

HamVotes 2024 Action Plan



Hamilton College's ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan 2024

I. Executive Summary

Hamilton College's 2024 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action plan was developed and written by Hamilton College's 2023-2024 HamVotes Student Coordinators: Anna Duarte, Veronica Smolinski, and Gabby Johnson. HamVotes is a student run and institution supported non-partisan organization concerned with student voter participation, voter registration, and nonpartisan civic involvement. This action plan considers data from Hamilton College's 2020 NSLVE report, feedback from the 2020 ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan, and a new understanding of civic engagement on Hamilton's campus.

The purpose of Hamilton's 2024 Action Plan was to:

- ✓ Solidify HamVotes' commitment to civic engagement on campus.
- ✓ Reflect on the successes and shortcomings of HamVotes' labor from 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023.
- ✓ Provide framework for programming and overarching goals for the 2024 election year.

To meet these goals, HamVotes worked mainly with the Arthur Levitt Center of Public Affairs, or the Levitt Center, and the Office of the President, in addition to other clubs, organizations, and associations on campus. These connections have been essential in not only increasing HamVotes' presence on Hamilton's campus, but also in understanding the needs and concerns of wider campus more generally. In addition, HamVotes is now working with an official network of faculty and staff who support its mission.

Ultimately, with the new structure of HamVotes solidified in the 2022-2023 school year, the organization has a clearer understanding of how it fits into wider college-wide conversations regarding civic learning, voting, and political engagement. HamVotes hopes to continue the trend of increasing the Hamilton voting rate, which increased from 50.7% in 2016 to 66.8% in 2020. Specifically, HamVotes hopes to increase the voting rate to 68% in the 2024 election year. The organization will do this by increasing presence on campus, connecting with different campus

organizations, and maintaining a streamlined mode of communication between campus and HamVotes leaders.

II. Leadership

In the 2022-2023 school year, HamVotes officially restructured from a staff-led organization with student volunteers to one fully operated by students. This restructuring occurred organically, as students showed interest in leading the organization and staff looked forward to giving students more hands-on opportunities within the organization.

The current organization of HamVotes includes three student coordinators, who meet weekly and communicate regularly over email. Their labor mostly consists of the “background” work for HamVotes: reserving and preparing spaces for programming, connecting with faculty on campus, and filling out all necessary paperwork for the organization. Additionally, the coordinators frequently assist in more public-facing events and serve as the main point of contact for any individuals that have questions about HamVotes. The 2024-2025 school year coordinators are:

Gabby Johnson, class of 2025

Anna Durate, class of 2026

Veronica Smolinski, class of 2025

To assist the coordinators in programming, campus engagement, and any other planning, student captains serve as the bridge between HamVotes and campus. Captains are responsible for maintaining the presence of HamVotes on campus by hosting weekly “office-hours” for students, working voter registration and information tables, and upkeeping the HamVotes socials. In the 2023 year, the captains incorporated a research component into their roles by researching information of specific interest to Hamilton students - such as local elections, campus concerns, and common ballot measures - to be then incorporated into infographics for students and helpful reports for the coordinators. The 2024-2025 school year captains are:

Aeden Burke, class of 2026

Ananna Das, class of 2028

Jack Carron, class of 2026

Luke Davis, class of 2028

Although student-led, HamVotes is largely supported by the Levitt Center and President of the College. The partnership between the Levitt Center and HamVotes transformed the organization from a club with more institutional restrictions to an organization with more institutional support and a more defined purpose. The College now supports HamVotes with an operating budget of approximately \$13,000, supporting the programming and wages of the coordinators and captains, cementing the College's commitment to HamVotes. The following individuals have been incredibly helpful and supportive of HamVotes' work and mission:

Christina (Chris) Willemssen, *Administrative Director of the Levitt Center*

Chris serves as the main contact between HamVotes, the Levitt Center, and the President's office. She meets regularly with the organization to discuss progress, programming ideas, and help provide funds for any events. She has been critical in pushing for the restructuring of HamVotes and in maintaining the presence of the organization.

Rachael Clark, *Programming Coordinator for the Levitt Center and Community Outreach (COOP)*

Rachael helps with processing HamVote's funds and providing resources for the organization to purchase any necessary materials.

Janelle Perry, *ALEX Program Coordinator*

Janelle also helps with processing HamVote's funds and providing resources for the organization to purchase any necessary materials.

Zack Schuman, *Assistant Director of Community-Based Learning for the Levitt Center*

Zack helps maintain relationships between the local community and election officials and HamVotes. Zack is a key member in supporting the role of HamVotes beyond Hamilton's campus in regions like Clinton and Utica.

Frank Anechiarico, *Faculty Director of the Levitt Center and Maynard-Knox Professor of Government and Law*

Frank helps sustain relationships between the Levitt Center, HamVotes, and campus faculty.

Steven Tepper, *President of Hamilton College*

President Tepper has been supportive of HamVotes' efforts and meets with HamVotes coordinators to receive updates on the organization's progress.

Gillian (Gill) King, *Chief of Staff and secretary to the Board of Trustees*

Gill has been instrumental in maintaining the relationship with the College Presidents, past and present, and assisting HamVotes Coordinators through Chris, especially concerning budgetary questions and concerns.

Tanith Sherman, *Associate Director of Housing and Conduct*

Tanith has been very supportive of promoting HamVotes in dorms and other housing buildings. We have utilized her help to hang posters and door tags up in living spaces to promote our mission.

Kaity Stewart, *Assistant Director of Common Ground*

HamVotes is expecting to partner with Common Ground to provide more spaces for nonpartisan political conversations.

Members of the HamVotes Network working group provide support and feedback for the Coordinators through monthly meetings. Members include **Chris Willemsen** (Levitt Center), **Joel Winkelman** (Assistant Professor of Government), **Carly Martin** (ALEX Advisor), and **Julie Gederos** (Advancement Office).

We acknowledge as well our campus partners, who support us in funding, event planning efforts, and assisting us in spreading the word about voting. Each of these groups has contributed to HamVotes' work, both this year and, hopefully, in the future:

Student Activities Office

HamVotes has collaborated with the student activities office to make programming more accessible for students, as well as receive extra funding for any events.

Student Government Alliance

SGA represents the student population with an elected body of twenty members who ensure that student issues are heard and addressed. The Hamilton Student Government Alliance and HamVotes have teamed up to create successful events. The SGA has also been supportive in promoting HamVotes social media and materials.

Trivia Night

Hamilton Trivia Nights are a Hamilton tradition and happen every Tuesday in the on-campus pub. Every semester HamVotes and Trivia collaborate to curate trivia questions about voting, civic rights, and politics more generally.

Jitney Services

The Jitney is a fully student-operated shuttle service. The Jitney and HamVotes coordinate every election season to provide a shuttle service to and from the local polling station for those who are registered to vote in the area.

Athletes of Color Initiative

The Athletes of Color Initiative is an organization that focuses on uplifting the voices and stories of athletes of color on Hamilton's campus. The ACI and HamVotes have worked together to create an inspirational and informational social media campaign to highlight why students, especially students of color, should vote in elections. HamVotes has also supported the ACI by providing them with stamps to share with athletes who require postage for their absentee ballots.

Center for Intersectional Feminism

The Center for Intersectional Feminism, CIF, is an organization that supports and welcomes students of all identities regardless of race, class, gender identity, ethnicity, ability, religion or sexual orientation. HamVotes and CIF have collaborated on programming that educates students on 2024 ballot measures, providing non-partisan information and facilitating open communication regarding the measures.

Common Ground

Common Ground is Hamilton's widely acclaimed multi-format program that helps prepare students for lives of active citizenship. Common Ground brings highly respected thought leaders

to the Hamilton campus to participate in small classroom dialogues and large event discussions. Common Ground student ambassadors coordinated with HamVotes to co-host a “Democracy Dinner” on election day to celebrate democracy and the American voting process. Common Ground ambassadors have also invited HamVotes to host voter registration tables and absentee ballot tables at multiple events, increasing outreach beyond the Hamilton campus (as Common Ground events are open to the general public).

Career Center

The Hamilton Career Center is committed to creating a transformative experience for every student, empowering them with best-in-class career resources, individualized support, and a dynamic professional network. The Career Center and HamVotes collaborated to co sponsor an event surrounding careers in voter accessibility, hosting an alum who works in the field and Dustin Czarny, the Elections Commissioner (D) of Onondaga County Board of Elections.

Finally, HamVotes has been committed to working in tandem with the local community and local voter registration office. HamVotes has been in communication with the Oneida County Board of Elections office, working closely with their requests and requirements – especially when re-registering or registering students to vote at the campus address. Communication between the two organizations is streamlined to ensure that registrations are accurate and processed.

HamVotes has utilized voter registration forms, civic engagement packets, and envelopes distributed by Oneida County Officials. Additionally, HamVotes has connections with the Utica charter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, working to ensure that students of marginalized identities are represented within the larger voting process. HamVotes has also received information and support from the local charter of the League of Women Voters, helping ensure voting on campus is equitable and providing leadership advice to both captains and coordinators.

III. Commitment

As it says in its mission statement, “Hamilton College prepares students for lives of meaning, purpose, and active citizenship.” HamVotes is committed to making voting accessible and equitable to every voter on campus. As an organization, HamVotes wants students to

understand that voting is not something that is explicitly for those interested in politics. Voting is for everybody, as one single vote can make momentous change that has a domino effect on policy and livelihood. HamVotes is also especially committed to being nonpartisan. Hamilton is unique in that despite being labeled a liberal arts school, it has students of varying political identities. HamVotes aspires to uplift every political identity by giving everybody an opportunity to vote and a purpose for why they're voting.

Hamilton's commitment to voting and democratic citizenship goes beyond support of HamVotes. In the fall of 2024, the Dean of Faculty led an effort to highlight and support election programming across the liberal arts through the following initiative: [*Crossroads: Elections and Practicing the Liberal Arts*](#), "an array of integrated programming around the 2024 elections that spans the full range of disciplines, departments, and spaces on the Hamilton campus." It culminated/ in an election and the arts festival on November 1, 2024.

IV. Landscape

Through Hamilton's college motto, "Know Thyself," the college actively encourages and "emphasizes intellectual growth, flexibility, and collaboration in a residential academic community." Our motto encourages students to take an introspective approach to discovering one's values and interests. With a student's values comes their stance on important political and social issues, in which HamVotes aids in discovering. We believe that participation in democracy leads to a more knowledgeable and empowered citizenry that can be extended beyond the campus and into neighboring communities. Hamilton uses the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to measure election participation amongst the students.

According to NSLVE, in the 2020 presidential election, Hamilton had a voting rate of 66.8%, a 16.1% increase from our voting rate in the 2016 presidential election, and .8% more than the voting rate across all institutions. Looking at our registration rates for both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, we find a 4.5% increase from an 83.3% registration rate in 2016 and an 87.8% registration rate in 2020. Lastly, looking at the voting rate of registered students, we find a 15.2% increase from a 60.9% voting rate in 2016 to a 76.1% voting rate in 2020.

To break down this information even further, there is relevant demographic information to better inform the strategy of HamVotes. In 2020, Hamilton's demographic makeup looked like

the following: 103 “international students” (noncitizens), 194 Hispanic/Latino students, 78 Black or African American/ non-Hispanic students, 1,242 White/non-Hispanic students, 0 American Indian or Alaska Native/ non-Hispanic, 203 Asian, non-Hispanic, 0 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander / non Hispanic students, 100 Two or more races / non-Hispanic students, and 55 Race and/or ethnicity unknown.

NSLVE data provides insight into voter turnout amongst specific race/ethnicity groups on Hamilton's Campus. The following voting rates for each enrolled ethnicity are the following: 33% Asian, 58% Black, 59% Hispanic, 57% 2 or more races, 68% White, and 67% race unknown.

Given these statistics, we have tried to embed more programming that targets students of color and marginalized identities, to ensure that voting across Hamilton’s campus is equitable. We have partnered with organizations like the Athletes of Color Initiative (ACI), Center for Intersectional Feminism (CIF), Hamilton Opportunity Programs, and Student Government Association who all exist to maintain the equity of all students on campus. Targeted programming with such organizations has included hosting voter registration and information tables in spaces where these organizations operate – such as the Hamilton Opportunity Programs office – and providing the HamVotes Instagram feed as a collaborative space and outlet for the Athletes of Color Initiative. The organization has listened to the needs and wants of the ACI to understand how to better serve underrepresented identities on campus – much of this support includes empowering people's voices and ensuring people are registered and know where / how to vote. HamVotes also co-hosted an event with CIF to talk about important policies on each state’s ballot so that students were aware of what ballot measures could possibly be passed. This event was well received and attended by the campus community, who wanted to get more insight into how their vote could impact their state beyond choosing candidates. These events have allowed the HamVotes team to listen to the concerns and demands of students of marginalized identities, and provide guidance for the team on how to meet students' demands and uplift their vote on campus. For future years, HamVotes intends to work more closely with the Asian community on campus; HamVotes is looking to reach out to the newly formed Asian Student Union and increase their presence at their events, as well as listen to the specific concerns of the community.

Additionally, despite the increases in voter registration and voting rates, there are still some challenges that the Hamilton community faces. In spite of efforts to bring a polling place to campus to make voting more accessible for Hamilton students, we have run into problems with finding a space on campus legally adequate for a polling site. Because it is not possible to have a polling site on campus, many students prefer to vote using absentee ballots / mail ballots for convenience. This requires our organization to strategically plan events that accommodate every state's registration deadline, absentee request deadline, and absentee return deadline. We have taken this fact into consideration and restructured our efforts as an organization to focus around mail in / absentee voter education.

Resources

HamVotes has a commitment to all Hamilton students to provide accurate and accessible voting information in a timely fashion. To achieve this goal captains and coordinators are both active on the HamVotes socials. Captains have created, researched, and posted curated resources to Instagram that are relevant to Hamilton college's geography and issues affecting the surrounding area. Specialized posts dedicated to the home states with the largest representation on campus have been created. The Instagram account is also a space for students to share any comments or concerns they have, whether it be through the public comment section or via direct messages.

HamVotes also has a hamilton.edu email account that has been utilized to send information to both students, faculty, and even wider campus. HamVotes sends updates about events, reminders about deadlines, and any other information that needs to be shared via the HamVotes email account. Students are encouraged to email any questions they have to the email and they can expect to receive a timely response.

At every HamVotes event there is a voting action card that asks voters to reflect on why, where, and how they're voting. This resource ensures that voters are not only informed about their unique process of voting, but also feel empowered and intentional with their vote.

Students that choose to vote by mail do not have to pay for postage. HamVotes has a relationship with the mail center on Hamilton's campus, fostered so that students never have to pay out of pocket. Expenses are covered by the HamVotes budget.

V. 2024-2025 Goals

1. Increase eligible student voter turnout rate 5 percentage points in the 2024 election from the 29.6% turnout rate in the 2022 election.
2. Reach out to and collaborate with 2 more organizations on campus to increase outreach.
3. Focus on reaching out to more corners of campus in a non-event context; zeroing in on various groups to personalize the experience and make the process easier.

Short Term Tactics

1. Create a “voting in Clinton” guide to help educate new Hamilton voters (both logistical info and candidate info).
2. Create a new logo by a campus artist.
3. Organize discussions on race and voting, and create objectives to assist students of color on campus throughout election season.

Long Term Tactics

1. Hold at least 6 voter registration and 3 educational events.
2. Send out email updates to students every two weeks to keep in touch with the community and to share news and information. Specifically in the fall semester, coordinators should send out information regarding absentee ballots.
3. Establish connections and close ties with community organizations (eg. Jitney services)
4. Write targeted state-by-state emails to be sent in the Fall prior to the election.
5. Integrate civic engagement initiatives in existing infrastructure. Numerous programming events annually take place on campus, such as orientation, summer programs, and Community Advisor (CA) programming, and it would be beneficial to incorporate civic engagement activities into these existing events.

VI. NSLVE

The 2022 NSLVE data came fairly late in the cycle and did not impact our planning as much as we hope it will in the future. For more analysis, see section IV.

VII. Strategy

Our strategy focused on four main areas and includes a timeline of events:

1. Rebuilding relationships with on-campus partners and enhancing support for student leaders.
2. Increasing voter turnout through increasing get-out-the-vote initiatives, focused on mail in / absentee voter education.
3. Teaching civic engagement and liberal democracy to students, with a focus on the shared governance framework as a recognized component of the institution's co-curriculum.
4. Organize discussions on race and voting, and create objectives to assist students of color on campus throughout election season.

Timeline

Fall 2024

August 27-28: Voter registration tabling and mandatory presentation on civic voting/important things to know in preparation for election year during new student orientation.

September 6: Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair

September 5: Collaboration with Hamilton Career Center to promote event about careers in voter accessibility.

September 17: National Voter Registration Day, voter registration tables and snacks at dining halls during dinner time

September 24, September 26, October 1 & October 3: Drop-in absentee events hosted by HamVotes Coordinators to provide information about how to obtain an absentee ballot and when the relevant deadlines are.

October 3: Voter Information table at a Common Ground Event related to the effectiveness of the two party system

October 7: Election button making at the Makerspace in the library

October 8: Election trivia night at the Hamilton Pub

October 9: “Why am I Voting?,” campus wide collaborative project and civic engagement tabling

October 10: Official Hamilton College Instagram club spotlight and Instagram takeover

October 11: Drop in absentee event

October 18-November 8: Coordinate with mail center to provide free stamps in the mail center for students to send absentee ballots. Coordinate with student transportation to provide transportation to and from polling sites.

October 29: Vote Early Day; free shuttle to local polling place after class hours.

October 29: “What is on my ballot?” collaborative event with Center for Intersectional Feminism for an informational event about ballot measures.

November 1: Hamilton Election Arts Festival; in collaboration with Crossroads, collaborated with other organizations to promote the festival, gave out merch and stamps for mailing ballots.

November 5: Election Day; hosted Democracy Dinner to celebrate civic engagement and voting, provided free Jitney shuttle service to and from polling site.

November 5: Co-sponsored the college’s Government departments election watch party, which included a presentation results from an (anonymous) survey about the political alignments and attitudes of students

Spring 2025

January 20: Watch party for presidential inauguration.

January 20-21: Voter registration tabling at January orientation.

January 24: Table at the Clubs & Organizations Fair.

No Set Date Yet: Event partnering with Common Ground with a registration table and discussions about election debrief and transfer of power.

VIII. Reporting

We have submitted our NSLVE data and it is available on the NESCAC Votes webpage. The report is shared with HamVotes, the Levitt Center, the President's Office, Institutional Research, and others who express interest. It is also publicly available online on the [HamVotes/Levitt Center](#) page on the Hamilton website.

IX. Evaluation

We have submitted our NSLVE data, which is available on the NESCAC Votes webpage, and will continue to do so to understand the impact of our efforts. Additionally, we will begin to measure the number of attendees at the events we host in order to better understand what types of events are most effective for registering voters and informing them about how to get absentee ballots or vote in-person. Collecting these metrics will help us make more informed decisions about the events we choose to hold each semester to ensure that we are reaching as many members of our campus community as possible.