

**2022 Campus Democratic Engagement Plan**  
**McKeen Center for the Common Good**  
**Bowdoin College**  
**December 2021**

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**Summary**

This Campus Democratic Engagement Plan was developed by an advisory group of diverse students, staff, and faculty, coordinated by the McKeen Center for the Common Good. See [Appendix 1](#) for a list of advisory group members.

This plan was developed to promote coordination and broad campus contributions to civic engagement efforts at Bowdoin College from January 2022 through January 2023, with a focus on the fall midterm election and spring primaries, but with a broader goal of cultivating students who identify themselves as active and informed stewards of a stronger democracy. This plan is informed primarily by two resources: [Election Imperatives](#) from the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education, and [Strengthening American Democracy](#) from the Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition.

This plan will be implemented primarily by the staff of Bowdoin Votes, with important contributions to be made by advisory group members and by others who are drawn into collaboration due to their position and/or enthusiasm for the project.

As was the case with Bowdoin's 2020 plan, this plan includes both firm intentions and initial suggestions for how various departments might engage in this work. Collaborations and conversations with stakeholders will continue to develop throughout 2022.

**Leadership**

The advisory group is chaired by Monica Bouyea, who administers Bowdoin Votes for the McKeen Center. The members of this iteration of the advisory group were recruited during summer and fall 2021, and have met monthly throughout the fall. The role of the advisory group has been to review past

practices and provide input on the Campus Democratic Engagement Plan as it has been drafted. After submission of this plan, the Advisory Group will continue with a more fluid lineup and individual roles, enabling broader contributions to the execution of activities named in this plan.

The advisory group consists of faculty members from the departments of Cinema Studies and Computer Science and staff from Student Activities, Institutional Research, the Bowdoin Library, Bowdoin Athletics, and Residential Life. Bowdoin Votes also employs a McKeen Center Fellow for Election Engagement that is responsible for managing student staff and volunteers and implementing the plans laid out in this document. She is aided by four “Democracy Ambassadors” who are paid for their time working at Bowdoin Votes events. These five student employees are members of the advisory group as well.

Bowdoin Votes also actively collaborates with fellow New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) schools. Together we have formed the NESCAC Votes coalition which meets monthly to compare strategies and form goals as a conference. These meetings are supervised and guided by representatives from ALL IN.

Bowdoin Votes has formed an essential partnership with the Brunswick Town Clerk that will continue to strengthen. The Clerk’s office has a list of Bowdoin students and their residences that serves as proof of residence for their voter registration. This has made the registration process much easier for students as they do not have to provide further proof of residence beyond identifying their College residence. The clerk has also helped Bowdoin Votes to track voter engagement by reporting the numbers of students who have voted in each election.

### **Institutional Commitment & Landscape**

In its [Statement On a Liberal Education](#), the faculty of Bowdoin concludes that “the success of a Bowdoin education is evident in the capacity of graduates ... to engage competing views critically, to make principled judgments that inform their practice, and to *work effectively with others as informed citizens committed to constructing a just and sustainable world* [emphasis ours].” This vision neatly mirrors the definition of *civic learning and democratic engagement* (CLDE) used by the SLSV Coalition in its [guide for developing Election Engagement Plans](#). According to the SLSV Coalition, CLDE is “promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility.” The similarity of the values articulated by Bowdoin and the SLSV Coalition suggests that CLDE are implicit goals of Bowdoin’s entire curriculum and that they are also pursued explicitly in particular departments, programs, and courses.

CLDE are also goals of many programs in Bowdoin’s co-curriculum, particularly within the Division of Student Affairs’ [student life](#) departments, which include The McKeen Center for the Common Good. As the campus department dedicated to modeling and advancing Bowdoin’s historical commitment to the common good, the McKeen Center was an appropriate launch point for an effort in 2016 to enhance students’ democratic participation. Outcomes from that cycle clarified the need for a collaborative

apparatus of students, faculty, and staff that can provide a consistent, programmatic approach to facilitating CLDE among students.

Notwithstanding the importance of the language quoted above, and the centrality of the Common Good in Bowdoin's understanding of its own culture, it is nonetheless consequential that civic learning and engagement are not named explicitly in either Bowdoin's mission statement or in the curricula for any of its departments. The absence of an institutional goal around civic engagement means that CLDE are cultivated unevenly across campus life. This stands in contrast to Bowdoin's education with respect to sustainability, where the addition of an Environmental Mission Statement during the past decade has provided the grounding for a long-term investment in all students' education for sustainable living. As Bowdoin Votes continues to develop a coalition in coming years, we will explore models from institutions like James Madison University and Tufts University, which embrace CLDE as institutional priorities on an equal footing with environmental stewardship.

Bowdoin Votes partners with many campus departments to inform and support its voter outreach and educational programming. Our goal is for this work to be informed not just by practical insights, but also by ongoing assessment of CLDE outcomes. We are still devising methods, and initiating conversations, to shed light on such outcomes. One promising approach we envision is to develop a CLDE Report Card that would be delivered to the faculty annually, and would include updates on data from NSLVE, as well as from a handful of questions featured on Bowdoin's First Year survey and Senior Surveys. By looking longitudinally at each cohorts' responses to questions such as *"how often did you discuss social, political or academic issues outside of class?"*, we may be able to detect slow changes in the campus culture. Making annual reports to faculty is one way to stoke faculty interest in integrating CLDE into teaching and research.

Arguably, the "bottom line" CLDE outcome is democratic participation: how many students vote. In 2016 Bowdoin began measuring voting rates by joining the [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#). NSLVE data comparing both voter registration and turnout among eligible Bowdoin students during presidential and midterm elections show that the advent of the McKeen Center's election engagement effort coincided with significant increases in both measures for both the 2016 presidential and 2018 primary elections, compared with 2012 and 2014, respectively. These improvements began to move Bowdoin's voting rate from below average to above average.

Bowdoin's registration and voting rates continued to rise in 2020 as we implemented plans and strategies laid out in our 2020 version of this plan. Our registration rate hit 94.8% in 2020, a 5.4% increase from 2016. Our voting rate was 85.4%, a 9.5% increase from 2016. Our continued progress reflects our impression that Bowdoin Votes makes a difference, and that additional efforts can make an even larger impact. Our work in 2020 laid a solid groundwork for Bowdoin Votes as an organization and showed us how to effectively run large scale programs in important election years. Having reflected on our successes as well as our missteps, we feel well established both within the College and in our internal strategies.

## Goals

### **Short-Term Goals 2022-23:**

1. Educate students on the issues & candidates that will appear on the ballot, as well as related topics such as polling, electoral reform proposals, and basic civics.
2. Run at least five voter registration drives before state primaries begin in early May 2022.
3. Run at least seven voter registration drives after the primaries and before Election Day 2022.
4. Work with Off-Campus Study staff to help students studying abroad register and vote.
5. Support students voting out-of-state with absentee ballot drives, state-by-state election information, and posters with out-of-state deadline reminders in the mail center.
6. Strive to incorporate voter registration and conversations about civic engagement into first-year orientation.
7. Partner with five student organizations to co-sponsor events, registration drives, registration challenges, etc.
8. Sustain and expand the Bowdoin Votes Advisory Group (BVAG).
9. Increase campus engagement in local politics while sustaining and expanding relationships with the Brunswick Town Clerk and other local representatives.
10. Register students to vote. Target is 95% in 2022, as reported by NSLVE.
11. Increase students' voter turnout. Target is 71% in 2022, as reported by NSLVE. This would be a 10 percentage point increase from 2018 voter turnout rates.

### **Long-Term Goals 2022-23:**

1. Integrate Bowdoin Votes into all aspects of the Bowdoin institution: residential life, academics, social scene, etc.
2. Increase faculty collaboration with and investment in Bowdoin Votes, such as presentations about voting in class, hosting discussions, encouraging setting time aside to vote, etc.
3. Lower affective barriers to voting; promote students' beliefs that voting is important, intellectually approachable, convenient, and is a basic democratic right that is only as powerful as it is practiced.
4. Sustain civic dialogue and programming beyond major election years.

### **National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)**

In 2020, 94.8% of eligible students registered to vote and 85.4% voted. This was a significant increase from both the 2018 midterms and the 2016 election. While our registration and turnout rates continue to increase, and are well above the national average for college campuses, there is certainly room for improvement. For example, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students voted at a lower rate than white students on campus. Moving forward, we hope to include more students of color on our advisory board as well as increase our collaboration with affinity groups and other student organizations to see how Bowdoin Votes can better serve students of color. Panels, workshops, and speaker events related to civic engagement could be opportunities for co-hosting and working with affinity groups on campus. We feel strongly that it is our role as an organization to listen to what students of color feel would be the most helpful way to engage with them and groups on campus and form our goals based off of those conversations.

### **Strategy**

Below is a rough chronology of the tasks that comprise this plan. The list includes efforts that may require only McKeen Center staff and volunteer support to execute. Most of them are definite plans, while a few may be pruned back or abandoned depending on the capacity that is achieved through volunteer recruitment. Following the list is a table of additional ideas that would require cooperation from other departments, and we will explore these possibilities in early 2022.

**Spring Semester 2022**

<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Map out components of <i>Bowdoin Votes</i> student-facing campaign, and develop SMART goals for each aspect of it</li> <li>● Table in Smith Union for absentee ballot request forms and Maine registration</li> <li>● Initiate conversations with affinity groups on campus about how <i>Bowdoin Votes</i> can best serve students of color</li> </ul>
<b>February</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revise “<a href="#">Where Should I Vote?</a>” guide to compare impact of voting in home states vs. Maine</li> <li>● Compile guide on types of primaries (open, closed, mixed) by state</li> <li>● Create training guide for tabling volunteers— information on how to help students register, rules/deadlines/elections in Maine and other states</li> <li>● Host panel of international students to discuss democracy and voting in home countries</li> <li>● Host workshop on how to write/contact your representatives</li> <li>● Recruit more student volunteers and leaders for <i>Bowdoin Votes</i> Advisory Group, especially students of color</li> </ul>
<b>March</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Publish comprehensive guide to spring/summer primaries in different states</li> <li>● Begin conversations with Bowdoin’s First-Year Dean and Residential Life Staff about incorporating voter education and registration opportunities into first year Orientation</li> <li>● Work with Bowdoin Outing Club, McKeen Center, and Bowdoin Science Experience to prepare materials for Orientation-trip leaders to engage incoming first-year students in conversations on voter engagement</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Seek collaboration with first-generation college students through THRIVE and other student groups to host conversations about voting and politics on Campus</li> <li>● Present about absentee voting at meeting for students going abroad next year</li> <li>● Work with Off Campus Study to incorporate overseas voting materials in departure packets</li> <li>● Develop program with mail center to facilitate voting-by-mail for primaries (covering postage, signage in mail center, etc.)</li> <li>● Begin recruiting for 2022-2023 Election Engagement McKeen Fellow and Democracy Ambassadors</li> </ul>
<b>May</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Begin recruiting volunteers to help with tabling, event organization, etc. in the fall</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Register students once they know their address for the fall</li> </ul>
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**Fall Semester 2022**

<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recruit and train volunteers, as well as paid student democracy ambassadors, to help with tabling and social media output.</li> <li>● Table at high turnout events (for example, athletics events, speaker events, etc.) and other strategic dates (for example, National Voter Registration Day).</li> <li>● Register first year students at high-traffic orientation events— libraries, OneCard office, Mail Center, move in day, etc.</li> <li>● Create a calendar of Bowdoin Votes fall events, key dates, and opportunities. Create comprehensive posters with all of this information and distribute them around campus (dining halls, library, mail center, dorms, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage leaders of various clubs, teams and affinity groups to personally urge their participants to register and vote.</li> <li>● Hold absentee ballot party(s) for students registering outside of Maine (we provide photocopier, postage, etc).</li> <li>● After registration push, run turn-out campaigns to motivate, create peer photo posts with #whyivote message; also myth debunking posts.</li> <li>● Early voting walk to the polls (town hall) with campus celebrities-- Clayton Rose, Randy Nichols, etc.</li> <li>● Organize local politics panel with Brunswick officials and representatives.</li> <li>● Co-organize debate watching parties and topical debates with campaign representatives and/or faculty experts; aim to cover every statewide question on the Maine ballot.</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use social media platforms, Service News bulletin, table tents in the dining hall posters, and email (including by campus celebrities) to reach students electronically with reminders and updates.</li> <li>● Distribute nonpartisan materials prepared by national organizations (for example, CEEP candidate guides, League of Women Voters Ballot Guide, etc.).</li> <li>● Offer stickers for students who submit ‘voting selfies’ at mail room (absentee) or polling place.</li> <li>● Organize vans to the local polls on election day, including snacks, fun, and campus celebrities at the pickup point</li> <li>● Host campus-wide election results viewing party</li> <li>● Send out campus-wide <i>Bowdoin Votes</i> program survey on election day or soon thereafter</li> </ul>

<b>December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debrief with staff, and individually with collaborators (email, meeting, and/or survey) to get their feedback</li> <li>• Analyze feedback, summarize findings, and make recommendations for 2023 and 2024.</li> </ul>
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**Proposed Collaborations**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Possible partner(s)</b>
Send every student registration & voting information, and reminders, for both Maine and their home state (electronic and/or hard copy)	Registrar Residential Life IT Mail Center
Support students who are studying abroad to get registered and vote absentee (before and/or when they are out of USA)	OCS office Mail Center
Establish Election Engagement liaisons in each College House	Residential Life
Inter-dorm voter registration competition	Residential Life
Enlist athletic teams as volunteers and spokespeople	Athletics
Political dialogue/civic engagement event(s) for students to engage Brunswick community leaders and members	Town Clerk Brunswick Town Hall
Incorporate conversations about voting and civic engagement into Orientation trips for incoming first-year students	Bowdoin Outing Club McKeen Center THRIVE/Bowdoin Science Experience
Set up self-serve voter registration stations in high-traffic areas of campus	Library OneCard Office Mail Center
Create post-election surveys for the student body and analyze the results	Institutional Research
Host conversations about race and voting and formulate goals to support students of color on campus during election season	Asian Students Alliance Athletes of Color Coalition Black Student Union Latin American Student Organization Native American Student Association

## **Evaluation & Reporting**

Evaluation of this plan's efforts will allow stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, understand students' needs and preferences, and make informed adjustments to the plan's goals and strategies. We will measure not only the degree of democratic participation in 2022 (through NSLVE and numbers reported by the town clerk), but also investigate the degree to which success is influenced by factors such as student attitudes, the amount of resources devoted to the effort, or simple competition for students' attention, time and energy. We also plan to use an anti-racism lens in order to assess the results of our work with students of color and campus affinity groups. Assessing outcomes from the 2022 cycle will 1) measure the efficacy of our nuts-and-bolts work, 2) deepen our insight into constraints on election engagement, and 3) suggest possible demographic areas and modes of engagement where there is room for greater reach.

Given that our efforts are aimed at all Bowdoin students who are eligible to vote, it would be ideal to survey the entire student body for feedback on the program. We have had success in the past with distributing surveys via campus wide emails and incentivizing students to respond to surveys with gift cards to local stores and restaurants. Additional surveys may be created and targeted to students who participate in specific programs such as the inter-dorm registration competition or athletic team voting campaigns.

We will ask students in person at our events and tables after the election about outcomes related to our goals (for example, did they register, do they believe voting was accessible, etc.) and about their impressions of the quality of particular efforts. This will be a third source of data in addition to NSLVE/Town Clerk counts and an online poll. We will also invite ideas for what could be done differently to reach and motivate students.

Data will be analyzed qualitatively for trends in both who responds and patterns in the responses. Relevant portions will be shared with collaborating departments as we re-tool for the next iteration of this plan in 2024, and to a lesser extent in 2023.

**Appendix 1:** Bowdoin College Democratic Engagement Action Plan Advisory Group

Penny Mack '22, Election Engagement McKeen Fellow

Alexandria Pizzino '23, Democracy Ambassador

Roman Parajon '22, Democracy Ambassador

Gizem Dogan '24, Democracy Ambassador

Casey Edmonds-Estes '22, Democracy Ambassador

Joe Anderson, Manager of Campus Services and Logistics

Mike Ranen, Associate Dean of Student Affairs & Dir. of Residential and Student Life

Nate Hintze, Director, Student Activities

Monica Bouyea, Associate Director, McKeen Center for the Common Good

Barbara Levergood, Data Services Librarian

Steve Papaccio, ETL Developer and Analyst, Institutional Research, Analytics & Consulting

Doug Cook, Director of College and Media Relations

Nathan Alsobrook, Head Coach, Nordic Skiing

Stephen Majercik, Associate Professor of Computer Science

Tricia Welsch, Professor of Cinema Studies and Director of Cinema Studies Program, Cinema Studies

Erin Valentino, Associate Librarian for Research