

10 Things Schools Can Do This Spring to Engage Students in the Elections

Begin Planning Now

November's elections may seem far away, but the sooner you begin planning effective nonpartisan ways to help your students register, volunteer, learn about the issues, and turn out at the polls, the better prepared you'll be as deadlines approach, and the more interest and momentum you'll build on your campus. Plus every student registered in spring is one less to register in fall. Here are 10 areas where you can begin acting now:

1. Build a team.

- **Create a core group of administrators, faculty, and staff** to coordinate campus election-engagement efforts and ensure key people are talking with each other across different departments and disciplines.
- **Approach key campus leaders** now to get commitments to help engage your campus. Include Deans, Provost, President, Student Affairs, Service Learning Coordinator, Registrar, IT department, Residence Life, Campus Newspaper Advisor, Faculty Development, Coaches, and academic departments.
- **Review what your campus has done previously** during election cycles and brainstorm ways to build on it.
- **Brainstorm funding sources** for ideas not already built into campus budgets. For instance, printing of voter engagement materials, food for get-out-the-vote volunteer parties, and transportation for students who want to register voters off campus.
- **Approach student leadership.** Student government and student programming boards can be important allies, as can the student newspaper. Begin planning together for fall.

2. Check the Calendar. Develop a preliminary calendar including:

- **Key campus dates:**
 - Deadline for the site students use when they register for fall classes, so you can post the [Rock the Vote registration tool](#).
 - Deadline for submission of materials to campus registration packets.
 - Deadline for Student orientations to include election-engagement activities and voter registration.
 - Fall book order deadlines for election-related course themes.
 - First and last days of classes.
- **Election related dates:** For info on state deadlines and rules, nonprofitvote.org links to info supplied by your Secretary of State and the League of Women Voters site, vote411.org has excellent summaries.
 - Voter registration deadlines.

- Deadlines to get an on-campus polling station.
- Dates of state primaries or caucuses and local elections.
- Fall early voting timelines.

3. Identify Key Potential Areas for Campus Efforts

- **Voter Registration:** Schools can play a key role in helping get students registered. Add registration components to activities like graduation, orientation, course registration, sporting events and concerts. Encourage student and relevant off-campus groups (like the PIRGS) to register voters in public spaces, like campus quads and the student union. If you have a residential campus, work with student organizations to do a “dorm storm,” where they go door to door to register students where they live. Encourage the campus Republicans and Democrats to do joint registration drives.
- **New Voter Registration and Identification Rules:** In many states, these have changed rapidly, making student registration and voting more confusing and difficult. Schools can play a critical role in ensuring that every eligible student knows what they need to bring to register and vote, and how and when to do it. In many cases schools can supply approved forms of identification, whether particular types of student ID cards, letters from the President attesting that a student is enrolled, or zero-balance utility bills. Nonprofitvote.Org and vote411.org have state-specific information. Your Campus Compact affiliate may also be creating a website section with information and templates. If your school runs into consistent hurdles trying to help your students register and vote, you can call the 1-866-OURVOTE hotline or visit 866ourvote.org to connect with voting rights experts who can advise you.
- **Student electoral volunteering:** Work with your service-learning center to encourage students doing off-campus service projects to register the communities they work with, and to connect the non-profits through which they volunteer with key resources like those offered by nonprofitvote.org. Encourage students to work with nearby schools to help register eligible high school seniors. Encourage them to volunteer with candidates and political campaigns, according to their individual beliefs. Encourage faculty to offer credit for any of these activities if students include reflective components like journals and reports.
- **Candidate and Issue Education:** You want your campus to be a hub where students reflect on key issues and critically evaluate local, state, and national candidates. Steer students to resources like votesmart.org where they can vet candidates’ stands. Schedule debates and forums. Think of creative ways, like those provided by the Annenberg School’s flackcheck.org, to help students question misleading campaign ads and actively challenge their airing. Plan distribution of nonpartisan voting guides, like those that the League of Women Voters and Rock the Vote will be preparing.
- **Voter Turnout:** It’s never too early to collect pledges to vote, or plan parades to the polls, debates and forums, mock voting days, and absentee ballot mailing parties (longdistancevoter.org is a great resource).

4. Plan IT support for student engagement and voter education

- Campus webpages, listservs, and social media sites can play a key role in getting students registered and involved. Work with your IT department to place [the Rock the Vote](#) registration tool on prominent campus websites and distribute it through campus email. Ask them to distribute the nearly completed Election Protection SmartPhone app -- a collaboration by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Rock the Vote, NALEO, NOI, and Verified Voting -- that we'll be sending out shortly, by publicizing the URL to download it and display its QR code in venues like the football stadium Jumbotron screen.
- [Votinginfo.org](#), initiated by Google and Pew, is still developing its tools, but they'll let students look up voting places online. They'll also offer other key resources, like helping students get ballots if they're studying abroad, as will [overseasvotefoundation.org](#). Make sure your campus IT dept knows about these resources, and coordinates with your study abroad program for the latter.
- Start a Facebook group or Twitter tag for later use. People can sign up easily and you can then efficiently remind them come fall.

5. Check out existing web resources – and keep your eyes open for more to come.

- [www.Compact.org/initiatives/campus-vote-home/](#) [This will be Campus Election Engagement Project's main site—CEEP is in the process of updating it]
- [www.Ysa.org/ServiceVote](#) From Youth Service America
- [www.Campusvoteproject.org](#) From the Fair Elections Legal Network

6. Include registration options at key Spring events and in key materials.

- Display the [Rock the Vote](#) registration tool prominently on key campus web pages, particularly those where students sign up for fall classes.
- Include mail-in registration forms in any materials given to students (e.g., class descriptions, graduation packets, summer residential life forms).
- Try to incorporate voter registration drives into as many end-of-year activities as possible, like graduation. One person with 100 voter registration forms can register lots of people in just an hour.

7. Encourage students to vote in primaries and local elections.

Nearly half the states still have upcoming primaries and local elections. They're great places to learn about candidates and issues and become more involved. Congressional seats, Senate seats and state and local offices fill out most primary ballots. Talk about ways these matter.

8. Encourage faculty to add voter education to their curriculums

- Invite primary candidates (presidential, Senate, Congressional or local) to speak on campus, or even host a debate.
- Include voter registration forms in course syllabi.

- Incorporate relevant election-related discussions and readings into classes.
 - Combat political cynicism by exploring how electoral and non-electoral participation can complement each other, whether in the civil rights movement, Occupy, or the Tea Party. Assign books that give students a sense of how social change has unfolded in America, and the critical role of elections.
 - Add an election volunteering component to classes involving service learning. See nonprofitvote.org for nonpartisan ways nonprofits can register and educate voters.
9. **Build master lists for fall updates** – Get emails (for text message) and phone numbers from all related events and programs. By fall, this could be a great list of students for Get Out the Vote efforts.
10. **Work with the local board of elections for an on-campus polling location.** Making voting easy and convenient will significantly boost campus voter turnout.

Produced by the Campus Election Engagement Project, a nonpartisan effort to help campuses involve students in the election, working primarily through the state affiliates of Campus Compact and other partners like Youth Service America.