

All In Campus Challenge 2024 Voter Engagement Plan

Pitzer College

Executive Summary

This plan was developed by Anjali Bhagat, Program Assistant for the college's program, The People's Pitzer, with help from the Pitzer College Community Engagement Center and Jessica Chairez, Assistant Director of the Community Engagement Center. Additionally, it was developed and solidified by other program assistants at the Community Engagement Center. This action plan seeks to increase voter registration, education, and turnout within the Pitzer and Claremont Colleges communities (Pitzer is part of a consortium of colleges termed the "5Cs"). This plan also seeks to institutionalize civic engagement at Pitzer over the long term to act on our core values of social responsibility, intercultural understanding, interdisciplinary learning, and student engagement. This plan begins during the 2024 election cycle and details long-term goals through 2030, though it will be updated every two years and resubmitted to the All In Campus Challenge. Currently, The People's Pitzer (TPP), an initiative of the Center for Community Engagement, facilitates this effort. This plan is based on equitable values and aims to center the empowerment of marginalized communities.

Leadership

Since its founding in 1963, Pitzer has been committed to community governance, encouraging everyone to use their voice. This commitment is rooted in social justice and activism, mirrored in the five core values guiding our academic and co-curricular programming: social responsibility, intercultural understanding, interdisciplinary learning, student engagement, and environmental sustainability. We are excited to strengthen civic engagement heading into 2024 by developing our voter engagement strategies and building on our action plan from 2022.

Pitzer's senior leadership displays an explicit, visible commitment to improving voter engagement. In Fall 2021, Pitzer President Melvin Oliver began a tradition of the President sending a letter via email to students, faculty, and staff each semester communicating the importance of civic engagement and providing resources for voter education and registration. President Oliver has also signed All In's Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. Pitzer's new president, Strom Thacker has demonstrated commitment to voter engagement. (find evidence) Not only is Pitzer committed to voter engagement in national and local elections, but also to elections within the Student Senate.

Commitment

Commitment to civic engagement is included in Pitzer's general curriculum, which is informed by the following core values, educational objectives, and community values:

- **Core values:** social responsibility, intercultural understanding, interdisciplinary learning, student engagement, and environmental sustainability.
- **Educational objectives:** breadth of knowledge, understanding in depth, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, effective expression, interdisciplinary perspective, intercultural

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understanding, social justice, social responsibility, and the ethical implications of knowledge and action

- **Community values:** community, diversity, dialogue, inquiry, and action

Pitzer's curriculum, informed by these existing statements, often involves civic learning and democratic engagement. A few examples of spring 2024 courses centering on this mission include: Law and Politics, Intro to Comparative Politics, U.S. Foreign Policy, Critical Community Studies, Environmental Justice, (re)Making American Metropolis, Power and Social Change, and Racial/Ethnic & Immigrant Justice. Each student is required to take a course focused on Intercultural Understanding, both local and global, Social Responsibility Praxis, Social Justice Theory, and Social Sciences. This equips students with the tools to make informed decisions when it comes to the polls. These courses allow Pitzer students to "gain a deeper understanding of community engagement."

Pitzer's mission statement reads, "Pitzer College produces engaged, socially responsible citizens of the world through an academically rigorous, interdisciplinary liberal arts education emphasizing social justice, intercultural understanding and environmental sensitivity." Outside of the CEC, Pitzer's cultural focus on social justice makes educating for civic learning and democratic engagement a pervasive part of our institutional culture. Many student organizations focus on social justice, and many faculty are actively involved in (and engage their students in) social movements through civic engagement.

Civic engagement is also present in co-curricular programming. One example of this is the Critical Action & Social Advocacy (CASA) Pitzer program. CASA Pitzer pairs students and faculty with local communities, organizers, activists, artists, and nonprofits to "advance critical analysis and community partnerships around the most pressing issues in the Inland Empire." The program aims to build community and enact change by "facilitat[ing] student internships and community-based participatory research on issues of regional equity and justice pertaining to incarceration, immigration, education, environment, labor, art, culture, and health." Some community partners include Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective, Youth Mentoring Action Network, and Huerta del Valle Community Garden. These programs connect students with the community through engagement, service, organization, and research.

Our commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement as a pathway to change is demonstrated through our Community Engagement Center (CEC). The CEC combines Pitzer's resources, including institutional power, community partners, faculty expertise, and student engagement to advance social justice causes. In the fall of 2020, the CEC identified an opportunity to specifically increase participation in the political process and created TPP, the college's flagship civic engagement program. These programs continued through 2024. For example, this fall the CEC is creating a panel to discuss and plan voter engagement in the upcoming election cycle. TPP aims to facilitate growth in the Pitzer community's civic engagement by focusing on education and empowerment, the application of

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civic action, and the development of strategies for student involvement in policy, legislation, voting, and the engagement of elected officials. The CEC has partnered with faculty to facilitate a discussion of voting on campus and its importance. These selected faculty members will provide their insights on voting in 2024 and its connection to academia and Pitzer's core values.

Pitzer Remains Committed

Landscape

Presidential communication, stated values, curriculum, co-curriculum, and student organizations display that civic learning and democratic engagement are important components of Pitzer's campus culture. Assessment data from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) shows the political climate and democratic engagement on campus. Pitzer's voter registration rate was 89.0% and the voting rate of registered students was 89.6%. Civic engagement is significantly increasing: there was a 22.8% increase in voting rates from 2016 to 2020. In 2022, the voting rate dropped to 41% from 80%, however, this was not a presidential election year. Pitzer's registration and turnout rate was still above the national average for public and private institutions. While the institutional average for voting was 30%, Pitzer soared above this even with a lower turnout than in 2020.

Institutional demographics and assessment data also reveal areas for improvement. Pitzer College is a private, undergraduate, liberal arts college, in Claremont, California. Pitzer is a member of The Claremont Colleges, a consortium of schools including Pomona, Harvey Mudd, Scripps, and Claremont McKenna Colleges. Pitzer has approximately 1,212 enrolled students, with approximately 40% of the student body coming from California (in-state) and 60% from other states or countries. About 36% of enrolled students identify as students of color and 15% are first-generation college students. NLSVE data shows participation gaps in voter engagement based on race. Turnout rates for Hispanic students were 10% lower than for White students, turnout rates for Black students were 28% lower, and turnout rates for Asian students were 26% lower. This gap significantly increased from the voter gap in 2020 with Asian students voting at a rate of 37% lower than White students. While this voting rate for Asian students has somewhat improved from 2020, there remains room for growth. This data reveals that engaging students within these racial demographics must be a top priority for voter engagement efforts heading into the 2024-2025 academic year. We address this goal in our strategy by detailing steps to build relationships with the college's affinity groups and connecting with faculty of color for support.

Past voter engagement efforts reveal more about Pitzer's current landscape. As discussed above, the CEC and TPP conduct most programming focused exclusively on voter engagement. These efforts have included projects focusing on community organizing, hosting guest speakers and workshop leaders, partnering with student groups, and supporting the development of legislative responses on local issues. The biggest challenge the CEC has faced in these efforts is recruiting student participation in events due to a lack of awareness. We plan to mitigate this problem by focusing more on branding and advertising via TPP's social media channels. The

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CEC also has resources set aside each academic year to sponsor community engagement projects. Increased advertisement of these resources by TPP could mobilize faculty and staff to use this funding for other voter engagement initiatives. Other internal challenges TPP has faced in the past are limited funding and lack of personnel. We plan to mitigate these two problems by periodically hosting fundraising events and hiring more students to work on the initiative. In spring 2022, we acted on these goals by hosting a fundraising event that raised \$1,976 for TPP and hiring another student to work for TPP.

The most recent voter engagement effort outside of TPP was community organizing work around saving farmland from warehouse development in nearby Ontario. Pitzer Professor of Environmental Analysis Susan Phillips, Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability Administrative Assistant Claudia Prats, and Community Engagement Center Assistant Director, Jessica Chairez, led the effort at Pitzer to acquire signatures, canvassers, and supporters at city council meetings. The focus on a specific cause was effective in mobilizing Pitzer students and community members. Taking the lesson learned from these events into account, our strategy going forward will focus more on promoting voter engagement around specific issues and legislation. Because 60% of Pitzer students are from out of state, another challenge we face in voter mobilization efforts is connecting with students registered outside of California. Our current efforts focus primarily on legislation specific to southern California, which does not apply to a large proportion of Pitzer's student body. We plan to address this issue by increasing the scope of our legislative research to include issues around the country and include that information in our programming. Overall, landscape research shows that our top priority going forward must be to address racial gaps in voter engagement by working with Pitzer's affinity groups. We have also identified internal areas for improvement, such as increasing awareness of the TPP initiative through a greater focus on branding, raising more funds, hiring more students, and focusing on specific issues and legislation both in California and the rest of the United States.

NLSVE As a Resource for Colleges and Universities

Goals

The following goals are informed by our campus landscape research, NSLVE data, and other observed areas for improvement in voter engagement.

Long Term Goals

- By 2026, increase student voting rates by 5% over 2020 turnout levels to reach an 85% voter turnout rate.
- By 2026, decrease the turnout gap between white and non-white voters
- By 2026, implement electoral engagement as a learning objective in 10% of Pitzer's courses.
- By 2026, increase TPP's presence on campus by:
 - Continuing supporting organizing and policy work with community partners
 - Continuing hosting inspirational and informative speakers

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- Facilitating workshops for students interested in running for public office
- Funding travel, meals, lodging, and materials for students, faculty, and partners to engage elected officials
- Funding fees and test prep for civil service applicants
- Funding (non-partisan) student campaigns in and around the Pitzer community

In conjunction with the NAACP, by May 2028, identify faculty, staff, and community partners working on voter engagement across the Claremont Colleges and create a structured working group.

- By 2026, establish a relationship with the local election officials and invite them to join our working group.
- By 2026, involve the working group and a diverse group of community stakeholders in creating the All In plan.

Short Term Goals

- [COMPLETED] By May 2022, sign the President's Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.
- [COMPLETED] By May 2022, raise \$5,000 for TPP through Pitzer's spring fundraiser.
- [COMPLETED] By May 2022, hire an additional student to work for TPP.
- Continue our relationship with the Pomona Valley chapter of NAACP and participate in their efforts to engage student voters in the local area.
- By fall 2026, ensure that 85% of eligible students are registered to vote (a 39% increase from 2022).
- By fall 2026, ensure that 85% of students pledge to vote in the upcoming election.
- By fall 2026, ensure a 90% turnout among registered voters (a 10.4% increase from 2020).
- By fall 2026, increase voter turnout by 10 percentage points for each non-white racial group over 2022 turnout levels.
- Throughout 2026, continue and expand voter education programming hosted by TPP.

Strategies

Strategy Short-Term Strategy

- **Institutionalize Pitzer's Commitment to Voter Engagement**
 - Urge our president to sign the All In Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation.
 - Aim to begin a tradition of the president sending a letter to all students every semester about the importance of being civically engaged and participating in elections.
 - Develop and disperse a pledge to vote in Fall 2026.
- **Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
 - Meet with affinity group leaders from Latinx Student Union, Black Student Union, Asian Pacific American Coalition, First-Gen Club, Middle Eastern Student

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Association, Mixed Identity Exchange, We Are Living History, and South Asian Student Association to discuss strategies for voter registration/education/turnout.

- **Develop the People's Pitzer Program**
 - Hire more students to work for the initiative.
 - Increase the scope of legislative research to focus on more specific issues both in-state and out-of-state.
 - Increase awareness of the program's existence by developing its branding and social media presence.
 - Raise funds for TPP through periodic fundraisers.
- **Increase Student Voter Registration**
 - Add voting registration into mandatory orientation week programming.
 - Include registration deadlines in Pitzer's campus event calendar.
 - Add voting registration and education into residential advisor programming.
 - Host voter registration tables in the courtyard outside of academic buildings centered around civic holidays (National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early Day, and Election Hero Day)
- **Increase Student Voter Education**
 - Host voter education modules in first-year seminar classes.
 - Supporting and uplifting policy work with community partners.
 - Hosting informative speakers.
 - Conduct policy education through TPP social media channels.
 - Conduct policy education through TPP weekly newsletters.
 - Host watch parties for televised debates.
 - Host educational workshops aimed at voter education.
 - Create a digital space for students to discuss legislative issues.
- **Increase Student Voter Turnout**
 - Include primary and general election dates, early voting timelines, and absentee ballot deadlines in Pitzer's campus events calendar.
 - Sponsor rides to the polls on election day through Pitzer's van program.

Long-term Strategy

- **Develop the People's Pitzer**
 - Hire a full-time staff member to head The People's Pitzer.
 - Increase available funds through fundraising efforts.
 - Expand volunteer and internship opportunities for students wanting to get involved in TPP.
 - Facilitate workshops for students interested in running for public office.
 - Fund travel, meals, lodging, and materials for students, faculty, and partners to engage elected officials.
 - Fund fees and test prep for civil service applicants.
 - Fund (non-partisan) student campaigns in and around the Pitzer community.

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- **Collaborate Across the Claremont Colleges**
 - In conjunction with the NAACP, identify faculty, staff, and community partners working on voter engagement across the Claremont Colleges and create a structured working group.
 - Establish a relationship with the local election officials and invite them to join our working group.
 - Involve the working group and a diverse group of community stakeholders in creating the All In plan.
 - Create a structure for volunteer and internship opportunities for students wanting to get involved in 5C voter engagement efforts.
 - Host 5C voter registration, education, and turnout events.
- **Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
 - TPP creates long-lasting relationships with student affinity groups and works collaboratively to develop voter engagement strategies.
- **Institutionalize Pitzer's Commitment to Voter Engagement**
 - Create a full- or half-credit academic course each semester covering policy in the upcoming election that culminates in a project that empowers other students to vote.
- **Create a Sustainable Framework**
 - Develop working group accountability procedures, compensation, member responsibilities, outreach efforts, diversity practices, communication, and turnover strategies.

Reporting

This plan and the 2022 NLSVE Report will be shared on the All In and TPP websites and promoted on TPP social media and weekly newsletters, which are publicly available and shared with the Pitzer community and community partners.

Evaluation

This action plan will be evaluated by All In. Goals will be continually reviewed and progress will be evaluated by TPP as part of Program Assistant responsibilities. Data will be collected from the 2022 NLSVE Report, TPP's programming reports, and the Community Engagement Center's internal reports. We will attempt to reach out to student affairs and the institutional research office for data as well. Important data collected will include voter registration and turnout rates, demographic information, voting accessibility, perspectives from campus affinity groups, and voter education information. Data will be analyzed and inform improvement in the creation and implementation of the 2025 action plan. Evaluation of voter engagement strategies is crucial in measuring progress and revising our strategies and will be carried out and published by TPP on our website for the Pitzer community and community partners. The evaluation will be carried out after 2024 data is available.