



**ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
Action Plan
Spring 2022**

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Appalachian State University is located in Boone, N.C. in Watauga County. Appalachian State formally began voter engagement work tied to a university department in Fall 2020. Despite making a significant impact on voter registration and turnout numbers, there are areas we still aim to develop. Specifically in regards to engagement in local and midterm elections, institutionalizing election engagement efforts, and implementing initiatives from a student-led perspective. This action plan outlines how the Election Engagement Coalition and corresponding partners plan to address these focus areas through programming and community organizing over the next year.

NSLVE DATA

The Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) campus report reveals information about Appalachian State's voter engagement that has shaped this action plan. When analyzing the data we received from our 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections we gathered the following:

Appalachian State has made significant increases in both registration rates and voting rates since 2016. In 2016, the average voting rate across all participating institutions was 53% which paralleled Appalachian State's own 2016 voting rate of 53%. The 2020 National NSLVE Report indicates that the 2020 presidential election brought increased voting rates for college students across the board. More specifically, 97% of NSLVE campuses saw rate increases between 2016 and 2020. Appalachian State was one of these campuses, and also saw a 2020 voting rate that was 11 points higher (77%) compared to the national 2020 voting rate average of 66%.

Early voting is still the most popular method of voting at Appalachian State with a rate of 55% compared to in-person on election day at 11%, and not-in-person at a rate of 32%. This fact indicates that it is critical for Appalachian State to keep the Plemmons Student Union as an early voting location to maintain a level of accessibility and convenience for students.

Appalachian State does not have comprehensive data from 2016 to draw conclusions about any increases within specific identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class standings. The report does indicate however, that there were significant increases in voting rates for every field of study at the university.

Self-Comparison (2016 vs. 2020)

Increases seen in registration rates (+15%), voting rates of registered students (+15%), and overall voting rates (+24%)

- Number of students who registered increased by 4,048
- Number of students who voted increased by 5,456

*note: total student enrollment at Appalachian State increased by 1,566

Institutional Comparison (2020 vs. 2020)

- Appalachian State's voting rates are higher than all institutions by 11%
- Appalachian State's voting rates are higher than similar public institutions by 12%
- Appalachian States voter registration rates are higher than the national average by 11%

2018 Midterm Election Data

- Registration rate of 84% compared to a national average 73%
- Voting rate of registered students 44.1%
- Voting rate overall 37% compared to a national average of 39%

Despite significant increases across all categories in 2020, Appalachian State can improve by closing the gap between our registration rate and voting rate for upcoming elections. Especially headed into a midterm election in Fall of 2022 where voting rates tend to be lower overall. Although Appalachian State is relatively ahead of its peer institutions, the university will seize the opportunity to address this national issue through its commitment to civic education. We will implement the programming outlined in this action plan to grow Appalachian State's voter registration and voter turnout numbers for the 2022 midterm election cycle.

PURPOSE & MISSION

This action plan is designed to serve as a catalyst for year-round, nonpartisan voter and democratic engagement at Appalachian State University. This action plan aims to:

- 1) Increase voter registration and voter turnout numbers (using our 2018 midterm election numbers as comparison for 2022);
- 2) Improve students understanding of civic and voter engagement processes;
- 3) Strengthen partnerships between App State's partisan and nonpartisan community organizations

This action plan will begin in January 2022 to be implemented continuously through the 2022-2023 school year. This action plan will be revised again at the start of the Fall 2022 semester to ensure accuracy of involved members and context around programming goals. Implementation and revisions will be spearheaded by the Office of Community-Engaged Leadership in collaboration with Appalachian State's Election Engagement Coalition, as well as campus and community partners with a vested interest in this work.

Appalachian State's All In Democracy Action Plan was developed by:

- Carly May, Community-Engaged Leadership
- Heather Jo Mashburn, Ph.D., Community-Engaged Leadership
- The Election Engagement Coalition

This action plan will be implemented by enacting the programming and strategies outlined in this document to achieve the defined goals.

SECTION II: LEADERSHIP

The office of Community-Engaged Leadership (CEL) at Appalachian State will coordinate and oversee the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. Community-Engaged Leadership provides service and leadership development experiences as opportunities to connect and engage with others to build authentic relationships, simulate critical thinking and skill building, and recognize individual impact and responsibility to our local and global community.

Stronger emphasis on civic engagement initiatives will assist CEL in achieving their mission by guiding students to become responsible and engaged citizens in their local, national and global communities. Students will become more aware of social issues, take diverse perspectives into consideration, and connect their current leadership and service efforts to a deeper meaning. Carly May, Assistant Director for Community Engagement and Dr. Heather Jo Mashburn, Director of Community-Engaged Leadership will primarily be responsible for the editing and implementation of this plan with full collaboration from the Election Engagement Coalition and Student Voter Coalition.

Election Engagement Coalition

Appalachian State's Election Engagement Coalition was initiated in Fall 2020 with a mission to create a nonpartisan campus-wide coalition on election engagement and education. The goal of the coalition is to ensure long-term sustainability of democratic participation on campus by establishing a group of faculty, staff, students, and administrators invested in this work. The Election Engagement Coalition will meet regularly to provide feedback on the mission and programs outlined in the action plan, as well as implement and support programming as it arises.

App State Voter Coalition

Students are crucial to developing and strengthening a culture around civic education and voting participation at Appalachian State and in the Boone community. The Student Voter Coalition is a group of committed students established to assist in the implementation of this action plan. The Student Voter Coalition is currently composed of nine student leaders who envision and implement student-led, year-round, nonpartisan civic engagement programming with a specific focus on voter engagement. This group of students cultivates collaboration with the below mentioned groups.

Additional Partners

On-campus partners:

- Division of Student Affairs
- Intercultural Student Affairs
- Campus Activities
- Student Government
- University Housing
- Residence Hall Association
- Advising and Orientation
- Department of Government and Justice Studies is the home of Political Science
- Specific clubs and organizations such as College Democrats and College Republicans

Off-Campus partners:

- Watauga Board of Elections
- You Can Vote
- Voter Friendly Campus
- All In Democracy
- National Voter Registration Day
- Campus Labs
- North Carolina Campus Compact

Our internal collaborators predominantly serve as partners in programming and resource cultivation. Student voice has, and will continue, to help determine and implement initiatives, as well as serve as voter advocates. The off-campus partners listed above have agreed to offer their support to the university's voter engagement initiatives through providing education and resources to assist in the planning and implementation of this work, as well as the cultivation of best practices.

SECTION III: COMMITMENT

The institution demonstrates commitment to improving voter engagement and civic learning in a myriad of ways. First, Appalachian State's mission statement is to prepare students to lead purposeful lives as engaged global citizens who understand their responsibilities in creating a sustainable future for all. Further, the transformational Appalachian experience develops individuals who are eager to acquire and create knowledge, to grow holistically, to act with passion and determination, to embrace diversity and difference, and to become contributing members of society. Appalachian State promotes a spirit of inclusion that inspires students, faculty, and staff to form relationships extending well beyond graduation. Our students think critically, communicate effectively, make local to global connections, and understand the responsibilities of community engagement. Appalachian State embraces our obligation to help create healthy, just, and sustainable societies by equipping our students to live with knowledge, compassion, dedication, humility, and dignity. This mission statement aligns closely with the work of civic engagement outlined in this action plan.

Additionally, Appalachian State has contributed monetary support in this area as well. First and foremost is our financial commitment to fellowship positions with Campus Compact and You Can Vote to utilize CEEP Fellows, Civic Influencers, and Newman Civic Fellows as advocates and community organizers to assist full-time staff and faculty with this implementation of this plan. Additionally, the office of Community-Engaged Leadership has added voter and democratic engagement as a primary job function to an employee's job description to ensure focus on the implementation of this action plan. Additional staff development in this area is also encouraged by allowing staff from a variety of functional areas to participate in the Election Engagement Coalition as a professional development opportunity.

Support from the Academic Affairs perspective is present as well. Currently, Dr. Philip Ardoin (Chair of the Department of Government and Justice Studies) serves as a primary member and key partner for the Election Engagement Coalition and serves as the bridge between academic and student affairs in this work.

The support in our guiding documents, financial resources, and staff/faculty involvement set our institution up for success when attempting to institutionalize civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.

The civic learning outcomes that have been outlined are the following:

- Students will understand the voting process and the resources available to them
- Students will gain a better understanding of political processes
- Students will understand how voting contributes to being an active citizen in their community

These three learning outcomes align with our goals for programming outlined in Section V of this document.

SECTION IV: LANDSCAPE

Appalachian State Demographic Breakdown of Fall 2021 Enrollment

- 20,641 total students
- 18,555 undergraduate students (main campus and online)
- 2,086 graduate students (main campus and online)
- 1,524 new transfer students (main campus)
- 4,099 first-year students
- 1,610 App State Online
- 18.2% racially and ethnically underrepresented*
- 19,004 in-state students
- 2,086 out of state students (7.9%)
- 42:58 male-to-female ratio
- 384 enrolled student veterans
- 112 enrolled foreign national students
- 32% first-generation undergraduate students
- 34.3% students from rural areas in NC

*Combined percentage of students who self-identify as Hispanic of any race; American Indian or Alaska Native; Black or African American; Asian; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Two or more races; or are Nonresident Alien. This percentage is taken from the total number of students who elect to report their racial and/or ethnic identities, as well as Nonresident Alien students. Actual counts may be higher, as some students choose not to report their race or ethnicity

Source: Data obtained from Appalachian State University Facts Webpage

Student Engagement Overview

NSLVE data suggests that Appalachian students were more engaged in registration and voter turnout than other four year public institutions and the national average in the 2016 election.

Table 1. App State Student Voter Registration and Turnout Rates, 2012-2018

	Student Voter Registration Rates		Student Voting Rates		
	App State	National	App State	4yr Public	National
2016	79%	76%	53%	52%	52%
2018	84%	73%	37%	40.8%	39%
2020	94%	83%	77%	62%	66%

Source: National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement, 2016 and 2020 reports

Source: National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement 2020 National Report

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT VOTER ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING

Appalachian State was awarded a Gold Seal from All In Democracy in the Fall 2021 award ceremony for having 70–79% voting rate.

ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS

Internal Barriers

Balancing new programming: The office of Community-Engaged Leadership is a newly formed office that combined two former offices called Appalachian and the Community Together (a service-based office) and LEAD (a leadership-based office). Merging two high-functioning offices comes with natural challenges such as creating a new identity (including branding, strategic plan, etc.), analyzing current programming efforts, onboarding staff to new roles, and

developing new office procedures. This adds a small barrier to election engagement work due to the pure fact that the Fall 2021 semester was utilized to regroup before driving new programming outlined in this plan forward.

Student apathy, confusion, and procrastination: With any program that is primarily student-facing, apathy, confusion and procrastination are challenges that this action plan actively tries to combat. We pride ourselves on meeting students where they are at, and will continue to think creatively to overcome these barriers.

Adjustments to Election Engagement Coalition: Despite having good momentum in the initial days of the coalition, staff transitions and general covid burnout among the majority of staff and faculty has limited the movement within this group post-2020 election cycle. This action plan will hopefully serve as the impetus for the reconvening of this group to revisit the 3-year plan created in Fall 2020.

External Barriers

Low Involvement in Local and Midterm Elections: The low involvement in Boone/Watauga County in regards to previous local and midterm elections impacts the excitement felt around campus in regards to election engagement.

Polling Location on Appalachian State's Campus: Having an on-campus polling location has been a huge benefit to our voter turnout numbers in the past, especially in regards to early voting. This polling location is not guaranteed each year and has to be advocated for by a variety of campus and community constituents.

Available Resources to Combat Barriers

- Diverse experiences and functional areas represented within the Election Engagement Coalition. Representation from University Housing, Campus Activities, Intercultural Student Affairs, Student Government, Academic Affairs, etc. allows for programming to reach campus-wide instead of being siloed within one particular unit.
- Group of engaged students and traditional programming: The office of Community-Engaged Leadership has direct contact with an array of dedicated student leaders passionate about creating positive local and global change in regard to social issues and sustainability. This group of existing students paired with the newly formed App State Voter Coalition provides a network of students to increase the social and cultural capital around this movement on campus to cast a wider net. Utilizing these students as advocates and sources of feedback will help cultivate the culture we are seeking to promote.
- Hiring a staff member focused on Voter and Democratic Engagement Initiatives in the office of Community-Engaged Leadership. When hiring for a new Assistant Director of Community Engagement, job responsibilities centered on coordination of election engagement specifically in regards to the App State Voter Coalition, Election Engagement Coalition, website coordination, and general community organizing were added to the job description to enhance the work being done in this area.
- Higher-level administrative support: The Division of Student Affairs supports the work being done by the Election Engagement Coalition and office of Community-Engaged Leadership. This support simplifies conversations of resources and credibility.

Additional Resources Needed

- Relationships with external partners: Although we have developed mutually-beneficial relationships with national and state level partners such as You Can Vote, All In Democracy, Voter Friendly Campus, National Voter Registration Day, etc., there is work to be done to build and strengthen relationships with local partners doing this work such as Watauga County Board of Elections and local politicians.

SECTION V: GOALS & STRATEGIES

Immediate goals for this action plan is to reignite this work on Appalachian State's campus by:

- Reconvening Election Engagement Coalition to discuss membership and action plan
- Organize collaboration with nonpartisan nonprofit organizations who specialize in voter engagement specifically with college students

As mentioned above, the civic learning outcomes that have been outlined are the following:

- Students will understand the voting process and the resources available to them
- Students will gain a better understanding of political processes
- Students will understand how voting contributes to being an active citizen in their community

This action plan seeks to accomplish the above civic learning outcomes and increase student engagement in civic efforts through the following:

Area One: Voter Engagement

- **Increase number of students registered to vote**
 - Specific: With 93.7% of voting-eligible students registered to vote, an increase in this percentage will be difficult, but increasing by even 1% will be a success. Specifically, the student voter coalition will put extra focus on targeting first-year students to register to vote for the midterm election cycle.
 - Measurable: Work with You Can Vote campus representative to track registration numbers
 - Achievable/Realistic: App State's voter registration number has steadily increased over the past few years
 - Timely: The student voter coalition will implement this plan between January 2022-voter registration deadline in Fall 2022

Strategies:

- Host voter registration, voter education, and get out to vote events
- Classroom/Student Organization voter registration events/presentations
 - Specifically:
 - Getting onto first-year seminar course calendars early
 - Attending Greek Life New Member Chapter Meetings
- Partner with orientation and Trailhead to promote voter registration materials to incoming students over the summer
- Partner with other CEL/large campus events:
 - Host voter registration table at Blood Drives and talk to students about voting in waiting areas
 - Host voter registration table at MLK Day of Service
 - Host voter registration event with Homecoming

- Work with ISA to put voter engagement information in cultural centers (specifically utilizing You Can Vote’s “Know Your Voting Rights” resources)
 - Revamp social media AppVotes account to be more user-friendly and increase followers/work with other campus media accounts to promote content
 - Pull in partners across campus to increase social capital and scope of our reach
- **Assist students in understanding their options of what voting method is right based on their situation**
 - Specific: Holding at least 4 face-to-face opportunities for students to ask questions and receive real-time answers (contact tabling, office hours, social media lives, etc.)
 - Measurable: Able to track participation in these opportunities with participation count or number of people spoken to at contact tabling/word-of-mouth advertising around campus
 - Achievable/Realistic: Small increase to current programming efforts.
 - Timely: All events will take place prior to the voter registration deadline.

Strategies:

- Maintain App Votes website to ensure up-to-date, user-friendly information
- Voting 101 presentation for classroom visits (first-year seminar) and student organization presentations
- Continue to advocate for and advertise on-campus polling location
- Send email with information and graphic to department chairs of departments/majors with historically (at ASU) low voter turnout (info gathered from NSLVE data)
- Provide absentee ballot information to our out-of-state students
- Train CEL Student Assistants to help register people to vote and advertise getting the answers to your voter engagement questions by stopping by the CEL outreach center

- **Assist students in verifying they are registered and their information is correct**
 - Specific: Ensure website, advertising, and voter information cards have up to date links for students to verify their information
 - Measurable: Track social media attention and number of voter information cards given away at tabling events
 - Achievable: Able to easily add this information to what we already disseminate
 - Realistic: Students are often registered incorrectly or do not know if they are registered – helping them check this could help increase voter turnout rates by catching issues early. This is easy to accomplish given our resources and partnerships
 - Timely: All work around this goal will be completed prior to the voter registration deadline

Strategies:

- Advertise voter information status checking tool early
- Maintain App Votes website to ensure up-to-date, user-friendly information
- Voting 101 presentation for classroom visits (first-year seminar) and student organization presentations
- Drop-by CEL outreach center hours to receive answers to questions

o **Provide education on voting logistics**

- Specific: Provide resources for students to look up their polling location, learn about transportation options to the polls, and check their sample ballot in advance
- Measurable: Track social media attention and number of voter information cards given away
- Achievable: Able to easily add this information to what we already disseminate
- Realistic: Students ask these questions all the time; putting the information in a place to make it clear would be very easy to accomplish
- Timely: All work around this goal will be completed prior to and on Election Day

Strategies:

- Advertise voter information status check tool early
- Maintain App Votes website to ensure up-to-date, user-friendly information
- Voting 101 presentation for classroom visits (first-year seminar) and student organization presentations
- Drop-by CEL outreach center hours to receive answers to questions

Area One: Voting- Initiatives

Initiatives:

- App State Voter Coalition: A program that was piloted in Fall 2021 to engage more people in the voter registration process. The coalition is composed of representatives from different student organizations and departmental programs that come together to register their peers to vote.

The Student Voter Registration Coalition will engage in the following to register and educate folks about voting in 2022:

- Complete student org and classroom visits
- Hold office hours in the Community-Engaged Leadership Office for students to individually stop by to have their questions answered by one of our team members
- Utilize signage outside the Community-Engaged Leadership Office and on our Plemmons union SCALA slides and display cases to provide QR codes to easily access App Votes and You Can Vote webpages
- Utilize social media to update people on our voter registration goal links to voter registration materials, and information about any upcoming events
- Participate in National Voter Registration Day by hosting an in-person voter registration drive
- Host a Doughnut Forget to Vote event to remind people to get out to vote

Area Two: Civic and Information Literacy Education

o **Provide programming focused on helping students understand the political process and to check the validity of their political news sources**

- o Specific: Provide education to clarify the political processes such as positions involved in elections, general purpose of midterm elections, and a deeper understanding of the effects the results could have for both the short and long term political climate, etc. Additionally, add information to our website about information literacy and checking your sources when gathering information about political or societal concerns.

- o Measurable: Track attendance and participation at events or interactions on social media
- o Achievable/Realistic: Access to edit our own website and social media accounts make this a simple task
- o Timely: We spread this information out over the course of the year to achieve our overarching goal of providing year-round, student-led, nonpartisan programming

Strategies:

- Incorporate media literacy information into classroom and student org visit presentations
- Link to helpful resources and educational election guides on our App Votes website

Area Two: Civic and Information Literacy Education Initiatives

- Social Media quizzes on media literacy/civic literacy to enhance student knowledge and engagement with our accounts
- Add a section of our website that is dedicated to information literacy resources to assist students in understanding the difference between reliable and unreliable sources
- Provide this information during tabling events, voter registration drives, digital formats of engagement, and in-person presentations

Area Three: Civic Action

o **Promote Civic Engagement & Active Citizenship in local community**

- Specific: Identify and disseminate information about civic engagement opportunities such as Civic Influencers, Civic Newman Fellows, Poll Workers or Poll protectors, etc. Additionally, exploring the interaction between service, leadership and active citizenship to integrate into CEL programs and overarching missions.
- Measurable: Strategic planning and outreach success
- Achievable/Realistic: We have a committed staff who sees the value of incorporating these conversations into our programming and student leader development
- Timely: On-going to achieve overarching goal of providing year-round, nonpartisan programming

Strategies:

- Promote the option to be an Election Worker or serve as a Poll Protector
- Promote local engagement opportunities, especially those with You Can Vote

o **Assist students in turning ideas into action by increasing students' capacity and commitment to participate constructively with others and working collectively to address common problems**

- Specific: Provide spaces and opportunities within our office's programs to have these conversations through trainings, individual meetings, and group-development models such as passion projects
- Measurable: Easy to track through curriculum plans
- Achievable/Realistic: We have a committed staff who sees the value of incorporating these conversations into our programming and student leader development
- Timely: On-going to achieve overarching goal of providing year-round, nonpartisan programming

Strategies:

- Utilize Community-Engaged Leadership's strategic planning process to explore interaction between service, leadership, and civic engagement as a means to develop active citizens and integrate this into CEL programs and curriculum

The before-mentioned goals and initiatives will occur in the 2022-2023 school year and will be implemented by the office of Community-Engaged Leadership, Election Engagement Coalition and App State Voter Coalition in conjunction with support from campus and community partners. The primary audience for said programming is Appalachian State undergraduate and graduate students living both on and off-campus. All programs aim to be as inclusive and equitable as possible, welcoming all into our spaces, and providing accommodations where necessary to have everyone be able to comfortably participate.

The long-term goal of this action plan is to create a culture of voter and civic engagement on campus, and to create and implement sustainable programming that is year-round, nonpartisan, and student-led.

Specific additional long-term goals include the following:

- Institutionalize election engagement efforts on our campus
- Development of a module/moodle on voting that can be integrated into First Year Seminar Curriculum
- Boost turn-out in local and midterm elections
- Use NSLVE data for setting goals related to voter turnout based on demographic group

Summary of Prior Programming & Initiatives:

Fall 2020:

- Established a campus-wide Election Engagement Coalition
- Hired 2 Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP) Fellows
- Hosted an Election Engagement Sustainability Fellow & associated grant funding
- Secured grant funding from Students Learn Students Vote used for get out the vote efforts
- Completed an overhaul of our campus vote website (vote.appstate.edu)
- Hosted Voter Registration event as part of Constitution Week
- Hosted events on National Voter Registration Day
- Hosted events during National Voter Education Week
- Hosted a "Doughnut Forget to Vote" get out the vote event
- Hosted a "Vote By Mail" how-to workshop
- Hosted several voter 101 sessions tailored to the time of year
- Created a passive education display case for National Vote Early Day
- Created a new voting specific instagram account (@appvotes)
- Hosted a polling location on our campus

Fall 2021:

- Hosted Voter Engagement event as part of Constitution Week
- Hosted events on National Voter Registration Day
- Hosted events during National Voter Education Week
- Social media campaigns to Get Out The Vote
- Overhaul of our campus vote website (vote.appstate.edu)
- Established App State Voter Coalition

- Recovered Election Engagement Coalition
- Revamped Civic Action Plan and 3-Year Election Engagement Plan

SECTION VI: REPORTING

This action plan will predominantly be used as an internal document to plan, implement, and drive programming for the Election Engagement Coalition and App State Voter Coalition. This action plan will be posted publicly on the AppVotes website for constituents to access. As a partner of ALL In Democracy Challenge, our NSLVE data and previous/current action plans will be published publicly on their website as well.

Community-Engaged Leadership is a newly formed office currently developing a strategic plan to set goals for our program areas and report out on this information at the end of each year. This action plan informs the voter/civic engagement section of Community-Engaged Leadership's strategic plan that will be tracked through assessment measures throughout the year.

SECTION VII: EVALUATION

Quantitative Measures:

- NSLVE data
- Number of and attendance at election-related events in 2021-2022
- Number of students engaged with App State Voter Coalition
- Number of partnerships both internal and external to the university

Qualitative Measures:

- Feedback from staff and students working on voter engagement initiatives
- Feedback from other stakeholders on campus
- Feedback from students involved with App State Voter Coalition

Evaluation will occur before, during, and after each academic year and correlates with the civic action planning cycle. The Election Engagement Coalition will use previous year's data to create our next civic action plan and inform our goals.

SECTION VII: CONCLUSION

The Election Engagement Coalition understands that this civic action plan is a living document that will be updated as necessary throughout the year. Overall this document will guide our programming and future planning as we commit to enhancing student-led, year-round, nonpartisan voter engagement on our campus.