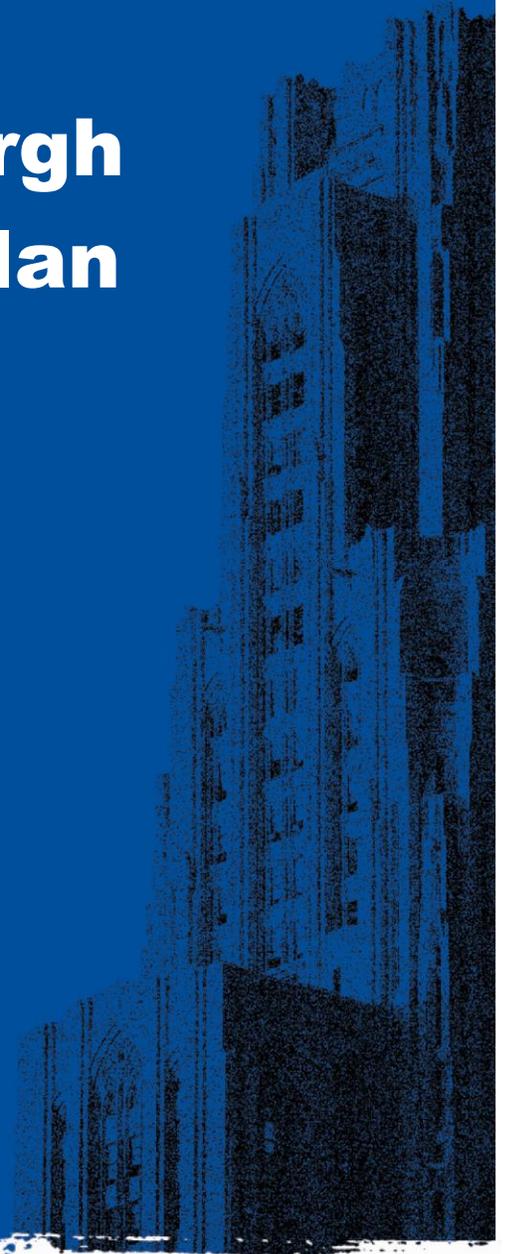


# University of Pittsburgh Voter Engagement Plan



June 2020  
Version 1.0



## **Executive Summary**

Voting is an important part of being a citizen of the United States of America. Elected officials make important decisions that directly affect our lives now and in the future. Voting is our opportunity to choose the decision makers and express our wants, needs and desires.

As one of the country's top academic institutions for research and innovation, the University of Pittsburgh has long held a commitment to civic engagement and is committed to working on a University-wide level to create a more civically engaged institution.

The Pitt Votes initiative, established summer 2019, aims to create a more accessible and consistent political environment on Pitt's campus. Through making registration tools widely available to students - without the pressure of political affiliation - Pitt Votes aims to stimulate greater civic engagement across Pitt's student body.

In recent years, the combined efforts of the University on an institutional level - along with grassroots mobilization on the student level - has led to historic levels of voter registration and voting rates. As of 2018, the voter registration rate at the University of Pittsburgh was 80.7 percent, and the voting rate among the student population was 42.5 percent (28.1 percent increase from 2014). Connections with the Board of Elections, support throughout the institution, and various programming efforts have allowed the University to take a collaborative approach towards improving civic engagement.

The University of Pittsburgh participates in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and approves making the data public through the All In Campus Democracy Challenge.

**Statement of Nonpartisanship:** The Pitt Votes Steering Committee does not support or oppose candidates for public office nor take a stand for or against any political party.

## **Scope**

The short and long-term strategies proposed in this plan are designed to improve voter registration, education and engagement at the University of Pittsburgh. A larger plan exist surrounding overall democratic engagement.

## **Leadership**

The Office of PittServes within the Division of Student Affairs will provide leadership and direction regarding the Democratic Engagement Plan. The structure will include a coalition, a committee and a student task force.

All leadership of the Pitt Votes Initiative will be diverse, inclusive and representative of the University of Pittsburgh. The Pitt Votes team acknowledges that communities of color encounter barriers to voter registration, voter information, and other bias throughout the process. We will work hard to educate our international students, while some may not be eligible to vote in the United States, being democratically engaged remains an important aspect of development.

**Pitt Votes Coalition** – identify areas of improvement for the civic engagement work already being done on campus. Coalition will meet four (4) times a calendar year.

**Pitt Votes Committee** – explore and design innovative and inclusive ideas that we can implement throughout the year that will create a culture for civic engagement through the entire campus. Committee will meet up to eight (8) times a calendar year.

**Student Task Force** – students from around the university that have committed to increasing civic engagement. Task Force will meet monthly during the academic year and once in the summer.

Membership for the various sectors of Pitt Votes will be a one-year commitment with the eligibility to remain engaged thereafter. Recruitment will occur throughout the year with target university and community stakeholders welcomed onto the various groups based upon gaps and review of needs and goals.

#### Pitt Votes Coalition

The Pitt Votes Coalition supports civic learning and political engagement at the University of Pittsburgh by coordinating voting activities across campus. The goal of this coalition is to increase campus-wide democratic engagement with a focus on voter registration, voter education, and voter engagement. With representatives from a broad cross-section of student organizations, university departments and academic units from across campus, the Coalition will leverage current resources, provide support for existing activities and expand opportunities for engagement.

The Pitt Votes Coalition is led by Chaz Kellem, Office of PittServes. Membership to the Coalition is open to faculty, staff and students who have an interest in supporting the work of the *Democratic Engagement Action Plan*. The coalition will meet once a semester and communicate electronically when necessary. The primary goal of the meetings will be to share updates, gather input for program ideas moving forward and collect resources for future engagement.

The Pitt Votes Coalition will serve as the lead agency on voter registration, engagement and education work with the purpose of driving resources and opportunities throughout campus. Tactical advisement, ongoing support and structure advancement will be provided through two subgroups: the Pitt Votes Steering Committee and the Pitt Votes Student Task Force, providing input and support from a variety of perspectives.

The Pitt Votes Coalition members comprise a university-wide approach to include multiple faculty, staff and students throughout the University. Our goal is to have representation from all academic schools in addition to several non-academic departments throughout campus. Coalition members will join on a rolling basis and will serve one academic term, with the possibility of renewal. Coalition members are able to send proxy representatives when unable to participate.

Pitt Votes Coalition Members (as of December 2019)

- Chaz Kellem, Office of PittServes
- Kathryn Fleisher, Undergraduate Student
- Paula Janikowski, Office of the Provost
- Kathleen Kyle, Director of Housing Panther Central
- Tyler Viljaste, Undergraduate Student
- Chase McIntyre, Life Skills Community Coordinator, Athletics
- Tom Misuraca, Pitt Program Council, Student Life
- Everett Herman, Director of Student and Faculty Engagement, Honors College
- Alexandra Curtis, Undergraduate Student
- Cameron Clare, Undergraduate Student
- Victoria Shineman, Professor, Political Science Department
- Shenay Jeffrey, Assistant Director, Office of PittServes
- Natasha Williams, Assistant Director of Career Services & Community Engagement Coordinator, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
- Meredith Maverro, Manager of Student Programs & Community Outreach, Institute of Politics

Pitt Votes Steering Committee

The Pitt Votes Steering Committee serves to guide the writing and implementation of the *Democratic Engagement Action Plan*. This committee is smaller than other involved groups, comprised of select members of the faculty, staff, and student populations, in order to create intentional messaging surrounding the goals of the broader coalition. Steering Committee participation is on a volunteer basis. The Pitt Votes Coalition leadership can use discretion to open participation in the working group beyond this representation.

Pitt Votes Steering Committee (as of December 2019)

- Chaz Kellem, Director, Office of PittServes
- Lauren Ban, Undergraduate Student
- Susanna Deemer, Graduate Student
- Cedric Humphrey, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member

Pitt Votes Student Task Force

The Pitt Votes Student Task Force will foster a collaborative environment that empowers student organizations and leaders who are currently working on voter registration and engagement efforts across campus to make a larger, more inclusive impact. The Student Task Force will support the utilization of resources and networks affiliated with Pitt Votes to supplement ongoing civic engagement work and ensure that voter registration and engagement remains a priority across campus. Ultimately, the goal of this task force is to put in place tangible, sustainable structures and systems that ensure collaborative voter registration and engagement efforts across campus during each election cycle. Centralizing all voter registration efforts under the Pitt Votes brand is an essential step in creating a University-wide effort that feels meaningful, approachable and useful.

The secondary goal is to build relationships among student organizations and support collaboration and idea sharing. This task force will ideally serve as the touchstone for various groups and entities to be engaged with one another in pursuing their shared goal of increasing voter registration and engagement on campus.

#### Pitt Votes Student Task Force (as of May 2019)

- Tyler Viljaste, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Kathryn Fleisher, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Madison Ricker, Undergraduate Student
- Katie Gingerich
- Nikhita Chakraborty
- Ryan Murphy, Undergraduate Student
- Grace Dubois, Undergraduate Student
- Cameron Hallihan, Undergraduate Student
- Hana Koob, Undergraduate Student
- Kiley Verbanac, Undergraduate Student
- Eric Macadangang, Undergraduate Student, Student Government Board Member
- Anfernee La Cruz, Undergraduate Student, Student Office of Sustainability

#### Campus Partners

The University of Pittsburgh has several academic departments, university departments and student organizations that are committed to voter engagement.

The following is a fluid list of academic departments and student organizations:

- Office of Community & Government Relations
- Division of Student Affairs, Office of the Dean
- Office of Residence Life
- Student Life
- Pitt Program Council (PPC)
- Student Government Board (SGB) CGR Committee
- NextGen
- Political Science Student Association
- College Democrats
- Student Office of Sustainability (SOOS) Votes Campaign
- Hillel MitzVote
- University of Pittsburgh Greek Life

#### Community Partners

Our voter engagement work at the University of Pittsburgh will have engagement and support from community partners. These community partners will provide support on projects as well as provide resources to eliminate barriers to student voting.

The following is a fluid list of community partners:

- City of Pittsburgh, Office of the Mayor
- Chatham University, Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics
- Carnegie Mellon University, Office of Student Leadership, Involvement and Civic Engagement (SLICE)
- League of Women Voters
- Allegheny County, Office of the County Executive
- YWCA Greater Pittsburgh

#### National Partners

A coalition of national and regional partners have been established by the University of Pittsburgh. This group will serve as resources to share strategies, lend assistance in creating initiatives, and assess successes and challenges. The following is a fluid list of national and regional partners:

- All In Democracy Challenge
- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- Campus Elections Engagement Project
- Campus Vote Project
- DemocrACCy Network – ACC Affiliated Network
- National Voter Registration Day
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition
- TurboVote
- When We All Vote

Additional support from national partners beyond resources and information include:

Campus Elections Engagement Project (CEEP) – is a national non-partisan project that helps America's colleges and universities get as many of their 20 million students as possible to register, volunteer in campaigns, educate themselves, and turn out at the polls. We teach administrators, faculty, staff and student leaders to use their institutional resources to engage students.

The University of Pittsburgh will have up to two (2) fellows (available to any current student) that will assist in the development of this plan and implement independent ideas on campus. The goal is to engage students in the entire election process.

Campus Vote Project Democracy Fellowship will permit up to two (2) fellows (available to any current student) that will work with the entire team to assist in the engagement of the action plan and consistent revisions to this action plan. In addition, this person will explore hosting events, building coalitions, etc.

### Future Staffing Assessment

A full assessment will be conducted over the next year to evaluate capacity, availability and action item completion within the current system. Per the conclusion of this assessment, a formal recommendation regarding additional staffing will be made to the University of Pittsburgh Dean of Students.

Currently, the exploration of staffing is leading to the recommendation of staff expansion to support the voter registration, engagement and education initiatives as well as the advising of student led initiatives. A Civic Resource Coordinator (title can vary) is a possible position that could be positioned within the Division of Student Affairs.

### Commitment

The University of Pittsburgh has remained at the forefront of research and innovation through continuous changes in the landscape of the city, region and beyond. As these landscapes transform, the University has utilized critical reflection and dialogue to create comprehensive, collaborative initiatives that maintain its status as a leading institution. In this spirit, in late 2016 a five-year Plan for Pitt was released with six key goal areas, one of which being to strengthen communities. When the institution launches its new five-year institutional plan, community and civic engagement efforts will remain one of the fundamental elements throughout the plan.

Specifically, the Plan for Pitt places emphasis on fostering a culture of civic engagement. This emphasis was as a result of the intentional inclusion of a variety of populations who exist in the Pitt community in determining what the University should place priority on in the upcoming five years. It is this institution-wide commitment that the Pitt Votes initiative exists within. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members have expressed a desire to improve the civic commitment of members of the University through various initiatives.

Additionally, each year the University selects a broad theme that dictates a centralized and structured set of initiatives and programs hosted on campus. Funding opportunities and other forms of support allow nearly every member of the community to engage in an event under the “Year of...” framework. The 2020-2021 academic year will be the Year of Engagement, once again illustrating a University-wide commitment to civic engagement.

Through the Plan for Pitt goal of strengthening communities and the Year of Engagement, civic action will be a priority in coursework, research, student programming and overall university cultural. The Pitt Votes initiative along with the various related committees and taskforces will be empowered to emphasize the importance of voting as a form of civic engagement with the help of these institutional commitments.

### Data

Much like academic institutions across the nation, the University of Pittsburgh has made significant strides in increasing voter registration and turnout since the 2012 general election. Additionally, similar to national trends, there are still areas for improvement in each of these categories across primary and general election years.

Based on NSLVE data from the 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 elections, our focus must be on closing the gap between voter registration and turnout rates along with closing the gap between voter turnout rates for general and primary elections.

### **General Elections**

- From 2012 to 2016 Pitt's voter registration rate increased by 10% (77.6% to 87.4%)
- Additionally, the 2016 rate was 10% higher than the national average
- From 2012 to 2016, Pitt's voter turnout rate also increased just under 10% (50.0% to 61%)
- Once again these turnout rates were 10% higher than the national average
  - Rates also higher than average for research and public institutions

### **Primary Elections**

- From 2014 to 2018 Pitt's voter registration rate increased by more than 14% (66% to 80.7%)
- The 2018 registration rate was about 5% higher than the national average
- From 2014 to 2018 Pitt's voter turnout rate increased by about 28% (14.3% to 42.5%)
- In 2014 Pitt was more than 5% below the national average but rose to about 4% above the average in 2018

The Pitt Votes Committee will utilize the NSLVE data to help streamline activation and programming. The team will work closely with underrepresented populations of students to assure engagement. Work to support less engaged academic units and majors will be part of this strategy.

### **Landscape**

Accompanying the recent emphasis placed on engagement at the University-level is a commitment by various schools, departments, offices and student organizations to take a collaborative approach to increasing all forms of engagement at Pitt. In addition, there are countless collaborative efforts occurring between University and community stakeholders including support around education, entrepreneurship, public health, etc.

Beyond the myriad engagement efforts already occurring, work is also being done to evaluate the alignment of students within these efforts to further improve the landscape of community and civic engagement. Multiple entities within the University have collaborated to create the Civic Pathways Initiative, originally created at Stanford University, to assess where students may want to engage with their surrounding communities on a local, national, and global stage. The Civic Pathways Initiative aims to create community engaged experiences visible and available to students along with supporting them as they have community engagement experiences that support their educational journey. Policy and governance is one of the pathways available through this initiative and will serve as an additional tool.

Within this landscape of engagement, specific efforts have been made around voting. Multiple student organizations have worked tirelessly in recent election years to increase voter registration and turnout rates on campus. Pitt Votes will work alongside student organizations to continue their efforts while providing access to additional resources and tools. Voter registration and turnout efforts are at the foundation of this work, while education is the overarching objective. The Pitt Votes initiative aims to increase these figures by intentionally combining existing efforts across the University in order to have concerted action for the upcoming general and future elections.

### **Budget**

Current Pitt Votes budget allocation is being shared between the Office of PittServes and the Office of Community and Governmental Relations. Additional funding is possible from Student Government Board and various academic departments pending program implementation. Budget allocations will vary year-to-year and will be carefully managed to evaluate future needs. It is estimated a programming budget could range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 annually.

### **Strategies**

#### Year 0 – Academic Year 2019-2020

- Launched Pitt Votes effort – created graphics, started using branding for outreach
- Established partnerships with several national/local partners
- Dedicated website through TurboVote – [pittvotes.turbovote.org](http://pittvotes.turbovote.org)
- Hired a graduate student and a CEEP Fellow to provide leadership and support
- Gathered materials from national and state partners to use at outreach events
- Hosted the PA Student Voting Summit in February in collaboration with Campus Vote Project, Campus Election Engagement Project, All In Democracy Challenge
- Participated in National Voter Registration Day (September 2019)
- Peer-to-Peer Training on Voter Registration – Student organization lead effort with peer-to-peer training on voter registration practices as a tool to encourage voter participation
- Voter Registration Drives – Across campus, University departments, student organizations, and student leaders continually put together voter registration drives or events with the intent of getting as many students registered to vote as possible
- Outreach and education regarding Census – email communication, social media usage, event for student organizations (cancelled due to participation)
- Tabling and being present at events on campus for registration and information distribution (including but not limited to):
  - Fall Fest (September 2019)
  - Pitt Make A Difference Day (October 2019)
  - Dick Thornburgh – Draw the Lines Forum Tabling (January 2020)
  - Elsie Hillman Civic Engagement Forum: Never a Spectator (February 2020)

#### Year 1 - Academic Year 2020-2021

- Relaunch Pitt Votes initiative to increase awareness and demonstrate the University commitment to democracy engagement
- Create a toolkit that student organizations can tap into in efforts to educate members
- Work alongside the student leadership of the Pitt Votes Student Task force to continue recruit and design outreach efforts connected to the November elections
- Create a political Scholar Series in collaboration with Pitt Program Council, Political Science Department, Student Life, etc.
- Dorm Storms: knocking on doors in residence halls and encouraging students to register to vote (Resident Student Association)
- Have a senior member of University Administration (i.e. University of Pittsburgh Chancellor) deliver a call-to-action as far as voter education, registration and engagement
- Facilitate a “Couch Party” through When We All Vote
- Participated in National Voter Registration Day (September 2020)
- Educate students with information in the Vote by Mail option for PA residents
- Develop a student ambassador program including recruitment, training, implementation, compensation, etc.
- Explore national, state, and local resources and continue to establish functional relationships that connect these resources to students
- Student Government President send an email/share information to students charging them with registering to vote (Opinion Piece in newspaper, social media post, etc.)
- A Call to action during major campus events – Student Affairs targeted events
- Host Civic engagement informational awareness events
- Include Voter registration as part of Week of Welcome – information table/booth
- Pitt Votes information and outreach tables during prime times in the dining halls and campus recreation facilities
- Pitt Votes information and outreach tables at various on-campus event (Arts Festival, Bigelow Bash, Family Weekend, etc.)
- Include a civic engagement session in Resident Assistant training that emphasizes the correct way to complete a voter registration form and information on why it is so important for all students to vote
- Partner with the various national/statewide organization to develop training for student ambassadors
- Active Citizenship FAQ – answer the “why” for students
- Support local Voting Summit(s) – including encouraging students to attend
- Info blasting on TV’s and Poster in high traffic zones on campus
- Election Literacy – educate students through various formats with voter responsibilities (i.e. terms, dates, rules, etc.)
- Video and Social Media Campaign leading up to election day
- Pitt Votes Branding – make it clear that we are all on the same page and reassure the university is committed to spreading the same message in order to create a civically healthy campus climate

- Participate and promote the annual Pitt Day in Harrisburg in addition to the ACC Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.
- Participate in the ACC collaboration including the creation of an ACC-wide competition and a coalition structure to sharing promising practice across the conference.

#### Year 2- Academic Year 2021-2022

- Add voter registration notice during housing signups and/or part of the move-in process
- Establish a pool of funding available for academic departments and student organizations to access to improve voter education
- Continue exploration around Active Citizenship programming to assist students in – answer the ‘why’ for students
- Semester gathering of student organizations interested in voter education and registration as we tool for collaboration and networking
- Integrate voter engagement in Greek Life recruitment, induction, etc.
- Register 75% of eligible incoming students to vote during Week of Welcome
- Video Series that provides testimony from faculty, staff and students as “why” voting in every election matters
- A Call to action during major campus events – First-Year Convocation, first home athletic games, homecoming, etc.
- Introduction events for students to political candidates in our local community
- Spokesperson/people – utilize our popular campus leaders to promote voter engagement
- Pitt Votes branding campaign – explore merchandise in the form of attire, gifts, etc.
- Engage and serve in a leadership capacity with ACC Challenge or voter campaign/competition

#### Year 3- Academic Year 2022-2023

- Surpass the voting rate national average by 5% by 2022
- Incorporate civic education and democratic engagement into the general education curriculum
- A Call to action during major campus events – Athletic Events, Homecoming, etc.
- Impact the class schedule (modified day/half day of classes) on Election days so the entire campus can participate
- Add a voter registration option to the site where student must go to register for classes
- Election Day Special Events/Festivals

#### Long-Term Strategies and Goals

- Voter registration information submitted to student with acceptance package
- Implement a voter registration as part of the student ID card process
- Survey to find out why students are or aren’t voting and why, and potentially what questions they have about the process
- Continue to explore voter accessibility for University of Pittsburgh students

- Involve community-based voter registration and engagements efforts in the University's ongoing civic engagement work. Partners should regularly be invited to engage with the campus community and build meaningful relationships with the Pitt community
- Ensure a mechanism to measure the staff and faculty organizing and sharing information regarding their own voter registration and engagement efforts

### **Reporting & Evaluation**

#### Reporting

In a similar manner to the University-wide practice of including a wide variety of voices in decision-making, the Pitt Votes initiative will seek feedback from students, faculty, staff and other members of the University community on our plan for action. We are committed to receiving input on the Action Plan not only when it is initially published but continually as we work towards our outlined goals.

This will be achieved through the following steps:

- Sharing of the plan internally with the individuals on the Pitt Votes coalition, the Pitt Votes Steering Committee, and the Pitt Votes Student Task Force along with University leadership.
- Providing it for review with the All in Democracy Challenge and the Campus Vote Project.
- Sharing the plan with other internal constitutions upon request.
- Include feedback survey with the publication of the Action Plan for anonymous feedback
- Hold forum when 2020 Action Plan is first published (in-person or virtually depending on need) to hear further input from University community
- Include physical copies or instructions for digital access of 2020 Action Plan at all tabling events and other programming
- Continue to hold forums every three months with the public University community to receive further feedback on initiatives and goal areas

Through the above steps we hope to ensure the Pitt Votes 2020 Action Plan includes the voices of all University communities and creates a space for open dialogue about the points included in the plan.

#### Evaluation

Comprehensive and continual evaluation of the Coalition's efforts to increase civic engagement is key to create successful outcomes that reach further and last longer than a single election cycle. Much like other aspects on this plan, the evaluation of the Coalition's efforts will take a collaborative approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data from perspectives across the University campus and beyond in order to understand how a wide array of populations and entities are being impacted.

As a start, communication within the Pitt Votes Coalition, its subgroups, and associated organizations will serve as an evaluation tool. Coalition and committee leaders will conduct

monthly check-ins with their members in order to understand how broad goals are being achieved and adjust accordingly to any challenges that arise. Additionally, the in-person meeting that occurs once per semester will allow a deeper evaluation of all aspects of the action plan to occur.

Beyond Pit Votes Coalition members, it is important to understand how campus and community partners are responding to the work being done. Members of the Pitt Votes Student Task Force will conduct regular check-ins with student organizations and their leaders to understand how these students are responding to various initiatives. These check-ins will allow open communication in an effort to collaborate on ways to improve on goals or outcomes.

In addition to check-ins with members and related organizations a comprehensive quantitative evaluation plan must be implemented to track the impact of our efforts. Data from the NSLVE will serve as evidence and motivation for future efforts and as a result will be heavily integrated into the evaluation plan.

- Input each student the Pitt Votes Coalition interacts with into Turbo Vote and update according to the student's future participation in coalition programming
- Track student attendance at associated campus events
- Monitor engagement with outreach tabling at larger campus events
- Track voter registration to assess which programming efforts are most effective  
Collaborate with the County Board of Elections to breakdown student voter turnout rates at on-campus polling locations

### **Outcomes**

The following outcome have been established to ensure the effectiveness of the proposed strategies designed to support students in voter registration, engagement and education are met. This outcome also demonstrate transparency and accountability within the Pitt Votes Initiative.

PittServes Outcomes – part of the Student Affairs Annual Plan

- Primary Goal/Indicator: In collaboration with Community Government Relations, Student Government Board, Student Office of Sustainability and additional partners, PittServes will implement a voter engagement and registration program on campus where students will report increases knowledge and awareness.
  - Target: 75% or more surveyed students who engage with PittServes (PittServes surveyed students – small subset of overall campus enrollment) will site increased knowledge of voter rights, registration, and voting information.
  - Trend: AY19 – 58%

In addition to the above PittServes outcome, the Pitt Votes Coalition will continue to monitor the NSLVE data for increases in voting rates, registration rates and rate of registered voters who voted.

Targets by AY20:

- 75% or more of student who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and (according to their voting record) voted in a given election
- 90% or more of students who were found in the voting record, were eligible to vote and (according to their voting record) registered to vote in a given election
- 75% or more of students who registered to vote who actually turned out to vote in a given election

### **Conclusion**

The Pitt Votes Coalition would like to thank all University of Pittsburgh faculty, staff and students that contributed to the creation of this plan.

The Pitt Votes Committee considers this a working document with expected additions and changes. Extended strategies will come with the every changing times and the team will remain flexible to assure positive outcomes. The intended outcomes could shift to assure all student needs are being fulfilled.