



CLC CENTRAL LAKES COLLEGE

2024

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN



Central Lakes College

Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2024

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Erich Heppner, Director of Student Life to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Central Lakes College. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2023-2024, on and around our campuses in Brainerd and Staples, Minnesota.

The following groups will be leading this work at Central Lakes College 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
- Student Life Department Student Workers
- Democracy Fellows

The mission of our initiative is:

- To increase the number of Central Lakes College students participating in local, state, and federal elections.

Our action plan is dedicated to helping our college faculty, staff, and student leaders implement data-driven strategies for increasing civic learning and democratic engagement on an annual basis.

II. Leadership

Erich Heppner | Director of Student Life, will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Mary Sam, Dean of Students, Equity & Inclusion - Mary is an integral part of our plan as she helps ground our decisions and programming to ensure they are equitable for all students.
- Nick Wiesmann, Student Life Assistant - Nick is on the front line of voter engagement work and helps the Student Life Director inspire and train the student leaders to focus on voter engagement initiatives.

- Student Leaders - Much of the voter engagement plan and work is completed by members of the Student Senate on each of our campuses. These students engage in peer-to-peer efforts to register, educate, and turnout students to vote.
- Hara Charlier, College President - Hara is involved at a high level by helping guide decisions that remove barriers and increase access to student voting. She is an All In Presidential Signatory for the Voter Friendly Campus and a consistent advocate of our work.
- Robb Kolodziej, Biology Faculty Member, and Athletic Coach – Robb is a faculty leader on our campuses and uses his voice to nudge his colleagues toward seeing the bigger picture beyond their individual academic subjects. He is also tightly knitted into the fabric of our Athletic Department, which has historically been the home to many marginalized student-athletes who can often feel disenfranchised by the political process.

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 meets twice per semester on the 2nd Wednesday in September, October, February, and March at 12pm. Meetings will be held in Room C209 with a hybrid online meeting option.

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. Voter Engagement duties are written into the Director of Student Life's position description.

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

- Voter Friendly Campus
- All In Campus Democracy Challenge
- National Study for Learning and Voter Engagement
- Campus Vote Project
- LeadMN
- League of Women Voters
- Motivote
- NASPA
- Pizza to the Polls
- Rock The Vote
- Unify America
- Vote Early Day

III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. As stated in our mission statement, At Central Lakes College, we provide life-long learning opportunities in Liberal Arts, Technical Education, and Customized Training programs; create opportunities for cultural enrichment, civic responsibility, and community engagement; and nurture the development and success of a diverse student body through a respectful and supportive environment. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, "Values: Excellence, Innovation, Inclusion, Community"

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in their strategic plan, stating to expand learning beyond the classroom through co-curricular programming such as student life, academic competitions, athletics and the arts. Increase civic engagement opportunities and programming. We also have senior leadership committed to civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.

Recently, we have been fortunate to receive recognition for our efforts to provide opportunities for every student to vote and for making the process fun and engaging. At the conclusion of the 2022 election cycle, our student leaders received the Making Democracy Fun & Engaging Award during the annual SLSV Awards. Additionally, LeadMN, our statewide student association, has routinely highlighted our college's voter engagement work as the gold standard for state colleges and universities in Minnesota.

It's fair to say that civic learning and democratic engagement are in the DNA of who we are as an institution. We look for opportunities to incorporate voting education and opportunities to exercise our rights every semester, whether that be full-blown national elections or small-scale city or township elections.

On campus, we've seen:

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

On campus, we've experienced:

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

We can point to the above institutional commitments to support our work.

IV. Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from 2022, when our total student enrollment was 3,777.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Full Time (12+ credits)	Part Time (less than 12 credits)
100.00%	37.4%	62.6%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
98.70%	1.30%	.08%	5.00%	95.00%

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
40.60%	59.00%		

Age:

Under 18	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-55	56+
53.50%	19.50%	12.20%	4.60%	8.90%	1.20%

Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Unknown	White	Total Students of Color
0.90%	1.30%	2.80%	3.00%	9.20%	82.80%	11.20%

Economic Status:

First Generation	Pell Eligible
46.00%	19.00%

Our institution has also utilized the following data-gathering tools:

- Community College Survey of Student Engagement

They help to inform our institution's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts by having our students complete the CCSSE survey each academic year, and those responses are analyzed to give our Democratic Engagement Committee relevant information on our student population. Our committee pays particular attention to the data involving student-faculty interactions. Our interest is related to the knowledge that the more contact students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist toward achieving their educational goals. Through such interactions, faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning. As a result, faculty play a crucial role in our efforts to motivate and move our students toward becoming lifelong voters and civic leaders.

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 the following challenges internally when it comes to get-out-the-vote efforts and registering voters:

- We don't have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We don't have sustainable or consistent funding.

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

- The political views of our students do not generally align with our institution's surrounding communities.

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

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.

- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have effective 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.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders to lead our initiatives.
- We have a working relationship with our local election officials.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

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

1. Organize and implement three comprehensive voter registration events with at least 300 new student voter registrations by the October voter registration deadline.
2. Work closely with the multicultural center, diverse campus clubs, American Indian Advisory Council, and our athletic department to increase the student-of-color voting rate by 10% over our 2022 voting rate.
3. Raise a total of \$20,000 through grants and donations that can be used for nonpartisan voter engagement activities during the Fall 2024 semester.

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

1. Integrate a voter registration method into the college admissions or class registration process.
2. Work with local election officials to designate the Brainerd Campus as a polling place for election day by the 2024 elections. In process.
3. Create a workforce of diverse students who local election officials will train to work as poll workers or election judges on election day.

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):

- Voter Registration Drives
- Voter Education Initiatives

- Voter Turnout Programming

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

- Voter Registration Drives - Rock The Vote event with free food, live music, free swag, and voter registration. All free food and items are available to all attendees regardless of whether they choose to register to vote. Lead: Student Life Department
- Puppies to the Polls - Free event with voter registration and lots of puppies to snuggle. Lead: Student Senate
- Voter Education Initiatives - CLC Votes program through the Motivote platform that utilizes peer-to-peer efforts of students to encourage their fellow students to register, become informed, and vote. The program runs from September to Election Day. It uses popular and exciting prizes to entice the students to work hard to encourage others to engage in the civic process. Lead: Student Life Department
- Free Outdoor Movie - Iron Jawed Angels will be shown to provide students with a historical viewpoint of the struggle of the women's suffrage movement to gain the right to vote. Lead: Student Life Department
- Vote Early Focus - Pizza to the Polls event that provides attendees with a free lunch and ride to the local courthouse election office to cast their ballot during the 28-day early voting period. Lead: Democracy Fellows
- Voter Turnout Programming - Voter Video Contest provides students with prizes if they submit a 30-60 video uploaded to social media and encourages others to get to the polls. Lead: Student Life Department

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

- Run to the Polls 5K - We believe a 5k that starts on our campus and ends at the doors of the local courthouse will provide us with a great opportunity to get more students to register and vote early. Lead: Student Life Department
- Absentee Ballot Party – We will host a number of absentee ballot parties where students will request an absentee ballot at the first stage of the party. Stage two is hosting a second party where students complete the absentee ballot and drop it into the mail together. We believe this activity will both celebrate voting and create good voting habits. Lead: Democracy Fellows
- Create an immersive gallery experience that showcases the importance of voting through a historical lens and outlines the issues at stake. We plan to create gallery displays that will inform students on important deadlines and voting opportunities in a gallery space that will be accessible to students the entire semester. Lead: Student Life Department, Graphic Design Program, and Art Department.

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

- Providing students with timely reminders of upcoming voting opportunities for all local, state, and national elections. Lead: Student Senate & Presidents Office.

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

- Increase our classroom visits with voter engagement student interns. These interns will be trained to work with faculty to provide quick tutorials on registering to vote, requesting absentee ballots, in-person early voting, and election day polling places. Lead: Democracy Fellows

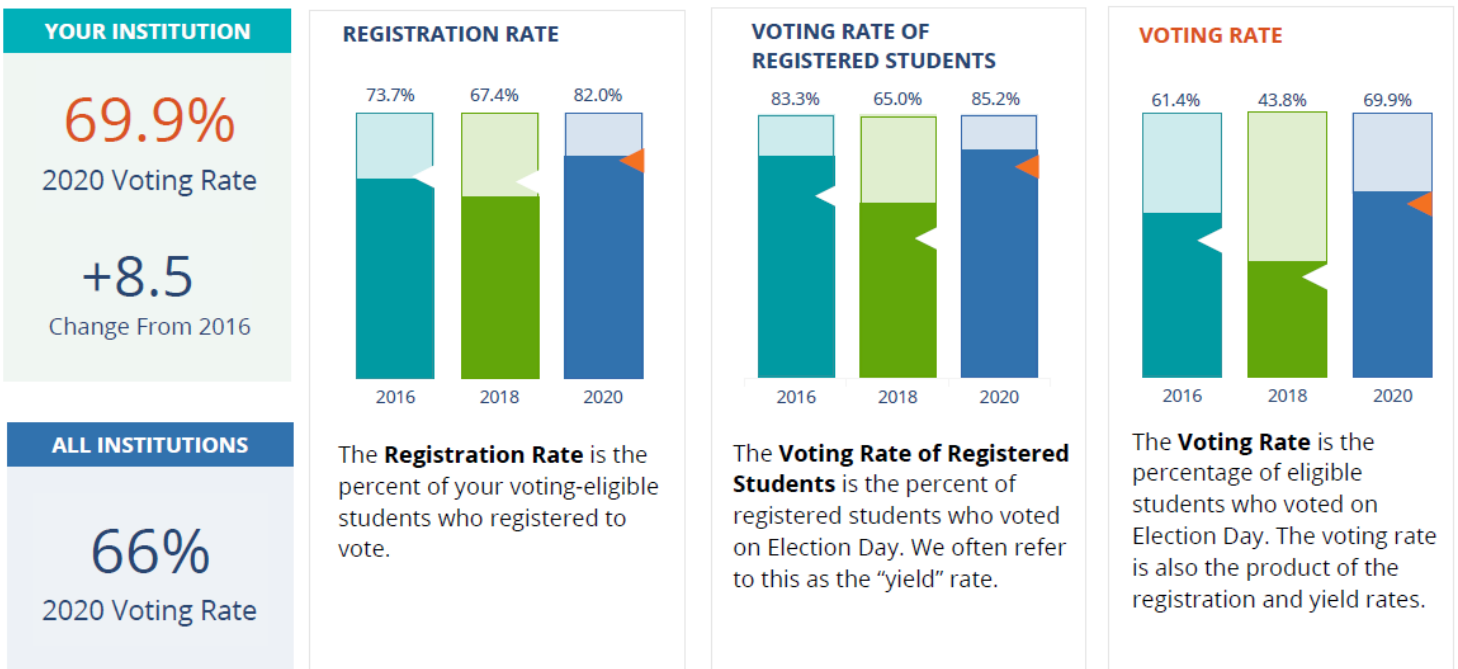
These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **long term**:

- Integrate voter registration into a college system or practice such as class registration. Lead: Dean of Enrollment Management & VP of Student Affairs

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 2020. **Currently, we are still waiting on our NSLVE data for the 2022 election cycle.** In 2020 our registration rate was 82. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

Voting, Registration and Yield Rates



In 2020, our voting rate was 69.9 and our voting rate among registered students was 85.2. During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

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

- 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.

- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

While we have American Indian students enrolled, the report indicated that they had no record of voting. We will need to do a better job of making sure this population has the tools needed to cast their vote. Also, early voting or not in-person voting methods rose substantially in 2020. We will need to continue to ramp up our efforts to make sure that our students have the opportunity to vote early.

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
- Disseminate to Student Senate
- Share with faculty union leadership

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

- Post on the campus website
- Share with voter engagement partners
- Share with our local election officials as we continue our work towards an on-campus polling location.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with the 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
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly

Data reporting and management:

- We will work with Joel Martin in the Office of Institutional Research to ensure that all data is accurate and current. Additionally, we will fully participate in the reporting requirements laid out by Voter Friendly Campus, The All In Challenge, and the Campus Vote Project to ensure we meet all deadlines for our end-of-the-year reports.

IX. Conclusion

Our coalition takes a year-round approach to our civic engagement work. We provide students with information on local elections, school referendums, special elections, ballot questions, and opportunities to caucus with their chosen party. Additionally, our student leaders hold voter registration drives each year to ensure we keep this vital activity at the forefront.

Our main focus for 2024 is working with our election officials to choose Central Lakes College as a polling place. While we realize that with limited on-campus housing, not all of our students live in the voting precinct, we are confident that many more students will benefit from the accessibility that comes with an on-campus polling place, and it will also be a great reminder and resource for students that need to go elsewhere to vote.

At Central Lakes College, we are committed to being recognized as a civic engagement leader in the State of Minnesota and amongst community colleges nationwide.