



**2018 University of Texas at Austin Voter Engagement Campus Plan**

Facilitated by TX Votes at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life.  
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## **Executive Summary**

The UT Austin Voter Engagement Campus Plan is developed by members of the UT Civic Engagement Alliance, which is convened by TX Votes. It is then written by TX Votes Program Coordinator, Kassie Barroquillo, who is with the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life. This action plan is a coordinated way for members of the UT community to work together to create more opportunities for civic engagement and support current work already taking place on campus. This plan is implemented by numerous organizations and institutes across the University of Texas at Austin campus. This plan was originally developed in 2016 because both UT Austin and the state of Texas have very low voter turnout rates and no centralized means for combatting those numbers. We have updated this plan to reflect the success of the 2016 election turnout, an increase of nearly 15 percent, and our known obstacles for midterm voting. This plan has already started by engaging students in the 2018 primary election and will end once we receive our 2018 midterm turnout NSLVE results. We will then use those results and our experience from 2018 and 2016 to write a report for 2020, while still promoting voting in local elections in the interim. The action plan will be implemented by sharing with all CEA organizations, as well as monitoring by TX Votes to see where implementation is failing or more successful than expected and trying to understand why. We will also present this report to student affairs and student government for their insights.

## Leadership

**The Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA).** The CEA, facilitated by TX Votes, and sponsored by the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life is the working group for the UT Austin campus. This collaborative effort has been a contributing effort for improved voter engagement on campus. Established in the fall of 2015, the CEA is a collaborative nonpartisan effort, convened by TX Votes, by organizations and institutes at the University of Texas at Austin to improve voter engagement, as well as other forms of civic engagement, on campus. The CEA, or working group, is an opportunity for many of these organizations to work together to

Participation is very simple, organizations choose a rep to attend one meeting per semester, register the students in your organization to vote, and share nonpartisan voting information around election time. If we deem there is something very important happening, we do call additional meetings. By including both political and nonpolitical groups in the CEA, we are able to ensure that we include students from all walks of life in our campus plan. Discussions with the CEA have led to more classroom talks, specific programming for STEM students, and different approaches to inviting even more groups to the CEA. The only way to be excluded from the CEA is to not exercise respect for all students at UT Austin. CEA reps are responsible for ensuring they pursue the activities they proposed and share the plan with their student org members. TX Votes members are responsible for ensuring the plan is shared with outside organizations and competitions.

**TX Votes.** TX Votes chairs the group with a newly elected leader every year. TX Votes is a student organization that organizes voter registration and voter education activities to increase campus civic engagement and electoral awareness. TX Votes is a student organization at the University of Texas at Austin that invites students campus wide to increase electoral participation and create more voters and better citizens. Each election cycle, TX Votes, in partnership with the Annette Strauss Institute, organizes and coordinates Get Out the Vote activities including registration booths, deputization sessions, and campus competitions. During off election cycles, TX Votes educates the UT community and engages in respectful and civil discourse on important issues. In addition to its relationship with the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, TX Votes also works closely with the Austin-Area League of Women Voters, the Foundation for Civic Leadership, Students Learn Students Vote, the Austin Tech Alliance, the Harvard IOP National Campaign, and the Voter Registration Division of the Travis County Tax Office. TX Votes acts as the facilitator between the ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge, NASPA Voter Friendly Designation, SLSV, and UT Austin. TX Votes write the campus plan after receiving input from organizations across campus, as well as fields all communication between these organizations.

**The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life.** TX Votes is sponsored by the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, which exists to cultivate informed voters and active citizens. We do so through research, education, and outreach programs focused on three key pillars: civic discovery, young people, and civil dialogue. Based in the nation's second most populous state at a premier public research university, the Annette Strauss Institute is aligned with the University's public role of designing and testing new ways of increasing civic involvement. It benefits from the collective expertise of scholars who are nationally renowned for their contributions to the study and development of civic participation and the conditions that give rise to or suppress engagement. Dedicated to applied research, the institute focuses on how new technologies of communication and innovative outreach can be used to increase political understanding and participation.

**Working groups members.** Members of the CEA change nearly every year. We currently have approximately 40 UT Austin members, as well as students representing groups that reside outside of UT Austin. Where the current CEA could best improve is by increasing its current work with UT Austin Student Affairs. We do not have an official membership with Student Affairs, other than that TX Votes and a number of other sponsored student organizations participate. As a large university, it is difficult to find the right time for Student Affairs to be involved, as well as other university institutions that may be involved in community engagement, but not political participation, like the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.

Current members include: Asian Desi Pacific Islander, American Collective, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Alpha Kappa, Delta Phi, Chi Omega Sorority, Christians in Business Organization, College Republicans, CommSGC, Communication Council, Delta Delta Delta, Generation Citizen, Graduate Student Assembly (Voting Graduate Student Agency), Hindu Students Association, Hispanic Health Professions Organization, IGNITE, Jolt at UT Austin, LBJ Graduate Public Affairs Council, Liberal Arts Council, Longhorn LULAC, Longhorn Singers, Minority Women Pursuing Law, Multicultural Engagement Center, Natural Sciences Council, Orange Jackets, Oxfam UT, Pi Beta Phi, Residence Life, Senate of College Councils, Socks for the Sole, Student Engineering Council, Student Government (Hook the Vote Agency), Tejas Club, Texas Freedom Network, Texas Friar Society, Texas Hillel, Texas International Affairs Society, Texas Political Union, University Democrats, Undergraduate Business Council, and Women in Business Association. Outside groups represented by students include: League of Women Voters Austin-Area, APIA Vote, and Travis County Voter Registration Division

Our relationship with the Travis County Voter Registration Division is a large part of the reason for our success. Currently, they have trained the TX Votes Program Coordinator to host Volunteer Deputy Registrar Trainings on campus. They are also incredibly helpful with

promotions and are sure that the UT Austin campus always has the materials it needs for voter registration work.

## Commitment

As noted above about Student Affairs, one of our greatest challenge is the size and layers of leadership at UT Austin. Our voter engagement efforts are largely student driven with the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life providing guidance and support. While the university does explicitly support community engagement, political participation is not part of that mission.

The [mission statement](#) of UT Austin is “to achieve excellence in the interrelated areas of undergraduate education, graduate education, research and public service. The university provides superior and comprehensive educational opportunities at the baccalaureate through doctoral and special professional education levels. The university contributes to the advancement of society through research, creative activity, scholarly inquiry and the development and dissemination of new knowledge, including commercialization of University discoveries. The university preserves and promotes the arts, benefits the state’s economy, serves the citizens through public programs and provides other public services.” It’s core purpose is “to transform lives for the benefit of society” with core values of learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility.

It is important to note that different educational departments and institutions that are part of UT Austin do have explicit political participation missions and goals.

## Landscape

Despite some of the barriers that UT Austin students face, our voter turnout is typically at average or above average compared to peer institutions. According to NSLVE data, approximately 56.5 percent of students turnout to vote in 2016 and 18 percent voted in the 2014 midterm election. Our improvement from 2012 led the country for undergraduates and our turnout was also slightly above average compared to our peer institutions. Our midterm turnout was on par with peer institutions. Our voter registration rates are usually between 70 and 85 percent, which is also on par or slightly higher than peer institutions.

Civic learning and democratic engagement are not considered overall campus learning outcomes. Civic learning and democratic engagement is presented through service learning courses and through some classes that are oriented toward governmental engagement (ie a course called Communicating to Government, offered by the Political Communication degree). UT Austin most exemplifies civic learning and democratic engagement in its co-curriculum. Presently there is the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life and the Division for Diversity and Community Engagement who work on democratic engagement and community engagement, respectively. In addition to a large number of political and community service student organizations on campus, nonpolitical organizations are starting to be more civically engaged through the Civic Engagement Alliance. There are also three Legislative Student Organizations that allow students to participate in student government activities.

UT Austin students face both inside and outside barriers to civic engagement. One of the largest interior barriers is no true central locations for democratic, community, and political engagement. While we do have institutes that serve those purposes, they aren't well connected. This can often be confusing for students. Our students would be well-served if at least one person was appointed to a position that would work between the Annette Strauss Institute, the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Student Affairs, and the President's Office. We also believe this would help with systemic change. Internally, we are also a very large school with limited funds for democratic engagement work. It is difficult to reach every eligible voter on campus and ensure they have all of the information they need to vote. Externally, voter registration is more restrictive in Texas than in other states: There is no online voter registration, nor is there same day voter registration and students IDs are not approved forms of identification. There is also confusion of voter ID laws in Texas that often deter people from voting.

Outside support for democratic engagement has been a catalyst for direct action by our students. With the support, financial and/or instructional, of groups like the Foundation for Civic Leadership, Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, Campus Vote Project, ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, League of Women Voters Austin-Area, Austin Tech Alliance, and the

Travis County Voter Registration Division. These groups have empowered students to do more democratic engagement activities on campus. Where we could use the most help is to find peer institutions with similarly-minded Boards of Regents who do have institutionalized democratic engagement practices in order to propose a similar model to our administration. We understand that our approach is very grassroots on our campus, but given the political climate of Texas, that may be the best approach.

## Goals

### Long-term Goals.

Consistently vote at higher rates than average Texas turnout (which is under 60% during presidential elections)

- Continue working on our short-term goals because it worked in 2016
- Work to encourage same-day voter registration or online voter registration to the state of Texas

Create a position on campus that will act as the liaison between the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Student Affairs, the Travis County Voter Registration Office, and the President's Office.

- Start having conversations with students and administration to see where to start and what they see as a problem.
- Find funding for a position like this.

Include democratic education curriculum in all First-Year Interest Groups and Transfer Interest Groups.

- Enter discussions Undergraduate Studies
- Develop curriculum
- Engage faculty and student leaders

### Short-term Goals.

30% voter turnout in the 2018 Midterm Election

- Increase of 12.5% from 2014
  - Add second polling location to campus
  - Host at least three voter education events/activities
  - Host at least two voter turnout activities
  - Implement text message reminder system
  - Purchase Facebook ads to increase awareness of election

85% voter registration in 2018 Midterm Election

- Increase of 17.7% from 2014
  - Integrate into student orientation for voter registration
  - Increase voter registration in classrooms, from only five classrooms in 2015 to 50

Increase the number of active CEA member organizations to 50

- Increase of 10 members, although out of our 40, not all are active at this time

Create legislation that ensures student employees are allowed to vote during work hours.

- Work with all legislative student organizations to create legislation, as well as work with with the president's office to see how this legislation can be implemented.

## Strategy

### Voter Registration

**VDR Trainings.** In 2016, over 200 students were trained as Volunteer Deputy Registrars. In 2018, the goal is to ensure we have at least 200 students trained as VDRs. To do this, we will need to continue to host more trainings on campus. We aim to host at least five trainings as soon as students return to campus for the Spring 2018 semester. We aim to host more than five trainings as soon as students return to campus for the Fall 2019 semester.

**Tabling.** Many of the Civic Engagement Alliance organizations will table across campus during the voter registration period of the election. At least two organizations, TX Votes and University Democrats plan to register students every day leading up to the Primary and the Midterm elections. Additionally, CEA organizations will coordinate to ensure that every table has enough volunteers and that they are spaced well throughout campus through a shared spreadsheet on Google Drive.

**Request Form.** TX Votes has created a request form for leadership around campus to use in order to request VDRs attend their event. In the past, this form has been used primarily by professors to register their classes and student organizations to register students during their meetings. We are going to promote this request form more throughout the year to reach an even greater number of students.

**Last Day to Register to Vote Celebration.** On the last day to register to vote, members of the Civic Engagement Alliance will gather on the steps of the UT Tower to register students to vote until midnight. This event will be a way to ensure that all students who want to register to vote can, and that extra attention is brought that it is the last day to register to vote in Texas.

**Email all professors teaching classes.** TX Votes is currently collecting the email addresses of all professors teaching during the Spring 2018 semester. They will receive an email asking for time in their classes to register students and offer the option of a presentation on voting in the state of Texas.

**Graduate Student Orientation.** The Voting Graduate Student Agency, which is part of the Graduate Student Assembly, will invite Graduate Coordinators in all areas of study to include voter registration and voter information presentations at all graduate student orientations. They will also table at the school-wide graduate student orientation.

**Residence Life.** Residence Life will host a VDR trainings for any interested Resident Assistants (RAs). These RAs will register their residents to vote and allow other RAs to send their residents

to them for voter registration. TX Votes will also provide bulletin board materials on voting and host information events for any RAs who are interested.

**Greek Life Efforts.** Our first effort with Greek life is to increase the number of fraternities and sororities in the CEA. TX Votes will also try to visit at least two sororities per week during their Monday meetings to register their members to vote.

## **Voter Education**

**Pick Your Politician Contest.** TX Votes plans to continue to host the “Pick Your Politician Contest” for its third and fourth times in 2018. This contest invites students around campus to guess which politicians will win the Texas primary and the midterm election. Students will be offered access to the Austin-Area League of Women Voters’ Nonpartisan Voting Guides to provide reliable and nonpartisan information on the candidates and issues on the ballot. The individual who has the most correct will win a prize.

**National Voter Registration Day Trivia.** To celebrate National Voter Registration Day, TX Votes will host a Political Trivia Night. Students will be registered to vote at the event and also learn more about politics at local, state, and national levels. This event will take place online and in-person.

**University Democrats/College Republicans Debate.** Traditionally, the University Democrats and College Republicans hold a debate leading up to the election on issues that are important to college students and also being used on the campaign trail by Republicans and Democrats.

**On-Campus Speakers.** Many member organizations of the CEA plan to have speakers on campus who will talk about the importance of voting to members of their organizations. In the past, these speakers have included potential candidates, party chairs, nonprofit leadership, and small business owners.

**Social Media Campaign.** Members of the CEA will also promote voting through their social media channels. In addition, the CEA is hoping to create a social media campaign that would include messages from influential members of the UT community talking about why they believe it is important to vote.

## **Other Events**

**VoteFest.** We plan to host VoteFest, in partnership with #VoteTogether. With the support of student government, we will plan a party near the polling location during early voting to encourage students to come to the polling location and cast their ballots.

**Election Day Celebration.** On Election Day, organizations will continue their traditions of asking students to vote via social media. TX Votes and University Democrats will table all day, with TX Votes offering thanks in the form of “Thank You” cards, cookies, and pies (for the “Piemary”). The day will end with a celebratory party for all volunteers and voters at a location near campus.

**Reminder Texts.** TX Votes will send reminder texts leading up to the election, so students will know when and where to vote, in addition to answering any question texts that respond. This will be done using the Remind Educational Text service. Students will be able to easily send a text to sign up for the reminders or give their information to a TX Votes member to sign up.

**Meet the Student Government Candidates.** TX Votes believes that voting needs to be a habit that starts with the most local elections. For this reason, we will host our second annual “Meet the Candidates” event for student elections at UT Austin. In addition the event, we will also create a nonpartisan voting guide for students to use when deciding on who to vote for in the student elections

**STEM Focus.** We know that the place for the most improvement for voter turnout among our students is with STEM students. Many degree programs in the STEM areas recorded voter registration rates over 10% lower than the campus average. For that reason, TX Votes has created a STEM Committee to concentrate on this challenge. The committee has already gained support from Computer Science professors and some STEM-oriented student organizations. In the upcoming year, TX Votes aims to create relationships with more STEM professors and student organizations, as well as receive permission to register students to vote in these classes and table in the STEM buildings.

**Big 12 Voting Challenge.** With support from the Foundation for Civic Leadership, TX Votes is working to establish the Big 12 Voting Challenge. This challenge will be similar in structure to SoCon Votes & Big 10 Voting Challenge. There will be a dedicated student intern working on the project to promote voter engagement not just at UT, but our entire conference.

**Texas Voting Summit and Network.** With support from the Students Learn Students Vote coalition, in partnership with Campus Vote Project and The Democracy Commitment, TX Votes is hosting a Texas Voting Summit, which will lead to a Texas Voting Network. Over two days, invited students and faculty members of higher education institutions in the state of Texas will be

attending the Summit to learn organizational methods and establish support networks to increase campus and community civic engagement participation rates from voter registration and voter education panels and workshops. The network will allow universities to stay in touch and maintain accountability for the work they started at the summit.

## **Reporting**

The campus plan will be published on the TX Votes website, as well as by some of the partner organizations. Civic Engagement Alliance organizations will be allowed to share the plan as well. We hope to also have it confirmed by our Student Government. The NSLVE data, which was used to inform the plan is already publicly available on the TX Votes website.

## Evaluation

We will evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts in a few different ways. We want to know how many people were impacted by each event, if those students found the events helpful, and if those numbers reflect in our voter registration and turnout numbers. This information will be collected and evaluated by TX Votes.

**Event Attendance.** We will take rough estimates of how many people are reached by each event. This information will be used in our next campus plan, which will be shared publicly.

**Follow-Up Surveys.** After events, if emails are collected, we will send follow-up surveys to see what students found valuable about the event. This information will be used in our next campus plan, which will be shared publicly.

**NSLVE Data.** We plan to continue using NSLVE data for insight on our voter turnout and registration numbers. We will both share the next NSLVE report on the TX Votes website and also use the data for our next campus plan, which will be shared publicly.