

Middlebury College 2024 Democratic Action Plan

Summary

This Campus Action Plan was developed through collaborative efforts of our Center for Community Engagement's Democracy Initiatives student and professional staff, as well as our non-partisan democratic engagement student organization leaders. Our 2024 Action Plan, adapted from our 2020 plan, seeks to build on our existing successes in driving substantial student voting participation by reaching out explicitly to campus communities that have been historically underserved and marginalized with respect to voting access and support. On the Vermont campus, we will partner with a coalition of faculty, staff and student leaders to further our work. This plan builds upon our commitment to civic education and empowerment in the Middlebury community during the 2024 presidential election, 2025 local elections, and beyond. The development of this plan has been aided by resources from the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) and the [Students Learn Students Vote \(SLSV\) Coalition](#). Our plan is intentionally student-led and student focused because the most effective organizing efforts center the leadership of the communities they focus on. Our Campus Action Plan and our NSLVE data will be available on the Center for Community Engagement Democracy Initiatives page of the Middlebury College website.

Institutional Context

At the heart of Middlebury's institutional mission lies a commitment to providing students with the skills and opportunities to engage as ethical citizens. Middlebury's mission statement says that "we prepare students to lead engaged, consequential, and creative lives, contribute to their communities, and address the world's most challenging problems." We believe that empowered and intentional participation in our democracy, when possible, is an essential element of community. Middlebury also works to foster "the inquiry, equity, and agency, for them [students] to practice ethical citizenship at home and far beyond our Vermont campus."

The institutional focus on conflict transformation and understanding cultural differences as two of our four fluencies, enabled in part by the Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation grant, also put spotlight on an essential aspect of the democratic process: embracing constructive conflict among diverse groups and individuals as a necessary tool for social change.

It's important for community members, particularly college students, to feel a sense of agency when engaging in local, state and national politics. Middlebury seeks to inspire students by instilling the idea that their individual voices matter, so their voices are further amplified in collaborative group settings.

By empowering students to vote and be engaged in local and national government, we embody Middlebury's mission. Middlebury uses the [National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#) to measure election participation among students. According to NSLVE, in the 2020 general election, Middlebury had a voting rate of 85.7%, and a registration rate of 97.6%. Between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, Middlebury's voting rate rose by 23.4%.

Middlebury's long-term involvement in this work has resulted in successful efforts to increase voter participation; we believe that we have the capacity to continue to increase access and participation. We hope to build upon our momentum in 2024 and beyond.

Operating as a student organization, MiddVotes is managed by undergraduate students in collaboration with the Middlebury College Center for Community Engagement and the Student Engagement Office. MiddVotes leadership is predominantly horizontal, with opportunities for democratic leadership within the organization. Through the CCE's Campus Coalition for Democracy Initiatives, MiddVotes partners with members from the Middlebury community who are united by their shared commitment to increasing election engagement and civic participation. Our coalition includes cultural organizations and affinity groups, athletic teams and leadership, performing arts groups, administrative groups, Orientation, Residence Life, the Middlebury College Student Government Association, faculty, staff, and administration. MiddVotes is nonpartisan and strives to include voices from across the political spectrum, including those who have not participated in the political process in the past.

Middlebury Civics in Action (MiddCiA) is a newer student organization, developed with the goal of helping students advocate for issues they care about and increasing their direct involvement in the legislative process. Given their newer presence on campus, we are still exploring opportunities for collaboration with MiddCiA. Their organizational goals, however, align with our overall commitment to help Middlebury students become more well-rounded participants in civic life in the places most important to them. We believe the group has immense potential as many Middlebury students come from diverse political spheres, from New York City to Rutland, from the Bay Area to Fort Lauderdale. Students from political communities, big and small, can become active members in the Vermont legislative process and gain exposure to decision-making on the local and state levels. During the spring 2024 legislative season, Civics in Action met with their Vermont State Senator, State Representative and Secretary of State. They also prepared testimony on bills of their choosing, and one student was able to testify in committee, in support of a bill which passed.

Middlebury Athletics was a critical partner in our efforts to increase participation in the 2020 general elections. We look forward to maintaining and growing that partnership and the Student Athletic Advisory Committee (SAAC) will play an integral role in this work. In 2020, athletic teams engaged with the Middlebury Does Democracy program (MiDD), utilizing the team structure to encourage competition and commitment to political engagement. In 2023, the Democracy Initiatives team adapted Middlebury Does Democracy for a First-Year Residence Hall Challenge. In 2024, we hope to sustain the partnerships with Athletics and Residential Life while engaging with other organizations and groups in our campus community.

The Democracy Initiatives Intern team (student staff) will expand in fall of 2024 and partner with MiddVotes and Civics in Action to support the implementation of our Campus Action Plan.

Succession planning is a part of the advising process for all student organizations.

Goals

Create and foster a sustainable campus infrastructure that will support the following outcomes among Middlebury College students through:

- **Election participation**
 - Register students to vote using our Middlebury-specific voter portal. By 2024, 99% of eligible Middlebury students will be registered to vote in the U.S.
 - Increase student voter turnout. By 2024, **90%** of Middlebury students who are eligible U.S. voters will vote.
 - Create initiatives for all students, eligible and otherwise, to engage in election day activities (volunteering, election parties, etc.)
 - Reduce demographic disparities in voter turnout. By 2024, 70% of eligible black and Asian students will vote in the general election.
 - Increase outreach to the affinity groups of demographics that are underrepresented in 2020 student voting rates.

- **Voter Education & Empowerment**
 - Educate new Addison County, Vermont and Monterey County, California voters on local and state issues, including candidates, and their potential impact on the campus community.
 - Educate all students on the issues and candidates that will be on their ballots and support them in making a plan to vote. Ensure that they feel confident in understanding the election process and policies for their state (Vermont or home state if they choose to vote absentee).
 - Foster an awareness among Middlebury students about voter suppression, disenfranchisement, and the history of activism that led to expansions of voting rights.
 - Specifically catering events and initiatives towards historically disenfranchised communities to help them recognize their collective power and potential for change.
 - Hold events and campaigns about civic engagement that are inclusive of students who are not eligible to vote in the U.S.
 - Underscore the importance of all elections, and how local changes can have nationwide impacts.

- **Expanding the Outreach and Impact of MiddVotes/Civics in Action**
 - Develop outreach to international students, adapting from [this](#) resource created by Stony Brook's Center for Civic Justice.
 - Reach more spaces, groups, and communities on campus with our election engagement efforts, prioritizing groups with low voter turnout in the 2020 election (black and Asian students) with the goal of better understanding the barriers they may face in political participation.

- Develop materials to help students decide whether to vote in Vermont, California (MIIS) or their home state.
 - Reach new students at multiple points during Orientation and the first semester of school, and work with the Dean of the First Year Experience, Residential Life, and Student Services (MIIS) to make this practice permanent.
 - Integrate initiatives like voter registration drives and Q&A panels in the orientation or training framework.
 - Recruit new volunteers, train and empower them to run voter registration drives (using our voter portal) and other events with skill and confidence.
 - Continually update the Democracy Initiatives website, and MiddVotes and Civics and Action [Instagram](#) with resources on registering to vote, requesting absentee ballots, and learning about upcoming elections, candidates, and issues for all 50 states.
 - Maintaining a living document with this information.
- **Strengthening campus partnerships and collaborations**
- Continue to integrate ideas and activities generated with the Democracy Initiatives Campus Coalition. One of these is to provide a communication hub of different democracy related programming opportunities.
 - Work with Middlebury’s Director for Equity and Inclusion, to develop programming to help faculty facilitate inclusive discussions about elections.
 - Select and implement targeted strategies from *Election Imperatives* and *Election 365* designed to deepen a culture of civic learning on campus.
 - In partnership with the Conflict Transformation team, support student dialogue events on our campus to promote civil discourse across political differences.

Strategy

Below is a general timeline of the tactics we will employ to accomplish these goals.

Summer 2024

Action Item
Write targeted state-by-state emails to be sent in the fall <i>Ongoing- Done by Sept</i>
Develop a slide deck that faculty can use to inform classes about how to vote <i>Ongoing</i>
Create a “what you can do beyond voting” w/info on how to contact reps, how to volunteer in Addison County, and the different service, political & activism orgs you can get involved with on campus

<i>Ongoing</i>
Create a “voting in Middlebury” guide to help educate new Middlebury voters (both logistical info and candidate info) <i>Ongoing</i>

September 2024

Action Item
Table at move in day and first year optional activities <i>Sept 2-6</i>
National Voter Registration Day. Extend this into National Voter Registration week. Table across campus at various locations simultaneously, have events with music, food trucks and t shirt making. <i>Sept 19-23rd</i>
Reach out to cultural orgs and political & advocacy orgs so we can come to meetings and talk about National Voter Registration week <i>Ongoing</i>
Table at popular campus activities such as the WRMC/MCAB fall concert, the all-student barbeque, and the Quidditch classic. All other tabling- National Voter Reg WEEK! <i>Ongoing</i>
Have students sign pledge to vote cards at events and include their emails so we can send follow up reminders <i>Sept 19-23rd</i>
Do a first social media takeover of the Middlebury College instagram to advertise National Voter Registration week <i>Sept 18-24th</i>
Partner with college dems & republicans to host a presidential debate watch party
Meet with SGA External Affairs Committee to determine what role they can play institutionally

October 2024

Action Item
Provide free stamps in the mail center, residential offices, and library for students to send ballots <i>Oct 18-Nov 8</i>
Host a public art competition to see who can make the best piece/sculpture that says “vote” <i>Early Oct</i>

Work with the Middlebury Campus (newspaper) to get voting info in the paper/make another election issue <i>Mid-October</i>
Host four registration drives in different locations across campus <i>Ongoing</i>
Work with Residence Life staff to have registration events in dorm res life offices or dorm common rooms <i>Ongoing</i>
Host a MiddVotes voting trivia night at one of the MCAB thursday trivia nights <i>Early October</i>
Create a poster or photo series "I vote because..." or "I want you to vote because..." <i>Mid-October</i>
Plaster the campus with reminders about requesting and sending in absentee ballots! <i>Mid-Late Oct</i>
Create posters and napkin dispenser cards with info about same-day voting in VT/reminder to vote <i>Late Oct</i>

November 2024

Action Item
First week until election day: do a second social media takeover of the Middlebury College instagram <i>Oct 30-Nov 5</i>
Rock the Vote Concert <i>Nov 2</i>
Have the Middlebury Campus (newspaper) run a picture of the VT ballot with instructions on how to fill it out <i>Nov 3</i>
Partner with local businesses/orgs to put out voting reminders starting the Friday (Nov 4) before election day <i>Nov 3-Nov 8</i>
Table outside of dining halls the 2 days before election day to advertise same day voting in VT and info about the Middlebury ballot <i>Nov 6-8</i>

ELECTION DAY – Tue, Nov 8

Action Item
Table outside of dining halls to encourage students to go vote <i>8-2pm 430-7pm</i>
Run a shuttle to the polls leaving ADK every hour <i>7am-7pm</i>
Run a shuttle to polls leaving Samson every hour (MIIS) <i>7am-7pm</i>
Have volunteers make announcements in the beginning of classes <i>Ongoing</i>
Host a #VoteTogether party with food and music <i>5pm-9pm</i>
Co-sponsor an election watch-party with College Dems and College Republicans <i>8pm -1130 pm</i>

Winter/Spring 2025

Action Item
Hold at least 5 voter registration drives across campus at varying locations and campus events in order to reach as many students as possible. <i>Ongoing</i>
Continue to support and communicate with the recently created Democracy Initiatives Campus Coalition <i>Ongoing</i>
Send targeted state-by-state emails before the primaries in the spring <i>Ongoing</i>
Hold one fun MiddVotes social event for volunteers <i>J-term</i>
Table at the activities fair for incoming Febs <i>February 2024</i>
Table at spring Club Fair to recruit volunteers and raise awareness of 2024-25 initiatives (MIIS)
Work with Orientation to see if we can table at Academic Forum Orientation in the fall -- <i>March-April 2024</i>
Work with Student Athletic Advisory Committee to do team-specific drives <i>Ongoing</i>

<p>Develop a “Where should I vote?” guide to help students decide whether to register in VT or their home state <i>Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Work with the faculty/staff at Middlebury Union High School to support their voting initiatives. Offer to host a voting party the day before town meeting/election day in March. <i>March 2024</i></p>
<p>Develop a go/middvotes website with resources for registering, requesting ballots, deciding where to vote, learning about election law/voter suppression, learning what will be on ballots, opportunities for democracy-related programming, etc. Make a QR code for the website so students can scan and get it <i>Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Have a voter registration table set up at the 2024 Gensler symposium <i>April 2024</i></p>
<p>Work with Middlebury’s Director for Equity and Inclusion and Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research to develop training for faculty on how to have inclusive conversations about local and national elections <i>Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Meet with SGA External Affairs Committee to determine what role they can play institutionally <i>Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Work with the Conflict Transformation team to support student dialogue events on our campus to promote civil discourse across political difference <i>Ongoing</i></p>
<p>Work with our NESCAC Votes colleagues and attend an in-person convening in February <i>Ongoing</i></p>

Evaluation & Reporting

Middlebury College uses the NSLVE report to evaluate student voting rates. We also propose an anonymous student survey after the election, to be sent out to the entire student body asking the following questions: Are you an eligible US voter? Are you registered to vote? Did you vote? Why or why not? What would have made it easier for you to vote? After the election, we will hold several meetings with the MiddVotes team as well as one meeting open to the public to discuss the effectiveness of various initiatives and events.

We will explore a collaboration with the Middlebury Campus (student newspaper) in their annual Zeitgeist Survey.

In collaboration with peer institutions convened by Citizens & Scholars, we are implementing surveys to assess civic learning among students who are engaged with the Center for

Community Engagement and Conflict Transformation programs and community connected courses. There may be data gathered through those surveys that will address political engagement.

Some other measures we will use to evaluate our success are as follows:

- 2024 voting rate (% of eligible students that voted)
- # of people we helped register or request ballot
- # of days tabled
- # of consistent student volunteers
- # of riders in the election day shuttles
- # of student groups we worked with

The results of our evaluation will be used to inform future efforts and plans.

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