

# Civic and Voter Empowerment Recommendations for Policymakers

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The [California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act \(A.B. 963\)](#) offers policymakers at the federal, state, and local level an example of a legislative solution for encouraging colleges and universities to play a more active role in student engagement in American democracy. The recommendations below, informed by my research, [Cultivating a Culture of Civic Engagement and Democratic Learning: Examining Institutional Responses to the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act \(A.B. 963\)](#), provide insight to support policymakers' efforts to prioritize civic and voter engagement. The purpose of the research was to examine the lived experience of implementing the legal requirements, not to study the efficacy of the legislation in achieving the articulated goals. Still, it's important to consider the real impact policy solutions have on the people and institutions they address. The following recommendations reflected the experiences of Coordinators for Civic and Voter Empowerment implementing the legal requirement across all three systems of public postsecondary education in the state of California.

## 1.1 16 Recommendations for Policymakers

- **Support Student Civic and Voter Empowerment:** Participants in the study expressed appreciation for legislation that outlined baseline actions their colleges and universities could take, which were not otherwise prioritized. Educating youth is critical for the health of our democracy. Access to trusted information about voting, and helping students form a habit of voting is increasingly important in an era of misinformation, disinformation, and active attempts to dissuade young people from voting.

## Civic and Voter Empowerment Recommendations for Policymakers

- **Invest in Secretary of State Office Support:** The California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act established the Secretary of State Office's Student Vote Project team through [California Elections Code §2148.5](#). Participants in the study referenced this office as instrumental in carrying out the legislative requirements. When developing policy, ensure the resources necessary for the Secretary of State office's administration of any policy interventions.
- **Designate a Coordinator for Civic and Voter Empowerment:** Requesting or requiring colleges and universities to appoint a point person for their campus to lead efforts is an excellent first step toward providing more local energy and support for this work.
- **Funding for Legislative Requirements:** The research demonstrated the burden and limitations when funding does not accompany legal requirements. When considering legislation like the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (A.B. 963), provide funding for colleges and universities to carry out the provisions.
- **Substance Over Semantics:** While it may be tempting to draft legislation with outlined details for colleges and universities, the specifics sometimes get confusing. Develop policies that encourage baseline action without being overly prescriptive.
- **Avoid One-Size-Fits-All Approaches:** The experiences of carrying out civic and voter empowerment work are not the same on every campus. Make sure any legal guidance offers enough flexibility for colleges and universities to make it their own. Recognizing the needs of community colleges, for example, are different from 4-year universities.
- **Increase Access to the Ballot:** The research demonstrates the importance of making voting accessible for students by increasing polling locations and drop boxes on or near campuses. If not on or near the campus, ensure polling places are easily accessible via public transportation and are open during hours convenient for students.
- **Bridge the K-12 Pipeline:** Encourage legislation that supports student civic education and voter registration as they transition out of high school.
- **Out-of-State Student Voters:** Consider legislation that makes it clearer as to what options out-of-state student voters have, including the option of casting a vote in their home state. Increase access to absentee and mail-in voting, making it easier for students and young professionals to vote from wherever they are.
- **Consider Ease of Updating Voter Registration:** Young people move frequently. Ensure that they can easily update their voter registration.
- **Options for Early Voting:** Expand access to early voting periods, allowing young voters to cast their ballots at a time that suits them.
- **Address Voter ID Laws:** A hotly contested concept, at the very least ensure students can use their student ID to be able to vote.

- **System-Level Support:** In states with organized systems of higher education, consider policy measures that organize resources and support at the system-level.
- **Consider Who Will Carry Out Provisions:** When considering any legislation, consider who will carry out legislative provisions. Gain their insight on the feasibility, structure, and design of the laws.
- **Incentives and Accountability:** When passing a legislative mandate, consider either incentives or measures for accountability. Without it, the provisions are not always implemented faithfully.
- **Advisory Board:** Develop a state-wide board composed of students, faculty, staff, and third-party leaders to help advise on the legal needs and barriers to civic and voter engagement.

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