

William & Mary Voter Engagement Committee Action Plan for 2024-25

I. Executive Summary

This plan is intended for the 2024-25 academic year, but also outlines some long-term goals for the coalition – the Voter Engagement Committee, working with the support Office of Civic & Community Engagement a branch/department of the Division of Student Affairs. This plan was developed by the student cohort of the committee with the advisement of Richard Thompson/Committee Advisor and collaborations with Amber Wilt, Campus Vote Project/Virginia State Coordinator

The following groups will be leading this work at William & Mary (W&M) in order to accomplish our goals and further institutionalize our commitment to civic learning, democratic engagement, and youth participation in elections:

- Undergraduate students
 - Saylor Barnes – Voter Engagement Work-Study Student assigned to Rich Thompson, Associate Director for Civic & Community Engagement/Student Affairs and Advisor of William & Mary’s Voter Engagement Committee
 - Sam Houghton – undergraduate student fellow with the Campus Vote Project
 - Ryan Taylor - undergraduate student fellow with the Campus Vote Project
 - Nikita Chellani – undergraduate at large member
 - Megan Kinney - undergraduate at large member
- Graduate student(s)
 - Marley Fishburn/Rising Graduate student/member of the William & Mary Student Assembly/Government for 2024-25 (**Note:** Marley is also a 2023 Student ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll Recipient)
- Faculty
 - Dr. John McGlennon, Professor William & Mary Government Department
- President’s Office
 - Michael Fox, Sr. Assistant to the President and Secretary to the Board of Visitors
 - Note: Co-Advises Rich Thompson
- Student Affairs Staff
 - Richard Thompson, Associate Director/Civic & Community Engagement (**Note:** Richard Thompson is 35+ year Student Affairs professional with previous backgrounds in Residence Life, Student Union/Activities Administration, Campus Recreation, First Year Experience/Orientation, and Student Club/Government Associations. Consequently, he is tapped into those areas/staffs at William & Mary for the promotion and assistance of Voter Engagement Activities/Programs)
 - Melody Porter, Director/Civic & Community Engagement

- **Note:** Co-Advises Richard Thompson and he reports to her position in the Division of Student Affairs
- External nonpartisan civic engagement organizations affiliations & collaborations:
 - Amber Wilt - The Campus Vote Project/Virginia State Coordinator
 - Tina Reitzel, Director of Elections & Haley Snapp, Deputy Registrar for The City of Williamsburg's Registrar's Office
 - Maryann Simpson, Voter Services - Williamsburg Chapter of the League of Women Voters
 - The All-In Democracy Challenge
 - NSLV

The mission of our initiative:

- Aiming to enhance civic engagement among students by sharing information to prepare students for an active and informed role in democracy.
 - Promotion of Voter Registration, Voter Information, and Recruitment of potential Election Officers/Poll Worker Campaigns/Events
 - Coordination of New Student Registration w/ Student Transition Engagement Programs/Orientation Programs
 - Civic & Community Engagement's Community & Volunteer Fair (**Note:** During First Week of Fall Classes)
 - National Voter Registration Day Celebration Event
 - Additional Voter Registration, Voter Information, and Recruitment of potential Election Officers/Poll Worker Campaigns/Events to be held at the following locations to target special interest groups on William & Mary's campus and support any deficiencies in voter registration/turnout as indicated in our 2020 NSLV report.
 - Athletic Department Center/Student Athletes
 - School of Education
 - School of Business
 - School of Law
 - William & Mary's Library
 - William & Mary's Student Union/Student Center
- Focusing specifically on voter education programs for students to gain the necessary information to become civically engaged. Aiming to collaborate with different campus organizations to expand the scope and reach of our work.
 - Proposed Programs for Consideration (Fall & Spring Semesters)
 - The Value of Registering to Vote by Oct. 15 to Avoid Provisional Vote Status and Ease the Voting Process of Election Day.
 - The Impacts of Registering to Vote Locally
 - National Vote Early Day

- Election Night Watch Party?
- What is Rank Choice Voting?

II. Leadership

Richard Thompson, Associate Director of Civic & Community Engagement will continue to advise the committee to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. If for some reason, he is unable to continue as the advisor to the committee, Melody Porter, Director of Civic & Community Engagement/Student Affairs will appoint another member of her staff to assume his duties as advisor. Here is the committee's proposed breakdown of responsibilities:

- Richard Thompson, Civic & Community Engagement – Advisor of the Voter Engagement Committee
 - Dr. John McGlennon, Government Department Professor – Co-Advisor of Education Programs
 - Tina Reitzel, Director of Elections & Haley Snapp, Deputy Registrar for City of Williamsburg and James City County Registrars – Advisors/Collaborations for Voter Information, and Recruitment of potential Election Officers/Poll Worker Campaigns/Events
 - Maryann Simpson, Voter Services Williamsburg League of Women Voters – providing trained volunteers to assist with Voter Registration at all Planned campaigns/events.
 - Undergraduate Democracy Fellows: Sam Houghton & Ryan Taylor – Co-Developers of Action Plan, Events, Promotions/Marketing/Videography/Social Media
 - Work Study Student: Saylor Barnes – co-producing meeting agendas, taking meeting minutes, and assisting Rich Thompson with grant funding applications, marketing plans, and updating our website.
 - Graduate Student/Democracy Fellow: Marley Fishburn – Community Liaison Work with the Student Assembly/Student Government, Social Media, and Info Graph Desings
 - The First Gentlemen of the College - Bruce Jacobson – Special Events (Note: Yet to be confirmed or determined)
 - Undergraduate At Large Members – Event Promotions/Tabling and Outreach to William & Mary Student Organizations.

Succession Planning

The William & Mary Voter Engagement Committee provides information on how members of the William & Mary Community (Students and Faculty/Staff) can get involved with the Voter Engagement Committee at sponsored events and traditionally during the Spring Semester at organized information sessions. Richard Thompson, Associate Director for Civic & Community

Engagement/Student Affairs works closely with Amber Wilt - The Campus Vote Project/Virginia State Coordinator and William & Mary's Department of Financial Aid to ensure that funded student fellow and approved work student positions are filled each academic year. As stated previously, if for some reason Richard Thompson is unable to advise the William & Mary Voter Engagement Committee, Melody Porter – Director for Civic & Community Engagement/Student Affairs will appoint a replacement from her staff.

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Leaders across campus who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into our work.
- However, although this coalition of Democracy Fellows has gender/sex diversity, we are hoping to diversify with more racial/ethnic groups. We will elaborate more on this in the Strategy section.
- We plan to work with different campus organizations on our voter education events, such as the athletic department, cultural groups such as Latin American Students Union (LASU), Chinese Students Organization (CSO), Black Students Organization (BSO), etc, Greek Life, political groups such as NAACP, Young Independents, and interest groups such as Sunrise (climate change), Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), and WMFIRE (immigrant rights).

Our group **continues/plans** to meet bi-weekly in person at the Student Union/Center for up to 1 hour.

We intend to continue our partnership with the following organizations to support our efforts on campus:

- Campus Vote Project
- All in Democracy Challenge
- **City of Williamsburg Registrar's Office**
- **NSLV**
- **The League of Women Voter's Williamsburg Chapter**

III. **Commitment**

As stated in their mission statements, our institution and campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement.

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in their strategic plan, stating their goals to elevate civic engagement and service for the 21st century, double down on W&M's abiding commitment to evidence-based argument discovery as a public

good, rekindle and model civil discourse, convening disparate views to advance democratic values, promote community-engaged teaching, and research and learning. Furthermore, the administration has stated its commitment to “studying, teaching and illuminating the rights and obligations of 21st-century citizenship” in its Vision 2026 Democracy Initiative. However, there are no required courses that involve civic participation.

Moving forward, we’d hope to work towards institutionalizing voter engagement programs for all students by incorporating voter education into the academic curriculum. We’d also like to focus on reaching marginalized groups, aiming our programs and outreach efforts to reach all student groups.

On campus, we’ve seen:

- Voter education resources
- Political clubs and student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voter registration and voting.
- Voter registration tables from various student organizations
- Signage promoting Election Day
- High levels of Voter Registration and Voter Turnout since 2019

On campus, we’ve experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers
- Registering to vote
- Election Day is considered Civic Holiday events/Classes and Work is Cancelled on Election Day (**Note:** Election Day is Now Consider an Official William & Mary Holiday for students and non-essential personnel)
- Deliberative dialogues
- Support from the President and or the Provost by sending out campus-wide emails encouraging the William & Mary to register to vote and vote.
- Campus Vote Project support
- Support from the office of Civic & Community Engagement/Student Affairs
- Faculty support from the government department
- Support from the Student Assembly
- Awards/Recognition/Positive Stories Written About our Success.
 - University News & Media
 - Civic & Community Engagement/Student Affairs Newsletters & Social Media Post
 - Richard Thompson, Advisor of the Voter Engagement Committee successfully nominated Marley Fishburn/2023 and Sophie Kim/2024 to be recognized as Student ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll Recipient.

- These Honorees had publicity/social media post, and stories written about them from William & Mary Media & Student Affairs

IV. Landscape

Civic learning and democratic engagement are not currently present in the curriculum across all majors/fields of study. The Government, Public Policy, and IR departments provide courses related to these topics, and the office of Civic & Community Engagement (CCE) provides Community Discussions in Civic Engagement, but most other departments do not teach civic engagement.

There are several campus groups that focus on civic engagement and politics, such as Student Assembly, Young Democrats, and Young Independents. However, these groups, especially partisan groups such as Young Democrats and Young Independents, have a reputation on campus for not being as engaged as they could be. Overall, the student body is heavily left leaning.

We also have some internal barriers, such as lack of staff support beyond that provided by the office of Civic & Community Engagement/**Student Affairs**, low level of student interest beyond the aforementioned student committee, and limited collaboration opportunities. In addition, external barriers such as lower than desired levels of voter education shared with incoming freshmen, coupled with the increasing apathy we have noticed about voting and elections hinders student voting.

However, the President and Provost support us by distributing election and voting information via email to students and they also send out campus wide announcements to promote Voter Engagement. This coalition also has ample institutional funding and **has filled a work-study position.** Virginia's absentee voting and early voting options also allow for more voting accessibility.

While William and Mary students have a high propensity to cast provisional ballots, student life (ex. high academic expectations/studying & high level of commitments in extracurriculars) can often restrict their time and ability to register before the registration deadline. This result can be a stressor on the registrar's office due to high voter registration levels on election day, and we will continue discussions with them to mitigate this.

Lastly, based on the data from our most current/2020 NSLV report we have developed/scheduled additional/extra voter registration & information sessions that target our student athletes and business majors which demonstrated a slightly lower participation rates. We hope to accomplish this by providing these additional options specifically at our Student Athletes trainings

centers/complexes and at our School of Business facility. **Note:** Based on our latest/2020 NSLV report William & Mary has some of the highest voter registration and voter turnout rates in the state of Virginia.

V. **Goals**

Before setting our civic learning and democratic engagement goals on campus, we took the following information into consideration.

Our campus faces the following challenges internally:

- We have had trouble engaging student leaders from other clubs/organizations to promote our initiative.
- W&M has a high historical culture for voter engagement. Consequently, there is some apathy towards implementing additional voter engagement programming.

Our campus faces the following challenges externally:

- The political views of the student body do not generally align with our institution's surrounding communities.

With that said, our campus has the following strengths when we approach our voter engagement work:

- Our institution's mission statement and values mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have secured institutional funding to help us implement voter engagement programming.
- We have processes in place for registering large percentages of our students.
- We have ways in which we communicate voting information to our students.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.

With this in mind, we have set some short-term goals we would like to achieve over the next two academic years:

- Encourage at least 10% of out of state students to transfer their voting address to Virginia (Williamsburg or James City County).
- Maintain a voter registration rate of 70% or higher.
- Have at least 70% of all new students registered to vote by October 1, 2024.

We have also set some long-term goals we would like to achieve over the next 2-3 years:

- Endeavor to recruit more people of color into the Voter Engagement Committee.

- Establish working relationships with student organizations on campus, ideally aiming for connections with cultural organizations before we turn to more partisan/special interest groups.

VI. **Strategy**

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term**:

- Civic & Community Engagement Annual Community Resource and Volunteer Fair
- Sharing voter education events, information, and election information to Faculty/Staff and Student listservs
- Tabling on National Voter Registration Day
- Collaborations with the City of Williamsburg and James City County Registrars
- Collaborations with the League of Women Voters/Williamsburg Chapter
- Social media to promote voter education events and share election and voting information.
- As stated previously we plan to expand our Voter Registration, Voter Information, and Recruitment of potential Election Officers/Poll Worker Campaigns/Events to be held at the following locations to target special interest groups on William & Mary's campus to support any deficiencies in voter registration/turnout as indicated in our 2020 NSLV report.
 - Athletic Department Center/Student Athletes
 - School of Education
 - School of Business
 - School of Law
 - William & Mary's Library
 - William & Mary's Student Union/Student Center
- Promotions/giveaways to promote Voter Awareness Events (ex: Voter Engagement t-shirts, stickers, etc.)
- Collaborations with Student Assembly to execute programs on the importance of local government and voting.

These are tactics that we **plan to do** in the **short term**:

- Bolster W&M Voter Engagement Committee and expand its reach on campus and in the community through frequent and identifiable social media outreach and tabling. We plan to increase our outreach primarily through Instagram, we hope to reach 400 followers by September 2024.
- Continue to develop & refine more "How To" voter engagement videos.

These are tactics that we **hope to do** in the **short term**:

- Collaborate with more politically affiliated student organizations on campus and encourage them to cross promote non-partisan voter engagement efforts by providing election resources and materials to distribute to members.
- Work with more faculty members of various departments, especially math, if possible, on our voter engagement programs to target student populations that typically do not vote.
- Survey students on where they are registered to vote - collect data on how many students vote locally.
- Work with Residence Life and Student Transition Engagement to provide voting and election information to incoming freshmen during Orientation in August.
- Offer additional Voter Registration days at W&M Athletics Complex, School of Business, and Math/Science Centers in partnership with the League of Women Voters on a monthly basis leading up to the 2024 election.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term**:

- Updating our website with all pertinent voter engagement information for each election cycle.
- Post our NSLVE report on our voter engagement website.
- Continue to heavily promote voter registration on our campus via these outlets:
 - The Civic & Community Engagement Annual Community Resource and Volunteer Fair
 - Faculty/Staff and Student listservs
- Voter registration and engagement tabling with nonpartisan information and resources
- National Voter Registration Day tabling
- Collaborations with the City of Williamsburg and James City County Registrars
- Collaborations with the League of Women Voters Williamsburg Chapter
- Use of social media, primarily Instagram, to promote voter education events and share election and voting information.
- Tabling prior to each election day to provide key information on when/where to vote if living on campus.
- We plan to expand our Voter Registration, Voter Information, and Recruitment of potential Election Officers/Poll Worker Campaigns/Events to be held at the following locations to target special interest groups on William & Mary's campus to support any deficiencies in voter registration/turnout as indicated in our 2020 NSLV report.
 - Athletic Department Center/Student Athletes
 - School of Education
 - School of Business
 - School of Law
 - William & Mary's Library

- **William & Mary's Student Union/Student Center**

These are tactics that we **hope to do** for the **long term**:

- Collaborations with a student cultural, political, and interest organizations on campus
- Work with the Williamsburg Registrar to collect data on both in-state and out-of-state student registration.
- Develop universal voter registration and engagement information to be promoted in academic listservs.

VII. NSLVE

Our campus is still awaiting the release of our National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) data from 2022. We are hoping to maintain the 92% student registration rate from 2020. We are also hoping to maintain the 82.4% student voting rate from 2020.

W&M has a strong tradition of Voter Engagement. For the 2020 cycle W&M was recognized for not only being a Voter Friendly University but was also recognized as a Platinum Level University. William & Mary was the only Platinum Award winning 4-year state university in VA and tied for 1st for the highest level of voter registration in the state.

In 2020, math majors were our least-engaged group. We are hoping to build on our increases in voting rates amongst Asian, black, and Hispanic students, who all saw a 19% increase from 2018 to 2020.

We intend address some deficiencies by providing additional voter registration and information sessions at facilities on campus where Asian, African American, and Hispanic students tend to have classes or participate in extra-curricular activities.

VIII. Reporting and Evaluation

We plan to share this action plan internally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Email to members of our campus coalition
- Email to campus administration (Student Affairs, President and Provost Offices)
- Share our NSLVE report on our website and Instagram.

We plan to share this action plan externally when it is complete by taking the following actions:

- Share with community/election officials, the Director of Civic & Community Engagement, and the liaison with the Campus Vote Project

- Share with the League of Women Voters/Williamsburg Chapter
- We will continue to explore new opportunities to share our goals and engage with more student-centered offices on W&M's campus.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping as a coalition to debrief and reflect.
- Meeting with student-centered offices and discussing components that are relevant to that partnership to improve and expand upon our collaboration.
- Receiving recommendations from the Director and Associate Director of Civic & Community Engagement.
- Receiving feedback from the League of Women Voters Williamsburg Chapter

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year by year
- Posting our NSLVE data to our voter engagement website
- Revisiting our goals as a coalition on a semesterly basis, identifying goals achieved and not achieved, and adjusting our short- and long-term goals accordingly.
- Creating voter turnout goals by race/ethnicity and field of study and evaluating accordingly
- Focusing DEI efforts to targeted groups with low voter turnout, then evaluating turnout rates after these efforts.
- Surveying students who attend our programs/events/forums to improve in the future.
- Surveying students over the summer to target programs, groups, and issues of importance for the following year.
- Receiving reviews from the Director of Community Engagement and the liaison with the Campus Vote Project