

# Cleveland State University's Office of Civic Engagement

## All In Democracy Voter Engagement 2020 Action Plan

### I. Executive Summary

Starting in the Spring of 2020, The Office of Civic Engagement will implement the Voter Engagement Action Plan to enhance engagement efforts on campus and to foster a well-informed student population that understands issues surrounding voting and why their votes matter. As the 2020 general election quickly approaches, this is a crucial time to implement this plan and to find strategies on how to get students to the polls. This plan seeks to implement many different programs and activities to ensure that students are registered, informed and at the voting booth. The Office of Civic Engagement will work in partnership with the League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland, Campus Vote Project, Campus Election Engagement Project, the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections and Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates to ensure that the goals of this action plan are met by the end of 2020. Through continued partnerships with these organizations, Anita Ruf-Young, Program Coordinator in The Office of Civic Engagement was able to develop this plan and indicate clear goals for Cleveland State University, with the assistance of her Graduate Assistant.

This action plan was developed because it is The Office of Civic Engagement's purpose to serve the students and to help them to be more civically engaged. According to the 2018 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report, Cleveland State University's overall voting rate was 48.4% which was almost 10% higher than the national average. Although CSU does have fairly high voting rates, there is still work to be done so that all students are informed and choosing to vote. Another problem that this plan seeks to address is low voter turnout for off-season elections. The following data was provided based on our previous plan to depict the gap between voter turnout in Presidential versus Midterm elections. In the 2012 Presidential Election, 81.9% of students were registered to vote, and 78.3% of those who were registered, voted. In the 2014 Midterm Election, 74.8% of students were registered to vote, and 31.6% of those who were registered, voted. It is clear that during off-season elections, less people are informed on what is going on or they feel as though it is not important to vote during those times. This plan seeks to bridge the gap and make sure students are staying informed even in off-seasons.

Democracy Fellows hired through Campus Vote Project and Campus Election Engagement Project will work with student organizations, community organizations, faculty and staff to promote the goals of this action plan. In collaboration with The Office of Civic Engagement staff, the fellows will develop, plan and execute strategies,

activities and programs that will target different populations within the university. This team will also work to institutionalize voting within freshman Introduction to University Life courses so that students are engaged and informed as they enter into their college careers. Through these initiatives The Office of Civic Engagement will successfully increase voter engagement and participation on campus and create an informed student body that will continue to be civically engaged far beyond their college years.

## **II. Leadership**

Anita Ruf-Young, Program Coordinator in The Office of Civic Engagement, will manage and coordinate all events, programs and activities surrounding voter engagement held at Cleveland State University. She will collaborate with community organizations as well as faculty and staff of CSU to create programming surrounding voter issues. Anita will be assisted by Emma Anderson and LaNiqua Jones, Democracy Fellows through Campus Vote Project and Nora Walsh, Democracy Fellow through Campus Election Engagement Project to execute these events, activities and programs.

This plan indicates the members of the coalition, or working group, which consists of organizations and community stakeholders whose roles are to assist in the implementation of this plan by providing resources, materials, data, funds, and other items needed to ensure the success of the action plan. These coalition members are representative of a variety of different populations and backgrounds that all bring different qualifications to the table.

Working group members are selected directly by the chair of the coalition, Anita Ruf-Young. Members will be chosen based on commitment to involvement, strategies and programs provided, passion for voter engagement and degree of overall mutually beneficial relationship. Membership responsibility will vary depending on the level of commitment agreed upon by Anita Ruf-Young and the member. Some members may provide resources and data, while other members will volunteer at events or help in launching different programming. This group will meet when deemed necessary by Anita Ruf-Young or other coalition members.

The following individuals/organizations are involved with the plan:

**Michelle Jackson**, Representative from Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates

**Dr. Beth Nagy**, Assistant Lecturer of Planning Practice at Cleveland State University

**Dr. Mittie Jones**, Associate Professor Emerita at Cleveland State University and member of Alpha Kappa Alpha

**Lauren Orrico**, Membership & Leadership Development Director at League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland

**Dylan Sellers**, Ohio State Coordinator at Campus Vote Project  
**Brenna Limbrick**, Ohio Director at Campus Election Engagement Project  
**LaNiqua Jones**, Democracy Fellow, Political Science and Criminology Major and CSU Democrat Member at Cleveland State University  
**Nora Walsh**, Democracy Fellow and Urban Planning Student at Cleveland State University  
**Emma Anderson**, Democracy Fellow and Nursing Student at Cleveland State University  
**Dalorean White**, Community Outreach Coordinator at Cuyahoga County Board of Elections  
**Anita Ruf-Young**, Program Coordinator in The Office of Civic Engagement at Cleveland State University

### **III. Commitment**

Cleveland State University (CSU) has developed a strong reputation for its level of engagement and commitment to serve the Greater Cleveland Community and Northeast Ohio region. This commitment to work with the community to address its most significant challenges is part of the identity of Cleveland State University and is clearly exhibited by the efforts of our staff, faculty, colleges, student organizations and leadership to focus resources and intellectual capital to make Cleveland an ideal place to live, work and play.

The Office of Civic Engagement provides support to staff, faculty, students, and administrators by developing, expanding and sustaining collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships with community residents, organizations and institutions. Rather than serving as a gatekeeper for all engagement activities, the Office works to create an infrastructure with six key objectives:

- 1) Establishing and upholding an institution-wide framework for defining civic engagement;
- 2) Creating a consistent process to comprehensively inventory engagement across campus;
- 3) Developing and tracking metrics that quantify the internal and external impact of engagement activities;
- 4) Communicating engagement efforts consistently to the campus community and broader community;
- 5) Promoting mechanisms to honor and reward faculty, students and staff who successfully advance engagement;

6) Setting up structures to develop competency among faculty and students for carrying out best practices in engagement.

The Office of Civic Engagement has led several efforts to achieve these objectives, including:

- Created an action plan for democratic engagement which resulted in our consecutive award of Voter Friendly Campus for 2019-2020.
- Consistently increased voter registration and participation earning the All In Campus Democracy Challenge Certificate of Excellence in Student Voter Engagement Gold Campus rating which increased from Silver in 2016.
- Hired three democracy fellows through Campus Vote Project and Campus Election Engagement Project, who work to provide non-partisan information, register students to vote and promote civic engagement on campus.
- Created a “Vikes Vote” initiative which includes a course to be taught in all First Year Experience courses to engage CSU’s incoming freshman. This initiative will be implemented in the Spring 2020 semester.
- Built partnerships with The Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, The League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland, The U.S. Census Bureau, Campus Vote Project, Campus Election Engagement Project, CSU Democrats, CSU Republicans, Ohio Student Association and Alpha Kappa Alpha to enhance our efforts within CSU as well as throughout the Greater Cleveland community.
- Collaborated with The League of Women Voters Greater Cleveland to create a student chapter at CSU which will allow students to act on issues they are passionate about. This chapter will be registered in the Spring 2020 semester.
- Hosted an event for National Voter Registration Day, in partnership with The Board of Elections, League of Women Voters, The U.S. Census Bureau and Alpha Kappa Alpha, where students registered to vote, promoted our emerging League of Women Voters student organization, provided non-partisan information and recruited for job openings within The U.S. Census Bureau.
- Re-vamped and designed the Plain Dealer Community and Civic Engagement Scholars program which rewards sophomore through senior level CSU students for extending themselves beyond the classroom and workplace to volunteer within the community of Cleveland State University and the Greater Cleveland area. The award gives Cleveland State University students the opportunity to focus on community engagement, community-based projects or issue areas of interest and partner with Cleveland State University or community-based organizations to find solutions that will benefit the communities affected by these issues. This scholarship program will be implemented in the Spring 2020 semester.

- Promoted our democratic engagement efforts on all of our social media platforms.
- Provided volunteer opportunities for the faculty, staff and students of Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs through our Levin Serves Series where we volunteered at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank and Laura's Home.
- Collaborated with faculty on hosting a National Issues Forum where we engaged CSU students on the topic of National Debt and proposed specific solutions to this issue.
- The Office of Civic Engagement is currently planning an event where we will host The Secretary of State at CSU to have an open dialogue with students around issues they are passionate about.

The Office of Civic Engagement at Cleveland State University has and continues to work hard along with our community and university partners to increase democratic and civic engagement on campus.

#### **IV. Landscape**

Cleveland State University has a strong political climate and is passionate about democratic engagement efforts that inform students on voting issues, the process of voting and why their votes matter. CSU is a highly diverse campus with many passionate students who want to have their voices heard. The university as a whole also stresses the need for civic and community engagement on campus in order to provide students the skills they need to be successful community leaders. As stated earlier, NSLVE data shows that Cleveland State University's voting rate is almost 10% higher than the average institution's rate, at 48.4%. Also, in 2018 registration rates were at an all time high of 82% at Cleveland State University. This does however pose the question, what is happening to all of the students who register and do not vote. Because of these discrepancies, The Office of Civic Engagement has proposed and is in the process of implementing a voter engagement course within the Introduction to University Life courses that are required for every freshman that attends the university. This course will be piloted in the Spring 2020 semester. Providing voter information to freshman is a great way to reach the incoming voter population and light a fire of civic passion within these students, so that they will continue to be civically and democratically engaged their whole lives.

Although Cleveland State University is highly engaged democratically, there are a few barriers that prevent the university from reaching as many students as it could. The main barrier that CSU faces is the fact that it is primarily a commuter school. Many students commute to campus from home and are only on campus when they need to be for class. It is difficult to find times that large groups of students are in different areas of the university and to plan events around those times. Another barrier is that The Office of

Civic Engagement is a one-woman staff currently along with student assistants, so it is difficult to take on large-scale voter engagement projects on top of all of the other programs ran in the office. With that being said, the office has created many connections throughout the university and with outside organizations that help and volunteer for many of the events planned. With these partnerships and programs, the university has built a strong civic and democratic presence on campus and with the continued support, democratic engagement will become second nature to all CSU students.

## **V. Goals**

### LONG-TERM GOALS

1. Institutionalize voter engagement efforts through ASC 101: Introduction to University Life courses by providing each class with voter engagement presentations.
2. Find strategies for learning what Cleveland State University students want and need in terms of civic and voter engagement opportunities on campus, with a primary focus on, how to engage voter registration and participation in under-served populations.
3. Partner with other university departments and faculty to plan and execute a “Vikes Vote Day” where students can come to have fun and learn more about voter and civic engagement.
4. Include “Election Days” as university holidays to give students, staff, and faculty the opportunity to participate in elections with no barriers.

### SHORT-TERM GOALS

1. Implement voter engagement presentations into all ASC 101: Introduction to University Life courses starting in Spring 2020 and continuing each semester after that.
2. Implement the League of Women Voters student organization starting in Spring 2020 to provide another avenue for voter engagement to be spread.
3. Plan and execute an event with the Secretary of State where he comes to campus and speaks to students about what issues they are interested in.
4. Increase voter registration on campus by 15%.
5. Increase the number of students in STEM majors that are registered and informed on voting as they tend to have low registration and voter turnout rates.
6. Maintain a database of voter registrations so that registries can be contacted for follow-up to ensure they are getting to the polls.

## **VI. Strategy**

In order to achieve the goals, set forth above, it is important to create a strategy for how the work will be accomplished and by whom. Beginning in the Spring 2020 semester the Democracy Fellows will be tabling and planning different events around campus. The fellows will plan 5 tables a semester and 1-2 larger events that incorporate other student organizations, staff, faculty or outside organizations. The fellows will target hard to reach populations like STEM or theater majors so as to ensure all populations are being served. The Office of Civic Engagement will be in charge of overseeing each event and ensuring all resources are distributed for each event. The Office of Civic Engagement's partner Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates has also dedicated themselves to coming to campus for 20 tabling events where they will register students to vote and provide nonpartisan voter information. The Office of Civic Engagement will also work with partners and coalition members to plan a discussion or forum surrounding voting issues and solutions.

The following are planned activities for the upcoming year:

- Secretary of State Forum
- ASC 101: Introduction to Student Life voting course roll-out
- Freshman Orientation Tabling
- Magnus Fest Tabling
- Major Connections Fair

## **VII. Reporting**

This plan along with the NSLVE data cited in the plan will be shared on our All-In landing page as well as our Office of Civic Engagement homepage. Any results and accomplishments will be marketed through press releases on the Cleveland State University website and The Office of Civic Engagement's Twitter and Instagram accounts.

## **VIII. Evaluation**

This plan will be evaluated every year to ensure that goals are being met. If goals and priorities change, the plan will be altered to meet those changes as needed. The Office of Civic Engagement collects all voter registrations so that a database can be kept on how many registrations the university has achieved. We will also rely on NSLVE data to provide voter turnout data so that success can be measured based on voting rates. Reports and press releases will demonstrate the results of these evaluations.