TOOLKIT FOR INCREASING COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT VOTER PARTICIPATION

Prepared by the California Students Vote Project

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VOTE CALIFORNIA
www.sos.ca.gov

ALEX **PADILLA**
California Secretary of State

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The California Student Votes Project is a collaborative public-private partnership including the California Secretary of State, the California Lieutenant Governor, CALPIRG, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus, California Common Cause, and a variety of other nonprofit organizations.

California State University, Los Angeles

1 Sample Civic Engagement / Student Vote Plan for a Campus

Best Practices for Creating a Student Civic Engagement Plan

Given the need to improve civic engagement, the Secretary of State is a key partner in the California Students Vote Project. The California Students Vote Project aims to identify the best practices each campus employs to increase online and paper student voter registrations. Our efforts are to instill students with a strong commitment to voting – a commitment that is still forming.

We are committed to supporting voter registration efforts of all private publicly funded higher education systems. That includes the 484,300 students in the California State University, the 238,000 in the University of California, the 1,434,573 students in the California Community College, and the 330,000 students that are part of the Independent California Colleges and Universities sector.

Below are several ideas and policies which campuses can utilize or incorporate to boost a culture of civic engagement among their students. Administrators and students can come together to choose to adopt whichever provisions and ideas they feel are appropriate to their campus.

1. Identify a point person who will manage all voter participation projects on behalf of the campus administration.

- This person will be responsible for working to convene a campus coalition on student voting and work with students to craft and implement a campus vote plan.

- It is important that this person have some degree of staffing support.

- This person will also serve as the contact with the Secretary of State's Office.

- This person could be the Dean of Student Life or the Vice President of Student Affairs, or a direct report of one of these individuals.

2. To better measure growth of student voter participation, register for the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

- NSLVE is a study that coordinates with the National Student Clearinghouse to match public voting records with anonymous student enrollment records, allowing you to measure the registration and voting rates for your school and allowing you to track progress in student voter participation.

- NSLVE is free, confidential, and protective of student privacy.

- NSLVE reports can help civic engagement leaders on campus better assess how many eligible students are participating and where additional efforts should be made.

- More information is available at: http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/research/NSLVE

3. Convene one "kick off" meeting of relevant administrators from student affairs, academics affairs, and government relations, as well as faculty and student leadership, to discuss a campus-wide effort to increase student voter participation. This could be your coalition moving forward.

- Attendees of the "kick off" meeting who choose to continue meeting can convene monthly during the spring term and weekly or bi-weekly in fall term leading up to the November general election.

- The coalition should include student leadership and several large, impactful student groups.

- Make clear to other organizations if/how they

may join the coalition if they decide to join in the work later.

4. Draft a written Student Vote Plan (example outlined below) that includes voter registration, voter education, voter access, and GOTV activities.

• Combine all of the commitments made by the coalition members into one plan. Ensure that this plan receives significant input from student organizations that lead civic engagement efforts. Submit to campus leadership.

• A comprehensive plan for the November general election should be prepared, if possible, before students leave for summer break. This enables the campus to get started on implementation immediately upon student return in the fall.

• Make sure to include students who will be in positions of leadership when students return in the fall. Avoid if at all possible making plans with outgoing student leaders who will not be around to see the work implemented.

• Campuses can create an abbreviated plan for the June primary election.

• Information about voter registration eligibility can be found at https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/frequently-asked-questions/#voterreg

Essential Pieces of a Student Vote Plan

A student vote plan / campus civic engagement plan should strive to include many or all of the components below.

Voter registration:

1. Send out campus-wide emails including voter registration information and a link to online voter registration.

• The best times to send these emails are after the first week of instruction or after move-in, the week before the voter registration deadline (15 days before an election), and the day of the registration deadline.

• Campus can utilize the California Secretary of State website to facilitate student voter registration, all information submitted by student voters will be collected and provided to campus administrators and/or student volunteers, so those parties can follow up with student voters with GOTV reminder messages later.

• If a campus uses the standard statewide voter registration site operated by the Secretary of State, the campus should make sure to use the campus's unique URL, provided by the Secretary of State. This will enable the Secretary of State to "credit" the campus for the registrations generated.

• Inform students that if they register to vote at a permanent address in a different county or state (i.e. a parent's address), they need to register as a vote-by-mail voter to ensure they get their ballot. Remind students that if they register or have previously registered at a campus address, they need to update their address every time they move.

• As a Californian living away from home while attending a college, trade school or technical school, you may choose to register to vote using your home away from home address you use while at school or your traditional home address. College Students and Voters Living Abroad (https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voting-california/students/).

2. Implement on-the-ground voter registration work during critical periods.

• Encourage staffers/volunteers to distribute and collect voter registration forms during orientation, welcome week, and move-in, and similar periods/programs. Incorporate voter registration into RA trainings.

3. Work with student affairs and/or the residential life office to distribute and collect voter registration forms in student housing.

• Make any needed changes to housing policies to permit door-to-door voter registration drives.

4. Embed voter registration information in the campus's homepage, course management systems

(Blackboard, Sakai, MyPortal, etc.), and other heavily trafficked online portals/sites operated by the school.

• The more visible the better – consider pop-up voter registration reminders close to the voter registration deadline, for example.

5. Coordinate with academic affairs to have faculty or a student representative make announcements and distribute voter registration forms in classes.

• Send messaging to faculty and TAs twice, once before the start of the school year and once in the week leading up to the voter registration deadline, encouraging them to allow voter registration to occur at the beginning of classes.

6. Actively promote and participate in National Voter Registration Day (visit https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org/ for more information).

7. Permit student voter registration drive organizers to table and clipboard at high-traffic campus locations.

8. For more information about how to conduct voter registration drives, please visit: https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/guides/guide-to-vr-drives.pdf

Voter education:

1. Consider hosting events that draw student attention to key races.

• Host an issue forum on a prominent ballot initiative or a candidate forum for local candidates.

• Host a debate watch party for major state or federal races.

2. Consider distributing nonpartisan ballot guides.

• The League of Women Voters usually provides rigorous, non-partisan ballot guides that include local measures and races. The organization helps create Voter's Edge (https://votersedge.org/ca), a nonpartisan resource for voters that may be useful to share with students.

3. Use campus media and posters/flyers to inform students about what candidates and issues are on the ballot in upcoming elections and about the voter registration deadline.

4. Utilize the California Students Vote toolkit created by the Secretary of State, which includes a variety of resources (visit http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/castudentsvote/college-students/).

Ballot access:

1. Consider hosting an early vote site and/or polling place on campus.

• Work with the County Registrar of Voters early — many months before Election Day — to make this happen.

• Site the voting location in a highly visible location on campus, like the student center/student union. Accentuate the visibility with things like signs and balloons.

• Ask the County Registrar of Voters to host not just a polling place on campus but a combined polling place / same-day registration site, which will enable students to register to vote even if they miss the voter registration deadline (15 days before the election).

2. Invite local election officials on campus to train relevant parties on how to conduct voter registration.

• Voter registration can be difficult. Students assume mandatory fields are optional, forget to date and sign the form, etc. Well-trained voter registration organizers can correct or avoid these mistakes.

3. Make sure the mailroom is ready for a potentially large number of vote-by-mail ballots leading up to Election Day, and make sure it works to get vote-by-mail ballots to the students even if they have moved.

4. Provide Election Day rides or organize walks to early vote sites or polling locations, if they are not on campus. Have a plan for dealing with long lines, common questions, and problems, etc. on Election Day.

Get Out the Vote (GOTV):

1. Send out a campus-wide email with information about vote-by-mail and early voting a month before Election Day (when vote-by-mail ballots start arriving), so students can make an informed choice as to how they want to vote.

- Provide information on the deadline for signing up to be a vote-by-mail voter. (Ask the Secretary of State's office if you have questions.)

2. Hang posters/flyers and utilize campus media to publicize upcoming elections and to provide information on how to register to vote and how to cast a ballot.

3. Consider assisting the Registrar of Voters in recruiting student poll workers.

- Campus administrators and student leaders can use email, social media, and other means to explain to students that they can make $100-200 in service of democracy on Election Day. The local Registrar of Voters can provide additional information

4. Send week-of, day-before, and day-of reminders about Election Day – the more visible and the more personal the better.

- In-person outreach, phone banks, texting campaigns, all-campus emails, and social media should all be utilized.
- Consider having some of these messages come from prominent members of the campus community, including student leaders, famous faculty, athletic coaches, etc

- Include information about easy polling place lookup tools and about where polling places are located on campus and immediately off campus.

5. Strive to create a celebratory environment on Election Day throughout campus and for those waiting in line to vote at the polls.

University of San Francisco

2 Additional Campus Civic Engagement Resources

Campus Vote Project, "Best Practices to Help Students Register and Vote: A Guide for Colleges and Universities"

This short pamphlet outlines some of the actions colleges and universities should take to motivate students to register and vote. Includes many suggestions that campuses have worked on since CSU administration signed the student voter registration MOU in 2016.

http://campusvoteproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Best-Practices-for-Colleges-and-Universities-2015.pdf

Idea42, "Graduating Students into Voters, Overcoming the Psychological Barriers Faced by Student Voters: A Behavioral Science Approach"

A simple guide that looks at why students may fail to register and vote based on ideas42's behavioral science research. Evidence-based solutions college leaders can use to improve the effectiveness of their registration and turnout efforts.

http://www.ideas42.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ideas42-Student-Voting-Brief.pdf

American Political Science Association, "Teaching Civic Engagement"

These books (from 2017 and 2013) explain how campuses can promote high-quality education on civic engagement, including a wealth of examples of successful practices, techniques, and assessment strategies.

http://web.apsanet.org/teachingcivicengagement/

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), "Youth Voting"

Includes statistics and analysis on youth voting in 2016, several reports, and information about what affects youth voting.

https://civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/

George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management, "Young Voter Mobilization Tactics: A compilation of the most recent research on traditional & innovative voter turnout techniques"

An evidence-based analysis of the effectiveness of various mobilization and GOTV tactics targeting young voters. Written in 2006 but many of its recommendations are still valuable.

https://civicyouth.org/PopUps/Young_Voters_Guide.pdf

David Hill and Paul Lachelier, "Can Face-to-Face Mobilization Boost Student Voter Turnout? Results of a Campus Field Experiment," Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 2014

Journal article in which the authors examine the impact of a face-to-face college student mobilization effort on a small, private university in Florida. The authors find a difference in turnout between those students contacted and those not contacted. Brief recommendations are offered for steps university staff can take to make elections a more established part of college students' experience.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1024167.pdf

Students Learn Students Vote, "Resources"

Several resources and reports on how campus leaders and administrators can boost civic participation, compiled by Students Learn Students Vote, an organization that works to promote civic learning and engagement on campuses across the country.

http://www.studentslearnstudentsvote.org/resources

California State University, Chico

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