



# Democratic Engagement Plan Montana State University Billings

Forward Montana Foundation | Montana Campus Compact | SLSV Coalition

## Context

This is the Democratic Engagement Plan for Montana State University Billings, located at 1500 University Drive, Billings, MT 59101. This plan will be reviewed by key stakeholders, including Associated Students Montana State University Billings (ASMSUB), interested campus clubs and organizations, faculty, staff, and administrators. This plan, once approved, will be official college policy and will be adhered to when all local, statewide, and federal elections take place in order to increase representation of student voices in government and to foster lifelong habits of civic engagement among students.

From 2014 to 2018, youth voter turnout in Montana increased from 8% to 11%. During the midterms, young people in Montana turned out with the highest rates in the nation. As we learned in 2018, young people have the skills to cast their ballot and make their voice heard by providing simple and accessible voter registration opportunities, access to educational materials and candidates, and further building power among young Montanans to increase participation and accountability.

When civic engagement is institutionalized -- from our colleges to our places of work -- young people create lifelong habits of civic engagement and involvement in our democracy. With the help of administrators, faculty, community organizations, and students at Montana State University Billings, we will create a culture of year-round civic engagement on our campus building a more representative democracy in which the voices of our students are valued at every level of government.

## Purpose

As a result of this action plan, students at Montana State University Billings will have access to the resources needed to register to vote, make informed decisions based on non-partisan information provided by civic engagement organizations on candidates and ballot initiatives, complete their respective ballots, and have the skills to encourage a healthy environment of civic engagement not only with their fellow students on campus, but *all throughout their communities.*

## Goals

1. Each student at Montana State University Billings will have *accessible, open access* to ample voter registration opportunities and *multiple opportunities and ways* to cast their ballots during all elections. This will be achieved by:
  - a. Expanding voter registration into all previously implemented programs such as orientation, advising, and residence life.
  - b. Online outreach to students who may be only online or did not need to attend any orientation (i.e; transfer students)
  - c. Voter registration drives held by Forward Montana Foundation staff and associated trained volunteers. Montana State University Billings reserves the right to coordinate similar voter registration events with multiple civically focused bodies, i.e. MontPIRG.
2. Providing a *healthy, open, and welcoming environment* for students to discuss and learn about civic engagement and the issues that surround them. This will be achieved by:
  - a. Hosting at least two civic engagement events per academic year (one per semester). These can be; guest speakers, panels, fairs, volunteerism activities, or anything encouraging civically-minded discussion and thoughts.
    - i. In addition, these activities should be inclusive to all students, and engage every demographic on campus. One way to encourage this inclusivity is to *intentionally and enthusiastically* include student leaders/voices from different backgrounds to plan and participate in these events.
  - b. Support and advocate for current anti-harassment policy which protects students from retaliation or harassment, based on **ALL** of the following; *race, religion, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or disability*.
    - i. This, along with reinforcement of this policy, allows the school to promote a healthy civic engagement environment for all students, which is vital to every other aspect of this Democracy Engagement Plan.

## Methods

### Voter Registration:

Forward Montana Foundation (FMF), and volunteers associated with the partnership between FMF and Montana State University Billings will be granted access to a complete, updated list of professors' contact information in order to reach out for non-partisan voter registration presentations.

FMF and volunteers associated with FMF shall have access to all relevant college-sponsored events and programs, for the purposes of non-partisan voter registration, education, Census work (where applicable), and voter engagement and turnout. The relevant events vary campus to campus and can be determined between the FMF organizer and the primary campus contact.

Student and staff partners will be responsible for holding a minimum of three voter registration drives each semester. For example, National Voter Registration Day.

Voter registration drives should include (but not restricted to); volunteers trained on the best practices of voter registration, a dedicated volunteer attentive at the table at all times, and voter registration should always remain accessible, nonpartisan, unbiased and inclusive.

Voter registration will be incorporated into the orientation process. A voter registration form will be provided to every freshman by including it in the standard orientation paperwork used FMF and volunteers associated with FMF will also be allowed to table at appropriate freshman welcoming events to provide further opportunity to register and turn in forms.

#### **Communications:**

Those responsible for the Democratic Engagement Plan will hold one presentation, upon request, every year to inform and update faculty, staff, and interested students on the importance of this Democratic Engagement Plan and the broader goal of student civic engagement, participation, and education.

Campus Administration will have access to the student email list to send at least one email reminding students to register to vote and provide important related information (election deadlines, mail-in ballot reminders, election dates, community candidate forums, polling location information, voter registration drive information/dates)

**Peter Buchanan** will work with FMF, ASMSUB, and interested campus clubs and organizations, faculty, staff and administrators to create and approve at least one email a year to professors; including this plan, general statistics for voter engagement and turnout on the campus, contact information for key leaders in the plan, and encouraging them to approve one in-class presentation on voter registration per semester.

Professors will also be invited to the yearly presentation listed earlier, to receive more information and provide feedback.

#### **Campus Cooperation:**

FMF and other civic engagement organizations agree to provide two weeks' notice before tabling. Written permission must be sought from **Peter Buchanan** before voter registrations events take place on campus. All tabling events on campus grounds must be accompanied or supported by a MSUB community member.

FMF and other civic engagement organizations shall have access to tabling areas on Campus\*. This is if there are no prior paid bookings, and the organization(s) have a non-partisan, civic engagement, and student-forward mission - all fees will be waived. This will allow students optimal chances to register to vote, receive educational materials, and experience voter engagement, which has all been proven to lead to higher turnout capacity among student voters.

\*Tabling areas defined: This coalition will be granted access to high-traffic areas at Montana State University Billings with the expectation that organizers will not interfere with students' access to vital college services.

In order to further institutionalize voter registration on campus, each campus will provide voter registration forms and a secure dropbox in at least one, but ideally several centralized, secure, and accessible locations on campus - possible locations include in an administration office, at check-in desks in the residence halls, and in the Library. FMF and Residence Hall Directors associated with the partnership between FMF and Montana State University Billings will provide a short training for all Residence Life staff working near the secure drop boxes concerning voter registration and the established collection locations.

Residence Hall Directors will then be responsible for reminding the students under their care to turn in the registration forms and answering questions students might have. FMF and volunteers associated with the partnership between FMF and Montana State University Billings will be responsible for turning in the voter registration forms from the box every week.

## **Section 2: Faculty, Administration and Community Partners**

Each campus will discuss the proposal to join NSLVE, or the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement through Tufts University, if not involved already.

Montana State University Billings will sign up for the ALL IN Democracy Challenge which is a national nonpartisan initiative that supports and recognizes colleges and universities to improve civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation rates.

The responsibilities and procedures above will be reviewed and updated as needed every two years by key stakeholders.

Placing important election dates on the academic and events calendar allows campuses to reinforce the importance of elections as a norm, not an elective.

Finally, each campus should push to make every Election Day a campus-wide holiday. This is shown to increase voter turnout by removing school-related scheduling conflicts and giving ample time for students and staff to make it to the polls.

### **Additional Campus Responsibilities (Key Stakeholders at Each Campus Choose Three):**

1. Host two additional voter registration events on campus per semester.
2. Host an unbiased candidate forum where all candidates on the ballot are invited.
3. Decrease the burden of traveling to the polls on election day by, providing a shuttle system from campus to the polls on election day, or making a satellite polling location available on campus.
4. Host a voting party (example: rock 2 vote, party to the polls, absentee fill-out party, etc.)

5. Send monthly campus-wide emails updating people on the importance of civic engagement, or civic engagement opportunities (example: election dates, candidate forums, community conversations, dates of city council meetings)
6. Providing a space on the school website that holds resources for civic engagement (links to MT My Voter Page, MT SOS website, local election offices).

## Timeline

Date	Purpose and Activities
<b>Freshman and New Student Orientation</b>	Voter registration forms will be included in every orientation packet.
<b>Week before classes Begin</b>	Residence Hall Directors and keepers of the registration dropboxes will be trained on best practices of voter registration. Drop boxes will be fully stocked. Montana State University Billings will email all teaching staff to encourage them to allow a class presentation on voter registration and civic engagement.
<b>First week of classes</b>	Forward Montana Foundation and civic engagement partners will table at appropriate welcoming events.
<b>Throughout the Semester</b>	Hold civic engagement events, and voter registration events. Maintain supplies at the voter registration boxes, process and turn in any forms weekly.
<b>One month before each election</b>	An unbiased candidate forum will be held, the administration will send out a email reminding students of the upcoming election and giving students guidance on preparing for an election (how to register to vote if they have not already)
<b>One week before each election</b>	Election day information and resources will be sent out via email to all students, faculty, and staff
<b>On each Election Day</b>	An election day email reminder will be sent to students/faculty/and staff and a shuttle to the polls or satellite polling location
<b>Last week of</b>	Remind students to update voter registration status if moving off campus,

**classes**

especially if classes end before the June elections.