



Bates College Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023 academic year

I. Executive Summary

The cultivation of “informed civic action” (Bates College mission statement) is a key goal and enduring aspiration of a Bates education. This cultivation happens in many ways and at multiple moments, both within the formal academic program and beyond it. In community-engaged learning courses and research projects, civic leadership programs, community work study opportunities, summer fellowships, and volunteer collaborations with off-campus partners, Bates students learn to recognize and activate their civic agency as they work for social, economic, and environmental justice and pursue the common good. In keeping with the original intentions of higher education in the U.S., they gradually build the knowledge and skills necessary to become informed and engaged citizens within the world’s longest surviving but currently imperiled democracy.

A central pillar of civic engagement is participation in the electoral process through voting. With on-campus leadership from the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, students collaborate with others at Bates and beyond to center voter education, registration, and mobilization as foundations of a thriving democracy. All eligible students are strongly encouraged to register and vote in all elections, whether local, statewide, or national, and to do

so on the basis of careful consideration of the issues and lives at stake. Bates Votes, a student-led initiative, leads diverse campus-wide efforts around voter education, registration, and mobilization. During election seasons, Bates offers a range of programs and activities designed to stimulate civic learning and participation. Bates faculty and staff serve as key sources of encouragement for students as they build their civic capacities. A range of off-campus partners also participate in and enrich students' civic learning and democratic engagement work.

With new staff leadership in place as of August 1, 2022, the democratic engagement program at Bates equips all students with the knowledge, skills, and experience to actively participate in the process of democracy and inspires them to pursue a just and inclusive democracy through political participation, public problem-solving, dialogue across differences, and democratic decision-making. Bates Votes advances this mission through a range of student-led, non-partisan voter education, registration, and mobilization activities designed to boost civic learning, engagement, and voting so that all students know where, when, and how to vote.

The chief aim of our Democratic Engagement Action Plan is to weave civic learning and democratic engagement into the very fabric of the Bates campus culture so that every student has access to diverse and compelling opportunities to build the knowledge, skills, and inspiration for informed civic action. Leveraging past learnings and mobilizing a diverse coalition of on- and off-campus partners, the 2022-2023 action plan takes advantage of existing systems, structures, and relationships while forging new ones where needed. A top goal of the plan is to diversify leadership and participation within Bates Votes and to ensure that all relevant campus units are represented as project stakeholders, particularly in the wake of staff transitions in campus units such as the Office of Intercultural Education and Human Resources. The plan also lays a foundation for the work of the first-ever Associate Director of Democratic Engagement and Student Activism at Bates, who will begin work on August 1, 2022 and for whom voter engagement during Fall 2022 will be a top priority.

This action plan was developed by Darby Ray, Director of the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, in collaboration with diverse campus partners, including the student-led Bates Votes Leadership Team. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over the 2022-2023 academic year, on and around our campus in Lewiston, Maine in hopes of further institutionalizing the Bates College commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections.

II. Leadership

The new Associate Director for Democratic Engagement and Student Activism (soon to be hired, with a start date of August 1, 2022) will oversee our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Avrah Ross, Noah Forman, Ethan Chan, Marcos Pacheco Soto, Elizabeth Gramley, Khadeeja Qureshi, Inez Johnson, Aaliyah Moore - Bates Votes Leadership Team

- Molly Newton, Associate Dean of Students for Residence Life and Health Education
- Anna Brown, Orientation Week Leader
- Blake Reilly, Assistant Dean of Students & Director of Operations
- Ray Grant, Assistant Dean for First Generation & Bobcat First Program
- Steve Engel, Professor of Politics and Associate Dean of Faculty
- Raymond Clothier, Associate Multifaith Chaplain
- Eric Dyer, Assistant Director of the Academic Resource Commons
- Shuja Masood, Office of Admission
- Nick O'Brien, Bates Communications Office
- Sylvia Grieser-Castonguay, Bates Leads Coordinator
- Kush Sharma, Bates College Student Government Co-President
- Beverly Vari, Center for Purposeful Work
- Julisa De Los Santos, Office of College Advancement
- Francis Gagnon, College Store
- Tonya Bailey-Curry, Counseling and Psychological Services
- David Evans, Dining, Conferences and Campus Events
- Jason Morin, Custodial Services Manager
- Patty Rooney, Human Resources Director
- Brenda Reynolds, Information & Library Services
- Dre Gager, Institutional Research, Analysis and Planning
- Dri Huber, Office of Intercultural Education
- Ed Jawor, Post and Print
- Kathy Montejo, Lewiston City Clerk
- Amy Smith, Healthy Homeworks
- Abdikhadar Shire, AK Health and Social Services

This coalition includes representatives from different parts of campus, a diverse student leadership team, stakeholders with different perspectives and areas of expertise, leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy, leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus in to our work, and off-campus partners. Our group plans to meet monthly at the Harward Center for Community Partnerships on the Bates campus. In the event that our aforementioned leader leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, another staff member from the Harward Center for Community Partnerships will be responsible for leading this work. If a particular staff member leaves, another will step in to take over the work.

We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- All In Campus Democracy Challenge
- NESAC Votes
- Project Pericles
- Maine Students Vote
- NSLVE
- NASPA Voter Friendly Campus
- Ask Every Student

III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement, as evidenced by our mission statement:

Since 1855, Bates College has been dedicated to the emancipating potential of the liberal arts. Bates educates the whole person through creative and rigorous scholarship in a collaborative residential community. *With ardor and devotion — Amore ac Studio — we engage the transformative power of our differences, cultivating intellectual discovery and informed civic action.* Preparing leaders sustained by a love of learning and a commitment to responsible stewardship of the wider world, Bates is a college for coming times (emphasis added).

This same commitment is reflected in our institution's values:

In 1894, Bates' second president, George Colby Chase, wrote that the aim of the college should be to produce graduates whose "education shall have prepared them to live in every chamber of their being, to be at home in the world as the world presents itself today, and to be master of ... the opportunities that the many-sided life of our age may offer." This vision of the liberal arts as a deeply humanistic, yet powerfully adaptive and pragmatic, model of education underlies our approach to preparing our students for life, work, and social contribution. It is a model that draws equally from all areas of scholarly inquiry. In particular, a Bates education aims to prepare graduates who strive to embody the following qualities, capabilities, and inclinations:

- 1) Knowledge, Problem Solving, Analytic Strength - To engage deeply with fields of study and acquire the habits of inquiry, the confidence, and the capacity to define and confront challenges with competence and creativity. Amidst a chaos of information, to derive patterns, knowledge, and understanding.
- 2) Discernment and Persuasion To think critically, contextually, creatively, and conceptually. To reason from evidence and to present ideas and evaluate arguments effectively.
- 3) Intellectual Curiosity - To embrace the power of ideas, the joy of learning, and informed engagement with our rich and complex world. To recognize differences in thought and experience as inevitable and valuable.
- 4) Social Commitment and Integrity - To strive for justice. To act based on the recognition of the importance of community, our shared humanity, and our common stake in the natural world. To live an examined life with courage and tenacity.

The college's most recent strategic plan (2016) also identifies its chief goal as Constituting Community and recognizes the importance of community engagement to that goal:

A Bates education is realized in community. We build our community with care and attention, seeking individuals—students, faculty, and staff—who will

together create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. We believe that community is strongest when it embodies a broad spectrum of human experience, and the Bates community is consciously constructed with an eye toward diversity of experience and background. . .The Bates community extends beyond our campus: to alumni who have taken their Bates experience out into the world, to the parents and families who make the Bates experience possible for our students, to our neighbors in Lewiston and Auburn, to our current students pursuing their education globally, and to our colleagues and peers around the world. The centrality of community to the Bates experience manifests itself in the extensive community-engaged work of our students, faculty, and staff, as well as in the intellectual connections we create and maintain to enhance our understanding of people and places beyond our physical reach.

Our college president is also an enthusiastic proponent of civic learning and democratic engagement and is a ready signatory to Campus Compact, All In NESCAC Votes Challenge, and similar initiatives.

Other evidence of our campus's commitment includes:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
- Signage promoting Election Day

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Walks / rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues

IV. Landscape

We do not have access to comprehensive demographic information about our student body at this time, but we can get it.

V. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we acknowledge that we face the following challenges internally when it comes registering and mobilizing voters:

- We don't make optimal use of every resource available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We don't have consistent funding for Bates Votes.
- Our data collection and analytics could be better.

We also know our campus faces some external challenges; namely:

- The political views of our students do not generally align with our institution's surrounding communities.
- As a result, election season always brings criticism about Bates students voting in Maine, as well as occasional, more formal voter suppression efforts.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

With this in mind, we have set the three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

- 1) Expand and diversify the leadership of Bates Votes.
- 2) Integrate voter engagement into the Bates Leads landscape.
- 3) Set the brand new Associate Director for Democratic Engagement and Student Activism up for success.

We have also set three goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

- 1) Develop a sustained funding stream to support Bates Votes, including paying leadership team members.
- 2) Institutionalize the Voter Engagement Leadership Council.
- 3) Develop a deliberative dialogue (or similar) program.

VI. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term** (within the next year):

- Pre-Orientation: Civic Engagement Online Form required of all incoming students in July - identifies voting as an institutional priority, invites students to get involved in Bates Votes, and collects some data
- Orientation: voter registration opportunities available at diverse Orientation events
- September Voter Registration Blitz - tabling at meals, in residence halls, at the gym, in the library, and in other campus locations
- Election Engagement Moments - beginning August 1, weekly tips for faculty on how to integrate voter education, registration, and turnout into their courses
- Commons Quick Bites (similar to Why I Vote) video series featuring students
- Student newspaper features and ads
- Community Liaisons as peer advocates for voter registration
- Candidate Forum on campus
- Democracy Quick Bites video series
- Bates Votes banner, stickers and related merch
- Coordination with student-led partisan efforts in order to reduce confusion and redundancy of effort

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- All of the above plus:
- Enhanced Incoming Student Orientation Voter Registration Blitz - adding opportunities for new students to register during Residence Hall Key Pick-Up and the Harvard Center's session with all new students
- September Voter Registration Blitz - voter registration table at residence hall key pick-up site, in addition to other sites; plus Motor Voter Brigade and other initiatives listed below
- Motor Voter Brigade - decorated golf carts to find students where they are and get them registered
- Enhanced Commons Quick Bites or Why I Vote initiative - mini-rallies outside of Commons (the only Bates dining hall) once each week featuring students, faculty, staff, and alums
- Use our customized ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge's ALLINtoVote.org portal, including its data analytics.

- Bates Leads - tap into a new leadership program and network on campus by mobilizing already existing student leadership groups like the Bonner Leader Program, the Community Liaison Program, the Office of Intercultural Education Fellows, and the Bates Leads program for nonpartisan voter engagement efforts with more intentionality and efficiency. These students are already campus influencers, so embedding voter education and registration into their program models.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- Teams and Clubs competition
- Paying students - We don't have an Ask Every Student grant this year so are trying to "find" money for paying Bates Votes students. We see paying students for their work as an equity imperative. We have also learned that a diverse voter education team is the best way to get diverse students to register to vote.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- Some of our short term tactics could be sustained into the future if we build infrastructure for them--e.g., an expanded, more diverse Bates Votes Leadership Team in which all students are paid for their work.
- We are also looking forward to hiring, onboarding, and supporting a new colleague in a newly-configured full-time staff position: Associate Director of Democratic Engagement and Student Activism. This new colleague, who will begin August 1, 2022, will become the point person for the college's democratic engagement program going forward.

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging - Conduct an equity audit of all previous and current efforts to identify and enact opportunities for greater EIB.
- Establish the Voter Engagement Leadership Council, comprising members from diverse campus units—including New Student Orientation, Residence Life, Athletics, Bates Leads, Community Liaison Program, and student government, among others—who will work together to create and institutionalize equitable voter registration processes that reach every student and are sustainable from year to year and when leadership transitions occur. Lay the groundwork for collaborative leadership; create meeting schedule; establish shared vision and goals. (This Council would integrate two different efforts from the past, creating a more unified effort for cross-campus collaboration.)

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- Provide financial and other support for our new colleague (see above) to "skill up" through conference and workshop attendance, mentoring opportunities, and the like.
- Follow this person's lead in growing and improving our work.

VII. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was an impressive 93.7%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased modestly.

In 2020, our voting rate was 84.9%. This 7.3 point increase from our 2016 voting rate is significantly higher than the national average. Our voting rate among registered students was 90.6%.

In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups: Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, and 2 or More Races. In every case, voter turnout increased compared to four years ago.

In 2020—likely because of the pandemic—we saw a huge increase in Early Voting and Not-In-Person voting and a consequent decrease in In-Person on Election Day voting.

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by emailing it to members of our campus coalition and to campus administration, including the President. We will share it externally by posting it on the campus website.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Sending a post-election survey to students
- Sending a post-election survey to faculty
- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Conducting one or more focus groups with students

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly