



**SUNY  
BROCKPORT**

# Civic Engagement Action Plan

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## Executive Summary

The Democratic Engagement Action Plan that follows was created by Betty García Mathewson, Associate Director for Leadership and Civic Engagement. It represents a compilation of efforts from across the institution for the 2024 – 2025 Academic Year to promote civic and democratic engagement at SUNY Brockport. The purpose of the plan is to guide Civic Engagement planning and implementation efforts. This action plan is intended to be a living document that is amended as appropriate through feedback from campus and community partners.

Civic engagement initiatives occur throughout campus under many different departments. Primary responsibility for voter engagement falls within Student Union, Leadership, & Activities (SULA). SULA oversees the national award-winning Leadership Development Program, community service initiatives, civic engagement, the Joey Jackson Intercultural Center, the Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity, and provides support to student organizations on campus. The American Democracy Project is a college-wide committee, chaired by a representative from SULA with representatives from across campus including the Political Science Department. This group meets throughout the year to implement programs that promote an informed and engaged citizenry.

For the 2024-25 academic year, our primary goals are:

- To establish an institutional definition of Civic Engagement including outcomes and appropriate assessment measures.
- To enhance voter education by hosting educational forums, and moderated discussions that emerge from student interest. Hosting “Meet the Candidates” events, and providing visual materials that present multiple perspectives and emphasize the importance of informed voting.
- To engage students to think critically about issues facing both the SUNY Brockport community and the surrounding community.
- To increase overall student voting through, ongoing voter registration, absentee ballot education and application support.
- To leverage our on-campus polling site to enhance voter education and increase access for students who are voting within the district.
- To engage with the Joey Jackson Intercultural Center to establish voter engagement opportunities supporting disenfranchised and minoritized student populations on campus.
- To enhance existing voter engagement opportunities that provide ballot access and encourage students to get out to vote, including reminders about absentee voting.

## Leadership

Primarily, leadership for these initiatives will fall to the Leadership and Civic Engagement pillar of Student Union, Leadership & Activities. The American Democracy Project committee of faculty, staff, and students has been re-established to guide campus efforts related to civic engagement. Members will be individuals from across campus who have an expressed interest in promoting this work on campus. Intentional efforts will be made to ensure diverse representation. Three positions have been identified as key roles necessitating development of a succession plan; these are the Associate Director for Leadership and Civic Engagement, Betty García Mathewson, Coordinator for Civic Engagement and Community Service, (hiring) as well as the Graduate Assistant for Civic Engagement, Ashley Cook.

Additionally, work is completed throughout campus including many intentional partnerships that support the day-to-day work. These include:

### **Student Union, Leadership & Activities (SULA):**

The Student Union, Leadership and Activities, in the Student Affairs Division, is primarily responsible for civic engagement initiatives at the college. The office, which is directed by Karen Podsiadly, oversees several areas of student engagement on campus including the nationally recognized Leadership Development Program and Community Service and Civic Engagement initiatives, headed by Betty García Mathewson, Clubs and Organization, and Fraternity and Sorority Life overseen by Rebecca Lemus, and the Joey Jackson Intercultural Center, ran by Will Walker. The office is also currently in the process of hiring a Coordinator for Community Service and Civic Engagement and a Coordinator for the Center Gender and Sexual Diversity

### **Department of Political Science:**

The department of Political Science and International Studies seeks to help students develop the skills and knowledge to critically evaluate political issues and analyze the role of the citizen in the political system. Dr. Steven Jurek, Chair of Political Science and International Studies serves as a primary contact for collaboration with the department.

### **Brockport Student Government (BSG):**

Student government at Brockport is a vibrant community. The organization seeks to develop students for roles as leaders in diverse and interdependent communities. Several student groups, under the auspice of BSG, are engaged in civic engagement efforts, including:

- Men of Color
- Turning Point
- Rotoract Club
- Environmental Science
- Eurosim
- Political Science
- Brockport Advocates for Individuals with Disabilities
- The Stylus Student Newspaper
- Talon Television
- ALAS
- OSAD

**Residential Life/Learning Communities (RLLC):**

Serving more than a third of the campus population, Residential Life represents a major stakeholder in efforts to civically engage students. The thriving Living Learning Community, directed by Kara Corlett program offers a unique opportunity to connect with students on a variety of related topics including service, sustainability, law and civility, leadership, and others. Amber Rice, Assistant Director of Residential Life is our main contact within residential life on civic engagement.

**Institutional Student Learning Outcome Assessment Committee:**

This group looks at how we assess our Institutional Student Learning Outcomes. One of the five Institutional Student Learning Outcomes is Civic Engagement. Committee membership reflects a broad cross-section of campus. Frances Dearing, Director of Accountability and Assessment is the committee chair.

**Civil Discourse Education and Planning Committee**

This Student Affairs committee has three primary goals that focus on explaining First Amendment rights, developing skills for civil discourse and activism, and to provide more resources and training to faculty and campus leaders. Betty García Mathewson, the Associate Director for Leadership and Civic Engagement is a member of this committee and SULA programming is an integral part of the first two goals.

1. Explain the First Amendment rights as it relates to a public campus and the connection to the principles of civil discourse
2. Develop skills within civil discourse and activism to respectfully engage with others who share differing viewpoints

The Division of Student Affairs focuses on the cocurricular life of students and advances the mission of the university by inspiring and enhancing student learning, professional exploration, and personal transformation. The Civil Discourse Education and Planning Committee is a mechanism for integrating SULA's efforts with complimentary efforts across the division.

**American Democracy Project**

The American Democracy Project (ADP) is a college-wide committee, chaired by a representative from SULA with representatives from across campus including the Political Science Department. ADP is newly re-established and because of the broad-based representation of its membership, it will be primary focus in the work of reestablishing student facing civic engagement programming across the University

**Monroe County Board of Elections**

SUNY Brockport has become a polling site serving the campus community as well as voters from the Town of Sweden in districts two, five, and six. Our primary contact is Natalie Sheppard.

Voter Registration Coordinator, Annette Ramos SUNY Brockport works closely with the Monroe County Board of Elections on voter registration and education initiatives. Annette Ramos, Recruiter and Voter Registration Coordinator is our primary contact and has been invited to be on campus encouraging students to register to vote and provide them with relevant resources.

## **League of Women Voters of the Rochester Metro Area**

Debra Gordon, Co-Chair of Voter Services for the League of Women Voters of the Rochester Metro Area is our primary contact. The League of Women Voters is a local resource for educating students on voter registration, as well as current issues facing the local community. As an ongoing collaborator they have been invited to campus to be a resource for students as well as provide training and support to our student staff, increasing their capacity to educate other students.

## **Commitment**

SUNY Brockport values involvement with its community. As a result, efforts have been made over the last few years to include this aspect of our work in guiding documents for the institution. The college's strategic mission, vision, values, and strategic plan have been shared broadly and emphasized among faculty, staff, students, and other community members. The institutional student learning outcomes are used as a guide for ensuring congruence across curricular and co-curricular programming.

Community service as one arm of our civic engagement programming helps to broaden the perspective of what it means to be a part of a community, and how students can positively impact their campus and local community. A key aspect of broadening the understanding of students on what civic engagement encompasses is opening opportunities to engage with a broad range of activities that fall under the umbrella of civic engagement. We seek to provide a range of opportunities including community service projects in collaboration with community partners, opportunities to engage in critical conversations about current issues. We also provide technical support to student led activist groups helping them to understand the range of tools available to them from marching to raise awareness of an injustice to letter campaigns, volunteering to serve on a committee working to create change or calling elected officials. Community service is a key entry into expanding the understanding of civic engagement.

## **University Mission**

SUNY Brockport is an inclusive learning community that inspires excellence through growth, engagement, and transformation.

## **University Vision**

Building meaningful lives and vibrant communities

## **University Values**

Excellence. Community. Inclusion. Transformation. Engagement.

## Strategic Plan: Building a Better Brockport

Most relevant to this Action Plan is Goal Two: To be a university engaged with its community.

Community engagement offers the opportunity to contribute to the public good by combining the resources of the college with those of the public and private sectors. To be a college engaged with its community, it is required that we promote, support, recognize, and celebrate the service and engagement of faculty, staff, students, and alumni in local, regional, national, and international communities, demonstrating our commitment to leadership, civic engagement, and global awareness.

Goal Two: Relevant Measures of Success

- a. Growth in the number and extent of engagement partnerships in the region with emphasis on urban, suburban, and rural partnerships ensuring students have an understanding of how political structures operate across the range of communities in the state and nation.
- b. Expand campus-based Lifelong Learning opportunities for community members.
- c. Ensure increased opportunities to link all students, including international students, with the community. Saturday of Service is a program that will return in Fall 2024 and is a strong example. It introduces students to the region, creating connections through the work of service, and is the starting point for making connections.
- d. See increased interdivisional and interdepartmental communication around scholarship, curricular and co-curricular events, and achievements.
- e. Ensure enhanced alumni and external engagement, providing for social and networking activities, and inclusive of meaningful opportunities to contribute time, talent, and funding to the College.

## Institutional Student Learning Outcomes

- **Written and Oral Communication:** Brockport graduates will be able to express ideas in a coherent, logical, and compelling way, in both written and oral forms appropriate to their disciplines.
- **Quantitative Reasoning:** Brockport graduates will be able to analyze, interpret and communicate quantitative information in a variety of formats, and solve relevant quantitative problems using appropriate methods.
- **Intercultural Competence:** Brockport graduates will be able to demonstrate an understanding of multiple worldviews and experiences as well as of relationships between diversity, inequality, and social, economic, and political power, both within the United States and globally.
- **Critical Thinking and Information Literacy:** Brockport graduates will be able to identify issues clearly, synthesize and contextualize relevant sources to achieve specific purposes, and make connections across experiences and disciplinary perspectives to generate well-reasoned and imaginative approaches to historical and contemporary issues, problems, and challenges.
- **Civic Engagement:** Brockport graduates will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of civic engagement and civic responsibility through knowledge and experience gained in their academic field(s) of study and co-curricular explorations.

A critical component of civic engagement is having the tools to effectively impact the community. The learning objectives of the institution outline skills that are essential to fully engaging in spheres of civic life. Brockport graduates should be able to use the tools that they have been given during their time as a student to positively impact the professional and personal areas of their life, both of which are informed by civic engagement. The ability to analyze data and information as it appears and then use it to engage in deeper, more robust critical conversations is an essential life skill. Graduates should be able to integrate understanding of the broad range of beliefs and opinions that exist across disciplinary fields and use that understanding to engage in more inclusive and positively impactful actions.

## **Landscape**

### **Curricular efforts**

#### **General Education**

Within the General Education requirements and structure, several course tags may connect with civic engagement and learning, however, it is difficult to discern to what extent a specific course connects to this work. All students must take a course that fulfills one of these tags, with a wide variety of options from which to choose. These course tags include:

The most direct and specific connection is the US History and Civic Engagement course requirement (coded “V”) which requires students to demonstrate understanding of United States’ society and/or history, including the diversity of individuals and communities that make up the nation, and the role of individual participation in US communities and government.

Other knowledge and skill areas that may connect with civic engagement to varying degrees include:

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice (coded “D”):

- describe the historical and contemporary societal factors that shape the development of individual and group identity involving race class, and gender;
- analyze the role that complex networks of social structures and systems play in the creation and perpetuation of the dynamics of power, privilege, oppression, and opportunity;
- apply the principles of rights, access, equity, and autonomous participation to past, current, or future social justice action.

Perspectives on Gender (coded “W”)

- demonstrate critical awareness of scholarship on women and gender as an aspect of patriarchal systems within a relevant knowledge area, with such scholarship constituting a central or major theme of the course as opposed to a peripheral or occasional consideration.

Contemporary Issues (coded “I”):

- analyze a major issue of contemporary and enduring human significance, integrating perspectives that have an important bearing on the issue(s) from more than one of the Knowledge Areas.
- recognize and articulate relationships between different Knowledge Areas;



- locate, evaluate, and synthesize information from a variety of sources;
- demonstrate an ability to develop and defend well-reasoned arguments.

#### World History and Global Awareness (O)

- demonstrate knowledge of a broad outline of world history and/or the development of the distinctive features of at least one civilization or culture in relation to other regions of the world;
- demonstrate an understanding of the structures, systems, and interrelationships among civilizations and cultures within historical and/or contemporary contexts, and their impact on wellbeing and sustainability.

### **Co-Curricular Efforts**

#### **Brock the Vote Campaign**

Throughout the year, SULA implements the following initiatives to promote voter registration, education, and turnout. This is a program that we are re-invigorating through collaboration with Brockport Student Government and the connections the office has throughout the campus community. These efforts are laid out in more detail in the “Strategy” section.

### **Overcoming Historic Barriers**

During COVID, civic engagement programming decreased dramatically, and re-engaging students has been challenging here as it has been across the nation. The 2022-23 CAS for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning was used as a springboard for grounding our re-engagement efforts. The overall process highlighted some historical weaknesses, and our interviews with students gave us a sense of where our young people are at. The campus community is still struggling to return to a level of engagement equal to that of what was seen before the COVID-19 Pandemic as students struggle to engage across the country.

#### **Internal**

The most recent Civic Engagement Action Plans were not modified to reflect the impact of changes that were happening. The combination of Civic Engagement programming being spear headed by a Graduate Assistant, the loss off the Coordinator for Service and Community Building position in 2020-21, and COVID, together resulted in plans that were beyond the capacity of staffing.

Our new structure was developed to support the creation of robust civic engagement programming that responds to our present circumstances. The Associate Director for Leadership & Civic Engagement will still oversee the program area, and a Coordinator for Civic Engagement & Community Service position has been created scheduled to start Spring 2024. This position will integrate the leadership of civic engagement programming with elements of the previous Coordinator for Service and Community Building lost in 2021. The Graduate Assistant for Civic Engagement position will continue.

The re-establishment of our award-winning Leadership Development Program, also a fatality of COVID, is a part of the University's commitment to student engagement. The Associate Director for Leadership & Civic Engagement spearheads this effort along with a Graduate Assistant for Leadership. Civic engagement and leadership programming are fully integrated within one team focused on reintroducing this generation of students significantly impacted by COVID to the importance and power of their collective voices.

The civic engagement program has not had a formal mission statement and the more recent Action Plans have had developing a mission statement as a goal. Through the Civic Engagement and Service-Learning CAS, it became clear that the mission of all civic engagement programming was to contribute to the University Learning outcome.

**Civic Engagement:** Brockport graduates will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of civic engagement and civic responsibility through knowledge and experience gained in their academic field(s) of study and co-curricular explorations.

Finally, we discovered a perception among some students and staff that Democratic Engagement was for people in the Democratic Party. In addition to comments in one-on-one conversations, our focus groups and interviews for our CAS illuminated this issue. The question, "don't you have republican engagement?" arose multiple times. There is also an impression on campus that the majority support liberal values, making an environment in which many conservative students may struggle to discuss their political beliefs. We have changed the name of our program area to Civic Engagement and are planning issue-based education and awareness events that highlight the full range of perspectives to begin to build the culture that all perspectives are important and are present.

While interviewing students for the CAS for Civic Engagement and Service learning, students had a range of perspectives that referred to action, education, and community. In one-on-one settings and in our clubs and organizations, students are engaged in siloed conversations. As the new Coordinator for Civic Engagement and Service-Learning and the Graduate Assistant for Civic Engagement build relationships, we can start turning the tide on civic engagement.

### **Response to External Barriers**

There is now a more effective and efficient way to register to vote online. Individuals may register online with identification from the Department of Motor Vehicles or their social security number. We have been promoting online voter registration this year and will continue to do so.

Monroe County also has a significant geographic barrier due to its size and population density. SUNY Brockport is now one of four polling sites in the town of Sweden that covers districts two, five, and six. Students who live on campus and have registered to vote locally will be able to walk to their polling place at the Special Events and Recreation Center on SUNY Brockport campus

Local offices working with voter registration and engagement have been invited to campus to share their resources to share their work with the SUNY Brockport community. These outside resources allow students with limited access to the surrounding community to gain insight into the critical issues being discussed.

As many campuses across the nation are also experiencing, there has been a significant decline in student participation and engagement with any type of programming, so educational efforts are an ongoing struggle as well. As we look to stimulate engagement across campus, collaboration with faculty in educational departments will be a huge point of growth for student engagement.

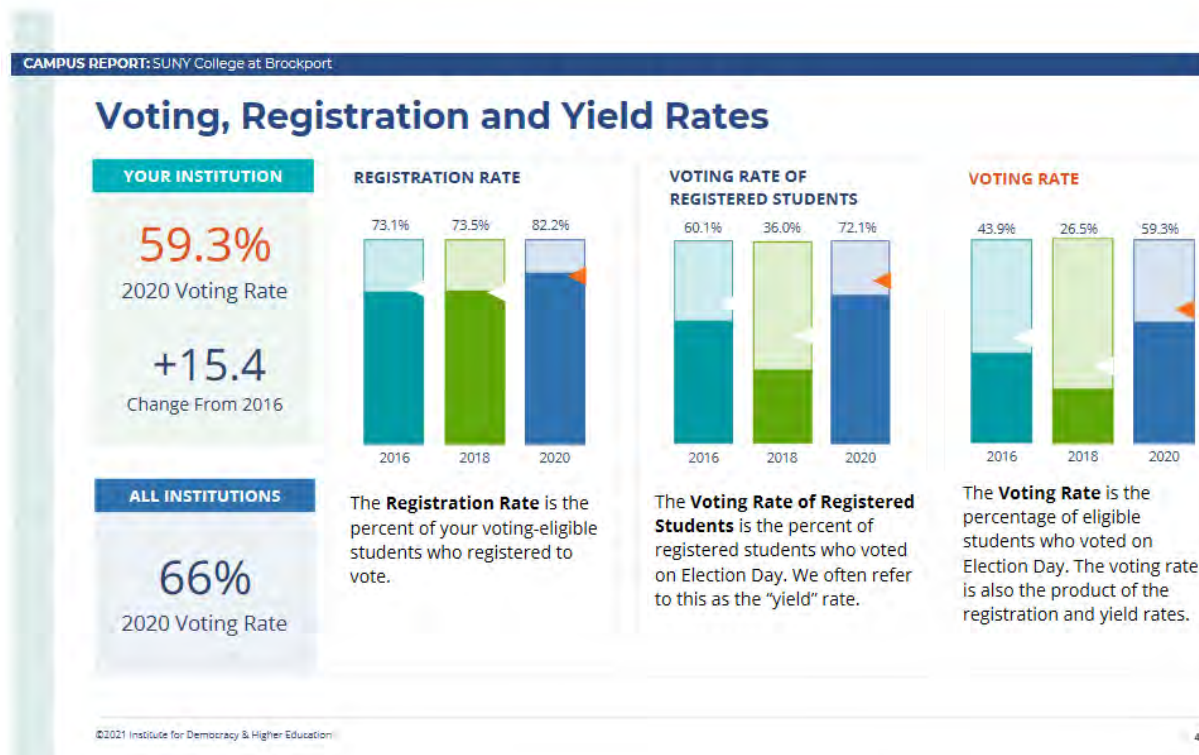
### **Available Resources**

- The American Democracy Project
- Coordinator for Civic Engagement and Community Building
- Ashley Cook, Graduate Assistantship for Civic Engagement
- Student Leadership Assistants
- 19 Residential Life Living and Learning Communities including Pride House, Brockport Global Village, Green House, Leadership & Community Service, Law & Civility,

### **Additional Resources Needed**

- Funds for events and speakers
- Reserved parking space for guest speakers

# NSLVE 2020 Midterm Data At-A-Glance



While we experienced improvement in all three categories depicted above between presidential election years, our overall voting rate and voting rate of registered students lags national averages. Voter mobilization should be a major priority in preparation for the 2024 elections.

Four out of six of our overall goals focus on increasing voter turnout and our long-term goal below outlines specific targets

- To increase overall student voting through, ongoing voter registration, absentee ballot education and application support.
- To leverage our on-campus polling site to enhance voter education and increase access for students who are voting within the district.
- To engage with the Joey Jackson Intercultural Center to establish voter engagement opportunities supporting disenfranchised and minoritized student populations on campus.
- To enhance existing voter engagement opportunities that provide ballot access and encourage students to get out to vote, including reminders about absentee voting.

## Goals

### Long Term Goals

- To increase voter registration rates to 85% during the 2024 election cycle
- To increase voting rate in presidential elections to 60% by 2024 and midterm elections to 30% in 2026

### Short Term Goals

- To establish a formal institutional definition of Civic Engagement including outcomes and appropriate assessment measures by Fall 2024.
- To re-establish civic engagement programming on campus through
  - American Democracy Project – Coordinator for Civic Engagement & Service Learning
  - Civil Discourse Education and Planning Committee – Associate Director of Leadership & Civic Engagement
- To enhance voter education by providing a range of engagement opportunities in collaboration with campus partners.

## Strategy

Voter Registration (this list is not exhaustive):

- Promotion of voter registration and an opportunity to register to vote at Summer Orientation, move-in, tabling, etc. Ongoing focus on guiding students through the process of deciding whether they vote in the Brockport District or their home district, and whether they will need absentee ballots or be able to vote in-person.
- Registration information and online links are provided to students in the University sponsored Student Newsletter as well as the Division of Student Affairs Newsletter.
- Ensuring that faculty are informed of voter engagement efforts on campus so that they may relay the information to their students
- Opportunity to register to vote integrated into initial Residential Hall floor meetings facilitated by RA's.
- Voter Registration information and forms handed out to off campus students by Good Neighbor Relations Team during Opening Weekend.
- Voter registration tabling throughout campus, using department staff, student workers, and local partners such as the League of Women Voters and the Monroe County Board of Elections. There is an ongoing focus on guiding students through the process of deciding whether they vote in the Brockport District or their home district, and whether they will need absentee ballots or be able to vote in-person.
- Trainings for student leaders (Resident Assistants, Peer mentors, and SULA Assistants) on how to register to vote so they can educate their peers
- Host one Naturalization Ceremony annually on campus
- Host National Voter Registration Day
- Remind students of voter registration deadlines through social media and tabling.

Voter Education (this list is not exhaustive):

- Host education programs in conjunction with Naturalization Ceremony- this historic program is a major component of SUNY Brockport's engagement with the surrounding community, and it is incredibly important to the work we do in engaging our campus community in different areas of civic engagement.
- Promote attending the Naturalization Ceremony to faculty so that they can promote to their students in the classroom setting
- Utilize social media and tabling to promote early voting, absentee voting, and remind students about voting deadlines and issues on the ballot
- Utilize social media and tabling to assist students in clarifying their perspectives on issues and candidates
- Build relationships with student leaders and begin engaging in the dialogues that are happening naturally and nurture opportunities to bring people together around topics of interest.
- Host Constitution Day Education events in collaboration with voter registration day, (September 17, 2024).
- "Meet the Candidates" events where students are able to meet with local elected officials and candidates running for office in urban, suburban, and rural regional communities.
- Host Debate Watch Parties
- Bulletin Boards throughout Campus with dates and information about events on campus
- Student staff and leaders conduct Democratic Topics Tabling and Outreach
- American Democracy Project Speakers

Voter Turnout (note: this list is not exhaustive)

- Posters, flyers, social media, and student media outlets utilized to remind students to submit absentee ballots
- Posters, flyers, social media, and student media outlets utilized to remind students who live on campus and have registered to vote locally that will be able to walk to their polling place on campus.
- Provost email to faculty encouraging support and flexibility for students needing to travel home for election day
- Opportunities to practice casting a vote to eliminate discomfort as a deterrent
- Email from the president encouraging participation in the democratic process
- Flyers and advertising throughout campus promoting election day and building excitement
- Video on website encouraging students to get out and vote on election day
- Election Day Watch Party
- "I Voted" Party

## **Reporting**

This plan will be the starting point for the Associate Director of Leadership & Civic Engagement, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement and Community Service, and the Graduate Assistant for Civic Engagement as they re-establish civic engagement programming on campus.

Students will be able to access our Civic Engagement Action Plan through the American Democracy Project page on the SUNY Brockport website. Students will also be given a link to the Civic Engagement Action Plan at the closing of civic engagement-related workshops and events to ground their understanding of the event's purpose as it relates to our action plan. Data surrounding attendance at civic engagement-focused events can be collected through a student I.D. card swipe at the start of the event.

Student feedback is recorded across many campus areas through brief surveys that give students the chance to share what they thought went well and what could be changed. Holding informal conversations with students can also be used to collect feedback to inform our thinking and reflection in an authentic way.

NSLVE data collected is not yet available for 2020. When complete the data will come to the SUNY Brockport President's office and will be forwarded onto Student Union Leadership & Activities.

## **Evaluation**

Assessment of efforts will be an integral part of the process. Throughout the year, data will be gathered in a variety of ways, including:

- Voter Registration Rates (NSLVE)
- Voter Turnout Rates (NSLVE)
- Number of engagement opportunities to enhance voter education in collaboration with campus partners.
- Internal measures on programming events and numbers of people registered and absentee ballots requested
- Student feedback from events and workshops

Through the analysis of the types of data collected, we will be able to assess the shift in engagement across campus to see what areas still require growth. We know that engagement of students in events outside of class has been a difficult aspect of re-engagement across the country and being able to measure how effective our efforts have been integral to the continued implementation of programming for civic engagement.