

Overview

Civic engagement and active partnership with the community are central to Montana State University's (MSU) strategic plan and institutional mission as a land grant university. MSU continually strives to strengthen and enhance the culture of civic engagement on our campus and ensure our students have all the necessary resources to be fully participatory members of their community. This Action plan outlines the current and future efforts taking place at MSU to increase civic participation. Core to these efforts are strengthening our relationships with our community partners and ensuring that civic engagement is an integral part of the education students receive at MSU.

MSU will work extensively with several community organizations and the county elections office to coordinate voter registration and engagement efforts. A key aspect of success for this program is to build strong relationships with these groups and partner where possible to maximize the opportunities students have to participate in the election. In instances where the university is unable to partner on specific programs, constant communication will be maintained to ensure that all relevant parties are aware of university efforts and that MSU's director of government affairs is aware of community efforts on campus and can provide resources or guidance as appropriate.

Working with various campus partners and utilizing existing programming, the program coordinator and director of government affairs will strive to distribute resources and information to students through as many channels as possible. As these efforts continue, feedback from campus partners and members of the ALL IN Advisory Board will be used to adjust messaging and create targeted resources to specific student needs.

Leadership

Civic engagement efforts at MSU are coordinated through the by the director of government affairs and program coordinator. In ensuring that the entire MSU community is engaged with these efforts an advisory board was established to engage all possible components of the campus and community. Board members assist ongoing efforts both through on campus programming and parallel work in the broader Bozeman community. MSU strives to continually develop community partnerships to broaden the impact of this work.

Committee Members:

Taylor Blossom – Program Coordinator

Janelle Booth – University Director of Government Affairs

Tracy Ellig – University Communications

Duane Morris – Auxiliary Services

Marianne Brough – Director of the Office of Student Engagement

Dr. Michael Brody – Faculty Senate

Emily Keller – Student Athletics Advisory Council

Aaron Grusonik – University Athletics

Megan McQueston – Residence Life

Margaret Davies – Associated Students of Montana State University

Parker McComb – College Republicans

McKade Mahlen – Inter Fraternity Council

Brin Purdy – Panhellenic Council

Carl Anderson – MontPIRG

Hannah Pate – Forward Montana

This leadership committee will meet weekly during the fall 2020 semester and quarterly thereafter until fall 2022. The leadership committee will help disperse program messaging and materials as well as provide feedback and guidance on program efforts. Further, to ensure streamlined and effective nature of program efforts, the members of the committee include members from several key university offices which are essential for effective programming. These members are particularly important for ensuring effective collaboration with local government offices.

Programming Strategies

Voter engagement efforts will include extensive programming at several key points throughout this fall's election. These will include National Voter Registration Day, Voter Education Week, and the week preceding the election. The primary goal of these efforts will be to educate students on how and when to register to vote as well as what resources are available to help inform them of what issues are on the ballot. Additionally, messaging around ballot return options will be emphasized heavily closer to election day as Gallatin County has elected to hold the election exclusively by mail.

National Voter Registration Day will be heavily advertised as it represented a huge opportunity to make progress on one of the main interest groups for the effort, first-year students. Voter registration cards will be distributed in the residence halls as well as through tabling on the mall and several offices around campus. Further, the Residence Hall Association will help host a social media competition among their members to promote voter registration and distribute registration resources.

Voter Education Week will be another opportunity to encourage students to register to vote as Montana has extended its voter registration deadline to October 26 this year. Further, this week will serve as an opportunity to help educate students on both what issues and candidates are on the ballot as well as how voting will be different this year due to many jurisdictions moving to an all-mail system. Resources will be posted on the MSU voting information website that include links to candidate debates, frequently asked questions about the registration and voting process as well as important dates for voting and registering throughout October.

In the weeks preceding the election, programming and social media outreach will be focused heavily on encouraging students to return their ballots. With all students registered in Gallatin County and many others registered in Montana having mail in ballots this focus will be extremely important for both first time and returning voters who may not have used mail in options previously. Signage will be put up around campus directing students to the official county dropbox located in the Office of Student Engagement, in the Student Union Building, for mail-in ballots. In addition to signage, several social media campaigns; including one with President Cruzado and Champ, the university mascot; will be used to remind students to return their ballots.

Voting Resources

MSU has partnered with the Gallatin County Elections Office to offer several additional resources to assist students with registering and voting this fall. These include a “Place of Deposit” on campus where students can turn in their mail ballots if they do not wish to mail them. Additionally, MSU will host a satellite registration office on campus the week prior to the election to assist students with voter registration after the regular deadline has passed. These county supported resources will be coupled with regular campus programming aimed at informing students on what registration and voting options are available to them.

The place of deposit will operate for most of October and continue through election day. This will provide students and community members with a convenient location in the Office of Student Engagement where they can get help with the entire voting process from registration through casting their ballot. This resource is crucial to the university’s goals of increasing voter registration and participation especially among younger students as the process will look significantly different this year than students may expect.

The week preceding the election, the university will also host a satellite voter registration office. Students who have not registered by the regular registration deadline will be able to register and vote on campus at this location just as though they were at the county office. In addition, if student have issues with their ballot or need other election related help, they will be able to receive it at the satellite office. As part of this effort, the director of government affairs and Office of Student Engagement will assist the County Elections Office with recruitment of elections clerks to help staff the satellite office.

Campus Partnerships

The program coordinator will enlist the help of various campus offices or organizations that have more regular direct contact with students. The exact manner of partnership will vary on a case by case basis. In an effort to integrate civic engagement into the existing campus culture the program coordinator will work to incorporate voting information and resources into the existing programing and activities of campus partners.

The Residence Hall Association and Residence Life Office will be critical partners throughout the election. As the two groups with the greatest access to first-year students, they will be able to distribute materials and resources to those students efficiently and safely. Several initiatives will be coordinated with them including as social media campaign and voter registration drive. In addition, they will help distribute printed materials and voting information to first year students.

Athletics has also agreed to partner with this program and distribute voting information and resources to their students. Not only will this partnership help ensure that all student athletes at Montana State are registered to vote, those athletes will be able to pass information about voting on to their communities outside of athletics. As campus leaders, these students can play a vital role in ensuring all students at MSU have the tools and information they need to fully participate in this election.

Resources will also be distributed through all offices and campus partners involved in the strategic planning committee. The Fraternity and Sorority leadership on campus will helped distribute resources to their members and encourage them to register. Auxiliary Services and the Office of Student Engagement will both play vital roles in MSU's partnership with the county by ensuring that all necessary resources are available to host the ballot drop off location and satellite registration office.

Goals

MSU strives to see 100% voter participation among our student population and will be striving to provide resources to all Bobcats. Efforts will focus especially on first year students and those living in the residence halls as this group has historically had the lowest participation rate and represent the greatest potential for long term increase in campus participation. Beyond this group, extra efforts will be made to increase voting in all communities which have lower participation rates than their peers based on NSLVE data from the past three elections. Further, MSU will strive to continually improve relationships and cooperation with community organizations and county offices working in parallel capacities to this effort.