

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

Rutgers University – New Brunswick Action Plan Working Document

2026

Executive Summary

This nonpartisan Campus Civic Action Plan was developed by and will be implemented by the Eagleton Institute of Politics' Center for Youth Political Participation at Rutgers University-New Brunswick to prepare for the 2026 midterm election cycle. Campus Civic Action Plan is one name for an increasingly prevalent effort by university administrators nationwide to methodically plan initiatives to engage students around elections and civic participation generally. Various referred to as Vote Plans, Student Vote Projects, and Campus Election Engagement Projects, these plans are formed to unite the voter engagement efforts of student organizations, administrators, and other appropriate affiliates of the university into a single plan. This planning process is more than just a compilation of information: the existence of such a plan creates public goals that various stakeholders have agreed to meet, shifts the campus culture to one of widespread civic participation, and creates the possibility for evaluative research on the various engagement initiatives at work on the campus.

The Center for Youth Political Participation (CYPP) is a nonpartisan center at Rutgers New Brunswick committed to advancing the political learning of young people and equipping them with the resources and information to be active citizens and leaders. CYPP's team of staff members and students will be charged with carrying out the main components of the action plan, mobilizing campus departments' participation, and overseeing the progress toward the goals stated below. Increasing students' civic engagement furthers Rutgers University's core values of increasing access to academic excellence, creating a supportive, empowering community, and serving the common good. The production of an Action Plan allows CYPP to mobilize its efforts toward increasing Rutgers student voter turnout in the 2024 election, while also contributing to the longer-term goal of creating a campus community that is invested in civic participation. The Center for Youth Political Participation receives funding for the RU Voting Program through the Rutgers Democracy Lab, the Darien Fund for the U.S. Constitution, Citizenship, and Civic Engagement, Rutgers University president's office, and the Rutgers University Student Assembly.

This Action Plan will be implemented across all five Rutgers University-New Brunswick campuses throughout the whole of 2026. The plan is updated annually to reflect changes in campus needs, institutional goals, and developing research on civic engagement. Rutgers University is committed to equitably serving the members and communities of its very diverse campus, and the strategies detailed throughout this Action Plan reflect this commitment.

Leadership

The primary group responsible for improving democratic engagement is the Eagleton Institute of Politics' Center for Youth Political Participation. CYPP is itself made up of a team of staff members, paid student interns, and student volunteers, some of whom receive class credit for participation. Additionally, CYPP partners with students, faculty, administrative departments, community, national, and campus organizations, and local elections offices to carry out civic engagement efforts. Rutgers University - New Brunswick Chancellor Francine Conway has signed the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge Presidential Commitment to declare Rutgers' full commitment to advancing civic participation.

Rutgers University is a large and active community, with several student organizations and administrative programs already working to promote voter engagement on campus. Student government, the political-affiliated student clubs, NJPIRG Students, and an assortment of other student groups promote voter engagement to some degree in varying forms. On the administrative side, the Eagleton Institute of Politics does notable work to engage students on this issue. There are likely a large number of student, administration, faculty, and staff-led engagement efforts currently happening on campus, but with no centralized way to track and record these initiatives, it is difficult to assess the magnitude of work that is already being done, and the opportunities for more initiatives to take form. To methodically track these initiatives and assess how to strategically increase our voter engagement on campus, the central administration at Rutgers should create and regularly update a Campus Civic Action Plan. All offices, departments, student organizations, and other university affiliates that have some direct contact with students should be considered as part of this effort. Once created and approved by stakeholders, the plan will be revisited and updated each year to account for changes in stakeholders, goals, and community needs.

The key to the successful implementation of a Civic Action Plan is engaging a wide variety of stakeholders that come in contact with students in all aspects of campus life. Studies of youth voter registration and election turnout across the decades have revealed that peer-to-peer voter engagement efforts are effective. The attached document (entitled "Student PIRGs New Voters Project Research Compilation") includes several research reports on the New Voters Project (NVP), a national voter engagement initiative that college student members of the Student PIRGs have run on their campuses for over 30 years. The 2006 study by Polimetrix studied the impact factor of peer-to-peer voter registration and peer-to-peer "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) contact. The study found that peer voter registration efforts had an impact factor of 5.9% and peer GOTV contact had an impact factor of 13.2%. GOTV contacts come in a variety of forms: field contacts (in-person chance encounters in public areas), email or mail reminders, and phone or text canvassing off of a given contact list. A 2007 study by Allison Dale of the University of Michigan and Aaron Strauss of Princeton University looked into the effectiveness of text messaging in the Student PIRG's GOTV outreach. The Dale/Strauss study found that GOTV texting had an impact factor of 3.1% by the conservative estimate, and 4.2% when accounting for process errors such as incorrect phone numbers among members of the treatment group. While the text GOTV impact factor was notably smaller than the overall GOTV impact factor of the Student PIRGs in the

Polimetrix study, youth have become increasingly reliant on text-based communications over the ensuing years, and the text GOTV effort has particular appeal due to its low-cost nature: in this 2007 study, the cost per vote generated was just \$1.56, notably less than the cost per vote generated ratio of traditional GOTV methods. A 2004 study by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) in partnership with Dr. Donald Green from Yale University observed the impact factor of pledging to vote through both phone and in-person GOTV outreach. For those unfamiliar, voter engagement campaigns often build momentum around elections by engaging the public in a voter's pledge; when an individual signs a pledge card, the GOTV organization uses that contact information to contact the individual in days leading up to the election to remind them of the pledge they took. The 2004 CIRCLE/Green study found that NVP's peer pledge to vote initiative had an impact factor of 10.6%.

The above research all supports the same basic conclusion: peer-to-peer voter engagement leads to significant increases in student turnout. This conclusion is put into greater context by the research of Nancy Thomas and Margaret Brower from Tufts University's Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) The Tufts IDHE is also the institution responsible for the launch and continued operation of the NSLVE program. The Thomas/Brower research examined the importance of campus culture in voter turnout, naming five main factors: social cohesion, diversity in practice, pervasive political discussions, students with shared institutional responsibility, and prevalence of political action. In summary, the research shows that a sense of community, connectedness between students and faculty, empowerment of student political action, and shared governance of university functions create a campus culture that results in higher voter turnout rates.

Highlighting Peer-to-Peer Contact

Academic literature notes that youth voter turnout can increase through a campus culture that fosters civic action, and research on voter engagement fieldwork strongly indicates that youth voters respond to peer contact. For GOTV work, the impact factor appears to rise as the GOTV contact methods become more personal. Synthesizing these best practices, it is recommended that the university focus heavily on enabling large-scale, personalized, peer-led engagement initiatives. For the majority of on-campus students, Residence Life can be a powerful stakeholder in furthering the voter engagement process. Residence Life has ongoing, highly personal interactions with all on-campus students throughout their time at Rutgers. Perhaps the most well-known element of Residence Life among students is the Resident Assistant (RA) and Apartment Assistant (AA) program. Note: RA's and AA's are different job titles and serve different somewhat different functions, but for simplicity, this writing will simply refer to all as RA's. RA's are student employees hired and trained by the Residence Life professional staff members who are embedded in residence hall communities and tasked with building community among the residents and enforcing community rules and expectations. Each residence hall has at least one RA overseeing it, with most or all buildings having at least three RA's and some having upwards of ten; specific RA's are assigned to specific sections of students within the building and are responsible for running hall programs and regularly engaging with their residents. To build a culture of engagement into

existing community structures, it is recommended that Residence Life on all Rutgers campuses include voter registration training as part of their RA training program, encourage RA's to incorporate voter engagement into some element of their community programming, and provide RA's with informative posters as part of passive educational programming in the halls.

Incorporating voter registration training into current RA training programs would empower each RA to be a direct resource to their residents in answering questions about the registration process and incorporating this knowledge into other elements of community programming. Such trainings have been part of RA training programs sporadically in the past: in recent years, both RU Voting and NJPIRG Students have worked with Residence Life to run these trainings during the week of RA training in August. It is recommended that Residence Life work with these organizations on an ongoing basis to include voter registration training as part of the RA training program each year.

Every RA on the New Brunswick Campus is required to run six active programming events with their residents, and these events must cover six different areas of student development. Rutgers Residence Life requires RA's to run programs that fulfill different themes of the C.A.R.E.S. model: Community, Academics, Responsibility, Equity, and Self-efficacy. The sample RA program in Appendix B was written as a sample program RA's or individuals in similar positions can use to encourage civic engagement; it is designed to fulfill the Responsibility program theme. The university and Residence Life should not require RA's to use this sample program, but this sample should be provided to all RA's, and Residence Life should broadly encourage RA's to include some form of civic engagement or voter education as part of their program design, and allow RA's to utilize this sample to implement this program in their own residence halls.

In addition to the active programming that RA's do by hosting hall events, Residence Life also engages with students through passive programming. Most often, this passive programming comes in the form of door hangings, bulletin boards, and posters in communal spaces within the residence hall. It is recommended that Residence Life provide each residence hall with a poster that clearly states the location of the polling station for students registered under their hall address, and which provides some form of directions for how to get to the polling station from the residence hall.

Residence hall communities can also promote peer voter engagement through the existing Residence Hall Association (RHA) governing/programming bodies that already exist within each community. A number of institutions promote voting through residence hall canvassing-type operations, where members of either the student government or the RHA go door to door within each residence hall to remind students to vote. Other institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley have successfully implemented such programs; at Rutgers-Camden, NJPIRG Students partnered with the RHA to do door-knocking in residence halls the day before the 2017 state election.

The university can increase student voter engagement through campus programming that normalizes a culture of engagement; this type of culture is best built through pre-existing and well-loved hallmarks of the fun side of the campus community. The Rutgers University Programming Association (RUPA) is a student-led programming board supported by the Department of Student Affairs and RUSA in Rutgers--

New Brunswick; their function is to run programming events for students that balance learning and enjoyment. Framing voter engagement in this way, as both informative and enjoyable, will help spur interest from a broader array of students who may not be attracted to the standard political-focused events available on campus. RUPA should be engaged as a stakeholder in the Civic Action Plan that can directly help mold the campus culture into one of civic engagement by way of enjoyment-focused programming and free distribution of voting-themed items that are usable or wearable by a majority of students.

Peer voter engagement should extend to other elements of the campus community, as not all students would experience that contact through residence halls or RUPA events. Many students are involved in student government, clubs, athletics, and other communities focusing on Greek life, cultural, or religious affiliation. All of these entities are capable of hosting voter information events or promoting registration and other election deadlines through their various channels of communication. When creating the Civic Action Plan, the university should make a strong effort to engage the following communities as stakeholders: all student government associations; the commuter's association; the Cultural Center Collaborative; the Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council; and the interfaith councils and related organizations that exist on each campus. Through collaboration with diverse student groups on campus, the Center for Youth Political Participation can ensure that barriers students face to civic participation are adequately addressed.

Departmental Engagement Methods

While peer voter engagement initiatives should be a strong focus of the Civic Action Plan, many offices and departments of the university have important roles to play as well. The Center for Youth Political Participation has regularly partnered with the Political Science Department but aims to increase collaboration with STEM departments whose students are less likely to participate in elections, as reported by NSLVE data.

One form of digital outreach that the university does in some measure is sending out a campus-wide email before Election Day; this is a good starting point, and it is recommended that the President's email account send a campus-wide email with voter registration and vote-by-mail application information ahead of their respective deadlines, and additionally send a campus-wide email serving as an Election Day reminder. Other forms of digital outreach from the university may include the Office of Information Technology including deadline information and relevant links on all university websites; academic schools and departments sending out email notices; department chairs encouraging faculty to remind students of election day in class or on Sakai; university calendar includes deadlines and election day; university departments and offices post deadline and election day reminders on their respective social media accounts. In terms of electronic outreach, many universities with higher than average student voter turnout have developed a stand-alone website that contains all relevant voting information, including deadlines and rules established by the state and county and campus-specific information about upcoming voter information events and other elements of the Civic Action Plan relevant to the

general student body. It is highly recommended that the development of a website be included as part of the creation of a system-wide Civic Action Plan.

On election day, visible promotion of the polling locations on and near campus will also aid students in accessing the polls. At the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus, there are several polling locations on campus, including the Busch and Livingston Student Centers; however, little to no signage currently exists indicating where within the student centers students should go to vote. The university should sponsor physical signage around the on-campus polling locations that direct students toward the appropriate buildings, and signage inside that direct students to the room where the polling is taking place.

For off-campus polling locations in New Brunswick and North Brunswick, Election Day shuttles currently sponsored by RUSA and the Eagleton Institute of Politics provide needed transportation to students whose on-campus addresses place their polling sites in hard-to-reach locations. These shuttles provide a valuable service in increasing accessibility, but the lack of signage and general promotion decreases the potential impact this service could have on voter turnout. The university should sponsor physical signage guiding students toward the sites that these shuttles leave from.

A variety of voter engagement best practices have already been implemented successfully at Rutgers. However, many effective practices happen sporadically and are frequently forgotten from year to year. The Civic Action Plan should aim to incorporate voter engagement initiatives that have succeeded in the past and promote their implementation from year to year. Such initiatives in the past have included:

1. The University President sending school-wide reminder emails about important voting deadlines.
2. Pop-up photoshoots with the campus mascot and a sign promoting voting.
3. Voter registration experts (such as RU Voting or NJPIRG Students) register student athletic teams to vote, with the event promoted on social media.
4. Campus VIPs such as chancellors, vice chancellors, student leaders, and well-known faculty participate in a voting-themed photo campaign, promoted on social media.
5. Campus newspaper, radio, and/or TV stations promote voter registration deadlines and Election Day reminders.
6. Departments or student organizations distribute voting “swag” (common term for items such as t-shirts, buttons, stickers, etc.) in giveaways or as part of a raffle.
7. Election Day “Party at the Polls” with signage, free food, music, etc.

Landscape

Rutgers University-New Brunswick is made up of a large and diverse campus community of approximately 44,000 students across five campuses. According to the Rutgers Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning, 82% of students are New Jersey residents, though students from all 50

states and over 120 countries are represented, with 10% of our student body being international students. In addition, Rutgers is one of the most ethnically diverse campuses in the nation and the Big Ten, as the Rutgers community is approximately 9% Black, 27% Asian, 17% Hispanic, and 32% White. Rutgers also offers over 120 undergraduate majors and 750 student organizations and clubs. While diversity is an important part of what makes Rutgers' campus community so strong, the breadth of Rutgers can pose a barrier to interacting with every student on campus. Additionally, the majority of Rutgers students either commute from home or live off campus, which can make them difficult to reach.

Considering the diverse landscape of Rutgers University-New Brunswick propels our efforts to work with the various campus organizations and departments. Through strengthening our campus coalition, we may gain information about the behaviors and needs of different pockets of the Rutgers community. We also aim to reach all Rutgers students by increasing university-wide digital messaging, on the various websites and apps frequented by students. (ie. Canvas, myRutgersPortal, email, Rutgers app, and social media). Finally, voter registration and mobilization drives will be held in popular locations across all Rutgers campuses and at university events to ensure all community members are reached with this essential content.

Past National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement data outlined in the NSLVE section below describes Rutgers students' participation in recent elections. To summarize, in 2020, Rutgers University-New Brunswick had a higher-than-average voting rate of 72.8% and registration rate of 83.5% with lower voter turnout for local and non-presidential elections. Data also shows that most students voted by mail. Data on Rutgers students' voting behaviors reveals that they are more civically engaged when it comes to Presidential elections, as in 2020. This information mobilizes RU Voting's efforts to increase awareness of and commitment to local elections. In addition, as students tend to vote by mail, RU Voting aims to increase resources for mail-in voting.

Commitment

Rutgers University - New Brunswick President Jonathan Holloway has signed the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge to declare Rutgers' full commitment to advancing civic participation.

After participating in the ALL-IN Democracy Challenge in Fall 2016 students, staff, and faculty proposed a variety of possible projects to the University Senate to be considered for the University's next steps in improving the civic engagement experience for students. The University Senate published the response below that describes the introductory process for a University Civic Action Plan in January 2018:

Response to Charge S-1702 – Increasing Student Voter Turnout in Federal, State, and Local Elections: Investigate how the number of Rutgers students who vote in federal, state, and local elections can be effectively increased.

Charge S-1702: Increasing Student Voter Turnout in Federal, State, and Local Elections:

Investigate how the number of Rutgers students who vote in federal, state, and local elections can be effectively increased. Consider what changes in policies, procedures, and practices can best encourage voting by students, including making election days holidays. Make appropriate recommendations. Respond to the Senate Executive Committee by December 26, 2017.

Background

The goal of the Student Affairs Committee was to analyze the resources that already existed at Rutgers in regard to this issue. The committee identified many university organizations and departments that participate or could participate in the process and have made recommendations on how to improve student voter turnout. Our report outlines steps we can take as a community to increase student voter turnout in federal, state, and local elections. The cornerstone of the report is the recommendation to create a Campus Civic Action Plan that unites the efforts of all partners.

Voter Registration

The gateway to voter participation in all elections is voter registration – a student can't vote if he or she is not registered. The process of registering to vote can be burdensome for young adults, especially students attending Rutgers-New Brunswick. Over the years, a variety of structures have been put into place and efforts undertaken to facilitate the process. As a result, voter registration rates among Rutgers-New Brunswick students are strong in relation to comparable institutions. To maintain and increase these rates, not only must current practices be sustained, but additional efforts can be taken to ensure that students receive the support they deserve and enter adulthood as informed and engaged citizens.

For much of the nation's history, the burden of registering to vote has fallen upon the citizens. Although growing in popularity, a minority of states automatically register citizens to vote currently[1]. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) {became law in NJ on April 17th, 2018} approach to voter registration explains in large part the relatively low voter turnout rates in the United States in relation to comparable democracies.[2] Given that determining the manner of administering elections is the responsibility of individual states, voter registration practices (residency requirements, deadlines, electronic or paper registration) vary considerably between states. The result is a patchwork of practices for participating in elections.

The nature of the nation's voter registration process negatively impacts the registration rates of college-age citizens. Given their limited to nonexistent voting history and their relatively transient lifestyle, voter registration practices can be a hurdle to youth political participation. In fact, it is those states with more favorable voter registration practices (such as Election Day registration) in which youth voter turnout rates are highest.[3]

The challenges associated with registering to vote are keenly felt by Rutgers students.

1. Although they may register to vote in their hometown, many Rutgers students are unaware that they may register in the Rutgers community (thus allowing them to vote on the Rutgers campus).
2. For those registering to vote in the Rutgers-New Brunswick area, students must take great care to list the correct municipality on their registration form (North Brunswick, New Brunswick, or Piscataway). Moreover, there are particular intricacies involved in completing the form for those living in residence life (students are expected to provide their residence hall name for “Home Address” and campus P.O. box for “Mailing Address”). These considerations are different for on-campus students vs. off-campus students, which further complicates things even with the recent change in NJ Law.
3. In New Jersey, the voter registration deadline is 21 days before Election Day (generally mid-October). Given the business associated with the start of the semester, this deadline often comes quickly for students.
4. If a student has changed residence halls or is living at a different address from where they were previously registered, they must update their registration.
5. Although the voter registration form can be accessed and completed online, New Jersey requires that these forms be printed out, signed, and delivered (by hand or mail) to the appropriate Board of Elections (postage is provided). 1) Postal mail is rarely used by college-aged people, & is perceived as highly inaccessible, and 2) the Board of Elections office is a significant distance from campus, which makes hand-delivery difficult since many/most students don't have access to personal vehicles. Also notable that these same complications apply to mail-in/absentee ballot applications & ballots.

Since its inception in 2012, Rutgers-New Brunswick has been a part of the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). NSLVE is a signature initiative of the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. The mission of IDHE is to shift college and university priorities and culture to advance political learning, agency, and equity. Thanks to the University's participation in this study, voter registration and turnout rates of eligible Rutgers-New Brunswick students are available. NSLVE results are based on enrollment records submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse (FERPA-blocked records excluded) and publicly available voting files collected by Catalist. The available data offers rates by such factors as gender, year, and field of study and also provides information about methods of voting.

NSLVE data indicate that voter registration rates among eligible Rutgers-New Brunswick students were 76.6% in 2016 – an increase from 73.6% in 2012. The voting rate of registered students in 2016 was 70.5% (up from 63.3% in 2012).[4] Even in an election with historically low voter turnout rates, students' registration rates were 62.1% in 2014 at the time of this report.

The University has an important role to play in educating its students to be active and informed citizens. Teaching the skills of democratic citizenship is a shared responsibility that extends across disciplines and across the campus.[5] In fact, current federal law requires federally-funded colleges and universities to request voter registration forms from their state at least 120 days prior to the voter registration

deadline and to inform students about voter registration procedures and deadlines via an “electronic communication” exclusively on that subject.[6]

Over the years, Rutgers-New Brunswick has supported a number of efforts to provide students with voter registration information. In addition to maintaining and embedding those currently in place in the campus culture, we recommend that the University take the additional steps of including a voter registration form as part of materials distributed to first-year or incoming students and programmatically educating all students on methods of voter registration throughout new student orientation programs.

The NSLVE data indicate that voter registration and turnout rates are lowest among first and second-year students. Given both the complications surrounding the process and the adjustments those new to college life encounter, incorporating voter registration into the orientation and acclimation process promises to enhance these rates. More and more, college campuses dedicated to enhancing civic engagement education are weaving such efforts into move-in, orientation, and first-year experiences.[7] Following such an approach would reflect a commitment by Rutgers-New Brunswick to be actively engaged in preparing their students for active citizenship.

Voting

The commitment to prepare students for active citizenship extends beyond supporting voter registration efforts and includes getting them to the polls. Voter turnout rates for Rutgers students on the New Brunswick campus stood at 54% for 2016 - an uptick of 7.4% from 2012. Moreover, 2016 turnout rates on the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus were higher than the average rates of comparable institutions. These turnout rates reflect the percentage of students who were eligible to vote and who actually voted in the 2012 and 2016 elections. Rates for the 2014 midterm election were considerably lower - 11%.

Data available from NSLVE provide information on students’ method of voting and show that, on the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus, far more students vote in person on Election Day than vote by mail. For the last three elections, vote by mail rates have hovered around 10-12%. With a vigorous information campaign and partnerships with campus groups, it is likely that this rate could be boosted considerably. Accordingly, we recommend actively promoting voting by mail to students by sponsoring initiatives for students to exercise this voting option, including underwriting the cost of postage.

Any registered New Jersey voter can vote by mail in any election for any reason. In New Jersey, a voter may vote by mail by completing the application for a vote by mail ballot and returning the application to his/her County Clerk. To receive the ballot by mail, the application must be received by the County Clerk 7 days prior to the election. A voter may also apply in person to the County Clerk until 3:00 p.m., the day before the election. The County Clerk cannot accept faxed or emailed copies of an application for vote by mail ballot unless voter is a military or overseas voter since an original signature is required. If a voter applies to vote by mail and changes his or her mind and goes to the polls, he/she will not be able to use a voting machine and must vote on paper instead.[8]

There are challenges associated with making good use of the vote by mail option in New Jersey. Some of these challenges apply to all NJ voters and some hit Rutgers-New Brunswick students harder:

1. The deadlines for submitting vote by mail applications are confusing – one deadline for those who want to receive their ballot in the mail and one for those who apply in person and receive the ballot in person.
2. Although there is a statewide voter registration form in use in NJ that all students can complete, voters must complete county-specific applications for vote by mail ballots. This adds another layer of confusion for students. The statewide form to apply to vote by mail requires the student to look up and write their County Clerk’s information by hand (“To be used when the voter’s county information isn’t known in advance” with a link on the website to the County Clerk’s contact information).
3. The information requested and the manner in which it is displayed varies between the registration form (which requires Rutgers students living in residence halls to list their dorm name as their “home address”) and the application for vote by mail which asks for “street address”. Moreover, there is no explanation that a student must be opted into campus mail to receive their ballot at school.
4. Applications for ballots and the ballots themselves require a stamp – this not only is cost prohibitive, but students often find it difficult to access a stamp for purchase.

Despite its shortcomings, “no excuse” vote by mail is an excellent option for Rutgers students (whether they’re registered at home or in the Rutgers community) and might be another way to boost turnout rates. For students who still are registered in their home (either within NJ or outside), this allows them to vote in without having to leave campus. For those registered in the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus community, voting by mail alleviates the burden of finding polling locations or risking missing class in an effort to vote and also allows them to vote in primary elections without having to change address forms or return to campus after classes have finished for the semester.

Recommendations for improving its use might include:

1. Synergizing the voter registration process with the application to vote by mail process by systematically offering the opportunity to apply to vote by mail with students when they register to vote (at New Student Orientation, in residence halls, in voter registration drives with RU Voting and other campus groups).
2. An increased commitment to raising awareness and facilitating applications to vote by mail also is essential in order to raise rates. Working in collaboration with county clerks, large quantities of applications can be made available to students (with postage paid) for vote by mail drives. In situations where counties do not provide postage, we recommend that Rutgers University underwrite the cost of postage and, to further lessen the burden, deliver these applications for ballots to county clerks.

A University-wide commitment to preparing students for active citizenship and providing support at each stage of the voting process is essential to boosting Rutgers voter registration and turnout rates.

Such a commitment must be woven through all facets of the campus and institutionalized. As such, we recommend that relevant information on how to register to vote and relevant voting information be provided on a permanent basis on University sponsored portals, such as Sakai, Blackboard, or similar platforms. Traffic on these portals is widespread and consistent. Voting information at students' fingertips not only provides easy access to resources but reflects the University's commitment to civic engagement among the student body.

In addition, we recommend that the University continue to support the voter registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts organized and administered by RU Voting. RU Voting is an initiative that has been in place on the Rutgers campus for over 10 years and has been supported by the Office of the President, the Office of the Chancellor-New Brunswick, and the Office of Student Affairs. RU Voting is administered by the Eagleton Institute of Politics' Center for Youth Political Participation (CYPP). CYPP advances the political learning of young people and equips them to be active citizens and leaders. Through education, research, and public service, the Center for Youth Political Participation plays a lead role locally and nationally in fostering and promoting the active citizenship and leadership of future generations.

RU Voting is a non-partisan and comprehensive voting information resource – a “one-stop shop” for Rutgers students who want to register to vote and participate in elections. RU Voting's efforts are anchored in its website – a site that has been featured on Sakai and other portals and to which campus-wide email blasts are directed. The site offers detailed and accurate information specifically for Rutgers students regarding such topics as voter registration, vote by mail, and polling locations. Specifically, the site's “Rutgers Polling Locator” lists each residence hall with its corresponding polling locations and includes a link to a google map. The information on the website is further extended via CYPP's Facebook and Twitter pages. This fall, Rutgers Today featured @RutgersCYPP in their "What's Trending" section. The website received 110,000 impressions this fall and over 30,000 in the week before Election Day alone.

In addition to virtual outreach, RU Voting holds a number of in-person voter registration drives (including on Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day), trains student groups and resident assistants how to register students to vote, holds voter education events and forums such as “Pizza and Politics”, disseminates vote by mail and Election Day information, and helps get students to the polls by co-sponsoring free Election Day shuttles. RU Voting has become the resource Rutgers students, administrators, and faculty rely upon for registration and Election Day information. RU Voting has played a meaningful role in fostering strong voter registration and turnout rates on this campus. To maintain and increase these rates, Rutgers must continue to support RU Voting, ensuring a consistent and institutionalized effort to register, educate, and mobilize Rutgers students for all elections.

Rutgers Policy on Absences and Voting

Many students registered to vote for the first time while at Rutgers. While we do not have exact figure on the number of students who register for the first time at Rutgers, we know that at least 3,773 students registered or updated their voter registration last semester.[12]

Of the students who are registered, 83.3% voted in person in 2016.[4] From our discussions as a committee, many student senators identified that their constituents, who live on campus, sometimes travel home to vote on election day. Some of these students feel a stronger connection to their home environments, than to the Rutgers area. Others may forget to update their voter registration information, but still qualify to vote at home as they are a college student. For these reasons, students sometimes go out of their way to vote in person. In order to allow for students to more readily vote in such situations, we as a committee recommend that Rutgers University amend its absence policy (10.2.7) to allow for students to vote.[11] We recommend a system in which the faculty member has full discretion in granting excused absence requests on this issue. While some faculty members may decline to excuse students from missing class due to their presence at the polls, other faculty members may be more inclined to excuse students. For these reasons, we recommend allowing students to be excused from class for the purposes of returning to the polls, subject to the discretion of the faculty member teaching the course. If a student can show sufficient hardship preventing their attendance to the polls (such as substantial travel time, inconvenient public transportation schedules, or similar circumstance), a faculty member should have the discretion to excuse an absence for this purpose and the absence policy should make this situation clear.

Local Polling Locations

Similarly, students who are registered on campus should feel welcome to vote and participate in the election process. The methods described above on getting students to the polls are appropriate and should be pursued. However, in the long term, we ask the university work with local officials to bring polling locations to every single campus of Rutgers. While on campus voting locations are available for some parts of Rutgers, we encourage the university to work with local authorities to ensure all on-campus students can vote on campus. From our investigation, we found that in the past there were more on campus polling locations. There was a location at the New Brunswick College Avenue campus. That polling location existed for 2 years; it was first added in 1994 and it was no longer a polling location in 1996. We urge the university administration to work with the Middlesex County Board of Elections and New Brunswick municipality access the reasons for the removal of the polling location.

Syllabus Information on How to Vote

In the committee's deliberations, we considered the methods on how to best raise awareness and encourage students to vote. One of the methods of raising student awareness is to include information on class syllabi about certain important matters. Many of the classes taught at Rutgers University include information on the class syllabi regarding general campus services. In particular, at the New Brunswick campus, many classes include information on medical services, important campus organizations such as Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA), Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and many more. As part of this investigation the committee considered and has decided to recommend that the President of the University urge the various schools within the universities to include information about voter registration and other voting related procedures. Student members of the committee indicated that including information about various campus services on syllabi raises

awareness of those services. For the benefit of various schools and units, we have provided some sample language as part of Appendix A, on the nature and form of this addition to class syllabi.

Automatic Voter Registration

Rutgers University's Department of External Affairs performs various functions, including state government Affairs.[9] From the data available in the NSLVE reports [4], there was an overall increase of student voter registration rates from 73.6% in 2012 to 76.6% in 2016. Even though this increase in registration is promising, about one in every four students is still not registered to vote. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, "nine states and the district of Columbia have already approved automatic voter registration and 32 states have introduced automatic registration proposals this year." [10] Automatic registration simplifies the voter registration process by changing from an opt-in to an opt-out system. Students who interact with the state government (be it through obtaining a driver's license, applying for state financial aid, or numerous other ways) can automatically be registered to vote. The state has recently adopted AVR, and while the effects of this policy change will not be felt in the upcoming election cycle, we look forward to monitoring its impact in later years.

Election Day Holiday

While the committee appreciates other evidence that indicates that Election Day holidays correlate with higher election participation, we believe that there is insufficient evidence to justify an Election Day holiday on the scale of a university at this time. The committee was unable to identify studies or other publications that indicate a university holiday leads to more students voting or participating in the election process. For this reason we do not recommend the university adopt an election day holiday at this point, but we urge this issue to be reconsidered if sufficient evidence emerges to support a voting day holiday on the scale of the university.

Reconsideration of These Recommendations

As it was previously discussed (see Voting section), there was a substantial uptick in voting rates between 2012 and 2016 on the New Brunswick campus. It is the committee's hope that this trend continues in future elections. After the next Presidential election, the NSLVE report for 2018 and 2020 should be available. At that time, this committee should have sufficient data to reconsider its recommendations and make an evaluation of the results of these recommendations. Reconsideration is important in order to assess the adequacy and success of these recommendations in achieving increased student participation in elections.

Leadership Team

As detailed above, there is widespread commitment to civic participation from Rutgers University staff members, students, and departments. To ensure these commitments and plans are upheld, the Center for Youth Political Participation will act as the dedicated leadership team. As CYPP has been responsible

for official voter registration and mobilization efforts at Rutgers University-New Brunswick for many decades, CYPP has the expertise and capacity to organize efforts across the campus.

The Center for Youth Political Participation team is led by staff members at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. These staff members work very closely with a group of RU Voting interns, who are paid undergraduate students with strong leadership skills and dedication to civic participation goals. This coalition of students and staff members at CYPP can recruit and coordinate campus partners, ensure the tenants of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are upheld in the work, and oversee efforts towards the university's goals. CYPP is responsible for sharing information on civic participation efforts at Rutgers within and outside of the campus community through social media, the Eagleton Institute of Politics Newsletter, and participation in ALL IN challenges and events.

Conclusion

The recommendations we make in this report have been identified by the committee as actions that lead to increased civic participation and engagement in elections. It is our job as a Rutgers Community to create an environment where civic discourse and similar issues are discussed and debated on campus and where students feel their views can be heard. The issues we raise here are part of a campus identity identified by Thomas and Brower in “Politics 365: Fostering Campus Climates for Student Political Learning & Engagement”.[13] In addition to the actions we recommend here, we encourage all members of the Rutgers Community to actively promote participation and engagement in society by students. Educating the next generation of actively engaged citizens requires the support of the university. We recognize the multitude of actions the university has already taken and commend the university for its role in supporting voting by students. In addition, we make recommendations on how the university can further promote and educate students on our civic process.

Goals

Long-Term Goals

- Over the next decade, Rutgers University - New Brunswick seeks to increase participation in local elections from 40% in 2018 to 65% in 2034, which is a 35% increase. This will be indicated by data collected by NSLVE. This increase should be seen proportionally across students of all races, ethnicities, genders, income levels, college majors, and Rutgers campuses.
- Within the next five years, all Rutgers students will interact at least once with the Rutgers TurboVote link to register to vote, sign up for election reminders, or apply for vote-by-mail.
- Within the next five years, RU Voting will advocate and place an Early Voting Location on the Rutgers University—New Brunswick campus for students voting in Middlesex County.
- Within the decade, the Center for Youth Political Participation will fully establish a campus-voting coalition and have strong relationships with various campus departments, student-led organizations, faculty and staff, the New Brunswick election office, Residence Life, Greek Life, Rutgers Athletics, and Global Education. This coalition will better meet the needs of the diverse

student population with increased insight from different organizations and departments and access to different groups of students.

- Within the next five years, the Center for Youth Political Participation will create a yearly candidate guide on individuals running for office in the state of New Jersey that can be housed on the CYPP website.

Short Term Goals (to be achieved within 2026)

- In the 2024 election, Rutgers University - New Brunswick seeks to increase the voting rate from 23% in 2022 to 45%, which is a 22% increase in 2026. This increase should be seen proportionally across students of all races, ethnicities, genders, income levels, college majors, and Rutgers campuses.
- The institution aims to increase voter registration of eligible students from 76% to 85%, as measured by NSLVE data. This increase should be seen proportionally across students of all races, ethnicities, genders, income levels, college majors, and Rutgers campuses.
- CYPP will create social media posts highlighting important election reminders and guidelines in the weeks leading up to the voter registration period.
- Student volunteers will reframe conversations at voter registration and mobilization drives to encourage students to make a concrete plan to vote. Shifting this conversation and encouraging students to pledge to vote, will hopefully contribute to increased participation in the 2024 General Election as measured by NSLVE. Drives will be held in various popular locations across all five campuses of Rutgers University - New Brunswick to ensure all students receive this content.
- We will strive for at least 40% of the RU Voting Team to represent marginalized communities on our campus. We will recruit members to this team by conducting outreach within various diverse student organizations and campus departments.
- Increase collaboration with Rutgers New Brunswick faculty, staff, and administrators, Residence Life, Greek Life, Rutgers Athletics, Global Education, student-led organizations, and New Brunswick city officials.
 - Deliver voter registration and mobilization content to campus events hosted by different Rutgers departments and organizations.
 - Connect with the New Brunswick election office to deliver relevant information about local election policies to students.

National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE)

Currently Rutgers University participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) through Tufts University. This project collected data on Rutgers University Undergraduate student participation in 2016 and 2020 for both voter registration, and for voter turnout in the federal elections. The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge requires participating schools to benchmark improvement and participation, the NSLVE reports will assist in that process.

The NSLVE process provided guidance to approach the topic of civic engagement and engaging a variety of areas of the New Brunswick university community in creating a campus culture of student voter participation and civic engagement. Voter registration and turnout rates are available as a result of Rutgers University- New Brunswick's participation in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and reflect the percentage of students who were eligible to vote and who actually voted in recent elections. The NSLVE report indicates that turnout rates on the Rutgers-New Brunswick campus were higher than comparable research institutions. The Eagleton Institute of Politics' Center for Youth Political Participation announces that voter turnout rates for Rutgers students on the New Brunswick campus increased 20.2% from the 2016 election to a 72.8% voting rate in 2020. Approximately 83.5% of Rutgers - New Brunswick students were registered to vote in 2020, and of those registered 87.2% voted. Voting rates are lower in non-presidential election years; the voter turnout in 2022 was 40%.

Data also indicates that the majority of students (57%) voted using other methods than in-person on Election Day, that first-year students and sophomores (66%) voted at higher rates than upperclassmen (62%). More women (69%) voted than men (59%) on campus. The fields of study with highest turnout rates included public administration and social service professions, library science, and education. The fields of study with the lowest turnout rates included statistics, mathematics, computer science, and physical sciences. NSLVE results are based on enrollment records submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse (FERPA-blocked records excluded) and publicly available voting files collected by Catalist.

Strategies

The Center for Youth Political Participation will carry out plans to meet the University's long-term and short term goals for civic participation. CYPP will continue strengthening relationships and building trust with campus and community partners through regular communication to establish a voting coalition on campus. This will ensure a greater campus investment in voting in all elections and awareness for CYPP. Additionally, the team will continue working with the New Brunswick board of elections to increase on campus voting locations, thus decreasing physical barriers to voting. CYPP will also continue to partner with Rutgers administration to increase digital messaging so every student is made aware of all election deadlines on a regular basis.

To meet long and short-term goals, strategies include:

- Create a campus plan, subject to yearly review, for voter engagement which unites the voter engagement efforts of student organizations, administrators, and other affiliates of the university into a single university-wide plan
- Continue disseminating voting and civic engagement information on social media platforms
- Include a voter registration form as part of the materials distributed to first year or incoming students
- Programmatically educate all students on methods of voter registration throughout new student orientation programs
- Train resident assistants on how to register students to vote

- Provide resident hall assistants with a copy of the sample program in Appendix B, which educates on-campus residents about how to register to vote
- Include on a permanent basis information on how to register to vote and relevant voter information on University sponsored portals, such as Sakai, Blackboard, or similar platforms
- Actively promote voting by mail to students by sponsoring initiatives for students to vote-by mail, including underwriting the cost of postage
- Publicize and provide a poster within each residence hall with instructions on the location of the polling station for students registered in that residence hall
- President’s office send out, via email, voter registration information, vote by mail application information, and an Election Day reminder prior to the respective deadlines for each of those processes
- Sponsor and actively promote Election Day shuttles to difficult or hard to access polling locations
- Post signage around campus with instructions on how to get to polling locations
- Explore the possibilities with local municipalities to provide for on campus polling locations in New Brunswick
- Participate in civic holidays
- Add a parenthetical statement to the existing language of University Policy 10.2.7 D.3 that states “(voting, family emergencies)”
- Continue to support voter registration and get-out-the-vote initiatives by RU Voting
- Ask every academic unit to include RU Voting (ruvoting.rutgers.edu) information on their sample syllabi to encourage faculty of the value in including it in their own class syllabi
- Maintaining and expanding the RU Voting website to include on the June Primaries

Academic Experiences offered to support Civic Engagement

- Academic Experiences offered to support Civic Engagement
- Rutgers University offered a wide array of academic coursework related to civic engagement. A sample of these experiences include:
 - Center for Youth Political Participation Internship Opportunities
 - Rutgers Democracy Lab’s Think & Do Tank
 - Center for Youth Political Participation’s Digital Content Creator Internship program
 - RU Running Political Campaign Training for Undergraduate students
 - The Darien Civic Engagement Project
 - Undergraduate Associates Program at Eagleton Institute of Politics
 - Ralph W. Voorhees Fellowship Program in Public Service
 - Lloyd C. Gardner Fellowship Program
 - Rutgers University Collaborative Center
 - Diversity Peer Education Program
 - Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN)
 - NEWLeadership™
 - Institute for Women’s Leadership-Leadership Scholars Program
 - Rutgers-Eagleton Washington Internship Award program

Planning Calendar for January 2026 to November 2026

January 2026

- *Reconvene members of the Rutgers-University Civic Engagement Coalition for our meetings*
- *Reach out to campus influencers i.e. Athletics and Residence Life contacts*
- *Draft a list of action items or deliverables for specific populations*
- *More consist engagement with Residence Life beginning in the spring semester*

February 2026

- *Arrange individual meetings with key partners:*
 - *Athletics Department*
 - *Office of Study Abroad*
 - *Office of Residence Life*
 - *Commencement Office*
- *Determine list of opportunities for departments to integrate voting and civic engagement into programming and provide accurate information to students*
 - *Share specific fact sheets on Early Voting, Voter registration, Vote-by-Mail, and Election Day voting*

March 2026

- *Develop plan for faculty members to include information on elections in syllabuses and provide other election reminders*
- *Work with the Office of Institutional Planning and Operations regarding Academic Calendar integration*
- *Create Voter Education training for Residence Life class*

April 2026

- *Create & disseminate marketing materials for June Primaries*
- *Develop and share messaging for June Primaries*
- *Develop language for Rutgers Commencement and voter registration changes*
- *Disseminate language for graduating students*

May 2026

- *Disseminate information on voter registration for Primed for the Primaries campaign*
- *Develop Coalition approved messaging for Rutgers units with appropriate tags I.E. RU-NB Civic Sustainability Plan*
- *Finalize Welcome Week in-person programming dates and activities*
- *Create mandatory voter registration training for all volunteers and students*
- *Host voter registration drives in preparation for New Jersey Primary Elections*

June 2026

- *Develop messaging and online deliverables for virtual Summer Orientation sessions*
- *Create voter registration one-pager and video for orientation*

- *Update Fall marketing materials for November 2022 elections, specifically information on VBM, Early Voting, and Voting on Election Day*
- *Develop materials for students living in off-campus housing i.e. maps for polling locations in New Brunswick and Piscataway off campus students*
- *Reach out to contacts on campus to begin preparing fall collaborations*
- *Connect with Rutgers University Newark and Camden to increase cross-campus collaboration of voter registration and casting your vote information*

July 2026

- *Foster partnerships with Recreation and Dining Services to share voter information*
- *Draft list of language and posts for Voter Registration on social media*
- *Build and train a team of volunteers for voter registration during the fall semester*
- *Develop Get Out the Vote plans for Late-October and Early November depending on whether students will be returning to campus*
- *Develop tentative Election Day activities*
- *Order QR code voter registration signs*

August 2026

- *Administer in-person Welcome Week activities and voter registration*
- *Disseminate voter registration messaging across all units via social media and email*
- *Offer online office hours for voter registration*
- *Train a team of volunteers for voter registration*
- *Set dates and send invitations for fall events*
- *Begin promoting voter registration practices prior to Welcome Week activities*
- *Create weekly voter registration goals to maintain accountability*
- *Coordinate Voter Registration practice for students hosting drives*

September 2026

- *Offer voter registration, either in person or virtually*
- *Draft vote by mail language for dissemination*
- *Draft language and organize email blasts for voter registration reminders*
- *Update messaging on finding your correct polling location*
- *Order QR code signs for Casting Your Vote*
- *Reach out to professors requesting to conduct class visits to encourage voter registration*
- *Deliver voter registration content to campus events, organization meetings, and classes*
- *Implement interactive features into voter registration drives*
- *Celebrate Constitution Day and National Voter Registration Day*

October 2026

- *Send email blasts to coalition partners regarding voter registration deadlines and election day reminders*
- *Draft and disseminate language on vote by mail to study abroad students*
- *Share polling location information for students by residence halls*

- *Disseminate polling location information specific for commuter and out-of-state students*
- *Disseminate polling location information for students living in off campus housing in New Brunswick and Piscataway*
- *Host vote-by-mail, find your polling location, and early voting drives*
- *Connect with New Brunswick polling locations to reserve tabling locations on Election Day*
- *Celebrate Vote Early Day*

November 2026

- *Implement Pre-Election Party for finding polling location*
- *Implement Election Day Party at the Polls events*
- *Reconvene and create a Summary of all year activities*

December 2026

- *Create evaluation plan (survey) for 2026 work*
- *Disseminate evaluation of work to coalition partners*

Reporting & Evaluation

This Action Plan and NSLVE reports will be shared internally within our campus community and externally to the local and national community. Data will be discussed internally with incoming student interns and volunteers to mobilize our efforts for the upcoming year. CYPP’s team will formally revise this plan after the 2024 election season, but individual plans will be updated throughout the year in responses to campus wide and broader national changes. It will additionally be shared on the Eagleton website, newsletter, and social media platforms, so it is available for students, faculty, and community partners to read. Access to this Action Plan and NSLVE data will be granted to ALL IN to share nationally and compare against other campuses efforts.

Evaluation is essential for determining the success of voter registration and mobilization on campus and for the continual improvement of our democratic engagement work. Rutgers University-New Brunswick’s civic capacity and campus culture will be measured through NSLVE data, TurboVote data, our student team’s subjective reports based on responses to the drives, evaluation information collected from students at civic participation events, and reports from campus coalition partners. The RU Voting Team at the Center for Youth Political Participation leads the efforts to evaluate voter mobilization efforts and campus climate, as well as to implement necessary changes to voter registration and mobilization efforts in real-time. In particular, Center for Youth Political Participation staff members and RU Voting Interns will review these data points on a weekly and annual basis. Metrics for success are based on meeting the short and long-term goals outlined within the action plan.

Evaluation is conducted every week with the RU Voting team as we approach the 2024 election to ensure that CYPP actions are meeting target points for voter registration. Voter registration and mobilization efforts will be continually re-assessed by CYPP staff members and interns based on TurboVote data and student reports to ensure that the delivery of information is as successful as

possible. Our efforts throughout the year will continually be compared to the short and long-term SMARTIE goals and planning calendar outlined in this Action Plan. This will ensure that we are meeting our targets, based on the numbers highlighted in the SMARTIE goals, throughout the year and allow us to reflect and adjust our plan to meet the needs of students. The responses of

At the end of each election season, RU Voting evaluates the overall success of Civic Engagement efforts to prepare for the upcoming election season. The Center for Youth Political Participation conducts a semester review in which we detail what worked, what did not work, and areas for improvement in our voter registration and mobilization efforts. The semester review provides an in-depth description of each year's work, which allows the team to compare strengths and weaknesses across different election seasons. This review provides insight into the University's TurboVote and NSLVE data, helping CYPPE understand how engagement efforts translated into actual voter turnout. In addition, as described above, the NSLVE data is reviewed when it is released to better understand the voting behaviors of various demographic groups at Rutgers University. This data informs where we should concentrate future efforts to ensure equitable dissemination of information. The semester review is shared internally to prepare our team, while the Action Plan is shared broadly to show our progress and plans to campus and community partners.

Report Citations

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