



2021-22 ACTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Towson University is a community that votes."

This is the call to action behind the TU Votes movement, and the "why" behind the following Action Plan for 2021. TU Votes is the official voter registration and engagement initiative at Towson University, seeking to foster a culture of engaged voters among our students, faculty and staff.

The 2021 TU Votes Action Plan was developed by the Office of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility (CESR) at Towson University (TU), in order to solidify the institution's voter engagement efforts through identifying challenges, opportunities, and next steps to prepare for the 2022 Midterm Election, and to continue institutionalizing voter engagement as a part of the fabric of the university. Though this plan will mostly be implemented within Towson University (primarily the main campus and TU in Northeastern Maryland), we understand how its implications will impact not only our neighboring communities, but also all the communities that our students, faculty and staff represent, both within and beyond the State of Maryland.

This plan is intended to be implemented in 2021-2022, mostly during academic semesters. Its implementation will rely heavily on the work of the TU Votes Coalition, with CESR and TU's Andrew Goodman Ambassadors serving as a central hub of programming and engagement, but ensuring it is a collaborative effort among student leaders and organizations, academic departments, and campus units. It will focus greatly on bridging gaps between voter registration and turnout, creating meaningful opportunities for voter education and empowerment, mobilizing to address voter challenges and barriers, and going beyond voting to foster civic learning and democratic engagement within our campus community.

Through the work of the TU Votes Coalition, and a set of strategies and plans to engage voters, we intend to accomplish a set of short- and long-term goals that include:

- A 90% registration rate and 60% turnout rate among eligible voters during the 2022 Midterm Election
- A 95% registration rate and 90% turnout rate among eligible student voters during the 2024 Presidential Election
- The establishment of Election Day as a campus holiday

In recognizing the impact of COVID-19 within our campus community and around the globe, this Action Plan will be implemented based on the guidelines set forth by the <u>ReTUrn to TU Task Force</u>, and will adhere to the same five guiding principles the Taskforce has built their guidelines around: "a commitment to health and safety, a commitment to excellence and shared governance, a commitment to student success, a commitment to inclusion and equity and a commitment to fiscal responsibility."



LEADERSHIP

Although voter engagement efforts are mostly coordinated through the Office of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility, they would not be possible without the collaboration, dedication, and leadership of students, faculty, staff, and administration all over campus. First-year students asking "how can I get involved?" during their Orientation, Andrew Goodman Ambassadors advocating for their peers and young voters nationwide, students focusing on voter engagement as part of their class projects, and President Kim Schatzel signing on to the <u>Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation</u>, are just a few examples of the ways the call to action to increase voter participation has been answered at Towson University.

As part of this, the TU Votes Coalition at Towson University is in place. The coalition is composed of a combination of student leaders, faculty, staff, and community partners to help us engage the various pockets of the TU community in this work.

The following is a list of partnering offices, units and organizations that are part of the TU Votes Coalition as of May 2020:

Departments and Campus Units

- Accessibility & Disability Services
- Athletics
- Center for Student Diversity
- Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility
- Counseling Center
- Government & Community Relations
- Honors College
- Housing and Residence Life
- International Students & Scholars
- Military and Veterans Center
- New Student & Family Programs
- Partnerships & Outreach
- Political Science
- Student Activities
- Student Success Programs

Student Leaders

- Andrew Goodman Ambassadors
- Director of Civic Engagement, Student Government Association
- Liaison & Role Model, Political Engagement Residential Learning Community

Community Partners

- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Baltimore Collegetown Network
- Baltimore County Board of Elections
- #BaltimoreVotes
- Democracy Works
- Maryland State Board of Elections
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
- United States Census Bureau

The coalition convened once a month starting in June 2020 up until the November Presidential Elections, and at least once more by December 2020 to debrief on the outcomes of the election, go over our goals, and determine the next steps around continued mobilization of civic learning and democratic engagement efforts. With staffing transitions, the coalition was put on pause in the Spring of 2021, but there is a plan in place to reconvene the coalition in spring 2022 to prepare for the 2022 Midterm Election season.

COMMITMENT

Mission Statement

Towson University fosters intellectual inquiry and critical thinking preparing graduates who will serve as effective, ethical leaders and engaged citizens. Through a foundation in the liberal arts, an emphasis on rigorous academic standards, and the creation of small learning environments, we are committed to providing a collaborative, interdisciplinary and inter-professional atmosphere, excellence in teaching, leadership development, civic engagement, and applied and sponsored research opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our graduates leave Towson University with the vision, creativity and adaptability to craft solutions that enrich the culture, society, economy, and environment of Maryland, the region, and beyond.

Towson University continuously seeks ways to inspire students, faculty and staff to become educated, engaged, and informed citizens with leadership skills and a passion for intellectual challenge. We want each of our students to be invested in matters concerning their government, as demonstrated by their involvement in local, state, and federal elections.

In addition, we understand that before students can become engaged citizens, they must be educated on key issues related to local, national, and international events. Students need to know why and how they should turn the issues they care about and turn them into action, with an understanding that their voice does make a difference. Without intrinsic motivation and a sense of responsibility towards taking an active role in their community, they will remain uninvolved. Once students' interests are piqued, and they know the worth of their own participation, they need help with the logistics. For first-time voters, for example, the process can be quite intimidating without staff members on campus

providing explanation and support as needed. As an institution committed to the civic engagement of our students, we must ensure they are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and resources to get involved and provide much-needed support.

Towson University's political engagement initiatives are highlighted by voter education and registration efforts, as well as ongoing resources and programs to educate themselves, express and deliberate issues of civic concern, and engage in the political process at every level. The voter engagement initiatives at TU continue to focus on the four major "buckets" of voter engagement: Voter Registration, Voter Education, Ballot Access, and Voter Turnout, this will be emphasized strongly as we prepare for the 2022 Midterm election. We utilize TurboVote to help get students registered to vote and simplify the process of voting away from home. We also provide resources and partnerships (such as those with Student Government and student political groups on campus) to help put on voter education drives, debate viewing parties, and large-scale registration drives.

In addition, we work with regional and national organizations to elevate this work, such as the Andrew Goodman Foundation and its Andrew Goodman Ambassadors, students who spearhead much of the voter engagement on campus and represent TU as part of the larger organization. Since 2015, the Office of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility, Office of Housing & Residence Life, and Political Science Department have been in close partnership to support a Political Engagement Living Learning Community for first-year students.











LANDSCAPE

Institutional Objectives and Outcomes

One of Towson University's Institutional Priorities, part of the TU2020 Strategic Plan, is a focus on serving as "A Model for Leadership Development." Towson University is rooted in our strong commitment to civic engagement, civility and ethics. The university supports personal and professional growth by recognizing and developing positive leadership philosophies and styles. Our primary goal is to instill in our students the qualities essential for outstanding, lifelong leadership in all aspects of their lives. We are committed to increasing credit and noncredit opportunities in leadership development for our faculty, staff and students.

Challenge, inspire and support members of the academic community to perform at the highest level.

- Provide credit and non-credit bearing programming for students, faculty, staff and the community to develop and understand leadership philosophies and styles.
- Inspire students, faculty and staff to become educated, engaged, informed citizens with leadership skills and a passion for intellectual challenge.
- Empower faculty with innovative pedagogical methodologies and establish best practices within each discipline.
- Offer professional development programs on the use of online delivery and new technology to support faculty and students.

Emphasize the shared governance structure throughout the university to ensure responsive organizational leadership.

- Encourage and support the university community to engage in effective shared governance.
- Improve communication in the development of priorities and policies.

In addition, Towson University strives towards becoming **"A Model for Campus Diversity:"** TU will further strengthen its commitment to diversity and continue to provide a safe, inclusive, welcoming, and peaceful community respectful to all. Our institutional strategies will expand and continue to provide a forum for campus dialogue and action.

- Enhance and celebrate a diverse and complex university.
- Promote appreciation for and advancement of equity, diversity and inclusion at TU.
- Enhance recruitment and retention of students from underserved and/or underrepresented populations.
- Close the achievement gap for first generation, low income and students from underrepresented groups.
- Enhance recruitment and retention of faculty and staff from underserved and/or underrepresented populations.
- Support respectful and mutually beneficial community collaboration.



Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Inside and Outside of the Classroom

The Towson University community continues to demonstrate its commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement in various ways, both inside and outside of the classroom, and beyond simply voter engagement. Student organizations often focus their events and meetings towards issues of concern, and in many instances, take meaningful action to get their voices heard to address injustices, whether they are happening within or beyond the institution. Every year, student leaders participate in Tiger Pride Day, organized by the Student Government Association to mobilize students for a day of legislative advocacy at our state's capital. The Big Event, Town & Gown, TU Serves events, Alternative Break trips, and student organization-led service projects provide students with the opportunity to infuse volunteerism into their university experience, and address needs in our communities. In addition, faculty, staff, students and community organizations come together, to design, implement, and evaluate service-learning courses.

Within the classroom, we were able to partner with faculty like Dr. Melanie Formentin and several of her Mass Communication courses, whose students have crafted integrated communication campaigns that have informed our census and voter engagement work, and Professor Kimberly Hopkins, whose Graphic Design Social Issues class created a design campaign for our campus ahead of the 2018 Midterm Elections. Dr. Natalie Scala, Associate Professor of Business Analytics and Technology Management, has been spearheading a project aimed at educating poll workers about the potential for cyber, physical, and insider threats at election polling places, a multi-year, interdisciplinary research endeavor involving her as well as several undergraduate and graduate students.

Under the leadership of the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of Inclusion and Institutional Equity, the Tiger Advocacy Advisory Team (TAAT) was recently formed to educate and support students on activism on and off campus, coordinating the appropriate level of response for different events, and to serve as the primary liaisons between administrators, the Towson University Police Department, and students. The team connects with event organizers, protesters and counterprotesters, identifies trusted faculty and staff to aid in facilitating conversations and provides support for event logistics.

The team also provides "just-in-time" guidance in the event of spontaneous demonstrations or those that are unknown to the team, including but not limited to: referring event organizers, protesters and counter-protesters to a newly created campus webpage on activism, advising students on campus policies and local, state and federal laws and providing printed resources with emergency contact information for students in crisis.

Challenges and Opportunities

Responding to COVID-19

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, <u>Towson University took a series of steps to prioritize the health and safety of our campus community</u>, from shifting to distance learning to the remainder of the semester, to canceling all in-person events. In addition, most faculty and staff started teleworking, and over 6,000 students who lived on campus had to move out of their residence halls early, and students in study abroad trips were brought back to their home states. Unfortunately, this also affected our outreach efforts for the 2020 Census, especially to ensure that students who lived off-campus are accurately counted.

Over \$220,000 of emergency assistance was provided to almost 900 students in need, serving as an example of the magnitude in which our students have been affected by this pandemic. As we worked to engage our students through check-ins, virtual events, and social media engagement, we did so with the understanding of the hardships many of them have faced, and the way in which this pandemic has disproportionately affected Black and Latinx communities.

Despite Towson University's intentions of re-opening in person for the 2020-2021 school year, the decision was made for students and staff to continue in remote status to curb the spread of COVID-19. This had a substantial impact on the 2020 Voter Action Plan and voter engagement for the fall 2020 semester.

For the 2021-2022 school year, under the guidance of the <u>ReTUrn to TU Task Force</u>, students, faculty, and staff have safely returned to in-person classes. While TU is "back in person," our campus community is still managing school and life during a pandemic. These realities will be taken into utmost consideration as we work towards the goals, strategies, and timeline set forth in the 2021 Voter Action Plan.

Bridging the Gap Between Voter Registration and Turnout

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the already-existing need to focus on bridging the gap between voter registration and voter turnout, along with comprehensive voter education. With the need to adhere to social distancing guidelines came the interruption of on-the-ground voter registration efforts around the country. In addition, it has led to a wave of concern and misinformation, as primary elections around the country had to adjust in various ways, and the national debate around mail-in ballots became a divisive subject. In Maryland, for example, the primary election was ultimately moved from April 28 to June 2 and shifted to a vote-by-mail election, where all registered voters were to receive a ballot. The presidential election saw the topics of accessible and legal voting practices intensify.

Towson University as a Polling Location

Towson University has the benefit of being a polling location, both for early voting and Election Day. In order to provide greater accessibility to voters, the location was moved from the Administration Building to South Campus Pavilion starting in 2020. Although this polling location was canceled for the Presidential Primary Election due to COVID-19, the plan is to conduct in-person elections for the upcoming Midterm Primary and Midterm Elections in 2022.

NATIONAL STUDY OF LEARNING, VOTING, AND ENGAGEMENT (NSLVE)

Towson University is a participating campus with the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), a signature initiative of the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education at Tufts University. Below is a summary of our NSLVE data, along with notable insights that inform the goals and strategy of this action plan.

2016 Presidential Election

- 87.1% of our students were registered to vote prior to the 2016 Presidential Election, compared to 80.9% in 2012.
- 60.7% of eligible students voted in the 2016 Presidential Election, compared to 55.8% in 2012.
 - 20.8% of students voted early in 2016, a notable increase from 2012. Absentee voting rate only changed by 0.2%, and in-person, Election Day voting decreased to 55% compared to 68.4% in 2012.
- The voter turnout rate is higher among graduate students (70.4%) than undergraduate students (57.4%).
- Voter turnout increased across almost all age groups, and *most significantly among students* 18-21. However, this age group is also the one with the *lowest voting rate* (55.6%, compared to 88.1% for students in the 50+ age group).
 - The only group with a negative change in voter turnout is students in the 40-49 age group (74.8% in 2016 compared to 76.5% in 2012).
- First-year students had the lowest voting rate (48.4%) compared to sophomores (54.4%) and upper-level students (60.8%).
- The two fields of study with the highest voter turnout were English Language and Literature (73.5%) and Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics (73%). The highest turnout rate went to students whose field of study is categorized as "Unknown" in the NSLVE report (73.8%).
- The bottom three fields of study in terms of voter turnout are Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies (48.1%); Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities (48.6%), and Physical Sciences (53.5%)
- Voter turnout was higher among students who identify as women in the 2016 election 71.2% compared to 62.7% among students who identify as men.

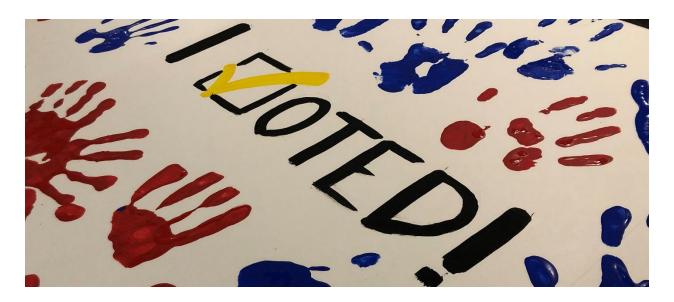
2018 Midterm Election

- 85.6% of our students were registered to vote prior to the 2018 Midterm Election, compared to 77.8% in 2014.
- 42.2% of eligible students voted in the 2018 Midterm Election, compared to 20.7% in 2014.
 - o The percentage of students who voted during early voting or via absentee ballot increased compared to 2014, leading to a decrease in students who voted in person on Election Day (58.4% in 2018 compared to 76.3% in 2014).
- The voter turnout rate is higher among graduate students (56.2%) than undergraduate students (38.9%).
- Voter turnout increased across all age groups, and *most significantly among students 18-21*. However, this age group is also the one with the *lowest voting rate* (36.7%, compared to 74.3% for students in the 50+ age group).
- First-year students had the lowest voting rate (32.2%) compared to sophomores (36%) and upper-level students (41.6%).

- The two fields of study with the highest voter turnout were *Natural Resources* and Conservation (53.8%), History (51.9%). The highest turnout rate went to students whose field of study is categorized as "Unknown" in the NSLVE report (60.9%).
- The bottom three fields of study in terms of voter turnout are Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies (29.2%); Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Humanities (29.9%), and Business, Management, and Marketing (35.8%).

2020 Presidential Election

- 86.4% of our students were registered to vote prior to the 2020 Presidential Election, compared to 87.1% in 2016.
- 71.9% of eligible students voted in the 2020 Presidential Election, compared to 60.7% in 2016.
 - o 30% of students voted early in 2020, a notable increase from 2016. Absentee voting rate also significantly increased to 46%. In-person Election Day voting saw a large decreased to 16% compared to 55% in 2016. We believe these percentages were strongly impacted by COVID-19.
- The voter turnout rate is higher among graduate students (76%) than undergraduate students (70%).
- Voter turnout increased across almost all age groups, and *most significantly among students* 18-21, reaching 71%. This age range had the *lowest voting rate* in 2016, but in 2020 surpassed students 25-29 who had 68%.
 - o The only group with a negative change in voter turnout is students in the 50+ age group (78% in 2020 compared to 86% in 2016).
- First-year students closed the gap and tied for voting rate with second years (68%%) compared to upper-level students (71%).
- The two fields of study with the highest voter turnout were *Philosophy and Religious Studies* (84%) and History and Law Enforcement, Firefighting, and Protection tied with (80%).
- The bottom three fields of study in terms of voter turnout are Computer and Information Sciences (63%), Business, Management, and Marketing (65%); and Family and Consumer Sciences (65%).



GOALS

Short-Term Goals and Action Steps

- A **90%** registration rate and **60%** turnout rate among eligible voters during the 2022 Midterm Election, narrowing the gap between voter registration and turnout
- The stabilization and growth of **TU Votes student action team**, led by the Andrew Goodman Ambassadors, and the **TU Votes Coalition**
- Expansion of voter registration efforts into existing campus engagement, such as new student orientation, welcome week, and online student portals
- Create a resource list geared towards mobilizing students who are unable to vote

Long-Term Goals

- A 95% registration rate and 90% turnout rate among eligible student voters during the 2024 Presidential Election
- The establishment of Election Day as a campus holiday

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Voting and COVID-19: The impact of COVID-19 is felt in almost every aspect of our lives, and voter engagement is no exception. It has led to very quick changes and updates, making it incredibly important to leverage our resources to engage the campus community in every way possible. We will continue to plan our efforts from a multi-dimensional approach: in-person events, virtually, and in hybrid environments. Social media and online communications will continue to play a major role as part of this.

Implementation of Ask Every Student Project: In May 2020, Towson University was selected as a Commitment Campus for <u>Ask Every Student</u>, a project of the National Resource Consortium on Full Voter Participation, that focuses on "accessing a few minutes of focus from every student on campus," to empower them to participate in our democracy. We intend to continue working closely with

members of the TU Votes Coalition and the Ask Every Student team to implement these tactics and resources into our efforts.

Focus on Majors with Lower Registration/Turnout Percentages: To continue our efforts that target students in specific majors and fields of study, we will contact professors in the departments with the lowest voter turnout rates according to our NSLVE data for both 2016 and 2018, and attempt to mobilize students through education and awareness on issues related to their fields of study, foster discussion about underlying causes, and provide opportunities to get involved further.

Engagement of Student Organizations: Meaningful engagement of student organizations, through initiatives such as the TU Votes Student Organization Challenge, student organization meeting visits, partnerships with key executive board members for select organizations, and partnerships with academic and co-curricular campus unites to further our reach.

Consistency in Promoting Voter Education and Engagement: Our team will continue to push voter engagement, voter education, and civic engagement consistently and constantly leading up to elections. We intend to carry on hosting our Issues to Action series to continue educating students about voter access issues and opportunities, the upcoming local and state-wide races, and the issues that affect our various communities.

Strengthen Relationships with Local Board of Elections: We will continue to foster a strong relationship with the Baltimore County Board of Elections, in order to ensure complete preparedness for November, while harnessing resources to remove voting barriers for students.

Ease Access to Voting Location: Though the new polling location provides overall ease of access and a bigger physical space, it will be important to take additional steps to bring about awareness and make it as easy as possible for student voters who desire to vote in-person to know how to get there (for example, promoting the shuttle bus routes that can drop students off in front of the South Campus Pavilion).

Facilitate Ability to Vote by Mail: We anticipate that the ongoing conversation about voting by mail to hold safe elections amid COVID-19 will still be present. In college campuses, it adds to already-existing challenges and opportunities that have come with encouraging our students to rely on this voting method. As we put this plan into action, it will place a heightened importance on debunking myths about voting by mail, addressing any concerns, and providing as much information and resources as possible.

Early Voting: We will continue to encourage students to vote during the early voting period. It is great to see the creation of the <u>Vote Early Day</u> movement, and we intend to implement this campaign as part of our strategy.



Meaningful and Inclusive CLDE – Beyond Voting: Submission of this Action Plan comes during a time where injustice and inequities continue to affect our communities, especially people of color and other marginalized groups. Voter engagement efforts are important, but they are only one piece of the puzzle. For this Action Plan to truly have an impact, it must come from a place of inclusion and equity, highlighting and advocating against voter suppression and other ways marginalized groups are particularly affected at the polls. It must also include students who are unable to vote. In addition, we will continue to commit to a full spectrum of civic learning and democratic engagement before and beyond election seasons, including the promotion of civic literacy and intentional navigation of media sources, creation of spaces for meaningful discussion and action planning around issues of concern, empowering our community to speak out and get involved about the injustices that affect our communities, and continuing to support our political, identity-based, and cause-focused student organizations.



TENTATIVE TIMELINE

The following calendar is subject to ongoing changes and revisions, especially due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

November 2021

- November 11: TU Know the First: Dialogue about Free Speech on Campus
- Issue to Action Series

December 2021

- History of Voter Suppression Event
- Issue to Action

January 2022

- MLK, Jr. Day of Service
- Virtual New Student Orientation
- Students return for Spring Semester

February 2022

- Tiger Pride Day
- Issue to Action Series

March 2022

- Political Student Org Roundtable
- Issue to Action Series

April 2022

- Earth Week
- National Volunteer Week
- Issue to Action Series

May 2022

• Issue to Action Series

June 2022

- June 7: Primary Election Voter Registration Deadline
- June 16: Primary Early Voting Begins
- June 21: Deadline to Request Mail/Fax Delivery of Vote-by-Mail Ballot
- June 23: Primary Early Voting Ends
- June 24: Deadline to Request Electronic Delivery of Vote-by-Mail Ballot
- June 28: Maryland Midterm Primary Elections

July 2022

- July 9: Voter registration re-opens
- TU Votes Coalition Planning Meetings
- New Student Orientation
- Andrew Goodman Foundation National Civic Leadership Training Institute

August 2022

- Welcome to TU Week
- Student Organization Challenge

September 2022 (Civic Action Month)

- Constitution Day
- National Voter Registration Day
- Issue to Action

October 2022

- October 18: Deadline to register to vote for the general election
- October 27: Early Voting opens
- Vote Early Day
- Issue to Action

November 2022

- November 1: Deadline to Request Mail/Fax Delivery of Vote-by-Mail Ballot
- November 3: Early Voting ends
- November 4: Deadline to Request Electronic Delivery of Vote-by-Mail Ballot
- November 8: General Election
 - o Party at the Polls
- Post-Election Campus Conversation
- Issue to Action

REPORTING

This action plan will be shared publicly as part of the requirements set by both the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge and the Voter Friendly Campus designation. They will also be shared with partner institutions as part of the NASPA Lead Initiative and will be available on our website for access by students, faculty and staff, along with summaries of NSLVE data.

EVALUATION

The NSLVE report will continue to serve well in assessing Towson University's voter engagement efforts. In addition, we will strive to collect meaningful feedback through multiple avenues throughout the period of this action plan. Below are some examples:

Ouantitative

• Assessment data collected after 2018 Midterm Election by MCOM453 Course

- TurboVote Engagement Data
- Report from the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement
- Metrics from Andrew Goodman Foundation's my.VoteEverywhere tool
- Data from Involved @ TU (Campus Labs Engage Platform)
- Carnegie Political Engagement Survey distributed to Political Engagement Residential Learning Community

Qualitative

- Focus group data collected after 2018 Midterm Election by MCOM453 Course
- Feedback from TU Votes coalition, student leaders, and student organizations, through verbal interviews, as well as written assessment tools

During the timeline of this action plan, we will work to collect real-time feedback in order to fill needs and address challenges as they happen. In addition, following the election, the TU Votes Coalition will use all data and feedback available to reflect on the voter engagement work, points of pride, and challenges. This information will initially be shared as part of the Freedom to Vote Report due to the University System of Maryland in December 2022, and the Voter Friendly Campus Report due in January 2023. It will also be incorporated into future editions of the TU Votes Action Plan.



The TU Votes Action Plan was compiled by the Office of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility at Towson University, located on the second floor of the Administration Building. Should you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please contact us at 410-704-4803, or civicengagement@towson.edu.