



HARVARD Kennedy School
INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



**CAMPUS
DEMOCRACY
CHALLENGE**

HARVARD VOTES CHALLENGE

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**ALL-IN-CAMPUS DEMOCRACY CHALLENGE
2022 ACTION PLAN**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HVC 2022 action plan was developed by June Park '24 and Pratyush Mallick '25 (2022 Harvard Votes Challenge Co-Chairs) with support from previous HVC Co-Chairs and other HVC members.

About the Harvard Votes Challenge:

The Harvard Votes Challenge (HVC) is a University-wide, non-partisan effort that aims to increase voter registration, turnout, and civic engagement at Harvard and beyond. Through institutional reforms and student-driven, community-based creative organizing, the HVC team creates and leads an innovative campaign to mobilize voters while building campaign and leadership skills. In partnership with students and staff at the IOP and around the University, HVC strives to cultivate a culture of civic engagement on campus. Additionally, HVC aspires to generate civic energy beyond the gates of Harvard by engaging with peer institutions in the Boston area and the higher-education community nationwide. To do all of this work, HVC is powered by seven departments: Boston Votes Coalition, Collaborations, Communications, Community & Events, Data & Technology, Organizing, and Strategy & Operations. In 2022, the Harvard Votes Challenge's ultimate mission is to reach the four 100s: 100% voter contact, 100% registration, 100% turnout, and 100% civic engagement at Harvard University by lowering barriers to student voting and offering resources and assistance to all students.

The purpose of the plan

The purpose of this plan is two-fold: to chronicle and analyze Harvard Votes Challenge's past organizing efforts and to lay out HVC's 2022 voter outreach plan.

Where the plan will be implemented

This plan will be implemented on all 12 schools of Harvard University, especially the undergraduate campus (Harvard College). The implementation will focus on a hybrid approach with both in-person and virtual elements.

Goal of the plan

This plan was developed to hold Harvard Votes Challenge and the rest of the Harvard community, including the administration, accountable for continuing the institutionalization and cultivation of a culture of civic engagement on campus.

Intended duration of the plan

This plan has already gone into effect with on-going voter outreach efforts for the 2022 primary and will continue to be implemented through the November 8 midterm elections. Elements of the plan that go beyond 2022 will be implemented by future HVC Co-Chairs and teams.

How the plan will be implemented

This plan's implementation will be driven by the students, especially members of HVC, with institutional support from the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, and Harvard University administration. HVC's mission is rooted in nonpartisan+ and inclusivity, thus 2022's voter outreach efforts have been expanded to focus on increasing voter turnout as a part of the overall mission of increasing civic engagement to be more inclusive for students and communities who are ineligible to vote for any reason. HVC has also been building a coalition of diverse groups and peoples both in the Harvard community and beyond to help cultivate a culture of civic engagement in our communities.

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LEADERSHIP

Students

Harvard Votes Challenge is a student-led, university-wide initiative. The Harvard College team of HVC is comprised of two Co-Chairs (June Park '24 and Pratyush Mallick '25) and seven departments (Boston Votes Coalition, Collaborations, Communications, Community & Events, Data & Technology, Organizing, and Strategy & Operations) to help reach HVC's goals on campus.



Boston Votes Coalition:

Boston Votes Coalition is a broad coalition of voting teams across 20+ colleges and universities in the Greater Boston area working together to ensure that civic engagement is a core component of every Boston-area college student's experience. The goal is to cultivate a robust city-wide civic culture, which will require exploring institutional support and working with city leaders and stakeholders, hosting the annual BVC Summit,

and leading the coalition on behalf of our university by organizing meetings, action items, and more.

Collaborations:

Collaborations will establish and maintain HVC's relationships with student organizations, affinity groups, and athletic teams at the College, in addition to forming partnerships with departments and faculty members. The goal is to bring civic experiences to students everywhere on campus and specifically look to build relationships with groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the civic engagement space. This will involve working one-on-one with different groups on campus to create and execute plans to register and turnout their membership to vote (Pledge to 100), helping to institutionalize a culture of civic action within those groups, and engaging in community events and activities.

Communications:

Communications will leverage HVC's social media presence and access to University-wide communications channels to spread crucial information about voting and civic engagement opportunities. The goal is to establish a branding guideline for HVC's social media, merchandise, and print multimedia.

Community & Events:

Community & Events will set the culture of HVC both internally within our membership and externally on campus. The goal is to plan engaging and informative events with partner organizations and special guests to advance student voting and civic engagement on campus, in addition to designing social events geared towards promoting community within general membership. This will involve working with vendors, administrators, and suppliers to carry out large events and other activities.

Data & Technology:

Data and Technology will perform the critical data organizing and analysis that all other teams in HVC rely on. The goal is to work extensively to fulfill data requirements and maintain our technology stack. This will involve developing the planned Harvard Votes Challenge portal, writing annual data reports, creating data visualizations, cutting turf sheets, and automating the voter contact process.

Organizing:

Organizing will reach every student at Harvard with effective voter and civic engagement resources as one of the leading voter engagement programs in the country. The goal is to utilize individualized and institutionalized voter engagement systems in order to help reach HVC's goal of 100% voter participation among eligible students. This will involve

creating and executing innovative voter outreach initiatives that effectively use both in-person and virtual methods with an emphasis on relational organizing.

Strategy & Operations:

Strategy & Operations will be responsible for setting and supporting HVC's logistical requirements, daily necessities, and overall vision. The goal is to ensure the day to day operations and overall strategic planning of HVC initiatives. This will involve conducting key research on all 50 states' voter laws, voter deadlines, election dates, voting holidays, providing logistical support by supplying voter resources (vote-by-mail applications, stamps, forms, etc.), and maintaining HVC's inventory of voting materials, merchandise, etc..

Faculty

Abbie James, Director of Student Programs at the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School

Staff member to be determined, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation
Working group of Harvard University administrators and stakeholders

Student affairs + other student groups

HVC's Collaborations department is building a coalition of student organizations, affinity groups, and athletic teams at the College to work together to build a culture of civic engagement. A primary tool is the Pledge to 100, which is a pledge by student organizations to ensure that 100% of their eligible members will vote in the upcoming election. Organizations that sign onto the pledge receive training, toolkits, and other support from HVC to reach out to all of their members about making a voting plan, as well as integrate voting conversations into events, weekly programming, communications, and more. Key student groups include the Harvard Undergraduate Council, Harvard Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), and other programs at the Institute of Politics.

Community/national organizations

HVC is a member organization of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and Students Learn Students Vote Coalition. In addition, HVC is a founding member and leader of the Ivy Votes Coalition (8 colleges and universities in the Ivy League) and Boston Votes Coalition (colleges and universities in the Greater Boston Area).

Local elections office coordination

HVC has historically worked with and continues to work with the Cambridge Election Commission.

COMMITMENT



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.

Winning the 2019 Presidential Administrative Innovation Fund

In August 2019, HVC was awarded a grant from the prestigious Presidential Administrative Innovation Fund. The grant was 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.

Administrative and Academic Buy-in

“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”

In the past few years, HVC has been able to get administrative and academic support and buy-in. For example, HVC has gotten commitments in the past to include the importance of voting in speeches (as seen in President Bacow’s First-Year Convocation speech in 2018), emails, and memos that reach the entire Harvard community. Additionally, in 2020, HVC convened a voting working group with various stakeholders in the Harvard community including Deans and administrators to create university-wide plans for the 2020 election. Furthermore, HVC maintains relationships with administrators, like those from Common Spaces for large-scale events and the Mailing Services for vote-by-mail ballots.

Integrating Pledge to Engage form into first-year orientation

In 2021, HVC worked with the Harvard College Dean of Students Office to integrate the Pledge to Engage form into the virtual first-year orientation. The Pledge to Engage was a form that walked students through the entire voting process to make a voting plan and/or make a civic engagement plan. A copy of the plan was sent to the student and to HVC organizers so that HVC organizers could follow-up with students at a later date about steps in their plan such as requesting a vote-by-mail ballot.

LANDSCAPE

To get to this point in 2022, HVC has built upon previous years of innovative voter outreach efforts. For more information on efforts before 2020, please see Harvard's 2018 and 2020 ALL IN Action Plans.

2020 - Presidential Election

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HVC's voter outreach efforts had to be switched completely to virtual efforts, which posed new problems to overcome. Despite these obstacles, HVC committed to the most robust voter outreach campaign possible and many new mechanisms made it possible to do so.

First, HVC conducted all of its voter outreach through **text-banking** because of the virtual nature of the year. HVC used a nonpartisan canvassing technology called E-Canvasser. One benefit of text-banking was the ability to reach populations of the community who were traditionally difficult to contact for any reason and underrepresented groups. It allowed HVC to better "meet students where they are."

Second, HVC organized the **voter outreach calendar in three phases** with different main goals for each phase. Phase 1 began in the summer and lasted until National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) with the main goal of registering every eligible voter to vote. Phase 2 began after NVRD and lasted until Vote Early Day with the main goal of helping every eligible voter make a voting plan (either vote by mail or vote in-person). Phase 3 began after Vote Early Day and lasted through the Election Day with the main goal of getting out the vote so either submitting vote-by-mail ballots or voting in-person early or on Election Day. Organizing the voter outreach efforts around these phases and their respective voting holidays allowed HVC to have targeted text-banking scripts and social media language that we found to be most effective.

At the same time, HVC ran into some problems during the 2020 efforts. Because of the sudden shift to virtual efforts there were struggles adjusting all of the original in-person plans to virtual. In particular, data collection and other data issues continued to be the biggest challenge for conducting smooth and efficient voter outreach efforts.

2021 - "Off-Year" Elections

HVC's 2021 voter outreach efforts faced different challenges than those in 2020. The primary challenge was overcoming the apathetic "off-year" nature of 2021. To do this, HVC continued to do crucial voter outreach work in six states with statewide elections: California, Massachusetts (Boston Mayoral Election), New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The key to this work were new innovations implemented in 2021.

First, recognizing that this was an “off-year,” HVC took this time to finally act on long-standing goals of focusing on **increasing civic engagement** on top of our voter outreach efforts. HVC worked with other public service organizations like the Phillips Brooks House Association to highlight civic engagement opportunities in the community that were both voting-related (becoming a poll worker) and not voting-related. HVC also established **inclusive language** in our outreach efforts, including starting off every conversation with “if eligible...” and emphasizing that voting is only one way to be civically engaged.

Second, HVC adopted **hybrid organizing** that utilized both virtual elements (text-banking) and in-person elements (door-knocking) to contact students. This allowed for students to be contacted in more diverse ways than before and resulted in more responses and contacts. In addition, HVC reorganized its organizer model to revolve around Harvard’s residential model (Houses/Dorms). This allowed for organizers to have smaller and more personable turfs of students since they were contacting peers in their own house/dorm.

Third, dedicated members of the Data & Operations team helped begin imagining and creating HVC’s own **in-house organizing technology**. The first iteration was using Google Spreadsheets to mimic canvassing technology, but we found that this was only effective and possible with small turfs, which worked for 2021 but not for a large-scale campaign like in 2020 or even 2022. The second iteration is now being made by the new Data & Technology team.

Problems that HVC faced in 2021 revolved around maintaining interest for off-year efforts in both the Harvard community and HVC organizers and dealing with continuing data problems from 2020.

NSLVE: HVC DATA EFFORTS

Historical data from The National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) for the years 2012 and 2014 both demonstrate a significant inflection point in the state of civic engagement at Harvard. In 2012, 73.6% students registered to vote, 65.9% of students registered and voted at a voting rate of 48.5%.

In 2014, these numbers were nearly halved in the midterm elections where enrollment increased by about 1,000 students over two years from 2012, but the number of votes cast decreased by nearly 4,000. This drastic change showed the need for more access to information and resources for students to register and get out the vote, especially with a focus on mid-term elections, which often go overlooked.

Since its founding in 2018, the Harvard Votes Challenge has caused dramatic shifts in student voter participation. In 2018, the Harvard community reached 80% registration rate and had a final voting rate of 50.7%. For a midterm election, this helped us observe a dramatic shift in rates of participation and civic buy-in from both students and administrators at our University. We saw even stronger numbers in 2020, widely regarded to be one of the highest participation voting years ever, especially among youth and college aged groups. We were able to increase campus voter registration to 83.4% and voting rate to 70.6%.

That being said, however, our work is not done. We strive to utilize existing voter rolls provided by the Cambridge Board of Elections and our campus resources to drive our registration rate up to 100%. Additionally, we hope to drive up our mid-term engagement rates and ensure that all Harvard students are actively participating in elections, regardless of the year.

The Harvard Votes Challenge will continue to analyze NSLVE information and its own internal materials to help validate our work and construct plans for our organizing and engagement efforts.

GOALS

Short-term goals for 2022

In 2022, the Harvard Votes Challenge's ultimate mission is to reach the four 100s: 100% voter contact, 100% registration, 100% turnout, and 100% civic engagement at Harvard University by lowering barriers to student voting and offering resources and assistance to all students.

While we recognize this is a moonshot of a goal, we believe that we need to keep these four 100s in mind as we build processes and programs to support this work. A perhaps more "realistic" goal is to contact every student at Harvard with voting and civic engagement information and increase voter turnout from 71% in 2020 to at least 80% in 2022.

In addition, HVC will continue its commitment to the three pillars of nonpartisan+, inclusivity, and meeting students where they are. In particular, we want to conduct more meaningful and intentional outreach to ineligible students. For example, we plan on creating more resources for international elections, like an API. Finally, we will continue to address the gap between voter registration and voter turnout.

Short-term goals by department for 2022

**not all departments have been included*

Boston Votes Coalition: The first goal is to expand the coalition to more colleges and universities in the Great Boston Area including Boston University, Boston College, Northeastern University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The second goal is to help organize and host the second Boston Votes Coalition summit in Spring 2022 in order to collaborate on voter outreach efforts for the 2022 election.

Collaborations: The main goal is to back the Pledge to 100 from 2020 to continue working Harvard extracurriculars and athletic teams to build civic culture. In particular, the goal is to get all 42 varsity athletic teams to sign onto the pledge because last time we had 41 of the 42 teams sign on and work with even more extracurricular organizations.

Data & Technology: The main goal is to create and test-run the Organizing Web Portal during the primary season and have it completely ready for the November election.

Organizing: The main goal is for organizers to reach 100% student contact and help all of these students through the entire voting process by three voter outreach methods: door-knocking, text-banking, and tabling.

Long-term goals

Our long term goals for the future have been designated to keep HVCs pace in getting more voting reforms implemented both institutionally and among the student body. Some of these goals are listed below:

- We seek to increase voter turnout rates at Harvard to be 80% or higher, no matter the year or election, with an emphasis on midterm and “off-cycle” elections!
- By 2024, we hope to develop and finalize the organizing web portal to be a one-stop hub for students to request and receive information on upcoming elections, absentee ballot deadlines, and more. In addition to consolidating information on students for organizing team members and HVC volunteers.
- By 2024, we hope to have HVC programming fully integrated into first-year orientation.
- By 2025, we hope to shift much of the work currently done by the Collaborations teams to Harvard extracurricular organizations and athletic teams because they will hopefully have their own infrastructure to encourage and hold their members accountable during the entire voting process. Thus, we hope to transition Collaborations into more of an advisory and support role to these organizations where most of the autonomy to do voter outreach work is given to these organizations.
- By 2025, IvyVotes and Boston Votes Coalition will be sustainable on their own without continuous HVC support. Instead, the two coalitions will be led by a rotating steering committee composed of different colleges and universities in their respective coalitions.
- By 2026, we hope to expand the use of the organizing web portal to campuses across the country and the ALL-IN-Challenge.

STRATEGY

Hybrid Organizing 2.0

Drawing upon the lessons from 2020 and 2021, HVC will continue a hybrid model for organizing in 2022 with new additions.

First, HVC will use **three methods of contact**: door-knocking (in-person), text-banking (virtual), and active tabling (new this year).

- There will be an increased focus on utilizing door-knocking (based on the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic), especially in the beginning of the voter outreach campaign.
 - When organizers are knocking on dorm doors, they will have a max 5 minute conversation with the student depending on the goal of the phase of the campaign (phase 1: voter registration, phase 2: make a voting plan, phase 3: vote)
 - If the student is NOT in the dorm, organizers will now be equipped with “literature” to drop off for more information.
- Once every student has been reached out physically through door-knocking, organizers will shift gears into text-banking to follow up on students throughout the phases.
- During all of this, organizers will also utilize tabling more than we did in 2021.
 - Although a bit more of a passive tactic than door-knocking or texting, tabling has two benefits: increasing the awareness of HVC even if people just walk by us and reaching people we might not be able to reach through the other tactics.
 - Tabling will be focused in high-traffic areas like dining halls and events like sport events to reach the most diverse population of students.

When conducting voter outreach, we will continue to focus on goals based on the phases (phase 1.0: voter registration, phase 2.0: voting plans, phase 3.0: getting out the vote).

Second, HVC will **employ both the Collaborations and Organizing teams to contact students at least twice** (aka at least once by each team). The Collaborations team will contact students through their extracurricular activities and athletic teams connections, while the Organizing team will contact students through the residential system. This is to truly ensure that we meet every student where they are.

Increasing Voter Education + Civic Engagement

Continuing one of the main missions from 2020, we want HVC to be more than “just a voting” organization and emphasize that voting is only one way of staying civically engaged! Thus, on top of doing our specific voter outreach work, we want to always provide civic engagement opportunities to everyone, regardless of voter status.

To do, we will be working with many different communities and organizations on campus to coordinate collaborative civic engagement opportunities:

- Cultural and affinity groups (through the Collaborations team)
- Classes with high student enrollment, especially in the STEM department

For civic engagement opportunities, we will:

- Create training materials specific to the audience that is requested. For example, the Collaborations team will work with individual organizations to create training materials that work for them.
- Work with the Phillips Brooks House Association to publicize civic engagement opportunities in the Cambridge area.
- Work with the Cambridge Election Commission to spread the word about becoming a poll worker for Harvard students.
- Expand the Harvard Votes Challenge's website so that it serves the international student body better by creating more resources for students who can vote overseas in elections for their home countries and partnering with the Woodbridge International Society to assist international students who want to vote. .

Engaging First-Years

HVC hopes to be fully integrated into first-year orientation, starting with the Class of 2026's pre-orientation and orientation programs, which includes:

- The distribution of voting material in orientation packets for first-years when they arrive on campus for the first time.
- The addition of the "Pledge to Vote" form for first-years to learn more about voting and civic engagement into mandatory first-year check-in.

Additionally, we will be reaching out to first-year focused events and programs to ensure that we are able to get individuals registered for the first time and assist with any questions for new voters on Harvard's campus. This will include:

- Canvassing large events like the Crimson Jab, the First Year Talent Show, Annenberg Hall, and more.
- Tabling large classes like Econ 10, CS50, and more.

Data & Technology

The Data & Technology team will be split into smaller working groups to help optimize the project development process.

- UI/UX Design: This team will work alongside the web team to develop low-fidelity, high-fidelity mockups and wireframes for the Harvard Votes Challenge Organizing portal.

- **Product Management:** The product team will be responsible for running the tasks assignment process for each project, breaking down work into development sprints and running auxiliary tasks like bug testing and feature ideation.
- **Web Development:** This team will be responsible for implementing the features ideated by product and the deliverables from UI/UX. They will be the primary technical working group, responsible for resolving bugs and generating full-stack tools.
- **Data & Data Visualization:** The data team will be responsible for splitting turfs and prioritizing organizing work based on fields like house, class-year, etc. This team will also work in some capacity with the Communications and Strategy & Operations teams to analyze and publish research on voting attitudes at Harvard.

Key Projects:

- **Contact automation:** Using research provided by the Strategy & Operations team, the HVC Technology team will automate contacts with voters through text and email messaging, in order to provide students with alerts about upcoming deadlines and any necessary information about elections.
- **Organizing Web Portal:** The primary project for the spring semester, the HVC organizing portal will be implementing a 2 year old vision for a digital campus organizing platform that eases that outreach and student contact process for volunteers.
- **Registration Chat Bot:** Putting NLP and Machine learning into action, we hope to deploy an easy to use end-to-end chat-bot that can provide Harvard students with important election information.
- **Misc. Projects:**
 - Find your legislators
 - International Student Election search
 - Make a plan to vote generator
 - AR/VR Filters
 - HVC NFTs lol
 - Automating Comms posting schedule
 - Annual Data Report
 - Civic Engagement Hackathon

Coalition Building

For the Boston Votes Coalition, we are hoping to expand our institutional partnerships to even more Boston area campuses and stakeholders this term. The follow institutions are current targets for expanding our coalition:

- Boston University
- Boston College
- Northeastern University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In addition to bringing in more academic buy-in, we are also attempting to attract more support from Boston city officials and leaders. This year we hope to host the Boston Votes Summit, a bi-annual semesterly meeting of coalition institutions and members, at the Boston City Hall and seek a direct collaboration with the city government with the end goal of promoting voter registration, turn out, and civic engagement. Potential asks from the city:

- Grants and funding
- City officials and speakers
- City sponsored Get Out the Vote initiative
- Meeting space for Boston Votes Coalition

REPORTING

Working with the Communications team, the Co-Chairs will publicize the 2022 ALL IN Action Plan on all of our social media platforms (i.g. Website, Instagram). In addition, we will share our action plan during IvyVotes meetings and hopefully the Boston Votes Coalition later in the spring.

EVALUATION

Working with the Strategy & Operations team, the Co-Chairs will work diligently to evaluate the action plan and edit when necessary to meet our four 100s. In a biweekly meeting, the Co-Chairs with the Strategy & Operations team will reevaluate the action plan and other blueprints to reassess any goals and strategies to meet those goals.

In addition, Strategy & Operations will conduct surveys and additional research to receive feedback both from the Harvard community and HVC members on HVC's voter outreach efforts. The surveys for the Harvard community will be used to assess the effectiveness of the different voter outreach methods and the overall organizing effort. The feedback forms for HVC members will ensure that HVC is meeting its internal goals of creating and maintaining community.

All of our work from a data perspective, will be analyzed and reported through annual Data & Technology Data Reports. This data infrastructure has provided novel opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of our organizing strategy, and these insights are especially valuable as we consider innovations for our future work in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Historically, HVC has had a weakness in accurately analyzing our impact, especially due to issues with undercounting contact rate and engagements with students across all 12 campuses. We also consider this potential undercounting to be a valuable item to learn from in itself, and hope to compare the data within this report with external sources such as NSLVE data to assess strengths and weaknesses of our internal data program.