

**Campus Election Engagement Plan
McKeen Center for the Common Good
Bowdoin College
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Summary

This Campus Election Engagement Plan was developed by a planning group within the McKeen Center for the Common Good, representing staff, faculty, and the student body. The contributors are: Andrew Lardie, associate director for service and leadership; David K. Hecht, associate professor of history at Bowdoin, and senior faculty fellow in the McKeen Center; and Annie Rose '20, McKeen fellow for community engagement.

This plan was developed as a continuation of the McKeen Center's election engagement initiative, launched in spring 2016 to enhance student-led efforts that have been inconsistently undertaken for many years. The development of this plan has been informed by resources from the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) and its partners in the [Students Learn Students Vote \(SLSV\) Coalition](#).

This plan is intended as a provisional map for Bowdoin's election engagement efforts for 2018 and beyond. The plan includes both firm intentions and initial suggestions for how various departments might engage in this work, and as such it represents a starting point for conversations and collaborations with stakeholders that will take place throughout 2018. Outcomes from 2018, as well as evolving campus needs and resources, will be incorporated into future iterations of this plan as Bowdoin continues to participate in the ALL IN challenge.

Institutional Context

In its [Statement On a Liberal Education](#), the faculty of Bowdoin concludes that "the success of a Bowdoin education is evident in the capacity of graduates ... to engage competing views critically, to make principled judgments that inform their practice, and *to work effectively with others as informed citizens committed to constructing a just and sustainable world*" (emphasis ours). This vision neatly mirrors the definition of *civic learning and democratic engagement* (CLDE) used by the SLSV Coalition in its [guide for developing Election Engagement Plans](#). According to the SLSV Coalition, CLDE is "promoting the education of students for engaged citizenship through democratic participation in their communities, respect and appreciation of diversity, applied learning, and social responsibility." The similarity of the values articulated by Bowdoin and the SLSV Coalition suggests that CLDE are implicit goals of Bowdoin's entire curriculum, and of course they are also pursued explicitly in particular departments, programs, and courses.

CLDE are also goals of many programs in Bowdoin's co-curriculum, particularly within the Division of Student Affairs' *student life* departments which include The McKeen Center for the Common Good. As the campus department dedicated to modeling and advancing Bowdoin's historical commitment to the common good, the McKeen Center was an appropriate launch point for an effort in 2016 to enhance students' democratic participation. Outcomes from that cycle clarified the need for a collaborative apparatus of students, faculty, and staff that can provide a consistent, programmatic approach to facilitating CLDE among students.

As Bowdoin's election engagement effort develops, it will need to be informed by ongoing assessment of CLDE outcomes. Although relevant data are likely being collected by a variety of departments, there has not yet been an effort to extract the relevant data or combine them across departments to construct a broad picture of outcomes across the College. Devising methods to shed light on various CLDE outcomes is one task proposed in this plan.

Arguably, the "bottom line" CLDE outcome is democratic participation; how many students vote. To inform its election engagement effort, and join the national conversation around this issue, in 2016 Bowdoin began measuring democratic participation by joining the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NLSVE data comparing both voter registration and turnout among eligible Bowdoin students in 2012 and 2016 show that the advent of the McKeen Center's election engagement effort coincided with significant increases in both measures. From 2012 to 2016, voter registration increased by 11.7 percentage points, from 64.8% to 76.5% of eligible students, while turnout increased by 14.1 points, from 38.5% of to 52.6%. Compared with the average of all schools nationally, the turnout improvement brought Bowdoin from 8.4% below the mean to 2.2% above.

Although nothing causal can be inferred from this change, it is consistent with our impression that our effort made a difference and that additional efforts would make a larger impact. Going forward, the expansion of election engagement efforts will depend on departments' capacity both to implement them, and to reconcile them with competing priorities. We are optimistic that if we invite stakeholders to contribute their ideas and respond to the ideas in this plan, most departments will be open to contributing to the effort in whatever way is appropriate to their particular knowledge, skills and capacity.

Goals

1. Develop a collaborative, campus-wide apparatus that will provide a consistent, programmatic approach to fostering the following outcomes among Bowdoin students who are eligible to vote.
2. Lower affective barriers to voting; promote students' beliefs that voting is important, intellectually approachable, and convenient.
3. Educate students on the issues & candidates that will appear on the ballot, as well as related topics such as polling, electoral reform proposals, and basic civics.
4. Register students to vote. Targets are 80% in 2018, 90% in 2020.
5. Increase students' voter turnout. Targets are 55% in 2018, 65% in 2020.

Strategy

Below is a rough chronology of the tasks that comprise this plan. The list includes efforts that may require only McKeen Center staff and volunteer support to execute. Most of them are definite plans, while a few may be pruned back or abandoned depending on the capacity that is achieved through volunteer recruitment. Following the list is a table of additional ideas that would require cooperation from other departments, and we will explore these possibilities in early 2018.

Winter

- Convene meetings with campus stakeholders (about 15 departments and student organizations) to invite input and share proposed plans.
- Hire a student Election Engagement Fellow to initiate the activities outlined in the strategy section of this action plan.

Spring & Summer

- Map out components of *Bowdoin Votes* student-facing campaign, and develop SMART goals for each aspect of it.
- Create website (and/or Blackboard module - see below) for students to easily find election resources (eg registration, issues/candidates, volunteering with campaigns).
- Investigate, and possibly propose to IT, adopting a campus-wide political social media platform (eg *Brigade*, *iCitizen*) to increase political discussion online.
- Review features of *TurboVote* and revisit how we advertise and support its use. Is it working?
- Explore *Hootsuite* or other ways to sync/coordinate *Bowdoin Votes* messaging on various social media platforms.
- Revise “*Where Should I Vote?*” guide to compare impact of voting in home states vs. Maine.
- Compile calendar of CEEP activities married with campus events (eg speakers, athletics) and state-by-state voting deadlines.
- Logistical reservations for events (eg space, a/v, dining, guests).
- Begin recruiting volunteers to help with tabling, event organization, etc.
- Draft survey(s) to gather feedback from students.
- Develop methods for assessing *Bowdoin Votes*, possibly launch pre-survey to gather baseline data on student attitudes and election engagement.

Fall Semester

- Use social media platforms, Service News bulletin, and email (including by campus celebrities) to reach students electronically with reminders and updates.
- Recruit and train volunteers to help with tabling and social media output.
- Table at high turnout events (eg athletics, speakers) and other strategic dates (eg Nat'l Voter Registration Day); continue using *TurboVote* for absentee registration.
- Distribute nonpartisan materials prepared by nat'l orgs (eg CEEP candidate guides, League of Women Voters ballot guide).

- Co-organize debate watching parties and topical debates with campaign representatives and/or faculty experts; aim to cover every statewide question on the Maine ballot.
- Encourage leaders of various clubs, teams and affinity groups to personally urge their participants to register and vote.
- Hold absentee ballot party(s) for students registering outside of Maine (we provide photocopier, postage, etc).
- Pay postage at campus mail center for sending registration forms, absentee ballot requests and completed ballots.
- After registration push, turnout campaigns:
 - To motivate, create peer photo posts with *#whyivote* message; also myth debunking posts.
 - Registered students pledge to vote effort (need to track).
 - Offer stickers for students who submit 'voting selfies' at mail room (absentee) or polling place.
- Organize vans to the local polls on election day, including snacks, fun, and campus celebrities at the pickup point
- Host campus-wide election results viewing party
- Send out campus-wide *Bowdoin Votes* program survey on election day or soon thereafter
- Debrief with staff, and individually with collaborators (email, meeting, and/or survey) to get their feedback
- Analyze feedback, summarize findings, and make recommendations for 2019 and 2020.

Proposed collaborations

Activity	Possible partner(s)
Add module to Blackboard with links for registration, education, survey, etc.	IT
Send every student registration & voting info, and reminders, for both Maine and their home state (electronic and/or hard copy)	Registrar Residential Life IT
Help students who are studying abroad get registered and vote absentee (before and/or when they are out of USA)	OCS office
Establish Election Engagement liaisons in each college house	Residential Life
Inter-dorm voter registration competition	Residential Life
Enlist athletic teams as volunteers and spokespeople	Athletics
Register students during orientation (several possible approaches)	Dean of Students
Incorporate registration question into required online Enrollment Form and/or registration hold	Registrar
Pitch voter registration in person, to select high-enrollment courses	Various academic depts & specific faculty

In student media outlets, highlight issues relevant to young voters, including voting-themed newspaper column with rotating authors	Orient Bowdoin Commons Harpoon
Recruit campus celebrity(s) to 'send' some voting reminder emails to all students	Student Gov. President Dining, etc.
Political dialogue event(s) for students to engage Brunswick community members	What Matters series Make Shift Coffee House
Screen election-related films & facilitate debrief	Bowdoin Film Society Film Studies Dept.
Investigate using Bowdoin's Text Messaging service for reminder(s)	Security IT

Evaluation & Reporting

Evaluation of this plan's efforts will allow stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of our efforts, understand students' needs and preferences, and make informed adjustments to the plan's goals and strategies. We will measure not only the degree of democratic participation in 2018 (through NSLVE), but also investigate the degree to which success is influenced by factors such as student attitudes, the amount of resources devoted to the effort, or simple competition for students' attention, time and energy. Assessing outcomes from the 2018 cycle will 1) measure the efficacy of our nuts-and-bolts work, 2) deepen our insight into constraints on election engagement, and 3) suggest possible demographic areas and modes of engagement where there is room for greater reach.

Given that our efforts are aimed at all Bowdoin students who are eligible to vote, it would be ideal to survey the entire student body for feedback on the program. An imperfect, but more accessible approach, would be to post a survey link on our web and social media sites and invite supporters to opt in. We may take a 'pre' and 'post' approach to help measure impact, first surveying students in August and then again on election day or soon thereafter. Additional surveys may be created and targeted to students who participate in specific programs such as the inter-dorm registration competition or Pledge to Vote campaign.

We will ask students, anonymously, about outcomes related to our goals (eg did they register, do they believe voting was accessible) and about their impressions of the quality of particular efforts. We will also invite ideas for what could be done differently to reach and motivate students.

Data will be analyzed qualitatively for trends in both who responds and patterns in the responses. Relevant portions will be shared with collaborating departments as we re-tool for the next iteration of this plan in 2020, and to a lesser extent in 2019. Finally, some results will be shared in future iterations of our ALL IN plan.