



at WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

ACTION PLAN 2024

Executive Summary

Western Michigan University (WMU) is committed to fostering informed, responsible, and engaged Bronco voters through its dedicated initiative, WeVote. Supported by the University administration, WeVote brings students, faculty, and staff in a collaborative effort to enhance civic engagement across campus. This non-partisan, campus-wide endeavor aims to embed voting as a lifelong habit among students while institutionalizing the practice within the university's culture.

Aligned with the core mission of WeVote, which is to organize and advance civic learning and democratic engagement at WMU, this action plan centers on four primary objectives:

1. Voter Registration
2. Voter Education
3. Voter Turnout
4. Institutionalizing Civic Engagement at WMU

Designed to span until the November 2024 election, this action plan aspires to sustain its initiatives well beyond that timeframe. WeVote operates through two distinct yet interconnected entities: a committee comprising administrators, staff, faculty members, and student leaders. This committee provides guidance, oversees monitoring and evaluation, and ensures alignment with the initiative's mission. Complementing this, the Registered Student Organization (RSO) functions as the active implementer, driving the execution of various activities on the ground.

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Leadership

WeVote operates through two integrated arms: a diverse committee of administrators, staff, faculty, community representatives, city clerks, and student leaders providing guidance, oversight, and alignment with the initiative's mission. Complementing this, the Registered Student Organization (RSO) acts as the hands-on executor, driving diverse activities on the ground. This collaborative approach empowers WeVote to effectively foster civic engagement throughout Western Michigan University.

WeVote Committee

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Administrator		
Jeff Breneman	Vice President, Government Relations	jeff.breneman@wmich.edu
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Clerks		
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Dusty Farmer	Township Clerk, Oshtemo Township	dfarmer@oshtemo.org
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Lisa Mackie	Township Clerk, Kalamazoo Township	clerk@ktwp.org
Students		
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Natalie Craft	WeVote President	natalie.e.craft@wmich.edu
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WeVote RSO

Barry Olson and Cheng Kidd Sun serve as advisors for the WeVote RSO, guiding its activities, while Natalie Craft and Eleanor Young hold the positions of President and Vice President. Presently, the RSO is in the process of establishment, with plans to recruit students in early 2024. The implementation of a constitution is underway to facilitate smooth and consistent transitions within the organization's structure and operations. The RSO's leadership serve as the liaison between the committee, community members, and clerks.

Campus Community Leadership

At WMU, a divisional organizational structure comprises 10 vice presidents. The Government Relations, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Athletics Divisions hold prominent roles within the WeVote initiative, while the

remaining vice presidents offer vital support roles. Specifically, Jeff Breneman, the Vice President of Government Relations, and Barry Olson, the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, assume pivotal roles in approving and signing off on crucial documents for the initiative.

Commitment

Western Michigan University has taken clear and notable steps to embrace democratic engagement. A significant demonstration of this commitment came from President Dr. Montgomery, who actively advocated for democratic participation in a video broadcasted during a fall 2018 football game, marking a visible engagement with the cause.

Moreover, WMU's commitment extended beyond this singular event. The establishment of the wmich.edu/vote top-level domain website, Dr. Montgomery's presence at a WeVote committee meeting, and the visible involvement of senior staff showcased a concerted effort to promote democratic involvement.

President Montgomery's endorsement of the All In's Presidential Commitment and the commitment of all D1 Athletes and Coaches to MACVotes further underscored the university's dedication to fostering civic engagement across various levels of its community.

Additionally, WMU implemented the WMU Essential Studies curriculum, which serves as a foundational requirement for all undergraduates. This curriculum aims to equip students with the skills needed for active participation in societal change, emphasizing qualities like perseverance and readiness for the future. Notably, the 'Inquiry and Engagement' component within Level 1 of this curriculum has played a pivotal role in encouraging civic involvement among students.

Looking ahead, as WMU finalizes its strategic plan, community building stands as a significant strategic goal. WeVote is actively advocating to integrate voter engagement as an integral part of this strategic vision. This ongoing effort emphasizes the university's sustained commitment to nurturing an engaged and participatory community.

Landscape

As of Fall 2023, Western Michigan University comprises a student body of 17,559 individuals, encompassing 13,874 undergraduates and 3,685

graduate students. A parallel comparison within the city of Kalamazoo reveals a registered voter count of 54,864, as per the city's data as of May 2, 2023.

The voter turnout in Kalamazoo exemplifies varying levels of engagement during recent elections. During the special election of May 2023, voter participation stood at a modest 10.5% among residents, reflecting a notably lower engagement. However, this figure sharply contrasts with the significantly higher turnout of 43.4% observed during the November 2022 midterm elections, aligning more closely with anticipated participation rates during such major electoral events.

Presently, the focus on voter engagement leans heavily toward top-down leadership, with administrators taking the reins, while student involvement remains limited. While there is notable enthusiasm among staff, faculty, and administrators, the student engagement in these efforts falls short due to their demanding schedules, resulting in limited capacity. Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated full-time role and consistent funding adds to the challenge.

Recognizing this disparity, the establishment of the WeVote Registered Student Organization (RSO) aims to address this gap by actively recruiting more students. This initiative intends to shift towards a bottom-up approach, empowering passionate student leaders to take charge of this crucial endeavor. By cultivating a more inclusive and student-driven strategy, the goal is to bolster engagement and create a more robust framework for sustained involvement in voter initiatives.

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Goals

Goal 1: Increase Voter Registration

- Objective 1: Host Voter Registration Drive
 - To enhance voter registration among the student body, the strategy involves organizing targeted drives in high-traffic zones across the campus. Key locations identified for these drives include the W Plaza, New Student Center, Student Recreation Center, Waldo Library, and Valley Dining Center. These areas are strategically chosen to maximize visibility and accessibility, facilitating the registration process for interested students.
- Objective 2: Engage with stakeholders during events

- Another vital aspect of the initiative involves active engagement with stakeholders throughout various campus events. This approach aims to create meaningful interactions and discussions regarding voter registration. By integrating this objective into existing events, the initiative seeks to capitalize on opportunities to inform, motivate, and register individuals within the university community.
- Objective 3: Host National Voter Registration Day Event
 - An essential milestone in the campaign involves hosting a dedicated event on National Voter Registration Day. This event serves as a pivotal platform to launch a comprehensive registration drive. Alongside the launch, the initiative plans to promote candidate forums, providing a forum for dialogue and awareness. Additionally, attendees will be presented with QR codes and accessible links to streamline the voter registration process, encouraging and facilitating immediate action towards registration.

Goal 2: Enhance Voter Education

- Objective 1: Raise awareness through comprehensive, accessible, and practical voter education materials.
 - The initiative aims to disseminate voter education materials effectively through both physical and digital platforms. Physical materials such as flyers will be strategically distributed in high-traffic areas including dorms, the Valley Dining Center, and the New Student Center. Additionally, designated walls for voter education in locations like Sangren, the New Student Center, and Waldo Library will serve as informative hubs. Leveraging public endorsements from esteemed figures like President Montgomery, Faculty Senate President, Student Body President, and potentially the Kalamazoo mayor, the campaign seeks to enhance credibility and reach. On digital platforms, a multi-pronged approach will be employed, utilizing various social media channels (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok) for repeated messaging and targeted ads. Furthermore, the WeVote website will serve as a comprehensive repository of information, ensuring easy access to all pertinent details.
- Objective 2: Host workshops, presentations, information sessions

- The initiative plans to conduct workshops, presentations, and information sessions to deepen voter education efforts. Collaborating with local election officials will offer insights into the electoral process, providing valuable knowledge to interested students. Additionally, organizing candidate forums will provide a platform for dialogue, enabling students to engage directly with candidates, fostering informed decision-making.
- Objective 3: Host Candidate Forums and Dialogue
 - Central to the voter education campaign is the hosting of candidate forums and dialogues. These forums will facilitate open discussions between candidates and the student body, fostering a deeper understanding of various electoral issues. Through these interactive sessions, students will gain valuable insights into candidates' perspectives, contributing to a more informed and engaged electorate.

Goal 3: Increase Voter Turnout

- Objective 1: Commitment - incentives
 - Encouraging commitment to voting involves incentivizing participation through various means. Initiatives like distributing pledge buttons, sending email reminders, and offering "I Voted" buttons or digital filters serve to reinforce the commitment to voting among students. Additionally, providing food at events aimed at voter engagement can act as a further incentive, creating a more engaging and welcoming atmosphere.
- Objective 2: Raise awareness on voting plan
 - The campaign intends to raise awareness about voting processes and options available to students. Informative campaigns will focus on elucidating absentee ballot procedures, in-person voting methods, and the use of resources like TurboVote. Emphasis will also be placed on promoting early voting, highlighting the availability of polls for nine days preceding each election. This information will be disseminated through a mix of social media campaigns and physical materials to ensure widespread awareness.
- Objective 3: Reduce barriers to voting
 - Efforts to reduce barriers to voting involve advocating for measures that make voting more accessible. Encouraging

professors to adopt flexible scheduling to accommodate voting commitments for students is a key step. Engagement with bodies like the faculty senate and academic forum will aid in advocating for such accommodations. Additionally, the initiative aims to reimburse mail-in ballot costs, alleviating financial barriers and encouraging greater participation among students who opt for this voting method. These measures collectively aim to eliminate obstacles and make voting a more feasible and convenient process for all eligible students.

Strategy

Strategy 1: Forge Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement

- Collaborate with Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force:
 - Explore partnership opportunities with the Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force in Michigan to expand voter engagement efforts beyond the university.
- Engage Key Stakeholders:
 - Form alliances with Registered Student Organizations (RSOs), Faculty Senate, and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to leverage diverse resources and perspectives in promoting active civic engagement within the university community.

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Strategy 2: Identifying Diverse Champions

- The strategy involves actively seeking and enlisting advocates, known as “WeVote Champions,” who will fervently support and drive voter engagement and the WeVote initiatives within WMU. These champions represent a broad spectrum of individuals, including administrators, staff members, faculty, and students, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The goal is to intentionally diversify this group of advocates, seeking representation from varied vice presidential divisions. By deliberately sourcing champions from diverse backgrounds and roles spanning the university's administrative and academic landscape, the strategy aims to create a network of advocates capable of fostering widespread support and participation in voter engagement and the WeVote program throughout the entire campus community.

Strategy 3: Integrated Communication and Marketing

- To create a strong marketing presence promoting voter engagement, the strategy involves a comprehensive approach utilizing university-wide communication channels. This includes collaborating with high-level university administrators to send campus-wide emails, leveraging their authority to highlight key deadlines and upcoming elections directly to students.
- Additionally, the strategy incorporates the use of university platforms like e-learning announcements, ensuring visibility within spaces regularly accessed by students for their coursework. Moreover, strategic placement within university publications such as 'The Legacy' newsletter and 'The Stampede' amplifies the messaging, reaching a broad audience across multiple communication mediums. This integrated approach aims to maximize the dissemination of information, enhancing awareness and encouraging active participation in elections among the university community.

NSLVE & Reporting

Western Michigan University has a history of publicly sharing the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) findings through WMU News, with intentions to consistently provide ongoing updates in the future.

Moreover, the 2018 NSLVE report is readily accessible for public download on the primary WeVote website. This report serves as a valuable resource for the WeVote Committee, assisting in the execution of strategic action items derived from the insights and data presented within the report.

Evaluation

WeVote will conduct a thorough assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of its voter engagement initiatives. This evaluation includes tracking metrics such as the number of voter registrations collected at events, attendance records, and voting participation rates through NSLVE. The goal is to refine strategies based on this data, continuously improving WeVote's approach for

future elections. This comprehensive assessment aims to enhance WeVote's impact and adapt strategies to maximize engagement among students.

