



## All In Challenge 2020 Campus Action Plan

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## **Executive Summary**

The TCNJ Votes! 2020 Action Plan was created to expand political engagement at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). Building on the successes of the past four 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, and get-out-the-vote efforts on campus, highlighting important issues in the upcoming 2020 election.

The plan will be implemented throughout the coming year, revising successful efforts and introducing new and deeper engagement initiatives. Previous aspects include a week of voter registration and walking students to the polls on election day. The plan will include new ideas for events and marketing techniques that will expand who comes to TCNJ Votes! events.

The plan was developed as a result of the most recent NSLVE report results which showed an increase in voting and registration rates at TCNJ. 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 Fall 2019 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 to make adjustments to the plan and events planned for the upcoming semesters.

The plan will be implemented by the coalition, who will work together to run events including night time political events, and a week of voter registration. In addition to the faculty coalition, there are a group of TCNJ students 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 Engagement 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
- Althia Muse, Director, Bonner Institute
- Suchir Govindarajan, Executive President of Student Government
- Roshni Raji, Student Government Vice President of Governmental Affairs
- Sarah Chartock, Associate Professor, Political Science
- Nina Ringer, Director, Writing Program
- Student Representatives from politically affiliated groups
- Community Representatives from Mercer County politically affiliated groups
  - Community representatives will be identified based on educational topic areas chosen and if students are on campus or in their home communities for the upcoming election cycles.

Leadership responsibilities for the coalition will be shared between co-chairs Avani Rana, Director of Leadership, and Brittany Aydelotte, Director of Community Engaged Learning. Currently, we do not have off-campus community partners that are actively involved in the project, however, we have deep connections to local and state elected officials that we will partner with throughout the course of this plan. Student government representatives and Bonner Community Scholars will take on student leadership roles. The group members were chosen from the TCNJ Votes collaborative which is a larger group of individuals who have helped with political engagement events at TCNJ previously.

Co-chairs will provide overall guidance for the initiatives. The student leaders will work on marketing events, running voter registration tables, and being at the events to ensure they are executed smoothly.

Each semester the coalition will work with the larger TCNJ Votes collaborative which consists of leaders from different student organizations, faculty members, and staff from multiple offices across campus. During these meetings, the coalition will gather ideas, and brainstorm events that the larger collaborative would like to see occur. These ideas have been taken and used as events previously, which included biweekly politically relevant conversations, and voter registration drives each semester.

The Office of Leadership and Center for Community Engagement are committed to continue to lead this committee in future years. As faculty and students transition off the committee we will strive to have at least two faculty and two student representatives.

## Commitment

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

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 these goals of empowerment and creation of civic change agents; in combination with Leadership and Global Engagement, two other signature experiences, it is evident that TCNJ is dedicated to creating actively engaged civic agents.

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 experience, partnering with more than 20 community organizations.

In 2018, the Community Engaged Learning Council at TCNJ approved a set of provisional community engage learning outcomes to better design and assess community engagement at TCNJ. These outcomes were developed from AAC&U's VALUES rubric on civic engagement, Steinberg, Hatcher and Bringle's Civic Minded Graduate model, and the Bonner Foundation's common commitment, and adapted to TCNJ conditions and parameters. TCNJ's CEL outcomes are:

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

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

A multi-year assessment plan was developed in conjunction with these outcomes, and will be implemented by staff at the Center for Community Engaged Learning and Research and members of the CEL Council. It will evaluate curricular, co-curricular, and organizational programming.

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> This and other academic programming 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 being 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. In addition to the first-year experience, approximately 60 courses integrated a CEL component in 2018-2019, reaching over 2000 students. TCNJ hosts a 80-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.

## 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, TCNJ has increased voter registration to 84.2% (it was 68% in 2014) and voter rating 37.5% (it was 10.4% in 2014). We more than exceeded our goal which was originally to double midterm election turnout, from 10.4% in 2014 to 21% in 2018.

Due to COVID-19, New Jersey is having a vote by mail primary in July and we will continue to monitor changes for the fall election cycle.

### Short-term goals

1. Increase voter registration rate from 84.2% in 2016 to 90% in 2020
2. Increase voter turnout from 55.1% (in 2016) to 60% in 2020.
3. Educate students on voter registration and vote-by-mail changes due to COVID-19.
4. Work with the President to sign commitment to supporting full student voter participation and send two campus-wide emails to encourage voter participation.
5. Include voter participation in new student orientation materials.

### Longer-term goals

1. Increase voter registration rate to 90%+ in 2020. With a “motor voter” law recently signed, as well as our annual voter registration drives, we anticipate voter registration to increase.
2. Increase political engagement, broadly defined, across the student body. TCNJ has a reputation of being a political apathetic campus, with minimal activism and advocacy historically.

## Strategies

The campus-wide TCNJ Votes Committee has developed a comprehensive political engagement campaign.

### Voter Registration

Throughout the next year, we will continue to host voter registration drives 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 are going to be relying on paper registration as New Jersey does not allow online registration. In addition to the coalition, Student Government and Greek organizations will continue to help with voter registration by working one of the two tables set up.

In a survey shared with students about obstacles to voting, we learned that the biggest obstacle for student voting was returning home to vote. In addition to voter registration, we will be hosting mail-in ballot awareness and sign-up events.

Due to COVID-19, we will continue educating students and holding virtual events and resources for voting.

### Voter Education

- Website
  - 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 provided as well. Before 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.
- Informed Voting Events
  - To help students become informed voters, we will host at least one issue forum each semester with a focus on our lowest turnout utilizing the NSLVE report.
    - Work with the Interim Dean of the Schools of Science and Engineering to develop a program for engineering/science students.
    - Work with Orientation staff and First Year requirements to integrate education into programming for underclassmen.
  - We will partner with other student organizations and departments to increase opportunities for other schools to lead relevant events. We will continue to host debate watch parties (live or virtual) for students to learn about presidential candidates as well.

## **Reporting**

This plan will be shared to the coalition and the larger TCNJ Votes collaborative. This will allow for the leadership and collaborative to make adjustments if parts of the plan do not work well with the campus. The plan will be shared with the President's office. TCNJ welcomed its current president, Dr. Kathryn Foster, this summer. This plan will provide context for TCNJ's existing efforts as well as future plans.

The plan will also 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 has already been previously published by the campus as the most recent NSLVE report data has been utilized in multiple articles involving political work at TCNJ.

## **Evaluation**

The strategies described above will be evaluated by the leadership team of TCNJ Votes and the broader TCNJ Votes 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 conducting the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership 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.