



All In Challenge  
Campus Action Plan

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Contact:  
Dr. Avani Rana  
Director of Co-Curricular & Leadership  
The College of New Jersey  
609.771.2411  
[ranaa@tcnj.edu](mailto:ranaa@tcnj.edu)

## **Executive Summary**

The TCNJ Votes! 2024 Action Plan was created to expand political engagement at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). Building on the successes of the past nine years, the TCNJ Votes! project will work alongside student organizations, academic departments, and various administrative divisions across campus to increase political engagement at the college. The project will continue to focus on increasing voter registration, voter education, civic engagement and get-out-the-vote efforts on campus, highlighting important issues in the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

The plan will be implemented throughout the coming year, revising successful efforts and introducing new and deeper initiatives. Previous aspects include: a week of voter registration, walking students to the polls on election day and several panels focused on local government. The plan will include new ideas for events, opportunities to engage on the issues, and ‘voting marketing techniques’ that will expand who not only comes to TCNJ Votes! Events but also votes and remains engaged in current events and issues.

In addition, the plan will be updated once we receive our most recent NSLVE report for 2022 results and will be informed by our 2020 presidential election NSLVE report. Civic engagement is a core value at TCNJ and the coalition utilizes a wide range of engagement efforts to implement a comprehensive plan. By increasing political engagement at TCNJ, the coalition is continuing to create more well rounded individuals who are more likely to vote in every election, federal and local alike.

This new plan starts at the beginning of the Spring 2024 semester and will continue throughout the next year. At the end of each semester, there will be a meeting to determine what worked well and what did not. Adjustments will be made to the plan and events scheduled for the upcoming semester accordingly.

The plan will be implemented by the coalition, who will work together to run events including night time political events, debate watching opportunities, and a week of voter registration. In addition to the faculty coalition, there are a group of TCNJ students who are part of Student Government, numerous political organizations, and community engaged learning entities who will be helping with the planning and execution of the events outlined in the plan.

The plan was developed by the TCNJ Votes! Initiative team which includes individuals from The Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research, Office of Governmental and Community Relations and the Division of Student Affairs.

## **Leadership**

The coalition for this project includes:

- Brittany Aydelotte, Director of Community Engaged Learning Institute
- Dr. Avani Rana, Director of Leadership
- Jennifer Keyes-Maloney, AVP for Government and Community Relations
- Lori Johansson, CEL Coordinator
- Dr. Daniel Bowen & Dr. Sarah Chartock, Political Science Dept
- Joe Woods, Student Rep- Student Government
- Jared Williams, Student Rep - Student Government
- Raj Manimaran, Director of Community Relations

Leadership responsibilities for the coalition are shared between Dr. Avani Rana and Brittany Aydelotte. While we do not have off-campus community partners engaged on a daily basis with the project, we regularly bring local, state and federal representatives as well as leadership from state based advocacy organizations to campus to interact with our students, staff and faculty. These regular and deep connections will assist us in more comprehensively partnering with elected and appointed officials in the future over the course of this plan. Acting President Michael Bernstein has signed the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation. This past year, TCNJ was also awarded the Voter Friendly Campus 2022-2023.

Dr. Avani Rana and Brittany Aydelotte chair the coalition and work closely with the students involved. The group members were chosen from the political engagement collaborative which is a larger group of individuals who have helped with political engagement events at TCNJ previously. The student interns work on marketing events, running voter registration tables, and being at the events to ensure they are executed smoothly. Dr. Rana works with student leaders, student government, orientation and leadership programs to promote the program and serve as a member of the coalition leadership.

Each semester the coalition works with the larger political engagement collaborative which consists of leaders from different student organizations, faculty members from all schools, and staff from multiple offices across campus. During these meetings, the coalition gathers ideas, and brainstorms events that the larger collaborative would like to see occur. These ideas have been taken and used as events previously, which included politically relevant conversations, movie discussions, panels of elected officials and voter registration drives each semester.

The group will meet monthly to discuss and share upcoming events, initiatives and programs. This collaborative plus the Bonner Center, Community Relations Office and Student Affairs, which serve as 'home base' for the leadership team of the project also help in providing a 'backbone of succession' should such a need arise. If the individuals on the team leave the institution, there is an arsenal of individuals from each of the programmatic areas from which they pull that are aware, and capable of continuing the work of the group.



## Commitment

TCNJ continues to demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling its civic mission through aspirational and intentional statements of purpose as well as action.

TCNJ's mission statement explicitly addresses this through its inclusion of language around creating “critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners and leaders” and its commitment to “empower[ing] its diverse students, staff, and faculty to sustain and enhance their communities both locally and globally.”<sup>1</sup> TCNJ's full mission statement reads:

*The College of New Jersey, a nationally recognized public institution founded in 1855 as the New Jersey State Normal School, is a primarily undergraduate and residential college, with targeted graduate programs. Grounded in the liberal arts, TCNJ's personalized, collaborative, and rigorous education engages students at the highest level within and beyond the classroom. TCNJ believes in the transformative power of education to develop critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners and leaders. The College empowers its diverse students, staff, and faculty to sustain and enhance their communities both locally and globally.*

Included in TCNJ's values are commitments to Engagement and Inclusiveness, as well as Excellence, Integrity, and Self-Reflection, all of which mirror TCNJ's commitment to civic engagement. In addition, among its five adopted Signature Experiences, community engaged learning realizes the goals of empowerment and the creation of civic change agents. In combination with Leadership and Global Engagement, two other signature experiences at TCNJ, it is evident that TCNJ is dedicated to creating actively engaged citizens.

In 2021, former President Dr. Kathryn Foster also took on a leadership role in gathering the New Jersey College Presidents together to increase voter engagement in the Gubernatorial election process. This past year, she spoke at the NJ Voting Summit at Princeton, which TCNJ and Princeton co-hosted with All IN. Acting President Bernstein has also signed on to the Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation for the upcoming year.

One of the predominant ways that TCNJ has embodied this commitment is through its community engaged learning program. TCNJ has a long history of efforts to institutionalize and develop civic and community engagement through its community engaged learning and research initiatives. In the 1960s and 70s, as Trenton State College, the institution demonstrated a commitment to access and to integrating community issues with teaching and learning. In 1995 TCNJ was at the forefront of the service-learning movement. As part of its nationally-recognized First Year Experience program, all TCNJ students were required to complete a Community Engaged Learning (CEL) experience through a common core course, partnering with more than 50 community organizations. Fast forward to today, and annually, more than 2,000 students (of approximately 6,500 enrolled) participate in community engaged learning activities of varying varieties, with TCNJ students dedicating more than 50,000 hours to community engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> TCNJ's mission, vision and values statements are available here: <https://tcnj.pages.tcnj.edu/about/mission/>

The Community Engaged Learning Council at TCNJ approved a set of community engaged learning outcomes to better design and assess community engagement at TCNJ. These outcomes were developed from: 1) AAC&U's VALUES rubric on civic engagement; 2) Steinberg, Hatcher and Bringle's Civic Minded Graduate model; and, 3) the Bonner Foundation's common commitment, adapted to TCNJ conditions and parameters. TCNJ's CEL outcomes are:

Social Knowledge	Identify the causes of significant social issues
Diversity of Communities	Engage as part of diverse communities in culturally and contextually appropriate ways
Application of Knowledge	Analyze and address social issues using disciplinary and/or course-based knowledge and skills
Systems and Structures	Identify how systems of privilege and oppression affect individual and group opportunities and experiences
Civic Responsibility	Actively contribute to sustaining and enhancing communities as members of local, regional, national, and global communities
Civic-Identity and Commitment	Demonstrate goals to live a life of critically informed community engagement

TCNJ's general education program, entitled Liberal Learning, includes civic responsibilities, which require students to take courses in the categories of race and ethnicity, gender, global awareness, and community engagement (which includes a required 8-hour community engaged learning experience).<sup>2</sup> Co-curricularly, all students receive a presentation on the importance of voting, community engagement, and being stewards of place during their first week on campus. Linked together, these components create a web of opportunities for students to learn how to become engaged and to actually engage in their communities. In addition, The Office of Leadership, which uses the Social Change Model of Leadership, has learning outcomes that are related to creating positive social change which includes the idea of citizenship. With leadership embedded as a signature experience on campus, students are encouraged to participate in activities in building citizenship and creating positive change in the local and global community.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://liberallearning.tcnj.edu/what-you-learn-2/civic-responsibilities/>

## **Landscape**

In 2015, TCNJ received the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement in recognition of its many programs and initiatives that seek to expand TCNJ's reach and commitment to community engagement, and by extension, civic engagement. TCNJ has been a member of New Jersey Campus Compact since its inception, and has signed Campus Compact's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Action Statement. TCNJ has participated in NSLVE since 2012.

As discussed above, civic engagement is embedded into the general education curriculum and the co-curriculum at TCNJ. The main vehicle for civic engagement education is TCNJ's community engaged learning (CEL) program. 72 courses integrated a CEL component in 2017-2018, reaching over 2000 students, including 90% of all first-year students. TCNJ hosts a 100-person Bonner Community Scholars program, supporting these students on a four-year student development model dedicated to community engagement and community service in the region. In addition, TCNJ's Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research supports numerous community-based and community-engaged initiatives, providing opportunities for faculty and staff to participate in long-term community efforts.

In addition to the Community Engaged Learning program, the Office of Leadership within the Division of Student Affairs has encouraged civic engagement through the various leadership development programs including the Fall Leadership Conference, Emerging Leaders and leadership courses in the new leadership minor.

Finally, the College expanded its footprint at the state and local levels with the introduction and support of the new Office of Government & Community Relations which seeks to not only bring elected and appointed representatives as well as community leaders onto the campus but also bring students to these folks in meaningful ways.

## **Goals**

TCNJ Votes! hopes to increase political involvement through interactions with peers during political events and increase voter turnout rates on campus.

Beginning in 2016, TCNJ focused on increasing both voter registration and turnout rates at the college. Following the recent NSLVE report in 2020, TCNJ has increased voter registration to 89.9% and voter turnout to 83.1%. We increased our voting rate by 30% over that same period. Prospectively, we would like to focus on increasing our numbers from the 2018 election to properly compare midterm to midterm election. We understand that the 2020 election numbers may have increased due to New Jersey instituting mail in ballots for all registered voters due to COVID19. However, we hope to keep some of that momentum going with the ease of mail in ballots and access to ballot boxes and early voting.

### **Short-term goals**

1. Increase voter registration rate from 89.9% (2020) to 92% in 2024
2. Increase the election Voting Rate (percentage of eligible students who voted on Election Day). The Voting Rate was 83.1% in 2020 and we would like to increase that rate to 90% in 2024.
3. Reach out to specific academic departments where we see a lower voting rate comparatively to encourage faculty to have conversations in class about topics related to the election once receipt of our NSLVE report. From our 2020 report that would mean increasing participation from the areas of Computer Science and Religion/Philosophy.

### **Longer-term goals**

1. Increase voter registration rate to 95%+ in 2024.
2. Increase political engagement, broadly defined, across the student body. TCNJ has a reputation of being a politically apathetic campus, with minimal activism and advocacy historically.



## Strategies

The campus-wide Political Engagement Collaborative has developed a comprehensive political engagement campaign, entitled TCNJ Votes!

### Voter Registration

Throughout the next year, we will continue to host voter registration drives for an entire week each semester during the busiest point of the day, 11am-2pm. There are two places tables will be set up, outdoors outside of the dining hall and in the student center. We will use our Pledge to vote campaign and the new All In Challenge Campus portal. NJ now has online voter registration so we want to share that resource, in addition to early voting options.

Further, Student Government and Greek organizations will continue to help with voter registration by working one of the two tables set up. For fall 2024, we will be hosting another full week of voter registration the last week of September (during voter registration day and before the New Jersey registration deadline) to prepare for the election and registering the entire first-year class during their orientation. We aim to keep campus voter registration rates above 80% and will continue to encourage all of the incoming first-year students to register during their First-Year Community Engaged Learning course. We will also explore adding some voter registration tables and information tables at Welcome Week.

### Voter Education

We have developed a website—[vote.tcnj.edu](http://vote.tcnj.edu)—that provides election-specific information for the TCNJ community, as well as details about how to register, how to get an absentee ballot, where to vote (if registered on campus), and basic information about local, regional, state, and national candidates. Links to relevant news sources and political parties are also provided.

Prior to each year's registration deadline, a campus-wide email is sent to the entire TCNJ community to encourage voter registration; and on the day before, or day of the election, another email is sent to encourage voting and announce day-of-election activities. Relevant members of the team also have access to past NSLVE reports available on the website and information is shared with the broader TCNJ community. We have also developed a Canvas module (online education management system for the college) that is accessible to all faculty and staff which is updated each year to increase voter engagement and participation. We encourage faculty to add the modules to courses each semester and add additional pages that relate to their course work. In addition, this past year, we collaborated with local officials and alumni who are engaged in politics to share their stories. We hope to continue these practices. The IDS 103 courses which is a requirement for first year students has also emphasized the importance of civic engagement in their course. We hope to bring speaker panels on topics that are pertinent to college students such as climate change, education, science and voting. In addition, we hope to host the NJ wide voting summit on our campus to engage college students across the state.

### Ballot Access

On Election Day, TCNJ Votes! hosts walk to the polls from 9am-8pm. Different student organizations including Greek Life, community service organizations and student government

help walk students over to vote during the day. Students meet up at the student center entrance and walk over to the church across the street from campus where the polling location is. In addition, there is always a student at the table in the student center answering questions in regards to voting for the day. This will continue in Fall 2024 for the presidential elections. The State of New Jersey has recently started conducting early voting so we have been sharing those resources for students so they may vote not just on election day but weeks leading up to the election. We will also advertise the ballot box on campus for those who are voting by mail in Mercer County to have easy access.

### *Voter Turnout*

The 2020 NSLVE report showed an increase in voting rate to 83.1%, an increase of 30% from 2016 and well above the national average. We hope to keep momentum going from the 2020 election but are also mindful and cognizant of the fact that in 2020 New Jersey solely used mail in ballots due to COVID19. This increased the overall rate for voters across the state. We hope that individuals will continue a high level of voting in this presidential election but want to be sure we do everything we can to encourage participation. We will provide reminder emails to campus (see above), post signs across campus, and remind all TCNJ community members to vote.

## **Reporting**

The plan will be shared to the coalition and the larger political engagement collaborative. This will allow for the coalition and collaborative to make adjustments if any part of the plan does not work as expected or requires modification to connect with the campus. The plan will be shared with the President's office.

In addition, the plan will be posted for public view on the TCNJ Votes website. This will allow for it to be accessed by anyone interested in political engagement efforts at the college. The data used to inform the plan previously has already been published as the most recent NSLVE report. Further, the data has been utilized in multiple articles involving political work at TCNJ.

Finally, information will be shared with different departments and areas who participate in voting. Specifically, the NSLVE report will be shared with the college's governance system to socialize these findings with faculty and to encourage their students' and faculty members to vote in the upcoming midterm election.

## **Evaluation**

The strategies described above will be evaluated by the leadership team of TCNJ Votes and the broader political engagement collaborative. Data collected will include: NSLVE data; number of voter registration forms submitted; number of students, staff, and faculty participating during get-out-the-vote activities; number of students participating in educational programming' and increased recognition of TCNJ as a politically and civically engaged campus community. TCNJ is also conduct the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership in 2025 which will measure student citizenship as another metric to track involvement and engagement. Evaluation will occur at the end of each semester, and will be responsive to data received and to political and electoral realities and results.