

Case Western Reserve University's Center for Civic Engagement & Learning Voter Engagement Action Plan 2020-2021

Executive Summary

This Voter Engagement Action Plan serves as a roadmap of Case Western Reserve University (CWRU)'s voter engagement initiatives, coordinated by the Center for Civic Engagement & Learning (CCEL) in collaboration with campus and community stakeholders. The plan focuses on voter registration, voter education, and get out the vote activities that are designed to inform our students and empower them to register and exercise their right to vote. It also establishes short and long term goals related to campus voter engagement and how we will approach them. We intend to conduct evaluation of the plan with the aim of continuous improvement as we approach the 2020 Election and create ways to continue democratic engagement beyond Election Day.

The activities in this plan primarily take place from Spring 2020 through November 2020 with follow-up activities and evaluation during Spring 2021. CCEL will oversee implementation of the plan in collaboration with partners in our working group. We will also reach out to additional stakeholders as necessary as the plan evolves. Through the initiatives outlined in the plan, we look forward to advancing civic learning and engagement on our campus in ways that equip students with the resources, tools, and motivation to be life-long, active community members.

Leadership

Working group members have been identified to fully leverage collaborative relationships. They have also been identified due to their key connection with students, connection to current voter engagement initiatives, and/or role as a stakeholder in voter engagement.

Membership in the working group is inclusive of a variety of departments, student organizations, campus partner organizations and stakeholders. This diversity of perspectives will strengthen the action plan, foster innovative ideas, and increase outreach across campus. Working group member departments are listed below. Additional members for the working group will be considered and invited as needed.

- Center for Civic Engagement & Learning (CCEL)
- Department of Political Science
- Greek Life Office
- Student Activities & Leadership Office
- Office of Graduate Student Life
- Office of Residence Life
- Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Local Government and Community Relations
- CCEL Student Executive Council
- The Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF), Vote Everywhere Ambassadors

- Student Voting Outreach Team
- Social Justice Institute
- Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP)
- Cuyahoga County Board of Elections

The Center for Civic Engagement & Learning (CCEL) coordinates and oversees efforts to increase civic learning and democratic engagement on campus. More specifically, Kelly Schmidt, Coordinator at CCEL and Elizabeth Banks, Director of CCEL, will oversee voter engagement activities, including coordination of events and resources, training of volunteers, and educational activities. They will also manage the working group. CCEL staff will be assisted by the three Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors.

The working group provides input from a variety of diverse units, in addition to specialized knowledge and expertise. Member responsibilities will include providing feedback on programming ideas as well as providing additional input on how to best serve students they work with. Members will also collaborate on events and promote activities to students across campus, based on their specific areas.

The working group will need to engage CWRU's University Marketing and Communications Office for guidance around any print, broadcast and online media produced. University Technology will also need to be involved at times to aid in media sharing and boosting voter engagement through virtual means. These virtual events will be especially important during the fall adjustment to coronavirus.

The working group will meet in early summer 2020 to share ideas and feedback, as well as plan for upcoming activities. The group will then check-in on a monthly basis. After the November elections, the group will meet bimonthly. Communication will occur via email as needed between meetings.

Commitment

The Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) Mission, Vision, and Core Values statements emphasize democratic engagement through commitment to broad interdisciplinary collaboration and civic engagement, promoting an inclusive culture of global citizenship that recognizes broad interdependence with diverse communities, including local stakeholders in the university's backyard (University Circle), Cleveland and communities across the country and around the world.

CWRU has a new strategic plan that kicked off this past fall, titled *Think Big*. The "North Star" statement of the plan articulates the university's commitment to community and justice: "Case Western Reserve University is a high-impact research university that aspires to be a community where humanity, science and technology meet to create a just and thriving world." Four pathways lead to the North Star and guide decision-making. Pathway 3 "Achieve Social Impact" makes visible CWRU's commitment to community engagement. The Pathway has multiple objectives that support its goal to "Foster social good through robust engagement of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff and alumni with the local and global community."

CWRU further demonstrates its commitment to democratic engagement through its ongoing membership with Campus Compact, the national organization that advances the public purposes of more than 1,000 colleges and universities by deepening their ability to educate students for civic and social responsibility.

Case Western Reserve University President, Barbara R. Snyder, consistently promotes community, civic, and international engagement through support of programs, local, national and international partnerships, and in communications with faculty, staff, students, alumni, neighbors and friends. For example, she initiated the creation of the Civic Engagement Scholars with the Center for Civic Engagement & Learning, a program in which approximately 400 students participate each year. These students complete 50 hours of service (20 at one primary community partner site) and attend a variety of educational programs to better understand community engagement and social justice. She awards completing Scholars a Certificate of Distinguished Service at a special, annual reception she hosts. The President also supports student attendance at *Propel Ohio: Collegiate Leadership Summit*, a statewide initiative of Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown's Office, which promotes civic engagement and inspires and empowers college students to grow into civic leaders in Ohio.

As a decentralized research university, many learning outcomes are determined within specific schools. The CWRU Division of Student Affairs reaches across these schools and provides a variety of educational, co-curricular programs and services that are designed to complement and support campus initiatives. "Community Engagement" is one of the Division's five learning domains. The learning domains provide a co-curricular learning framework and demonstrate a variety of connections between other departmental programs and the university's academic programs. The learning outcomes that connect to the domains require students to focus internally on their personal development as well as externally on their contributions to their communities as they craft their personal vision for meaningful life and work.

A central resource for co-curricular education around civic learning and democratic engagement is the Center for Civic Engagement & Learning (CCEL). Housed in the Division of Student Affairs, CCEL works to create an engaged campus by providing and supporting opportunities for community service and collective action while promoting civic awareness and student leadership. CCEL offers a variety of programs, services, resources, educational training, and advising to connect students with the Cleveland community. CCEL also coordinates initiatives focused on campus-wide voter registration, voter education, and access to the polls.

Landscape

At CWRU, civic learning is represented in various individual, topical academic courses (such as courses offered by the Department of Political Science), rather than being incorporated into a general education requirement. However, civic learning and democratic engagement has a robust presence in the co-curricular activities of the Center for Civic Engagement & Learning (CCEL). CCEL coordinates programming related to voter registration, voter education, and getting out the vote. The department provides guidance to the Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors who engage their peers in activities such as National Voter Registration Day, debate watch parties, and panelist presentations that address social issues and political engagement. CCEL also promotes the TurboVote software platform and develops resources such as web-pages and FAQs about voter registration, absentee ballot requests,

campus addresses for residence halls and information on polling locations CCEL also coordinates Early Voting excursions via bus and shuttles to the polls on Election Day, and provides free envelopes/stamps for students to mail requests and ballots. Students can drop by CCEL for in-person assistance at any time.

Student organizations also provide opportunities for co-curricular involvement on CWRU's campus. The university has a number of student organizations with a focus on political engagement, such as the College Republicans and Case Democrats.

CWRU participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), which analyzes voter registration and turnout rates across the US. According to the 2018 NSLVE report, CWRU's voting rate was 38.7% which parallels the national average of peer institutions. Looking more closely at the data reveals that, while CWRU student registration rates were at 69%, the voting turnout rate was 38.7%. This shows that there are significant barriers between registering to vote and actually voting. When examining voting methods outlined in the report, the largest percentage of CWRU students voted by absentee ballot at 27.6% and 11.8% of the students voted by mail. Comparatively, only 4.4% voted in-person on Election Day and 2.8% of students voted early. This indicates two issues for the university to focus future efforts on, in regards to raising the voting turnout rate.

1. Focusing efforts on getting information to students about absentee voting may be beneficial, as this is how the majority of students on CWRU's campus are participating in the voting process.
2. Additional efforts can be made to share information about Early Voting, polling locations, and transportation options in order to bolster rates of in-person voting.

Additionally, the age of CWRU student voters has a dramatic impact on voting rates – the older students have higher turnout rates with students ages 18-21 having lower voting rates (25.3%) than students aged 30-29 (39.4%) and 40+ (60.4%). Based on this data, our plan will seek to address low voter turnout in younger students who appear to be less engaged than older students. It is important for our plan to outline how to bridge barriers and provide voter education so that students learn about the current political climate, impacts on issues they care about, and their ability to participate and make their voice heard.

We plan to use the university's NSLVE report data to inform our 2020 efforts to reduce barriers to voting. In particular, several internal and external barriers persist, which are described below.

- Timing has been a challenge as students arrive on campus at the end of August and voter registration deadlines occur approximately 5 weeks after the start of classes. It is often difficult to get students' attention during this time, given everything going on at the start of the academic year.
- Additionally, it can be difficult to navigate non-partisanship when designing voter education events. Given the country's political polarization, many social issues are now perceived through a partisan lens, even when information is presented in a non-partisan manner. CCEL has a positive relationship with the University's Government Relations Office as well as with the University Office of General Counsel; both of these offices are helpful contacts to assist with any questions around maintaining our non-partisanship commitment.
- CWRU also faces the challenge of having multiple polling locations that cover on-campus residence hall addresses. Students often move to a different residence each year, which then creates confusion about whether or not their registration is current and what

polling location they should visit. Additionally, students are often confused by voter ID requirements in Ohio and many think they are not able to vote because they do not have the correct form of ID or the correct address listed on their ID. Each of these layers of confusion can hinder voter turnout.

- Currently, the biggest external challenge is the unprecedented, evolving landscape of in-person activities due to COVID-19. It has been challenging to relay information to the CWRU population about rapidly changing election updates and voting guidelines. This was a significant barrier when CWRU transitioned to remote learning due to the spring pandemic. Many students who had planned to vote in-person at the Ohio Primary Election had to move to family homes out of state. Social distancing guidelines will also impact traditional voter registration programming and budget issues related to pandemic expenses may also impact resources related to voter engagement events.

There are several resources that will be fundamental in helping to overcome barriers. Weekly electronic campus newsletters and publicity outlets are key resources that will be utilized to spotlight voting related information leading up to the voter registration deadline, absentee ballot request deadline, and Election Day. CCEL utilizes a promotional spreadsheet to submit to a large variety of campus e-newsletters that are sent to diverse student constituencies. In addition, CCEL has three minivans that are utilized for civic engagement opportunities. The vans can be helpful for Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts to reduce transportation barriers.

CWRU also has renewed its partnership with TurboVote, which enables us to continue integrating the software platform “one-stop” voter engagement link into resources for students. This can help reduce confusion for students and provides election reminders about polling locations, forms of ID to take to the polls, etc.

With the changing landscape of many higher education events going virtual, innovative ideas of how best to outreach to students are also going to be important resources. We plan to take full advantage of webinars and Zoom meetings offered by organizations such as CEEP, Ohio Campus Compact, Campus Vote Project, Voter Friendly Campus, All-In Challenge, Andrew Goodman Foundation, etc. to learn about various models for voter engagement in virtual and socially-distanced spaces. We also look forward to utilizing their social media kits and concise, non-partisan, voter education guides on candidates and issues that students can reference.

Goals

The long term vision CCEL hopes to achieve is an active and engaged campus community. More specifically, CCEL’s aim is to develop and provide sustained information, programming, and resources to empower eligible students to register to vote, become informed on election and community issues, and exercise their vote. Longer term goals related to this are as follows.

- Increase the percentage of registered CWRU student voters who vote to above 40%.
- Develop intentional strategies to engage typically under-served student voter populations.
- Develop new networks by bringing together additional faculty members representing disciplines such as Engineering, Arts & Sciences, and Humanities (these were the areas the NSLVE data conveyed as having the lowest voting rates).
- Include voting related events on the CWRU campus calendar, such as National Voter Registration Day and Election Days.

- Coordinate with student organizations to ensure that those organizations that register students to vote are carrying out their responsibilities in submitting those registrations appropriately.

The following goals will be focused on in the next three years to align with the vision above. We will continue to rely on the resources and expertise of the working group, the Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, and TurboVote to accomplish these goals.

- Include TurboVote on the First Year Student Orientation Checklist and other virtual platforms such as Canva.
- Utilize TurboVote data to follow-up with users and ensure completion of the voter registration process.
- Train new Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, CCEL Executive Council and other student leaders on voter registration policies and procedures.
- Recruit and train new student volunteers to grow the CWRU Voting Outreach Team to assist with voter events and extend impact across campus.
- Hold at least two voter registration events per month in campus centers, with a focus on first year students and those students who recently turned 18.
- Collaborate with working group members and student organizations to develop strategies to reach typically under-represented student voters.
- Collaborate with on campus organizations to organize one larger event per semester, either virtually or in person, that promotes political education and engagement on topics such as diversity in politics, political redistricting, climate change, etc.
- Hold campus wide events that leverage awareness on nationally recognized days such as Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day.
- Invite speakers (elected officials, professors, etc.) to have roundtable discussions and presentations that educate students on political topics that interest them in the lead-up to elections.
- Improve social media presence and promotion about political engagement programming through CCEL and working group members' departmental pages and social media accounts.
- Promote campus wide awareness of absentee voting and voting by mail so that students are able to take part in local elections occurring in their home states, especially if guidelines change due to COVID19.
- Coordinate campus wide ballot access and voter turnout efforts to increase voter participation in the 2020 Presidential Election.

Strategy

All planned activities and initiatives will be led by CCEL staff, the working group members, the Andrew Goodman Foundation (AGF) Vote Everywhere Ambassadors, and the CWRU Voting Outreach Team student volunteers. The work will begin in Spring 2020 and continue through the end of the Spring 2021 semester. Training of all individuals implementing these activities will occur throughout the action plan period. Depending on the future landscape of COVID-19, related precautions and guidelines provided by university leadership will dictate whether activities will occur on campus or virtually.

The planned activities and initiatives will be focused and categorized around four main

democratic engagement topics in order to achieve the plan's goals.

Voter Registration

- Continue to utilize TurboVote software to provide an online portal for student access to various state voter registration forms, absentee ballot requests, and election reminders. Include TurboVote on the First Year Student Orientation Checklist and other virtual platforms such as Canva.
- Recruit, train, and engage additional student volunteers for the Voting Outreach Team.
- Conduct voter registration at events across campus.
- Promote voter registration resources to departments, students, staff and faculty across campus.
- Collaborate with campus departments to have paper voter registration forms in their office spaces.
- Include a regular political engagement/voter registration story in CCEL e-newsletters each week from the start of the school year through the Voter Registration deadline.
- Develop video tutorials of how to fill out voter registration form, request and complete an absentee ballot, etc.
- Provide training for student organizations interested in hosting voter registration tables/drives.
- Present to student organizations, Resident Assistants, Greek Chapters, classes, etc. interested in a session that encourages their students to register to vote.

Voter Education

- Utilize Campus Vote Project, National Issues Forum, CEEP, and other resources to provide non-partisan voter education information to students.
- After the voter registration deadline, include a voter education tool or resource in CCEL's newsletter every week through Election Day.
- Provide speaker presentations, panels, and/or workshops for students related to voter education issues.
- Develop an event for students regarding what is on the ballot and why voting in elections is important.
- Create Cleveland based excursion(s) focused on political engagement and/or history to learn more about politics and history in Cleveland.
- Provide opportunities (such as a debate watch party) for student led dialogue about local, national, and/or international political issues.

Get Out the Vote (GOTV)

- Provide resources to students regarding residence hall street addresses and polling locations for students living on campus.
- Provide information sessions regarding Election Day (what type of ID is needed to vote, how to find a polling location, best practices, students' voting rights, etc.).
- Work with Office of Residence Life to provide students living on campus with information about how to get proof of address as ID for voting.
- Provide targeted information about absentee ballots, especially if students are unsure about getting to the polls on Election Day.
- Create reminders and events (e.g. an Absentee Ballot Party) to encourage students to request and send their absentee ballots on time.
- Provide Early Voting excursions during the weeks before Election Day.
- Promote Election Day events the weekend prior to Election Day.
- Provide student shuttles to the polls on Election Day.

Creating sustained commitment to political engagement is an ongoing challenge, given competing demands on students' time and attention. The working group will address this challenge throughout the action plan timeframe as we work to establish programming beyond Election Day. We intend to build upon the momentum of the 2020 Presidential Election to continue campus interest and involvement.

CCEL will work with student leaders (such as the AGF Vote Everywhere Ambassadors) to determine what types of programming are of most interest to a diversity of students. We will also collaborate with working group campus partners, such as the Office of Multicultural Affairs, to amplify their important work of building a more inclusive campus, through political engagement events. CCEL plans to reach out to local and national partners to learn, share, and apply additional best practices of how programming can be more inclusive and equitable.

These partner organizations can also provide models of campuses that have made successful progress on institutionalization of civic learning and political engagement. We hope to use these models to plan and implement our own events and initiatives, with the understanding that institutionalization is a long-term process and would need to be aligned with university leadership's priorities for this area. Below is our preliminary list of work that needs to take place in order to move our campus toward a vision of more institutionalized civic engagement, including the party who will take the lead on each effort. We anticipate that this list will continue to evolve.

- Update CCEL's Election and Voter Resources web-pages to provide the campus community easy access to clear and accurate information. (CCEL Coordinator)
- Research other universities' events to gain innovative ideas for making political engagement attractive and increase participant turnout, especially through virtual avenues. (Vote Everywhere Ambassadors and Voting Outreach Team)
- Reach out to additional campus organizations and departments to incorporate events that promote political education and engagement in their annual program planning. (Working Group)
- Invite speakers (elected officials, professors, etc.) to have roundtable discussions and presentations that educate students on political topics beyond Election Day. Interact with students to find out what kind of speakers and topics most interest them. (Vote Everywhere Ambassadors)
- Reach out to political student organizations on campus to host and collaborate on events beyond Election Day. (Working Group)

Timeline

The following timeline will guide event implementation, with adjustments being made as necessary.

Spring 2020

- January
 - Promote Voter Registration during Voter Registration Day 2.0 on February 11
 - Begin recruiting for student volunteers for the Voting Outreach Team
 - Complete marketing materials and educational workshop facilitation guides and supplemental materials
- February
 - Train new Vote Everywhere Ambassador and Voting Outreach Team members on voter registration policies and procedures

- Facilitate Voter Registration Day 2.0 on February 11
- Research Election Day transportation quotes for shuttles to polls for Ohio primary on March 17
- Organize Early Voting excursions to County Board of Elections
- March
 - Vote Everywhere Ambassadors host Voter FAQ & Myths workshop
 - Continue to organize Early Voting excursions to Board of Elections
 - Organize volunteers for shuttles to the polls
- April
 - Boost social media presence to promote census information and election updates
 - Host several virtual Absentee Tea party for election updates
- May
 - Student volunteer debrief and thank you celebration

Summer 2020

- June
 - Schedule and host meeting of voter engagement action plan working group.
 - Reach out to First Year Experience about details regarding Orientation Week to ensure that TurboVote is still on new student checklist
 - Make changes and updates on CCEL's web-pages in regards to Voter Registration and Election Information
 - Begin material preparation
 - Update information as needed pertaining to ID requirements for voting, voter registration, campus housing addresses and corresponding polling locations, and TurboVote
 - Create guide of how students can access their proof of residency
 - Develop staff and faculty voter engagement toolkits
- July
 - Begin recruiting for volunteers to join the Voting Outreach Team
 - Complete marketing materials and educational workshop facilitation guides and supplemental materials
 - Research Election Day transportation quotes

Fall 2020

See table below for specific dates of planned activities to be implemented.

Aug. 17-22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New Student Orientation Week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thurs., Aug. 20: First-Year service day - Election information & voter registration table at service day (<i>collaboration with CCEL Executive Council</i>) ○ Sat., Aug. 22: Student Activities Fair - Election information & voter registration table
Aug. 24-28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mon., Aug. 24: First day of classes ● First Vote Everywhere Ambassador "Kick Off" meeting
Sept. 1-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Voting Outreach Team meetings - current member meetup & new member training ● Attend student organization general body meetings including: Greek Life General Body Meeting, Residence Life Committee Meeting, and Student Service Alliance Meeting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start in-class voter registration presentations (either in person or via Zoom drop-ins)
Week of Sept. 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin organizing volunteers for National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) event & publicity regarding NVRD
Week of Sept. 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thurs., Sept. 17: Constitution Day Fri., Sept. 18: Community Service Fair
Tues., Sept. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NVRD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement social media posts & emails with information about NVRD Vote Everywhere Ambassador Event (TBD virtual event) & utilize Voting Outreach Team to facilitate voter registration tables in multiple locations around campus
Oct. 5-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tues., Oct. 6: Ohio Voter Registration deadline Develop Election Day transportation plan and Early Voting volunteer planning for Early Voting excursions to Board of Elections
Week of Oct. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin organizing volunteers for shuttles to the polls & implement publicity regarding shuttles to the polls
Mid-Oct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presidential Debate Watch Party with partner student organizations
Sat., Oct. 24 – Mon., Nov. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Voting excursions to County Board of Elections
CCEL Sat. of Service (date TBD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Voting and election Information table at Saturday of Service in collaboration with CCEL Executive Council
Week of Oct. 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fri., Oct. 30: Absentee Ballot Request Deadline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin publicity for Election Day Make trips to the Board of Elections to drop off forms as needed
Week of Nov. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mon., Nov. 2: Absentee Ballot postmark deadline Tues., Nov. 3: Election Day shuttles and CCEL vans to the Polls
Nov. 9-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer debrief and thank you celebration

Spring 2021

- Evaluation of Fall 2020 efforts
- Thank students and partners for being involved; provide information on outcomes achieved
- Compile feedback from students regarding political engagement activities
- Work with student leaders and working group members to get feedback about what activities can be planned in non-presidential election years

Reporting

The action plan will be made available to the campus community and the public via CCEL's Voting Resources web-page, pending permission from CWRU's University Marketing and Communications Office. That web link will be shared with various stakeholders, including student organizations, departments, and community partners. The CWRU's NSLVE report will be utilized to inform future action plans and that report data will only be made available to the public if approved by CWRU's University Marketing and Communications and Institutional Research offices.

Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation of this action plan is to understand and debrief the plan's goals and progress. The evaluation process will examine if our goals are being met and how programming and practices can be strengthened and adapted moving forward. Results will be shared with key stakeholders. For the evaluation, we will utilize assessment practices and guidance provided by the CWRU Student Life Assessment Committee, a committee of representatives from all Student Life departments and staff members from Institutional Research.

CCEL will oversee the evaluation of successes and challenges on an ongoing basis throughout the plan's time period by gathering both qualitative information and quantitative data as programming is implemented. Quantitative data from TurboVote and NSLVE will be examined to understand voter turnout rates, voter registration rates and what specific demographics are engaging in these activities. The university is currently considering the purchase of *Collaboratory* software, which should make logging and compiling attendance and participation records more straightforward. Qualitative information will be collected through feedback surveys received after the implementation of individual programs.

Success will be determined by increased participation in voter registration and turnout rates, as well as by positive feedback received from students and partners. CCEL, in collaboration with the working group, will collect all information related to the evaluation of this action plan to begin analyzing it in early January of each year. Results will be shared to improve the impact of voter engagement efforts in future years.

References

Institute for Democracy & Higher Education: National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement. (2019). 2014 and 2018 report for Case Western Reserve University. Medford, MA.

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