



Ridgewater College 2024 Nonpartisan Democratic Engagement Action Plan



Developed by: Heidi Olson, Dean of Students/Campus Vote Coordinator

Executive Summary:

This nonpartisan democratic engagement action plan was developed by Ridgewater College located in Willmar and Hutchinson, Minnesota for the 2024 election. The purpose of this action plan is to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter registration, education, and turnout in the 2024 election.

Ridgewater College (RC) is nationally recognized as an Aspen Prize Top 150 U.S. Community College and is known for excellent and unique career and technical programs, civic engagement and innovative approaches to education. The college has served as a resource for career readiness, transfer education, workforce development and lifelong learning throughout its history. Host to about 3,000 students annually, RC offers degree and certificate programs online, at its two campuses, and additional locations. Through Guided Pathways with Integrated Support Services, RC is transforming the ways it champions student success, college completion, university transfer and career attainment or advancement. The College's award-winning faculty are dedicated to student success, providing the education and training that empowers RC students to successfully compete in the workforce. RC campuses are located in west central Minnesota and is one of 32 institutions in the Minnesota State College and University System.

The Campus Democratic Engagement Action Plan reaffirms the college's commitment to serve the community and prepare students to become engaged civic leaders through strategic pathways designed to increase student participation in local, state, and federal activities that support democracy. This plan is designed to increase student voter registration and voting in local, county, state, and federal elections. This plan aspires to increase civic learning, political engagement and voter participation in meaningful and measurable ways. The plan outlines both short- and long-term goals with strategies that are sustainable and adaptable. The plan will focus on segments of the campus population who have traditionally been underrepresented. The Campus Democratic Engagement Action Plan is designed to be reviewed yearly and revised accordingly. The plan also supports RC's mission statement to "empower diverse learners to reach their full potential and enrich their lives through personalized and relevant education in an accessible, supportive and inclusive environment". The college continues to explore new approaches to support its objectives and to utilize the data collected by the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), as well as to utilize input from faculty and students who are involved in civic engagement projects.

The goals for Ridgewater College for the 2024 election are:

- To have our President complete the Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation through ALL In.
- To share information about joining the coaches challenge through ALL IN with all of our varsity head coaches and encourage their participation.
- To comply with changes/requirements to Minnesota State Statute, as well as Minnesota State Board Operating Instruction 2.3.1.1 regarding voter education and information.

- To maintain or increase our 2020 voter registration rate and voting rate.
- To form a community partnership on our Hutchinson campus (ie: League of Women Voters or other active bipartisan community group).

Leadership:

Our leadership team includes the following, campus groups, and organizations:

Heidi Olson – Dean of Students, Campus Vote Coordinator
 Heather Marcus – Student Life and Wellness Coordinator, Hutchinson Campus
 Angela Haas – Student Life and Wellness Coordinator, Willmar Campus
 Student Senate members – both campuses
 League of Women Voters, Willmar
 Local election office coordinators, Kandiyohi County and McLeod County

Commitment:

This is the first action plan that our institution has developed for ALL IN.

Ridgewater College does not have a current signatory to ALL IN's Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. We have encouraged him to do so and will work with our marketing team to prepare a press release when complete.

Educating for civic learning and democratic engagement is an important part of Ridgewater College's institutional culture. Ridgewater College is committed to inspiring our students to be informed and active citizens through a variety of engagement opportunities.

Landscape:

Ridgewater College is a rural community and technical college in Minnesota and joined the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge mid-year in 2024. Our institution is designated as the following:

- Predominantly White Institution, Rural Serving Institution.
- 100% commuter campus, with no on campus housing.

Our campus demographic and voting data:

- Ridgewater College has 3,176 students.

Ridgewater College has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) through 2033 and will receive campus voting data in the future from Tufts University.

- The 2020 data from NSLVE reported a 77.7% voter registration rate for RC.
- The 2020 data from NSLVE reported a 84.7% voter turnout rate for RC.

Goals:

Our institution's nonpartisan democratic engagement goals are:

- To have our President complete the [ALL IN Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation](#) by September 2024.
- To share information about joining the coaches challenge through ALL IN with all our varsity head coaches and encourage their participation during October 2024.
- To comply with changes/requirements to Minnesota State Statute, as well as Minnesota State Board Operating Instruction 2.3.1.1 regarding voter education and information.
- To maintain our 2020 voter registration rate and voting rate at rates higher than the current national averages.
- To form a community partnership on our Hutchinson campus like the one we have on the Willmar Campus (ie: League of Women Voters or other active bipartisan community group).

Strategy:

Ridgewater College will implement strategies to increase nonpartisan democratic engagement and student voter participation.

Ridgewater College participates and or engages in the following initiatives to support the development and implementation of our nonpartisan democratic engagement efforts on campus:

- Transmit a message of referral to a centralized voter registration website or platform that provides voter registration forms. Our Campus Vote Coordinator's contact information will be posted on the institution's website.
- Consult with our campus student association to determine the most effective means of distributing voter registration forms, supporting election day registration of students, and how to promote 'get out the vote' activities.
- Provide students attending on-campus orientation with a physical voter registration form or access to the online form.
- Provide students attending an online orientation with a link to the Minnesota Secretary of State's website or another centralized voter registration website or platform that provides voter registration forms.
- Communicate to students who reside in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa or Wisconsin as early as possible in the fall semester the instruction of how students may register to vote, making available information regarding State registration deadlines, residency requirements, and absentee voting, as applicable.
- Communicate a reminder to students after the voter registration deadline has passed on how they can register to vote on Election Day.
- Ensure that all physical Minnesota voter registration forms received from students at the campus are submitted in timely manner to the Minnesota Secretary of State or county election office.

- Request Student Senate assistance with voter engagement efforts.
- Promote Constitution Day with an educational event and prizes.
- Promote Voter Registration for National Voter Registration Day with free food, activities and prizes.
- Engage and partner with League of Women's Voter groups (Willmar only).
- Participate in National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Survey (NSLVE).

Evaluation:

We will evaluate our action plan in the following ways:

Ridgewater College has authorized the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), and we will use our campus voting data to help with the evaluation of our action plan and nonpartisan democratic engagement efforts.

We will track participation in events as well as the number of voter registrations at each event.

Reporting:

Our campus action plan will be posted on our campus page on ALL IN's website <https://allinchallenge.org/campuses/ridgewater-college/>, as well as on our institutional website <https://ridgewater.edu/student-services-activities/student-rights-responsibilities/voter-registration/>.

We plan to share the action plan internally by emailing it to the members of our planning group, campus administration and to the College President.

Ridgewater College has given ALL IN permission to publish our past NSLVE reports, which can also be found on our campus page above.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with our campus group to debrief and reflect
- Integrating feedback collection into individual campus efforts

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year over year
- Seeking out feedback throughout the action planning process from people outside of our action planning team
- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our goals accordingly