to institutional and educational missions, the more likely the plan can be sustained over time.

2 The Planning Roadmap

As the Aggies say ... Vote with Clarity
(NC A&T Voter Action Plan)

Campuses must account for their unique ecosystems when planning, evaluating the opportunities and challenges within the local context. A planning roadmap helps institutions establish where they fall on the engagement spectrum and identify strategic actions that move their campus culture towards more ‘justice-oriented’ approaches. As demonstrated by the battles over voting rights described in this book, there are always new challenges. Without campus buy-in, resources, and on-going planning and monitoring, it is impossible to ensure full access, participation, or long-term sustainability.

This Planning Roadmap outlines specific actions for each step of the planning process. The steps can be used in part or as a whole depending on institutional resources and goals. Users of the roadmap can be individual students, faculty, or staff, whether they are working on campuses with little to no existing voter support or as part of a designated campus coalition already working on enhancing or expanding existing voting infrastructures.

Each section of the roadmap includes a corresponding table with sample activities and timelines that can help campus teams develop more comprehensive voter action plans at each stage of the voting process. The activities reflected in these tables are a compilation of the kinds of activities organized on each of the four campuses featured in this volume. The tables are practical guides that can be used to support campuses at any stage of planning.

2.1 Voter Registration

Registering students to vote is at the core of any voter action plan, and planning prepares campuses to meet the logistical and motivational challenges when engaging student voters. According to CIRCLE, more than one-third of youth voters in 2024 indicated that they were uninterested in engaging with the election. Many

lacked information and motivation to register, citing dissatisfaction with candidates as the biggest barrier to participation while others did not see voting as important or felt “politically adrift with no party home.”¹⁵ Addressing these barriers starts at voter registration.

Critical to this process is coordination by a planning team responsible for voter registration and the monitoring of whether those registrations are successfully processed. Minimally, a campus voting action plan should establish a baseline for the number of students registered and the number of students voting. The team can use this list to target the most at-risk registrations. Young people have lower turnout in states without facilitative voting laws, and report missing deadlines or running out of time when online registration, automatic registration, or same-day registration are not available.¹⁶ Therefore, targeting voter registration at the youngest voters (18- to 19-year-olds), that is, incoming college freshmen and sophomores, whose voter turnout traditionally trails their slightly older (ages 20–29) peers, can begin to address the most acute gaps in experience and information.¹⁷

The planning for voter registration can be organized by senior leadership, student groups, the faculty, or staff in administrative departments but ideally involves some combination of all four. When and how voter registration occurs depends on the voting options available to students on a given campus: non-residential colleges with mostly local or regional students have different voter registration processes from large state schools with primarily in-state voters. Many campuses manage both local registrations as well as in-state and out-of-state registrations. Organizers should start by assessing the types of voters they will encounter to prepare information and resources and provide training for teams responsible for the voter registration drives. In the case of a commuter campus, for example, this means preparing to register voters in multiple local precincts or counties within a given geographic range. Campuses with a large percentage of out-of-state voters need to prepare for the rules governing local voter registration and statewide and out-of-state voter registrations.

15 Medina, Siegel-Stechler, Suzuki, Booth, and Hilton, “Young People and the 2024 Election.”

16 Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “State-by-State Youth Voter Turnout Data and the Impact of Election Laws in 2022,” updated May 2, 2023, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/state-state-youth-voter-turnout-data-and-impact-election-laws-2022>.

17 Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Youth Turnout Among Teens Shows Need for Growing Voters,” September 19, 2019, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-turnout-among-teens-shows-need-growing-voters>.

Since a myriad of state rulings and the *Symm*¹⁸ decision, students are eligible to register at either their college address (on or off campus) or at the address of their home of origin. Determining which option best fits the student's needs can be confusing, especially for new voters who are unfamiliar with complicated absentee voter registration systems in their home states or may not know that they are eligible to register at a school address. New voters often have questions about where they should register and how to register. To help each student complete and submit a voter registration form at the address that makes sense for that individual student, teams should begin communicating with students prior to arrival on campus. As restrictions to first-time voter registration and absentee voting mount, institutions should consider advocating for students to register at their campus address in order to provide clearer assistance under changing legislation, or at least make clear that this is an option. Bard has shifted messaging since establishing an on-campus polling site, actively encouraging students to consider in-person voting to make sure they can successfully cast a ballot (while informing them, of course, of their right to vote from their home-of-origin address should they satisfy the residency requirements there). For students opting to vote by absentee ballot, institutions should attempt to ensure that election-related mail is accessible and prioritized in campus mailing systems, and even proactively communicate with students when such mail arrives in order to avoid common issues stemming from strict election-related deadlines.

How voter registration drives are organized and how voter registrations are processed will be determined by local laws. In some states, voter registration drives are limited by restrictive laws and can carry heavy fines or even threats of criminal charges.¹⁹ In Florida, for example, a 2023 law, Bill 7050, requires organizers to register annually with the state and follow numerous rules or face fines of up to \$250,000.²⁰ In Alabama, it is a crime to assist a voter in obtaining or returning a mail application. At the time of writing, both are being challenged in court.²¹ To be sure, restrictions such as these are rare. However, knowledge is power. A comprehensive annual review of rules governing voter registration

¹⁸ *Symm v. United States*, 439 U.S. 1105 (1979), affirming *United States v. Texas*, 445 F. Supp. 1245 (S.D. Tex. 1978).

¹⁹ Brennan Center for Justice, "Voting Laws Roundup."

²⁰ Florida State Senate, An Act Relating to Elections, SB 7050, introduced April 11, 2023, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/7050>.

²¹ Johanna Alonso, "A Florida Law Has Nearly Killed Campus Voter Registration Drives," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2024/07/08/florida-voter-registration-law-has-major-impact#>; Florida State Senate, An Act Relating to Elections, SB 7050, introduced April 11, 2023, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/7050>.

can be incorporated into training for teams to strategize how to manage potential barriers. And, when appropriate, institutions can decide to join a regional or state coalition to challenge state rules or highlight restrictive laws during voter registration drives or educational events.

How to manage voter registration drives within the local ecosystem must be determined by the campus team. In cases like Bard, where voters are from across the country, teams must track voter registration deadlines and regulations across the United States. A well-coordinated, well-trained voter registration team can manage multiple types of voter registrations while also keeping track of who has successfully registered (and where), and troubleshoot options when registration forms are not successfully processed. Schools can maintain an up-to-date list of registered voters (including location of registration) with the cooperation of the local Board of Elections (BOE) to help teams coordinate educational programs, outreach, and GOTV efforts. To manage the challenges of large-scale and/or complicated voter registrations, a campus might elect to invest in digital tools like Motivote that gamify the process to help voters register, find information about elections and candidates, and encourage peer-to-peer networking to increase participation. Rock the Vote, Vote.org, and The Andrew Goodman Foundation's VoteEverywhere offer similar digital tools. Planning teams should consider the most effective tools for their particular campus and advocate for more resources when needed.

Although voter drives can emerge from different parts of campus, the most sustainable and effective organizing is done by cross-campus coalitions (see section 3.1). In order to effectively reach all students, voter registration is linked to important bureaucratic processes in which all students participate. This can include first-year and returning student check-ins, orientation, course registration, room selection, and student billing. Integration into annual student events can reach students who might not engage with traditional registration campaigns. These events can include student club fairs, student government elections, homecoming, athletic or Greek Life events, or other campus traditions that draw large numbers and a diverse range of students. Faculty can disseminate information about opportunities to register or sponsor class visits by voter registration teams in a first-year seminar or other course where new voters are likely to be enrolled. NC A&T's plan, for example, pushes to "get voter registration and education in the classroom (separate from the first-year experience curriculum) and virtual/electronic platforms (links and information on the University website, virtual student union, Aggie Access, in Housing application and Orientation material, etc.)."²² Ultimately, the goal is to have multiple touchpoints for all eligible voters

22 North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, "Voter Engagement 2.4: Aggies Vote

every academic year of a student's time at an institution. These touchpoints can act as building blocks to expand students' knowledge not only about elections and maintaining voter status (hopefully with increasing independence), but also to develop their sense of civic agency within the American context.

Bard's updated 2024 plan incorporates more structured touchpoints on an annual basis. Campus teams have a required check-in at all arrival days, voter registration is connected to Housing Selection and other routine processes, and regular registration drives happen through the Fall. Students are asked to complete a form that includes a voter registration status look-up (encouraging independence) and information about primaries and requesting absentee ballots. Students opting out of Housing Selection are prompted to re-register with their new off-campus address. Student orientation includes a Democracy Day, a day-long event centered on readings and panel discussions related to elections, politics, and civics. PVA-MU's voting plan calls for "In-person voter registration drives, in-person voter education events (e.g. film screenings, debates, lecture series, etc.), classroom voter registration presentations (in-person or virtual), [and] virtual voter registration drives (e.g. Couch Party text banking events), virtual voter education events (e.g. film screening, debates, lectures series, etc.)."²³ Each moment is an opportunity for engagement that builds students' confidence.

Tapping into student energy and knowledge makes the planning more responsive and connected to student needs. Relational, peer-to-peer organizing that leverages personal networks is most effective in reaching a diverse range of voters. Relationships between the voting advocate (canvasser, organizer) and the potential voter matter.²⁴ Beyond social networks, young voters seek inspiration and connection. Tuskegee's Andrew Goodman Foundation Fellows Xadia Cherrie and Paige Henry reflected on how important it was for them to connect with community leaders and organizers who looked like them and with whom students could relate.²⁵ When asked what universities should consider when building a plan, they recommended that organizers focus on voter education, things like bringing can-

with Clarity, Seeing Beyond the Polls," June 2024, 13, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/North-Carolina-AT-State-University-2024-Action-Plan.pdf>.

²³ Crystal Edwards, "2020 Democratic Engagement Action Plan," Prairie View A&M University, 2020, 3, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/Prairie-View-AM-University-ALL-IN-Challenge-Action-Plan.docx.pdf>.

²⁴ Cassandra Handan-Nader, Daniel E. Ho, Alison Morantz, and Tom A. Rutter, "The Effectiveness of a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Get-Out-the-Vote Program: Evidence from the 2017 Virginia State Elections," *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 145–160, <https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.11>.

²⁵ Xadia Cherrie and Paige Henry, interviewed by Erin Cannan, February 26, 2025.

didates to campus, teaching logistics about voting, and advocating for students to vote at school. However, they both described how powerful it was to connect with the community and with the history around them. Xadia reflected on how moved she was to hear the intergenerational stories during a Bloody Sunday commemoration in Selma, saying “I came to understand that success has its ups and downs. Hearing intergenerational stories at the Bloody Sunday events in Selma gave me inspiration because older people are still fighting for young people. They reminded me to not stop fighting even if discouraged.”²⁶

For further information regarding activities related to this section, see Table 1.

Table 1: Sample timeline for a voter registration drive.

Pre-arrival
– Communicate with new students (post-enrollment) about voter registration options in the local context. – Send communications to new students from campus leaders about the link between education and democracy, endorsing voting as a critical way to participate in democracy. – Coordinate with local or national partners to build a voter registration plan for the semester. – Set planning goals (for instance, register 100 % of eligible voters). – Request current voter lists from BOE to establish the baseline of participation. – How many eligible student voters are on campus? – How many are registered and where are they registered? – Who is not registered (or registration is unknown)? – Link registration to enrollment processes (billing, housing forms, move-in information).
Arrival
– Require voter registration check-in for first year and transfer arrival day. Students can determine where and if they want to register to vote. – Distribute information at orientation sessions or during course registration processes. – Table at the opening of school check-ins and events to confirm voter registration status for returning students. – Send campus communications about available voter registration options and upcoming deadlines. – Send campus text to returning students whose registration status is unknown, with link to the form and supporting resources, requesting updates.
Fall semester
– Utilize federal work-study funding to hire peer leaders to coordinate. – Support opportunities for students to engage with voter registration, either peer-led or in partnership with organizations in voter fellowships, or support courses/research on elections and voting.

²⁶ Xadia Cherrie, interviewed by Erin Cannan, February 26, 2025.

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- Celebrate civic holidays such as National Voter Registration Day, with tabling, academic, and co-curricular programming.
 - Faculty host student voter registration teams in a class (especially targeting courses with younger students).
 - Provide sample language for faculty to use in class announcements and in emails to their students with educational information on voter registration and programming.
 - Identify faculty champions to educate other faculty on voter registration information in various settings like faculty committees, departmental meetings, or in faculty meetings.
 - Offer students fellowship or other opportunities to support the voter registration process by developing savvy peer-to-peer voter education materials, such as social media memes and videos.
 - Teach students how to check voter registration rolls independently or using digital tools.
 - Track and communicate voter registration deadlines, especially for out-of-state voters. Disseminate posters or other visuals that map deadlines.
 - Host voter registration drives in partnership with athletics, residence life, graduate schools, off-campus offices.
 - Schedule voter registration classroom visits during established civic holidays in September.
 - Text, email, and phone communications to eligible voters whose voter registration status is unknown.
 - Coordinate regular team check-ins to track registrations.
 - Hold open office hours, table at key events, and programming
 - Coordinate educational efforts to teach people how to track their own voter registration status online.
 - Offer last-chance events to help students register at the final deadline available to them based on residency.
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Spring semester

- Require voter registration check-in for mid-year entering students, including transfer arrivals.
 - Host voter registration tabling to align with primaries, local, or special elections.
 - Coordinate with senior services to provide information for graduating students moving from the area.
 - Coordinate with the study abroad office to confirm voter registration and voting services for voting from overseas.
 - Provide faculty advisors with information on how to update voter registrations to be used during advising meetings; especially for students moving off campus or graduating.
 - Re-register students who are moving out of district or off campus in compliance with local election law.
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2.2 Monitoring Voter Registration

Bard's voter registration process focuses on more than just the successful submission of registration forms. Members of the team are assigned to closely track registration forms to ensure that they are correctly and fully processed by the local BOE to troubleshoot errors made by students or detect systemic efforts to reject student forms that should be successfully processed. In the case where students

are making errors, campus teams can work with individual students and train teams to watch for specific errors that are causing forms to be rejected. If it is the case that student forms are not being processed as they should by the BOE, the monitoring team can address using a variety of strategies including discussions with BOE officials, advocacy with appropriate state offices, or by taking legal action.

Monitoring begins at voter registration. Election@Bard has organized an institutionally sponsored voter registration team that monitors and tracks student voter registration forms after they have been submitted to the BOE to ensure that they have been successfully processed. The team identifies problems at two critical times: prior to the end of registration and prior to election day. This is supplemented by efforts to strongly encourage student voters to check their voter registration status. This early monitoring can often catch registrations that are rejected due to misspelled names, missing information, or other defects. Around election deadlines and election day itself, monitoring efforts can shift towards helping students avoid missing absentee voter deadlines, participate in early voting, or, in more extreme cases, preparing them to complete affidavit ballots or even to appear before a judge on election day if appropriate.

This form of monitoring is also critical in allowing an institution to be ‘justice-oriented.’ Tracking the cycle provides mechanisms for early detection of more systemic problems. Teams can monitor rolls for frequency of denied forms (are student voters being targeted and how?) to identify efforts to disenfranchise student voters, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Appropriate officials can then consult with the Board of Elections, or sympathetic lawyers, to identify the appropriate response.

Teams can measure improvements in turnout by tracking the percentage of eligible voters who are registered and the percentage of voters who come out to the polls. This allows for long-term planning and the refinement of voter plans.

For further information regarding activities related to this section, see Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: A sample timeline for monitoring voter registration.

Pre-arrival
– Meet with BOE to check in and obtain the most up-to-date voter rolls. – Identify returning students who may have been made inactive or been dropped from the rolls. – Follow up with students about their status. – Coordinate with college enrollment offices to identify all eligible voters (over 18, U.S. citizenship, residency). – Compare eligible voter information from campus officials with BOE voter registration rolls.
Arrival
– Coordinate outreach for eligible voters whose registration status is unknown. – Develop predetermined time frame to request updated voter rolls (weekly is recommended) to track successful registrations. – Note any rejected voter registration forms and reasons for the rejection. – Follow up with the voter to address the issue. – In some states, colleges and universities offer local BOEs a list of on-campus student registrants, to offer an additional proof of residency, where required. Early coordination with the local BOE helps the overall youth electoral process.
Before deadlines for voter registration
– Text, email, and phone eligible voters whose status is unknown. – Text, email, and phone voter registration status to eligible voters whose address has changed and requires re-registration. – Coordinate peer-to-peer outreach to voters who have not yet registered. – Host open office hours, tabling at key events, and programming with voter registration teams to field questions about voter registration status. – Monitor why and how many voter registration forms are rejected and for what reason. – Troubleshoot options for voters whose forms were not successfully processed, especially those whose forms were rejected after a registration deadline (i.e., voters living in New York State can register ten days prior to election day, which may provide time to register locally).
Before election day
– Confirm final voter registration rolls for local polls after voter registration deadline.

Table 3: A practical guide to encouraging student voting.

College-sponsored voter registration must be led by non-partisan teams.
– Campus teams should not advocate for candidates, parties, or positions. – The responsibility of the team is focused on empowering and teaching student voters how to participate in an election to encourage a lifelong practice.

Residency eligibility considerations:

Does the length of time at a student's address meet eligibility requirements for that state?

- Voter registration teams should be aware of requirements and deadlines for absentee voting in all states where students are registering. In cases where polls are on or near to campus, teams might make a determination to recommend that students register locally to avoid confusing absentee ballot processes, especially for campuses with on-site polls. Absentee voting has severe restrictions for new voters in some states. Ultimately, teams should advise students that the determination of where they decide to vote is subjective and that they should take into account a range of considerations including residency and eligibility.
- Campuses which are able should consider advocating for a single voter registration address for on-campus voters to avoid confusion with listing dorm names or numbers on voter registration forms. Where this is not possible, campuses should work with the local BOE to offer proof of on-campus student residencies (such as lists provided by the college to the BOE) to avoid erroneous denials of voter registration forms.
- Students voting at their campus address must mark the address correctly otherwise forms can be rejected based on residency. Bard's lawsuits were in some cases driven by challenges to residency. A single campus mailing address is now used by all on-campus students at Bard.

Forms must be completed by the voter, filled out accurately (correct spelling, birthdates, etc.), and mailed prior to registration deadlines (which vary) to the local Board of Elections.

- Teams can provide sample forms at all voter registration drives to help minimize mistakes and should be trained to review completed forms to address mistakes on site.
- Where possible, teams can process voter registration forms for voters or help voters complete and mail forms directly. Distributing forms or QR codes with links to forms or information is likely going to result in a fewer number of successfully processed forms.

Registration forms should be tracked.

- Where allowed, forms should be copied and then sent via certified mail and/or dropped at the BOE to obtain receipts for hand delivery. In-person drop-offs to the BOE are particularly important when delivering forms close to deadlines, as deadlines for mailed forms vary.

Maintain records of completed forms (make copies where allowed, track numbers) to compare with updated voter rolls and to troubleshoot in cases where forms are rejected.

- For campuses with local voters, teams should regularly request (through Freedom of Information Law requests, if needed) updated voter rolls from the BOE to ensure registrations are processed.
 - The BOE can provide information on why forms are rejected. Having copies of submitted forms can help in cases where concerns might arise.
-

2.3 Getting Out the Vote

Not every successfully processed voter registration form translates into a vote. In the 2024 election, some states experienced an uptick in new voters registered, yet youth participation dropped nationally.²⁷ Persuading a student to register to vote,

²⁷ Medina, Siegel-Stechler, Suzuki, Booth, and Hilton, “Young People and the 2024 Election.”

which is a largely easy and quick process (without voter obstruction), may not be enough to convince them to commit time and resources to cast a ballot. GOTV campaigns must be targeted, responsive, compelling, and focused on the needs and interests of the voters. Without a plan, GOTV efforts may not motivate reluctant voters to participate on election day.

GOTV efforts are part logistics and part a call to action. The logistics are focused on tracking if eligible voters are voting. The call to action is a strategy to motivate reluctant voters to go to the polls. At first glance, sitting out an election might be attributed to apathy when in fact logistics, confusion, and complicated attitudes towards voting or candidates might be playing a role.²⁸ In some cases, students may not trust the system or trust that elections will have outcomes that will impact their lives. According to NSLVE, the overall student voting rate in 2022 was down from the 2018 midterms.²⁹ As a whole, institutional voting rates went down, with minority-serving and women's colleges experiencing the biggest decreases.³⁰ GOTV teams should take these trends into account, and the trends on their own campuses, when considering how to frame GOTV efforts.

GOTV involves two types of strategies. The first focuses on the mobilization of voters who are likely to vote and preparing them for what to expect at the polls. This aspect of planning involves education about who and what is on the ballot, including overlooked issues like referendums (often called 'ballot proposals,' 'propositions,' or 'initiatives') and about what the process of voting actually looks like (whether voting in person or by absentee ballot). This educational programming can come in many forms. How to vote is certainly important; what the ballot looks like and what to expect at the polls are critical. However, programming is often more successful when students can learn about the issues connected to a particular election. This can be done in a variety of ways. Meeting candidates is one of the most direct ways to connect with an election. This can be coordinated through a class or sponsored as a campus-wide program. Visits can come in many forms, including candidate and/or representative forums and debates and/or individual 'meet and greets.' This is particularly useful for smaller local, regional, and/or state candidates. Student debates focused on issues represented on the ballot or debate watch parties for bigger elections can be linked to courses and sponsored by student groups. Faculty-led panels, teach-ins, and class visits (even opening certain relevant classes to the entire campus) can help students understand how

28 Medina, Siegel-Stechler, Suzuki, Booth, and Hilton, "Young People and the 2024 Election."

29 Adam Gismondi, Matthew Nelsen, Mariani German, Victoria Tse, and Amanda Sahar d'Urso, "Democracy Counts 2022: Student Engagement in a Midterm Year," National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, 2024, 3, <https://tufts.app.box.com/v/democracy-counts-2022>.

30 Gismondi, Nelsen, German, Tse, and d'Urso, "Democracy Counts 2022," 8.

their future work sector might be impacted by election outcomes. Student newspapers, student government, or election teams can produce voter guides that include candidate responses to questions relevant to youth voters. Websites, social media posts, emails, and fliers with election information including links to candidate websites, volunteer, or internship opportunities with campaigns can encourage broader participation. Coordination with off-campus partners like the League of Women Voters who might sponsor regional events can connect students to local GOTV efforts and can provide additional learning opportunities. Finally, students can sign up to work elections as poll workers or poll watchers.

The second strategy is more complicated. It is focused on persuading reluctant voters that they should vote and involves appealing to emotions and shared values. GOTV campaigns need to stir people's emotions, inspire and encourage a sense of belonging, and connect the power of voting with issues that the individual voters care about. The more targeted, individualized, and personalized a campaign, the more effective the outcomes.³¹ This is where peer-to-peer organizing is most critical. Connecting with trusted peers may have the largest impact on a reluctant voter's decision to come out to the polls. Taking the time to listen to why students are reluctant to come out to vote, and finding ways to help address their concerns, requires multiple in-person touchpoints that focus on relational organizing through student networks, student-only programs, and student-to-student messaging. Such is the case with PVAMU's annual March to the Poll, which experienced the largest turnout of students when the planning was shared with the major campus organizations.³² PVAMU's Kala Washington describes how each student organization plays a critical role within the voter engagement ecosystem: "Student participation is almost entirely dependent on student-driven efforts. Without a strong desire or call to action from students, engagement remains minimal. However, for civic engagement to be truly effective and sustainable, it must be recognized and supported as a core institutional priority. The level of staff and administrative involvement directly correlates with the number of students who participate."³³

NC A&T takes a different approach through a student-organized volunteer group called Research Revolutionaries, who work to tie what's on the ballot to research.³⁴ For example, Research Revolutionaries created an Aggie voter guide based on student interest that emphasized how issues might impact fields of in-

³¹ Yale University Institution for Social and Policy Studies, "Lessons from GOTV Experiments," <https://isps.yale.edu/research/field-experiments-initiative/lessons-from-gotv-experiments>.

³² Kala Washington, email with author, March 16, 2025.

³³ Kala Washington, email with author, March 16, 2025.

³⁴ Tiffany Seawright, interviewed by Erin Cannan, February 25, 2025.

terest or their future sectors. Student groups created programs based on the research and the outreach team created infographics and materials for social media while a student street team coordinated live events. These efforts act as invitations to a diverse range of students, encouraging participation and establishing a campus as a place where voting is expected and encouraged.

For further information regarding activities related to this section, see Table 4.

Table 4: A sample plan for a campaign to get out the vote.

Strategizing
– Coordinate campus surveys to understand why students are voting or not voting. What issues do students consider to be important? Is that compelling them to vote? – Invite candidates, organize debates, sponsor issue-based discussions. – Create student-developed voter guides (what’s on your ballot). – Troubleshoot how many students who registered chose not to vote. How many eligible voters chose not to register? Why? – Engage trusted groups like athletic teams, clubs, Student Government Association, fraternities and sororities, student groups, scholarship offices, faculty advisors (why voting matters by major/industry) to organize networks. Likely more in-person, smaller group discussions and engagement. Consider hiring peer ambassadors to coordinate targeted campaigns. – Centralize resources on websites with relevant messaging for all voters on campus. – Coordinate educational programs with faculty, student groups/organizations, campus departments, or off-campus partners that help students translate what is on the ballot to issues that they care about. – Link educational programming to relevant courses in collaboration with academic departments.
Messaging
– Coordinate messaging from senior leadership: public statements from the president/senior leadership affirming students’ right to vote; reinforce link between education and democracy. – Coordinate messaging to families to support new voters. – Coordinate social media campaigns and messaging and begin prior to first-year arrival. Include evidence-based strategies like personalized, student-to-student communications on why voting matters. These peer-to-peer communications are key to voter outreach, since students know best how to engage their peers and how to capture their attention. – Make civics a class, encouraging faculty to link one class with a topically relevant focus to the election (provide resources for speaker, travel, screening, etc.). – Establish an early voting initiative. – Offer a campus-wide voting challenge or ‘friends don’t let friends stay home’ campaigns. – Promote accountability pledges like ALL INs ‘Triple your Pledge’ campaigns.

Counting down

- Create a comprehensive communication strategy to launch in the summer that includes key dates and deadlines. Campaigns should be targeted based on what phase of the election cycle (voter registration, absentee ballot requests/mail-in deadlines, and early voting/election day).
 - Link issues to programming for civic holidays such as National Voter Registration Day and Early Voting week, focused on student interest. Consider providing resources for student groups to coordinate group-specific programs (i.e., residence hall programs, athletic teams, student clubs).
 - Create a ‘make your voter plan campaign’ (each voter asked to make their plan for election day, can include a ‘take a friend’ or ‘remind a friend’ strategy).
 - Distribute information and announcements for faculty with information on deadlines, early voting, or absentee dates and where to find more information
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Preparing for election day

- Focus specifically on messaging to registered voters through peer-led and individualized texting, emailing, calling, and door-knocking.
 - Support a peer-led campus poster campaign encouraging students to vote and informing them where their polling sites are located.
 - Prepare messaging and announcements for faculty to distribute and/or discuss in class just before the election.
 - Host faculty panel on ‘disciplines on the ballot,’ educating voters on what types of issues are represented on the ballot (this could be campus-wide or departmental).
 - Coordinate with campus partners on ‘make your voting plan’ to help students schedule when they will vote and if they will bring a friend. This can be discussed in smaller cohorts, including in classes with faculty, in athletic teams with coaches, and in residence halls with residence life staff.
 - Coordinate GOTV reminders one week prior to early voting (text, email, calls, dorm storms, tabling).
 - Work with monitoring teams who track voters to coordinate individualized outreach via coaches, team captains, peer ambassadors, etc. 48/24 hours prior to election day.
 - Include emails, notes, and calls that promise a follow-up communication that will ask about the voting experience.
 - Offer programs focused on ‘beyond the ballot’ initiatives to engage students.
-

2.4 Voting Plan and Election Day

All election day plans should focus on preparing voters for what to expect, whether they are voting absentee or in person at a polling site, during the early voting period and/or on election day depending on the state. Every voter should have an individualized voting plan which includes contingency plans in case they face challenges. But just as with voter registration, planning for early voting and/or election day looks very different on campuses with different types of voters. Campuses exclusively working with commuting students should focus on identifying applicable polling sites, hours, and sample ballots. These teams may want to em-

phasize early voting options to account for how work and class schedules on election day might conflict with plans to vote. For residential campuses without a poll site on campus, arrangements should be made to provide regular shuttles to the polls for locally registered voters, including transporting students to early polling sites. If students vote at multiple locations based on residency (campus is split between districts or off-campus students vote in different local polls), then early education will be key, and coordinated plans to transport students to multiple sites might be necessary.

Election day efforts ramp up on the first day students can request an absentee ballot: this is when voting begins. Periods to request absentee ballots vary wildly, ranging from three to twenty-one days in advance of election day.³⁵ Return deadlines fluctuate as well. Some states allow absentee ballots to be received within designated times following election day while others require ballots to be received by or on election day. Absentee ballots can often require additional steps. For instance, voters might be asked to include a signature from a witness (in some instances required to be a voter from that same state) or notary. Other ballots might require copies of state-issued IDs. Rules governing absentee ballots in the states where students are registered should be confirmed annually on websites that aggregate this information but it should be noted that rules should be double checked by teams in advance of GOTV efforts. The most up-to-date information should appear on individual secretary of state websites.

Once voter registration deadlines have passed, monitoring teams can turn their attention to tracking the voter experience at the polls in order to track how many voters are successfully casting a ballot. This effort can include campus officials, faculty, and students signing up to be poll workers and poll watchers at sites where the majority of students are voting. In Bard's case, faculty, staff, and students all work the polls both on campus and at local off-campus sites where students are most likely to be voting. Given past experiences, Bard has developed relationships with attorneys who have agreed in advance of election day to represent students in the case of difficulties. Bard transportation is prearranged to take students to the county seat where student voters can appear before a judge in the case that they believe they have been inappropriately turned away from the polls.

The size and makeup of the election day team depends on the campus. Larger campuses must train and deploy much larger teams and are likely supporting voters who are casting ballots at multiple local polling sites. However, the organizing principles for the teams are largely the same. For instance, NC A&T's coalition includes over 30 campus and local partners with the goal to reach 50 % higher voter

³⁵ Vote.org, "Absentee Ballot Deadlines," <https://www.vote.org/absentee-ballot-deadlines/>.

participation.³⁶ In Bard's case, the election day team is divided into multiple subgroups. A centrally located campus team helps educate students heading to the polls by providing sample ballots, answering logistical questions, and troubleshooting issues for voters who might be turned away from the polls inappropriately, like misspellings of names. They track and reach out to eligible voters who have not yet turned out. This team coordinates day-of-GOTV efforts, answers questions, and encourages students to come out. A second team is trained to monitor students who may experience difficulties at the poll or who are turned away. These team members are trained to troubleshoot issues and advise students on their options.

Inevitably, young voters will make mistakes on voter registration forms and not appear in the voter rolls. Voters will have been made 'inactive' because, for example, they have studied abroad and a BOE mailer sent to their mailing address is sent back. Helping students understand what to expect at the polls is important, including teaching them what their rights are in the case that something goes wrong (e.g., options to complete a provisional or affidavit ballot). And, if a voter does not have any remaining options to help them vote, explaining what went wrong and what to do for the next election cycle can help ensure they can cast a ballot next election. However, it is the case that sometimes voters are inappropriately challenged when trying to vote and legal expertise is needed.³⁷ Monitoring teams can coordinate with lawyers who can advise students on options to respond to the challenge.

2.5 Post-Election Debrief

Following every election, teams should debrief to determine if they met their goals. This is where yield rates for voters can help teams assess their plan. Post-election campus teams can call, email, or text voters with surveys to assess students' experiences at the ballot (or mailbox) and review NSLVE comparative data which comes out after midterm and presidential elections. NSLVE data provides campus-specific, detailed data about who voted based on multiple criteria and includes comparative data. Insights gained by the team can be embedded into future plans, making the whole process evidence-based, more effective, and sustainable. Post-election educational programs like 'beyond the ballot' or 'now

³⁶ North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, "Voter Engagement 2.4," 5, 15.

³⁷ Election@Bard, "Bard College's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan," revised December 10, 2023, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/Bard-College-2024-Action-Plan.pdf>, 13.

what’ sessions can make more explicit the link between elections and ongoing civic engagement opportunities year-round.

For further information regarding activities related to this section, see Table 5 and Appendix A.

Table 5: A sample of activities for monitoring before and after election day.

Before election day and during early voting
– Support establishment of teams setting up in high-traffic areas on and off campus to help students determine rules in their state and troubleshoot, especially in the week leading up to the early voting period. – Coordinate with campus mailroom to provide postage and answer questions regarding postmarks, and to ensure that election materials are prioritized in campus mailing systems, even during the spring break period in connection with the primary elections. – Remind voters about ID requirements (if needed, what type of IDs are accepted, and facilitate access to student ID if accepted).
On election day
– Coordinate with GOTV team to monitor which eligible voters have voted and manage election day messaging to voters, including outreach to voters who have not yet voted. – Establish and coordinate centralized teams set up in designated areas to provide information, track voter experiences, and troubleshoot issues at the poll. Inform voters of their rights, including how to complete provisional ballots in the case that a voter might not appear, has been made inactive, or has been removed from the rolls. Troubleshoot voters who are not appearing on the rolls, who have been made inactive, or who might have a misspelled name. – Transport voters to appear before a judge in the case that the voter believes the roll is incorrect. In some states, voters have the option to appear in front of a judge when they believe they are being prevented from voting for a reason they consider to be illegitimate (i.e., challenged by an election poll watcher). – Establish on-site legal support to advise voters who may need representation.
After election day
– Survey voters to solicit feedback on their election day experience. – Review NSLVE data analysis to identify students who are not participating. – Inform students who voted provisionally about how to cure provisional ballots. – Track students’ ability to cast a successful vote by mail or in person on election day, and provisional ballot. – Support students and faculty interested in studying voter trends and systems design analysis.

3 Implementing Plans: Building an Ecosystem of Engagement

3.1 Cross-Campus Coalition-Building

In their “Strengthening American Democracy” guide, SLSV recommends the establishment of campus-wide coalitions as the second step in the planning process.³⁸ These coalitions or campus teams can originate from different departments, programs, or student groups. The most effective plans are directed and led by peers, supported by staff, partnered with community members, and explicitly endorsed by leadership. Each of the four campuses represented in this volume demonstrates different types of planning, yet all coordinate the work using cross-campus coalitions composed of students, staff, faculty, senior leadership, and community partners. It is important to note that for those campuses experiencing active voter disenfranchisement, it is especially important to have campus coalitions that can take on different aspects of the work. In Bard’s case, the small Election@Bard team had to be in court multiple times just before election day. Much of the team was preoccupied with the legal challenges, making it hard to implement planning strategies for GOTV and voter education.

PVAMU’s and NC A&T’s voter action plans are designed by a coalition of faculty, staff and students. NC A&T’s Director of Leadership and Engagement and External Affairs/Office of Strategic Partnerships, works closely with a large number of student leaders, the student government and clubs, while much of PVAMU’s has been largely student led. Bard’s plan is based out of The Center for Civic Engagement under the student-led Election@Bard team, which receives institutional support from the executive vice president and (former) vice president for student affairs. Tuskegee’s team is led by powerful student clubs and the Student Government Association in coordination with Student Life and Development.

Teams can originate from different departments, programs, or student groups. Larger cross-campus coalitions can help alleviate the pressure on smaller teams and ensure that students are participating in elections by reaching more students through a diverse network of academic departments, student services offices, and student organizations. Coordination with multiple academic depart-

³⁸ Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, “Strengthening American Democracy: A Guide for Developing an Action Plan to Increase Civic Learning, Political Engagement, and Voter Participation Among College Students,” 4th ed., August 2023, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/StrengtheningAmericanDemocracyGuideVOL4.pdf>.

ments to incorporate the work into the classroom can help realize the mission to link voting and democratic learning. Coalitions can build momentum across campus, build a voting campus culture, and act as a check and balance to a potential shift in institutional or leadership priorities. Without a cross-campus coalition, institutional commitments can waver as changes in leadership occur or external pressures work to erode institutional priorities. This body can build on lessons learned from tracking student voting habits, provide ‘on the ground’ messaging that reflects student interests, and maintain the archival record of actions. The collaborative nature and multi-stakeholder approach can help realize the institutional commitments made in the planning and meet the evolving needs of student voters over time.

The Civic Engagement Coalition (CEC), the main organizing body for NC A&T’s voter engagement, distributes planning across faculty, student groups, administrators, and off-campus partners.³⁹ NC A&T’s director of leadership and engagement, Tiffany Seawright, a key organizer and author of NC A&T’s Student Voting Action plan, collaboratively leads the team with the Office of the Chancellor and the Student Government Association. The CEC is charged with the oversight of the planning work, revisiting the student voting plan every year, assessing what worked and what didn’t, and establishing short- and long-term goals aiming “to achieve institutionalization and 100% participation supported through concrete and achievable annual goals with a system of monitoring.”⁴⁰ NC A&T’s system of phased planning uses different focus areas for deeper engagement with the issues represented on the ballot.⁴¹ The group monitors trends in new students’ civic literacy as they enter the university to be responsive to the needs of the evolving student body.

The responsibilities of a campus coalition can vary widely and depend on how a group is authorized to act. The most effective implementation should include careful consideration of the structure of the group, including its leadership, organizing principles, primary goals, and communications strategies. Members of the coalition can work together to track and monitor voter registration forms and participation, as well as managing reporting, archiving, and evaluation of the annual election cycle to determine what is working and what needs to change. This kind of engagement also allows members of the coalition to determine if challenges to students’ access to the polls is occurring.

39 North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, “Voter Engagement 2.4,” 4.

40 North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, “Voter Engagement 2.4,” 12.

41 North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, “Voter Engagement 2.4,” 14.

Seawright and the CEC support a variety of student-led organizing efforts, including the Student Social Action Coalition, a body of students composed of representatives from different student groups and committees on campus whose work incorporates civic engagement as a pillar within their mission. The work has raised student political awareness and social action and the continuous dialogue helps when there is a call to action or a threat to student voting rights, as was the case a few years ago.

Tuskegee's dean of students, Tameka Harper cites the collaborative nature of the campus voting efforts for a successful 2024 student voting outcome.⁴² She attributes the success to multiple partnerships, from student government and Greek organizations, to staff offices, to the NAACP and local and state-elected officials. The goal of the 2024 plan was to register students to vote and “change the narrative on how HBCU students perceive voting and the political process.”⁴³ This effort resulted in the Tuskegee University Royal Court winning the “Vote Loud HBCU Voter Registration Challenge,” receiving the most voter registration submissions among 100+ HBCU campuses.⁴⁴ These efforts would not be possible without the coordination of large campus coalitions.

3.2 Campus Polling Sites

Once a campus has successfully managed multiple elections, it might be time to consider campaigning to secure a campus polling site. Accessing polls off campus can be difficult and creates logistical barriers to voting. On-campus polling sites increase student access and eliminate barriers. Institutions should consider local BOE requirements and consult with campus leaders, local partners, and legal teams to determine the path forward. Institutional leaders should identify and make available appropriate locations for voting that are accessible and centrally located. Campaigns should align diverse groups and demonstrate the logistical and civic value of establishing a polling site on campus.⁴⁵ Access to polling sites on campus is especially helpful for young, newly registered voters.⁴⁶ Success-

⁴² Tameka Harper, email with author, February 19, 2025.

⁴³ Tameka Harper, email with author, February 19, 2025.

⁴⁴ Tameka Harper, email with author, February 19, 2025.

⁴⁵ The Andrew Goodman Foundation, “Toolkit: Securing On-Campus Polling Places,” 2, <https://andrewgoodman.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A-Toolkit-For-Securing-On-Campus-Polling-Places.pdf>.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Daniel A. Smith, “On-Campus Early In-Person Voting in Florida in the 2018 General Election,” The Andrew Goodman Foundation, August 9, 2019, 10, <https://andrewgoodman.org>.

ful campaigns include an understanding of the support of the local BOE. Strategies will largely depend on the cooperation of the BOE. If BOE officials are receptive, then the focus might be on meeting polling site requirements (like registering the number of required voters, as is the case in New York State). However, if BOE officials are reticent or even hostile to hosting a site on campus, campus coalitions need to build strategies that challenge restrictions that can range from state laws, like the one proposed in Texas in 2023 which attempted to prohibit campuses from hosting early voting or election day sites, or uncooperative officials, as in the Bard polling site case.⁴⁷

3.3 Leadership

Leadership plays a critical role in the activation and long-term sustainability of a voter action plan. ALL IN's 2023 "Nonpartisan Student Voting Group Report" identified some troubling trends to watch for in future elections.⁴⁸ This includes lower engagement by stakeholders, including senior campus leaders, with less election messaging and coordination by campus leadership and lower financial support.

We have argued that not only should "leadership ... be willing to promote the view that students not only have the right to vote" but that they should actively encourage students to vote locally where their vote is more likely to be counted.⁴⁹ Campuses whose leadership actively engages experience better outcomes, with higher voter turnout on campuses whose president signed ALL IN's Presidents' Commitment to Full Voter Participation.⁵⁰

IDHE's executive director Nancy Thomas recognizes that "institutional leaders may be reluctant to wade into political waters" but advises that "'political' and 'partisan' are not interchangeable terms" and senior leaders should "reimagine election seasons as opportunities to bridge differences; strengthen community and inclusion; improve political discourse; cultivate student activism, leadership

org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/On-Campus-Early-In-Person-Voting-in-Florida-in-the-2018-General-Election-FINAL-8-9.pdf.

47 Becky Fogel, "A Texas Republican Says Banning College Polling Places is About Safety. Students Don't Buy It," *KUT News*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.kut.org/education/2023-03-01/a-texas-republican-says-banning-college-polling-places-is-about-safety-students-dont-buy-it>.

48 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, "ALL IN Nonpartisan Student Voting Group Report," 2023, <https://allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/ALL-IN-Student-Voting-Group-Report-and-Toolkits.pdf>.

49 Becker and Cannan, "Institution as Citizen," 1894.

50 "ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, "2024 Annual Report."

and collaboration; make political learning more pervasive; and encourage informed participation in democracy.”⁵¹ Senior leadership can harness campus resources, set expectations, message broadly, connect large networks, and explicitly connect the work to institutional missions, strategic plans, educational learning outcomes, and institutional priorities. Although voting registration efforts can emerge from any point on campus, long-term sustainability requires senior-level endorsement. Without it, plans can be sidelined or abandoned.

4 Conclusion

At the foundation of this kind of work is the belief that institutions themselves must act with the values we hope our students embody. Activating students is the challenge. Appealing to students who are feeling like their voices do not count is the most vexing problem to plan around, especially when candidates and issues may not motivate voters to work through the barriers that are placed on young voters. Successful planning must combine education, logistics, strategies, emotional intelligence, and empathy. For the 2024 election, young people reported that issues, especially the economy, were the biggest factors in the election—not candidates or a sense of civic duty.⁵²

Planning must respond to the students we have on campus today, and each new year brings new students. A careful planning process allows campus communities to be responsive to the evolving needs of students. Voting is emotional and taps deeply into a civic imagination. However, without planning, the ability to reach and inspire all students to register and to vote is unlikely. As new voters come to college, so will new concerns and challenges. It is the responsibility of institutions of higher education to prepare students in active citizenry, today and tomorrow. Institutional planning for voter registration and engagement, including building processes for communications, monitoring, curing, and cross-coalition support, are key to satisfying the mission of higher education.

⁵¹ Nancy Thomas, Margaret Brower, Ishara Casellas Connors, Adam Gismondi, and Kyle Upchurch, “Election Imperatives Version 2.0,” Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, August 2020, 4, <https://dgm81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Initiatives/IDHE/idhe-election-imperatives-v2.pdf>.

⁵² Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Poll: Economic Struggles, Varied Issue Priorities, and Dislike of Candidates Shaped the Youth Vote in 2024,” <https://circle.tufts.edu/poll-economic-struggles-varied-issue-priorities-and-dislike-candidates-shaped-youth-vote-2024>.

Appendix A. Questions to Consider for Managing and Monitoring Election Day

- How close are local polling sites for students? Is there a polling site on or near campus? If not, how far are the polling locations? Are they accessible via public transportation? Are they actually handicap-accessible?
- What is the experience of students at polling sites during early voting or on election day?
- Do students have to travel far from campus?
- Are polling sites accessible by public transportation and are they handicap-accessible?
- Are students turned away by poll workers or forced to vote via provisional ballot (a vote normally cast on paper and not on a machine and reviewed later for eligibility) due to concerns about ID or for other reasons?
- Do student voters know what their rights are if they are challenged or if they are asked to vote provisionally?
- Are student absentee ballots or mail-in forms counted or challenged?
- What does the data reveal about the students missed during campus outreach?
- Have students been disproportionately purged from the rolls and/or made ‘inactive’? If so, for what reason?
- Are local voter registrations being properly processed? Why or why not?
- How many students are casting a ballot and how are they casting those ballots (mail in, absentee, in person, affidavit aka provisional)?
- What challenges are students facing when casting a vote? Are they being turned away at the polls? Did they understand how to mail in an absentee ballot?
- At what rate do students turn out to vote during early voting or on election day? What challenges emerge on election day? Are students’ absentee ballots or mail-in forms counted or challenged?

Appendix B. Considerations for Building Campus Coalitions

- Where does the campus planning emerge from?
 - Bottom-up (student-led and driven with little administrative support).
 - Top-down (directives issued by institutional leadership, vice presidents, chancellors or presidents).
 - Middle-out (faculty or administratively driven coalitions with some institutional supports).
- What cross-campus coalitions exist or can be developed, and does their work align with voting goals?
- Who can charge a coalition with the authority and resources to do the work?
- How can cross-constituent groups align the work with existing strategic or learning goals?
- What is the primary focus and mission of the group (i.e., voter registration, voter participation or ongoing civic participation, removing obstacles to youth voting)? How is that mission articulated to the campus community?

Appendix C. Considerations for Engaging and Activating Campus Leaders

Considerations for engaging campus leaders

- Have campus leaders signed national commitments on behalf of student voting rights? Are they engaged in any way in national discussions or academic spaces related to student voting rights?
- What demonstrated commitment is available that is in support of student voting rights or, more importantly, links the work to the institutional mission to educate for democracy? Are those commitments up to date, publicly available, and articulated to the campus community on a regular basis?

Considerations for activating senior leadership

Leadership has a range of options to demonstrate institutional commitment:

- Link student voting and engagement to educational outcomes related to democracy and connect the work to ongoing efforts to teach civic participation, including where appropriate clinical or applied learning work so that students may study and analyze engagement trends of their peers.
- Public articulation in support of students' right to vote in annual communications to all constituencies, including to families.⁵³
- Public articulation of the institutional commitment to defend students' right to vote.⁵⁴
- Articulate and define the work related to the institution's third mission.
- Actively work towards creating an enabling environment for student voting:
 - Designate resources to support the work, including campus facilities to host an accessible and centrally located on-campus polling site.
 - Create and publicly support cross-campus, intergenerational teams charged with the development of voter action plans.
- Bind words and deeds through ongoing and repeated articulation that student voting rights are not only supported but are an institutional priority:
 - Write opinion pieces linking voting and higher education's link to democracy.
 - Annually encourage students to vote, and where appropriate to vote with their campus address.
 - Actively defend students' right to vote when threatened.

⁵³ Becker and Cannan, "Institution as Citizen," 1894.

⁵⁴ Becker and Cannan, "Institution as Citizen," 1894.

- Explore local, state, and federal-based solutions such as those offered by the Youth Voting Rights Act and analogous state proposals, and monitor proposed potential restrictions.

Appendix D. Voting Terms Defined

The rules governing voter registration vary widely by state and, in the case of local elections, by counties, towns, and villages. The process of registering to vote, how and where to register, is confusing and often intentionally inconvenient, especially for new voters. What and how to plan for a voter action plan are determined by the types of voting available in the local campus context. The following are definitions of key words that campus teams should be familiar with when planning.

Voter Registration: Eligible voters complete required paperwork which identifies them as living within a certain voting district and confirms their eligibility to vote. That paperwork enrolls them in that district's electoral roll. The paperwork is sent to the local Board of Elections. Requirements for voter eligibility vary widely across the country.

Once a voter is registered at their local district they can vote in person, absentee, or in some states, by mail-in ballot. In-person voting has set dates and a voter is typically required to vote at designated polling sites. Absentee voting requires voters to request a ballot by a certain date. This is often done through the mail. In many cases, online or digital processes are not available.

Boards of Elections (BOEs) are state-run, local, bi-partisan government agencies charged with overseeing election-related activities as dictated by state law. BOEs process voter registrations, manage polling sites, and count voters to determine election results.

Voter Rolls are the voter registration lists of voters in a given district eligible to vote in an upcoming election. Voter rolls are public and voters can use digital tools to find out if they are registered.

Ballots are how voters cast their votes. Ballots are pre-printed by the local BOE and can include candidates running for local, state, or national elections. Often ballots also include voting for or against proposed legislation or other actions (like school board budgets).

Absentee Voting requires voters to request a paper ballot from their BOE. Rules governing absentee voting vary widely state by state and in some cases require a state-approved excuse (i.e., being out of district for the election day). If a request is approved, the voter completes the ballot and mails the ballot back as required.

Mail-in ballots are used by some states for all voters. Ballots are mailed to all voters in the state directly and returned by mail. At the time of publication, eight states allow all elections to be held by mail: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Washington State (see <https://www.ncsl.org/>). Other states allow counties to opt in or use mail-in for only some elections.

Early Voting is available in some states where voters can vote in person on designated days and at certain locations prior to the federal election day.

Election Day occurs annually for federal, state, and local public offices and is set as “the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November.” Smaller elections like Boards of Education may occur on different dates, depending on local election law. Many states now hold early voting in some elections. Dates, locations, and timing of polling sites can vary.

Casting a Ballot is the process of voting. Voters must be registered in advance (same-day registration is rare) and typically cast a ballot at a designated site(s) unless a state is a mail-in-only state. Voters complete ballots by hand at designated privacy booths and cast their votes on official election machines which read a voter’s ballot.

Provisional Ballots are available in all states except those that offer same-day registration. Required by the National Voter Registration Act 1993, voters who do not appear on the voter registration list at their designated polling place but believe that they are properly registered can vote via a provisional ballot. The ballot is the same pre-printed form received by other voters but is placed in a special sealed envelope instead of cast by machine. Following election day, registration status is confirmed and votes counted for voters whose registrations can be confirmed.

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