



## **SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The University of South Carolina (USC) is located in Columbia, S.C., the state's capital. The state legislature is in the university's backyard, just a block away from the center of the main campus. USC has seized many of the great opportunities that are afforded with this unique setup, through intentional partnerships and educational initiatives. Despite previous attempts, this has not yielded as high of voter turnout as desired.

The Tufts University National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) campus report reveals information about USC's voter engagement that has shaped this action plan. When comparing the 2016 voting data with that of 2012, it is evident that USC is making progress in terms of increases among students registered to vote, as well as those actually voting in elections. In the 2016 presidential election, USC had a 53.5% voting rate which was 3.1% higher than the national institutional average. Additionally, the voting rate of USC students in 2016 was a 7.7% increase from the previous presidential election in 2012.

Like many other institutions, USC experienced a dramatic decrease in student voter turnout during the 2014 midterm election. Of the 32,156 enrolled students, only 17.8% of the eligible voters participated in the midterm election. Since 2018 brings another midterm election, USC will focus on voter engagement and civic education surrounding the midterm election.

Overall NSLVE data reveals the distressing reality that the majority of college students nationwide are not exercising their right to vote during presidential elections. Furthermore, data depicts that less than twenty percent of students participate in midterm elections. Although USC is relatively on par with its peer institutions, the university will seize the opportunity to address this national issue through its commitment to civic education.

USC is interested in making civic engagement more of a priority on campus, specifically through the Leadership and Service Center. This plan is designed to introduce new initiatives and further integrate civic education into existing programs. USC is interested in the Voter Friendly Campus Designation to help propel a culture shift on campus and create a stronger emphasis on education and action.

## **PURPOSE & MISSION**

This action plan is designed to serve as a catalyst for year-round nonpartisan civic and democratic engagement at the University of South Carolina. This action plan aims to:

- 1) Improve students understanding of civic engagement processes;
- 2) Enhance student's civic competencies through respectful dialogue and consideration of diverse viewpoints; and

### 3) Strengthen partnerships between USC, partisan and non-partisan community organizations

This action plan will begin Summer 2018 and continue through the 2018-19 school year, being revised again Spring 2019. Implementation and revisions will be spearheaded by the Leadership and Service Center in collaboration with campus and community partners.

University of South Carolina's Civic Engagement Action Plan was developed

by: • Jabari Bodrick, Ph.D., Leadership and Service Center

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#### **REFLECTING ON PREVIOUS EFFORTS**

##### **Lead the Way Initiative**

Born out of Student Government, Lead the Way was composed of 20 executive members from many different areas of campus life. The demographics of the executive board intentionally matched that of the student body's demographics, as well students holding a variety of political views. USC's president and general counsel supported this initiative through guidance, while staff members in the Leadership and Service Center and other areas of the Department of Student Life provided the students with direct logistical support and funding.

The Leadership and Service Center purchased TurboVote, a product of Democracy Works, Inc., to help ease the process of registering to vote. More than fifty percent of the University's student population is from out of state, so TurboVote's online system eased the process for those who needed to register to vote. TurboVote also offered opt-in messaging systems that reminded students via email of dates they need to be mindful of, such as the last day to submit an absentee ballot in their state and deadlines for registering to vote.

Additionally, TurboVote helped students ensure they either voted absentee or made it to the polls on Election Day. Not only does the system send out automatic reminders, TurboVote also sent pre-stamped forms to students' current school addresses so they were able to simply sign and drop off their absentee ballots or voter registration forms at any post-office. This tool eliminated the extra effort to fill out forms, figure out where to mail them, or trying to secure the proper postage.

Lead The Way and Student Government developed a partnership with the Richland County Elections Commission for those out-of-state students who wished to vote in South Carolina during the national election. Because South Carolina requires a South Carolina ID to vote within the state, the Elections Commission set up voter identification creation stands in the Russell House University Union, the central hub of student engagement on campus. Most students were unaware they were required to have a South Carolina ID, so the events served two great purposes. Students were able to obtain a South Carolina voter ID, as well as learn more about the voting process.

Lead The Way also formed a partnership with South Carolina Athletics Department. At the University of South Carolina, sporting events tend to have great attendance, especially among

diverse crowds. The students were able to host voter registration drives outside the entrances of many athletic games. They also developed a friendly competition for which school can register the most students with the University's longest-standing rivalry, Clemson University, the winner of which was announced at the schools' traditional Thanksgiving weekend game at halftime. To demonstrate the university's commitment to civic engagement on campus, Lead The Way hosted a voter registration drive on the first day of classes on Greene Street, directly outside the Russell House University Union. Periodic voter registration drives also occurred in the center of campus such as the student union, where there is a lot of heavy traffic. Due to USC's NSLVE data revealing that many students in majors outside of liberal arts were not getting to the polls in as high of numbers, many of the voter registration drives and educational forums facilitated by Lead the Way were held in academic buildings of those majors who are not as likely to vote.

All classes at the university's main campus were cancelled on November 8, so students had one less barrier to making it to the polls on that day. To accommodate those students who might still needed transportation or assistance figuring out where to go, the Leadership and Service Center partnered with others in the community to secure transportation for students. The Leadership and Service Center also owns a fifteen passenger van that was driven by a staff member to provide on-campus students with transportation if needed.

### **2016 - By the Numbers:**

#### **Voter Registration**

**2,306** – Single day voter registration: on National Voter Registration Day. In talking with the National Voter Registration Day staff, this is believed to be a national record for single-day collegiate voter registration.

**4,261** – Official number of individuals registered by South Carolina voter registration deadline (October 9<sup>th</sup>)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Nationally** - The voter registration deadline for the state of South Carolina was Sunday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. As of Friday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, the University of South Carolina had registered 4,099 and was in second place nationally among all institutions using TurboVote.

#### **Fall 2016- Civic Engagement Forum Series:**

- *Climate Change/Environmental Justice – August 31<sup>st</sup>*
  - Attendees: 15 students
- *Civil and Human Rights – September 7<sup>th</sup>*
  - Attendees: 20 students
- *Economic Empowerment – September 13<sup>th</sup>*
  - Attendees: 20 students
- *Constitution Day – September 16<sup>th</sup>* (Davis Circle Celebration and Constitution Trivia) ○  
Students Engaged: Approximately 75
- “Scalia, Separation of Powers, and the Constitution”
  - Lecture given by Dr. Kirk Randazzo, Department of Political Science about the vacant Supreme Court Seat and what the Constitution had to say about it. ○
  - Attendees: 20 students
- *Women in Politics – September 22<sup>nd</sup>*

- Attendees: 10 students
- *Media in Politics – September 27<sup>th</sup>*
  - Attendees: 60
- *National Security – October 4<sup>th</sup>*
  - Attendees: 20
- *Personal Partisan Conversation – October 10<sup>th</sup>*
  - Attendees: 15

## **SECTION II: LEADERSHIP**

The Leadership and Service Center (LSC) at University of South Carolina will coordinate and oversee the institution's work to increase civic learning and democratic engagement. The Leadership and Service Center equips students to positively impact their communities through self-exploration and connections. LSC programming focuses on student involvement, leadership development, and community advancement.

Stronger emphasis on civic engagement initiatives will assist the LSC in achieving their mission by guiding students to become responsible and engaged citizens in their local, national and global communities. Students will become more aware of social issues, take diverse perspectives into consideration, and connect their current leadership and service efforts to a deeper meaning.

Jabari Bodrick, Assistant Director of Service-Learning and Community Engagement, and Carly Zerr, Leadership Coach, will primarily be responsible for implementation of this plan and collaboration with campus and community partners. As of now, Student Government Representatives, Momentum Series Advisory Board members, and the Civic Leadership Education and Action Team have been identified as part of the working group.

### **Civic Leadership Education and Action Team**

Students are crucial to developing and strengthening a culture around civic education and participation at USC and in Columbia. The Civic Leadership Education and Action Team (CLEAT) established a group of committed students to assist in implementation of this action plan. Two student leadership positions have been identified; Chief Civic Education Strategist and Chief Civic Action Strategist.

The Chief Civic Education Specialist will be responsible for:

- Helping students cultivate fundamental principles and debates about democracy within the United States;
- Increasing students' familiarity with key historical struggles, campaigns, and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy
- Challenging students to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences
- Other duties as assigned

The Chief Civic Action Strategist will be responsible for:

- Challenging students to analyze systems of power in order to plan and engage in public

action

- Helping students develop the moral and political courage to actively and consistently work towards achieving a greater public good
- Increasing students' capacity and commitment to participate constructively with others and to work collectively to address common problems
- Other duties as assigned

CLEAT's student leadership will recruit and manage student participants to assist with the organization's mission. This organization will cultivate collaboration with Student Government Representatives, specifically the Congressional Advisory Board and Legislative Action Network, to streamline civic engagement efforts.

### **Momentum Series Advisory Board**

Momentum Series is designed to create meaningful dialogue and connect students to opportunities for conversations around important issues and topics locally, nationally, and globally. Two students have been identified to assist in the planning and implementation of a Momentum Series event focused on civic engagement. This event will bring a guest speaker to campus and develop supplemental programming to support the speaker's message. The identified students meet regularly with LSC staff members to brainstorm and strategize for this event.

### **SECTION III: COMMITMENT**

The University of South Carolina values diversity and inclusion. The university's Carolina Creed states "I will discourage bigotry, while striving to learn from different people, ideas, and opinions". USC has a rich history of helping students develop their multicultural competencies through a variety of programs, and this civic engagement initiative is an attempt to both continue and further such tradition. In recent political events, the nation has witnessed Americans becoming increasingly less civil toward one another as they discuss their political views. USC believes that civility and education about voter engagement and political issues can happen simultaneously.

Because of USC's proximity to the state capitol, the university is fortunate enough to have access to many campus and community partners with a vested interest in civic engagement.

On-campus partners:

- Student Government (Legislative Action Network, Congressional Advisory Board) • Civic Leadership Education and Action Team
- Momentum Series Advisory Board
- Off-Campus Living and Neighborhood Relations

Off-Campus partners:

- Richland County Elections Commissions
- Civic Nation
- #VoteTogether
- National Voter Registration Day
- TurboVote
- South Carolina Campus Compact

Our internal partners will predominantly serve as advisors in strategic planning and resource

cultivation. Student initiatives such as CLEAT and Student Government will help determine and implement programming, as well as serve as voter advocates. The off-campus partners have agreed to offer their support to the university’s civic engagement initiative through helping with voter registration drives, helping students obtain free voter identification cards, and/or educating students about policy issues. Our external partners also provide a variety of helpful resources to assist in planning and cultivation of best practices.

**SECTION IV: LANDSCAPE**

**Student Engagement Overview**

NSLVE data suggests that University of South Carolina students were slightly more engaged in registration and voter turnout than other 4 year public institutions and the national average in the 2016 election. Despite this success, USC lagged behind their peers for registration and voter turnout for the previous midterm election. Since 2018 is another midterm election year, much attention will be given to increasing both of these percentages.

Table 1. USC Student Voter Registration and Turnout Rates, 2012-2016

	Student Voter Registration Rates		Student Voter Turnout Rates		
	USC	National	USC	4yr Public	National
2012	75.6%	69.0%	45.7%	46.8%	46.9%
2014	67.1%	68.0%	17.8%	18.5%	18.5%
2016	83.5%	70.6%	53.5%	49.8%	50.4%

Source: National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement, 2014 and 2016 reports

**Internal Barriers**

*Lack of financial resources:* securing additional resources for new initiatives can be difficult and redirecting existing revenues from other worthy efforts can be problematic and challenging.

*Balancing new programming:* CLEAT is a relatively new student group being advised by the Leadership and Service Center at USC. Balancing new organization culture, as well as new programming in conjunction with prior prioritized projects could come with challenges.

*Student confusion/procrastination:* While electronic voter registration is allowed in the State of South Carolina, absentee ballots require students to mail in forms. Some counties allow electronic commissions to be emailed or faxed, but not all have this option. Due to confusion and/or procrastination on behalf of students, absentee ballots may not be turned in by the deadline of 7pm on Election Day.

**External Barriers**

*Election laws: Registration deadlines, ID Requirements, Early Voting Restrictions*

- Early voter registration deadline is 30 days prior to the election which means heavy efforts on the front-end of the cycle.
- Voter ID requirements enforce students to present a government-issued photo ID when

voting. A student ID is often not an accepted form of ID.

- Despite absentee voting allowed prior to Election Day in some South Carolina counties, South Carolina as a whole does not allow early voting. To take advantage of absentee voting, voters must report to the election office in the county in which they are registered, providing a further barrier.

*Transportation to Polls:* Being able to provide enough reliable transportation for students to actually make it to the polls is a challenge. Furthermore, efficient advertisement of such transportation is critical.

*Midterm Election Year:* Voter turnout for midterm election years is dramatically less than voter turnout in presidential election years. Although US Senate races can help combat lower turnout, South Carolina does not have a US Senate race in 2018. Lack of awareness about the potential outcomes and significance of a midterm election will be a barrier this plan works to combat.

### **Available Resources**

The Leadership and Service Center has identified the following resources to further our action plan despite the previously listed barriers:

- New staff member focused on Civic Engagement Initiatives in the LSC: after shifting job responsibilities among Leadership Coaches in the office, a new leadership coach will be dedicating significant time to implementing this action plan in conjunction with an Assistant Director in the center. This Leadership Coach will work with the new members of CLEAT to help develop programming from both educational and action perspectives to create a year-long civic engagement culture on USC's campus.
- Engaged students and traditional programming: The Leadership and Service Center is a premier space at USC that is located in the hub of campus. Falling within the department of Student Life, the center has significant support from higher level administration. Additionally, the variety of programming that stems from the center provides an effective outlet to implement civic engagement into. The students who are involved in programming from the Leadership and Service Center are often very engaged in campus with a great deal of social capital. Utilizing these students as advocates and sources of feedback will help cultivate the culture we are seeking to promote.
- Topic alignment with Momentum Series: Momentum Series is a well-known, funded opportunity to further engage with students on the topic of civic engagement. Two students are dedicated to the planning and implementation of this event with support from staff. The budget and student power is helpful to bring in an expert on the topic and allow for a well developed event closely linked to our goals.

**SECTION V: GOALS, STRATEGIES & INITIATIVES** This action plan seeks to increase

student engagement in civic efforts through the following:

#### **Area One: Voting**

- Increase number of students registered to vote
  - Assist students in understanding their options and what voting method is right based on their situation

- Assist students in verifying they are registered to vote and that their information is correct
  - Disseminate absentee ballot voting information
- Provide education on voting logistics
  - Such logistics might include concerns such as: where students can cast their ballot or transportation to help them reach the polls

**Strategy:** Continue utilizing TurboVote to track voter registration

- Helps students register to vote either online or by paper
- Helps students vote by sending election reminders via text or email to stay in touch with local elections
- Helps students vote by mail via absentee ballot request forms

**Strategy:** Streamline voter information

- Comprehensive and coherent information to help students register correctly and stay informed

**Initiatives:**

- Establish a user-friendly website page that houses voting information and logistics, as well as advertising voter registration events
- Host voter registration drives such as National Voter Registration Day, Constitution Day as well as other general tabling events in the hub of campus
- Create a Social Media Campaign to remind students of voter deadlines

### **Area Two: Civic Literacy Education**

- Programming focused on helping students understand the political process including positions involved in elections, general purpose of midterm elections, and a deeper understanding of the effects the results could have for both the short and long term political climate

**Strategy:** Streamline civic literacy information

- Comprehensive and coherent information to help students better understand the political process, specifically midterm elections

**Initiatives:**

- Momentum Series: Civic Engagement centered keynote and subsequent events to further dialogue
- User-friendly website page with links to civic literacy information and advertisement of related events
- Provide information during tabling events and voter registration drives

### **Area Three: Dialogue & Deliberation**

- Provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue to cultivate civil deliberation and increase issue-based knowledge. Effective deliberation can help students gain development in civic literacy, active listening, humility, non dualistic thinking, Grit, among a variety of others. Additionally, this type of dialogue can increase student's understanding of local and national social/political issues.



**Strategy:** Utilize CLEAT Chief Civic Education Specialist to assist with program plan curriculum development

**Strategy:** Cultivate partnerships across campus to increase involvement and visibility  
• Potential partners include: Office of Multicultural Affairs, Off-campus Living and Neighborhood Relations, Greek Life, and Student Government

**Initiatives:**

- Increase student participation in CLEAT and develop stronger organizational structure
- Host dialogues and deliberation events to help students hone deliberation skills and gain a better understanding of local and national issues

**Area Four: Civic Action**

- Assist students in turning ideas into action and increase students' capacity and commitment to participate constructively with others and to work collectively to address common problems

**Strategy:** Utilize CLEAT Chief Civic Action Specialist to assist with program plan development

**Strategy:** Incorporate civic action into existing Leadership and Service Center programs to create more cohesive understanding of how leadership, service, and civic engagement work together

**Initiatives:**

- Incorporate brainstorming/reflection of civic action concepts in Alternative Break Curriculum
- Incorporate conversations of civic action into Women's programming
- Incorporate conversations of civic action into Leadership classes and programming
- Incorporate conversations of civic action into Service Saturday Site Leader training

The before-mentioned goals and initiatives will occur in the 2018-19 school year and will be implemented by the Leadership and Service Center and CLEAT students in conjunction with support from campus and community partners. The primary audience for said programming is University of South Carolina undergraduate and graduate students living both on and off campus.

**SECTION VII: TIMELINE**

June 22<sup>nd</sup>: University of South Carolina submits Voter Friendly Action Plan

July: Website revisions to make Leadership and Service Center website more voter friendly providing information and direct links to helpful resources

August: Launch Social Media Campaign with Voting Information

August: Receive marketing materials from National Voter Registration Day

Organization September 17<sup>th</sup>: Constitution Day Voter Registration Event

September 25<sup>th</sup>: National Voter Registration Day Event

Momentum Series?

October 7<sup>th</sup>: Voter Registration Deadline

November: Create strategic plan for Spring semester

Ongoing fall projects: Deliberation Initiatives, CLEAT

### **SECTION VIII: REPORTING**

This action plan will predominantly be used as an internal document that can be shared with Leadership and Service Center staff and Department of Student Life at University of South Carolina. As of now, University of South Carolina's NSLVE data is kept predominantly internal as well.

### **SECTION IX: EVALUATION**

USC will have succeeded in implementing this plan if voter registration and voter turnout numbers increase compared to our data from the 2014 midterm election. Increase in the number of engaged partnerships with both on-campus and off-campus partners will also be measured. Additionally, success will occur if our civic education and action programming reaches at least 40 students throughout the semester and participants walk away with a deeper understanding of the topic. Finally, this being the first year where significant effort is placed on civic engagement, being able to learn and fine tune our action plan based on first-hand experience will be considered as a success.

Quantitative Measures:

- TurboVote and NSLVE data
- Number of and attendance at election-related events in Fall 2018
- Number of and attendance at dialogue and discourse events through Spring 2019
- Attendance at Momentum Series Civic Engagement Keynote Event

Qualitative Measures:

- Feedback from staff and students working on civic engagement initiatives
- Feedback from other stakeholders on campus
- Surveys collected from dialogue and discourse events