

Rio Salado Campus Action Plan 2024-2025

Executive Summary

The Rio Salado Campus Vote Plan was developed by Kate Packer, Director of Rio Salado College (RSC) Student Life & Leadership (SLL) and Ivonne Kroman, Senior Instructional Coordinator in the Social Science Department. Through this plan, we seek to contribute positively to the surrounding community and engage students and community members by establishing a college presence of civic leadership, civic education, and active civic engagement. The plan will promote civic leadership skills, civic discourse, service learning, social responsibility, and collaboration with the community and diverse populations. This plan will be implemented at Rio Salado College in Arizona. The college is one of the ten Maricopa Community Colleges and has ten different locations throughout Maricopa County. The college has ten different locations and the goal is to implement it at seven of them - six locations where in-person adult education classes are offered and one where both virtual and in-person students receive various services.

Rio Tempe - Tempe, AZ, virtual

Rio Southern - Tempe, AZ - in-person and virtual

Rio Downtown - Phoenix, AZ - in-person and virtual

Rio Northern - Phoenix, AZ - in-person and virtual

Rio Avondale - Avondale, AZ - in-person and virtual

Rio Thomas - Phoenix, AZ - in-person and virtual

Rio Surprise - Surprise, AZ - in-person and virtual

The hope is to increase student, community, and staff civic engagement and provide opportunities for all participants to increase their knowledge and comfort level regarding a wide range of civic topics, e.g. understanding of barriers to voting, of the ballot, ability to find answers to their questions, and ability to hold a productive and polite conversation about elections and other civic matters. Additionally, we want to engage students long-term to create a chain reaction where students teach students, and hand off the torch as they transition to universities leaving behind a legacy of newer students who are already knowledgeable in civic conversations and can build similar legacies of involvement, participation, and stewardship.

Rio Salado is a part of the Maricopa Community College district, which has expressed a vested interest in student civic engagement and voter participation. I would like to start in June 2024 and continue on indefinitely. For the paid initiative, we will participate as long as it is available and we get selected to build a foundation for internal engagement with or without the pay. This action plan will be updated in the Spring following each election in order to

incorporate lessons learned, successes, failures, and ideas to further institutionalization efforts. This action plan, a collaboration between RSC and CVP, will be implemented by faculty leaders and student fellows conducting regular events on the Rio Salado campuses. We ensure diversity and inclusion in this action plan by planning collaboration with diverse student populations and involving faculty members throughout the College in order to gain a broader perspective.

Leadership

Kate Packer, Director of RSc Student Life and Leadership, will be held accountable for the assignment distribution and monitoring of project completion by the Democracy Fellows. She is an RSC employee and will not be receiving additional pay.

Democracy Student Fellows will be paid upon completion of their fellowship and RSC and CVP will be tracking their project completion.

RSC will be able to increase Democracy Fellows' pay through the Ask Every Student Initiative. Additionally, the initiative will increase engagement of the faculty by offering them a one-time scholarship for working with student leaders and encouraging and supporting students in their civic endeavors and serving as a point of contact at each of the seven RSC locations. Both Democracy Fellows and Faculty will participate in a Maricopa County Registrar training to become deputy registrars. We will ensure diversity in our leadership team by paying students and faculty and recruiting student fellows from different study focuses. We will also host events both in-person and virtually to ensure accessibility.

Rio Salado will collaborate with Campus Vote Project, Vote Riders, and Arizona Clean Elections to add even more student resources and provide a benchmark to gauge student engagement progress. We are also a part of the Maricopa Civic Council and the Student Life and Leadership Directors Affinity Group. Members of these working groups have actively participated in the past and can provide support, feedback, and knowledge to help make these efforts successful.

As we connect with student fellows, we will extend coalition invitations to different organizations that they are involved in both on campus and in the community. As Rio Salado has not previously engaged in VFC work, we intend to build our coalition from the ground up, engaging with as many community organizations as possible to ensure the broadest reach. We will attempt to partner with the League of Women Voters, Instituto, Lucha, and the Arizona Students Association. We will strategically involve these organizations by recognizing their long standing leadership and asking how we can help first, rather than how they can help us. The SLL will engage

- The Community Development department who serves over 5,000 in-person students a year.
- The RSC Social Science Faculty who oversee virtual political science classes.
- Phi Theta Kappa, Honors, and National Society of Leadership and Success organizations who work with students who expressed a high level and capacity to be more socially engaged and continually grow personally and academically.
- All online students will receive an invitation to participate in these opportunities.

Our coalition enjoys strong support from the college and district upper-level leadership.

RSC President Dr. Kate Smith has supported all civic engagement opportunities.

MCCCD Associate Vice Chancellor of the Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy

Deanna Villanueva-Saucedo extended support to the RSC SLL team by offering them an

overview of various opportunities, connecting them to existing resources, and introducing them to MCCCD contacts to leverage resources and increase intercollegiate collaboration.

We plan to engage the following stakeholders in our coalition as efforts progress:

- Marketing
- Residential Faculty
- RSC Office of the President and Student Affairs Leadership
- Advisement
- Community Development leadership
- Event Services
- Safety

The first project under this action plan will be to develop the infrastructure, training materials, tools, and repository of resources that will become available, can be added to, and improved. This way as more students, staff, and faculty become engaged, they will have a clear purpose, mission, and idea of what has been done, needs to be done, and how to do it. It is expected that new people join and some people leave. Having a Handbook, a clear and logical infrastructure, and tools will allow for the transition to be minimal and with less negative impact. As students and staff join the effort, they will be supported by the Student Life and Leadership team on the college level when they are onboarded. Among the students, specific roles will be developed and assigned, each with tasks, responsibilities, and room for growth and creativity. Students will elect leads and choose their own areas of influence. Together, participants will be expected to finalize the meeting schedule and a working communication plan. It is prudent to have more than one person work in each area. As staff and students graduate, transfer, or leave for any other reasons, they will hand off their responsibilities or, if they don't have an opportunity to hand it off, the new person will work with the person's counterpart to continue with the projects. We will save all documents and planning information to ensure that any new staff is set up for success. Some projects may be short-term and the person responsible may leave upon completion. For long-term projects, a larger group will work together and share the responsibilities, minimizing the risk of lost expertise as or when a person exits the project.

Commitment

Commitment shown through action is more effective than commitment shown through words. We commit to providing clear goals, structure, and support tools to engage students, staff, and the community in civic opportunities, personal learning experiences, and chances to affect positive change by educating selves and others in a friendly and respectful manner. The goals will be achieved through providing events, workshops, discussions, and other learning events as well as tools and materials for all to grow as responsible citizens, individuals, and neighbors.

The VP of Student Affairs has communicated his endorsement for the civic engagement opportunities and events and requested that the SLL team share the specific steps they would need from his office to demonstrate The Maricopa Community Colleges state on its MCCCCD Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy page that: "A well-rounded education goes beyond the classroom — we believe it extends beyond our campuses into the local and national communities. Maricopa Community Colleges is a strong voice for civic engagement, and we are proud to promote awareness of important policy issues, as well as encourage our students to become more deeply involved in civic life at all levels." The MCCCCD Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy focuses on: **Civic Engagement:** Get involved in promoting civic awareness and public discourse on campus and beyond. **Leadership Development:** Build your leadership and group participation skills while giving back to the community. **Hands-on Experience:** Boost your resume, earn college credit and get real-world public policy experience.

Landscape

Rio Salado serves nearly 40,000* students annually in 50 states, offering more than 650 online classes, 143 programs, flexible Monday starts, and more. Additionally, Rio Salado serves as Arizona's largest provider of Adult Education and Dual Enrollment instruction and works with local and national partners to create other programs, services, and lifelong learning opportunities. In 2022-2023, Rio Salado served 19,662 online, 9,749 Dual Enrollment, and 5,507 Adult Education students. Serving non-traditional populations such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and High School Equivalency (HSE), Rio Salado serves some of the most "in-need" populations of voters - 74.5% of Rio Salado students are Pell Grant eligible, 43.5% are First-generation to attend college, and nearly 40% identify as ethnic minorities. Access to accurate voter information requires privilege, time, and a knowledge of where to begin. In Arizona, a state where information and rhetoric surrounding voting changes rapidly, easy access to this information is more important than ever. Currently, one person in RSC Student Life & leadership dedicates their time to Civic Engagement. The MCCCCD District provides support and opportunities to leverage resources among the ten community college teams by holding regular meetings for the Maricopa Civic Council and the Student Life and Leadership Directors Affinity Group. Rio Salado has received the Ask Every Student grant, which will help the college to

engage more help from students and faculty. We hope to also secure additional resources from our partners to have Democracy fellows on campus. A challenge we observed and are working to overcome is being an online institution. The largest part of our students take classes virtually, which poses some difficulties with student engagement. We are addressing it by providing a large number of virtual events and heavily advertising them on all media available to the college.

NSLVE

We have committed to the NSLVE program and intend to use this information to better inform strategies in the future. The Associate Vice Chancellor of the Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy at Maricopa Community Colleges has confirmed that Rio Salado is part of the NSLVE program.

At Rio Salado in 2018, our institution turned out to vote at a rate of 32.9%-- 6.2% below the national average. As this was a midterm election year, less participation can be expected, but we hope (through our efforts) to increase voting rates year-round. We would like to increase midterm voter participation by 3 percentage points for an average of 35.9%. We do not currently have data on voting rates by ethnicity but hope to acquire this information in the future. We will attempt to target our outreach efforts to majors that typically have lower turnout rates-- psychology, law enforcement, computer and information sciences, engineering, and health professions. We will collaborate with different departments and make election information digestible to those who do not typically engage with politics.

Goals

In the long term, our team wants Civic Engagement to become a common best practice at Rio Salado, with students starting clubs, spearheading events, and growing to become local and even national leaders. We seek to generate a program with so much impact that local and national level leaders want to come to talk to RSC students because we are such an active voter base. This interest would come from the amount of accessible, clear, and consistent information that we provide to the students and the number of civic engagement opportunities that shape us as an Voter voter-friendly institution and a learning institution where students learn their curricula as well as skills to aid them in life. To reach these goals, we will attempt to instill a knowledge of democratic principles, awareness of social issues, and civic literacy in *every* Rio Salado student. We also wish to impart skills such as critical thinking, media information literacy, leadership, collaboration, problem-solving, and civil discourse/communication skills.

In the short-term (2024-2025), we will recruit and train 5 student fellows and seven faculty members to engage in student vote work. We will host 8+ events (general timeline below, more to be added) at Rio Salado and bring in partner organizations to provide voter registration opportunities and ID clinics as they are available. We seek to integrate opportunities for voter registration into online LMS, as well as promote VR opportunities in classrooms.

Timeline	
May 7	Voter Registration Event
June 27	Breaking Down Barriers: Challenges to Voting Access in Arizona
July 16	The Power of Your Vote: Understanding the 2024 Primary Election Ballot
August 14	AZ Town Hall Maricopa County Voter Registration Training
Sept 17	Constitution Day activities
Sept 27	National Voter Registration Day & AZ Student Vote Summit
Oct 16	Your Voice, Your Vote: Navigating the 2024 General Elections Ballot
Oct 29	National Voter Education Week Voter Registration Deadline
Nov 8	Fellowship Event TBD

Strategy

Throughout our civic engagement initiatives, Rio Salado College will focus on increasing student and staff engagement in civic leadership opportunities and making civic responsibility and civil discourse part of core practices. Currently, the Student Life and Leadership team, in collaboration with faculty and other teams, is developing service learning opportunities, leveraging resources with other organizations to offer training and tools for students and staff to attend workshops, events, and training to become more fluent in the language of democracy and prepared to vote in an informed and confident manner.

Our plan is to host events and develop blueprints and tools that can be reused and improved over time rather than offering them as a one-off opportunity. We are assessing the areas of need in our curricula and will use our findings to close the gaps by developing and offering what is already needed rather than inventing unfounded problems to solve. These opportunities will give hands-on experiences for leaders to develop. Student Life and Leadership will then support those leaders as they start student clubs and sharpen their skills, promote democracy,

create networking and employment opportunities, and work with other civic partners such as MCCC Student Public Policy Forum, AZ Town Hall, etc.

We will utilize the tools already in place to accomplish these long-term goals. For instance, faculty from multiple community colleges partnered with Arizona Town Hall, aztownhall.org, Center for the Future of Arizona, arizonafuture.org, Flinn Foundation, flinn.org, Greater Phoenix Chamber, phoenixchamber.com, and iCivics, icivics.org to create a civic guide. This document demonstrated the need for democratic engagement and showed individuals how they can contribute civically to their communities. This guide was made possible by a generous Vitalyst Health Foundation, vitalysthealth.org grant. These courses can provide a curriculum for democratically active and involved students to start outreach and to build on in an effort to engage the community, students, and staff more.

In the next 5 years, we would like to transform these efforts into a program that is student-guided, with student-led initiatives, events, and activities. In this, we wish to create opportunities for past democracy fellows to serve as mentors for new fellows. We also aspire to create a civic education program available to students, faculty, staff, and community members, incorporate service learning projects in course curricula across disciplines, and maintain a stream of continuous volunteer and internship opportunities by collaborating with partner organizations. Rio Salado and partners will be tracking and measuring very specific and realistic goals that are time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.

Students will be provided an orientation, so they know what to expect, how and when things will be done. The SLL staff and the CVP team will be tracking hours of participation, events that are held, and their attendance and participation. Rio Salado has a very diverse student population—ethnically, age-wise, orientation, culturally, and so on—and they will be included in all opportunities. When it comes to long-term goals, our team is ambitious yet realistic. There is a lot of work to be done and we will do it in a coordinated manner with specific plans, checking in on progress, seeking feedback and making changes to improve. The CVP team's commitment is to support schools not only during the voting season, but to support them at all times.

By hiring and training five student fellows, we will be able to assess the knowledge students have gained from their campus communities more accurately, which, in turn, will inform us of the informational needs at locations and develop educational sessions to meet the needs and interests of the current student body. Students participating in the fellowship program will report to the Student Life & Leadership director to carry out monthly activities surrounding Arizona voting, conduct voter registration drives, offer in-class presentations and Q&A sessions, and ensure engagement across multiple locations and programs, so civic information isn't confined to majors that are typically involved. Student fellows will also participate in educational activities and mentor incoming students interested in civic engagement to develop a college-wide civic-minded culture that will continue even when participating fellows complete their programs.

We plan to use the Ask Every Student tactic of institutional involvement to engage faculty across different realms of interest, training instructors to answer voting-related questions, register students to vote, and provide a safe space for open dialogue surrounding upcoming

elections. To motivate faculty participation and to maintain long-term expertise at the college, we will provide a \$100 incentive to seven faculty members for supporting student training on voting best practices and for implementing these ideals into their learning environments. These seven faculty members and the student fellows will be the start of an on-campus coalition in which members will share their institutional knowledge and represent each Rio Salado location to tailor content to diverse student populations. We will train coalition members through a partnership with the Maricopa County Elections Department, establishing them as deputy registrars and ensuring they have accurate and up-to-date information. We wish to become a college that is open to and encourages productive dialogues. To us, civic engagement is not just about voting—it's about being an informed citizen. We want students and staff to make educated decisions and have dignified discussions with one another.

SLL, in collaboration with CVP will be providing the support, tools, and space for the participants implementing the strategy and tactics together with the student participants. It is crucial that participants go through an orientation process, are trained and consistently supported to provide accurate information, receive and offer regular support, and stay nonpartisan. Students will meet with both the CVP staff as well as RSC SLL staff weekly receiving updates as well as reporting on the outcomes of their actions and collaborating with other participants, and develop team spirit and a sense of belonging and purpose. The activities will occur in person at one of the locations, virtually, as a hybrid of the two, and event at partner locations.

Overall, we believe that a campus that is committed to educating for civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation would look like a campus community that actively cultivates a culture of democracy and civic responsibility with its students, faculty, and staff. To achieve these goals, both in the long-term and the short-term, we will promote the fellowship, secure a commitment to civic participation by all college and community stakeholders, and continue partnerships with diverse groups and organizations.

Reporting

In the Spring of 2025, we will meet as a coalition to assess the goals outlined in this plan and draft a report detailing every effort made, successes, areas for improvement, and the data that we have collected. We will share this report on our webpage, and will make it available to all coalition members and interested parties upon request.

Evaluation

In order to evaluate the overall success of this action plan, we will track student participation in the democracy fellowship (number of fellows per term), civic engagement activities or events on campus and in the community (% of civic engagement events and # of participants), and student proficiency in democracy and civic engagement/student education (democracy/civic engagement training opportunities for democracy fellows on leadership skills

via # of educational training per term). We will also host a reflection session at the end of each semester to record fellows' thoughts on successes, improvement areas, and future ideas.