



Northwestern University Voter Engagement Action Plan 2022

Introduction

This Action Plan was developed by Northwestern University's Center for Civic Engagement, specifically our NU Votes initiative, in order to guide the University's voter engagement work for the 2022 election season. Northwestern's voter engagement plans are developed and implemented by NU Votes in collaboration with the NU Votes Steering Committee and a number of other diverse campus and community partners.

These voter engagement activities serve over 8,000 undergraduate students on Northwestern University's main campus in Evanston, Illinois, as well as over 13,000 graduate and professional students on the Evanston and Chicago Campuses. NU Votes also serves as a resource for voter information for the entire University community, including faculty, staff, alumni, and local community members.

These activities cover voter registration, voter education, and voter turnout efforts for the 2022 primary and general election seasons. Our short term goal is to match or increase Northwestern student voter participation rates from the 2018 midterm election, working towards long term goals of full voter participation at Northwestern, and creating a culture of political participation and broader civic engagement at the University and beyond.

Note that Northwestern's voter engagement activities are the primary focus of this plan, but only one part of the University's broader commitment to and efforts towards civic learning and democratic engagement.

This Action Plan offers an overview of each of the following key areas:

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Leadership

Northwestern University's voter engagement work is coordinated by the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE)'s NU Votes initiative.

About CCE & NU Votes

The [Center for Civic Engagement](#) facilitates engaged student learning and promotes a lifelong commitment to social responsibility and active citizenship. By integrating academics with meaningful volunteer service, research, and community partnerships, the Center supports students, faculty, staff, and alumni as they enhance their own academic experiences while contributing to stronger communities and a more engaged university. The Center aspires to make informed, responsible civic engagement a cultural norm at Northwestern; and to make engaged teaching, learning, research, and civic participation signature strengths of the University.

[NU Votes](#) is a non-partisan initiative of the Center for Civic Engagement, designed to provide the Northwestern community with accessible information about registration and voting and to promote informed voter engagement. NU Votes aims to help students get registered, get educated, and get to the polls.

NU Votes Steering Committee

NU Votes is supported by a diverse campus-wide Steering Committee of administrators and staff from relevant departments, faculty from across schools, and undergraduate and graduate students. The Steering Committee is composed of individuals and departments committed to or working on to voter engagement in some capacity, and/or representing key stakeholder groups across the University. Steering Committee membership varies a bit from year to year and new members are frequently added throughout the election season or replaced as roles turn over.

Currently, the Steering Committee consists of: the Assistant Vice President for Student Engagement, the Director of the Office of Leadership Development and Community Engagement, the Director of Residential Academic Initiatives in Residential Services, and the Associate Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, all in the Division of Student Affairs; the Executive Director of Government Relations; the Executive Director of Neighborhood and Community Relations; the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer for Northwestern Athletics; the Associate Director of Student Life in The Graduate School; faculty from the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, the McCormick School of Engineering, the Medill School of Journalism, the School of Communication, the School of Education and Social Policy, the Feinberg School of Medicine, and the Pritzker School of Law; as well as graduate and undergraduate student representatives (typically those serving in paid roles as CCE Undergraduate Fellows or Graduate Assistants, or NU Votes Staff or Ambassadors).

The Steering Committee meets regularly during each election season. Meetings are typically in person and coordinated and facilitated by CCE and NU Votes staff. The Steering Committee supports NU Votes in assessing our current voter engagement work, brainstorming ideas for expansion, developing plans for voter engagement activities, collaborating to help execute specific activities, communicating with and bringing in additional partners, as well as evaluating

outcomes, celebrating successes, and identifying further opportunities for growth. Many of these individuals and departments also initiate and execute independent civic and voter engagement efforts that contribute to this broader work at the University.

Other Partnerships & Collaborations

Outside of the Steering Committee, NU Votes collaborates with a number of other institutional partners, on campus, in the community, and across the country.

Our voter registration, education, and turnout efforts would not be possible without the active partnership of departments across the University. Past and current partners include the President's and Provost's Offices, the Office of Student Transition Experiences, The Graduate School, Norris University Center, University Libraries, Campus Life, Residential Life, Off-Campus Life, Multicultural Student Affairs, Athletics, the Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion, and University Relations.

NU Votes is also reliant on the support and collaboration of individual faculty and academic departments, as well as a number of student groups, including the Associated Student Government, College Democrats, College Republicans, and the Political Union, other political, service, and social issue-oriented undergraduate and graduate student organizations, residential colleges, fraternities and sororities, and more.

In addition, NU Votes works closely with some important external and community partners, most notably the Cook County Board of Elections and our local Voter Participation Action Coalition, as well as technology partners including Vote.org and BallotReady.

Finally, on the national level, Northwestern participates in the National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), as well as the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, the Big 10 Voting Challenge, and the Illinois Campus and Chicago Campus Voting Challenges. Our staff team also engages in the broader national conversation around student voter engagement, and aims to support other universities interested in expanding their own voter engagement work.

Commitment

Northwestern has demonstrated a significant commitment to voter engagement, as well as civic learning and democratic engagement more broadly.

The University's current [Strategic Plan](#), which has been in place since 2011, identifies engagement as one of four key pillars "critical to the university's future." References to the mission and mechanisms of civic engagement are included throughout, as the university commits to "create solutions to problems that will improve lives, communities, and the world," "integrate student learning with experiences in the world beyond the classroom," "connect individuals from diverse backgrounds... to a truly inclusive community," and "engage locally, nationally, and internationally to heighten our global impact for the greater good."

The University's commitment to civic and political participation is evidenced in the very

existence of the Center for Civic Engagement as a University-wide Center housed directly under the Office of the Provost, as well as the University's support for the Center's NU Votes initiative and our voter engagement and other civic learning and democratic engagement work.

Northwestern was one of the first universities in the nation to integrate voter registration into student orientation each year, and those efforts are now institutionalized at the University. The University, in partnership with NU Votes, includes voting information in campus-wide communications during each election season. In addition, the University works with the Cook County Board of Elections to host one or more on-campus polling places for each election. The President and Provost's Offices also support the University's participation in NSLVE and the national and local Voting Challenges referenced above.

Northwestern's commitment to voter engagement in particular is regularly publicly expressed. For instance, as Northwestern gained national media attention for these voter engagement efforts, Northwestern's President was quoted in the [New York Times](#) about the University's commitment to voter engagement, calling it "an obligation" and saying, "We're supposed to teach citizenship." While Northwestern's current President has not yet signed the ALL IN Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation, Northwestern's incoming President has signed this commitment at a previous institution, and we are confident Northwestern will become a signatory in the near future.

Further evidence of institutional commitment across and throughout the University can be found in the willing and eager participation of the plethora of University departments referenced above in our voter engagement work, as well as the efforts of the many faculty, staff, students, and alumni who participate in civically engaged teaching, learning, research, and community pursuits, and integrate civic and democratic engagement into their efforts inside and outside the classroom.

Landscape

Past Efforts, Successes & Areas for Growth

The Center for Civic Engagement began NU Votes in 2011. Over the past ten years, we first designed an ambitious program to integrate voter registration into orientation for all incoming students, and then built up a robust set of voter registration, education, and turnout activities (described in the [Strategies & Activities](#) section below) that we implement for federal, state, and local elections each year. The result has been strong voter turnout rates in recent elections, and a growing culture and norms of voter engagement on campus.

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 offered evidence of our success. Northwestern recorded a 91% voter registration rate and a 64% voter turnout rate among eligible students. Our voter turnout was 15 points, or 30%, higher than in 2012, and 14 points higher than the voting rate for all institutions. We won several All In Challenge Awards, including highest and most improved voting rates among large, private 4-year institutions, and

most improved voting rate among all universities.

The 2018 Midterm Election 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 recorded an 86% voter registration rate and a 51.5% voter turnout rate. Our turnout increased by 29 points, significantly outpacing the 19 point increase nationally, and representing a 133% increase from 2014 to 2018, and a voting rate 12 points higher than the rate for all institutions.

The 2020 Primary & General Elections were a challenge of their own, as they were across the country, as they took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Northwestern went fully remote just before the Illinois Primary in the spring, and remained fully remote throughout the fall, with only a limited number of upperclassmen living on or near campus. As a result, we had to shift our voter registration, education, and turnout activities significantly to largely virtual formats, in order to try to reach and accommodate students living across the country and around the world. We were unable to offer the in-person services that have been key to our success in past years to the vast majority of students, and our impact was lower as a result. We are still awaiting our NSLVE report for 2020, due to data discrepancies we are still working with Northwestern & IDHE to address. Our preliminary data shows a voter turnout rate of 68%, a modest increase over 2016, which was our most important goal given the context in which we were operating, even if the increase was not as standout as in previous years. In addition, 2020 stretched us to innovate, and many of the new tools and strategies we created may be useful in future years.

While we are tremendously proud of our successes, there is certainly more work to be done. We have not achieved full voter participation at Northwestern, and we know our efforts are not reaching every student. In particular, reviewing the demographic breakdowns in our NSLVE data from previous years and the national NSLVE reports reveals some prospective areas of focus. Our 2016 data showed men voting at lower rates than women (similar to the national data; though comparison data was not available in our 2018 report). Our 2016 data also showed upperclassmen voting at slightly lower rates than underclassmen, and graduate students, especially students in their 20s, voting at lower rates than undergraduates (though those differentials were not as stark in our 2018 data). In addition, our 2018 data showed significantly lower voter turnout rates for STEM majors than social science majors, in some cases a difference of 30 points between the highest and lowest turnout groups. While Northwestern's NSLVE data is not currently available by race/ethnicity, we would imagine the gaps between white students and students of color might be similar to national trends. And while we do not yet have demographic breakdowns from 2020, and the 2020 national report showed some encouraging closing of gaps nationally, many of those gaps are clearly still present nationally, and we suspect at Northwestern as well. Finally, in addition to focusing on specific populations of students, there is also room to continue to grow in terms of expanding, experimenting, and innovating in our activities and tactics.

Broader Environment & Context

As an institution with a large national student body (approximately 65% of undergraduates come from out of state), Northwestern students vote in all 50 states. As a result,

communication and processes can be more of a challenge. Staff and volunteers must learn to navigate registration and ballot request forms, rules and procedures, and deadlines for all 50 states. Students who vote via mail in other states face barriers logistically (requiring printing and mailing of forms, copies of IDs, sometimes even notarization) and are reliant on local election officials, with varying results. Out of state students regularly report that their ballots don't arrive even when requested on time, and are often frustrated by their experiences with local registration and voting systems.

A plurality of our students vote in-state, either because they are from Illinois or choose to vote at their campus addresses. Fortunately, Illinois has generous registration and voting policies and practices, including support for vote by mail, robust early voting, and election-day registration. However, Illinois is not a competitive state in the Presidential election, and in many cases, local offices are not competitive in general elections either, suppressing turnout.

Northwestern also has a large graduate and professional student population (approximately 60% of our total student body). Many of the professional students are on a secondary campus, where they are harder to reach. In addition, the graduate student body on the Evanston campus contains a high percentage of international students (approximately 40%), complicating messaging as well as peer-to-peer efforts and the culture of participation in elections.

Timing of elections can also be a challenge given the University calendar. Illinois primary elections and Evanston and Chicago municipal elections often fall around spring break; in 2022, the Illinois primary election will take place over the summer. And in federal election years, as Northwestern is on the quarter system, there are typically only six weeks or so between when students arrive on campus for Fall Quarter in late September and the November election, shortening the time available for awareness-raising and often limiting the success of turnout efforts, especially when so many students need to vote by mail and are thus facing voter registration and ballot request deadlines up to four weeks prior to Election Day.

The broader political climate has also had an impact on students' interest in elections post-2020. The past several years have exposed stark inequalities and injustices nationwide, yet the political system has been stymied by increasing levels of polarization, partisanship, and inaction. As a result, many students are increasingly frustrated with and by the political system and disengage from politics and elections; even our most aware and active students often choose to engage in making change in other ways.

One thing working in our favor is that the culture at the University is still a positive one for voter engagement. Many of our voter engagement efforts are institutionalized at the University, and have the support of University leadership and collaborating departments, faculty, staff, and students. Our high turnout rates in past elections are well-known and contribute to a culture of engagement. For instance, our Voter Van was running during Family Weekend at Northwestern a few years ago, and one of our staff overheard a student remarking to her family as it passed by, "we're all about voting here at Northwestern." Our voter engagement efforts are bolstered by the Center for Civic Engagement's other curricular and co-curricular service-learning and experiential education programming, as well as by other civic learning and democratic engagement efforts conducted by faculty, staff, and student groups.

At the same time, the University is quite decentralized, so our voter engagement work often involves a great deal of coordination and collaboration; and students are often siloed in their networks and involvements, so it is hard to reach everyone with any single effort, which requires working on many different fronts, so as mentioned previously, our efforts don't yet reach all students. In addition, the Center for Civic Engagement and the NU Votes program operate with limited budget and staff capacity, and our ambitions for this work regularly exceed the time and resources we are able to dedicate to it.

Nonetheless, we are committed to building on our past successes and furthering Northwestern student voter engagement in the 2022 Primary and General Election seasons. We plan to adapt and where possible expand upon the voter registration and absentee ballot services, voter education, and voter turnout efforts we have offered in past years that were fundamental to our success, while continuing to experiment and innovate to further strengthen the practice and norms of voter engagement at NU.

Goals

Our short term goal is to match or increase our 2018 student voter participation rate, working towards long term goals of full voter registration and participation at Northwestern, full integration of civic learning and democratic engagement efforts into curricular and co-curricular work across the University, and a robust culture of political participation and civic engagement at the University and beyond.

Our primary goal for 2022 is to maintain or increase our voter turnout over 2018, in the current political climate. We would like to sustain a voter registration rate above 80%, a voting rate of registered students above 60%, and an overall voter turnout rate above 50%. In a midterm election in a more challenging political climate than in 2018, we anticipate that even sustaining our 2018 numbers may be a significant challenge. Of course, over time, we aim to increase our voter turnout rate in each election, and to close the gaps in turnout between midterm and presidential elections.

In addition, we aim to return to the institutionalized, in-person voter engagement efforts and activities we had integrated across the university prior to the pandemic, while keeping some of the remote and virtual offerings that students appreciated. We also aim to continue to expand our reach across the university. Areas of focus include expanding our ability to offer voter services to returning students, graduate, and professional students, as well as increasing targeted voter turnout efforts to STEM majors, men, and students of color.

Specifically, we aim to increase the number of returning students and graduate and professional students utilizing our voter services over 2018 and 2020 levels, and reduce or eliminate the turnout gaps we have seen among upperclassmen and graduate students in past years. In addition, we aim to plan and implement at least one new effort, initiative, or partnership targeted specifically at STEM majors, in order to reduce the turnout gap in that

population. Finally, we aim to broaden our outreach efforts and activities aimed at men and students of color. Even where we don't have sufficient or recent metrics among these populations to measure our results, we will be contributing to civic engagement across the university by raising awareness and stimulating action among those groups.

Increasing Northwestern's voter participation will help us achieve our long term goals, to foster a culture of civic and political participation across the University, and help students develop the civic knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors needed to be actively engaged leaders and citizens in their local and global communities. A campus-wide coalition of partners working together on these efforts will also help create a forum for and ultimately help advance full integration of civic learning and democratic engagement efforts into curricular and co-curricular spaces across the University.

Strategies & Activities

NU Votes plans to implement the following strategies and activities during the 2022 Primary and General Election seasons:

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 plans to return to implementing our 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 typically staffs 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 typically offers the same services to incoming graduate students at The Graduate School Orientation. Some graduate student orientation activities may still take place remotely this year, so in-person opportunities may be more limited; nonetheless, we still aim to integrate voter services into graduate student orientation in some capacity.

Registration Drives

For returning undergraduate and graduate students and other members of the University community, NU Votes typically organizes and staffs Voter Services Stations in key locations across campus early in Fall Quarter, where 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 are planning to 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 also had success with a visible location outside the COVID testing center in 2020, which we may keep as an option as well. We are also considering a station on Northwestern's Downtown Chicago Campus, in order to provide more accessible voter services to professional students. Finally, we will supplement these in-person stations with greater access to and promotion of the online tools and services that we created and utilized successfully in 2020. Ultimately, we aim to work towards integrating our online tools into other University systems.

Ongoing Voter Services & Support

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

In-person support is typically available at CCE on a drop-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 forms or ballots, even accessing notary services if needed. In 2020, we also piloted contactless Dropboxes & Mailing Support Stations across campus for students to drop off registration or ballot request forms or pick up stamps to mail ballots. Many students found these to be helpful, and we are likely to continue to utilize them moving forward.

We also supplement these in-person drop-in services with remote services. In partnership with Vote.org, NU Votes 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. In 2020, we also piloted a text support line and remote drop-in hours via Zoom, which many students found to be helpful and we are likely to continue as well.

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 publish and promote online voter education guides for both the Primary and General Elections, in order to provide the entire University community with accessible and understandable information about voter registration and voting deadlines and procedures, ballot education resources, and answers to frequently asked questions. We developed and expanded our online resources significantly in 2020 and will incorporate those additions into our 2022 guides.

Campus-Wide Emails

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

Voter Education Events

NU Votes will continue to collaborate with departments and student organizations across the University to organize and promote voter education events during the Primary and especially the General Election season. Events might include voting 101 or voting rights workshops, introductions to local politics, speakers and panel discussions on policy issues, debate watch and election watch events, ballot parties, and more, for both undergraduates and graduate student audiences. We anticipate most of these events will return to in-person formats, though we may supplement them with some virtual events as well.

NU Votes Ambassadors

NU Votes will continue the Ambassadors program we utilized successfully in 2018 and 2020. For the General Election, we will 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, share voting reminders on social media, and organize events and activities to educate, motivate, and turn out their peers.

Faculty & Course Resources

NU Votes will continue to offer and expand upon our voter engagement resources and services for faculty. In 2020, we piloted a new Canvas module offering introductory voter education and online voter services tools that faculty could import into their course sites. We also created a new resource for faculty with additional ideas to integrate voter education and engagement activities into their courses and classrooms, including the option to request a class presentation from a trained NU Votes Staff or Ambassador. We plan to continue and expand upon these resources in 2022, promote them more widely, and aim for wider utilization among faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Advertising, Email, Flyers & Social Media

NU Votes will continue to raise awareness about the Primary and General Elections, share election-related information 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 for the General Election in particular 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 & Early Voting

NU Votes will return to offering our Voter Van and promote early voting in the General Election. 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 same-day registration and voting. Ambassadors also lead walking trips to the local early voting site.

Election Day Polling Places & Visibility

NU Votes will work with the University and the Cook County Board of Elections to promote a return to one or two on-campus polling places for the General Election, as one previous on-campus polling place was moved off campus in 2018 due to construction, and the second was moved off campus in 2020 due to COVID restrictions. In addition, the NU Votes team will

maintain a visible 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.

New Initiatives

In addition, the NU Votes team will continue to explore additional ways to expand our existing voter registration, education, and turnout efforts beyond what we have offered in past years. Ideas thus far include expanding our partnerships with schools, departments, faculty, and student groups, especially to target populations referenced previously, including graduate and professional students, STEM majors, men, and students of color; integrating voter services tools into course registration or other university technology; advocating for an early voting site on campus; and more.

All of the efforts above are coordinated by NU Votes in collaboration with campus partners, and executed by CCE and NU Votes' full-time and part-time staff as well as trained undergraduate and graduate NU Votes Student Staff and Ambassadors. Still more voter engagement activities are planned and executed by other campus partners, so the list above may not be comprehensive. And of course, our voter engagement strategies for 2022 are supplemented by our year-round voter engagement efforts, as well as broader civic learning and democratic engagement activities organized by CCE and departments, faculty, staff, and students across the University.

Year-Round Voter Engagement Efforts

Northwestern's voter engagement activities extend far beyond federal election seasons. NU Votes conducts voter registration for all incoming undergraduate and graduate students every year, celebrates civic holidays such as National Voter Registration Day even in non-election years, and offers drop-in voter services year round. In addition, NU Votes conducts voter education and voter turnout efforts not only for federal primaries and general elections, but also for state and municipal primary and general elections; as a result, there are voter engagement campaigns taking place every year.

Other Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Activities

In addition, Northwestern's civic learning and democratic engagement activities extend far beyond voter engagement. The Center for Civic Engagement's many offerings include an academic certificate program in civic engagement, an immersive summer field study course for undergraduates, faculty-led trips to local neighborhoods and civic institutions, service-learning programs in preschools, middle schools, and the local juvenile detention center, practicum programs for graduate students, a post-graduate fellowship program, conferences, speakers and special events, 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 dozens of active student groups centered on politics, service, social issues, philanthropy, and activism in co-curricular spaces. These efforts all help to contribute to a culture of civic and political engagement at Northwestern.

Evaluation

Northwestern will measure the success of its voter engagement efforts through a number of mechanisms:

NSLVE Results

We consider the primary metric of our success to be Northwestern students' actual voter turnout rates in the 2022 General Election, as measured by the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE). We use NSLVE data to assess the success of our efforts and set goals for future years, both for overall turnout rates, and for turnout among specific populations of students.

Other Quantitative & Qualitative Data

We track the numbers of students served through our voter registration, education, and turnout activities. This includes the number of students who utilize our voter services in-person and online to register, check or update their registration, request, check the status of, or return an absentee ballot, or access mailing services, rides to the polls, or other services; the number of students who attend voter education and voter turnout events such as speakers, workshops, ballot parties, debate and returns watch events, and more; the number of students we reach through email and social media; the number of Ambassadors we engage and the number of students those Ambassadors reach through class presentations, 1-on-1 conversations, and events within their networks; and finally, turnout at on-campus polling places. In the past, we have found those numbers are often correlated with our broader voter turnout rates, and allow us to assess our progress throughout the election season, as well as predict our potential impact before the NSLVE results are available.

We also track the demographics of the students involved where possible, including year, school and major, home state, race/ethnicity, campus affiliations and involvements, and more, so that we can measure and continue to increase our reach, especially among targeted groups with lower levels of involvement in previous years.

We collect qualitative feedback from key stakeholders, including our NU Votes Ambassadors and Staff, as well as our Steering Committee and other campus partners, about what was most effective or successful, what students learned and gained from their involvement, remaining challenges and obstacles, and suggestions and ideas for the future.

Research Studies

Finally, starting in 2018, we formed a partnership with faculty in Political Science, Human Development & Social Policy, and the Institute for Policy Research, to conduct research around the effectiveness of our voter engagement efforts. During each major election season, we work

with this faculty team to identify and test specific tactics or interventions to increase voter turnout. The faculty team designs experiments that our NU Votes team implements as part of our voter engagement efforts. The faculty team then uses NSLVE and internal data to measure the success of those efforts. In addition to evaluating our own work through this research, we will ultimately be able to contribute to the knowledge base around student voter engagement in the broader field.

The NU Votes team, our Steering Committee, and other collaborators review each year's NSLVE data, research results, and other quantitative and qualitative data carefully, consider it seriously, and use it to shape future years' efforts.

Reporting

We are quite proud of our voter engagement efforts and results, and aim to share them widely.

Northwestern's voter engagement activities and results are promoted publicly on the NU Votes website and the Center for Civic Engagement website, as well as in our email newsletters and social media. Our Action Plan and NSLVE Reports are also publicly available on the ALL IN Challenge and Voter Friendly Campus websites, and as we resolve the issues with our past years' data, plan to make our NSLVE Reports publicly available on the NU Votes website as well.

We prepare and review our voter engagement plans internally and externally with key stakeholders, including NU Votes Ambassadors and Staff, the NU Votes Steering Committee, collaborating departments and student groups, and University leadership, as well as local and national community partners. We also share our results with those internal and external stakeholders following the election and again when NSLVE data becomes available, in order to share our successes, celebrate together, and recognize all parties' contributions to this work, as well as identify areas for further growth.

Finally, we aim to publicize our plans and activities, data and results, and any awards or designations received widely in news media, within the University community and in the broader community when we are able. Broad sharing of what are typically high rates of voter engagement at Northwestern contributes to and continues to foster the culture of civic and political engagement that we aim to create.

Plan Drafted: June 2022