DRAFT: Colorado State University Voter Engagement Action Plan 2020

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colorado State University (CSU), established in 1870, is the state's land-grant institution. Located in picturesque Fort Collins, Colorado, the fall 2019 enrollment saw over 34,000 students on the flagship campus. Steeped in the land-grant tradition that the university belongs to the people, CSU's mission, values, and guiding principles include promoting civic responsibility and service to our local, regional, and global communities.

Excitement is in the air at CSU. Now, more than ever, groups are contributing to the overall democratic process. Students, faculty, staff, and the community alike are craving civic engagement. Our entire community wants (one could even say – demands) to be informed citizens and contribute to the betterment of our society. President Joyce McConnell, new to CSU, has actively and outwardly committed to increasing civic engagement and has given her support specifically to voter engagement efforts. CSU wants to institutionalize the work, creating educated and participatory citizens for generations to come.

The work is not new to our campus, but rather this is our first time putting actionable items to paper and holding our own feet to the fire to get the work done. This action plan lays out our hopes and dreams for a more engaged CSU community. We fully recognize we have signed up for a marathon and not a sprint, and we need to start somewhere, learning as we go. Here is our starting line:

a. Why: Support for civic engagement, specifically voter engagement, has seen starts and stops for several decades at CSU. The work has typically been led by a few active and passionate student leaders. While students are at the very core of the institution's mission, students are cyclical in nature and cannot commit to seeing the work through institutionalization.

b. Who: The plan has been authored out of the CSU Division of Student Affairs' Student Leadership Involvement and Community Engagement (SLiCE) office with the expectation and support it will find a permanent home as the work evolves.

c. What: The plan is being established to lend deeper credibility to the outstanding civic engagement work already happening across campus. It seeks to gain further buy-in and commitment to civic engagement as a whole through organizing and streamlining existing efforts; in turn providing educated and involved citizen who will engage at the local, state, and federal levels.

d. Where: The goal of this initial plan is to start someplace (SLiCE) and have it live and breathe in a *home* that can commit to the long-term work. Many partners across campus have expressed interest in contributing, and our hope is a new *home* will emerge.

e. When: The groundwork has been laid in the fall of 2019 for initial 2020 voter engagement education/registration/outreach efforts, with full intention of expanding on the work to go right into 2021 plans.

f. How: In full transparency, how we will execute the plan is still unknown. What we do know is there is commitment across campus to engage in the work and keep the ball moving forward. We have already seen active engagement from staff and students through activities such as *Democracy Works' Votes and Ballots.*

II. LANDSCAPE/BACKGROUND

a. Historical context:

In 2013, Colorado elected officials voted in to law the automatic mailing of ballots to all registered voters. With this change in law, the state as a whole saw an increase in election participation*. At Colorado State University, the Lory Student Center has been an official Larimer County vote center since at least 2012. Based on conversations with County officials, it is one of the top polling sites in the state of Colorado (Draft note: in our final plan, we should have historical data from the county on when the site was established and #s). Since the partnership began, CSU has provided the ballroom space in-kind at the rate of $240/day; the room is typically taken offline and used as a polling site for 24 days ($5,760.00 total in-kind donation). In addition to the vote center, the fall of 2019 brought the permanent placement of a ballot drop-box.

Outside of the set voting system and structures, much of the voter engagement efforts on campus have stemmed from various members of the Associated Students of Colorado State University (ASCSU) in various years. 2008 saw the last formal (written) plan for voter engagement activities written by ASCSU's Director of Community Affairs. The student body government's work has primarily been focused on voter registration. The organization has partnered with nonprofits including *New Era Colorado* and *Rock the Vote*. Additionally, ASCSU has sent out emails to the student body reminding them to participate in a variety of elections.

Since 2014, CSU has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE). CSU's student voting rates are as follows:

Presidential Elections

	2012	2016
Registration Rates	77.2%	74.8%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	74.1%	80.4%
Voting Rate	57.2%	60.1%
*Mail-in ballot rate		73.7%

Midterm Elections

	2014	2018
Registration Rates	69.9%	76.2%
Voting Rate of Registered Students	53.2%	66.7%
Voting Rate	37.2%	50.8%
*Mail-in ballot rate	39.1%	76.1%

In addition to participating in the NSLVE reports, CSU became an ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge partner in 2016. CSU received a silver campus rating for the 2016 presidential election and a platinum campus rating for the 2018 midterm election. The recognitions received were shared with the campus and larger community through CSU's *SOURCE* electronic newsletter.

Today, CSU is busy expanding voter engagement efforts with new and exciting partnerships. Through campus' existing CampusLabs service, our students can utilize TurboVote's voter registration software. Additionally, a constituency of staff and students participated in the first Colorado Student Voting Summit hosted by Metropolitan State University in October 2019. This is where the group was introduced to *Democracy Works Votes and Ballots* activity. Since attending the summit, the *Votes and Ballots* activity has been used for groups like the Division of Student Affairs Directors and SLiCE employees. Several student groups have requested the activity in the spring 2020 semester, including the President's Leadership Program.

b. **University commitment/civic engagement efforts:**
   Colorado State University has a deep commitment to civic engagement. Across the university you can find academic courses focused on civic learning, all the way to programs and services throughout the campus, community, state, and beyond. President McConnell has shared far and wide the commitment the university has to educate and nature civically engaged students, alumni, and faculty/staff. These very voter engagement efforts have received the stamp of approval from the President.

   In an effort to run the marathon verse the sprint, the discussion with President McConnell's team focused on the larger civic engagement umbrella, where voter engagement would be a component. Other components included, but were not limited to, the census, engaging in politics, first amendment rights, and civic academic courses. Much of the people doing this work have already started the *CSU Civic Impact*. This group has come together to increase awareness around the work happening across campus, explore building a community of practice, and to create more nimble partnerships on campus. Thus far, the *Civic Impact* is comprised of CSU partners in:

College of Liberal Arts:	College of Health & Human Sciences:
▪ Staayer Center ▪ Communication Studies ▪ Political Science ▪ Center for Public Deliberation	▪ Center for Community Partnerships ▪ Prevention Research Center ▪ Institute for the Built Environment
The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, Office of the Vice President for Research	Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement (SLiCE), Division of Student Affairs
School of Global Environmental Sustainability: ▪ Urban Sustainability Research Network ▪ Salazar Center for North American Conservation	Office of Engagement/CSU Extension: ▪ The Family Leadership Training Institute of Colorado ▪ Colorado Water Center

Civic engagement work is not limited to the above, there are many other partners across campus. As stated earlier, ASCSU is actively engaged in voter registration efforts, as well providing voice in local and state policy work. Housing and Dining Services has recently created an election year support taskforce and has asked to serve on the voter engagement committee. Another group actively involved is the Collaborative for Student Achievement's Key Communities. Under Key, students live and learn together and can take academic courses such as *CityWorksEDU: Campus, City, and Civic Engagement.*

It is clear CSU is committed to these efforts, including financially. In-kind donations have included the vote center at $5760.00/year. SLiCE and ASCSU have committed $10,000 each for 2020 voter engagement education and outreach.

III. POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP/COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT/CONTRIBUTORS

Civic engagement work is happening across Colorado State University. Our commitment is strong. Who will *own* voter engagement is still an unknown, and yet partners are raising their hands to contribute. President McConnell has approved the work moving forward and has shared she wants committees across campus to look like:

a. Core Team (5 people)
b. Work Teams/Sub-committees (6-8 people)
c. Larger Advisory Committee (meets 1-2x/year)

At this point, based on conversations with the administration, and a select number of staff and students, we have put together the following potential contributors with roles to be determined:

Student Groups:	Academic Affairs
- Associated Students of Colorado State University - Residence Hall Association - Greek Councils - President's Multicultural Student Advisory Committee - Graduate Student Council - CO Student Voting Summit attendees	- Office of the Provost - College of Liberal Arts (Straayer Center, Political Science, Center for Public Deliberation) - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math departments - Academic Advisors - Faculty Council
Division of Student Affairs:	Other CSU Departments/Areas
- Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement - University Housing - Student Diversity Programs and Services - Fraternity and Sorority Life - Campus Recreation - Adult Learner and Veteran Services - Off-Campus-Life - Lory Student Center - Orientation and Transition Programs - Parent and Family Programs - Assessment and Research	- Office of President - External Relations - Office of the Registrar - Academic Computing and Networking Services - Alumni Relations - Athletics - Administrative Professional Council - Office of International Programs
Community Partners: - Larimer County Clerk and Recorder - City of Fort Collins City Clerk - League of Women Voters - Poudre School District	

IV. STRATEGY/GOALS

In this section, we have identified key next steps that SLiCE will take to keep voter engagement efforts moving forward. Additionally, we have identified stretch goals and outcomes we wish to accomplish along the way.

a. Next Steps:

    i. Executive sponsor: With President McConnell's backing, create a call to action for support and expanding upon CSU's civic engagement efforts; send a campus wide email to recruit committee members, and find a permanent *home* for the work.

    ii. Committee creation: Form a core team, sub-committees, and advisory committee; discuss the following:

        1. Expectations (time commitment, roles/responsibilities, meeting dates)
        2. History/context (NSLVE report, assessment of current efforts, barriers/gaps/ strengths analysis)
        3. Who is missing/needs to be added to the committee
        4. Discuss different perspectives and areas of expertise; work to create sub-committees/advisory committee
        5. Create metrics to define the work: what are we working on (informed voters, increase in voter registration numbers, increase voter turnout rates, etc.)?
        6. Define SMARTIE goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time bound, inclusive and equitable); create evaluation tools to measure success
        7. Tools: watch ALL IN webinars, review other nonprofit materials/resources

b. Stretch Goals:

During the fall 2019 semester, SLiCE engaged over 100 various CSU student and staff members in the *Votes and Ballots* activity. The following are stretch goals, that should be included in voter engagement efforts, identified by participants which had 7 or more group votes:

    i. Registration

        1. Host an event on National Voter Registration Day
        2. Have your institution's president or student government president send out a campus-wide email about the importance of voting
        3. Work with residence life to incorporate voter engagement into at least one resident hall meeting each semester (additional thoughts: move-in materials and day; front desk materials)
        4. Wildcards: incorporate registration info: into "RamReady" tasks, advisor materials/conversations/meetings, OTP materials

    ii. Education

        1. Promote and host debate watch parties
        2. Work with the student newspaper to launch a series of articles about youth voting
        3. Add a page to your school's website dedicated to nonpartisan student voter education (additional thoughts: update to include minority voting groups, ie Native Americans)
        4. Create and distribute a nonpartisan voter guide featuring FAQs tailored to student voters (additional thoughts: short video; make it discussion based)
        5. Work with motivated faculty and/or identity based groups to host lunch and learns about issues affecting your community
        6. Wildcards:

     a. Providing support/materials/info to faculty/staff so they know where to direct people, how to answer questions, how they can and can't engage; training to help faculty/staff on how to facilitate conversations

     b. A lot of thoughts around "how to": practice ballot out on the plaza; handout w/steps to take leading up to the election, important dates, where to go, what you need to bring, how-to guide, etc.

     c. Educate out of state students on pros and cons of registering/voting locally or in their hometowns/states

     d. Education on language around "why didn't you vote" "did you vote" – it may ostracize those who couldn't vote

     e. Ballot party/discussion so people can get answers to their questions before casting their votes

     f. "what's next" post-election programming

     g. Information in different languages/accessibility to info for anyone

     h. Use SEED to help facilitate student based education

     i. Design email signature people could use that updates based on important dates, etc. with reminders for people

     j. Faculty/staff education campaign around do's and don'ts – what can and cannot be shared, what you can and cannot do personally, etc.

     k. Education of students who are 17 – can register and participate in primary if they will be 18 by the national election (taken from CO State Election website: Every person who is seventeen years of age on the date of a primary election or presidential primary election and who will be eighteen years of age on the date of the next general election is entitled to vote in the primary election or presidential primary election.)

iii. Turnout

    1. Host an absentee voting party, complete with stamps and envelopes for ballots

    2. Organize a walk/ride to the polls on Election Day (additional thoughts: RamRide and Around the Horn)

    3. Add Election Day to the campus calendar

    4. Wildcards:

      a. Educate people on the temporary vote center location at Durrell while the student center is under construction

      b. People holding signs leading people to Durrell; incentivize with prizes/food; provide temporary free parking

      c. Address safety – various groups have concerns around large groups of people gathering, could create intimidation and keep voters away

      d. Map of places to vote with drive-up locations

      e. Handout "I voted" stickers at ballot drop box; create digital "I voted sticker" for social media use; photo op at Durrell and in Plaza with large cut out

iv. Institutionalization

    1. Work with faculty/staff, or identity-based groups to host a deliberative dialogue series – provide space to discuss different community issues

    2. Promote and host an info session for students who are not eligible to vote to get involved

    3. Promote and host a "Circle of Voices" discussion where international students share their political experiences from their own countries with peers (additional thoughts – include students who cannot vote)

4. Start the conversation with administration and faculty about attendance on Election Day (additional thoughts: have President McConnell vote on campus and lead a march to Durrell, drive an admissions cart; no exams or classes during a period of time to encourage voting during that window)
5. Wildcards:
    a. Academic side:
        i. Working into course work – provide language for syllabus for profs to use – overall civic engagement commitment at institution
        ii. Class discussions and assignments
        iii. Service learning/civic engagement activities (Key Civic examples)
    b. Chat with ASCSU students running to include voter engagement as a part of their yearly budget – budgets get completed quickly after they are voted in
    c. Now what/Post-election work
        i. Discussing results, continuing conversation
        ii. Holding elected officials accountable

c. **Communication Plan:**
We will establish a communication plan in order to share with our internal and external community. The following are examples of how we can share:
    i. Create a website dedicated to campus civic engagement efforts (include voter engagement efforts)
    ii. Send an all campus email
    iii. Utilize campus e-newsletter (ex: *SOURCE, Parent & Family newsletter*)
    iv. Utilize the various social media platforms
    v. Post education on the campus electronic screens
    vi. Partner with student media (newspaper/CTV/radio)
    vii. Create posters/flyers to display across campus (ex: table tents in dining centers)

d. **Timeline:**
Create a timeline of key dates/events: (Draft note: we are working on this and will include in the final plan; we are considering a grid format that would include dates, whether they are long-term or short-term goals, who is doing the work; please provide any thoughts on what is important to include)
    i. Registration dates (including for primaries)
    ii. County calendar
    iii. 2020 Presidential Primary (3/3/20, ballots mailed week of Feb. 10th)
    iv. 2020 Primary Election (Federal – except president, State, and local; 6/30/20, ballots mailed week of June 8th)
    v. Municipal elections (held 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday in April on odd-numbered years)
    vi. ASCSU elections
    vii. Voter Registration Day
    viii. Constitution Day (September 17, 2019 – look up 2020)
    ix. Election Day (11/3/20, ballots mailed week of Oct. 12th)

V. REPORTING

In order to institutionalize the work, the community must know what is happening and how to engage. The voter engagement plan will include sharing efforts through:

a. An annual meeting will be hosted by the core team to report out on efforts; both the campus and greater community will be invited
b. The core team and sub-committees will report out on efforts by visiting with various stakeholders, including groups in which they are members (ASCSU, Faculty Council, etc.)
a. Utilize the civic engagement website to share information/reports
b. Partner with External Relations to create a communication plan, including the use of press releases, to share more broadly with stakeholders/interested parties

VI. EVALUATION

In order to measure the success of voter engagement efforts, the core team/sub-committees will create evaluation tools, including but not limited to:

a. Connecting back to the defined metrics – evaluation tools used to assess if metrics were met (if not, how to tweak efforts to meet them moving forward)
b. Program review type work – visiting/connecting with best practice institutions to compare our work with what is happening nationally to see how to strengthen our work (use ALL IN as resource to identify institutions to connect with)
c. During the report out meetings, collect qualitative data from stakeholders to help define and strengthen the work