



## **2024 Democratic Engagement Plan**

### **Executive Summary**

The 2024 Democratic Engagement Plan for Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), located at 777 Grandview Dr, Kalispell, MT, 59901, outlines a variety of programs and activities designed to foster civic learning, civic engagement, and democratic participation among all students. These initiatives encourage students to learn, reflect, and act, making a positive impact on their communities and developing habits of informed participation in the democratic process.

Created by Wendy Jeschke, Student Engagement Program Director, this plan aligns with FVCC's mission of promoting excellence in lifelong learning, focusing on student success and community needs. The mission of the Student Engagement Office is to provide a campus environment with enriching events, activities, organizations, resources, and service opportunities, creating a more fulfilling college experience and a strong sense of community. This includes involving students in democratic engagement activities.

Institutionalizing civic engagement helps young people cultivate lifelong habits of active involvement in our democracy. With the support of administrators, faculty, community organizations, and students, FVCC aims to create a culture of year-round civic engagement, fostering a more representative democracy where student voices are valued at every level of government.

The FVCC Democratic Engagement Plan will cover a two-year period, 2024-2026, and will include both short-term and long-term goals. The plan will be reviewed annually and updated every two years by key stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Our goals for the 2024 cycle will focus on incorporating a more institutional approach and getting more students involved in this process to create a culture of democracy. We will emphasize faculty engagement and creating inclusive spaces for students to voice their concerns and opinions. This plan will be adhered to during all local, statewide, and federal elections to increase student representation in government.

### **Leadership**

The Office of Student Engagement is pleased to collaborate with FVCC colleagues and community partners to coordinate activities and events that engage our students in the democratic process. The Student Engagement Director is responsible for promoting democratic engagement on campus and recruiting and leading a democratic engagement advisory team.

The advisory team will consist of: FVCC staff from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and the President's Office, FVCC faculty members, a non-profit community partner and a Flathead County Election Office representative. To ensure representation for underserved communities FVCC's Trio Director, Running Start Director and Gender and Sexualities Alliance Advisor will also be part of the advisory team. When we experience personnel changes, we will recruit new employees and students to fill these rolls and encourage anyone interested in serving to join the committee. At each meeting of the Advisory team we will discuss any current or upcoming open seats and agree upon a timeline and tactic for filling those roles.

The plan will be developed, implemented, and promoted by the Office of Student Engagement, with contributions from others campus representatives familiar with subject matter expertise. The members for the 2024 election year are:

- Wendy Jeschke - Student Engagement Program Director, Chair
- Kelly Murphy - Dean of Students, Student Affairs
- Brenda Hanson - Dean of Compliance, Academic Affairs
- Suzanne DeCamp - Senior Executive to the President
- Marty Mullins - Adjunct Faculty, American Government
- Isaiah Wilson - Student Government President
- Vacant - Student Government Legislative Senator
- Ian Fleming - Forward Montana
- Adrienne Chmelik - Flathead County Election Office

The role of the advisory team is to review past practices and provide input on the FVCC Democratic Engagement Plan. After submitting this plan, the group will continue to review and explore other initiatives to help students develop habits of active and informed civic engagement.

## **Commitment**

Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) is dedicated to inspiring students to be informed and active citizens. Civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE) are central to FVCC's institutional culture. Since the early 1990s, FVCC has supported community engagement programming, including service learning, volunteerism, and civic engagement, aligning with its mission to promote excellence in lifelong learning focused on student success and community needs.

FVCC's 2020-2027 strategic plan outlines how the college fulfills its mission by setting priorities, focusing resources, and ensuring alignment with common goals. The Democratic Engagement Advisory Committee's objectives closely align with the strategic plan's goals 3 and 4:

- **Goal 3: Foster an Environment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
  - Objective 3a: Create an inclusive, welcoming environment for students, faculty, staff, and the community.
  - Objective 3b: Increase opportunities to develop global citizenship and appreciation of diversity.

- **Goal 4: Enhance Institutional Vitality**
  - Objective 4a: Foster a sense of community through engagement, dialogue, transparency, and data-informed decision-making.
  - Objective 4b: Increase data literacy campus wide.
  - Objective 4c: Use assessment data to inform decisions, resource allocation, and improvement initiatives.
  - Objective 4d: Improve campus-wide communication.

FVCC President Jane Karas has signed the Higher Education President's Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. Bryan Brophy-Bearman, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, is committed to emphasizing the importance of democratic engagement across campus and mobilizing efforts to encourage full-campus participation. Under his direction, our Data Governance Committee reviews and analyzes voter engagement data received from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

As a result of our efforts and commitment, FVCC students will have access to resources for voter registration, education, and mobilization. Students will be equipped to make informed decisions based on non-partisan information from civic engagement organizations and develop the skills to foster a healthy environment of civic engagement on campus and in their communities.

## Landscape

Flathead Valley Community College is an esteemed institution in Northwest Montana. Established in 1967, FVCC has an enrollment of approximately 2,000 full-time students. Our total enrollment including non-credit students is closer to 3,000. The following table provides a brief overview of FVCC's demographic landscape, based on data from the 2022 National Center for Educational Statistics:

Category	Details	Percentage/Number
Total Full-Time Enrollment		2,129
Gender	Female	56%
Gender	Male	44%
Age	Under 24 years of age	69%
Racial/Ethnic Background	White	79%
Racial/Ethnic Background	Students of Color	8%
Racial/Ethnic Background	Two or More Races	3%
Racial/Ethnic Background	Unknown	10%

## Goals

1. **Increase Student Voter Registration:** Increase the student voter registration rate from 66% to 75% by the next midterm election, ensuring outreach and support are provided equitably across all student demographics.
2. **Enhance Voting Participation:** Raise the voting rate of registered students from 55.2% to 67% by the next national election through inclusive engagement and equitable access to voting resources.
3. **Improve Overall Voting Rate:** Boost the overall student voting rate from 36.4% to 50% by the next general election, ensuring all students are informed and supported in the voting process.
4. **Strengthen Civic Engagement Culture:** Establish at least two regular events or recognition programs that celebrate student participation in elections, fostering a strong voting culture on campus by the end of the 2024-2026 plan period.

## NSLVE

The data presented offers a snapshot of voting, registration, and yield rates at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) for the year 2022. This is the first cycle in which FVCC participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), so there is no previous institutional data for comparison. The 2022 voting rate at FVCC was 36.4%, which, while a decrease of 13.8 percentage points from 2018's voting rate nationally, is still higher than the 30.6% national average for all institutions.

The registration rate in 2022 was 66.0%, down from the 76.5% rate in 2020 and 75.0% in 2018 nationally. Similarly, the voting rate of registered students (yield rate) dropped to 55.2%, a significant decline from 85.7% in 2020. Despite these declines, the 2022 rates are still an improvement over previous years, such as 2014.

Since receiving the NSLVE data in July 2024, the Democratic Engagement Advisory Team has not yet had time to fully analyze the results to fine-tune the democratic engagement plan. Moving forward, this data will be crucial for making future adjustments or implementing new strategies. FVCC, like many community colleges, faces unique challenges in engaging its diverse and commuter student body. These challenges make it difficult to reach all students through traditional tabling and large campus events. Nonetheless, the advisory team remains committed to reviewing and adapting strategies to effectively engage all students despite these communication barriers.

## Strategy

Based on the data and challenges mentioned, FVCC's short-term and long-term strategies are as follows:

**Short-Term Strategies:** FVCC can enhance student engagement by promoting online voter registration through the college's website, social media, and email campaigns. Automated reminders about registration deadlines and Election Day via text and email will help keep

students informed. The institution will host one virtual information session or town hall focusing on the voting process and key election issues. These efforts will ensure that specific groups of students who are less likely to register or vote receive personalized messages that encourage their participation.

Expanding accessibility and convenience for students is another crucial short-term strategy. FVCC is researching the possibility of hosting a drop box on campus to make voting more accessible for the student body. Training student leaders to engage in peer-to-peer outreach will further enhance efforts, as peer influence can significantly boost participation. To address the challenges of engaging a commuter student population, FVCC can set up pop-up tables or stations in high-traffic areas where commuter students frequently pass through. These tables can provide information and assistance with voter registration and voting. Additionally, by reaching out and collaborating with faculty, the institution can integrate voter registration and engagement activities into classroom discussions, making civic engagement a part of the academic experience.

**Long-Term Strategies:** Over the long term, FVCC can institutionalize digital campaigns as a permanent part of its student engagement strategy, ensuring that online voter registration and digital reminders are consistently used in every election cycle. Ongoing voter education efforts should be developed into a series of recurring events and resources that keep students informed about the voting process and key issues throughout the year, not just during election seasons. These events could include Move-in Day, New Student Orientation, and Club Day.

To build a stronger voting culture at FVCC, the institution can establish regular events or recognition programs that celebrate student participation in elections, fostering a sense of pride and community around civic engagement. Securing institutional support for these initiatives is essential, and the creation of a Community Involvement position, along with securing long-term funding for voter engagement efforts, will ensure that FVCC continues to prioritize and support student voting in the years to come.

## **Timeline**

A chronology of tasks that make up this plan is outlined below. These activities will be hosted by the Office of Student Engagement and adjusted based on volunteer capacity. Activities should be inclusive and engage all demographics on campus. Student leaders from diverse backgrounds will be encouraged to participate in planning and executing these events.

### **All Year:**

- Voter registration forms and information available year-round in the Student Lounge (LRC 102). Supplies maintained at registration boxes and forms mailed weekly.

### **Each Semester:**

- Host at least one civic engagement event (guest speakers, panels, fairs, volunteer activities, etc.).

**Week Before Classes:**

- Email teaching staff to encourage class presentations on voter registration and civic engagement.
- Email all employees to include voter registration information in existing programming.

**Second Week of Classes:**

- Classroom presentations on community involvement and democratic engagement activities.

**Constitution Day Celebration:**

- Celebrate the U.S. Constitution with various activities, including voter registration materials.

**Week Before Voter Registration Day (VRD):**

- Information on voter registration opportunities shared in the weekly student newsletter.

**Voter Registration Day (VRD):**

- Observed on the third Tuesday in September with activities including tabling and classroom presentations.

**One Month Before Each Election:**

- Send information in the weekly student newsletter reminding students of the upcoming election and providing guidance on registration, voting locations, and candidate information.

**One Week Before Election Day:**

- Distribute information and resources via weekly newsletters to students, faculty, and staff.

**On Election Day:**

- Send email reminders to students, faculty, and staff. Provide shuttle service to polling locations if possible.

**Day After Election:**

- Recognize Election Day Heroes for their dedication through various marketing channels.

**Last Week of Semester:**

- Remind students to update voter registration if moving, especially before June elections.

## **Reporting & Evaluating**

The Democratic Engagement Plan will be shared with administrators and departments/offices that promote civic engagement. After approval by senior administration, efforts will be shared with FVCC employees, uploaded to the Civic Engagement and Voter Registration webpage, and shared externally with the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge, Campus Vote Project, and other organizations.

Evaluation plays a crucial role in enhancing student participation in democratic engagement and civic education. Stakeholders will use evaluation to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, student needs and preferences, and make informed adjustments to goals and strategies.

Surveys will be conducted via FVCC Connect, FVCC's new student engagement platform, and in-person at tabling events post-election to gather feedback on programming. Collected data will be analyzed and shared with the relevant stakeholders.