



CMU
Voter Engagement
Action Plan

Carnegie Mellon University

May 2024

Executive Summary

Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) is committed to empowering our students to meaningfully engage with society. We recognize that voting is an important step to being civically involved within our communities. Voting gives us the power to choose decision makers who represent our needs and impact our everyday lives. Our goal is to make every student voice heard and as such, our voter engagement plan is designed to be nonpartisan and inclusive.

CMU was pleased to make significant progress on a number of the goals from the 2022 CMU Voter Engagement Action Plan, including the 2-year pilot of Democracy Day (no classes on Election Day until 5pm), hiring of a student worker dedicated to supporting voter registration and voter engagement, securing additional funding to support voter engagement efforts, launching the Student Voter Ambassador program, and continued partnerships on campus to support targeted programming for National Voter Education Week.

The 2024 CMU Voter Engagement Action Plan builds upon the incredible work done on campus the previous two years, and continues to think about new opportunities for growth in this space. Of particular significance is the creation of CMU's online PA voter registration interface in partnership with the PA Department of State. CMU is the first higher education institution in the state of PA to have created this PA Voter API, and CMU is excited to roll out this API for the Fall 2024 election cycle.

The 2024 CMU Voter Engagement Action Plan was developed by leadership from the Office of Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement (SLICE), in collaboration with students, staff, faculty and community partners. The plan centers primarily on our internal campus but has incorporated feedback and input from community partners in Pittsburgh.

The plan is intended to be implemented during the 2024 – 2025 academic year. Implementation of the plan will rely heavily on the continued collaboration between the SLICE office, as well as key student governing bodies (Undergraduate Student Senate and Graduate Student Assembly). The Voter Engagement Action Plan centers on peer-to-peer educational models to aim to 1) communicate the importance of voting to the larger campus community, 2) facilitate voter registration, 3) provide educational resources to create informed voters, and 4) cultivate a culture of political participation.

Through the work of this action plan we have identified several goals, including the following:

- Narrowing the gap between percentage of students registered to vote and percentage of students who vote on election day to **10%** for midterm and presidential elections;
- Voting rate of registered students for 2024 election cycle: **90%** for presidential election, **80%** for midterm election;
- Overall student voting rate for 2024 election cycle: **85%**; and
- Implementation of the inaugural PA Voter Registration API project

Leadership

The Office of Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement, housed within the Division of Student Affairs, provides leadership and dedicated staff support for CMU's Voter Action Plan. Implementation of CMU's Voter Engagement Action Plan is part of the Assistant Director of SLICE's current job portfolio, with supervisory support from the Director of SLICE, Liz Vaughan. Input for the plan came from the two student governing bodies, the Undergraduate Student Senate and the Graduate Student Assembly, as well as additional staff and faculty and the office's long-term community partner, the League of Women Voters of Allegheny County.

CMU has additionally partnered with numerous state and national organizations in the implementation and development of our voter engagement programming, including the following:

- All In Campus Democracy Challenge
- Ask Every Student
- Students Learn Students Vote
- TurboVote
- Pennsylvania Student Voting Coalition
- Vote Early Day

CMU assists the local Elections Office in recruiting campus members to serve as poll workers through various communication channels, and by having the Elections Office come to campus and table at events such as the annual Volunteer Fair.

CMU is working to reestablish the CMU Voter Engagement committee for the upcoming 24-25 academic year. Due to both staffing and student transitions, there was turnover within this committee, and CMU is working to identify additional campus members to add to this committee. The committee will continue to have representation from the two governing student bodies, as well as open to additional students who are interested in democratic engagement. Students added to this committee will be trained utilizing materials from Ask Every Student.

Commitment

The mission and vision statements of Carnegie Mellon University reflect the university's continued emphasis on transformative impact on society. As an institution, CMU's vision is to *"have a transformative impact on society through continual innovation in education, research, creativity, and entrepreneurship"*.

CMU's vision is lived out through the mission of the institution which states:

"To create a transformative educational experience for students focused on deep disciplinary knowledge; problem solving; leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills; and personal health and well-being. To cultivate a transformative university community committed to (a) attracting and retaining diverse, world-class talent; (b) creating a collaborative environment open to the free exchange of ideas, where research, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship can flourish; and (c) ensuring individuals can achieve their full potential. To impact society in a transformative way – regionally, nationally, and globally – by engaging with partners outside the traditional borders of the university campus."

Societal impact is additionally described in several of the values guiding the institution as well, notably the value of collaboration – *"reflected in our interdisciplinary approach, our focus on internal and external partnerships and our capacity to create new fields of inquiry"*; the value of impact – *"reflected in our commitment to address critical issues facing society regionally, nationally and globally"*; and the values of empathy and compassion – *"reflected in our focus on improving the human condition and on the personal development of the members of our community"*.

CMU operationalizes the mission, vision and values of the institution through the strategic plan. CMU is currently operating under the CMU Strategic Plan 2025, the institution's 10-year strategic plan released in November 2015. The current strategic plan has three main pillars of focus, one of which is Societal Impact. Within the pillar of Societal Impact is the goal of Regional Impact, maintaining a focus on "contributing significantly to economic growth and quality of life in Pittsburgh, Southwestern Pennsylvania, and all of the regions where CMU operates," as well as the goal of Engaging and Impacting the Global Community: "build on leadership in world-class education and research outside the borders of a traditional university-campus; focus on continued international engagement, and deeper and broader incorporation of the full CMU experience around the world."

Support of and for democratic engagement through institutional and administrative support is one avenue CMU lives out its dedication to transforming society. CMU is a member of the Higher Education Presidential Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation through All In Campus Democracy Challenge, and the current Vice-President for Student Affairs issued a charge letter to the inaugural Voter Engagement Strategic Committee in full support of the committee's work. Due to student feedback and input regarding the challenges of voting on Election Day, CMU in 2023 implemented a 2-year pilot initiative called Democracy Day, when there are no classes held on the Fall Election date until 5pm. Students are encouraged to use this time to vote, work as a poll worker, and additionally participate in events related to Democracy during this day.

Democratic engagement within the curriculum is seen throughout the seven colleges and schools at CMU most notably within the Institute for Politics and Strategy, which offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in International Relations and Politics. The Institute for Politics and Strategy also runs the Washington Semester Program, providing undergraduate students from any department the

opportunity to live and intern in Washington D.C. while engaging in coursework focused on policy, security, media and intelligence. Within the seven colleges and schools several have a focus on democratic engagement through their general education curriculum requirements. Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences revised its general education curriculum in Fall 2021, requiring students to complete 6 Foundations Courses, 5 disciplinary perspective course offerings, and 3 special seminars and topics. One of the 3 special seminars is the Grand Challenge seminar courses which are required for all first-year students in Dietrich and which focus on real, complex global problems like environmental sustainability, equity in health care, or racism. Previous Grand Challenge seminar topics have addressed democratic engagement: Democracy and Data, and Voting: An American Tradition. Within Dietrich Experiential Learning opportunities for students, such as undergraduate research, study abroad, or community service, enhance students' learning outside of the classroom. The Mellon College of Science has a requirement for its general education curriculum of 9 hours of engagement with the arts, wellness and community service. To fulfill the ENGAGE Service component students must engage in a minimum of 9 hours of work devoted to a non-profit organization or organizations of their choice, 3 of which must have a direct benefit to the local Pittsburgh community. Additionally numerous courses across the university curriculum have focused on democratic engagement, political participation or community engagement.

Co-curricular democratic engagement has been supported through several student bodies and organizations on campus as well as departments. Student organizations such as the Roosevelt Institute, Sustainable Earth, and Women in Politics as well as CMU Democrats, CMU Republicans and CMU Progressives focus on advocacy and political participation. Both the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) as well as the Undergraduate Student Senate and Undergraduate Student Senate Advocacy Committee have spearheaded voter educational sessions, voter registration drives, town halls with candidates, lobbying efforts, celebrated the National Civic Holidays, and promoted voting in student body elections. SLICE for the past two years has hired a student staff worker as a Voter Engagement Coordinator position and will continue to do this. SLICE has also for the past two years run the student voter ambassador program, which provides students with various opportunities to get involved in democratic engagement work based upon their capacity. Opportunities have ranged from assisting with scheduled voter registration drives to various tabling events on campus to running educational events for residents.

CMU additionally has a polling location on campus, in the Jared Cohon University Center on the first floor.

Landscape

CMU has continued to build upon several years of momentum within its democratic engagement movement. Due to the decentralized nature of previous efforts, timing and community-wide initiatives were challenging to coordinate. This lack of centralized efforts prompted the creation of a consolidated Voting Engagement Committee in 2019 of students, staff and faculty to facilitate the planning and execution of more wide-ranging voter engagement efforts. This Committee was instrumental in the programming for the 2020 election cycle. Following the 2020 Election cycle and the challenges of the pandemic the new Voter Engagement Strategic Planning Committee formed to support the submission of our first All In Action Plan as well as to coordinate and collaborate on programming. After the success of our first All In Action Plan CMU is excited to build upon this work and create new short and long term goals with the 2024 Action Plan.

CMU has been recognized by several national voter engagement organizations. A professional staff member from the Office of Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement office was selected into the Ask Every Student Codesigner Cohort for 2022. CMU was awarded an Ask Every Student Implementation Grant for 2022 of \$5,000 to support institutionalization of our voter engagement efforts. In support of the PA API voter project CMU was awarded \$25,000 through Students Learn Students Vote's fiscal sponsor to hire an external programmer to build out the voter registration interface. CMU was named a Voter Friendly Campus for the first time during the 2023-2024 cycle and was granted the All In Highly Established Action Plan Seal for the 2022 election.

NSLVE Data

Year	2016	2018	2020
Registration Rate	78.5%	75.3%	81.9%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	78.7%	60.5%	86.2%
Voting Rate	61.8%	45.6%	70.6%

Our overall voting rate for the 2020 election cycle was 70.6%, which was a 8.8% increase from 2016. Our efforts during the 2020 election cycle won CMU a Gold seal from the All In Campus Democracy Challenge. Unfortunately, at the time of this submission the 2022 NSLVE data has not been released. When this data is released we anticipate adjusting our short and long term goals accordingly. CMU does not currently receive data on our NSLVE reports broken down by race. This is something we are thinking about exploring moving forward.

Goals and Strategies

Below are the goals for the 2024 – 2025 academic year as well as long-term goals, with a specific focus on voter participation, voter education, and building student skills in civil discourse. Given we are still waiting on the 2022 NSLVE data our voter registration and participation goals mirror some of our previous goals, but as noted will be adjusted once our data has been received.

Short-Term Goals (2024 – 2025 academic year)

Voter Registration/Participation

- Narrowing the gap between percentage of students registered to vote and percentage of students who vote on election day to **10%** for midterm and presidential elections
- Voting rate of registered students for 2024 election cycle: **90%** for presidential election, **80%** for midterm election
- Overall student voting rate for 2024 election cycle: **85%**
- Increase overall percentages of students from STEM academic programs voting in the 2024 election cycle
- Implement the inaugural CMU PA Voter API online registration interface

Voter Education

- Build out materials on civil discourse for students
- Create series of programming on civil discourse in partnership with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs for Civility Initiatives
- Continue and build upon programming for National Voter Education week
- Educate students about “your major on the ballot”
- Better education on campus that CMU has a polling place, as well as better education on who can vote at this polling place. Send out communication to students on how they can locate their polling location
- Increase communication and marketing materials for PA primary election. Create specific content for the primary to have Undergraduate Student Senate as well as Graduate Student Assembly send out to students

Institutionalization of programming

- Add voter registration into First-Year Orientation programming

Long-term Goals

- Add post-graduation voter registration information into Senior Week activities
- Coordination of community-based voter registration competition among different areas on campus (Fraternity/Sorority Life, Athletics, STEM academic programs, etc.)

Strategies & Tactics

The following are strategies articulated by All In and Democracy Works CMU is currently and will continue to do:

- Offering a Service Saturdays volunteer program for students to volunteer with community-based organizations in the Pittsburgh area
- Lobby Day/other lobbying advocacy efforts
- Participation in the National Civic Holidays
- Recruiting students to be Poll workers
- Hosting a polling location on campus
- Creating, printing and posting flyers on campus promoting voter registration
- Host candidate town halls
- Utilize a CMU-specific TurboVote site

The following are strategies and tactics CMU will be focused on for the upcoming academic year:

Continuation of paid Voter Engagement Coordinator position and Student Voter Ambassador program: CMU will continue to have paid student staff supervised out of the SLICE office to support this work. Additionally, CMU is looking into the new federal guidance related to the federal work study positions to support this work and hopes to hire additional students to increase capacity. CMU will also continue the Student Voter Ambassador program to increase increasing capacity across campus.

Embedding voter registration/education into First-Year Orientation programming: A key area of focus for us is our First-Year Orientation program for both incoming first-year undergraduate students as well as incoming graduate students. We will hold a voter registration drive during Orientation.

Inaugural PA Voter Registration API: As mentioned previously in this action plan, CMU has finalized creation of a PA voter registration API. CMU was the first higher education institution in the state of Pennsylvania to create this API and will be serving as a model for other institutions throughout the state. The majority of students enrolled at CMU are not from PA, and therefore do not currently have PA state documentation. Though not originally from PA students wish to register to vote in PA, but for the past several election cycles students have struggled to register online with the PA Department of State's website, primarily when needing to upload a copy of their signature. CMU in collaboration with other national partners engaged in the state's API project, and have since created an internal, CMU branded interface, where students can log in, fill out the voter registration form, and the information is automatically sent to the Department of State's website. This project will drastically change how students register to vote on campus and will remove the current barriers students encounter when registering to vote.

Democracy Day: CMU last year created a two-year pilot initiative of Democracy Day, which provides students with no classes on the Fall election date until 5pm, in order to have time to vote. Intentional programming was offered last year on this day, and this year CMU looks to build upon this programming as well as increase the messaging to ensure students understand the purpose of the day. The two-year pilot initiative will then be assessed to see if it will continue moving forward.

Educational resources for the campus: We will continue to build and expand onto our current webpage of voter resources as well as getting a vanity URL or a university-level webpage dedicated to these resources for ease of access for the entire CMU campus. We will create and distribute a nonpartisan voting guide for students as well as materials tied to “Your Major on the Ballot.” We held a series of programming events and provided resources for each day of the National Voter Education Week in conjunction with Graduate Student Assembly and will continue to do this annually going forward.

Partnerships with campus departments: We will outreach to various departments across campus to partner on educational materials and promotion, including our partners in the Library, our Sustainability Initiative, and the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion. Given the tensions expected during the Fall election we will be hosting a series of programming related to civility and civil discourse for students.

Partnerships with external organizations: We will continue our partnerships with external organizations such as the League of Women Voters and will look to further our programming and events with these organizations.

Additional opportunities to get involved: Though our plan is primarily focused on voter engagement efforts CMU also has a large population of international students who are not eligible to vote. We will start to build out resources and offer additional opportunities for these students to get involved in advocacy and political participation efforts as well.

Reporting

This action plan will be shared with All In Campus Democracy Challenge for the purposes of the challenge. Additionally this action plan will be shared on the university’s webpage for voter resources along with our NSLVE data, to be viewed by the entire university as well as external stakeholders. The link for the public version of both of these will be [here](#) . This action plan will be posted after submission to All In.

Evaluation

We will continue to use our NSLVE data as an assessment for our short and long-term goals. In addition to our NSLVE data we will use the following assessment measures for other areas mentioned in our Action Plan:

- Track participation at events
- Assessment tools to evaluate the Student Voter Ambassador program including focus groups with students and quantitative tools to track number of activities completed.
- Registration numbers from the PA Voter API registration interface
- Assessment data from Democracy Day