



## Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership

### University of Texas at San Antonio Civic Action Plan: 2023 - 2024

#### Executive Summary

The University of Texas at San Antonio, a Hispanic Serving Institute located in Central South Texas is home to over 34,000 students. The UTSA vision is *“to be a premier public research university, providing access to educational excellence and preparing citizen leaders for the global environment”* centering student success, public research, and innovative excellence. The UTSA Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership (CCEL) contributes to this vision through its mission *“to empower students, faculty and staff to serve society through community engaged scholarship and promotes civic literacy”* to prepare students to become socially responsible, prepared and civically engaged social agents, strengthening democracy. CCEL leads the RowdyVOTES Community of Practice on campus which brings together campus/community partners to learn and promote civic engagement and voter education, registration, and turnout.

According to the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement Report (NSLVE) only 12,371 students out of 21,917 voted in the 2016 presidential election yielding a 46% voting rate. However, in 2020 over 20,000 students turned out to vote in the 2020 presidential elections, increasing the voter turnout rate from 46% to 62%. This trend is demonstrating significant improvement in student voter turnout and an opportunity to continue to strengthen voter engagement throughout campus. Indeed, the pandemic has impacted engagement in general due to remote, hybrid modalities, yet outreach and engagement was adapted to meet students where they are using digital content.

In preparation for the 2024 presidential elections, CCEL is preparing to re-engage campus/community partners, expanding the newly formed RowdyVOTES Community of practice with the goal of building a cohesive and coordinated effort to activate democratic engagement starting in Spring of 2024.

Under the leadership of the CCEL Director, Maria Alejandro, Civic Leadership Program Specialist, Noelani Cubillos- Sanchez and supported by Program Coordinator, Lukas Valdes, the goal is to increase both the student registration from 84.8% to over 90% and voter turnout rate for voters at University of Texas at San Antonio from 62.4% to over 65% based on 2020 NSLVE report and promote courses with integrated civic learning outcomes aligning with the presidential elections. As well as host/co-host at least one student “platica” about presidential voting.

The planned activities outlined here will be carried out on the UTSA campus and in the San Antonio community starting Spring 2024 leading up to the presidential elections in November.

The following groups will be leading this work at University of Texas at San Antonio to accomplish goals and further institutionalize commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership
- Faculty and Staff campus partners
- Student organizations



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- Community Partners
- Student Affairs campus partners

### **The mission of the initiative is:**

To broaden and deepen civic learning, democratic engagement, and student voter participation on campus. foster a civic ethos on campus and surrounding community by bringing together a fluid community of practice around democratic engagement work toward institutionalizing democratic engagement into the curriculum and co- curriculum that persist regardless of election cycles by building stronger working partnerships and targeting first experience programs.

The University of Texas at San Antonio stands in a unique position to establish itself as an emergent leader committed to institutionalizing democratic engagement efforts. The newly renamed Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Learning (CCEL), formerly the “Center for Civic Engagement” is part of the Career Engaged Learning Department within Academic Affairs and seeks to prepare students for civic life and promote social responsibility beyond the academy alongside the career ready efforts.

CCEL will take a leadership role in development, coordination, and implementation of the RowdyVOTES civic action plan bringing campus and community partners together by applying the community of practice model and hosted on the community engagement platform Givepulse. A core group of students, faculty, community partners and staff will meet regularly to support and amplify democratic engagement efforts such as inviting first year students through entry courses in Political Science, for example and programs such as First Gen and ACE Scholars.

### **Leadership**

The RowdyVOTES 2024 Civic Action plan was drafted by Maria Alejandro, Director and Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, Civic Leadership Program Specialist for CCEL. Ms. Alejandro and Ms. Cubillos-Sanchez will have direct oversight over the plan and RowdyVOTES with the focus on increasing civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. A strong effort will be made to gather students, staff, faculty, and community members to construct a more participatory version of the action plan based on the Technology of Participation Action Plan (ToP) model to facilitate co-creation of shared ownership and collective impact design as it relates to specific activities.

### **Internal-Campus Partners Academic Affairs**

UTSA Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership; Maria Alejandro, Director, Noelani Cubillos-Sanchez, Civic Leadership Program Specialist, Lukas Valdes, Program Coordinator, along with student team will lead the RowdyVOTES efforts coordinating meetings, voter deputy registrar trainings, student/community outreach and engagement as described in this proposed action plan. It is important that the staff of CCEL can step into leading #RowdyVOTES efforts on behalf of CCEL at any point. This plan and the work behind it build an institutional framework that can provide continuity through organizational shifts by sustaining an active community of practice centered on building civic capacity and engagement.

Senior leadership such as President Taylor Eighmy is a strong supporter of voter engagement on campus and will promote voter participation on campus. Interim Vice Provost Heather Shipley and Associate Vice Provost Cie Gee also support CCEL’s mission to broaden civic participation and democratic engagement. The Department of Career Engaged Learning (CEL) where CCEL is



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housed also hosts the Office of Undergraduate Research, Health Professions, Institute of Law and Public Affairs, Najim Center and University Career Center where students from a wide-array of disciplines are served.

Student Success Centers housed within each college provide an opportunity for broad outreach. SSCs help promote events to students served and help expand outreach.

Faculty – CCEL has established working relationships with faculty from COEHD, Mexican American Studies, College of Health Community and Policy, UTSA Libraries, College of Liberal and Fine Arts and others. Efforts continue to develop working relationships across all colleges prioritizing according to NSLVE disciplines data. A working collaboration with political science professors is in development with an aim to align goals for encouraging civic engagement by creating a video for the introductory courses attended by all disciplines. The video will consist of programs offered by CCEL including RowdyVotes. CCEL Director will also encourage faculty to integrate, where appropriate, opportunities such as becoming a volunteer deputy registrar or poll worker or other community engaged experiential opportunity into coursework.

### **Student Affairs**

Representatives from the Multicultural Student Center for Equity and Justice such as Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Director of Leadership and Volunteer Services; Director of Student Activates will be invited to build on existing efforts to engage students. Each of these offices engages students and registered student organizations. Strengthening a partnership with Student Affairs will enhance the student experience by providing unique opportunities to become volunteer deputy registrars, work together to identify and address barriers to voting, and promote voter engagement before and during elections.

### **Registered Student Organizations**

Student Government Association, MOVE UTSA; Texas Rising UTSA chapter; NextGen America; and the NAACP chapter of UTSA are student organizations which have worked with CCEL to register voters, table and promote voter engagement, distribute voter guides. RSOs can greatly contribute to learning from their peers how to best meet students where they are as it relates to their civic action.

### **External-Community Partners**

CCEL will establish a point of contact with the Bexar County Elections office to gain insight on strengthening volunteer deputy registrar training, voter registration efforts, learn about specific changes to voting laws, and encouraging opportunities for students to be involved. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission will bolster these efforts via grant opportunities.

The following groups will be engaged in campus forums and as established leaders in voter engagement such as Ernest Martinez, chairperson of Cesar E. Chavez Legacy and Education Foundation; disABILITY SA; Southwest Voter Registration Education Project; SA2020, League of Women Voters of San Antonio; ALL IN-Democracy Challenge, City Council offices; Texas Secretary of State and the newly formed Youth Do Vote. The Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative of which CCEL is a member of will share and exchange resources and best practices across the local campuses and provide collective support in civic engagement opportunities.



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CCEL will continue to strengthen working relationships with national organizations such as ALL In Democracy, Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, Campus TakeOver, the Civic Holidays team, Alliance for Youth Organizing, Campus Election Engagement Project; When We All Vote, Voto Latino, and others.

**RowdyVOTES Community of Practice** is inclusive of:

Representation from different areas of campus, including student leadership; representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise; trusted leaders and organizations who support communities that are historically underrepresented in democracy; and leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into the work.

Presidential election debrief will bring involved and potentially new members to reflect and strategize. Monthly meetings will launch at start of semester followed by bi-monthly meetings as elections approach. Meeting will be held at various locations and various capacities (i.e., virtual/hybrid/in-person) to ensure maximum attendance at everyone's convenience. Outreach and engagement include meeting students where they are at. CCEL staff will present to first year students, attend various campus events such as orientation and welcoming events as well as coordinate presentations for classes and student organization meetings.

The community engagement platform GivePulse will host the community of practice named RowdyVOTES. Inviting the above mentioned students, staff, faculty and community organizations to sign up to be part of the community that will work together to promote democratic engagement on campus. Grouping the team on the online platform creates shared learnership, a touch base to find updated information on events, and offers an opportunity to survey the team on a variety of topics.

A succession plan will be developed to ensure the plan moves forward through staff transitions. In addition, succession will include asking the exiting members for their recommendation on how to keep their office/department engaged through staff transitions. The online RowdyVotes community of practice hosted on Givepulse supports succession as events, members and impact data will remain available. Key is to create shared leadership through an authentic community of practice and develop a framework that can transcend organizational changes on campus and in community.

### **Commitment**

UTSA and campus leadership demonstrate a commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement as reflected in the institution's values statement: *"UTSA is invested in teaching them to be civically engaged and active participants in civic discourse. We strive to provide students with the tools to express their beliefs with passion and conviction while putting just as much energy into listening and understanding alternate points of view."* The university's commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is also embedded within the strategic plan to serve *"as a prosperity engine graduating world-engaged civic leaders of tomorrow"* President Eighmy has signed the ALL IN Presidential Commitment and efforts will be made to engage Athletics and encourage the Coaches Pledge. University Communications created a shared RowdyVOTES webpage to host updated election information. President Eighmy consistently sends



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messages via social media and email to encourage students to exercise their right to vote. UTSA Office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership (CCEL) is committed to asking students what their barriers to voting are and co-design programming to meet students where they are at. CCEL also commits to setting the framework for engagement and programming inviting campus and community partners to work together to promote voter engagement on campus and in surrounding community.

Civic learning exists within the institutional culture as exemplified by campus partners such as Student Leadership and Volunteer Services and the Multicultural Student Center for Equity and Justice as well as faculty led coursework and programming within CCEL. Through committee work such as Hispanic Heritage, Black History, Civil Rights Marches and others are opportunities to create programming to promote civic literacy.

CCEL commits to hosting a voter education event as part of Hispanic Heritage Month in September to facilitate a platica on historical challenges faced by local civil rights leaders and energize voter registration building on those struggles.

CCEL will work with members of the Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative (SLIC) to encourage local universities to participate in the ALL IN Democracy Challenge and share resources and promote events.

On campus, we've seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- On campus polling place
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day
- NVRD Events
- Student led civic activities.

On campus, we've experienced:

- Walks / scooter rides to polls
- Town halls
- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues
- Paletas to the Polls

Pending is exploring how to integrate civic learning into the core-curriculum.

### **Landscape**

The following tables provide a brief overview of the landscape of the campus. This information is based on data collected from Fall 2023 when the total student enrollment was 34,864.



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### Enrollment Data:

Undergraduate	Graduate	Full Time	Part Time
86.00%	13.00%	23.00%	77.00%

In-State	Out-of-State	International Students	On-Campus Residents	Commuter
98.00%	2.00%	1.00%		

### Gender Demographics:

Men	Women	Non-Binary	Transgender
49.00%	51.00%	Not available	Not available

### Race/Ethnicity:

Hispanic/Latino	White	Black/African American	Asian	Two or More Races	International	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Only	American Indian or Alaska Native	Unknown or Not Reported
59.49%	19.56%	7.68%	5.57%	3.39%	2.70%	0.19%	0.12%	1.30%

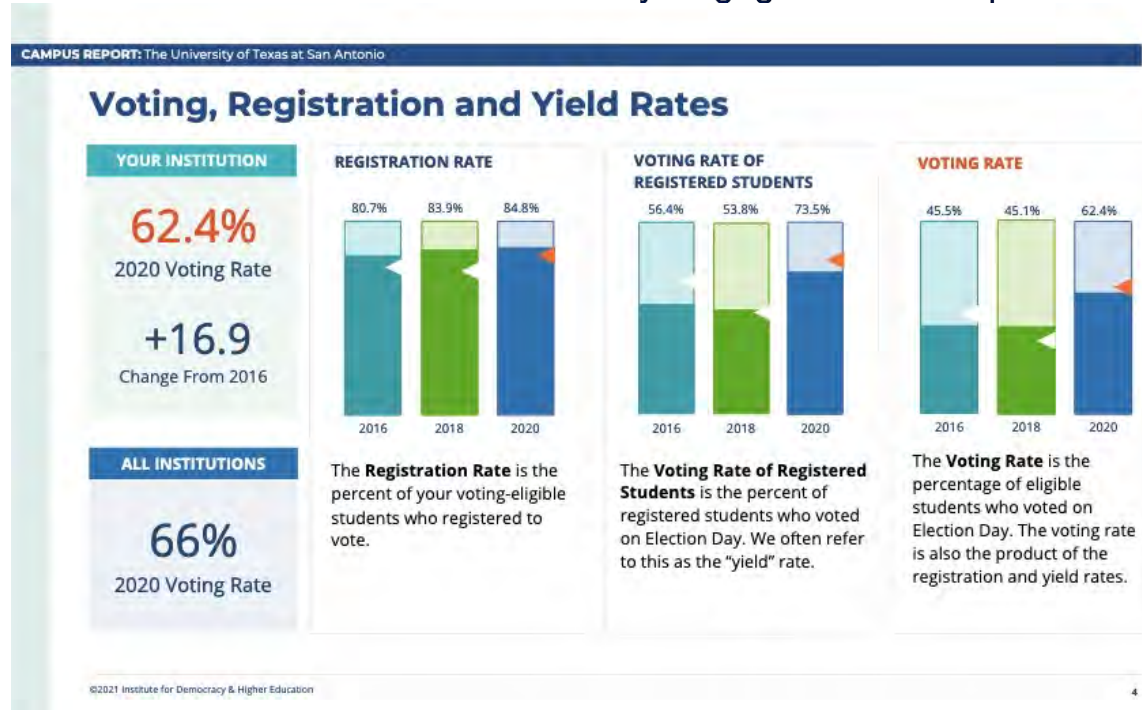
### Age:

18-21	22-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
17,392	7,997	4,171	2,783	978	407

Although UTSA has reached a voting rate of 62.4% up +16.9% from 2016, it is below the national average of 66% for all institutions in 2020.



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Forthcoming is an opportunity to work with a team to ensure civic engagement is part of the core curriculum. Internal barriers include limited funding to support programming events. In addition, Texas voting laws can create some confusion and may, at times discourage voter turnout. And organizational shifts have yielded new offices and staff changes that require partnership re-establishment.

Partnering with campus and community partners can help augment funding to expand programming and efforts are underway to secure funding and better serve students to emerge career and civic ready. Important is to identify ways to keep students up to date on voting laws and work toward strengthening campus relationships with offices that are important toward institutionalizing civic engagement across campus. It is important to consider a funding infrastructure to support the preparation of active, socially responsible, and democratically engaged members of society.

The office of Government Relations has since committed to support civic programming by inviting local elected officials to a voter education engagement event in Fall 2024 in preparation for the presidential election that will include campus, high school and community.

### National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

UTSA participates with the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) which provides data that guides the designing of strategies to target engagement and encourage voter turnout. NSLVE data for UTSA will include pending mid-term NSLVE data for 2022 and presidential election data for 2020 providing comparisons between two presidential elections and most recent midterm elections. Considering the 2020 presidential elections occurred during a pandemic lockdown, the 2022 mid-term election data may provide a better insight of the impact of in-person engagement post-pandemic. In 2020, the registration rate was 85%. In comparison to the data from the 2016 NSLVE report based on the presidential elections, this rate increased. In 2020, the voting rate was 62% and the voting rate among registered students was 73%. It is of concern this



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voting rate is lower than the national average.

Race and Ethnicity breakdown was not available for UTSA in 2020 but is now being reported via the university's Institutional Research and Analysis office. Efforts will be made to ensure the NSLVE includes this demographic data. However, according to the NSLVE 2020, ages 18 – 21 and 22-24 each had a voter turnout of 60%, where voter turnout for ages 25-29 was 57%. For students ages 30-39 voter turnout was at 63%, ages 40-49 were at 75% and students ages 50 and above led turnout at 85%. Significant is that the voting rate of the first two age groups of 18-21 and 22-24 increased 19% and 21% respectively compared to 12% for students of ages 25-29 and 8% for students 30-39.

Voting rate by education level slightly varies between 14% and 18% which means strategies will need to be designed to engage students across all levels with special attention to the first three age groups.

NSLVE data by field of study indicates that the highest voting rate is held by Public Administration and Social Service Professions, 79% followed by Education at 78%. A partnership with the Department of Political Science is underway to reach students enrolled in entry level courses comprised of all disciplines on the importance of registering to vote and finding voter education activities on campus.

CCEL will host this data on its website and provide a link to the Rowdy Votes university page and the Rowdy Votes Community of Practice on the UTSAEngaged (GivePulse) platform. In addition, a communication campaign will launch early Spring to reach faculty in the different fields to share their students' voting rates and invite support to increase their respective voting rates.

### **Goals**

Before setting the civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we considered the following information.

### **Challenges:**

We know the campus faces the following challenges internally when it comes to getting out the vote efforts and registering voters:

The voter engagement work on campus is siloed and can benefit from more intentional collaboration. There is a need for sustainable and consistent funding to plan programming and partnerships.

We also know the campus faces the following challenges externally when it comes to getting out the vote efforts and registering voters:

Texas state laws make it challenging to support student voter registration efforts. Extra effort is dedicated to ensuring that students are aware of ID requirements and absentee ballot specific instructions.

Students living in on-campus housing have access to receiving one mail drop. A long-term sustainable solution must be identified to ensure students have access to receiving voter registration cards and mail-in ballots.





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### **Opportunities:**

UTSA is a Hispanic Serving Institute with a public service/urban serving mission that can work to embed a civic ethos as part of preparing the socially responsible graduates.

The office of Civic and Community-Engaged Leadership has “building civic capacity” as part of its mission and has recently hired a fulltime Program Specialist focused on Civic Leadership that can dedicate more time to coordinating civic programming throughout campus along with Director and Program Coordinator. Faculty and campus leaders have expressed interest in promoting voter engagement and are positioned to implement civic programming in their areas. Several faculty members have already incorporated voter engagement and civic leadership into their courses and some have incorporated voter engagement into community engaged scholarship in the past. There are processes and opportunities in place for registering large percentages of students in partnership with campus and community partners.

Tabling, social media and engagement platforms are tools with which we communicate voting information to students. Givepulse has partnered with TurboVote in the past to send important date reminders. Under consideration is inviting students to sign up via the All In pledge to vote.

Voter engagement efforts on campus are nonpartisan and efforts are underway to implement a non-partisan pledge to create a focus on education and engagement.

There are working relationships with community partners who are invested in civic learning and democratic engagement and offer support seeking opportunities to work to promote student engagement.

UTSA Athletics has expressed interest in supporting voter engagement activities. The Track and Cross Country team joined CCEL in tabling and creating short videos on “Do’s and Don’t at the voting center to highlight ID requirements and polling station rules.

### **Goals to achieve over the next academic year:**

Create an opportunity for a participatory action plan during the spring 2024 semester to develop ideas for activities over the goals outlined below as an effort to build cohesion within RowdyVOTES CoP with campus partners, student organizations and community partners. A summer mid-term debrief will gather partners to identify challenges and strategize on how to address them and better coordinate voter engagement efforts on campus by targeting outreach to expand engagement and more effectively reach diverse groups.

Increase voter turnout rate for presidential elections at University of Texas at San Antonio from 62.4% (2020) to 65% in 2024.

Register 50% of the incoming students during orientation through programs such as First- Gen, ACE Scholars, Transfer Student and core curriculum courses. Attention will be applied to ensure equitable access to voter resources under the guidance of the Office of Disability, community partner disAbilitySA and students.

Identify courses where voter engagement can be integrated aligning civic learning outcomes



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Increase the overall student registration from 73.5% to over 75% by Fall 2024.

Host/co-host one student “platica” about voting and integrate a “platica” about voting with local civil rights leaders as part of Heritage Months.

Table with creative themes such as “DoNut forget to Register”, “Paletas to the Polls” “Ballots and Pan Dulce” to provide educational information and opportunities to learn from students.

We have also set the following goals that we would like to achieve over the next five years:

- Create a cohesive RowdyVOTES Community of Practice for long-term engagement
- Institutionalize voter registration into the admissions process for first-time/transfer students
- Achieve voter parity with students of all fields based on NSLVE data
- Institute a sustained civic ambassadorship program
- Seek to secure fellowship programs based on civically engaged experiential learning (i.e., Democracy Fellows through Campus Vote Project) for the Spring 2024 semester.

### Strategy

**To increase voter education, registration, and turnout and help foster an institutionalized civic ethos on campus where students are civically engaged and enthusiastic to participate in municipal, state and national elections.**

Existing action items to undertake in the **short term** (within the next year):

Meet with campus and community partners to build on the momentum and strengthen partnerships following the recently held Youth Voter Fest modeled as a community resource fair for college and high school students.

Promote voter engagement through voter registration drives; have staff deputized to register students; host regular voter registration opportunities, coordinate trainings for volunteer deputy voter registrars; host VDR capacity support, circulate election reminders via social media and the electronic campus digital signage.

Set up regular meetings with campus partners (faculty, program staff, student orgs) to engage and co-design strategies for voter education and engagement.

Invite President and Provost to share a video emphasizing the importance of civic engagement and goals for voter turnout.

### Short term action items

Set up meetings with Government Relations to plan fall event

Work with Dept of Pol Sci, ACE Scholars, First Experience, First Gen faculty and staff to coordinate classroom engagement and create opportunities for faculty to integrate civic learning outcomes into their coursework and update CCEL website with resources.

List opportunity for classroom engagement on RowdyVotes Community of Practice online site to



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provide updates, share events and engagement.

Revisit supporting mailing services for students living in on-campus residence halls so they can receive voter registration certificates and mail-in ballots at no cost to them

Build on Women's Track and Cross Country engagement to further engage Athletics and strongly encourage Coaches commitment signature.

Co-host a Democracy Dialogue with the newly formed UTSA Dialogue Institute, and the Dept of Political Science

Explore the opportunity to encourage students to participate in the Unity Challenge as part of building civic capacity skills.

### **Long term action items (beyond the next year):**

Facilitating voter registration drives and providing election reminders

Build cohesion and expand RowdyVOTES

Be inclusive by increasing engagement with undocumented students and noncitizens as well as the Inspire Greater Potential Community of Practice which includes students, staff and community members working in disability services.

Continue to host a Youth Voter Fest for high school and college students with campus and community partners.

### **Reporting**

This Action Plan will be shared internally when it is complete providing a copy to RowdyVOTES community of practice, campus administration, Deans and Chairs and others. Publish on new CCEL website, add a link on RowdyVotes university webpage and RowdyVotes Community of Practice community engagement platform. The NSLVE 2022 and this plan will be published on the All IN Democracy website.

CCEL team will produce an article in UTSA Today to invite engagement and modify article for faculty newsletter to encourage community engaged learning opportunities around voter education and engagement and invite VDRs to their classrooms to register students to vote.

This action plan will be shared externally when it is complete with:

Community members of RowdyVOTES

Service-Learning Intercollegiate Collaborative

SA2020

City Council officials

Community partners



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### Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation of the plan will include a focused conversation late Spring and in the summer to ensure goals and strategies are aligned and attainable. The focused conversation will include members of the community practice, campus partners, students, community partners and staff.

In addition, a survey will be launched early Spring to request information from students about barriers to voting via Givepulse and distribute the link widely to maximize engagement and collect information to better design strategies. Efforts will be made to partner with Student Government and publish in school newspaper as well as distribute through digital signage.

A re-maneuver of the action plan as outlined by feedback will take place to build best practices and address blind spots.

Host an in-person focused conversation with RowdyVOTES CoP and partners for the purpose of debriefing and reflective learning (collecting qualitative data) to celebrate wins and identify challenges; strategize on opportunities to better coordinate collective resources post-election. CCEL will also provide a survey online opportunity using Givepulse to survey participants unable to attend in-person debriefs.

Proposed approach to evaluate success include the following quantitative and qualitative data:

- The number of students engaged through activities.
- Number of presentations
- Number of registered voters (not exclusively students)
- Identifying goals achieved and not achieved and adjusting the short and long-term goals accordingly.
- Document what the barriers were to the proposed goals.
- Document agile re-maneuvering due to unforeseen circumstances
- Measure the success of any strategies such as targeting a particular discipline to see if the intervention caused an increase in voter turnout.

A final report will include the proposed action plan and any re-maneuvering/additions of action items along with evaluation data that will be updated once the 2024 NSLVE is completed. The action plan and report will serve as a reference to modify and apply to future civic engagement efforts around presidential elections and identify what strategies are applicable to midterm and local elections as part of continued engagement strategies. In addition, the final report will be published on the CCEL website and linked to the RowdyVotes university page and community of practice site.