

Berea College 2024 Democratic Engagement Campus Action Plan

Executive Summary

At Berea College, the Voter Empowerment and Political Awareness Coalition (VEPAC) continues to take the lead in promoting awareness, education, and programming related to voter engagement and empowerment. This cross-campus collaboration, led by representatives of Student Life and the Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS), is made up of students, staff, and faculty and promotes voter registration, voter turnout, engagement with elected officials, and the development of civic engagement skills. The work of VEPAC reflects the values articulated in Berea College's mission statement, known as the Great Commitments ([The Great Commitments - Berea College](#)), including a commitment to the kinship of all people, the creation of a democratic community, and a way of life characterized by a concern for the welfare of others. Following VEPAC's formation during the 2017-18 school year, it has benefited from strong and ongoing leadership and involvement from students, staff, and faculty, support from Berea College's administration, and collaboration with community-based organizations. These collaborations help to strengthen the impact of VEPAC's work.

The VEPAC planning committee members (see Leadership section for names, titles, and departments) created this 2024 Campus Action Plan, with input from students across campus. Planning committee members represent multiple programs within the Student Life and Academic Divisions. Also, VEPAC events are open to all members of campus. Students who participated in VEPAC events provided input during VEPAC programming and a "pop-up" survey of students on campus ensured input from students not already involved in VEPAC programming.

The plan will be implemented in person at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. The purpose of the plan is to further the goals of Berea College's VEPAC, which are to increase voter registration and voter turnout and to continue to engage Berea College community members in educational programming that provides opportunities for students to develop civic engagement skills. The work outlined in this plan has already begun; the plan reflects continuous efforts to achieve goals through the 2026–27 academic year. The plan will be updated annually, in the spring semester. All current members of the collaborating groups and organizations will play roles in implementing the plan, with primary responsibility falling to members representing Student Life and the Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS). Implementation will be tracked and evaluated by VEPAC planning committee members during the regular weekly meetings of VEPAC.

Leadership

The on-campus Berea College VEPAC planning team includes students and staff from Student Life and the Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS), as well as faculty. On-campus VEPAC planning team members include (by division, and then in alphabetical order by last name):

- Academic
 - Ashley Cochrane, Director, Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS)
 - Sarah Heggen, Community-Based Learning Coordinator, Center for Excellence in Learning Through Service (CELTS)

- o Dr. Andrea Woodward, Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Chair of the Sociology Department
- Student Life
 - o Jessica Powell, Berea Corps Non-Traditional Student Associate
 - o Charles Saunders, Associate Director of Student Involvement and Engagement
 - o Dr. Sharonda Steele, Associate Director of Non-Traditional Student Services and Operations
- Student Leaders
 - o The VEPAC Student Team is primarily composed of two roles, the VEPAC Specialist and VEPAC Liaison which are both labor/work-study positions
 - Maddie Pierce, VEPAC Specialist (2022-23 and 2023-24)
 - James Stabler, VEPAC Liaison (Spring 23)
 - o Student representatives, volunteer, and work study positions from Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELS)
 - Rilie Ledford (2022-23 and 2023-24)
 - o Campus Life volunteer and work-study students
 - o Student Government Association student representatives

Strengths and roles within working group leadership

- Representatives from CELTS
 - o Representatives from CELTS (professional staff and students) bring experience and insight related to curricular and co-curricular community-engaged service and civic collaborations with community partner organizations. CELTS representatives bring connections with non-profit, community-based, and governmental organizations, as well as with regional and national civic and community engagement networks. These organizations and networks provide knowledge and resources that support the work of VEPAC. CELTS representatives also bring experience and knowledge related to student leadership and skill development specifically within the context of community-engaged service, social change, and civic involvement. CELTS professional staff and students help make connections with student learning outcomes, both in the curriculum and in through student's co-curricular experiences.
- Representatives from Office of Student Involvement and Engagement (OSIE)
 - o Representatives from OSIE (professional staff and students) are responsible for shaping campus culture and ensuring student success through campus involvement. Some of the key strengths of professional staff from OSIE include the knowledge of event engagement strategies and techniques within the campus community, the ability to think creatively to find campus engagement solutions and uplift students to become leaders through Recognized Student Organizations (RSO). Representatives from OSIE within VEPAC advise and support the working group on event planning, engagement of a diverse student body, and supporting the other work of VEPAC.
- Representatives from Non-Traditional Student Services and Operations
 - o Representatives from Non-Traditional Student Services and Operations work to support non-traditional students on and off campus through Non-Traditional Student

Programming (NTSP), providing resources to navigate social services, and running the Ecovillage, an eco-friendly on-campus residential community for non-traditional students and their families. In addition, they are knowledgeable of social services, and they provide insight about how to best support Non-Traditional Students in engaging with political processes, as well as support the overall work of VEPAC.

- Faculty Representatives
 - Faculty members involved in the VEPAC planning committee bring knowledge of their specific academic discipline, including Child and Family Studies, Sociology, Political Science, and Community and Civic Engagement. They bring knowledge of academic processes and structures at Berea College and insights into how civic engagement can be incorporated into the academic curriculum and into faculty members' and students' scholarship and research.
- VEPAC Student Labor Team
 - The members of the VEPAC student labor team, one primary (15 hours of work per week) and one secondary (0-5 hours of work per week), are students who have shown a particular passion and interest in voter engagement and civic education and possess an interest in affirming a democratic society, have a love for knowledge, are interested in events and social media skills, and are passionate about getting peers involved in the civic process. The VEPAC Specialist (primary) organizes and oversees all aspects of the work of VEPAC, while the VEPAC Liaison (secondary) actively supports the work of the Specialist and VEPAC team.

Support also comes from Berea College leaders, including President Dr. Cheryl Nixon, as well as leaders of the Academic Division - Provost Dr. Scott Steele and Associate Provost Dr. Eileen McKiernan-Gonzalez - and a leader of the Student Life Division - Interim Vice President for Student Life Gus Gerassimides. They provide support by requesting updates on the work of VEPAC, referring inquiries on voting and civic processes from faculty, staff, and students to VEPAC, and conveying awareness of the importance of the work of VEPAC to the broader campus.

Local community collaborators include:

- **Staff and volunteers from a statewide, membership-based, issue-focused organization that works to empower disenfranchised Kentuckians, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC).** KFTC co-sponsors educational and skill-building programming, including training and information sessions about how to communicate with elected officials, candidate forums for local elections, and lobbying trips to the state capitol. KFTC also regularly collaborates with service-learning courses and has hosted a labor (work-study) position for a Berea College student.
- **Staff with the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy (KY Policy).** KyPolicy offers educational and skill-building programming for students and produces research to educate the public on policy initiatives in Kentucky. Some of the many programs they provide including scholarships for students to attend their annual policy conference and a multi-day residential summer policy institute for college students and recent graduates. KyPolicy has also hosted a labor (work-study) position for a Berea College student.

- **Staff of the Madison County Clerk Office, the local election office in Madison County.** The Madison County Clerk's Office requests translations of voting information and other materials from English into Spanish from the Berea College CELTS Hispanic Outreach Program (HOP), which is a service-learning program supported by CELTS and the Spanish language department.

National networks also significantly inform and support the work of VEPAC, including (in alphabetical order) the Bonner Foundation, Campus Compact, Gulf South Summit on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement in Higher Education, Kentucky Campus Compact (soon to become Engage Kentucky), National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), Project Pericles, and TurboVote. These networks and organizations provide resources including mini-grants and faculty fellowships for voter engagement work, publications and online teaching modules, conferences, online platforms for sharing ideas and resources, and research on college student voter patterns and trends.

The VEPAC planning committee meets weekly throughout the academic year to plan events, strategize future initiatives, and report progress. These meetings take place mainly in person with a virtual option to allow all team members to join remotely, as needed. Whenever something specific and/or urgent arises, the VEPAC planning committee coordinates through Microsoft Teams. The VEPAC Specialist is a labor (work-study) position, and the student leader in this position oversees coordinating meeting times, coordinating communications between members, planning meeting agendas, and leading meetings.

The VEPAC planning committee welcomes new members to join at any time. The addition of staff representatives from Non-Traditional Student Services and Operations has created space for increased student voice and participation from non-traditional students. VEPAC has expanded programming in response to their input (presentations at the weekly meetings of this group and an information table in the area adjacent to non-traditional housing on election day, for example).

VEPAC has developed a structure to support student leadership succession by hosting one primary (15-hour-per-week) labor (work-study) position and one secondary (5-hour-per-week) labor (work-study) position. This arrangement creates space for a less experienced student to train for the leadership position held by the student in the primary position.

Having multiple representatives from each area ensures that when someone steps back from the work, there are other informed members in that area prepared to step up to make sure that the work continues.

Commitment

Founded in 1855 as the first interracial and co-educational college in the South, Berea College promotes understanding and kinship among all people, service to communities in Appalachia and beyond, and sustainable living practices. Berea admits only academically promising students who have limited economic resources, and every Berea College student receives a full-tuition scholarship and holds a ten to fifteen-hour per week labor (work-study) position either on campus or in the community.

Guided by its motto, "God has made of one blood all peoples of the Earth," and its Eight Great Commitments that are rooted in service, justice, and equality, Berea College has a long history of public

engagement, service, and nonviolent social justice activism. Berea demonstrates its commitment to improving civic learning through existing programs, affiliations, and collaborations, which include:

- Recipient of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (awarded in 2008, renewed in 2015, applying for renewal in 2026)
- Bonner Scholar Program (established in 1990, the founding Bonner Scholar school in the nation)
- Project Pericles member institution
- Campus Compact member institution
- Active member of Kentucky Campus Compact (soon to be Engage Kentucky)
- Student Life promotes programming focused on civic engagement, includes civic engagement in wellness programming, and hosts two labor (work-study) positions focused on coordination and support of VEPAC's work.
- Center for Excellence in Learning through Service (CELTS), Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education, and the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center, are three of the centers at Berea College that promote place-based education, development of awareness of and skills to address current social issues related to social justice, identity, and place, and engagement with local community partners through educational collaborations, service, and outreach.
- CELTS is the home for student community engagement and "learning through service." CELTS supports both co-curricular and curricular community engagement. The work of CELTS is student-led and carried out in collaboration with community-based organizations.
- Strategic Initiatives is a division of the College that is responsible for overseeing and stewarding relationships with external funding partners that support on-campus programming and capital improvements as well as educational and community development programming in the Appalachian region.
- A variety of academic courses across the disciplines include service-learning collaborations and civic engagement topics and pedagogical strategies
- A new Community and Civic Engagement (CCE) minor, approved in Spring 2023 and implemented beginning in the 2023-24 academic year, provides students with a curricular path to explore how their academic major approaches public-facing work and problem-solving.
- NSLVE (National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement) participant college
- Campus collaboration with TurboVote

Berea College's President Dr. Cheryl Nixon attends, participates, and hosts programming that engages students in practicing civic engagement skills. Since becoming president on July 1, 2023, Dr. Cheryl Nixon has been engaging the campus community in open listening sessions requesting feedback from faculty, staff, and students to improve campus culture. Dr. Nixon provides an example of communicating with elected officials by lobbying for educational policies that support higher education with Representatives and Senators of the United States Congress in Washington, D.C., and updating the campus community through email about important government policies that impact the college.

Landscape

Recent reports from the NSLVE have played a key role in informing VEPAC and the Berea College campus about Berea's voter registration and turnout rates, and in providing national context for Berea's rates as

compared with other college students. Participation was highest in 2020, a presidential election year, when 56.3% of students turned out to vote, the previous high in participation occurred in the previous presidential election, 2016, when nearly 50% of the student body voted. In 2020, 83.3% of Berea College students were registered to vote, and 67.2% of those registered voted in the 2020 presidential elections. While an increased rate of students registered in 2020 compared to the previous 2016 presidential election, only a statistically insignificant increased number (1.2%) of those registered voted in 2020, compared to 2016. Despite these increases in voter turnout, Berea College student voting rates remain lower than voting rates at other private Bachelor's institutions, as the institutional average was about 68%.

In addition to the barriers that prevent many college students from voting, VEPAC has spent significant time exploring, discussing, and developing strategies to address some challenges that may be particularly relevant for Berea College students:

Internal Barriers

- During the 2023-24 academic year, the Berea College campus represents students from forty-six different states, 3 U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia, as well as 70 countries. This leads to a campus environment where we have a total of 595 (40%) students from outside the state of Kentucky, 119 (8.1%) of whom are international students. Out-of-state students can register in Berea; however, many out-of-state students stay registered in their home states, and all international and non-citizen, permanent resident students cannot vote. This puts us in a position where we need to foster civic engagement with elections and community engagement for those who cannot vote. The following are some ways VEPAC has worked to accommodate out-of-state and non-citizen students during election season.
 - We provide postage for students casting absentee ballots for every election.
 - We provide civic education experiences open to all students, including skill-building workshops, field trips to the state legislature, and issue-based educational opportunities to educate all students.
 - We host mock elections to encourage student engagement.
- The national climate of political polarization extends to every community in our country, including our own. Unaffiliated and unofficial polls have found that politically conservative students have expressed that they feel their political opinions are often underrepresented in the college community.
 - VEPAC is a non-partisan organization and makes deliberate efforts to promote programming that makes space for students with diverse views to participate.
- Statistically, US voters with higher incomes have higher voting rates than those with lower incomes. Based on these statistics and because we know that Berea College students come from limited financial means, we can surmise that some Berea College students may come from families and communities without a strong tradition or culture of voting. Strategies to address this challenge include:
 - VEPAC provided voter education programs that highlighted these statistics and encouraged Berea students to change these statistics by voting and by becoming lifetime voters.

- Finding time to vote on Election Day can be a challenge for Berea College students, who have particularly full schedules with academics, labor, and extracurricular activities. Historically, Berea College has not cancelled classes and labor hours on Election Day. Through the efforts of VEPAC, Election Day is now listed on the Berea College academic calendar, to encourage awareness of voting among the campus community.
 - In recent years, the state of Kentucky has expanded options for early, in-person, no-excuse voting. These state-wide changes have made voting more accessible for Berea College students, as well as all Kentucky voters.
 - Over the last two years, VEPAC has been working to encourage labor supervisors to permit students to use their labor meeting time, held on Tuesdays at 4 PM, to vote on Election Day. Departments such as CELTS and Student Life have done this in the past.

External Barriers

- Historically there have been members of the Berea community who advocate that Berea College students should not be allowed to vote in Berea. Students have encountered indirect and overt discouragement, as well as unhelpful or inaccurate information at the polls in the past. The climate of Berea's polling places has appeared to improve over the last several years, but a few problems persist, including questioning of out of state students registered in Kentucky, who have out of state IDs:
 - Volunteer polling place shuttle drivers and stroll leaders attended a training to become informed of voter rights. Each shuttle driver and stroll leader were prepared to go into the polling place to assist voters who encountered questions about their voting rights, by helping them to communicate with poll workers.
 - To instill confidence in student voters, trained voter advocates stationed at tables around campus handed out voter rights guides created with information directly from the state board of elections website. This allowed students to be able to easily reference their state voter rights if they had any issues at the polls. This information includes details of accommodation, when to ask for a provisional ballot, and voting eligibility.
- Over the last several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, initiatives to make voting easier in Kentucky have become law, including expansion of in-person, no-excuse early voting, and laws allowing Kentuckians to vote at any polling place within the county. Another primary issue that has arisen due to this law change has been the number of polling places in Kentucky. In Berea and other areas of the state, many have complained of long lines due to a significant reduction in the number of polling places due to these new laws. One of the biggest threats to this advantage we have been given since the COVID-19 pandemic is state-level legislation for these to be taken away, which was up for debate in the 2024 session of the Kentucky General Assembly. For instance, SB 61 would eliminate no excuse early voting in Kentucky, and SB 80 would remove the ability for people to use student and work IDs as a form of identification at polling places. These bills did not pass in the 2024 session, but this does not eliminate the possibility of them becoming law in the future.
 - VEPAC has made efforts to inform student voters of state voter rights and law. One of the most recent initiatives introduced by VEPAC during the 2023 gubernatorial elections

was to hand out voter rights guides, which included all Kentucky voter rights information and a QR code to the Board of Elections website.

Factors that have led to success

- Prior to 2022, the Berea College campus was split into four state congressional districts and precincts. After redistricting following the most recent Census, all of Berea College's campus is now in one state congressional district. This is of an even greater benefit because Berea College is a residential campus, and approximately 96% of all degree-seeking students lived in a traditional residence hall or in non-traditional, on-campus housing in the Fall 2023 semester. Previously this has been one of VEPAC's greatest challenges for voter engagement, especially on Election Day, because transportation and information would vary dependent on residence hall assignment.
- Another factor that has led to success has been a change since the COVID-19 pandemic that gives Kentucky voter the ability to go to any polling place in their county, making it significantly easier for VEPAC to coordinate its efforts towards a single polling location, conveniently located within walking distance of campus. Early in person, no-excuse voting has also seen success for student voters, as many students have been able to vote early in either Berea or in another Kentucky county without missing class or labor.
- An internal factor that leads to success is the broad and deep presence of civic learning and democratic engagement in the curriculum and co-curriculum.
 - 54% of 2022-23 graduates took a service-learning course; service-learning courses are taught across the curriculum, in diverse academic programs.
 - 21% of 2022-23 graduates volunteered through CELTS; student volunteers typically commit approximately 2 hours of service per week.
 - 70 students each year hold a labor/work-study position through CELTS; through these labor positions students are implementing community engagement programming in collaboration with community-based organizations.
 - The Bonner Scholars Program provides 60 students with a supported and scaffolded four-year "learning through service" experience.
 - A new minor in Community and Civic Engagement was launched in the 2023-24 academic year.
 - Any student can become involved in community-engaged work from their very first semester at Berea College as a volunteer through CELTS or VEPAC. In 2023-24, 195 students volunteered outside of any required service-learning course or labor position, for a total of more than 2,000 volunteer hours.
 - Civic learning and democratic engagement are integrated into the General Studies Program and into academic programs including African and African American Studies; Peace and Social Justice Studies; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Student Demographics

Berea College's student population encompasses a wide variety of demographics and student identities. In addition to the wide variety of locations students hail from and household income, mentioned above,

most students belong to groups that predispose them to lower civic engagement rates. In Fall 2023, 53% of Berea's 1,487 students were classified as First Generation (Berea College 2023-24 Fact Book). According to a study published in *Teaching in Higher Education* in 2012, which surveyed the academic engagement of first-generation students compared to their non-first-generation peers, with civic engagement included as a form of academic engagement, first-generation students reported lower levels of academic engagement. Increased differences persisted when controlling demographic, academic, and social factors (Soria & Stebelton).

NSLVE

The reports that Berea College receives about voter registration and voter turnout rates from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) have provide a tremendous resource to help us understand voter engagement trends and progress at Berea College. The information also helps us to understand how Berea's voter engagement compares to similar institutions and to voting trends across the nation. The significance of the role that the NSLVE reports play in the work of VEPAC is reflected in how the NSLVE data is integrated throughout this report, including summary and detailed NSLVE data in the Landscape section and goals based on these data are found in the Goals and Strategies sections.

Goals

Long-term/aspirational goals: When VEPAC was formed, the planning committee members discussed long-term, aspirational goals for the group. We established a vision for high rates of voter registration and participation for current students. We also established a vision for the development of civic engagement skills in all Berea College students. These aspirational goals guide the long-term work of the group and give direction to the short-term goals that we establish for each year and election cycle.

- Increasing voter registration: By 2028, VEPAC will work to ensure that 90% of Berea College students eligible to vote will be registered to vote by the general election.
- Increased voter turnout: By 2028, VEPAC will work to ensure that 80% of Berea College students who are registered to vote will vote in the national election.
- Developing skills of civic engagement: By 2028, Berea College will have at least 10% of students on-campus participate in at least one civic engagement skill-building opportunity an academic year.
- Maintain and update an accessible portal of civic engagement resources and modules for faculty and staff from both VEPAC and our partner organizations for use in faculty and staff course planning and coursework.
- By 2025, successfully request that Election Day be listed on the official Berea College academic calendar each year.
- By 2028, successfully request an alternate class schedule on Election Day in November to allow time for students, faculty, and staff to vote.

Annual/short-term goals: The goals for the coming academic year follow the SMARTIE goal model (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable) and are informed by data from the NSLVE reports for Berea College and by data from Berea Office of Institutional Research

and Assessment. These goals will be updated during the spring semester of every academic year to make reasonable adjustments and reflect progress.

- *Increasing voter registration:*
 - Provide opportunities as laid out in the strategies so that at least 85% of eligible Berea College students are registered to vote before the 2024 fall voter registration deadline.
 - Provide opportunities so that every incoming student will encounter at least 4 opportunities to learn about how to register to vote before the fall voter registration deadlines.
 - Provide opportunities so that every returning student will encounter at least 2 opportunities to learn about how to register to vote during the academic year.
- *Increased voter turnout:*
 - Provide resources so that Berea College's eligible student voter turnout rate in the 2024 November General election is at least 60%.
- *Developing skills of civic engagement:*
 - Provide educational programming for Berea College students about voting, including at least one program in each category: Academics, Labor, Co-curricular, and Residence Life.
 - Provide resources, information, and opportunities so that every Berea College student can encounter information about civic engagement topics including how to engage with elected officials, how to participate in constructive dialogues, why voting matters, how decisions are made, and how to communicate with elected officials, at least once a semester.
 - Sponsor at least two off-campus events for students during the academic year to talk to elected officials during the legislative session, attend a local conference discussing local issues and legislation, or visit a government facility.
 - Expand the reach and resources of VEPAC by collaborating with at least three existing departments and/or organizations and at least one new department or organization to host an educational program per academic year.
 - Create a way for faculty and staff to easily access civic engagement resources from VEPAC and our partner organizations for use in their course planning and coursework, including resources like modules and class presentations.

Strategy

Long-term, on-going general strategies:

- Continue to develop connections between the academic curriculum and voter engagement, including through the Community and Civic Engagement (CCE) minor, service-learning collaborations, and opportunities for student and faculty research.
- Continue to build strong connections with administrators. Berea's President Dr. Cheryl Nixon has been an enthusiastic supporter of civic learning and democratic engagement efforts since joining Berea College as President in summer 2023 and has modeled participation in democratic processes like dialogue about challenging topics and engagement with elected officials.

- Maintain an active partnership with Democracy Works to provide TurboVote’s services to Berea’s campus, which provides information on registering, gives election reminders, and other voter information prior to upcoming elections.
- Ensure the link for TurboVote is displayed on the student portal (myBerea) as well as Berea Engage, to help give students 24/7 access to individualized voter information.
- Develop opportunities for students to encounter information about how to register to vote through required activities like incoming student orientation and the annual housing selection process.
- Develop opportunities for students to register to vote with the support of trained volunteers in co-curricular settings, like residence hall programs, labor meetings, volunteer recruitment fairs, student organization fairs, campus-wide celebrations (Mountain Day, Labor Day, and more), and on-campus tabling leading up to elections.
- Develop opportunities for students to register to vote with the support of trained volunteers in curricular settings, like academic courses, by asking faculty to make time for short presentations in their courses, especially general education courses.
- Promote National Voter Registration Day through celebratory, fun, and educational programming, like a mock vote for favorite drinks or desserts, emails to campus sharing data from NSLVE reports, and offering voter registration stations in central locations around campus.
- Host candidate forums for local elections like City Council, in collaboration with a local community-based organization.
- Successfully requesting that Election Day continue to be listed on the official Berea College academic calendar.
- Restart the effort to request an alternate class schedule on November Election Day to allow time for students to vote.
- Support efforts to ensure that faculty and staff are offered time to vote on Election Day and are informed about this opportunity.
- Providing Election Day shuttles to voting precincts with trained volunteer drivers and a welcome table at the shuttle departure location that provides information about voter rights and helps voters check their voter registration precinct.
- Educational programming and collaborations with various campus groups, including issue-focused letter-writing/calling campaigns; trainings about how to communicate with elected officials; and various forums for discussing and debating pressing social issues.
- Develop a sense of fun and celebration around voting and civic engagement through activities like coffee/hot chocolate station at the shuttle departure location on Election Day; Election Day returns watch parties; swag giveaways at registration tabling events (stickers, beads, etc.); photo booth with red, white and blue props and signs that say, “I vote because ...” or “My voice matters because ...”
- Provide students with absentee ballot funding to ensure all students have access to mail in their ballots prior to the election.
- Engage and collaborate with at least one new campus partner, center, organization, etc., per semester to increase voter awareness and civic education skills to a broader audience of students.

- Engage and collaborate with at least three established or new non-partisan community-based organizations each year to promote VEPAC's established goals.

Specific Strategies for 2024-25 goals:

- Continue successful long-term strategies, listed above (Summer and Fall 2024).
- VEPAC team members meet with staff of Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) to develop strategies for tracking progress on long-term and short-term goals (Summer 2024).
- Engage with incoming students to promote voter registration during Week of Welcome (August 2024).
- Share VEPAC short-term goals and plans with campus community via email and social media (Fall 2024)
- Engage with incoming students by presenting in required writing classes for all incoming students (GSTR 110) (August-September 2024).
- Students have issued an initial invitation for Berea's President Dr. Cheryl Nixon to sign the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, and VEPAC student leaders plan to continue this conversation with her (August/September 2024).
- Participate in National Voter Registration Day/Constitution Day through various platforms including in-person and digital programming. For our largest event, we plan to host a barbeque for the campus community, to celebrate voter registration and engagement (September 17, 2024).
- Celebrate National Voter Education Week which is taking place October 7-11, 2024. We will take a particular focus on Voter education and information about the ballot for our voting district. We will also take a focus on requesting absentee ballots for out-of-state students.
- Recruit volunteers for the upcoming election season and promote voter registration at regular volunteer and student engagement fairs (Fall 2024).
- Promote voter registration prior to the deadline through tabling in high traffic campus areas such as dining services, the library, non-traditional student housing, and academic buildings (Early October 2024).
- Engage with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members with fun engaging activities such as mock voting, election trivia, or some other method of celebrating voting. In addition, make students aware of ways to request absentee ballots and absentee ballot funding (Mid-October 2024)
- Work with the local schools to promote civic education and voting through an art or essay contest centered around voting and engaging with your community. (Mid-October, Mid-March)
- Host a collaborative event for students to get to know upcoming candidates such as an open-to-the-community city council panel, or election watch party (Late-October 2024)
- We will try to celebrate Vote Early Day which takes place on October 29, 2024. We will host events to learn more about voting and help people make plans to vote early on Kentucky's dates, which are from 10/31/2024 - 11/02/2024.
- We will celebrate Election Hero Day which takes place on November 4, 2024. We will promote elections workers and work to collaborate with the County Clerk as well as other civically

involved organizations in our community to talk about elections, working the polls, and its importance.

- Providing shuttles and strolling groups for election day using the methods listed above, and providing a promotional service such as a coffee stand or truck could be a good option to promote the regularity of voting. (November 5, 2024).
- Report on progress toward short-term goals to campus via email, social media, and presentations, when data is available (November-December 2024)
- Bring students to an annual state-wide Kentucky Center for Economic Policy conference to discuss policy and connect with prominent figures in Kentucky politics (January 2025).
- Host a presidential inauguration watch party to allow students to view an important historical event (January 20, 2025).
- Organize a trip to Frankfort, Kentucky in collaboration with a local community partner to allow students to interact with local Representatives and Senators on a non-partisan issue. Examples of issues/considered for this trip in the past: voter rights restoration, menstrual equity, food insecurity (February 2025).
- Engage students on local political issues, some of which discussed at the KY Policy conference, by hosting Legislative Lunches in collaboration with the Sociology Department. In the past, we have done this by inviting an expert to discuss the issue and having students present (February–March 2025).
- We plan to have a week of activities to celebrate National Civic Learning Week which will approximately take place between March 10-14, 2025. We will work in partnership with other centers and departments on campus to emphasize how you can be civically engaged as in their department and hope to work with the wider community on civic engagement as well.

Reporting

VEPAC planning committee members will develop plans for making information about the action plan, goals, and progress toward goals accessible to the campus community. We plan to use pre-established campus information sources such as our email, bulletin boards, and screens in buildings to spread information to all campus communities including students, staff, and faculty.

Specifically, VEPAC planning committee members plan to share this action plan report generously, so that it can be used to strategically plan programming and to track progress toward goals. Internally, the action plan will be shared with and regularly reviewed by VEPAC participants, which means that the plan will be accessed regularly by VEPAC student leaders and by students, faculty, and staff in Academic Affairs, Student Life, Student Government Association, and CELTS, as well as by community-based collaborators. Externally, the plan will be shared with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and Voter Friendly Campus. Campus representatives to other national and regional community and civic engagement networks will offer to share the action plan with members of those networks, as it is relevant and helpful.

VEPAC plans to review progress on action plans during weekly meetings. Data to reflect progress towards both our short-term and long-term goals will be provided by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and by the Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). The full NSLVE report is shared with the campus community by VEPAC via email and is published on the

ALL In Democracy Challenge website. Data from the NSLVE is also made available to the campus community through infographics featuring key information from the report; the infographics are shared with the campus community via email and may be shared in the future through other platforms, including presentations on campus, social media.

VEPAC planning committee members will meet with OIRA staff to develop strategies for gathering relevant data from current students and understanding the best ways to utilize data already gathered and provided by OIRA.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the action plan will allow VEPAC planning members to assess progress toward goals and will give feedback related to the effectiveness of strategies toward achieving the goals. That feedback will allow members to adjust strategies, as needed. VEPAC plans to document progress on action plans during regular weekly planning meetings. Results of evaluations will be used to inform VEPAC program planning.

Data to reflect progress towards both our short-term and long-term goals will be provided by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and by the Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). The Director of OIRA has supported VEPAC by identifying key findings from NSLVE reports and creating infographics that can be used to inform the campus community about student voting data. The OIRA also collects and shares data about student community engagement through internal surveys and select questions on national student surveys.

Assessments of programs and student learning outcomes in Student Life and CELTS may also help inform evaluation of Berea's democratic action plan. While NSLVE data is usually received every other year, other forms of evaluation are on-going, including evaluation of participation rates, effectiveness of program implementation, and progress toward institutional goals. Assessment of other related areas of community and civic engagement are occurring through the collection of institution-wide data for the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement.

VEPAC will communicate with administrators about data from Campus Climate Surveys, Student Satisfaction Survey, and other related assessment measures to explore the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts related to voter engagement. Because VEPAC is a cross-campus collaboration, evaluation of voter action plan strategies and goals benefits from the perspectives of students, staff, and faculty from academic affairs and from student life, a cross-campus effort.

Mentioned earlier in this report, recent measures of success for voter empowerment have included:

- voter registration rates and voter turnout rates provided by NSLVE;
- progress toward institutional goals like establishing a paid student leadership position (labor position) to support student voter empowerment and the addition of a secondary student position to provide institutionalized support for student leadership development and succession planning;
- programmatic feedback like student participation rates in events and student reflections about their participation in educational activities.

Key performance indicators include voter registration and turnout rates, participation in educational events on campus, and shifts in institutional supports for civic participation and education. We were pleased with progress made and look forward to receiving additional data from NSLVE to inform us about progress made during the 2022 election.

Efforts to advance voter empowerment at Berea have been consistent with the Ask Every Student Framework:

- Voter registration has been integrated into existing processes, including a pop-up screen inviting students to register to vote appearing each time students log onto Berea Engage, the online portal for student clubs and organizations.
- Efforts to support the individualization of students' voter registration and turnout have been made, including collaborating with the Campus Post Office to provide and cover the cost of postage for absentee ballots, if needed, and consistently providing information for out-of-state voters to help them identify key information like deadlines particular to their state.
- Success in achieving institutionalization tactics has been encouraging, including adding Election Day to the official academic calendar for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years.

One area of progress related to diversity and inclusion has been in efforts to support non-traditional students who live in family housing, including specialized programming integrating into a regular lunchtime discussion series and an Election Day information table with drinks and snacks positioned in the family housing community, which is adjacent to the polling place now used by most Berea College students.

The greatest impact in increasing voter turnout in 2022 may have resulted from statewide changes in Kentucky, including expanded early voting opportunities and the option for voters to vote at any polling location in each county (rather than going to one specific polling location for each voting precinct). VEPAC adjusted voter turnout information and supports to be consistent with these changes. We look forward to receiving 2022 data to determine whether these changes did impact Berea College voter turnout rates.