



SUNY Fredonia Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-2023 academic year

This plan was created using the Votes & Ballots Action Planning Form. We highly recommend editing and expanding upon this draft before submitting for review.

Throughout this document, we mention the Strengthening American Democracy Guide as a resource for your review. We encourage you to turn to that resource for guidance and support as you complete your action plan!

I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Angela McGowan-Kirsch, Associate Professor of Communication; Chair, American Democracy Project Committee to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at SUNY Fredonia. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-2023 academic year, on and around our campus in Fredonia, New York.

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

- Faculty

The mission of our initiative is:

- The Fredonia American Democracy Project (ADP) committee was formed with the goal of educating students to become engaged in civic issues through participatory democracy as well as to encourage students to become well-informed voters and to appreciate the impact that voter participation can have.

ADP Fredonia's main goal is to encourage democratic participation among students. This action plan is designed to meet this goal by increasing student voter participation from 37% in 2018 to a total of 40% during this year's midterm election.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Executive Summary* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

II. Leadership

Fredonia's chapter of the American Democracy Project which is part of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- The first group involved with our initiative is our own ADP Committee. Members include:
- Faculty- Chair Dr. Angela McGowan-Kirsch, Dr. Kevin Kearns, Prof. Raymond Rushboldt, Dr. Jessica Finkelde; Staff - Charles Cornell (Incubator), Rachel Martin (campus life), David Phillips (advising); Chautauqua County League of Women Voters representatives - Mary Croxton and Gail Crowe; Students- Allyson Youngs, Audrey Erickson. The committee meets regularly to discuss progress in current initiatives as well as brainstorm potential tactics or events that contribute to our goal of encouraging students to be more politically engaged. In addition to the ADP Committee, ADP Fredonia has the privilege to work with the League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County. The LWVCC shares our goal of encouraging and promoting forms of civic engagement, making them a perfect fit for collaboration. We also work with on-campus entities, like campus life and campus media outlets, to promote and organize our events.
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- Since students are at the core of our organization, we collaborate with them through student interviews and our student subcommittee. This year's subcommittee is comprised of four students who are led by ADP's "community relations" intern. The committee's goal is to encourage students to vote by appealing to a sense of community and emphasizing more accessible forms of voting. The first aspect of community is harnessed each time we collaborate with student groups. These events use the goals of the other student group to encourage students to vote. For instance, a communication club may have a goal of refining public speaking skills. This fall ADP is co-hosting a debate on campus. This debate will have both political intentions and be an opportunity for students in a communication or public relations student group to exercise their public speaking skills. As for the second piece of our goal, committee members noticed that students could use help soliciting absentee ballots and knowing how to fill out the ballots. The ADP subcommittee is partnering with LWVCC to educate students on how all things related to voting by absentee ballot.

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

Our group plans to meet 2-3 times a month at During the week via Zoom

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Leadership Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrates commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, "Fredonia educates, challenges, and inspires students to become skilled, connected, creative, and responsible global citizens and professionals. The university enriches the world through scholarship, artistic expression, community engagement, and entrepreneurship."

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
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- Voter registration tables
- Protests / rallies / walkouts
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On campus, we've experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Walks / rides to polls
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- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
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The emphasis on civic learning and democratic engagement could be increased.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Commitment Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

IV. Landscape

We do not have access to comprehensive demographic information about our student body at this time.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Landscape Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

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:

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan do not mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We don't have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We don't have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
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- We don't use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
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- We don't have sustainable or consistent funding.
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- We have trouble engaging student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.
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We also know our campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to get out the vote efforts and registering voters:

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

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- 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.
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- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.

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- We have working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement.
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With this in mind, we have set the three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

To grow ADP's student subcommittee from four to possibly six members.

To increase voter registration by 5%

To collaborate at least once with the campus media, such as the student newspaper or radio station, to promote ADP events/goals.

To have consistent funding.

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

To create a subcommittee that will continue to be in operation after this group of students graduates in 2023.

To continue to offer students valuable information on when, where, and how to vote.

To have a presence on campus through direct communication with the Fredonia campus community as well as collaboration with on-campus and off-campus entities.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Goals Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

VI. 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):

- **OVERARCHING GOAL:** Promote civic engagement by making politics more approachable to the student body so that students feel empowered to vote in the 2022 midterm elections. Through our midterm election plan, we hope to not only encourage students to vote but to also build and maintain trust between the student body and ADP. This campaign is meant to show students that ADP is a reliable organization that can help them navigate the political climate. The goal is to have ADP perceived as a dependable, nonpartisan, credible, and helpful organization that students are excited to work with.

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

- **TACTIC 1:**
- Community partnerships. ADP Fredonia is working with the League of Women Voters Chautauqua County to organize campus voter registration drives. These drives are held once a week during the month of September and at least once in October. Students can pick up a voter registration form and get help filling it out. We chose the LWVCC because they have vast experience in voter registration efforts.
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- **TACTIC 2:**
- We're recruiting students to participate on a student subcommittee that focuses on increasing democratic engagement. ADP student representatives and the ADP intern are leading the student subcommittee. Getting more participation with the ADP student subcommittee. ADP is working with this group of students to organize collaborative events with clubs across campus. The goal is to grow ADP's following and increase awareness of our voting initiatives by expanding our audiences that we reach. The group of students meet over zoom bi-weekly?? to discuss what tactics will best reach students and encourage them to participate civically—voting or otherwise.
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- **TACTIC 3:**
- Hosting a candidate debate on campus (partnering with LWVCC). This will include student involvement. Students can get involved by tabling questions, encouraging other students to ask questions, as well as answer questions called in via phone.
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- **TACTIC 4:**
- Using Fredonia ADP's social media - Instagram, Facebook, Twitter - to provide an accessible stream of more digestible political content. This content is nonpartisan and targeted at a general understanding of the political process and why it is important for

students to be involved. This includes generating political puns that are a light-hearted way to provide valuable information relevant to the voting process.

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- TACTIC 5:
- We rely on our blog, which is maintained by the ADP student intern, to address topics relevant to the voting process in a slightly more in-depth manner than a social media graphic and caption allow. Our main strategy is to keep an updated blog that focuses on different political topics each week. We incorporate the information in a way that is more interesting way than traditional news outlets.
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- TACTIC 6:
- Promote events: ADP also is generating print promotional materials, like posters, that we distribute on campus. These posters promote voter registration opportunities and events that foster political awareness. We have also tackled numerous press releases and media advisories that inform the community about our events. The press releases and media advisories are more formal than our social media coverage and are meant to engage with the campus community.

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

- TACTIC 7:
- On-campus partnerships. Reaching out to other on-campus organizations, student groups, and athletics helps us gain more traction for our efforts. With this in mind, we hope that their support and advertisement of these events will increase awareness of ADP and persuade more students to get involved.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- OVERARCHING GOAL: Educating students to become engaged in civic issues through participatory democracy as well as encouraging students to become well-informed voters and to appreciate the impact that voter participation can have. |

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- TACTIC 1: Expand upon current community partnerships Last semester, the League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County provided valuable information on a variety of topics related to voting rights. This semester we continue to collaborate with them by having them review the blog posts and running voter registration drives. The LWVCC is also partnering with ADP to host a candidate debate on campus and inform students about voting via absentee ballot. TACTIC 2: Develop on-campus partnerships with campus media and use their existing followers to grow our existing followers. Thus finding new channels to approach our target audience (Fredonia students). We also are looking at partnering with clubs or athletic teams on campus. Part one of this is launching our #FREDvote campaign. This is a social media campaign that encourages individuals or clubs to share #FREDvote graphics on their social page when they plan to cast their votes. Individuals can use the graphic, hashtag, and tag us when they post it to their page.

Clubs/teams can do the same and are encouraged to show support or share closer to election day with an inclusion of the number of members who cast their vote. TACTIC 3: Get students registered to vote and become active in politics

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

- These are tactics that we hope to do: So as to have a more sustainable impact on our campus, the hope is that campus media, such as the radio station, newspaper, and television station, will cover ADP's events. In addition, our social media coverage, blog entries, and poster advertisements frequently expose students to our organization. We hope this will help the campus community to become more aware of our brand and our initiatives and, in turn, encourage political participation.

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Strategy Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

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

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 82.7. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

In 2020, our voting rate was 60.2 and our voting rate among registered students was 72.8. During this year, our voting rate was lower than the national average.

In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups:

- Asian
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- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

For the racial groups that have recent voter turnout data, we saw the following groups increase in voter turnout compared to four years ago.

- Asian
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- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your NSLVE section includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

VIII. Reporting & Evaluation

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

- Email to members of our campus coalition
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We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

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We will collect feedback on this plan by:

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- Regrouping with campus coalition to debrief and reflect
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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 short and long-term goals accordingly
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How can you improve this section? Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Reporting & Evaluation Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.