

2024
Voter Friendly Campus
Action Plan Report

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Contents



UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

Student Success

Center for Leadership & Civic Engagement

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Executive Summary

The University of South Florida (USF) is one of the fastest rising universities in the United States. In the realm of community engagement, looking specifically at civic learning and democratic engagement, the efforts at the University of South Florida are led by the professional staff of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE) at the Tampa campus, the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) at the St. Petersburg campus, and the Office of Student Engagement (OSE) at the Sarasota-Manatee campus. These units coordinate with Student Government (SG) and other campus partners within the Division of Student Success, as well as local and statewide community agencies, to align and focus their work. Together, these units meet with internal and external partners in the democratic engagement coalition, internally called the BullsVote Coalition, to collaborate and coordinate on further integration and promotion of a culture of civically engaged students at the University of South Florida.

The following action plan was written by the staff of the Center for Leadership & Civic Engagement on the Tampa campus based on conversations with and input from the BullsVote Coalition. The purpose of this plan is to outline USF's student voter engagement strategy and goals through the 2024 national election. The document highlights a comprehensive approach centered on student voter education, registration, mobilization, and poll access during the 2024 election congruent with USF's renewed strategic emphasis on community outreach and engagement, and the plan strives to be implemented in curricular and co-curricular spaces across the three campuses.

Leadership

BullsVote Coalition

The University of South Florida Democratic Engagement Coalition (DEC) was formally organized in late summer 2020 by the professional staff of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE) on the Tampa campus and the Student Government Advising, Training and Operations office (SGATO). The DEC successfully brought together a group of campus and community stakeholders with diverse perspectives, areas of expertise, resources, and influence to share information, coordinate communication, and collaborate on civic learning and democratic engagement initiatives across the university's three campuses – Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee.

This working group, by design and in alignment with best practices, is composed of USF staff members, faculty, students, and nonpartisan community organization representatives with the common goal of elevating and institutionalizing a campus culture of active citizenship and civic participation.

USF community members do not currently receive any additional compensation for participation in coalition meetings or initiatives, and the majority do not have any formal job responsibilities related to voter engagement.

The DEC was rebranded as the BullsVote Coalition (BVC) in spring 2022 to help highlight and reflect the coalition member's priorities more precisely:

1. Promote and provide sustainable structures for coordinated and collaborative university-wide student voter engagement activities.
2. Provide leadership in the design, implementation, and evaluation of student voter engagement activities, to include voter outreach, education, and mobilization initiatives.
3. Assess and challenge barriers to student voting and progress toward a visible culture of democratic engagement.

The BVC strives to meet, virtually, once per month during the fall and spring semesters (i.e., January – May and August - November), and at least once during the summer (i.e., June – July). Interested stakeholders are welcome and encouraged to participate in these meetings to the extent possible (i.e., as individual availability, technology, and safety protocols allow). Minutes and/or meeting summaries are made accessible via a collaborative workspace in Microsoft Teams.

As is a reality for institutions across the country, widespread turnover across most of the campus and community partner staff makes it challenging to keep a list of individual contributors updated in this document. The following is an overview of spaces that have demonstrated commitment to actively participate in collaborative voter engagement since the implementation of the previous action plan.

USF Campus and Student Organization Coalition Partners

Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (CLCE)

The professional staff within the CLCE galvanize partnerships, provide strategic leadership for democratic engagement initiatives, and deliver and support collaborative voter engagement programs and resources

focused on the Tampa campus and serve as the primary university liaison for the Voter Friendly Campus program, the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, TurboVote implementation, Campus Takeover, and numerous other partnerships and collaborations.

Center for Civic Engagement, St. Petersburg campus (CCE)

The professional faculty and staff within the CCE facilitate beneficial partnerships in the voter education and registration space and lead initiatives focused on the St. Petersburg campus.

Office of Student Engagement, Sarasota-Manatee campus (OSE)

The professional staff within the OSE facilitate beneficial partnerships in the voter education and registration space and lead initiatives focused on the Sarasota-Manatee campus.

Student Government Advising, Training and Operations (SGATO)

The SGATO professional staff facilitate and support SG participation in coalition activities and maintain a robust online voter information and education resource.

Student Government (SG)

SG representatives contribute knowledgeable and influential student voices to the coalition's efforts, provide robust communication conduits to the broader student body, and deliver substantive standalone and collaborative educational programs.

Center for Student Involvement (CSI)

CSI professional staff members create numerous opportunities (e.g. University Lecture Series) for student engagement and learning about a variety of topics.

Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL)

FSL professional staff members create numerous opportunities for student outreach and communication regarding voting, and facilitate engagement and collaboration with our FSL community.

Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA)

OMA professional staff provide opportunities to connect with cultural student organizations.

Dean of Students Office (Tampa)

Most of the USF professional staff who contribute to the work of the BVC report directly or indirectly to the Associate Vice President/Dean of Students.

Institute for Public Policy and Leadership, Sarasota-Manatee campus (IPPL)

IPPL programs and partnerships provide robust civic learning and engagement opportunities for students primarily on the Sarasota-Manatee campus.

School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies (SIGS)

SIGS faculty and graduate students frequently contribute to voter education programming (as speakers,

panelists, and subject matter experts) and solicit broad student participation in voter engagement initiatives.

USF College of Public Health (COPH)

COPH serves as a strategic partner in engaging and activating a target academic demographic that is historically underrepresented in college student registration and voting.

University Communications and Marketing (UCM)

UCM helps unite the marketing materials for democratic engagement activities under one umbrella by adding branding icons that identify the events as part of the BullsVote Coalition.

Florida PIRG Students at USF/New Voters Project

Florida PIRG Students at USF currently serves as our institutional model for student organization participation and collaboration in the voter engagement space. They actively organize voter registration drives and events.

Politically oriented registered student organizations

- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- First Amendment Forum
- John Quincy Adams Society
- The Network of Enlightened Women
- Stonecatchers
- Students Demand Action USF
- Students for Sensible Drug Policy
- Students for Socialism
- Students Protecting the Environment and Animals Through Knowledge
- Tampa Bay Students for a Democratic Society
- UNICEF at USF
- Vot-ER at USF
- Young Americans for Liberty
- Young Democratic Socialists of America at USF

Local Community Coalition Partners

Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections (HCSOE)

Representatives from HCSOE frequently collaborate with USF partners to bring resources on campus and provide information about upcoming elections and election laws to students.

League of Women Voters of Hillsborough County (LWVHC)

LWV staff and volunteers regularly engage on campus and with the coalition.

External Coalition Partners

Campus Vote Project/Fair Elections Center (CVP)

CVP identifies a USF student with the help of the CLCE to act as a Democracy Fellow. The Democracy Fellow work with the CLCE to provide voter education materials to students and to engage with the politically oriented student organizations.

Democracy Works/TurboVote

USF uses TurboVote as a campus wide voter education tool.

Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE)/NSLVE

USF participates in NSLVE data collection.

Emerging Coalition Partnerships

Explicit in the design of a university-wide voter engagement initiative is the desire and need to cultivate support beyond the working group members and their respective areas of responsibility and influence. The working group will be charged to pursue and leverage opportunities to coordinate efforts with internal and external partners including but not limited to:

Student Accessibility Services (SAS), Information Technology (IT), Student Publications (The Oracle), Marshall Student Center, Campus Recreation and Wellness, USF Housing and Residential Education, Faculty Senate

Commitment

To date, USF has demonstrated a desire to improve civic learning and democratic engagement outcomes through a comprehensive emphasis on global citizenship development as demonstrated through tangible actions, detailed below.

The University continues to express support for the evolution of both the general education curriculum and co-curricular initiatives as domains for civic education and action. A brief review of public documents, policies, and statements reveals the following visible indicators of institutional commitment:

USF Mission and Goals

As part of USF's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, five goals were established, four of which explicitly use civic engagement language. Phrases such as "engaged citizens," "solve global problems and improve lives," "build a prosperous and sustainable future," and "provide a safe, inclusive and vibrant community" are embedded in this public declaration and signal the primacy of active citizenship and campus-community partnerships in the institution's work.

Centers, Offices, and Institutes

USF is home to several departments, centers, institutes, and offices that promote and support democratic engagement programs and initiatives. The existence, staffing, and funding of these entities is an act of institutional commitment to advancing civic learning and engagement for campus and community stakeholders:

- Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement – Tampa
- Office of University Community Partnerships – Tampa
- Center for Civic Engagement – St. Petersburg
- Institute for Public Policy and Leadership
- Office of Student Engagement

Co-curricular Artifacts

The following co-curricular events and activities serve as evidence of institutional commitment to democratic engagement on campus:

- USF, led by the professional staff of the CLCE and SGATO, observes Constitution Day annually in September with educational programming and engagement activities.
- Several BVC partners coordinate and collaborate annually to observe National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day through in-person and remote educational programming, registration and pledge drives, and social media campaigns.
- Student Government hosts an annual Day at the Capitol, which takes USF students to Tallahassee to learn about how the government operates, tour the Capitol, and meets with lawmakers.
- Student Government regularly schedules additional opportunities to meet with political leaders in the Tampa Bay area including a Day at City Hall in Tampa; and a student forum with Kathy Castor, US representative for the Florida 14th District.
- USF is home to several politically focused registered student organizations representing a range of ideologies and agendas, including:

- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- First Amendment Forum
- John Quincy Adams Society
- The Network of Enlightened Women
- Stonecatchers
- Students Demand Action USF
- Students for Sensible Drug Policy
- Students for Socialism
- Students Protecting the Environment and Animals Through Knowledge
- Tampa Bay Students for a Democratic Society
- UNICEF at USF
- Vot-ER at USF
- Young Americans for Liberty
- Young Democratic Socialists of America at USF
- In partnership with the Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections, the USF Tampa campus hosts early voting and Election Day polling sites.
- USF students and organizations routinely engage in targeted social change initiatives, such as protests, demonstrations, petitions, public forums, and call campaigns.

Landscape

Internal Factors

Staffing transitions have affected the membership and programming capacity of the BullsVote Coalition. The group still aims to engage existing and potential members for more visible and frequent interoffice, interdepartmental, interdivisional, and intercampus collaborations. The overwhelming majority of student outreach, registration, and mobilization efforts continue to be planned and implemented at the department level or lower. Strategic sharing of institutional assessment and research data (e.g., NSLVE) with a broader audience may encourage division- and campus-level leaders to become more actively involved in voting and political education initiatives.

External Challenges

While on-campus activities are returning to pre-COVID levels, a less active 2023 election cycle saw fewer numbers at democratic engagement events. The incoming student classes are showing a renewed energy and interest in campus activities, though many still express a preference for flexibility in programming, desiring the option to participate either virtually or in-person. Our BVC partners have been flexible with program and activity implementation as campus and community needs ebb and flow.

While rapidly evolving communication and collaboration tools have been effective in minimizing the impact of geographic dispersion among our community and campus partners, wholly virtual engagement is not the ideal medium for developing and sustaining long-term interpersonal relationships, so the search for an effective balance between virtual and face-to-face interaction is ongoing and important to consider when planning programming during the 2024 election cycle.

In addition, while current events and the nature of a presidential election point to a peak in interest around democratic engagement, and an increase in student-led activity, the state legislature has implemented new guidelines that will impact activism, and how the BVC can support efforts, in the coming academic years. A significant shift to more community partner and student initiated and led efforts may be required due to legal limits of state employees.

NSLVE Data

USF regularly participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) to track student voting and registration rates across the institution. Data from the NSLVE report positions USF among the top tier of institutions in both voter registration rate and voting rate; USF's aspirations are for continued and greater engagement.

USF's 2020 NSLVE report indicated a 4.3 percentage point increase in registration rate from 2016 to 2020. Registration rate is the ratio of registered voters to eligible voters; an increase in this metric means the total number of additional registrations in that period outpaced the total number of additional students eligible to be registered. Our registration rate remains above the national average. The report also indicated a 9.3 percentage point increase in the voting rate of registered students and an 11.5 percentage point increase in overall voting rate during the same period. Voting rate is the ratio of actual voters to the number of eligible voters; this is the metric we need to focus on improving because it captures the measurable impact of our cumulative outreach, registration, and mobilization efforts.

The rate of growth among USF students in the realm of voter engagement has been demonstrable. As shown by 2014 NSLVE data, the registration rate of USF students for nearly a decade has been strong, circling the 80% mark. However, in 2014, the voting rate was 29%. By 2020, that number had risen by 2.5 times to 74%. While NSLVE data demonstrates remarkable growth among the USF student community in terms of voting, there is still room for growth.

Trends we see in the NSLVE data include:

- During the past three election cycles, females have voted in higher numbers than their male counterparts.
- There are lower voting rates among Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander identifying students.
- Those under 40 years of age vote in smaller numbers than their older colleagues.
- Midterm elections notice a marked decline in participation across the board.

Using this information, the coalition at USF plans to

- Coordinate with a USF institutional "celebrity" to promote voter turnout.
- Attempt to network with Residential Education to bring awareness to students living in residences halls of the processes for voting.
- Attempt to network with Fraternity & Sorority Life to bring awareness to FSL students of the processes for voting.
- Network with the Office of Multicultural Affairs to bring awareness to students across cultural student organizations
- Partner with the Center for Student Involvement (e.g. University Lecture Series) to bring awareness via their programs

Goals

Goal 1: Deliver Education Programs

We will facilitate student access to multichannel, nonpartisan voting information and political education throughout the 2024 national election cycle, to include collaborative on-campus and virtual events.

Potential learning outcomes for students participating in outreach and education events include:

- Understand common political processes.
- Identify the implications of interactions among political, social, and economic systems.
- Demonstrate foundational information literacy, critical thinking, and active communication skills.
- Develop and expand a sense of civic identity and responsibility.
- Commit to participate in the process and act.
- Utilize a framework of empathy, open-mindedness, and diversity in engaging in civic learning and democratic engagement.

Goal 2: Maintain Student Voter Registration Rate

We will maintain our registration rate. Registration rates for previous election cycles have remained steady and the high volume of non-voting eligible students on campus introduces marginal returns on effort. Campus partners are always present for voter registration drives and they will continue to be welcomed. Institutional efforts will be focused elsewhere.

Goal 3: Maintain and Strive to Increase Student Voter Turnout Rate

With strong presidential election year turn out, we will strive to increase our reported NSLVE voting rate.

Goal 4: Expand Coalition Involvement and Diversity

The BVC was formed with an intentional focus on representation for university stakeholders who have a discernable impact on student voting and civic engagement – staff, faculty, nonpartisan community agencies, state and national organizations, and students themselves. The next phase of evolution for the coalition necessarily involves planning for and tracking these indicators:

1. Engaging student leaders and student organizations in the coalition space as impactful partners in the process of initiative design, voter registration and education
2. Meaningful, measurable, and strategic engagement with student voters from all coalition partners, and
3. Appropriately diverse representation among contributor backgrounds, expertise, perspectives, and political alignments.

Strategy

Collaborative Outreach and Education Programs (Education)

Goal1: USF will facilitate student access to multichannel, nonpartisan voting information and political education throughout the 2024-2025 academic year, to include collaborative on-campus and virtual

events.

1. BullsVote Coalition partners will utilize USF's student engagement platform, BullsConnect, and coordinate with University marketing staff to communicate about student-facing, nonpartisan opportunities to learn about voting process and political issues education, and engage in the democratic process. (August – November 2024)
2. USF Communications and Marketing are in the process of creating a singular webpage for resources related to voting, registration, and the political process. Coalition departments will have links to this resource on their webpages to encourage student registration and voting in the fall, prior to the 2024 election, and to direct the campus community to accurate sources of nonpartisan election information. (Ongoing)
3. BullsVote Coalition partners will continue to use digital tools (e.g., TurboVote, StudentVote.org, Vote411, and Ballotpedia) to coordinate student access to resources for voter registration information and updates on political issues, legislation, and research. (August 2024 – April 2025)
4. Led by CLCE, SGATO, SG, CCE, OSE, BullsVote Coalition partners will collaborate on educational programming for designated campus-wide democratic engagement observances and civic holidays:
 - a. Constitution Day (September 17, 2024)
 - b. National Voter Registration Day (September 17, 2024)
 - c. National Voter Education Week (TBD)
 - d. Vote Early Day (October 28, 2024)
 - e. Election Day (November 5, 2024)
5. Led by CLCE, SGATO, SG, CCE, OSE, BullsVote Coalition partners aspire to facilitate democratic engagement programming related to the political process, UN Sustainable Development goals and more, in addition to the civic holidays listed above.

Maintain Student Voter Registration Rate (Registration)

Goal 2: We aim to maintain our 2024 registration rate from the reported NSLVE level.

1. Coordinate campus-wide observance of National Voter Registration Day. (September 17, 2024)
2. Coordinate with campus partners to encourage voter registration through digital tools (e.g., TurboVote, StudentVote.org, Vote411, and Ballotpedia) and provide referral links to track impact of digital registration campaigns.
3. Work with deans and department chairs to encourage faculty to share information about voter registration in their classes, through their medium of choice (e.g., email, canvas module, in the syllabus, etc.).
4. Coordinate with the local Supervisor of Elections Office and community partners to conduct regular on-campus and/or virtual registration drives and provide training for student volunteers to promote voter registration.
5. Ensure that students have direct access to registration information and resources.

Increase Student Voter Turnout Rate (Mobilization)

Goal 3: We aim to increase our reported NSLVE voting rate for the 2024 presidential election cycle.

1. Encourage Faculty to create assignments or generate class discussion around voting and political issues.

2. Promote absentee voting and vote-by-mail.
3. Coordinate a campus-wide “pledge to vote” campaign.
4. Promote early voting and Election Day polling locations on campus.

Expand Coalition Involvement and Diversity (Long-Term Engagement)

Goal 4: Planning for and tracking (1) meaningful, measurable, and strategic engagement with student voters from all coalition partners, and (2) appropriately diverse representation among contributor backgrounds, expertise, perspectives, and political alignments.

1. Engage student organizations in the coalition and support them in the implementation of campus wide initiatives.
2. Utilize BullsConnect to track student engagement in democratically aligned initiatives through the creation of a “civic engagement” tag on the platform for events.
3. Identify areas for growth and intentionally network with representatives from the burgeoning partnerships section.
4. Add three new unit members or organizations to the coalition.

Reporting

Reporting outcomes of the 2024 action plan will be informally reported as appropriate on a continuous basis through the coalition membership and are compiled here into a formal written report by the CLCE and SGATO staff. The formal report will be shared with Voter Friendly Campus and the coalition members during a monthly democratic engagement coalition meeting. It will also be used to inform the next cycle of planning, as will updated NSLVE data be incorporated into that planning process when the 2022 report is made available. The culmination of this plan and the subsequent formal report will result in continued development and growth for the next 1-2 election cycles.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the 2024 action plan will be assessed on a continuous basis throughout the year by coalition members as they engage in planned and unplanned tactics to address each initiative. Evaluation methods will be determined for each set of initiatives as coalition member resources allow.

The CLCE will engage in ongoing internal evaluation of learning outcome attainment while monitoring the progress of the plan. At the beginning of the new calendar year and close of the academic year, the coalition will discuss the successes, challenges, and next steps in light of the action plan and the outcomes of initiatives designed to meet the goals of this plan. Further steps to determine external conversations will happen at that time. NSLVE data will be utilized and shared according to university guidelines where appropriate.

Beyond 2024

It is exciting to consider the opportunities available for civic learning and democratic engagement as we look to 2024. Beyond 2024 will be incumbent on the evolving national, Florida, and local political environment after the current election cycle. The BullsVote Coalition will continue to meet 8-10 times a year for the upcoming year and expand our educational offerings in preparation for the 2024 elections. Opportunities for growth include connections to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, values alignment in the political sphere and more.