

**ALL IN CHALLENGE**  
SUNY Cortland  
*Executive Summary – December 2019*

1. *Who Developed this Action Plan?* This first draft of SUNY Cortland’s *Action Plan* was developed by the college’s Institute for Civic Engagement director, John Suarez. To refine the Plan, he will partner with faculty and with staff in Student Affairs.
2. *What is the action plan for and what does it seek to accomplish?* The Plan provides an overview of steps to take, and with whom, to achieve a high rate of SUNY Cortland voter registration and actual votes in the April 2020 primaries and in the November 2020 General Election.
3. *Where will this action plan be implemented?* The Plan will be implemented at SUNY Cortland, under the guidance of the Institute for Civic Engagement.
4. *Why was this action plan developed?* The Plan was developed as a way of identifying key steps in the path to a set of successful student-vote events (April and November).
5. *When does this action plan start and end?* The Plan begins on January 27, 2020 – the first day of spring 2020 classes at SUNY Cortland. It ends in mid-December, 2020 – the end of the fall 2020 semester’s classes.
6. *How will this action plan be implemented?* Under the direction of SUNY Cortland’s Institute for Civic Engagement, the Plan will be implemented through a network of (primarily) college organizations. This network will conduct activities and events that register student voters, educate students (and others) on issues in a non-partisan – and often participatory – way, and that facilitate student voting, especially in an upbeat and festive atmosphere (celebrating this opportunity).

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Guiding questions: People

1. *Who is coordinating the plan?* The Institute for Civic Engagement.
2. *Who is chairing the working group?* Initially, John Suarez, director, Institute for Civic Engagement. By [date], [who] will do so.
3. *What is the role of the working group?* The working group’s role is to (a) identify and collaborate with partners for particular events, (b)

4. *How will the working group members be selected?* Working group members will be selected from a list of partners which whom the Institute has been working, especially on voting-related projects.
5. *What are working group members' responsibilities?* Members' responsibilities include (a) researching and creating voter education, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote event designs, (b) event planning, and (c) recruiting individual and organization partners.
6. *How is the working group inclusive of different campus and community stakeholders?* The group includes campus organizations such as NYPIRG, the College Republicans, the Young Democrats, and the Political Science Association. We have begun discussions with student clubs such as the Black Student Union, and two of the Institute for Civic Engagement's *Action Team* interns have coordinated with our first-year-experience (COR 101) course instructors to conduct voter registration drives during class time.

We are also partnering with the League of Women Voters of Cortland County, as well as with local not-for-profit agencies and with members of the Cortland County Legislature.

7. *Who are the working group members and how are they involved?*
  - a. *What academic departments and which faculty within academic affairs are involved?* The English Department's Writing Program is involved, as is Advisement and Transition and the Institute for Civic Engagement, which is in Academic Affairs.
  - b. *What units within Student Affairs are involved and what are their roles?*
  - c. *Which students and which student organizations are involved?* Interns with the Institute for Civic Engagement's Action Team, NYPIRG, Student Government Association Club members, and "Greek" organizations are involved.
  - d. *Which community and/or national organizations are involved?* The League of Women Voters and the county legislature are involved.
  - e. *Is the working group coordinating with the local elections office? If so, with whom and how?* We will work with both the Republican and the Democratic Board of Elections Commissioners.
8. *How often will the working group meet?* We will meet via email as need be, and we will meet in person every two weeks.

Guiding questions: Leadership –

1. *How does the institution and its leadership demonstrate commitment to improve civic learning and democratic engagement? Is there an explicit, visible commitment to the part of the governing board, president, and senior leadership?* Yes. This commitment is

demonstrated by our mission statement, our strategic plan, and by the college administration's continuing support of this kind of work – including its funding of the Institute for Civic Engagement.

- a. *Is the commitment communicated within the institution? To whom, specifically, and how?* The commitment is communicated in a variety of ways: Civic engagement is named in our mission statement, and applied learning (civic engagement with an intentional learning component) is listed as a strategic goal. The college funds the Institute for Civic Engagement, our college president, Dr. Erik Bitterbaum, is a member of two civic engagement organizations (the National Campus Compact and the Campus Compact of New York and Pennsylvania), the college provides \$10,000 in civic engagement scholarships (in addition to other civic engagement scholarships).
  - b. *Is the commitment communicated outside the institution? To whom, specifically, and how?* The college's Institute for Civic Engagement shares its civic engagement Newsletter with community partners, and each April it gives *Leadership in Civic Engagement* awards to deserving individuals and groups from on- and off-campus.
2. *Is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement a pervasive part of institutional culture? Is it ongoing, consistent, systematic, and sustainable across programs, departments, and the entire institution? How do you know?* I need to identify ways in which civic engagement and democratic engagement is deeply integrated into our culture – and, if it is not, to take steps to make it so.
  3. How is the institution's commitment reflected in existing statements and documents? Our mission statement (especially) and strategic plan reflect that commitment.
  4. *What are the institution's overall civic, democratic, and/or political learning outcomes? Is there a process in place to ensure that outcomes are measured and met?* The Institute for Civic Engagement will be that place.
  5. *How is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement included in the general education curriculum?* I need to research the answer to that question.
  6. *How is educating for civic learning and democratic engagement included in the co-curriculum?* I need to research the answer to that question.

#### Guiding questions: Landscape

1. *Are civic learning and democratic engagement overall campus learning objectives?* Yes, they are central to the college's mission statement and to its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan.
2. *What do assessment data show about political climate and democratic engagement on campus? How do these data compare to that of peer institutions?* Although we lag behind

our counterparts (per NSLVE), we have made great strides in voter-registration and in voting percentages.

3. *How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the curriculum?* I need to research the answer to that question.
4. How is civic learning and democratic engagement present in the co-curriculum? I need to research the answer to that question.
5. *What internal barriers (e.g., limited funding, staff resistance, lack of leadership) prevent the institution from being successful?* Faculty members' need to meet rigorous teaching requirements could interfere with our reaching our goals. One benefit is that we do not lack leadership on this score: Our president and other campus leaders support this work.
6. *What external barriers (e.g., election laws, voter ID laws, lack of proximity to polling location) prevent the institution from being successful?* One on-campus polling place interferes with success, as does transportation to off-campus polling locations. However, one of our long-term partners – NYPIRG – has been able to provide rides for many students.
7. *What resources are available to help the institution be successful?* One of our key resources is our wealth of interested and active student groups, including our Student Government Association.
8. *What additional resources are needed to help the institution be successful?* Additional funding for events.

## Guiding questions: Goals

### Long-term goals

1. *What impact is expected?* Per our NSLVE reports, our 2016 and 2018 voting rates were 35.8% and 22.1%, respectively. The 2016 voting rate was 2.1% higher than in 2012; the 2018 rate was 15.0% higher than 2014. While those rates show improvement, they pale in comparison with our Carnegie Classification peers: Our 2016 rate is 14.6% lower than other Carnegie Classification institutions; our 2018 rate is 17.0% lower.

We expect that our efforts will raise voting rates an average of 10% each two years, as voter-related activities become more fully integrated into our academic and co-curricular cultures. We are especially concerned about the lower voting rates among certain populations, such as the 18- to 21-year-old group (though their rates are increasing) and the historically underrepresented groups.

2. *What knowledge, skills, and capacities (learning outcomes) does the institution want students to achieve and graduate with in order to be active and informed?* We want our students to access information from a variety of sources, to use their critical thinking skills to assess that information, and to use their skills in a civil way in civic decision-making processes.
3. *What does the institution want to accomplish over the next 10 years?* We want to continue doing what we have been doing over the past two years: We have designed and conducted activities with partners on- and off-campus; those activities have emphasized civil apolitical critical thinking, analysis, and action on a variety of controversial issues. The activities have included debates, deliberative dialogues, and panel discussions; they have explored topics such as the climate crisis, gun violence, and freedom of speech on the public college campus.

We also want to integrate these kinds of activities into events conducted by people in Academic Affairs, in Student Affairs, and in activities that are co-conducted by both divisions. Through these activities, we want to generate engaged graduates, as evidenced by (for example) Alumni Affairs surveys.

### Short-term goals

1. *What does the institution want to accomplish in the next year or two? What needs to be accomplished in order to move towards the achievement of long-term goals?* We want to continue building the action-oriented partnerships that we have been nurturing over the past two years, and to set in place data-collection instruments that will help us assess progress.

### Guiding questions: Strategy

1. *What is the work? What are the planned activities?* The activities include those mentioned above, as well as recruitment of additional academic departments (especially as we demonstrate the importance of specific issues to those departments' majors) and student clubs and organizations (especially those that promote the interests of under-represented groups). We have already begun this work.
2. *Who will do the work? Who is responsible for implementing each planned activity?* Teams of students, faculty, staff, and community partners will do this work. Two of the leading groups will be the Institute for Civic Engagement's *Action Team* of interns and NYPIRG.
3. *Who is the work for? Who is the audience for each activity?* Although students are our main audience, we also want to include individuals and groups from the greater Cortland community so that we can all learn how to improve life at the local level, regardless of where we live.
4. *Where will the work happen? Where will each activity occur on campus?* The work will happen at venues on campus and in the city of Cortland; in each case, we will use venues that are appropriate to a given event.
5. *When will the work happen? When will each activity occur on campus?* Events will happen during the fall and spring semesters.
6. *What is the purpose of the work? Why is each activity being implemented and what is the goal for each activity?* The activities will be conducted as ways of reaching our stated goals.

### Guiding questions: Reporting

1. *How will the plan be shared, internally and externally? Please state where the plan will be shared.* The plan will be shared through a variety of mediums, especially on campus. Announcements will be sent via email to people on- and off-campus. For on-campus announcements, we will also use low-tech approaches such as tabling, campus newspaper and newsletter articles, and paper posters. The paper medium will also have QR codes as a way of giving people additional information.
2. *Will the plan be made public? If so, how?* Yes, the plan will be made public in the ways described above.
3. *Will the data be used to inform be made public? If so, how?* Yes, as described above.

### Guiding questions: Evaluation

1. *What is the purpose of the evaluation? What does the institution want to know and be able to do with the information gathered?* Evaluation will be used to help us refine our methodology, especially as incoming students (each year) represent a “moving target” with regard to knowledge, interest, motivation, and communication channels.
2. *Who is the audience of the evaluation?* Our audience is administration, the Institute for Civic Engagement, and politically-oriented student groups.
3. *Who will carry-out the evaluation?* The Institute for Civic Engagement.
4. *When will the evaluation be carried out and completed?* The evaluation will be carried-out and completed after the November election, with smaller, activity-specific evaluations conducted during the year.
5. *What information (data, evidence) must be collected and how it will be collected? What are the performance measures and indicators of success?* In addition to our NSLVE survey, we will record the number of volunteers and student participants at various events, and we will survey participants with regard to the educational and motivational value of those events, relative to them actually voting.
6. *How will information (data, evidence) be analyzed?* This will be a learning experience to all involved – including students who participated in the planning and execution of events. We will have quantitative and qualitative data to analyze, looking for ways of refining our messaging.
7. *How will the results of evaluation be shared?* We will share our evaluation results through a Sandwich Seminar and through the Institute’s monthly newsletter. The Sandwich Seminar Series is a twice/week event at which people from on- and off-campus can share their work. It is free and open to the public. Our newsletter is shared electronically with the campus and with our community partners. It is also available through multiple links at the college’s website.

### An action plan’s principles

1. Comprehensive – local, state, & national elections; non-election-related programming; politically neutral; voter education, voter registration, & get-out-the-vote events.
2. Continuous – even through non-election times
3. Integrated – into curricular and co-curricular planning
4. Intentional – informed by data

5. Pervasive – Activities should occur across campus and reach all students
6. Deep – Embedded in curricula and in the co-curricula, and tied to the institution's learning objectives
7. Innovative – improve existing efforts through new and original idea.

#### Action Plan planning process

1. Assign leaders
2. Assemble a team and develop a timeline
3. Assess current work and outcomes
4. Set goals
5. Plan work
6. Document plan
7. Implement plan
8. Assess progress toward goals
9. Review the plan
10. Repeat