



# Best Practices to Help Students Register and Vote

## A Guide for Colleges and Universities

Two-thirds of college students surveyed who did not vote in 2010 cited reasons having to do with a lack of information rather than a lack of interest, citing issues like a lack of familiarity with the voting process, missing important deadlines, and being confused about residency rules. CVP puts FELN's election law knowledge to use by helping schools institutionalize specific reforms that help more students register and vote. CVP helps schools make electoral engagement a regular part of their educational mission to graduate active and engaged citizens and comply with the Higher Education Act requirement to make voter registration available to students.

This guide outlines some of the actions colleges and universities should take to ensure students are able to fulfill this important civic duty. For assistance with any of these activities or for additional resources contact Campus Vote Project at [info@campusvoteproject](mailto:info@campusvoteproject), 202-331-0114, or find us at [www.campusvoteproject.org](http://www.campusvoteproject.org).

### Tackling the Information Deficit

#### Establish a College/University Voting Website

CVP can help you develop content or update information on a website that includes the non-partisan nuts and bolts of registration and voting, such as; dates and deadlines (voter registration, early voting, Election Day); information (polling place locations, ID requirements); and links to forms (voter registration forms, absentee ballot request forms). Providing a trustworthy voting website reduces the information deficit that keeps many students from participating in elections.

#### Email and Social Media Posts with Non-Partisan Voting Information

Reminders about voter registration deadlines, absentee ballot deadlines, and Election Day through email and social media are an important way to talk to every student directly. Linking to the campus student voting website or voter registration forms that are often available online gives students direct access to the information they need through the communications they regularly use. This is also an opportunity to comply with the Higher Education Act requirement to distribute registration forms to all students.

#### Participate in Tufts' NSLVE Program

Tufts University has launched a research initiative on college student engagement in democracy available to campuses **free of charge**. As a participant in the [National Study on Learning, Voting and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#), your campus will receive a tailored report indicating in aggregate numbers how many of your students registered to vote, how many voted, how that data breaks down by age, class level, field of study, and more. For more information, contact Margaret Brower, [margaret.brower@tufts.edu](mailto:margaret.brower@tufts.edu), at CIRCLE directly.

### Promoting Voter Registration

#### Compliance with the Higher Education Act

Section 487(a)(23) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 references the

National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) and requires institutions of higher education to distribute voter registration forms to

their students. See [this letter](#) from the Department of Education on July 1st, 2013 for more information, <http://www.ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/GEN1317.html>.

*"If your institution is a covered institution, you must make the voter registration forms widely available to your students and distribute the forms individually to your degree or certificate program students who are physically in attendance at your institution."*

*Higher Education Act of 1965*

#### Incorporate Voter Registration into Campus Activities

Depending on the activity format voter registration can be incorporated into a number of campus activities by providing paper registration forms, links to downloadable forms, or voter registration widgets, and to online registration where available. In most states the Secretary of State's office can provide state voter registration forms.

#### Freshman Orientation, Move-in Packets, Residence Hall Meetings

All of these activities are great places to incorporate the distribution of voter registration forms to students.

#### Class Registration, School Intranet, School Email Login, Student Affairs Websites

These are great sites where students can be presented with information and links to voter registration information.

## Use a Voter Registration Widget like Rock the Vote or Turbovote

Through a widget embedded on your own website students can input their information and print a voter registration form with their information already filled out, for the student to sign and mail. Both tools also allow students to sign-up to receive email and/or text reminders about absentee voting, early voting, Election Day, and future reminders about updating their registration.

**Rock the Vote:** <http://www.rockthevote.com/partner>  
**Turbovote:** <https://turbovote.org>

## Fund Student Voter Registration Efforts

Student Government, or if provided funds other student organizations, can use funding to acquire the materials needed to conduct voter registration drives or Election Day activities.

## Inform Students of Their Street Address and Help Them Prove it at the Polls

To register, students need a street address, not a P.O. Box. Often a residence hall address alone is also not sufficient. Check with local registrars to find out what is needed and provide it to students living on campus. Schools can also provide students with documentation with their name and address that may be sufficient identification at the polls in some states, e.g., zero balance utility bills. Check with local registrars to see what is needed and provide it if possible.

## Incorporate Voting Information into Curriculum

Courses on voting rights, civil rights, civic engagement, and service learning centers are all places where non-partisan information on voting can be incorporated into curriculum to advance student learning. Studies have shown that civic engagement, including voting, leads to higher retention rates, grades, and graduation rates for students.

## Encourage Issue Forums and Debates

Holding issue forums and debates on campus illustrates the importance voting has on the direction of public policy. Encouraging discourse on issues that impact students motivates them to become engaged citizens.

## Direct Students to Candidate Information or Host Candidate Forums

Non-partisan student voter websites, emails and social media posts can identify the candidates in a given election and direct students to their websites for more information while still remaining non-partisan. Informing students of the candidates on the ballot helps prevent drop-off for down ticket races.

Find Campus Vote Project's resources at  
[www.campusvoteproject.org](http://www.campusvoteproject.org)  
A Project of the Fair Elections Legal Network

## Reduce Barriers to Voting

### Provide Students with Photo Identification

In states with photo ID requirements that can be fulfilled by student ID cards, schools should provide compliant photo ID cards to all students. If the state law requires a signature or address on the ID card, these should be added where possible.

For more information, see FELN's Student ID as Voter ID map and fact sheet at [fairelectionsnetwork.com/student-id-map](http://fairelectionsnetwork.com/student-id-map)

### Establish a Campus Polling Location or Early Voting Site

Contact local election officials well in advance of the primaries and/or Election Day to encourage them to put a polling location on campus. In some states you may also be able to host an early voting site on campus.

### Establish a Shuttle to the Polls if Necessary

If polling locations or early voting sites that serve students are not easily reached by walking or public transit providing transportation to the polls can dramatically increase turnout. Your campus may have its own transportation vehicles that can be reserved for a shuttle to the polls program, you may work with a public transit system to adjust routes for early voting and Election Day service, or you may contract a transportation company to provide Election Day service.

### Plan a Student Poll Worker Program

Work with local election officials to recruit students to be poll workers. Many jurisdictions are in need of younger poll workers who are comfortable with technology, such as electronic poll books. Additionally, bilingual students can be a tremendous resource in communities with high rates of limited English proficiency voters.

Participating as poll workers is a great experience for students to understand the effort needed to maintain our people-driven democracy and also become more familiar with the voting process. Adding educational and reflective components to a student poll worker program is a great way to establish civic engagement curriculum.

### Get Out The Vote For Early Voting and on Election Day

Helping students exercise their voting rights around early voting and Election Day can entail a number of activities that raise awareness and provide information such as:

- Emails and social media post reminding students about voting, including information on where to vote and relevant voter ID requirements.
- Post fliers, banners, and allow chalking to raise awareness about Election Day.
- Encourage professors to remind students about Election Day at the end of each class.
- Give students the day off to engage in GOTV campaigns or be a poll worker or to miss class without penalty if they need to travel to vote.