Voter Access on College Campuses

As students head back to school, many are wondering how they will cast their ballots this coming November. Some will apply for an absentee or mail ballot in the district where their parents' reside, while others will choose to cast a ballot in their campus' district. Below we outline a detailed list of barriers students regularly face in voting and policy recommendations – where applicable – that states and colleges can implement to help make voting more accessible for students who wish to cast a ballot.

THE ISSUE: ACCESS TO RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION

One of the key barriers to college student voting is the ability to physically get to a polling location – many students who live on campus don't have access to reliable transportation. Additionally, schools may not coordinate transportation to and from polling locations, but even if they did, transportation schedules may not align with student class schedules, causing a barrier and burden for students to get to the polls to cast their ballot. Studies show that increased travel time distances to reach polling places have a direct negative effect on turnout.

Additionally, if students get their ballot via mail, lack of transportation access can cause difficulties for students to drop off their ballot and cast their vote.

THE SOLUTIONS: POLLING PLACES AND DROP BOXES ON CAMPUSES

When you can't physically get to a party, what's the simplest solution? Bring the party to you. The same concept is applicable to casting a ballot. The two common sense policy solutions that Responsive Gov recommends are to locate polling locations on college campuses and to place dropboxes on or near college campuses – these solutions help to bring the ability to cast a ballot physically closer to eligible student voters.

College campuses are ideal locations for polling places – not only are they centrally located for a large population of eligible voters, but in many cases, they also provide ample space, accessible parking, and a pool of younger poll volunteers. Universities can encourage students to serve at poll workers for on-campus locations, as well as any nearby off-campus locations.

As for drop boxes, a recent study out of Social Science Quarterly found that location of drop boxes matter and that decreasing the placement distance between boxes and eligible voters can lead to an increased likelihood of casting a ballot.

THE ISSUE: GETTING STUDENTS REGISTERED TO VOTE

A new school year brings new surroundings, new classes, new faces, and more for young adults to process. It becomes easy for something like getting registered to vote or updating voting registration to a campus address to fall on the backburner for students. If not provided the opportunity, students may get swept up in acclimating to campus life and

not register to vote or update their registration ahead of looming registration deadlines, many of which are in early October for states that don't offer same-day registration.

THE SOLUTIONS: ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION AT CAMPUS POLLING LOCATIONS, APPLICATION PROGRAMMING INTERFACE (API) FOR ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION, AND NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION DAY ACTIVITIES AND EDUCATION

Election Day voter registration (EDR) is critical for college students who may attend out-of-state universities and can help students who need to update their address on election day. According to data from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, EDR voters constituted roughly 20% of the electorate in some states, and higher numbers of eligible voters utilize EDR in presidential elections in comparison to midterms. However, only 21 states and Washington D.C. offer EDR as an option to students.

Outside of EDR, online voter registration (OVR) has made registration more secure, efficient, and cost-effective for voters and taxpayers. In recent years, several states extended their OVR systems to include an application programming interface (API), which allows trusted and verified third-party groups to submit registration forms electronically. In states with APIs, colleges and universities can apply to use the API and integrate OVR into university websites, and can even pre-fill information for students.

Colleges and universities can also use APIs to allow for digital voter registration drives on campus. Online registration through APIs eliminates additional paper registration forms and helps to process eligible voter registration information in a faster manner. Time is of the essence with voter registration deadlines approaching rapidly throughout the Fall, and use of API with OVR greatly helps speed up processing time.

Another way that campuses can ensure students are registered or updated to the correct address is to provide education and activities around National Voter Registration Day (NVRD), which is set to take place on September 17, 2024. We strongly recommend campuses coordinate with NVRD and their local chapter of Students Learn Students Vote for opportunities.

Finally, one of the simplest ways universities can help students register and vote is to give them clear information on their campus residential and mailing address. This will help them register to vote at their campus address, or receive their mail ballot more easily if registered and voting in another state.

THE ISSUE: VALID FORMS OF ID

According to the Fair Election Center's Campus Vote Project, 36 states currently have a form of in-person voter ID law that eligible voters must abide by. However, the list of acceptable forms of ID vary from state to state. Of the 36 states that require a form of ID to vote, 6 – Arizona, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas – do not accept student ID cards. 11 other states accept student IDs for voter verification, but there is variation in what kinds of IDs are actually acceptable due to the information the ID must contain in order for it to be used as an eligible form of ID.

Variance in state laws create an unnecessary barrier and burden on students, especially if students are voting out-of-state and may be unfamiliar with their college's state voting laws.

THE SOLUTIONS: STUDENT IDS AS A VALID FORM OF ID AND USE OF DIGITAL STUDENT IDS

For states that require a form of ID to cast a ballot, Responsive Gov strongly recommends that colleges and universities in those states work alongside the secretary of state and legislators so that student IDs can be used as an acceptable form of voter ID. Why? Out-of-state students typically will not have another form of ID outside of their student ID to cast a ballot locally, forcing them to rely on mail ballots from their home state.

States can take this an additional step by allowing the use of digital student IDs as an acceptable form of ID as well. [Research shows](#) that many voters without ID have been issued acceptable ID, but their physical ID has been lost, stolen, or misplaced on election day. Digital IDs can help solve this problem – they are simply electronic equivalents of the physical IDs that colleges and universities issue, with the digital ID available on the student's phone. This provides an electronic back-up for people who may have lost or misplaced their physical student IDs.