



Bellarmine University Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2024-2025 Academic School Year

This plan was created using the Votes & Ballots Action Planning Form. We highly recommend editing and expanding upon this draft before submitting for review.

Throughout this document, we mention the Strengthening American Democracy Guide as a resource for your review. We encourage you to turn to that resource for guidance and support as you complete your action plan!

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Sydney Bland, Assistant Director of Community Engagement to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Bellarmine University. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2024-2025 Academic School Year, on and around our campus in Louisville, Kentucky.

The following groups will be leading this work at Bellarmine University in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate Students
- Student Affairs Staff

II. Leadership

The Center for Community Engagement will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Social justice focused community partners (League of Women Voters and SURJ- Showing Up for Racial Justice), registered student organizations (College Republicans of Bellarmine, College Democrats of Bellarmine University, and the Political Science Club), The Dr. Patricia Carver Office of Identity and Inclusion, Allison Schumacher Smithkier our Chief Title IX Officer, Student Government Association, Elaine Hartlage our Director of Student Activities and Orientation, Leslie Maxie our Dean of Students, Helen-Grace Ryan our Vice President for Student Affairs, and Jacob Smith our Associate Director of Residence Life.

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership, Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise, Trusted 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 into our work

Our group plans to meet Twice/Month on Teams

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. Civic engagement is the responsibility of the entire university, but more specifically, the Center for Community Engagement. We have a team that is well versed in civic engagement and will divide the responsibilities among the existing and/or team members. This is inclusive of student workers and student volunteers.

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

- The League of Women Voters, ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, and Campus Compact.

III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, “Our Values Bellarmine University finds its Catholic identity in the inclusive spirit of Thomas Merton. We believe in the search for the true self, the interconnectedness of life and the solidarity of the human spirit, which transcends ethnic, religious, and social divisions. We educate the whole person to realize their highest potential as part of an interconnected world. Our values are Academic Excellence, Intrinsic Dignity, Social Responsibility, Integrity, Hospitality, and Stewardship. Academic Excellence: Promoting academic inquiry rooted in the liberal arts tradition—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and compassion—with an expectation of excellence Intrinsic Dignity: Respecting the intrinsic value and dignity of every individual Social Responsibility: Cultivating grounded citizens who contribute to and advocate for the public good, environmental sustainability, global understanding, and informed civic engagement Integrity: Fostering strong ethical principles, honesty, fairness, transparency, and trustworthiness Hospitality: Creating an inclusive community that welcomes all and models a spirit of goodwill Stewardship: Exercising thoughtful stewardship of our university resources”

On campus, we've seen:

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

On campus, we've experienced:

- Walks / rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Deliberative dialogues

The emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement could be increased.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Commitment Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

IV. Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from Fall 2023 when our total student enrollment was 2993.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
79.00%	21.00%	9.00%	91.00%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
71.00%	19.00%	4.00%	47.00%	53.00%

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
39.00%	61.00%		

Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White	2 or More Races
3.30%	0.23%	9.70%	6.70%	0.03%	72.00%	4.80%

Our institution has also utilized the following data gathering tool:

- National Survey of Student Engagement

This helps to inform our institution's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts by This determining the disconnect with our students between registration and actual voting (more are registering than actually voting). To resolve this, our focus will be on follow through, transportation to poll locations, voter intimidation, and absentee ballots. We are also looking at the difference in age group, underrepresented populations, and sex as contributing factors to the lower percentages of actual voting.

V. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

We know our campus faces following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan do not mention civic learning and democratic engagement explicitly.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office.
- We don't have sustainable or consistent funding.
- We have trouble engaging student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.

We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

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

- 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 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:

Goal 1:

Decrease the margin between the Registration Rate and Voting Rate by 5%

Goal 2:

Add more community partners as liaisons to voting information and registration.

Goal 3:

Provide more information about law and politics so that students feel well informed and comfortable making decisions on their own about voting.

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

Goal 1:

Increase the voting rate by 10%.

Goal 2:

Increase the percentage of underrepresented voters by 5%.

Goal 3:

Increase the number of students actively involved in civic engagement leadership.

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):

- **Tactic 1:**

Information- We are providing voting and registration information to the students over summer break in preparation for the Presidential election. We have provided deadlines and registrations dates including everything that was needed for the KY elections. We also provided a reminder of the Presidential debates to help students stay informed.

Responsibility- The Center for Community Engagement is responsible for implementing this tactic over the summer.

The audience for this tactic is current students, community partners, alumni, and friends of Bellarmine.

This tactic was largely virtual because of summer vacation. The work and preparation for the school year has already begun and the leadership team for this has met, exchanged plans and programs for the year, and continues to participate in professional

development opportunities that are intended to prepare universities for ethical non-partisan civic engagement and voting techniques.

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

- Tactic 1:

The Work- Weekly voter registration and voter information tablings. In the most populated location on campus our Ogle Cafe.

Responsibility- Our student workers/volunteers, staff, and community partners will take turns to ensure a variety of people for students to connect to while learning about civic engagement.

Audience - The students, faculty, and staff are the audience. Having a variety of people supplying students with information will be helpful in ensuring access to all. Advertising on our social media pages, in our weekly Bellarmine news that goes out to faculty and staff, and our Things to do at BU page for students will help with ease of access. Our location for the tablings is right outside of our Dr. Patricia Carver Office of Identity and Inclusion which will give historically underrepresented students easy and constant access to voter registration materials and information. All voter registration/informational will be on campus, but our community partners will bring resources to campus that our students can use to follow up with community partners and resources off of campus if they need it. This work will happen every week leading up to the presidential elections beginning the first week of September.

- Tactic 2:

The work- We are bringing in the League of Women Voters to do several voter registrations during our first day of school, campus resources fair, and tablings throughout the year. We have also planned a training for our student leadership from the League of Women Voters to better prepare our students to share voter registration resources to the larger student body. This will occur in a central classroom and our Ogle Cafe directly across from our office of Identity and Inclusion. The audience for this are all students, faculty, and staff.

- Tactic 3:

The work - We have also invited the director of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) to talk about allyship in the climate that we are in and to provide voter resources to students. The Center for Community Engagement is responsible for implementing this tactic. This was a request by some of our students. The audience for this tactic are students who want to be allies to underrepresented groups of people. This will occur on campus, but resources will be provided to students that are off of campus if they would like to use them.

- Tactic 4.

The work - We have scheduled a voting pep rally in the quad which is central to our campus. We are working to make voting exciting and fun while maintaining informational integrity. Our slogan will be "Pop Out and Vote". The theme will be "things that pop" (popcorn, pop music, popsicle, soda pop, etc.). This will be a collaborative event between the Center for Community Engagement and the Office of Identity and Inclusion. The audience is the entire student body, faculty, and staff. We will have voter registration booths, signups for transportation to the polls, mascots with "I am a voter" t-shirts, and social media pushes.

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

- Tactic 1.
We hope to invite a variety of speakers to campus to speak with the students about voting from various parties.

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

- Tactic 1: We are constantly working on building a positive climate around civic engagement on campus. We are staying visible, posting, asking questions from students, and working to provide what they are asking for.

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

- We are building a civic engagement team. We have several professionals from the university, but we are planning to include our Bonner Leaders in the civic engagement conversation by allowing them to volunteer with the voter registration tabling and attend the training by the League of Women Voters.

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

- We hope to get our whole campus involved in civic engagement and open the door to positive and productive debate.

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 2022. In 2022 our registration rate was 75.9%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate decreased.

In 2022, our voting rate was 35.1% and our voting rate among registered students was 46.2%. During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups:

- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

For the racial groups that have recent voter turnout data, we saw the following groups increase in voter turnout compared to four years ago.

- 2 or More Races

Education and History majors had the highest voting rate among the various fields of study.

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to campus administration
- Email to the President

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts

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