



Amherst College 2024 Nonpartisan Democratic Engagement Action Plan

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Executive Summary:

This nonpartisan democratic engagement action plan was developed by Amherst College in Massachusetts for the 2024 election. The purpose of this action plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education, and turnout in the 2024 election. This plan is informed by resources from the All-IN Strengthening American Democracy Guide and the Election Imperatives from the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education. The goals for Amherst College for the 2024 election are:

1. Create a campus voting coalition plan that endures student and staff turnover
2. Maintain Gold Campus status (70-79% voting rate)
3. Design systems that support and encourage voter registration and participation among students, staff and faculty every year
4. Coordinate programs and events that engage students, staff and faculty in civic learning and electoral activities

Leadership:

The Amherst College Center for Community Engagement is convening a working group on campus to lead voter engagement. Last semester, the campus coalition AC Votes was inactive. We do not currently have a leadership succession plan, but are in the midst of coordinating among departments to solidify our campus coalition.

Commitment:

Commitment to civic engagement has been a cornerstone of Amherst College for its 200 years. The [college mission](#) states “Amherst College educates students of exceptional potential from all backgrounds so that they may seek, value, and advance knowledge, engage the world

around them, and lead principled lives of consequence.”

The new President of Amherst College, Michael Elliot, has articulated “service to the greater good” as one of his three presidential priorities. The priority explicitly centers on building a community that connects the liberal arts to democratic practices, creates a culture of civil dialogue and embraces civic responsibility. These priorities are regularly cited during all-staff meetings and communications with students, staff and faculty at large.

Amherst College has been a signatory to the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation since 2020. Amherst College has submitted Action Plans consistently since 2018. Amherst College is also a part of NESCAC Votes (New England Small College Athletic Conference).

Landscape:

Amherst College is a private, 4-year institution and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge in 2018. This small, liberal arts college is located in Amherst, Massachusetts.

The overall enrollment is 1,898. 11% of the student body are international students representing 70 countries, and the remaining students come from all 50 states, plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. 86% of U.S. students are from states other than Massachusetts. Additionally, 52% of students identify as women, and 48% as men. 97% of students live on campus. 48% of U.S. students identify as students of color.

In accordance with the Presidential Priorities, Amherst College has developed events and initiatives to promote democratic engagement. The Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning has launched a new Interns for Democracy program, supporting paid internships for democracy-oriented organizations. In October 2023, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healy visited Amherst College and spoke with President Elliot about challenges facing democracy and service to the greater good.

We recently conducted a survey of 129 students which included a question about voting. 63 students responded that they plan to vote by mail in their home state. 29 students stated that they did not have a voting plan. The remaining respondents either did not have a plan, were not sure if they were going to vote, or a voting plan was not applicable to them as an international student.

With 86% of students coming from states outside of Massachusetts, and half of the survey respondents planning to vote by mail, Amherst College needs to prepare to support students in registering, requesting, receiving and returning ballots. All states' voter registration laws, processes and timelines will apply to our voter engagement campaign.

The following voter participation information is from the Amherst College 2020 NSLVE Report:

Campus-Wide Rates

Registration Rate 86.9%

Voting Rate of Registered Students 86.9%

Voting Rate 75.5%

Voting by Race/Ethnicity

Asian 50%

Black 57%

Two or More Races 72%

White 79%

American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (missing data)

Voting Method

Not in Person 39%

Early Vote 18%

In-Person 18%

Unknown 24%

By Age Group

18-21 year olds 70%

22-24 year olds 56%

By Sex

Female 72%

Male 63%

By Class Year

First Year 66%

Second Year 70%

Upper Level 68%

Disciplines with Highest Voting Rate

Environmental Studies 89%

Visual and Performing Arts 82%

English Language and Literature 77%

Philosophy and Religious Studies 76%

Disciplines with Lowest Voting Rate

Psychology 66%

Mathematics and Statistics 66%

Biological and Biomedical Studies 62%

Computer and Information Sciences 52%



Goals:

Our institution's nonpartisan democratic engagement goals are:

1. Create a campus voting coalition plan that endures student and staff turnover
2. Maintain Gold Campus status (70-79% voting rate)
3. Design systems that support and encourage voter registration and participation among students, staff and faculty every year
4. Coordinate programs and events that engage students, staff and faculty in civic learning and electoral activities

Strategy:

Amherst College will implement these strategies to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter participation.

Create Working Group

- Finalize charge for working group
- Identify working group members and ask President's Office to send invitations
- Map out the scope of the working group's efforts (event coordination, registration, education, etc.)
- Build a campus coalition that includes student clubs, affinity groups, offices, academic departments, faculty and staff
- Hire 1-2 student fellows who will manage election activities and programs

Maintain Gold Campus status through campus engagement

- Table at the Science Center and Seeley Mudd to increase voter participation among the STEM disciplines
- Partner with BSU, ASA, La Causa, NISA, MRC to create inclusive events around voter participation
- Identify coaches who can coordinate election activities and outreach across teams
- Send voter registration link and deadline to every student based on home address
- Celebrate civic holidays
 - 9/17 National Voter Registration Day
 - 10/7-11 National Voter Education Week
 - 10/29 Vote Early Day
 - 11/4 Election Hero Day

Encourage voter participation every year

- Create voter registration information guides for students and student leaders
- Schedule yearly outreach around voter education
- Engage Amherst students to volunteer as poll workers

Coordinate programs and events

- Gather programming ideas from campus partners
- Schedule panels/presentations with faculty
- Present cohesive educational programming (with consistent branding and marketing)
- Develop a voter engagement toolkit that can be deployed for every event (registration forms, QR codes for Turbo Votes, etc.)

Evaluation:

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

1. We will continue to authorize NSLVE to publish our campus voting data report.
2. We will use anecdotal feedback, or even possibly student surveys to get a sense of which strategies were the most effective.
3. The coalition will do a reflection process to determine if the division of labor, breakdown of roles, and communication contributed to or inhibited success.
4. The Working Group will create a guide to voting and civic engagement that will be shared with future iterations of the Working Group.

Reporting:

We will share our campus action plan with the campus coalition members and NSLVE data if appropriate.