



Campus Vote Project Voter Friendly Campus Action Plan 2024-2025

Voter Registration, Education, and Mobilization (Voter REM) Plan for Radford University

Written By

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Executive Summary

2024 represents the next step in the development of a comprehensive culture of voter engagement at Radford University. In 2022, Radford University deployed its first university-wide voter registration effort. Piecemeal work was conducted in the past, but no strategic efforts to sustain elevated levels of voter registration and to convert those registrations into voters were undertaken. After initial successes and lessons learned, the next step of our work will focus on strategically targeting and encouraging voter education and mobilization. The new elements are highlighted by new educational programming such as on-campus forums for area candidates, an active student voting group conducting trivia nights, student-focused events and enhanced online communication.

Radford University operates its main campus in Radford City and the Radford University Carilion campus in Roanoke. Radford's plan began on the Radford main campus, but plans will be expanded to include the Roanoke campus with a significant online support system.

NSLVE (National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement) data showed Radford students were registered at a rate of more than 85% in 2020. Having a sustained strategy, team, and implementation plan suggest that it is possible to have at least 90% of RU students registered in 2024.

The initial 2022 plan addressed voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts through the November 2022 midterm elections and 2023 Commonwealth of Virginia state General Assembly elections. The intention is to make this an ongoing effort, which includes securing institutional support and administering assessment tools to measure effectiveness to improve efforts in subsequent elections.

In addition to the campus voter team, volunteers among students, faculty, staff, and community members will staff registration tables and organize events to fully implement the plan. Fall 2023 saw the pilot of several educational efforts that are scheduled for full deployment in 2024.

Leadership

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Rackaway and Mistele serve Radford University as leaders of the Radford Alliance for Civic and Community Engagement, a cooperative effort to supervise all civic and community engagement efforts at Radford University. Our participation in the Campus Vote Project is an extension of that commitment. While Rackaway and Mistele lead the Campus Vote Project, the campus voter team (see membership below) supervises all voter registration, education, and mobilization at Radford.

The team's construction is intentional, to include representation of vital constituencies across the campus and into the off-campus community. Radford's team consists of seven people chosen to

represent important constituencies in the voter registration, education, and mobilization process: active members of the Political Science department, representative from Citizen Leader, a representative from Student Affairs, a representative from the Highlanders Vote student group, a library representative, and the city's chief elections official. Joining faculty, staff, students, and members of the Radford City community together, ensures all essential components of the Voter Registration process are represented.

Department of Political Science

- Department Chair (Chapman Rackaway)
- American Politics faculty member (Daniel Reed)

Citizen-Leader Program

- Director (Jean Mistele)

Office of Student Involvement

- Director (Jen Rentschler)

Highlanders Vote Student Organization

- Outgoing President (I'yonah Cartwright)
- Incoming President (Lane Chrepta)

McConnell Library

- Faculty representative (Alyssa Archer)

City of Radford, VA

- Director of Elections (Lindsey Holman)

The succession plan, to replace Voter Team members, requires the appropriate constituent body be represented, so that successors are recruited from the group that lacks representation.

Rackaway serves as the team lead to further develop the succession plan to include current or future stipends, reassigned time, and/or service recognition at the university level

The team meets monthly to review efforts and tactics with additional meetings to unpack the newly released NSLVE data.

Commitment

The institution is supportive, as evidenced by President Bret Danilowicz's signatory to the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. President Danilowicz curated the Radford campus as a space for open and free discourse, which is a priority for his administration.

, Currently, Rackaway informally and regularly reports to his Dean, the Provost and President about the Voter REM project and Highlanders Vote Student Organization in which they all fully support his efforts. However, the institutionalization of Voter REM is lacking. Specifically, creating a paid administrator position to include office space.

Landscape?

In 2023, Radford University retired its 2018 Strategic Plan and embarked on a new interim two - year plan from 2023 – 2025. In the interim plan, President Danilowicz identified four primary areas of focus for Radford: 1) Branding - defining Radford’s distinctive nature, 2) stabilize enrollment, 3) spurring economic development in partnership with the community and 4) streamline the institution to increase efficiency. The new branding highlights the university as an integral part of the Appalachian geographic region, the New River Valley. In this way, Radford University is a ‘steward of place’ (a term developed and used by the American Democracy Project), and voter engagement is one of the hallmarks of a university’s caretaking for the environment in which it operates.

Academic Affairs, led by Provost, Dr. Bethany McKay Usher, implemented the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ *Social Determinants of Health* (SDH) framework to guide its strategic direction. The SDH framework includes five primary categories: Education Access and Quality, Health Care Access and Quality, Social and Community Context, Economic Stability, and Neighborhood and Built Environment. Voter engagement aligns with the SDH in both its Neighborhood/Built Environment and Social and Community Context categories. As Perrone’s “Town-gown sense of community in campus-adjacent neighborhoods: a mixed methods study” (<https://rdw.rowan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3722&context=etd>) shows, communities where town-gown divides do not exist or are minimally divided experience healthier, mutually beneficial interactions focused on improving quality of life for all. As Radford University’s new brand identity focuses strongly on the unique nature of our home in the New River Valley, a mobilized student body would align well with that focus.

Radford University further shows its commitment to student civic leadership through our internal and external communication systems. University Relations uses a periodic *Connections* newsletter to inform the campus that the Voter Team uses to update the campus about upcoming deadlines and opportunities. The Provost sends the bi-monthly Threads newsletter to the entire campus – main and in Roanoke. The Voter Team has access to share announcements and information about voter registration, voting, and news associated with our designation as a Voter Friendly Campus. The university uses social media outreach mechanisms to promote voting and the work of the Voter Team.

Assessment - Radford University reports annual assessment of civic engagement to the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV), including four core outcomes: connecting academic knowledge with participation in civic life, seeking understanding of interpersonal differences in attitudes and beliefs, demonstrating effective collaboration and inclusive discourse, and commitment to civic activities that serve the community. Using data from Citizen Leader Program, Athletics, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and NSLVE, the university submits its report to SCHEV each Fall.

The Citizen Leader program provides a vital curricular connection to civic learning and democratic engagement. Students enroll in Citizen Leader designated courses. engage in community activities, attend campus events focused on diverse types of cultures, citizenship, leadership, and/or social issues, and they engage in an immersive experience that has a community/social engagement focus. The students disseminate their Citizen Leader journey before graduation as they join their professional goals with their personal passions to improve their community. Reflection plays a significant role in the program.

In Spring 2024, the university embarked on a review of its extant general education curriculum, called REAL. The team will use this opportunity to identify areas to advance civic learning and democratic engagement in the revised curriculum. The co-curriculum features a variety of civic learning integrations, including candidate forums during election seasons, constructive dialogue training, town hall meetings, voter registration, education, and mobilization efforts, leadership opportunities through student organizations, and off-campus partnerships.

Budget

The university provides no dedicated budget for the campus voter team because it was created after the annual budgeting process. However, partnering with the Alumni Relations Office the Voter REM project received \$900 donations from alumni. These funds were used to purchase: an informational display board, posters, table cover, and palm cards (voter registration information). The Fall 2022 registration drives were used to develop the 2024 – 2025 budget. Both are used for the current budget shown below.

Table 1: Campus Voter Team 2024-2025 budget

Item	Unit cost	Qty	Total
E-Z Up tent	\$480	1	\$480
Paperweights	36.75	12	\$441
T-shirts	\$9.60	50	\$480
Polo shirts	34.25	10	\$343
Mobile cart	\$215	1	\$215
Stress balls/Lanyards	\$1.42	500	\$710
<i>Total</i>			<i>\$2,669</i>

Landscape

About Radford University

Located in Southwestern Virginia, Radford University is a Carnegie Doctoral/Professional University (D/PU) enrolling 7,718 students. Primarily undergraduate in nature, as well as white and rural, Radford's student body does have a growing diverse population, primarily in black and Hispanic students. Radford University's population is 62% female and 38% male. Radford is a PWI (Predominantly White Institution) and has a population of 71% white, 13% black, 7% Hispanic, Asian 1%, and two or more races at 5%. 30% of our students are first generation.

Radford University has a strong civic and community engagement commitment, exemplified through our Citizen Leader program and other high impact practices. The Citizen Leader program is a multi-disciplinary curricular and co-curricular effort to engage students in hands-on problem solving in real-world contexts. Grounded on the Social Change Model for Leader Development (HERI, 1993), the Citizen Leader Program at Radford University grows community and global leaders who embrace diversity and equity. Citizen Leader aims to merge students' professional goals with their personal passions by offering multiple pathways to meet the program requirements (interdisciplinary academic course work, attending speaker events, community and/or civic engagement activities, an immersive capstone experience, and dissemination). Many departments across campus join to develop our students into effective civic leaders that will make a better world.

Since 2022 Radford University has participated in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities American Democracy Project (ADP), the nation's largest and most significant university-embedded civic engagement pathway. ADP campuses since 2003 have registered tens of thousands of students and helped equip them with the civic skills to cast their votes with knowledge and confidence. With the express focus of building civic leadership skills in students, ADP campuses are regular participants in NSLVE, Voter-Friendly Campus, ALL IN Challenge, and Campus Vote Project efforts to build voting participation as a habit among the newly enfranchised. The campus ADP coordinator has undertaken an audit of Radford's civic engagement work, with the participation in ADP providing Radford the opportunity to compare itself with other participating campuses in ADP, and we have seen the strategic opportunity to provide an intentional and structured voter enhancement program.

Radford's pedagogical strategies emphasize student-faculty interaction and high-impact practices. For example, one of the newest high-impact practices at RU has a strong focus on empowering the next generation of leaders and voters. The Wicked Problems initiative, based on the work of Paul Hanstedt, re-envision class efforts to build authority in students on persistent public (or wicked) problems. Our Wicked Festival has students develop proposals to ameliorate or solve those persistent public problems and present them at a conference-style event. Some of the more recent Wicked Festival presentations have focused on voter participation and engagement.

In previous years, various entities at the university have supported student groups or outside parties who have made efforts to register students, but there has been no centralized or coordinated effort. Voter registration drives have been sponsored by student government, the League of Women Voters, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the

state's political party organizations. Virginia's laws requiring registrations be done by deputy registrars have prompted all members of the Campus Voter Team to complete the training to become a Virginia deputy registrar.

A growing structure of support for community leadership and voter engagement is developing. Citizen Leader and the American Democracy Project have convened a planning group, the Radford Alliance for Civic Engagement, which supervises our voter engagement program and coordinates with other community engagement entities across campus. A reorganization of the upper administration has created a new Vice President for Community Engagement, and that office has a representative on the Alliance. The continuing advancement of Citizen Leader, the American Democracy Project, Campus Voter Team, and these other new entities are combining to build the beginnings of a brand identity for community and civic engagement at Radford.

Goals and Objectives

1. Secure a one-time and continuing budget allocation to support voter efforts
2. Systematize voter registration efforts, including:
 - a. A direct process for requesting the voter team visit a class or event
 - b. Succession planning for student leadership, especially in the Democracy Fellows positions
 - c. Establishment of an annual calendar of voter drive events
3. Expanded voter education efforts including:
 - a. Highlanders Vote educational events
 - b. Campus candidate forums
4. Expanded voter mobilization opportunities including
 - a. Seeking the location of a polling place on campus
5. Deploy voter efforts at the Roanoke campus
6. Increase voter registration to 90%
7. Increase voter participation to 35%

NSLVE

The most recent NSLVE data available to Radford University is from the 2020 elections. Data from 2022 has not yet been provided to the university, but the Campus Voter Team will review that data immediately and integrate analysis into this plan. Data from 2020 show an institution that has made great strides in registration but has an opportunity to do more. Between 2016 and 2020, at least eighty percent of RU students were registered, reaching a high of 87.6% in 2020. When students are registered, they do tend to follow through at the ballot box. In 2020 74.3% of RU students who had registered voted, with the overall voting rate at 65.1%. Radford's voting rate is like the national average but just below 66%.

Radford's student voting is trending upward. In 2016 RU's 47% student voting was six percent below the national rate, and by 2020 that gap had decreased to 0.9%. As suggested by the data, registration is not the totality of the plan. We have a chance to expand our voter education and mobilization efforts in addition to the registration piece so that once they are registered, students are more likely to vote.

In future reports we hope to receive more useful data on registration and voting by race, currently our data only includes Hispanic and multiracial student breakdowns. In both instances, RU is at or above the average for each group. We have surmised from anecdotes and the data gaps that one of our most significant opportunities lies in improving black student voter registration. As a result, the voter team will liaison with the Black Student Alliance to provide opportunities for African American students to register.

Voting data by age suggests that our most significant opportunity to register comes when students enter RU for the first time. Our 61% voter turnout for 18–21-year-olds is the lowest demographic category of voters, with other age groups ranging as high as 83%. First-year experiences, such as back-to-school festivals and University 101, provide opportunities to strategically target the least likely registrants.

Strategy

To ensure maximum contact with students, our strategy employs a combination of in-person and online engagements. We continue to institutionalize our voter registration efforts with emphasis on in-class registration visits and drives. The Highlanders Vote student organization has begun rolling out programming for students to build our education efforts, and we are attempting to have a polling place moved onto campus to help mobilization. We discuss each element in detail below.

Registration Phase: August – October

Our goal was to finish the 2022 election cycle with 90% or more of Radford University students registered to vote. In 2020, 87.6% of RU students were registered to vote according to NSLVE data. Our numbers are already high, but there is a significant opportunity to cross the 90% threshold. We anticipate receiving NSLVE data from 2022 soon but have not done so yet as of the deadline to submit this document.

Since the lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for more online options to register to vote has increased. Therefore, the voter team has decided to include both in-person and online strategies for voter registration.

Online Portion:

Advertisement is critical for registration drives. The New River Valley is a news and media desert, so traditional advertisement venues are few and far between. Instead, we have deployed social media tactics for most of our outreach, due to budgetary constraints. The Political Science department, McConnell Library and College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences currently share content on their media outlets. Highlanders Vote has established its own Instagram presence as well. The Black Student Alliance and Student Government Association promote voter registration on their Instagram pages, providing information on how students can get help with an absentee/ mail-in and who was running in the area and for what office. It is important that voters have access to more information and support during the registration and voting process. We continually seek new organizations to join our effort through their social media platforms within Radford University. Many student-run accounts for clubs and organizations have agreed to share voting content and recently the Political Science Society liaising with Highlanders Vote to ensure cross-posting of all voter-related content.

The week before and including the opening of the early voting window, we will run a registration reminder on the Radford University OneCampus platform. It is the website interface for students, staff, and faculty to fulfill daily tasks. This platform increases the visibility of our initiative for students who choose not to follow University social media channels.

In addition to advertising, having sites available to redirect students is of utmost importance. This includes: 1) directing students who want more information, 2) registering online is best accomplished with a single university-level website. The webpage for Highlanders Vote is the central hub to which advertising redirects students interested in registration or pathways to voting (<https://www.radford.edu/content/highlanders-vote/home.html>). The Highlanders Vote page allows students to submit their registration online through the Commonwealth of Virginia's online registration portal. It also allows students from other states who wish to keep their registration intact (Virginia the link to <https://vote.gov/>). Highlanders Vote includes information on upcoming events, links to sample ballots, and pathways to volunteer at the university to help register other students.

In-Person:

Radford University is primarily an in-person institution, with a limited online presence for undergraduate courses and/or programs. While some online voter registrations are necessary for those students who do not join us in person, the purpose of the online process is to give us a chance to reach students who may not have had the opportunity to be registered in-person. In-person drives form the core of our strategy.

The team created a table for school-sponsored events to inform the Radford student body on voting laws and how to register.

Both the Radford University main campus and Radford University Carilion (RUC), in Roanoke Virginia, hold parallel events. The team will coordinate with the staff at RUC to have a registrar to operate registration tables in parallel with the main campus. Early in the Fall semester the team launches its plan with registration tables present at the following events:

1. Bonnie Bash (Radford University's official welcome back fair for all students)
2. Unity Fest (sponsored by the Diversity/Equity/Inclusion Office)
3. Highlander Day (events promoting the university to prospective students)
4. Club Fair (opportunity for organizations to promote themselves to students. Highlanders Vote both registered and recruited members)
5. Fall Fest (sponsored by Black Students Alliance and the Student Government Association)
6. Wicked Festival (academic event co-hosted by Political Science, Office of Undergraduate Research, Center for Teaching and Learning)
7. Political Science Days (annual spotlight event for the Political Science Department)
8. Stand-alone voter registration drive in front of the student activities center
9. Constitution and Citizenship Week (hosted by Citizen Leader)

In addition, other avenues to promote registration include Davis College of Business' Venture Lab and the thirty plus sections of Introduction to the College Experience (UNIV 100).

Education – August to November

The campus voter team has developed several ways to educate students about voting. In 2023, the university held a candidate forum on campus with four office-seekers in Radford City and the surrounding counties. The event's success, with one hundred attendees, is planned in 2024 with the intent to make this an annual event.

Other events include a block party that provides an in-person opportunity for students to receive educational resources on issues, candidates, and registration at Radford events. Social media content will leverage the University's social media pages to promote educational opportunities and direct students to resources.

The Highlanders Vote student organization is an active participant, holding a Political Jeopardy night with Political Science Days, co-hosting debate watch parties with the Political Science Society, and election night watch parties.

All buildings at Radford University have electronic signage. The campus voter team created content for the signage promoting students to vote. The signage includes a QR code linked to Highlanders Vote that includes additional information about voter education opportunities, resources, and events.

The team's outreach efforts will be built around five central concepts. First, why it is important to vote. Students need to know that their vote matters. Second, we educate students on how to vote. They are not always aware of how the process works. Third, knowing what to do before voting and the associated deadlines. to register and how to register can be shared. Fourth, students need to be educated on the candidates running for office. This is extended with their candidates' parties and position on issues and policy. Fifth, the type of election, local, state, or national.

- a. Why is it important to vote (Attempt to convey the importance behind voting and express what their part plays in the election, express to them that their vote matters)
- b. How to vote (How the process works and what the person need to know/do before voting)
- c. Deadline to register/How to register (Where, When, and How to get people registered)
- d. Candidates running for office (Educate them on their candidates' parties and position on issues and policy)
- e. Inform about the type of elections (Who and what level they are running for Local/State/Federal)

In creating this message, the team used several online resources:

- <https://civicinfluencers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/7-Key-Ways-to-Engage-Your-Campus.pdf>
- <https://kdp0143vw6z2dlw631if5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/large/2015/06/6-Key-Ways-to-Engage-Your-Campus.pdf>
- <https://www.polyas.com/election-glossary#A> (Explanations on how to get young people registered)

Mobilization – September to November

Our primary goal for the 2024 registration effort is to increase the percentage of students who vote early, by mail, or on Election Day to 68%. NSLVE data indicates that the overall student voting rate in 2020 was 65.1%, below the national average of 66%. By increasing the voting rate to 68% we exceed the national average.

Subsidiary goals for the 2024 election cycle include encouraging students to vote by helping them navigate through confusing procedures such as arranging absentee ballots and mail-in ballots. To do this, we will provide regular content on Highlanders Vote and social media and ask faculty members to promote voting to students in their learning management systems and in-class.

To commemorate and promote early voting, Highlanders Vote and the Zeta Phi Beta sorority began holding ‘spin the wheel’ promotional events the day before early voting began in 2023 and will continue. In these events, students spin a wheel where they are asked a question about voting and political participation. Students who correctly answer the question win a prize.

McConnell Library hosts pop-up Civic Labs to engage the university community in civic engagements questions. The topic in early October will be voting and elections, asking attendees questions like “are you planning to vote? Why or why not?” to elicit discussion, as well as provide information on key terms and concepts, and non-partisan sources maintained on a [library guide](#) to get informed about candidates on their ballots.

One high-value initiative for 2024 involves lobbying the Radford City Elections Board to move the polling place for the precinct in which Radford University is located from a church a half-mile from campus to our athletic facility, the Dedmon Center. Having a polling place on campus could be a significant boost to student turnout. Unfortunately, the city elections board denied the request to make Dedmon Center the primary polling place for this district, so we will work through the summer on other ways to get students to the polls such as rideshare and shuttles.

In April 2024, the Campus Voter Team submitted a grant proposal to Ask Every Student to pay for a subscription to Motivote, a crowdsourced voter encouragement app platform for smartphones. The Team submitted the Ask Every Student First Step form in February 2024 and await the decision on our request. [Leave out. This is not part of mobilization between these months]

Five days before and including Election Day, we will run an election reminder in our OneCampus platform, our user experience interface which students, staff, and faculty all use daily to increase visibility for students who might not follow University social media channels.

Beyond 2024

The team looks forward to receiving 2022's NSLVE data to help build the next phase of our plan. Having that data will allow us to see what has worked, what areas for improvement exist, and how we can better reach our students with an impactful message.

Institutionalizing the work of the Campus Vote Team is of high importance. These efforts do not occur in a vacuum, nor are they only the product of creative labor. Regularly printing of materials, support for students, and infrastructure are important. Thus, we need a stable budget to maintain our work.

The Black Students Association of Radford University, in conjunction with Highlanders Vote, has launched a "Black Votes Matter" campaign. The initiative features infographics and starter videos of their executive board explaining important matters such as how to register and the effect of the media on elections. BSA and HV will continue to release such videos bimonthly throughout the semester. In 2023 the members of BSA and HV also rode golf carts around campus asking students spontaneous questions such as: "Are you registered?" "Do you plan on voting?" and "Do you feel as though your vote matters?"

Highlanders Vote and the Student Government Association constructed a student survey beginning in Fall 2023 to better understand the wants and needs of students and the issues most important to them. SGA and HV have agreed to share the results of the survey with the Campus Voter Team to help improve our registration, education, and mobilization efforts to be more student-interest driven.

Furthermore, there is no permanent institutional home for voter engagement at RU. As part of the provost's reorganization of Academic Affairs, we plan to lobby for a civic engagement portfolio to be included in the job description of one of the Assistant or Associate Provost positions which the provost plans to fill in 2024.

Reporting

The campus voter team will create a full report of the voter efforts during 2024 at the debrief meeting for the midterm cycle. That report will be submitted to the Campus Vote Project and ALL IN Challenge per existing commitments. We will ask the university leadership after their review, to approve the report, when at that time it is made public.

Evaluation and Improvement

We believe it imperative to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of our work, particularly since this is the first systematic and strategic attempt at a comprehensive student voter registration effort at Radford University.

At each voter registration drive, and on Highlanders Vote, students will be invited to opt-in to a database with the students' name, mobile phone, and email. We can track student registration success or challenges, send surveys to those students, and trace whether they voted.

Those evaluations occur at the time data is collected. Collecting data on the number of students registered, who participate in events, and vote are key to creating a feedback loop that empowers the voter team to continuously improve our processes. The university's new Presence app will allow us to check students in to events to measure what NSLVE data cannot provide. The campus voter team and Democracy Fellows will also hold a debrief meeting after the election to reflect and consider what opportunities for improvement exist in preparation for the 2024 election cycle.