



# VOLUNTEER AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

University of Nebraska at Omaha

“Mavericks Vote”

Revised 2024 All in Action Plan

## **I. Executive Summary**

The All in Action plan was developed by Community Engagement Center and Civic Engagement staff with input and review by the UNO Voter Engagement Coalition. The purpose of the plan is to further institutionalize and operationalize efforts to engage students civically across campus and create a campus culture of voter engagement, civil dialogue, and informed citizenship for students during their collegiate years and beyond. The plan will be implemented on the campus of the University of Nebraska Omaha. This plan will be implemented by the Volunteer and Civic Engagement Programs unit staff in collaboration with the Voter Engagement Coalition using resources from its operational budget and additional NU Foundation resources that will be pursued that support civic engagement on our campus.

The goals of the plan are as follows: to increase voter registration amongst eligible voters and identify gaps in using NSLVE data, develop informed citizens who have the necessary information on the process and the issues at the ballot box, encourage civil dialogue around civic engagement related issues relevant to the modern day student, and frame messages that highlight the stories and voices of students participating in both campus and community democratic engagement.

The intended duration of the plan is for one year from May 2024 to May 2025 to encompass the upcoming Primary and General elections along with building a solid coalition and base of student advocates to support our work.

## **II. Leadership**

The current Voter Engagement Coalition contains a variety of coalition members across various members that work across the institution to employ our proposed strategies. Presently, the coalition consists of a leadership model that has the Volunteer and Civic Engagement Programs coordinator, Toni Monette, facilitating coalition meetings and agendas. Going forward, the leadership team will expand to student ambassadors to co-create the coalition's strategies and goals.

Presently the coalition has representation from students connected to UNO Student Government, and previous nominees of Campus Compact's Newman Civic Fellowship. Going forward, we plan to expand this engagement to other advocacy-oriented student organizations and learning communities that contain diverse and first-generation students. In addition, we have faculty membership across departments such as History, Community Affairs, Political Science, International Studies and others. We are actively recruiting more Student Affairs representatives that interact with student facing organizations and other campus wide culture departments such as UNO Spirit and Tradition. We have several local community organizations in the coalition to include Elevate Omaha – a youth centered civic engagement organization, Civic Nebraska – a voting rights advocacy organization, and the local and state League of Women Voters. Additionally, we have begun progress on campus partnerships with the Douglas County Election Commission to host deputy registrar trainings and other events, this partnership will continue to expand into co-hosting community events on elections as we move forward.

A centralized leadership team is in progress to include members of the Office of Engagement staff, students, and faculty. Members of the coalition will undergo training and a shared drive of Civic Engagement campus specific information (such as NSLVE Reports and Action Plans) has been developed and centralized for instances of succession or transition of faculty/staff/students in the future.

### **III. Commitment**

The institutional commitment has been shown via the institution's consistent participation in flagship organizations like Campus Compact and the American Democracy Project. This participation has yielded gold and silver star ratings from the All in Democracy Challenge regarding student voter registration and turnout. This information is visible and displayed prominently on our dedicated Voter Engagement university website along with other relevant voting deadlines and resources.

As we are continuing to encourage participation in our Voter Engagement Coalition by members of leadership at UNO, we are actively engaged in the conversations around the future of the university's mission, vision and values. Presently, we are actively involved in strategic planning conversations where we will ask the institution to include democratic and civic engagement in the university's forthcoming mission and values statement – with a focus on building global informed citizens. We plan to utilize this process, along with annual reports and additional grassroots community outreach to community organizations where we will share data and tell the story of UNO's active participation in civic life as a public metropolitan university. This broad campus-wide messaging will be leveraged to increase the size of the Voter Engagement coalition and strengthen the mission work of the institution in civic engagement on campus and in the Omaha community.

## **IV. Landscape**

The campus landscape consists of a public metropolitan university with about 14,000 students as of Spring 2024. Our institution is progressively moving toward classification as a Minority Serving Institution with the following breakdown of demographics: 40% First Generation students, XX% Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and XX% Pell Grant eligible. In the past few reports, UNO has not included demographic information in its NSLVE reports, however, this information will be included going forward to identify gaps and inform goals and strategies for our institutions civic engagement efforts and eliminate barriers for participation by these populations. In the past we have employed strategies like hosting voter registration events in high traffic areas like the Student Center and campus library, however, these strategies did not yield a diverse or large quantity of students. This is primarily due to previous leadership not utilizing the campus demographics to guide these targeted efforts.

These student population demographics influence the ways in which we message the process for voter registration, its importance, and how we center seamless accessibility to this information by integrating it in all student's campus experiences. This ensures that even those with nominal information on how to navigate college can receive information on democratic engagement and registering to vote at the same time and with the same clarity as information about classes, campus programs etc. Since the legislature passed a Voter ID bill to begin during the May 2024 primary election, our goal is to engage the Douglas County Election Commission in our efforts to ensure our diverse student body has the appropriate idea, is able to access the free methods of obtaining one, and can make the necessary photocopies of their ID should they choose to Vote by Mail.

## **V. Goals**

Our goals as an institution can be broken down into both short- and long-term efforts to create a campus culture that centers democratic engagement. These goals can be categorized below:

### **Short Term Goals:**

Promoting voter registration and voting across campus by increasing the usage of TurboVote by 10% leading up to the 2024 general election by promoting student voter registration, providing

information on key voting deadlines, and other resources for advocacy to ensure those who are ineligible to vote ( i.e. international students) have the same inclusive and equitable opportunities to participate in receiving legislative action alerts , information on community events and other opportunities to engage outside of voting. This effort will also include ensuring students have appropriate information about the issues and candidates that is nonpartisan – this effort will include distribution of nonpartisan voter's guides from the League of Women Voters and other entities with a goal of increasing engagement on the Vote411 site by 5%. Additionally, we will double student participation in civic holidays such as National Voter Registration Day to promote voting and political engagement in an interactive and engaging way with at least 2 civic minded nonprofit organizations involved in its execution.

We will continue to develop informed voters by hosting at least 2 events per semester related to political learning outside of the classroom and across disciplines to include continued participation in UNO's DEIA Symposiums and providing workshops on legislative advocacy, mis and disinformation and other related topics that reach across disciplines. More specifically, our efforts will co-create events and strategies with UNO Student Government's Civic Engagement Committee to highlight advocacy topics. The implementation of these events already began in February 2024 with a "Legislative 101" event hosted by our office and SGA. The goal is to continue this advocacy series through the Spring of 2025 to include sessions on tips on providing testimony and forums with public officials to provide further context on the importance of youth civic engagement in our political process. To ensure these timelines and that the aforementioned events are equitable and inclusive we will continue to support and sustain an inclusive Voter Engagement Coalition that includes touch points with UNO's Maverick Food Pantry, Durango Access, Services, and Hardship Office, and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to ensure these events are widely marketed and attended.

Another short-term endeavor is to provide workshops to faculty and staff to promote voter and democratic engagement through partnering with existing and university organizations to offer training and assistance. We hope to engage at least 3 new organizations in these endeavors to include NE Appleseed, Common Cause NE, and the NE Civic Engagement Table. All these organizations work statewide on civic and voter engagement and registration initiative and touch urban and rural parts of the state where our students are from or have ties to. This broad representation will allow us the capacity to reach more students with voting information and engage them in voting adjacent work such as campaigns and ballot initiatives. As mentioned previously, we will host at least one workshop in the Fall 2024 and Spring 22025 semesters to emphasize the many ways students can participate in campus voter engagement.

A primary goal leading up to the General Election in November 2024 is to promote political engagement communication strategies by continuing to engage with the over 20 campus communicators to share nonpartisan voter information via social media, department newsletters, and other channels. We hope to drive engagement and analytics from our posts and messages up by at least 10% leading up to the General Election.

Lastly, we try to continue celebrating UNO as a place for civil dialogue by hosting public events such as debates, community forums, and civil dialogues sponsored by student organizations.

The first of this Civil Dialogue series occurred Spring 2024 in collaboration with the Women and Gender Equity Resource center – the topic centered on voter engagement and women’s health initiatives. We hope to increase attendance at these events by 30% over the course of the months leading up to November 2024 and beyond. Additionally, we will promote these events via digital signage, email lists, and will find at least 2 untapped communication methods during this time frame that reach underrepresented student populations.

### Long Term Goals:

In the long term, our goals center around identifying and implementing strategies that encourage a widespread socialization of our efforts across ALL campus departments, units, and areas. These are strategies that will require an increase and diversification of our Voter Engagement Coalition and a strategic focus on funding and additional volunteer resources and touch points to remain sustainable.

First, we will identify high impact areas to encourage student voting and to offer voter registration. This goal centers on having a consistent presence at New Student Orientation, Commencement, and MavCard Distribution. This integration will include voter guides, one sheet on the voter registration process, and Voter ID considerations. Beyond these campus culture initiatives, we will continue to update and further develop the campus voter resource and political engagement website to include interactive videos from students, Voter Registration challenges and other student facing initiatives.

We realize that students have the most campus interaction with faculty and will incorporate content related to voting via Campus Fellows and other Faculty Cohort presentations that provide infrastructure for them to implement strategies for discussing community issues, current events, and local politics in their classes. These training curriculums will cross the intersection of disciplines, colleges and departments to ensure widespread reach.

At the same time, we plan to continue to grow and diversify our Voter Engagement Coalition as we continue to provide equitable opportunities for Voter Engagement. We will promote the coalition across nontraditional spaces to include student organizations and other affinity groups that traditionally experience low voter turnout. The coalition growth will center inclusivity and increase membership by 30 – 40 over the next 5 years. Its focus will be to champion messaging curated for young voters and college students. While the coalition is our human capital goal long term, we also want to sustain the voter engagement work long term via reinstating monetary infrastructure in the form of Civic Engagement grants. In prior years, the institution gave \$50000 grants to students, faculty, and staff to implement civic engagement initiatives on campus. We budgeted for this sustainability in the prior fiscal year but want to increase this line item to give out 2–3 more grants over the next few years. Specifically, these efforts will focus on getting more student led research and other projects that center the student voting experience.

## **VI. NSLVE**

UNO's NSLVE data reported for 2020 is the most recent information we have available until 2022 data is released. The institution has been participating in NSLVE since 2014?? The most recent data ranks UNO as having a 71.9% voting rate which is the percentage of eligible students who voted on Election Day. This represents a 9.8% increase from the 2016 percentage and is 5% higher than the national average for higher education institutions. The Voter Registration rate was 85%, although the demographic breakdowns were not requested in previous years so it is hard to determine presently where there may be gaps. Going forward, we will request this demographic information to inform our voter registration and Get Out the Vote strategies to target student populations whose voter turnout is lowest. Additionally, the 2020 data reveals a high percentage of student voters voting by mail, presumably due to the pandemic. We will be paying close attention to the 2022 data when it is released to determine if there was a decline in getting out to vote and particularly this voting method. Our strategies to increase these numbers should they be impacted will be to provide more voter education materials on the Vote by Mail process to our students via campus Marketing and Communications departments and at all students facing events across departments. With the addition of voter ID, this initiative will also include readily accessible ways to print photocopies of student and other IDs for vote by mail purposes. There are some gaps that can be seen in the 2020 NSLVE data as it relates to voting by the 18 – 21-year-old age group at the institution – it is at 69% respectively. To address this perceived gap, we will strategize on how to engage students earlier in their collegiate career in the voting process to include voter registration at Orientation and other campus programming that all new and transfer students are required to attend.

## **VII. Strategy**

We have routinely participated in National Voter Registration Day as a day of action on UNO's campus to rally around student voter registration. In the Fall of 2024, programming consisted of the Nebraska State Court of Appeals held their College Campus Initiative at UNO where students could observe real-time cases and engage with Justices. To round out the week, an event in partnership with the local League of Women Voters, SkateFest Omaha, and the Nebraska Writers Collective to curate a Voter Registration Day event full of voting resources, creative activism expression, and voting advocacy. Also, in collaboration with the Political Science department coordinated lectures on the Supreme Court of Today and the Role of the Presidency.

Going forward we plan to mobilize around Vote Early Day and National Voter Education Week to engage students at various stages of their voting journey. These efforts will promote participation by upper class students and students already registered to vote to ensure a 5% increase in student voter turnout during the 2024 General Election.

Long term strategies that our Voter Engagement Coalition can spearhead include incorporating democratic engagement in seminars required via various campus learning communities. Given partnerships with existing learning communities that the Office of Volunteer and Civic Engagement Programs has with Project Achieve and the Thompson Learning Community, we plan to develop curriculum that can be socialized with their students in the future. As mentioned in the goals section, a primary strategy is to institutionalize voter engagement across campus. As we are currently in the

process of applying for an Ask Every Student Grant to operationalize these activities, we hope to integrate voter registration and education in new student orientation, MavCard Services, and including our TurboVote landing page as a button on Canvas pages to maintain visibility to students.

## **VIII. Reporting**

The All in Action Plan, NSLVE Reports and additional collected data from our institutions campus voting efforts will be displayed prominently on our Voter Engagement page and distributed to our Voter Engagement Coalition to disseminate the quantitative numbers ( # of registrants, voter turnout etc.) and the qualitative efforts ( impacts on student skill development , leadership, and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion) as we continue to prepare students to be global informed citizens. The URL for this website is <https://www.unomaha.edu/voter-engagement/index.php>. In addition to directing campus departments and students to the website, we will also develop an impact report yearly that encompasses our voting efforts and data. We will also begin submitting faculty, staff, and students' names for American Democracy Project Awards and submitting research to democratic engagement conferences that highlight the best practices implemented to achieve these goals and metrics. As we continue to diversify partnerships with community organizations, we will work to share our programs and initiatives noted in the Goals and Strategies sections so that we are thought leaders in the community on the topic of student voting and democratic participation. To this end, we hope to be able to submit articles and other collaterals to local media that highlight UNO as a thought leader in the space of civic engagement.

## **IX. Evaluation**

As for the evaluation of our efforts, we hope to be able to continuously improve our voting strategies and processes and procedures. Each year we receive NSLVE data, our Voter Engagement Coalition will convene a specific meeting to review the data and evaluate our current strategic plan which consists of Voter Registration, Voter Education, and Advocacy efforts to determine gaps in participation across the student body.

Additionally, we will take a holistic approach to evaluation to include the impact on people, processes, and performance and center diversity, equity, and inclusion lens as we review our strategies. Many of the strategies include an element of participation so these will be evaluated based on number of registrations which can be tracked through TurboVote reporting. Outside of registrations, we currently utilize pledge cards at various tabling events across campus and will have a database to track trends in activations that students request to participate in to include learning more about candidates, attending community forums, engaging with ballot initiatives, becoming poll workers etc. These trends will inform where our Voter Engagement coalition and office will focus its energy and resources in future semesters. To further expand our evaluation insight, we plan to conduct student listening sessions to evaluate the short-term goals mentioned above to determine the effectiveness of civil dialogues and voting related events and its relatability to student majors, relevant skills they would like to obtain, and

the current community climate. Our office of Volunteer and Civic Engagement Programs will be the primary collectors of this data via our programming and will work with non-profits like Elevate Omaha, a youth voting organization, and the Department of Institutional Effectiveness at UNO, to analyze the data and identify trends. After the data is aggregated, we will have varying members of our Voter Engagement Coalition along with Student Ambassadors of our work share the information each semester to Staff Advisory Councils, Faculty Senate, along with other relevant stakeholder across campus.