



# William & Mary Democratic Engagement Action Plan: 2022-23 Academic Year

*This plan was created using the Votes & Ballots Action Planning Form. We highly recommend editing and expanding upon this draft before submitting for review.*

*Throughout this document, we mention the Strengthening American Democracy Guide as a resource for your review. We encourage you to turn to that resource for guidance and support as you complete your action plan!*

## I. Executive Summary

This action plan was developed by Richard Thompson, Associate Director, Office of Community Engagement to communicate our strategy for increasing both the registration and turnout rates of voters at William & Mary. The planned activities outlined here will be carried out over 2022-23 Academic Year, on and around our campus in Williamsburg, Virginia. This plan is intended for the 2022-23 academic year specifically, but also outlines some of our long-term goals for the coalition. Creating this action plan allows us to state and work towards our goals and measure our progress tangibly.

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

- Undergraduate Students
- Faculty
- Student Affairs Staff
- External Nonpartisan Civic Engagement Organizations

The mission of our initiative is:

- Voter Engagement aims to enhance William & Mary's mission of civic engagement among students by sharing information to build capacity, knowledge, skills, and values that prepare students for an active and informed role in democracy.

- We focus specifically on voter education programs for students to gain the necessary information to become civically engaged. We're also aiming to collaborate with different campus organizations and individuals to expand the scope and reach of our work, which will allow us to plan and execute consistent, quality programs.

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Executive Summary* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

## II. Leadership

Richard Thompson will be overseeing our work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. They will be supported in this work by:

- Dr. John McGlennon - Government and Public Policy Departments
- Madeline Doane - Campus Vote Project
- City of Williamsburg & James City County Registrars
- Williamsburg League of Women Voters
- Jisu/Sophie Kim - Undergraduate Government Major/Campus Vote Project Fellow
- Maddy Meekins- Undergraduate Government Major/Programming Director
- Ellie Wess- Undergraduate Finance Major/Outreach Director
- Marley Fishburn - Undergraduate Public Policy Major/Social Media Director

This coalition is diverse and inclusive of:

- Representation from different perspectives and areas of expertise, Leaders who can help with outreach and power building by bringing more people across campus into our work
- However, we currently do not have representative leadership from all racial/ethnic groups, majors/fields of study, and interest groups. Our coalition is currently composed of all female members with little diversity, we are hoping to diversify with more genders and racial/ethnic groups. We plan to bring in more students/faculty members to work with us and ensure that our coalition represents the demographics of the W&M community and greater Williamsburg area. We will elaborate on these plans in the Strategy section.
- We also hope to work with different campus organizations on our voter education events, such as the athletic department, cultural groups such as Latin American Student Association, Chinese Student Association, Black Student Association, etc, Greek Life, political groups such as NAACP, and interest groups such as Sunrise (environmental/sustainability), Student Environmental Action Coalition, WMFIRE (immigrant rights).

Our group plans to meet weekly in person at the William & Mary Student Center or via zoom for up to 1 hour.

In the event that our leadership leaves campus or is no longer involved in this work, we have a succession plan in place. If Rich Thompson changes roles or leaves William & Mary. Another staff member from the Office of Community Engagement would be identified to assume the role as Advisor of the Voter Engagement Action Committee.

We are also partnering with the following organizations from the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition to support our efforts on campus:

- Campus Vote Project
- All in Democracy Challenge

**How can you improve this section?** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Leadership Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

### III. Commitment

Our institution and our campus leadership demonstrate commitment to improving civic learning and democratic engagement. As stated in our mission statement, **Vision** - William & Mary transcends the boundaries between research and teaching, teaching, and learning, learning and living. People come to William & Mary wanting to understand and change the world – and together we do. **Mission** - A preeminent, public research university, grounded in the liberal arts and sciences since 1693, William & Mary is a vibrant and inclusive community. Through close mentoring and collaboration, we inspire lifelong learning, generate new knowledge, and expand understanding. We cultivate creative thinkers, principled leaders, and compassionate global citizens equipped for lives of meaning and distinction. William & Mary conveys great minds and hearts to meet the most pressing needs of our time. William & Mary is a community that fosters deep human connection. We reflect on the lessons of history to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We engage diverse perspectives and seek wisdom in bridging differences. Together, we are unceasing in our efforts to make a meaningful difference in our communities, the state, the nation, and the world. We also see this same commitment reflected in our institution's values. They state, "W&M recognized for its commitment to civic learning, engagement" -

<https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2013/william--mary-recognized-for-its-commitment-to-civic-learning1.php>

W&M launches Democracy Initiative to promote civic engagement, civil discourse -

<https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2021/wm-launches-democracy-initiative-to-promote-civic-engagement,-civil-discourse.php>

In addition, our campus has mentioned civic learning and democratic engagement in their strategic plan, stating elevate civic engagement and service for the 21st century, double down on W&M's abiding commitment to evidence-based argument and 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. Moving forward, we'd like to work towards institutionalizing voter engagement programs for all students. 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 or student organizations
- Campus leaders promoting voting
- Voter registration tables
- Signage promoting Election Day

On campus, we've experienced:

- Voting in student body elections
- Political speakers

- Registering to vote
- Civic Holiday events (such as National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day)
- Deliberative dialogues
- Support from President and the Provost
- Campus Vote Project Support
- Office of Community Engagement Support
- Faculty support from the Government Department

We can point to the above institutional commitments to support our work.

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Commitment Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

## IV. Landscape

Civic learning and democratic engagement are not currently present in the curriculum across all majors and fields of study. Generally, the Government, Public Policy, International Relations departments have courses related to these topics, and the Office of Community Engagement provides Community Discussions in Civic Engagement, but many 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, Young Republicans, Young Independents, Branch Out alternative breaks, College Socialists, etc.

We also have several internal barriers, such as limited institutional funding, lack of staff support (beyond Rich Thompson, Melody Porter from the Office of Community Engagement, and Dr. McGlennon from the Government Department), low level of student interest beyond the aforementioned student committee, and limited collaboration opportunities. In addition, external barriers such as low levels of voter education shared with incoming freshmen and misinformation about elections and voting laws hinder student voting.

However, the President and Provost supports us to distribute election and voting information via email to students and they also send out campus wide announcements to promote Voter Engagement such as Virginia's absentee voting and early voting options also allow for more voting accessibility. We have strong faculty/staff support from Rich Thompson and Melody Porter of the Office of Community Engagement and Dr. McGlennon of the Government Department. Our campus also has walkable on-campus polling locations for students.

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Landscape Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

## V. Goals

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

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

- We don't have large scale/sustainable or consistent funding.
- We have had trouble engaging student leaders from other clubs/organizations to support our initiative.
- W&M has a high and historical culture for Voter Engagement. Consequently - there is some apathy to implement additional voter engagement programming

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

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

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

- Our institution's mission statement, values, and strategic plan mention civic learning and democratic engagement.
- We have someone whose job responsibility is to foster civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have a coalition of people who are positioned to implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- 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 use the resources readily available to develop and implement civic learning and democratic engagement on our campus.
- We have a working relationship with our local election office.

With this in mind, we have set the three goals that we would like to achieve over the next academic year:

- Encourage at least 10% of out of state students to transfer the Voter Registration to Virginia (Williamsburg or James City County)
- Maintain Voter Registration Rate of 70% or higher
- Have at least 70% of all new students registered to vote by Oct. 1, 2022

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



- Build the Voter Engagement Action Committee which reflects W&M's Gender/Orientation and ethnicity percentage wise. Currently, we have a high-level female participants/leadership in regard to our student committee participants.
- Endeavor to recruit 20% more males and people of color over the next 5 years
- Obtain more institutional funding where W&M can potentially offer a graduate assistant and or intern position that is focused on Voter Engagement.

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Goals Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

## VI. Strategy

Below, we have outlined a strategy describing how we will bring this vision to life in the coming months and years.

These are tactics that we **are already doing** in the **short term** (within the next year):

- Heavily promoting Voter Registration to new students and faculty/staff via these outlets
- Office of Community Engagement Annual Community Resource and Volunteer Fair
- Faculty/Staff List Servs to share voter education events, information, and election information
- Student List Servs to share voter education events, information, and election information
- Tabling/National Voter Registration Day Event
- Collaborations with the City of Williamsburg & James City County Registrars
- Social Media to promote voter education events and share election and voting information
- Couch Party Text Banking Events
- Voter Education Programs/Collaborations with W&M Government Department
- Election Watch Parties

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

- Same as above + promotions/giveaways to promote Voter Awareness Events (ex. Voter Engagement T-Shirts)
- Bolster W&M Voter Engagement Action Committee and expand its reach on campus and in the community
- Collaborate with Student Assembly to execute programs on the importance of local government and voting
- Collaborate with the League of Women Voters Williamsburg Chapter starting in Fall 2022 on voter registration and education programs

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

- Collaborate/Engage with more student politically affiliated student organizations on W&M's campus and encourage them to cross promote our non-partisan voter engagement efforts
- Work with more faculty members of various departments on our voter engagement programs
- Survey students on where they are registered to vote- collect data on how many students vote locally
- Work with Resident Life and Student Transition Engagement Programs to provide voting and election information to incoming freshmen

These are tactics that we **are already doing** for the **long term** (beyond the next year):

- Updating our website with all pertinent Voter Engagement Information by each August 15 for each election cycle
- Post our NSLVE Report on our Voter Engagement Website - <https://www.wm.edu/offices/oce/programs/voter-engagement/nslve-report/index.php>
- Continue to heavily promote voter registration on our campus via these outlets
  - Office of Community Engagement Annual Community Resource and Volunteer Fair
  - Faculty/Staff List Servs
  - Student List Servs
- Voter Registration and Education Tabling with nonpartisan information and resources
- National Voter Registration Day Event
- Collaborations with the City of Williamsburg & James City County Registrars
- Social Media – sharing voter registration, education, and important updates w
- Couch Party Text Banking Events
- Voter Education Programs/Collaborations with W&M Government Department
- Hosting Election Watch Parties

These are tactics that we **want to do** in the **long term**:

- Work with the W&M Government Department to encourage them and their students to promote at least one Voter Education Program per year.

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

- Develop more 'How To' and 'Did You Know' Voter Engagement videos - Encourage our students to transfer their voter registration to Virginia, City of Williamsburg, or James City County so that they can vote in Virginia and local elections.
- Work with the Williamsburg Registrar to collect data on both in-state and out-of-state student registration

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Strategy Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

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

Our campus has access to our National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for 2020. In 2020 our registration rate was 92%. In comparison to the data from four years prior in our NSLVE report, this rate increased.

In 2020, our voting rate was 82.4% and our voting rate among registered students was 89.6%. During this year, our voting rate was higher than the national average.

In our NSLVE report, we had racial data for the following groups:

- Asian
- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

For the racial groups that have recent voter turnout data, we saw the following groups increase in voter turnout compared to four years ago.

- Asian
- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- 2 or More Races

William & Mary has a strong tradition of Voter Engagement. For the 2020 voting cycle William & Mary was recognized for not only being a Voter Friendly University but was also recognized as Platinum Level University. William & Mary was the only Platinum Award winning 4-year state university in Virginia and tied for 1st for the highest level of voter registration. Math majors were our lowest level, but we saw an increase of 9%. We also saw an increase of Asian (20%), Black (19%), and Hispanic (19%) voting

***How can you improve this section?*** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your NSLVE section includes everything that you feel should be addressed.

## VIII. Reporting & 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/W&M Voter Engagement Action Committee
- Email to campus administration (ex. Student Affairs, President and or Provost Office's)
- We will share our NSLVE Report on our Website (**Note:** Completed) and Social Media Platforms

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

- Share for the W&M Voter Engagement Action Committee which is composed of students, faculty/staff, and community/election officials, the Director of Community Engagement, and liaison with the Campus Vote Project
- Sharing 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 William & Mary's campus.

We will collect feedback on this plan by:

- Regrouping with campus 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
- Recommendations from the Director of the Office of Community Engagement
- Getting feedback from the League of Women Voters Williamsburg Chapter to evaluate how to best collaborate moving forward

We plan to evaluate our success by:

- Reviewing our NSLVE data and looking for improvements year by year
- Posting our updated NSLVE data to our voter coalition website
- Revisiting our goals, 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 of low voter turnouts, then evaluating turnout rates after these programs
- Surveying students who attend our programs to improve in the future
- Surveying students over the summer to target programs, groups, and issues of importance for the following year
- Reviews from the Director of the Office of Community Engagement and liaison with the Campus Vote Project

**How can you improve this section?** Visit the *Strengthening American Democracy Guide* and review the *Guiding Questions* to ensure your *Reporting & Evaluation Section* includes everything that you feel should be addressed.