

Saint Mary's College of California Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022

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!

- **Executive Summary**

This action plan was developed by Steve Woolpert, Professor of Politics to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at Saint Mary's College of California. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022, on and around our campus in Moraga, California.

The following groups will be leading this work at Saint Mary's College of California 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:

- To build on the College's excellence in student voting, expand public service internship opportunities for Saint Mary's students, and develop new academic initiatives that promote nonpartisan democratic learning.

- **Leadership**

Steve Woolpert will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Prof. Monica Fitzgerald, Prof. Jennifer Pigza, Prof. Zahra Ahmed, Prof. Marshall Perry, Prof. Ron Ahnen, Prof. Patrizia Longo,

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

Our group plans to meet as needed at Zoom

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a

succession plan in place. Professor Monica Fitzgerald will succeed the current leader

We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- Ask Every Student

- **Commitment**

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, ““Faculty members at Saint Mary's College are participants in an intellectual, social, and spiritual community... dedicated to developing students' capacities for... active citizenship.” (Faculty Handbook, 2.6.1)”

We also have had a senior leader commit to civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
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- Voter registration tables
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- Ballot drop box on campus

On campus, we've experienced:

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

- **Landscape**

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

time.

Our institution has also utilized the following data gathering tools:

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- National Survey of Student Engagement
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They help to inform our institution's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts by Not used

- **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:

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- We don't have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
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- We don't have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
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- The voter engagement work on our campus is very siloed within one office.
- We don't have sustainable or consistent funding.
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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:

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.
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- Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan.
- We are able to engage student leaders for the leadership of our initiative.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.
- 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:

Establish a regular process for student voter registration
 Register every eligible student
 Increase voter turnout by 10% over the 2018 mid-term election

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

Rebuild civic trust and democratic tolerance by providing opportunities for members of the campus community to think critically together about solutions to problems in a community setting.
 Recruit deserving student nominees for the Newman Civic Fellowship and similar awards.
 Establish ongoing partnerships with local public officials, councils, agencies and non-profit groups

- **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):

- Publicizing our high achievement. Letters of commendation from our local, state and congressional representatives

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

- Canvass new students to ascertain voter registration status. Renew contract with TurboVote. Recruit/train student interns to provide one-on-one assistance with online registration and voting by mail to their peers. Create content for College social media

platforms. Register for National Voter Registration Day and National Vote Early Day.

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

- Apply for funding to pay student interns and customized TurboVote site. Student-created videos on ballot initiatives. Partner with the League of Women Voters, Braver Angels and Heterodox Academy to hold public forums prior to election.

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

- Establish a new Center for Engaged Democracy (CED) dedicated to strengthening non-partisan democratic values at the College and in the region.

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

- CED will increase student voter registration and turnout. CED will expand public service internship opportunities and develop interdisciplinary pedagogies and curricular pathways that strengthen democratic values. CED will conduct “engaged democracy workshops” that include exercises in inclusive communication skills. CED will post commentaries on topics related to democratic citizenship. CED will give honorary awards to exemplars of engaged democracy.

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

- Establish an institutional mechanism/process to register all students, e.g. during registration for classes Solicit external support to underwrite CED's activities through grants and gifts.

- **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 88.9%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

In 2020, our voting rate was 80.1% and our voting rate among registered students was 90%.

During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

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

- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic
- Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- 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
- American Indian / Alaska Native

- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

Older students had lower turnout rates than younger students

- **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
- Email to campus administration
- Email to the President
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We plan to share this Action Plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Post on the campus website
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We will collect feedback on this plan by:

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- Sending a post-election survey to faculty
- 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
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- Revisiting our goals, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short and long-term goals accordingly
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