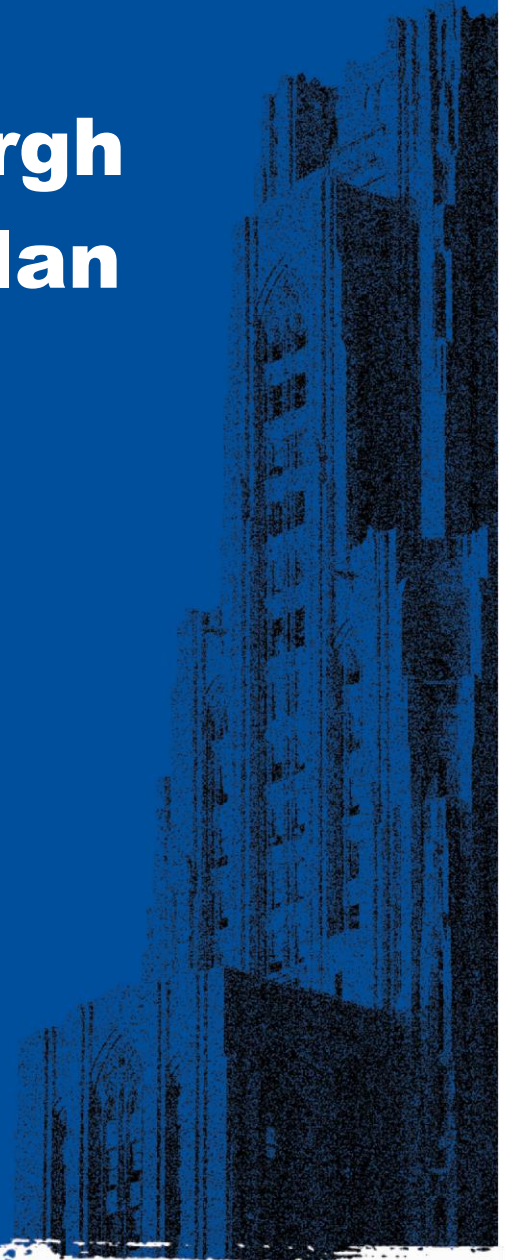


# University of Pittsburgh Voter Engagement Plan



May 2020  
Version 1.0



### **Executive Summary**

Voting is an important part of being a citizen of the United States of America. Elected officials make important decisions that directly affect our lives now and in the future. Voting is our opportunity to choose the decision makers and express our wants, needs and desires.

As one of the country's top academic institutions for research and innovation, the University of Pittsburgh, has long held a commitment to civic engagement and is committed to working on a University-wide level to create a more civically engaged institution.

The Pitt Votes initiative, established summer 2019, aims to create a more accessible and consistent political environment on Pitt's campus. Through making registration tools and voter information widely available to students - without the pressure of political affiliation - Pitt Votes aims to stimulate greater civic engagement across Pitt's student body.

In recent years, the combined efforts of the University on an institutional level - along with grassroots mobilization on the student level - has led to historic levels of voter registration and voting rates. As of 2018, the voter registration rate at the University of Pittsburgh was 80.7 percent, and the voting rate among the student population was 42.5 percent (28.1 percent increase from 2014). Connections with the Board of Elections, support throughout the institution, and various programming efforts have allowed the University to take a collaborative approach towards improving civic engagement.

The University of Pittsburgh participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and approves making the data public through the All In Campus Democracy Challenge.

**Statement of Nonpartisanship:** The Pitt Votes Steering Committee does not support or oppose candidates for public office or take a stand for or against any political party.

### **Leadership**

The Office of PittServes within the Division of Student Affairs will provide leadership and direction regarding the Voter Engagement Plan. The structure will include a coalition, a committee and a student task force.

**Pitt Votes Coalition** – identify areas of improvement for the civic engagement work already being done on campus. Coalition will meet four (4) times a calendar year.

**Pitt Votes Committee** – explores and design innovative and inclusive ideas that we can implement throughout the year that will create a culture for civic engagement through the entire campus. Committee will meet up to eight (8) times a calendar year.

**Student Task Force** – students from around the university that have committed to increasing civic engagement. Task Force will meet monthly during the academic year and once in the summer.

Membership for the various sectors of Pitt Votes will be a one-year commitment with the eligibility to remain engaged thereafter. Recruitment will occur throughout the year with target university and community stakeholders welcomed onto the various groups based upon gaps and review of needs and goals.

#### Pitt Votes Coalition

The Pitt Votes Coalition supports civic learning and political engagement at the University of Pittsburgh by coordinating voting activities across campus. The goal of this coalition is to increase campus-wide democratic engagement with a focus on voter registration, voter education, and voter engagement. With representatives from a broad cross-section of student organizations, university departments and academic units from across campus, the Coalition will leverage current resources, provide support for existing activities, and expand opportunities for engagement.

The Pitt Votes Coalition is led by Chaz Kellem, Office of PittServes. Membership to the Coalition is open to faculty, staff and students that have an interest in supporting the work of the *Democratic Engagement Action Plan*. The coalition will meet once a semester and communicate electronically when necessary. The primary goal of the meetings will be to share updates, gather input for program ideas moving forward and collect resources for future engagement.

The Pitt Votes Coalition will serve as the lead agency on voter registration, engagement, education work with the purpose of driving resources and opportunities throughout campus. Tactical advisement, ongoing support and structure advancement will be provided through two subgroups. Within the Pitt Votes Coalition there are two subgroups: the Pitt Votes Steering Committee and the Pitt Votes Student Task Force that provide input and support from a variety of perspectives.

The Pitt Votes Coalition members comprise of a university-wide approach to include multiple faculty, staff and students throughout the university goal is to have representation from all academic schools in addition to several non-academic departments throughout campus. Coalition members will join on a rolling basis and will serve one-academic term with the renewal possible. Coalition members are able to send proxy representatives when unable to participate.

#### Pitt Votes Coalition Members (as of December 2019)

- Chaz Kellem, Office of PittServes
- Kathryn Fleisher, Undergraduate Student
- Paula Janikowski, Office of the Provost
- Kathleen Kyle, Director of Housing Panther Central
- Tyler Viljaste, Undergraduate Student
- Chase McIntyre, Life Skills Community Coordinator, Athletics
- Tom Misuraca, Pitt Program Council, Student Life
- Everett Herman, Director of Student and Faculty Engagement, Honors College
- Alexandra Curtis, Undergraduate Student
- Cameron Clare, Undergraduate Student

- Victoria Shineman, Professor, Political Science Department
- Shenay Jeffrey, Assistant Director, Office of PittServes
- Natasha Williams, Assistant Director of Career Services & Community Engagement Coordinator, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
- Meredith Mavero, Manager of Student Programs & Community Outreach, Institute of Politics

#### Pitt Votes Steering Committee

The Pitt Votes Steering Committee serves to guide the writing and implementation of the *Voter Engagement Action Plan*. This committee is smaller than other involved groups, comprised of select members of the faculty, staff, and student populations, in order to create intentional messaging surrounding the goals of the broader coalition. Steering Committee participation is on a volunteer basis. The Pitt Votes Coalition leadership can use discretion to open participation in the working group beyond this representation.

#### Pitt Votes Steering Committee (as of December 2019)

- Chaz Kellem, Director, Office of PittServes
- Lauren Ban, Undergraduate Student
- Susanna Deemer, Graduate Student
- Cedric Humphrey, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member

#### Pitt Votes Student Task Force

The Pitt Votes Student Task Force will foster a collaborative environment that empowers student organizations and leaders who are currently working on voter registration and engagement efforts across campus to make a larger, more inclusive impact. The Student Task Force will support the utilization of resources and networks affiliated with Pitt Votes to supplement ongoing civic engagement work and ensure that voter registration and engagement remains a priority across campus. Ultimately, the goal of this task force is to put in place tangible, sustainable structures and systems that ensure collaborative voter registration and engagement efforts across campus during each election cycle. Centralizing all voter registration efforts under the Pitt Votes brand is an essential step in creating a University-wide effort that feels meaningful, approachable, and useful.

The secondary goal is to build relationships among student organizations and support collaboration and idea sharing. This task force will ideally serve as the touchstone for various groups and entities to be engaged with one another in pursuing their shared goal of increasing voter registration and engagement on campus.

#### Pitt Votes Student Task Force (as of May 2019)

- Tyler Viljaste, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Kathryn Fleisher, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Madison Ricker, Undergraduate Student
- Katie Gingerich
- Nikhita Chakraborty

- Ryan Murphy, Undergraduate Student
- Grace Dubois, Undergraduate Student
- Cameron Hallihan, Undergraduate Student
- Hana Koob, Undergraduate Student
- Kiley Verbanac, Undergraduate Student
- Eric Macadangang, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Anfernee La Cruz, Undergraduate Student, Student Office of Sustainability

### Campus Partners

The University of Pittsburgh has several academic departments, university departments and student organizations that are committed to voter engagement.

The following is a fluid list of academic departments and student organizations:

- Office of Community & Government Relations
- Division of Student Affairs, Office of the Dean
- Office of Residence Life
- Student Life
- Pitt Program Council (PPC)
- Student Government Board (SGB) CGR Committee
- NextGen
- Political Science Student Association
- College Democrats
- Student Office of Sustainability (SOOS) Votes Campaign
- Hillel MitzVote
- University of Pittsburgh Greek Life

### Community Partners

Our voter engagement work at the University of Pittsburgh will have engagement and support from community partners. These community partners will provide support on projects as well as provide resources to eliminate barriers to student voting. The following is a fluid list of community partners:

- City of Pittsburgh, Office of the Mayor
- Allegheny County, Office of the County Executive
- League of Women Voters
- Chatham University, Center for Women in Politics
- YWCA Greater Pittsburgh

### National Partners

A coalition of national and regional partners have been established by the University of Pittsburgh. This group will serve as resources to share strategies, lend assistance in creating initiatives, and assess successes and challenges. The following is a fluid list of national and regional partners:

- All In Democracy Challenge
- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Campus Elections Engagement Project
- Campus Vote Project
- DemocrACCy Network – ACC Affiliated Network
- National Voter Registration Day
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
- TurboVote
- When We All Vote

Additional support from national partners beyond resources and information include:

Campus Elections Engagement Project (CEEP) – is a national non-partisan project that helps America's colleges and universities get as many of their 20 million students as possible to register, volunteer in campaigns, educate themselves, and turn out at the polls. We teach administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders to use their institutional resources to engage students.

The University of Pittsburgh will have up to two (2) fellows (available to any current student) that will assist in the development of this plan and implement independent ideas on campus. The goal is to engage students in the entire election process.

Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellowship will permit up to two (2) fellows (available to any current student) that will work with the entire team to assist in the engagement of the action plan and consistent revisions to this action plan. In addition, this person will explore hosting events, building coalitions, etc.

### **Commitment**

The University of Pittsburgh has remained at the forefront of research and innovation through continuous changes in the landscape of the city, region and beyond. As these landscapes transform, the University has utilized critical reflection and dialogue to create comprehensive, collaborative initiatives that maintain its status as a leading institution. In this spirit, in late 2019 a new five-year Plan for Pitt was released with six key goal areas, one of which being to strengthen communities.

Specifically, the Plan for Pitt places emphasis on fostering a culture of civic engagement. This emphasis was as a result of the intentional inclusion of a variety of populations who exist in the Pitt community in determining what the University should place priority on in the upcoming five years. It is this institution-wide commitment that the Pitt Votes initiative exists within. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members have expressed a desire to improve the civic commitment of those within the University through various initiatives.



Additionally, each year the University selects a broad theme that dictates a centralized and structured set of initiatives and programs done on campus. Funding opportunities and other forms of support allow nearly every member of the community to engage in an event under the “Year of...” framework. It was recently announced that the 2020-2021 academic year would be the Year of Engagement, once again illustrating a University-wide commitment to civic engagement.

Through the Plan for Pitt goal of strengthening communities and the Year of Engagement, civic action will be a priority in coursework, research, student programming, and overall university cultural. The Pitt Votes initiative along with the various related committees and taskforces will be empowered to emphasize the importance of voting as a form of civic engagement with the help of these institutional commitments.

### **Landscape**

Accompanying the recent emphasis placed on engagement at the University-level, is a commitment by various schools, departments, offices and student organizations to take a collaborative approach to increasing all forms of engagement at Pitt. In addition, there are countless collaborative efforts occurring between University and community stakeholders including support around education, entrepreneurship, public health, etc.

Beyond the myriad engagement efforts already occurring, work is also being done to evaluate the alignment of students within these efforts to further improve the landscape of community and civic engagement. Multiple entities within the University have collaborated to create the Civic Pathways Initiative, originally created at Stanford University, to assess where students may want to engage with their surrounding communities on a local, national, and global stage. The Civic Pathways Initiative aims to create community engaged experiences visible and available to students along with supporting them as they have community engagement experiences that support their educational journey. Policy and governance is one of the pathways available through this initiative and will serve as an additional tool.

Within this landscape of engagement, specific efforts have been made around voting. Multiple student organizations have worked tirelessly in recent election years to increase voter registration and turnout rates on campus. Pitt Votes will work alongside student organizations to continue their efforts while providing access to additional resources and tools. Voter registration and turnout efforts are at the foundation of this work while education is the overarching objective. The Pitt Votes initiative aims to increase these figures by intentionally combining existing efforts across the University in order to have concerted action for the upcoming general and future elections.

### **Goals**

#### **Year 0 – Academic Year 2019-2020**

- Launched Pitt Votes effort – created graphics, started using branding on various outreach
- Established partnerships with several national/local partners

- Dedicated website through TurboVote – [pittvotes.turbovote.org](http://pittvotes.turbovote.org)
- Hired a graduate student and a CEEP Fellow (undergraduate student) to provide leadership and support
- Gathered materials from national and state partners to use at outreach events
- Hosted the PA Student Voting Summit (40+ attendees) in February in collaboration with Campus Vote Project, Campus Election Engagement Project, All In Democracy Challenge
- Participated in National Voter Registration Day (September 2019)
- Peer-to-Peer Training on Voter Registration – Student organization lead effort with peer-to-peer training on voter registration practices as a tool to encourage voter participation
- Voter Registration Drives – Across campus, University departments, student organizations, and student leaders continually put together voter registration drives or events with the intent of getting as many students registered to vote as possible
- Outreach and education regarding Census – email communication, social media usage, event for student organizations (cancelled due to participation)
- Tabling and being present at events on campus for registration and information distribution (including but not limited to):
  - Fall Fest (September 2019)
  - Pitt Make A Difference Day (October 2019)
  - Dick Thornburgh – Draw the Lines Forum Tabling (January 2020)
  - Elsie Hillman Civic Engagement Forum: Never a Spectator (February 2020)

#### Year 1 - Academic Year 2020-2021

- Relaunch Pitt Votes initiative to increase awareness and demonstrate the University commitment to democracy engagement
- Create a toolkit that student organizations can tap into in efforts to educate members
- Work alongside the student leadership of the Pitt Votes Student Task force to continue recruit and design outreach efforts connected to the November elections
- Create a political Scholar Series in collaboration with Pitt Program Council, Political Science Department, Student Life, etc.
- Dorm Storms: knocking on doors in residence halls and encouraging students to register to vote (Resident Student Association)
- Have a senior member of University Administration (i.e. University of Pittsburgh Chancellor) deliver a call-to-action as far as voter education, registration and engagement
- Facilitate a “Couch Party” through When We All Vote
- Participated in National Voter Registration Day (September 2020)
- Educate students with information in the Vote by Mail option for PA residents
- Develop a student ambassador program including recruitment, training, implementation, compensation, etc.
- Explore national, state, and local resources and continue to establish functional relationships that connect these resources to students



- Student Government President send an email/share information to students charging them with registering to vote (Opinion Piece in newspaper, social media post, etc.)
- A Call to action during major campus events – Student Affairs targeted events
- Host Civic engagement informational awareness events
- Include Voter registration as part of Week of Welcome – information table/booth
- Pitt Votes information and outreach tables during prime times in the dining halls and campus recreation facilities
- Pitt Votes information and outreach tables at various on-campus event (Arts Festival, Bigelow Bash, Family Weekend, etc.)
- Include a civic engagement session in Resident Assistant training that emphasizes the correct way to complete a voter registration form and information on why it is so important for all students to vote
- Partner with the various national/statewide organization to develop training for student ambassadors
- Active Citizenship FAQ – answer the ‘why’ for students
- Info blasting on TV’s and Poster in high traffic zones on campus
- Election Literacy – educate students through various formats with voter responsibilities (i.e. terms, dates, rules, etc.)
- Video and Social Media Campaign leading up to election day
- Pitt Votes Branding – make it clear that we are all on the same page and reassure the university is committed to spreading the same message in order to create a civically healthy campus climate
- Participate and promote the annual Pitt Day in Harrisburg in addition to the ACC Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.
- Participate in the ACC collaboration including the creation of an ACC-wide competition and a coalition structure to sharing promising practice across the conference.

#### Year 2- Academic Year 2021-2022

- Add voter registration notice during housing signups and/or part of the move-in process
- Establish a pool of funding available for academic departments and student organizations to access to improve voter education
- Continue exploration around Active Citizenship programming to assist students in – answer the ‘why’ for students
- Integrate voter engagement in Greek Life recruitment, induction, etc.
- Register 75% of eligible incoming students to vote during Week of Welcome
- A Call to action during major campus events – First-Year Convocation, first home athletic games, homecoming, etc.
- Introduction events for students to political candidates in our local community
- Spokesperson/people - utilize our most popular leaders on campus to promote civic engagement
- Pitt Votes branding campaign – explore merchandise in the form of attire, gifts, etc.

- Engage and serve in a leadership capacity with ACC Challenge or voter campaign/competition
- Maintain 80% or above registration rate (2018 NLSVE Report – 80.7%)

### Year 3- Academic Year 2022-2023

- Surpass the voting rate national average by 5% by 2022
- Incorporate civic education and democratic engagement into the general education curriculum
- A Call to action during major campus events – Athletic Events, Homecoming, etc.
- Impact the class schedule (modified day/half day of classes) on Election days so the entire campus can participate
- Add a voter registration option to the site where student must go to register for classes
- Election Day Special Events/Festivals

### Future Goals

- Voter registration information submitted to student with acceptance package
- Implement a voter registration as part of the student ID card process
- Survey to find out why students are or aren't voting and why, and potentially what questions they have about the process
- Continue to explore voter accessibility for University of Pittsburgh students
- Involve community-based voter registration and engagements efforts in the University's ongoing civic engagement work. Partners should regularly be invited to engage with the campus community and build meaningful relationships with the Pitt community
- Ensure a mechanism to measure the staff and faculty organizing and sharing information regarding their own voter registration and engagement efforts

### **Reporting & Evaluation**

#### Reporting

This Action Plan will be shared internally with the individuals on the Pitt Votes coalition, the Pitt Votes Steering Committee, and the Pitt Votes Student Task Force along with University leadership. It will be made available to all other internal constitutions upon request. The plan will be distributed with the All in Democracy Challenge and the Campus Vote Project.

#### Evaluation

Comprehensive and continual evaluation of the Coalition's efforts to increase civic engagement is key to create successful outcomes that reach further and last longer than a single election cycle. Much like other aspects on this plan, the evaluation of the Coalition's efforts will take a collaborative approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data from perspectives across the University campus and beyond in order to understand how a wide array of populations and entities are being impacted.

As a start, communication within the Pitt Votes Coalition, its subgroups, and associated organizations will serve as an evaluation tool. Coalition and committee leaders will conduct monthly check-ins with their members in order to understand how broad goals are being achieved and adjust accordingly to any challenges that arise. Additionally, the in-person meeting that occurs once per semester will allow a deeper evaluation of all aspects of the action plan to occur.

Beyond Pitt Votes Coalition members, it is important to understand how campus and community partners are responding to the work being done. Members of the Pitt Votes Student Task Force will conduct regular check-ins with student organizations and their leaders to understand how these students are responding to various initiatives. These check-ins will allow open communication in an effort to collaborate on ways to improve on goals or outcomes not being met.

In addition to check-ins with members and related organizations a comprehensive quantitative evaluation plan must be implemented to track the impact of our efforts. Data from the NSLVE will serve as evidence and motivation for future efforts and as a result will be heavily integrated into the evaluation plan.

- Each student the Pitt Votes Coalition interacts with must be inputted into Turbo Vote and updated according to the student's future participation in coalition programming.
- Track student attendance at associated campus events.
- Monitor engagement with outreach tabling at larger campus events.
- Track voter registration to assess which programming efforts are most effective. Collaborate with the County Board of Elections to breakdown student voter turnout rates at on-campus polling locations.