



Center for Civic Engagement

Northwestern University

All-In Campus Democracy Challenge Action Plan 2020

Background & Goals

Northwestern University's voter registration, education, and turnout efforts are led by the Center for Civic Engagement's NU Votes initiative.

NU Votes is a non-partisan initiative designed to provide the NU community with accessible information about registration and voting and to promote informed voter engagement. NU Votes is supported by a campus-wide Steering Committee of staff from relevant University departments, faculty from multiple schools, and undergraduate and graduate students.

The Center for Civic Engagement founded NU Votes in 2011, and over the past nine years, has designed an ambitious program to integrate voter registration into orientation for all incoming students, and worked to impact the culture of voter engagement on campus through other voter registration, education, and turnout efforts.

In 2016, NU Votes made special efforts to expand voter engagement among undergraduate and graduate students around the General Election. Our NSLVE data from 2016 provided evidence of our success, recording a 91% registration rate, a 65% voter turnout rate, and a 15 point, or 30%, increase in turnout from 2012 to 2016, resulting in several All In Challenge Awards.

The 2018 Midterm Elections naturally offered an additional challenge, as Northwestern's voter turnout rate in 2014 was only 22%, so we ramped up our voter engagement efforts as a result. Once again, our NSLVE data offered evidence of our success. In 2018, Northwestern's voting rate increased by 29 points to 51.5%, significantly outpacing the 19 point increase nationally, and representing a 133% increase in student voter turnout from 2014 to 2018.

NU Votes plans to build on this momentum for the 2020 Primary and General Election seasons. We are committed to expanding upon the voter registration and absentee ballot services, voter education, and voter turnout efforts we offered in 2016 and

2018 that were fundamental to our success, while continuing to experiment and innovate to further strengthen the practice and norms of voter engagement at NU.

50-State Voter Registration & Absentee Ballot Services

As Northwestern is a national university, NU Votes will continue to provide students with support for registering to vote in all 50 states, as well as with requesting and submitting absentee ballots as needed.

Integrated Registration During Orientation

NU Votes will continue to implement its flagship registration program, which integrates 50-state voter registration and absentee ballot requests into the University's orientation processes for undergraduate and graduate students. To achieve this, the NU Votes team will staff Voter Registration Stations at each Welcome Center on move-in day, offering every incoming first-year or transferring undergraduate student the opportunity to register to vote for the first time, update their registration, or request an absentee ballot to vote by mail. The NU Votes team will offer the same services to incoming graduate students at The Graduate School Orientation.

Registration Drives

For returning undergraduate and graduate students and other members of the University community, NU Votes will organize and staff Voter Services Stations in key locations across campus early in Fall Quarter. Students can check their registration status, register to vote or update their voter registration information, request absentee ballots or check on the status of ballot requests, access copying and mailing services, get answers to registration and voting related questions, and more. This year, we will expand our Voter Services Stations beyond the Norris University Center (the main student center on the Evanston campus) where they have been held in previous years, to additional locations including the University Library and the Technological Institute, in order to reach a broader undergraduate student audience. We are also considering a station on Northwestern's Downtown Chicago Campus, in order to provide more accessible voter services to professional students.

Ongoing Voter Services & Support

In addition to these registration drives, NU Votes will continue to offer voter services yearlong, in person at Northwestern's Center for Civic Engagement, as well as online through NUVotes.org.

In-person support is available at CCE, Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm, on a walk-in basis, throughout the academic year. Students are provided with assistance for everything from answers to complicated registration or voting questions, to support printing and completing forms, to picking up stamps and envelopes to mail in registration forms or absentee ballots.

In partnership with Vote.org, NU Votes also offers online tools, accessible anytime from anywhere, for students to check their registration status, register to vote, and request absentee ballots in any of the 50 states, on their own.

Students can also contact our team via phone, email, and social media messaging for 1-on-1 support.

Voter Education & Turnout

In addition to our voter registration efforts, NU Votes works to help students become more informed and active citizens through voter education and turnout efforts.

Online Voter Education Guides

NU Votes will continue to build upon our online voter education resources, in order to provide students with accessible and understandable information about voter registration and voting procedures, ballot education resources, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Campus-Wide Emails

NU Votes will continue to work with campus partners to send emails to the entire University community with timely information about voter registration deadlines, ballot education resources, and procedures for absentee voting, early voting, and voting on election day.

Voter Education Events

NU Votes will continue to collaborate with departments and student organizations across the University to organize and promote voter education events, such as introductions to local politics, speakers and panel discussions on policy issues, debate watch, and election watch events, for undergraduates and graduate students.

NU Votes Ambassadors

NU Votes will expand upon the Ambassadors program we developed for 2018. We

will once again recruit, select and train teams of undergraduate and graduate student Ambassadors to promote voter engagement among their peers. Ambassadors raise awareness about the elections through announcements in classes and student group meetings, conduct 1-on-1 conversations within their networks, and organize events and activities to educate, motivate, and turn out their peers.

Advertising, Email, Flyers & Social Media

NU Votes will continue to raise awareness about the elections, share election-related news and educational resources, and promote voter turnout, through advertisements, emails, flyers, and social media. Efforts from previous years we are likely to repeat and expand upon include ads in the student newspaper, banners in key locations around campus, flyering campaigns in the residence halls, public service announcements at football games, targeted peer-to-peer and state-specific emails, and social media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Voter Van & Election Day Visibility

NU Votes will once again organize our Voter Van. The Voter Van offers transportation to and from the local early voting site during the week leading up to Election day, enabling students to take advantage of early voting or grace period registration and voting. In addition, the NU Votes team will have a presence at on-campus polling places and other popular locations around campus on Election Day, in order to serve as a visible reminder of the election, generate excitement for voting, and continue to promote a culture of voter engagement.

Adaptations & New Initiatives

In addition to the established efforts above, the NU Votes team is currently exploring additional ways to expand our voter registration, education, and turnout efforts. Ideas thus far include working more closely with student groups and other departments, targeting special populations of students such as athletes or engineers; working more closely with faculty to integrate voter education and voting reminders into classes and syllabi; integrating voter services tools into course registration technology; advocating for an early voting site on campus; and more.

Additional Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Work

Outside the voting sphere, the Center for Civic Engagement offers a plethora of programs and services designed to promote a lifelong commitment to social responsibility and active citizenship.

CCE's many offerings include an academic certificate program in civic engagement, an immersive summer field study program for undergraduates, faculty-led trips to local neighborhoods and civic institutions, service-learning programs in preschools and the local juvenile detention center, practicum programs for graduate students, a post-graduate fellowship program, and more. The Center also advises students on ways to connect academics and civic life, supports faculty in incorporating engagement components into their courses, conducts research on civic engagement in higher education, and fosters connections between the university and the local community.

Finally, beyond the Center for Civic Engagement, Northwestern University has a robust culture of civic learning and democratic engagement, with faculty implementing engaged learning in their classrooms and collaborating with community organizations in their research, staff in student life fostering leadership development, community engagement, and social justice education among students, and many active student groups engaging in service, philanthropy, and activism in co-curricular spaces. These efforts all help to contribute to a culture of civic and political engagement at Northwestern.