



# **2018**

## **Voter Engagement Plan**

### **East Tennessee State University**





In 2016, East Tennessee State University entered the Inaugural SoCon Votes Competition. As a part of the competition, ETSU's faculty, staff, and students committed themselves to making voter engagement a priority throughout the 2016 election year by hosting a variety of events and initiatives to bring voter education, advocacy, and registration to the forefront of campus involvement. From this initiative ETSU Votes was created and the university community welcomed a new commitment to voter engagement as the overall winner of the SoCon Votes Competition.

The following plan serves to offer a strategic overview of the structure of the ETSU Votes Planning Team, an evaluation of current and past voter engagement efforts, and an outline of future projects and initiatives for the 2018-19 academic year. In addition, the Voter Engagement Plan offers an analysis of key take-aways from ETSU's most recent report from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement as well as a summary of long-term goals and possible areas of improvement beyond the 2018-19 academic year.

## Leadership and Partners

Leading up to the 2016 Presidential Elections, a temporary coalition identified itself as the ETSU Votes Planning Team. The ETSU Votes planning team consisted of a diverse group of campus stakeholders and included involvement from students, faculty, and staff. The planning team worked together to develop a clear set of goals, create a calendar of events, train voter registration workers, and create excellent content to improve voter education and engagement.

The planning team also involved other stakeholder groups from within the campus community including the Department of Women's Studies, the Communications Debate team, faculty and graduate students from varied academic departments. The Multicultural Center, the Sherrod Library, and the Reese Museum also collaborated with the ETSU Votes Planning Team to develop and sponsor events related to the team's civic engagement goals.

Following the success of the team during the 2016 Election Cycle, the ETSU Votes Planning Team transitioned to a permanent committee housed within the Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement under the university's Division of Student Affairs. Focused on improving civic education and engagement within the university, the new committee continues to develop programming to encourage students to become an active part of a knowledgeable electorate, improve democratic engagement, and offers opportunities to participate in civic engagement activities.

Seeing as the leadership team was comprised of full-time students, faculty, and staff, the Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement made the decision to partner with the Campus Vote Project to secure two Democracy Fellows at East Tennessee State University. In the Spring of 2018, two ETSU students were selected to serve as Democracy Fellows for the Spring and Fall Semesters, where they have and will continue to work on the day-to-day planning, organizing, and implementation of various voter engagement efforts in partnership with the larger ETSU Votes Planning Team.

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

Overall, ETSU was very encouraged by the results of the 2016 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE data). The overall voting rate of ETSU students increased by 9.5% from 2012 to 2016. One of the primary tasks of the ETSU Votes Planning Team for 2017-18 was to review NSLVE data and begin to plan activities to increase student-voter participation in the 2018 mid-term elections. In September 2017, the ETSU Votes Planning Team met to discuss results of NSLVE data. Upon review of the information, the team noted the following strengths of the 2016-17 ETSU Votes campaign:

- Increase of 13% in the voting rate of registered students – 64.6% of registered ETSU students voted in 2016
- Increase in early voting by 9.5%. The ETSU votes team had noted early in the Fall 2016 planning process that early voting was a strength on the campus and we made efforts to capitalize on that strength
- Increased voting rate in every age category with the largest increase in the 18-21 age group; 31.1% in 2012 to 43.1% in 2016
- By education level, the voting rate was the highest among graduate students (52.7%)
- Registration was up across gender as well and the highest increase was among female students.

The team also identified several areas where we can improve in our voter registration and engagement efforts:

- By education level, the voting rate was the lowest among first-year students.
- Only 35.8% of first-year students voted in 2016. In addition, the reviewed NSSE items related to civic engagement and found room for improvement among first year students as well. 54% of students indicated “quite a bit” or “very much” when asked about how much the university experience contributed to their becoming informed, active citizens. First-year students are in some ways a captive audience for voter-education and voter registration initiatives. ETSU has a variety of efforts devoted exclusively to engagement and success of first- students. These efforts include first-year courses, orientation, preview, and an emerging leaders’ academy. We have opportunities to use these efforts to improve first year student voting rates.
- We are not currently using any of the information available regarding field of study because of confusion on campus about how areas of study map to ETSU majors and programs.
- The 2012 ETSU NSLVE data did not include information about race/ethnicity therefore the 2016 data cannot be compared to earlier results. However, the 2016 voting rates among students of color are significantly lower than the voting rates of white students.
- While females vote at higher rates than males nationally, at ETSU the voting rate among males is 7 points lower than that of females.

## Short-Term Goals and Strategies

2018-2019 AY

Based upon the review of NSLVE data for the 2012 and 2016 Elections, the ETSU Votes Team developed the following goals for the 2018-2019 Academic Year. Each goal is accompanied by at least one strategy for achieving these goals, and further strategies will be developed during the summer of 2018 to be added to the plan presented below.

Goals	Strategies
<b>Goal 1</b> Meet or exceed the voting rate for all institutions in ETSU's Carnegie Classification	Create voter registration ambassadors at distant campuses to aid students in identifying polling locations and absentee ballot options  Create transportation strategies for getting students to the polls for early voting and on election day  Continue to capitalize on ETSU's early voting strength by creating social media posts and PSAs for creating a "voting plan"
<b>Goal 2</b> Improve ETSU's registration rate to 75%	Create voter registration ambassadors at distant campuses to engage a broader audience of ETSU students  Partner with ETSU Athletics and the Office of University Relations to develop and implement a community-wide paid marketing campaign to encourage voter participation
<b>Goal 3</b> Increase voting rate among first-year students to 40%	Train staff in the Office of New Student and Family Programs to assist

	<p>students in registering to vote at New Student Preview</p> <p>Incorporating voter registration and education opportunities into all new-student and transfer-student orientations</p> <p>Incorporate voter education and civic literacy into ETSU 1020 courses (first-year students learning course)</p>
<p><b>Goal 4 Offer 6 voter education events and activities on campus in the fall of 2018</b></p>	<p>Host a Constitution Day debate series to promote civil discourse and constitutional literacy</p> <p>Partner with the university administration, community organizations, and government officials to host a Naturalization Ceremony on ETSU's main campus</p> <p>Partner with political candidates and local political parties to host debates and encourage students to research and learn about candidates for public office</p> <p>Host student-led parliamentary-style issue debates around current controversial issues (immigration, freedom of the press, gun control)</p> <p>Create an infographic for candidates' views on important issues including candidates at a variety of levels of government (mayoral, gubernatorial, senatorial, etc.)</p> <p>Develop a faculty learning-community to encourage faculty to incorporate policy issues and democratic engagement into their teaching</p>

## Long-Term Goals and Strategies

In addition to goals for 2018-2019 Academic Year, the ETSU Votes Planning Team discussed several long-term goals and strategies for exploration at East Tennessee State University.

Improving the voting rates of students of color
Making better use of field of study information from the NSLVE report
Establishing an early voting polling location on, or around, campus
Securing funding for a full-time staff person devoted to voter education and voter engagement at East Tennessee State University
Advocate for inclusion of voter education and engagement in the university's overall strategic planning process

## Implementation and Planning Strategy

Because the ETSU Votes planning team takes on a great deal of work during even years (election years), the team has adopted a two-year implementation and planning cycle for its efforts. In other words, the team decided to use odd years to review progress toward our civic engagement goals, examine NSLVE data, learn from other NSLVE schools, discuss civic engagement initiatives with campus and community partners, and plan activities to be implemented during election years. During the 2017- 18 academic year, the ETSU Votes Planning Team were engaged in the following activities:

- Reviewed most recent NSLVE data along with conversations with various campus stakeholders including Academic Council members, Student Affairs leaders and staff, and students
- Developed a list of strengths and opportunities based upon the results of the NSLVE data
- Entered into discussions with the Washington County Election Committee to establish a more intentional partnership between ETSU and the Community.



- Collaborated in organizing and hosting the Tennessee Campus Civic Summit for faculty, staff, and students committed to voter engagement work at their various institutions

In addition to the planning activity, the ETSU Votes Team and the Democracy Fellows implemented the following activities; which are ongoing efforts of the team and the Office of Leadership and Civic Engagement:

- Incorporated voter registration into a variety of campus events and activities throughout the academic year. These included Farmers Markets, New Student Orientations, the ETSU LGBT Pride Festival, the annual ETSUCon event, and various political and special interest events on campus
- Marketed Tennessee's new Online Voter Registration program in all marketing materials and outreach

Planning and Reporting Calendar	
AY 2017-18 & AY 2018-19	
Date	Activity
September – October 2017	Review NSLVE data
November – December 2017	Engage in conversations with campus-wide stakeholders
January-February 2018	Engage in conversations with civic education partners and the Washington County Election Commission
March-May 2018	Establish goals and strategies for accomplishing those goals based upon data analysis and stakeholder conversations
June-August 2018	Plan ETSU Votes activities
August – November 2018	Implement ETSU Votes activities
February-March 2019	Reflect upon activities from the fall.
April – June 2019	Review and analyze NSLVE data Develop a report on goal attainment
July-September 2019	Present report to campus constituencies