

Stetson University

Voter Friendly Campus Application

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**In 500 to 1000 words, summarize your institution's current Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement work.**

Stetson University's political engagement work is manifested through Stetson Votes, our campus's non-partisan political organization. Stetson Votes is student-led and faculty-supported, operating under Stetson University's Center for Community Engagement. Stetson Votes's actions are guided by 4 goals: Voter Registration, Voter Education, Voter Turnout, and Voter Activism.

**Voter Registration:**

One of Stetson Votes's main goals for voter registration is to register as many students using their on-campus address as possible. We know from prior election cycles that students who register using their on-campus address have 23.7% higher turnout in elections, so this move would significantly increase our turnout by decreasing geographic barriers to voting. Further, registering more students using their on-campus address would increase the numbers for the precinct in which they are registered, which would strengthen our argument to our county Supervisor of Elections office of designating our campus as its own voting precinct (instead of having to travel 1.5 miles to their assigned precinct. Additionally, because of Stetson University's location along the I-4 corridor in Central Florida, our campus would be a likelier target for state and national political campaigns.

In order to achieve this goal, Stetson Votes obtained (through its association with the Center for Community Engagement, which has access to our University student information database,) every eligible undergraduate student's name, address, birthday, and email address, which were merged into .pdf copies of the state of Florida's voter registration form, printed, then distributed to students during "bottleneck" campus events, such as first-year orientation and high-density fairs and programs; all students had to do was sign the paper, then submit it to the Stetson Votes team, who would take it to the Supervisor of Elections Office for processing and registration. This significantly increased the rate at which we were able to register students to vote - and, at that, register using their on-campus address. Moreso, this method of voter registration allows us to track which students are not registered yet because we can compare a list of all undergraduate students to our list of voters registered on our campus address, therefore allowing us to microtarget individual students with calls to action that correspond to their registration status.

**Voter Education:**

Stetson Votes hosts voter education events throughout the semester. Every Friday, we lead a group discussion about current events. These discussions take place in Stetson's cafeteria, so any student eating lunch has the opportunity to join us. In addition, Stetson Votes provides lectures and panels led by various professors. For Constitution Day, we had a lecture titled "State of the Constitution in Present-Day Politics: The Looming Constitutional Crisis." Recently, we hosted a panel of 4 professors regarding the Impeachment Inquiry into President Trump. Furthermore, Stetson Votes hosts debate watch parties for every debate during the election season, and often partners each election cycle with local newspapers *The Daytona Beach News-Journal* and *The West Volusia Beacon* to host on-campus candidate debates (for local, state, and federal races) that are both open to the public while being accessible to students. Finally, we distribute voting checklists and sample ballots to every student on campus so that they'll be prepared to vote when they vote by-mail or at their precinct.

### **Voter Turnout:**

For voter turnout, Stetson Votes pushes voting by mail, as research shows that people who enroll to vote by mail have a 20 to 30 percent higher chance of voting. Stetson Votes also coordinates group transportation to the polls on election day. We also ask students how they plan to vote in the months leading up to election day so that the idea is implanted ahead of time.

We also are in the process of creating a database of all eligible undergraduate students that tracks (1) whether they are registered already, (2) whether they have enrolled in a vote-by-mail program through the State of Florida, (3) how likely they believe they are to vote (1 = hot, 5 = cold), and (4) their participation in activities such as Student Government Association (SGA) elections, Stetson Votes-administered straw polls, attendance at Stetson Votes educational programs, and participation in other forms of civic and political engagement. This database will also include information such as major, residence hall, and past turnout history. Through these, we'll be able to get them a message that meets them where they are at any point in the voter activation/turnout sequence, thus maximizing the probably that they will actually listen and heed the call/text/email/DM to register to vote, enroll in VBM, attend an event, or show up to vote. In other words, we basically run our campus like it is a professional political campaign, with a database of voters, a clear communications plan, and assigned turf to our team of canvassers/callers/texters/emailers. Further, this data will help us understand which of our levers of political activity have the highest return on investment for inculcating habits of citizenship that lead to voting (both during their time at Stetson and later, if we can keep up our longitudinal data collection efforts).

To maximize turnout, we also utilize the resources of each of our political and partisan registered student organizations, including College Democrats and College Republicans. Each of these organizations appoints a liaison to work with Stetson Votes, and Stetson Votes shares the data in its database with those organizations so that they can focus on turn out for their targeted student audiences (e.g., CDs target our registered Democrats; CRs target our registered Republicans; SV targets all NPA and third party students). This approach not only allows for collaboration

between our partisan student organizations, but it also builds these students' capacities for managing an actual political campaign - experience that can make them very attractive candidates for paid internships and staff positions on campaigns before and after they graduate. Stetson Votes uses this information to target students in the most efficient manner possible. In order to accomplish this, we provide the partisan student organizations with the names of students who we have partisan data for, and Stetson Votes targets non-partisan and third party students. Stetson Votes utilizes mass texting and calling, as well as Facebook and Instagram to inform students of upcoming elections, activities, and deadlines.

For the purpose of increasing voter turnout, Stetson Votes runs straw polls throughout the year, in which Stetson students engage in a mock election so that we can see where students stand on various issues or candidates. This exercise also helps prepare students for actual elections by getting them to think about what they'll be voting on ahead of time. Stetson students also participate in SGA elections, which work to the same effect as the straw polls. In addition, Stetson Votes helps students prepare for actual elections through suppliance of sample ballots to build down-ballot awareness, a "what to bring" list so that every student shows up prepared to vote, websites for nonpartisan information on candidates and issues, and information about our walks and rides to the polls events.

While discussing political engagement is (in our opinion) inherently beneficial, Stetson Votes takes the conversation to the next level. During any Stetson Votes event, we raise the question, "What can we do about this?" Whether it is protesting or canvassing, we work with students to find meaningful opportunities and resources to interact with the political process beyond the polls. In January, we will hold a training for interested volunteers, so that students will be able to work with Stetson Votes to a greater extent. This training will consist of a campaign management boot camp, voter registration training, and calendar planning, among other things.

#### **Voter Activism:**

It is not enough to simply vote - our students should be expected to take an active role in shaping their communities through politics. To that end, Stetson Votes collects and regularly posts opportunities for students to volunteer with political organizations and campaigns, obtain internships, and even discover job and graduate school opportunities in the field. We share these through an email list, through social media, and through our website.

#### **List the top three things you'd like for your institution to gain and/or learn by being a part of the Voter Friendly Campus designation process?**

1. Evidence-based college student VR and GOTV best-practices
2. Grant/funding opportunities available to fund our work
3. Additional awards/recognition that can be applied for

