



Rider University Democratic Engagement Action Plan 2023-2024

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by the Rider Votes 24 committee to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration, education, and turnout rates of voters at Rider University. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2023-2024 academic year, on and around our campus in Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

The following groups will be leading this work at Rider University in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics
- Rider Student-Athlete Advisory Committee
- Office of Service & Civic Engagement
- Student Involvement
- Sorority and Fraternity Life
- Residence Life
- Office of Sustainability
- Student Government Association
- Association of Commuting Students
- Political Science Club
- Various Faculty

This plan will be centered from the Rebovich Institute but will rely on implementation from all groups across campus, to ensure the widest potential buy-in. The objectives of this plan will be to increase: voter participation among Rider students in the next election, as well as their level of knowledge about the election.

II. Leadership

Micah Rasmussen, director of the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics, will oversee our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. He will be supported in this work by:

- Paola Carlesso, student, member of the Rider Student-Athlete Advisory Committee
- Maria Castillo, student, Executive Vice President of the Student Government Association
- Billy Malone, student
- Liz Sapudar, Coordinator of Academic Support
- Olivia Newman, faculty
- Roberta Butler, Dean, Residence Life
- Melissa Greenberg, Director, Sustainability

Each of these committee members will be involved in the day-to-day work of implementing the plan their respective areas of campus stakeholder groups, and will report back to Rasmussen for compilation purposes.

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different parts of campus, including student leadership,
- Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise,
Trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy,
- Leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus in to our work.

For succession planning purposes, should any member of the steering group no longer be at Rider, another member will be selected to assume responsibility for covering that person's responsibilities until a staff successor is named. At the beginning of every semester, an organizational meeting will be convened to determine whether sufficient personnel are involved to adequately implement this plan. Whenever recruitment is necessary, the steering committee will reach out broadly to campus groups, students, faculty and staff for recommendations on bringing additional personnel into the implementation of this plan.

III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. As stated in our mission statement, "...prepare students to be responsible citizens, who embrace diversity, support the common good, and contribute meaningfully to the changing world "

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in their strategic plan, stating "...real leadership is derived from service to others ... celebrate differences for they are our strength... share not one truth but respect our common pursuit for understanding".

On campus, we have seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day
- Teach Ins
- Partnership with Penn America related to promoting free speech
- A bipartisan series of public officials who visit campus every semester and hold discussions about how to get involved in our public affairs.

On campus, we have experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Walks/rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Promotional, informational and resource messages leading up to voter registration deadlines and Election Day.

Rider University has emphasized civic learning and democratic engagement at Rider University to all students as part of its freshman seminar, campus offerings and communications. In implementing this plan, the steering committee will identify and implement opportunities to further prioritize civil learning and democratic engagement.

IV. Landscape

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of our campus.

Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
75.20%	24.80%		

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
74.00%	23.00%	4.00%		

Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
39.00%	59.50%		

Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
59.00%	19.00%	9.00%	7.70%	3.50%	2.80%

Racial Demographics:

Asian	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	White	2 or More Races
5.80%	0.03%	13.50%	15.60%	0.02%	55.00%	3.20%

The committee will use this and other demographic data to target its outreach efforts to the most appropriate students based on where they live, etc. to ensure they are receiving the most relevant civic messages. For example, registration deadlines are different in each state. Different cities have elections at different times. By making sure that the most relevant messages reach students at the most relevant times, the committee can ensure it is timely and germane to the voter decisions each student will make, when they make them.

V. Goals

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

We know our campus faces following challenges internally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

- The voter engagement work on our campus is decentralized among several different offices.
- A need for sustainable, consistent and funded efforts across these offices.

With that said, we know our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.

With this in mind, we have set the two goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

1. Increase election participation in a presidential election cycle
2. Make voting information and resources accessible on multiple platforms

We have also set two goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

1. Institutionalize a culture of civic engagement
2. Develop campus wide political roundtables and other opportunities for deliberative dialogue among students

VI. National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data since 2014. The collaborative initiative, Rider Votes, was created beginning with the 2016 election cycle and has shown significant impact on the voting rate of Rider University students.

When reviewing NSLVE data for mid-term elections 2014 to 2018, we saw an increase of 25% for a student voting rate of 38.3% (up from 13.2% in 2014). According to data from the last presidential election, in 2020, Rider University's voting rate was 73.7%, a 21.7% increase from 2016. Also notable, in 2020 our voting rate was higher than the national institution average of 66%.

VII. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we are already doing in the short term (within the next year):

- Facilitate a “Rider Votes” program to engage students in the registration and education phases of the initiative as a means for earning engaged learning credit.
- Coordinate community-based voter registration efforts (residence halls, Greek Life, cultural student organizations, athletics)
- Work with Residence Life to incorporate voter engagement into at least one community meeting/event each semester.
- Incorporate voter registration into popular events on campus.
- Promote and host debate watch parties, complete with swag and snacks
- Participate in National Voter Registration Day.
- Participate in National Voter Education Week (NVEW).
- Teach -Ins about local & state issues and relation to voting
- Organize ride to the polls on Election Day.

These are tactics that we plan to do in the short term:

- Start the conversation with administration and faculty about class attendance on Election Day.
- Work with Commuter Services, distance-learning and out-of-state staff to incorporate voter engagement into specific communications for these student populations.
- Add Election Day and other key dates to the campus calendar and course syllabi.
- Incorporate voter registration into new and/or transfer student orientation.
- Work with campus staff to incorporate voter registration into the online campus platforms they frequently use.
- Incorporate voter registration into popular events on campus.
- Promote and host debate watch parties, complete with swag and snacks
- Organize a Lobby Day or Advocacy Day to support student-friendly voting laws.
- Host election related Quizzo Nights
- Create a voting-related Tik Tok Challenge
- Have school mascot lead a team of students, staff and faculty around campus on key dates to remind students to vote.
- Decorate all dining halls for Election and Vote Early Day and create participatory art walls.

These are tactics that we hope to do in the short term:

- Provide voter registration forms in different languages.

- Host a candidate town hall. Invite local and/or state-level candidates to campus or an online forum, to share stances on issues that matter to students. Be sure to invite candidates from all parties. In some states this is required!
- Provide voter registration resources for international students.
- Promote and host a roundtable-type discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers.

VIII. Reporting

We plan to share this Action Plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Sharing with the constituent stakeholder groups represented by members of the steering committee for review and feedback.

We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website
- Preparing social media content and other external communications (e.g., news releases) to highlight progress in boosting voter and civic participation.

IX. Evaluation

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Sending a post-election survey to students
- Sending a post-election survey to faculty
- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
- Sharing with the constituent stakeholder groups represented by members of the steering committee for review and feedback.

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Documenting student participation in Rider Votes activities