



All-In Action Plan for Harvard University 2020

Prepared January 2020

Revisions Expected

“Your very first homework assignment [is]... if you are eligible to vote, we expect you to register and inform yourself of the candidates and issues, and to cast a ballot in the upcoming elections.” – President Larry Bacow, First-Year Convocation 2018

Harvard University’s efforts to increase and institutionalize voter engagement are led by the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School (IOP) and the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation (Ash Center). The university’s programming is being implemented through the Harvard Votes Challenge, a university-wide program with goal of reaching 100% participation across the university.

About the Harvard Votes Challenge

The Harvard Votes Challenge (HVC) aims to increase voter registration, engagement, and turnout at Harvard University and beyond through institutional reforms and student-driven, community-based creative organizing. Originally founded for the 2018 midterm elections, HVC builds on previous voter registration and GOTV campaigns to create a permanent infrastructure across Harvard University. In partnership with students and staff at the IOP, the Ash Center, and across the University, the HVC team will create and lead an innovative campaign to mobilize voters and change campus culture. In the process, team members will build campaign and leadership skills, while being a part of a warm and friendly community. HVC aspires to have an impact beyond the gates of Harvard and seeks to engage with peer institutions and high schools in the Boston-area as well as the higher education community nationwide.



Efforts to Date

Although HVC was founded in 2018, it built on previous efforts led by students and administrators at the IOP. Harvard Votes and HVote worked to integrate voter registration into in-person class registration and then to online pre-semester “Check-In” once the registration process was digitized. More information on previous efforts can be found in [Harvard’s 2018 All-In Challenge Plan](#).

Integrating TurboVote in Pre-Semester “Check-In”

Since 2014, TurboVote has been integrated into Harvard College’s online pre-semester “Check-In” process. TurboVote is one of the steps in a module where students have to update their current addresses, emergency contacts, and other essential information for the Harvard College Registrar. Students have the opportunity to complete the TurboVote process, or to continue to the next check-in step. In 2018, TurboVote was integrated into a similar process at the Harvard Kennedy School

2018 Midterm Elections

In 2018, over 125+ students, faculty, and administrators worked with HVC to engage voters at all 12 Harvard degree-granting schools and the Harvard Division of Continuing Education (DCE). At Harvard College, a team of students led organizing efforts in Upperclassmen Houses and First-Year dorms as “Dorm and House Captains.” HVC also organized the first-ever Harvard-Yale Votes Challenge which helped students request vote-by-mail ballots and pledge to vote when they picked up tickets for the Harvard-Yale football game. HVC also stipended students at all 11 Harvard graduate schools and the DCE. These “Coalition Leaders” worked with classmates, administrators, and faculty at each of their schools to create a hyperlocal plan to support voters at their schools. The Ash Center and two Coalition Leaders led efforts at the Harvard Kennedy School, where they surpassed their goal of getting 90% of eligible students to sign-up for TurboVote. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, 48.6% of eligible Harvard students cast a ballot – more than double the percentage in 2014 and matching the proportion that voted in the 2018 Presidential election.

Fall 2019 First-Year Voter Registration and Local Elections

In August 2019, HVC students led the first-ever First-Year Voter Registration program. Over four days, a team of paid students had over 1000 conversations with incoming first-year students during pre-orientation programs and during move-in. The program was inspired by research from the National Consortium of Full Voter Participation. This program was unique from 2018 efforts in that it trained organizers on how to support registrations in all 50 states on paper using a Federal Voter Registration Application.¹ By using paper, organizers were able to help students check forms for errors before mailing them on the students behalf (if allowed by state law). More information can be found [here](#).

HVC also led tabling for National Voter Registration Day (with Boba tea and spray paint art), and conducted a dorm-to-dorm GOTV canvass in the days before the Cambridge City Council Election.

¹ Organizer’s adjusted their tactics based on state law. For example, organizers were unable to help students fill out a voter registration form if they were registering to vote in Texas.



Winning the 2019 Presidential Administrative Innovation Fund

In August 2019, HVC was awarded a grant from the prestigious Presidential Administrative Innovation Fund. The grant is being used to support the development of a Harvard-specific voter engagement toolkit and to support building Voting Teams around the University.

The President's Administrative Innovation Fund (PAIF) was created to foster a culture of innovation and catalyze administrative innovation and collaboration across Harvard by investing in staff-generated, creative solutions that reduce administrative burden, enhance our ability to serve faculty and students, and invigorate our employees.



Harvard's Current and Aspirational Voting Rates

As [reported](#) by the Harvard Gazette, "A detailed analysis of midterm voter turnout figures from the 2018 elections shows that the percentage of eligible Harvard students who turned up at the polls nearly doubled when compared to the last midterm elections in 2014.

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), a report examining voting behavior among younger Americans produced by Tufts University's Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, found that **Harvard's eligible student voter participation rate jumped to 48.6 percent in 2018, up 25 percentage points from 2014 and about 10 points higher than the national average.** The NSLVE data includes voting figures for both eligible undergraduate and graduate students across all of Harvard's schools and departments." Harvard's 2018 voting rate **matched** its voting rate in the 2012 presidential election.

Areas for Improvement

Eliminating Gaps Among Students of Color: While the gaps in participation between white students and students of color have narrowed from previous year, students of color continue to vote at lower rates than white students. While 49.9% of White students voted in 2018, 47.0% of multi-racial students, 41.3% of Black students, 40.7% of Hispanic students, and 33.8% of Asian students voted in 2018. Addressing these gaps through grassroots organizing and partnerships is a key priority for 2020.

Addressing the Turnout Gap: While 75.1% of Harvard students were registered in 2018, only 48.6% cast a ballot. In other words, only about two-thirds of registered students actually vote. These numbers are fairly consistent with Harvard's turnout rates from 2016. This

Harvard's NSLVE reports for 2018, 2016, and 2014 can be found [here](#). A Harvard Gazette article about Harvard's 2018 NSLVE report can be found [here](#).

Our "Moonshot" Goal

HVC aspires to 100% voter registration, engagement, and turnout. While we recognize this is a moonshot of a goal, we believe that we need to keep 100% in mind as we build processes and programs to support this work.



The Plan for 2020

HVC is building on previous efforts which empowered organizers at all Harvard schools. In 2020, HVC will work with students, faculty, and administrators to *institutionalize* voter engagement and *build grassroots movements* at all Harvard schools, as well as at centers and other campus institutions. HVC believes that voter engagement is most impactful when efforts around registration, education, culture, and turnout are addressed through a combination of institutional and grassroots efforts. Institutional efforts refer to programs which make voter engagement a part of existing or new programs like orientation, class registration, and other campus traditions. Grassroots efforts empower students, faculty, and administrators to have the agency to register, educate, and turnout their community through traditional and creative organizing tactics. These efforts will be led by the IOP's HVC Student Program.

HVC efforts will revolve around three phases:

1. Registration
2. Engagement
3. Turnout

Institutionalizing Voter Engagement Across All Harvard Schools

This section will be updated as plans become finalized.

HVC seeks to integrate voter engagement into institutional processes and programs at all Harvard schools. HVC will do this by sharing best practices through a forthcoming toolkit and through an individual school action-planning process guided by HVC coaching.

Our Approach: Aspiring to 100% Voter Participation. 0 Tabling.

Campuses like Harvard often think about voter engagement in the following way: student volunteers (sometimes with the support of administrators) take the lead on conducting voter registration and vote-by-mail drives. Usually this involves "active tabling" in high-traffic areas such as the Science Center or the Smith Campus Center. While it is often a useful and necessary tactic, tabling can be a less effective technique for a voter engagement campaign that aims to reach 100% of students. Tabling engages a small minority of passerby and requires at least 2-3 volunteer's labor plus preparation time and pubbing efforts. Furthermore, as described by Ideas42's report on student voting behavior, tabling makes voting seem like an opt-in activity, rather than a key part of campus citizenship.

In the same way the University has a system for us to collect our dorm keys, register for classes, or check out a book, the University can create systems to help students register to vote, request mail-in ballots, return mail-in ballots, and learn about candidates and issues. **Institutionalizing voter engagement means creating a system that helps every student make an informed decision about voting and supports the student as they interact with the electoral process.** *Engaging the handful of students who walk by a table is not enough.*

By relocating the more administrative tasks of voter engagement to the institutional realm (like processing voter registration forms), student organizers will be able to focus their efforts on



grassroots organizing that transforms campus culture and excites our community about democratic participation.

HVC Action-Planning and Coaching Model

The HVC team is working with administrators at all 12 degree granting schools, the DCE, and several other centers and institutions to identify “Voting Teams” who will lead efforts on respective campuses. Each of these teams will identify a Voting Lead who will serve as a point person for school-specific action planning.

Each Voting Team is assigned a coach from the IOP or Ash Center. Their role is to support action plan development and hold each voting team accountable to deadlines.

Action-planning is supported by a forthcoming toolkit, which stakeholders with suggestions on how to integrate voter engagement into their institution.

This model is inspired by the [Harvard Green Team](#) program, which empowers individuals at schools and departments to make their workspaces more sustainable.

Integrating Voter Engagement into Orientation/All-Reach Moments

As part of our coaching, we will heavily emphasize integrating voter engagement into all-reach moments like new student orientation.

During August 2019, and in collaboration with the National Resource Consortium on Full Voter Participation, Campus Vote Project, and the Center for Civic Justice at Stonybrook University, HVC conducted the first-ever First-Year Voter Engagement Program at Harvard College.

During a three day period, over 1000 first-year students had a conversation about democratic participation and were guided through a paper voter registration form if they were eligible. Conversations took place during pre-orientation programs and during move-in and were framed as conversations about civic engagement. Students were expected to have these conversations, and fill out a packet to make a civic engagement plan during dedicated times in pre-orientation, or after picking up their keys and ID cards at move-in.

For 2020, HVC is excited to apply its lessons from 2019 at the College. It seeks to integrate this program into Orientation week so that it reaches all students. It also looks to include vote-by-mail ballot requests as part of the process. Scripts will also be revised so that they are more inclusive of students who are not eligible to vote in US elections (including international students, undocumented students, and students who are disenfranchised). HVC is working with the Resource Consortium to build a toolkit on how to implement this program.

Schools besides Harvard College are encouraged to implement similar programs. As an alternative, TurboVote remains available for schools to integrate into their registration and check-in modules.

Grassroots Organizing

This section will be updated as plans become finalized.



Student leaders at the IOP will lead HVC's grassroots organizing efforts. Extensive plans for Harvard College are being developed. Plans include building a robust residential life organizing program in which students collaborate with House administrators to reach all peers; a program to engage and empower student organizations and cultural affinity groups; and a program to plan fun and exciting events that shape our campus's civic culture and educates students on the democratic process. At schools besides Harvard College, similar efforts will be led by members of each school's Voting Team.

Inclusion Towards International, Undocumented, and Disenfranchised Populations

This section will be updated as we finalize an inclusivity statement and plans.

HVC is grateful to members of the Harvard community who have worked to make voter engagement work more inclusive of people who cannot vote in US elections. Based on their feedback, efforts to make HVC more inclusive should include but are not limited to the following. HVC should build systems and processes which reflect the forthcoming inclusivity statement.

- Providing information on non-US elections and partnering with international student organizations
- A shift in messaging towards election engagement, rather than registration and casting a ballot. Organizers should seek to recruit members of a movement, rather than just checking to see if students are registered to vote or have requested a ballot.
- Actively encouraging students who cannot vote in US elections to volunteer with HVC, if they feel comfortable.
- Ensure that any all-reach program includes easy and discreet opt-outs for students who do not want to disclose their ability to vote.

Beyond Harvard

This section will be updated as plans are finalized.

Student leaders are working with Boston-area high schools to empower students to register their classmates to vote. In November 2019, HVC and the IOP hosted the first Boston Votes Summit and trained students from 15 schools on registration best practices.

HVC is also connected with Boston-area Colleges and National Higher Education Institutions through the IOP's National Campaign. In November 2019, leaders from Boston-area Colleges Convened at the IOP to action-plan and network.

A possible collaboration with other Ivy League schools is forthcoming.

Harvard's Voting Leadership

When each Harvard's school's Voting Teams are finalized, they will be added to this section.

- Rob Watson, Director of Student Programs at the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School



- Teresa Acuña, Associate Director of the Democratic Governance Program at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation
- Kevin Ballen (College '22) and Amanda Powers (College '21), Student Co-Chairs of the Harvard Votes Challenge

About the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School

The Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School was established in 1966 as a living memorial to President John F. Kennedy. The Institute's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policymakers on a non-partisan basis to inspire them to pursue pathways in politics and public service. The Institute blends the academy with practical politics and offers students the opportunity to engage on current events and to acquire skills and perspective that will assist in their postgraduate pathways.

About the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Center fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. For more information, visit ash.harvard.edu.