

Civic and Voter Empowerment Recommendations for Faculty and Staff Coordinators

by *Alex Kappus, Ph.D.*

UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement

The following guide is intended for faculty and staff members who lead campus-wide civic and voter empowerment work. Coordinators for Civic and Voter Empowerment (CVECs) across the state of California, and their counterparts at colleges and universities across the country can find value in the recommendations. Notably, CVECs in the state of California benefit from a defined role, dedicated support from the Secretary of State's office, and peers to connect with across public higher education. The position is not, however, without its share of challenges. For faculty and staff at institutions of all shapes and sizes, there is little guidance on how to coordinate campus-wide student civic and voter empowerment.

The following recommendations are informed by insights from my research, [Cultivating a Culture of Civic Engagement and Democratic Learning: Examining Institutional Responses to the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act \(A.B. 963\)](#). I recommend readers visit the "Promising Practices" section of the full manuscript, as these recommendations build off of those highlighted practices. As evidenced in the study, the role, campus prioritization, and subsequent level of resources dedicated to civic and voter empowerment work vary greatly.

1.1 15 Recommendations for Coordinators of Civic and Voter Empowerment

- **Conduct an Institutional Audit of Civic and Voter Empowerment Work:** Learn as much as you can about what is already being done on your campus related to civic and voter empowerment. Perhaps your residence life office posts on bulletin boards ahead of elections, or maybe a department offers an annual lecture on democracy. Go beyond the political science office, and look in places you might not expect to find civic engagement. Create an inventory of any and all efforts. Make this an annual practice and reach out!

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- **Get Grounded in Your Focus:** It's important for coordinators to become clear on how you and your campus define civic and voter empowerment and associated boundaries (i.e. how you practice nonpartisanship on your campus). Specific to voter engagement, gain an understanding of requirements and resources through the Department of Education, your Secretary of State office, and local Board of Elections office.
- **Find Collaborators On-and-Off Campus:** Odds are, you're not leading this work as your primary role for the college or university. You cannot do it alone! Find trusted partners to support your work. Establish a relationship with local election officials.
- **Invest Time in Relationship with Student Leaders:** Find student leaders who are energized by the work. This can, but does not necessarily need to, be your student government/ associated students/student trustees. The warning here is to not rely too much on students' labor. They need guidance from you or a faculty/staff advisor. Ideally, the students will also receive some form of compensation or, at the very least, recognition for their work. Leverage work-study dollars ([see here](#) Department of Education guidance).
- **Identify a Champion on the Cabinet:** Getting your president or another senior-level cabinet member on board with your efforts is critical to institutionalizing the work. Finding a champion, someone supportive of, and energized by the efforts is important for navigating barriers, finding funding, and weaving into institutional priorities.
- **Develop a Coalition:** As you build relationships, a coalition is a great vehicle for amplifying your efforts. Ideally, the coalition has an identity/brand and is housed in a department that can ensure accountability. Seek a coalition composition reflective of the entire campus community including external partners.
- **Connect to Institutional Mission, Vision, Values – the Strategic Plan – and Campus Traditions:** Making this work relevant and context-specific will help you gain more buy-in and support, especially for finding funding to support your efforts.
- **Develop (and Gain Feedback On) an Action Plan:** If you're a CVEC in the state of California, you're required to have an action plan. No matter where you practice, create a living document with actionable projects and measurable goals. Seek input and feedback from colleagues all around campus as well as community organizations. This step is much easier with buy-in from cabinet and campus partners.
- **Year-Round Engagement:** Develop your annual calendar and strategy. Remain responsive to real-time needs. Seek to incorporate the work even in off-election years!
- **Go Beyond Voting:** It's tempting for this work to only focus on voter registration and education, disproportionately so during presidential election seasons. Consider other "civic actions" students can take to learn and contribute. Think about critical civic learning and skills you can instill in students in holistic, intentional, and continuous ways.

- **Civic and Voter Empowerment for All:** Align civic and voter empowerment with campus efforts to foster inclusion, belonging, and justice. Disaggregate your civic data. Civic engagement is more than voting, it's about developing socially responsible leaders.
- **Find Community:** When possible, attend webinars and join with others invested in this work to lift your spirit and give you plenty of new ideas to support your good work.
- **Tap into Third-Party Support:** Consider developing 1-2 partnerships with external organizations locally and nationally. Start small, and build from there.
- **Document and Create Succession Planning:** Document your files well. Train a backup person for when you're out of the office, or when your time comes to transition.
- **Be Patient (but Persistent):** Especially if your institution is new to this work, it will be easy to get frustrated about the lack of progress. Build partnerships, and know change takes time. Remember you make a tremendous difference and progress will be made!

Additions or questions? Contact Alex at Alex.Kappus@gmail.com.