Massachusetts Institute of Technology Democratic Engagement Action Plan: AY2024 and Beyond

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by the co-chairs of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ALL IN Working Group (MIT ALL IN) to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over AY2024, on and around our campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MIT ALL IN has been in existence since 2020, since MIT's President signed on to the ALL IN Democracy challenge. It is jointly led by the MIT Priscilla King Gray (PKG) Center for Public Service and the MIT Office of Government and Community Relations. The following groups have representatives on the group and work together towards to further our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate Students
- Graduate Students
- Faculty
- PKG Staff
- Government Affairs Staff
- Student Affairs Staff

The strategies outlined in the plan are implemented through the pooling of resources, sharing of advice, and coordination of MIT ALL IN members. In the coming year, we will be focusing on increasing coordination and idea-sharing with additional student groups, Institute departments, labs and centers and with MIT faculty. MIT ALL IN pursues creative ways to embed civic engagement in the life of the Institute and encourages all eligible members of the MIT community to vote.

II.   Leadership

Vippy Yee, Assistant Dean of Community Based Programs and Interim Co-Director of the Priscilla King Gray Public Service Center at MIT, and Annalisa Bhatia, Associate Director for MIT's Office of Government and Community Relations, will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Miguel Buitrago, MITvote Co-chair
- Calvin Macatantan, MITvote Co-chair
- Sharon Bridburg, Director, Human Resources
- David Goldston, Director, MIT Washington DC Office
- Jill Bassett, Chief of Staff to the Chancellor
- Nancy Kanwisher, Walter A. Rosenblith Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences
- Amy Huynh, PKG Graduate Community Fellow and President, Graduate Student Council
- Chris Peterson, Director of Special Projects, Admissions Office
- Andrew Turco, Captain, Campus Police
- Rebecca Tyler, Associate Director of Institute Events
- Polina Vulf, Program/Events Assistant, Institute Community and Equity Office
- Susan Cassidy, Writer, Office of the President
- Michael Santoro, Office of the First Year
- Paul Irvine, Undergraduate Association Public Affairs Committee
- Kimberly Liao, Undergraduate Association Public Affairs Committee
- Michael Rutter, Senior Advisor for Communications, Office of the Vice Chancellor

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:
- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership, Institute faculty, and staff.
- Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise.
- Trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy.
- Leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into our work.

Our group meets monthly via Zoom.

Succession Plan

If our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. Having co-chairs ensures continuity in leadership of the working group, even if individuals transition out of their specific roles. The MIT PKG Center for Public Service,

in addition to the co-chair role, serves in an advisory capacity to MITvote, a nonpartisan student group committed to engaging an active voter community on campus.

MIT ALL IN has not extended membership to outside community members or elected officials, though they have participated in individual events conducted by members, such as a panel discussion of the importance of specific elections. The group has identified a need for adopting a policy for requests from third party non-profits for sponsorship of on-campus events.

Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement.

Our campus features evidence of civic engagement, including:
- Voter education resources developed by ALL IN committee members
- Sample syllabi language to encourage voter registration and voting has been shared by the Chancellor's Office and Provost
- Political clubs or student organizations like MIT Vote and the Undergraduate Association Public Affairs (UAPA)
- Voter registration and state-specific election date reminder emails sent by student organizations
- Voter registration information included in annual matriculation and graduation communications
- Campus leaders promoting voting through university-wide emails
- On campus polling place hosted at MIT's Kresge Auditorium
- Voter registration tables routinely hosted in major campus thoroughfares
- Voter registration parties and events organized by MIT Vote
- Signage promoting Election Day
- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers, such as local city councillors, professors, and MIT's government relations professionals, are invited to discuss important issues for upcoming elections or to answer questions on a panel. These events are typically hosted by MIT Vote.

This year, MIT ALL IN is developing commercials reminding the MIT community to vote, which will feature MIT's mascot as well as MIT's President.

III.   Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus. This information is based on data collected from 2022-2023 when our total student enrollment was 11,858.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
4,657 (39.00%)	7,201 (61.00%)	11,662	53

Undergraduate In-State	Undergraduate Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Off-Campus
7%	81%	3,465	6,170	2,799

Women Enrollment:

Women
5,074

Undergraduate Student Age:

18-24	25 and above
99%	1%

Domestic Student Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White
2,501	9	597	1,148	3	4,174

IV. Goals

We know our campus faces following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- We do not have a professional staff or faculty member whose primary responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- Although we have limited funding for this work, the funding is not sufficient to support the level of programming we envision.
- The NSLVE data available at the time of drafting this action plan (2020 NSLVE Report) only reflects a limited portion of the time in which MIT ALL has existed. This limits our ability to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of our current efforts.
- While we have a clear charge from the President's Office, the ALL In Committee is a voluntary working group and not an Institute Committee.

We also know our campus faces additional challenges related to the abundance of eligible students who come from other states and want to vote absentee for the first time. We must support students from fifty different electoral systems with fifty different sets of deadlines through the often more difficult process of voting by mail.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- We have a coalition of people positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on campus.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students that include an institutional partnership with TurboVote.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- The voter engagement work on our campus is distributed throughout many offices and areas of expertise.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We can engage student leaders to our initiative.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.
- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.

With this in mind, we have set the following goals for the next academic year:

1. Continue the positive trajectory of the campus voting rate. While the private institutional average was 70% in 2020, MIT had a voting rate of 73%. We aim to continue this positive trend by exceeding the national average for private institutions.

2. Prior to 2020, some MIT groups compiled their own report detailing efforts to increase voter participation and registration on campus. Going forward, MIT ALL IN will incorporate that past work into our ongoing Action Plan analysis.

3. Educate MIT's Massachusetts-based employees on voting by mail, which was implemented during the pandemic and has become Massachusetts law.
4. Increase graduate student representation on the leadership team of MITvote, the Institute's nonpartisan student group dedicated to increasing student voter turnout, to further engage graduate students in voting. Based on the NVSLVE data, we understand that there is a greater gap in MIT graduate student voting than undergraduate student voting compared to national averages.
5. Leverage faculty participants on MIT's ALL IN working group to engage faculty more broadly in voter registration and voting efforts.

We have also set three goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. Increase MIT's rate of graduate student voting turnout to be commiserate with the national graduate student average.
2. Incorporate voter registration into faculty onboarding materials.
3. Incorporate voter registration into retirement planning, especially for retirees who plan to move out of state.

V. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020, our registration rate was 84.4%. This was an increase from 2018 (78.6%) and 2016 (80.6%).

In 2020, our voting rate was 72.3% and our voting rate among registered students was 85.7%. This is a 13.3 and 13.4 percentage point increase over 2016 and 2018, respectively.

VI.   Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we are already doing in the short term (within the next year):
- We have taken steps to communicate more broadly and directly with our community about voting, including:
  - Incorporating information about voter registration in student onboarding materials and orientation activities.
  - Incorporating information about voter registration in graduation checklists and graduation activities.
  - Continuing an institutional agreement with TurboVote.
  - Committing to an annual letter to the community from the president encouraging voter registration.
  - Developing MIT-branded Zoom backgrounds encouraging voting.
  - Holding events about voting, democracy, and other political issues.
  - Incorporating voter registration reminders into several Institute systems, including those focused on employees.
  - Distributing materials about voting.
  - Conducting voter registration tabling at the annual MIT flu clinic; and
  - Publishing MIT News stories relating to this work.
- A "register to vote" link also appears in our student financial services system and new-employee orientation.
- We continue to make the MIT vote-a-saurus a fixture on our campus.

These are tactics that we plan to do in the short term:
- We plan to hold additional events including debate watch parties, Election Night Return Campus event, themed voter registration events.
- We also plan to look for creative ways to reach students where they are, including through residence hall liaisons.
- Build on the momentum of our communications across the MIT community.
- We plan to create voter registration and engagement PSAs featuring President Kornbluth and student athletic teams.

These are tactics that we hope to do in the short term:
- We hope to encourage faculty to add key voting dates to syllabi and in lectures.
- We encourage academic advisors to mention voting when they meet with their students.
- We hope to institutionalize academic flexibility on Election Day to allow students an opportunity to get to the polls and/or volunteer with elections.

These are tactics that we are already doing for the long term (beyond the next year):

- We are enhancing our communications and educational materials.
- We are building relationships with offices around campus and thinking of new ways to integrate voting into their processes.
- We have begun recruiting for increased faculty involvement in MIT ALL IN.
- We have developed a "Perpetual Calendar" that codifies voter registration activities that MIT has agreed to do. The calendar is organized into monthly activities to take place regularly in local election years, mid-term election years, and Presidential election years. This calendar also denotes departmental responsibility for these events, ensuring continuity when there is staff turnover.
- The PKG Center has dedicated part-time staff to support civic engagement and voter engagement initiatives across MIT.

These are tactics that we want to do in the long term:
- We plan to hold additional events, including more registration events and return watching parties.
- We want to recruit more student leaders, especially graduate students, who are dedicated to this work and can assist at spreading the message through student-focused channels.
- We hope to incorporate voter registration into course registration.

VII.   Reporting

We will distribute this final Action Plan internally to members of our campus coalition and Institute administration. We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:
- Post on the MITvote website: vote.mit.edu
- Sharing it to be posted on the ALL IN Challenge's website

We will collect feedback on this plan by:
- Soliciting feedback on initial draft with campus coalition.
- Participating in multiple rounds of feedback with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, integrating feedback collected from ALL IN where possible.

VIII.   Evaluation

Building off the feedback referenced in the previous section, we plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year, drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of MIT ALL IN actions.
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team.
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly.
- Attempting to collect statistics on student engagement with our projects through whatever means possible and appropriate, such as link click counts, email open rates and surveys at events.