



VOTE FOR ASTRA

The Campus Canvass Strategy

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VOTE FOR ASTRA

THE DOGGED PURSUIT OF **VOTER TURNOUT**

Vote for Astra is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization devoted to promoting voting on college campuses. Focused on closing the gap between registration and turnout rates, we work with schools across the United States to implement innovative student voter outreach methods.

We believe that barriers, not apathy, are the true impediment to young voter participation.

As such, we stand and advocate for solutions centered on equity, access, and simplicity. Our Campus Canvass strategy, the foundation and core of Vote for Astra, was created with those principles in mind. Derived from the techniques of professional political campaigns, the strategy is designed to provide a systematic, consistent, and scalable solution that schools can leverage to improve student turnout.

This guidebook details the Campus Canvass strategy. It describes the strategy's genesis, the specific problems it's designed to combat, and the ways it intends to solve those issues.

In addition, the guidebook includes step-by-step instructions for implementing Campus Canvass. The instructions are designed to assist administrators and student organizers as they either add Campus Canvass to their existing toolkit, or use the strategy as the foundation of a new approach.

We are available for consultation and assistance as you implement Campus Canvass. If questions emerge as you read through this document, or begin your planning process, please feel free to contact us.

To vote and beyond,

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VOTE FOR ASTRA

TEAM

LUCAS CARMEL, DIRECTOR

Lucas graduated from Pomona College in 2019 with a degree in Politics. He led voter outreach efforts at Pomona in 2018 and was placed on the All-In Challenge's Student Honor Roll for his work. He's proud to be a former US Open ball-person, a lover of Broadway musicals, and James Franco's one-time biking instructor (true story).

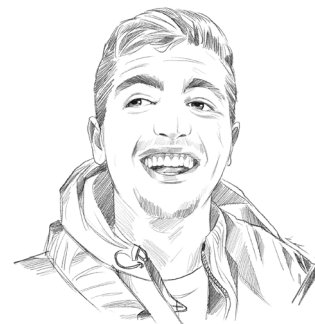


DEVEN KIRSCHENBAUM, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Deven received his BA in Economics - Political Science from Columbia University in May 2018. After graduating he worked as a healthcare consultant in New York City, and plans on attending law school at the University of Pennsylvania starting in Fall 2020. He cares about healthcare law and patients' rights, working to remove voting restrictions in the US, and perfecting his Chemex coffee brew.

MAHDI FARISS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Mahdi received his BA in Economics from Rice University in Spring 2019, where he was an active member of the Student Association Senate and staunch advocate for increased civic engagement. Since then, he has worked as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in the Netherlands. He is passionate about campaign finance reform, limiting his carbon footprint, and scrambled eggs.





Voter engagement is a tricky business. College administrators and students face myriad logistical, political, and technical difficulties. Good intentions and enthusiasm are rarely in short supply. But without efficient and effective ways to channel them, much of that initial energy can be lost.

Our **Campus Canvass** strategy emerged from observations about the challenges faced by college voting organizers, and the strategic missteps that stymie voter engagement.

It started with these **three questions**.

1 REGISTRATION

Helping students register is great. But how can we help overcome barriers to turnout as well?

Huge numbers of registered students do not vote. Bridging the divide between registration and turnout rates, and helping students navigate complex, state-specific laws, is critical.

2 OUTREACH

How can we communicate with potential voters in a way that actually engages them, and boosts turnout?

Campus outreach strategies typically rely on mass emails and social media campaigns. Missing is a student-driven community that's able to leverage digital tools their peers will actually engage with.

3 INSTITUTIONALIZATION

How do we ensure that our efforts today will be carried on next year, in 5 years, in 10 years?

Achieving full voter participation— thousands or tens of thousands of students voting -- demands a centralized, robust strategy with strong leadership. But it also requires institutional support, and a commitment to make the efforts of one year, and one group, last.



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These questions emphasize clear areas for improvement. Missing in the college voting toolkit is a centralized, scalable strategy. **Campus Canvass** attempts to be just that.

At its core, **Campus Canvass** uses sustained peer-to-peer contact to help students register and vote. It transfers the practices and techniques of a professional political campaign to the college campus.

And it's powered by **three principles**.

1 VOLUNTEER DRIVEN

Campus Canvass relies on people power. Volunteers and/or staff are the field team, responsible for direct voter engagement. When the program begins, they choose a set of students to be responsible for. Those students can be friends, acquaintances from class, or people in their dorm. The goal is simple: directly contact as many people as possible.

2 SUSTAINED + CONSISTENT CONTACT

Throughout the year, volunteers make contact with the people on their list. That contact is systematic, spaced-out, and facilitated by text and Facebook messages. Equipped with pre-written (but flexible) scripts, volunteers make sure their targets know an election is upcoming, help with registration and ballot requests, and remind students to turn out. Since the contact comes in waves, students are never overwhelmed with tasks or requests. And if questions or issues emerge, they know a peer is there to help.

3 CENTRALIZE + INGRAIN

Professional field teams are structured like a pyramid. A field director oversees the operation, field organizers coordinate and direct contact, and volunteers pound the pavement. Campus Canvass works in the same way. With clearly defined roles, the strategy can scale easily and transfer seamlessly from one group of students to another. As such, it's meant to last and embed itself on campus, making voter engagement consistent year-to-year.



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THE CAMPUS CANVASS STRATEGY

Campus Canvass is not a one size fits all solution, even though it intends to be as close to that as possible. Some questions about its applicability to your campus may be:

My campus has 30,000 undergraduates. Will this work here?

Absolutely. Campus Canvass is designed to scale. The more volunteers you recruit, the more students you can reach and help. But if your volunteer base is limited, know that you can still have a tremendous impact. Your team can shift to email instead of text, and message hundreds at once. And even if you stick to text, your work will have a cascading effect. Each student you reach might now talk to their friends about voting, and so on and so forth. Any application of Campus Canvass, however limited, will bring positive change.

What about faculty and staff? Is this only student-run?

Campus Canvass is student-powered, but made stronger with faculty and staff participation! Any number of configurations can work. Faculty and staff can serve as volunteers, or if certain people already lead voter engagement, they can lead and organize the volunteer base. Even alumni can participate! Perspective and knowledge from existing voters is deeply important.

What about international and undocumented students? Will this isolate them?

This is a crucial question. Volunteers are trained to apply sensitivity. They should never put a student in the position of having to disclose why they're ineligible, question them on their answers, or chide them for not voting. International and undocumented students can and should participate in other forms of civic engagement - volunteers can offer ideas on how.

My campus already has plans for voter engagement. Can we incorporate Campus Canvass in a pared-down way?

Absolutely. Campus Canvass can be the centerpiece of a voter engagement plan, but it can also be a complement to an existing strategy. One person messaging folks can make an impact. A team of volunteers that only send out messages once (instead of three or four times) can have an impact. Direct contact is the goal. However you apply Campus Canvass to get there, works.



COVID-19, and its aftermath, will exacerbate all voter engagement challenges. Students, faculty, and administrators are off-campus, navigating unknown terrain and an uncertain future. But a forceful and coordinated response can help meet the specific challenges that have emerged:

All organizing needs to be remote-enabled

As schools weigh the reality that in-person learning may not be possible until 2021, updated outreach strategies are needed. The power of the Campus Canvass strategy is in its ability to leverage remote outreach strategies. As described above, sustained outreach to potential voters through messaging platforms is the most effective way to help students navigate the various steps in the voting process.

More voters will vote by mail in 2020 than ever before - accelerating an existing trend

Organizers need to adopt a comprehensive approach to voter participation that does not stop at registration. Absentee and mail ballot voting pose unique challenges to young voters. State-specific questions will emerge repeatedly from students; adequate information and response will be needed in turn.

Institutional coordination matters more than ever

2020 calls for an especially coordinated and forceful approach to voter engagement. Without institutional support, such efforts become challenging. College administrations should plant their flags and throw their weight behind centralized, school-wide strategies.



Ready to begin? Curious to see how Campus Canvass goes into effect? Start here.

STEP 1: ORIENT

Background

It's always important to understand context. Before you put Campus Canvass into action, take a moment to learn what your campus has done for voter engagement in the past. What outreach methods and messages were used? Who led the efforts? If you have access to NSLVE data, consult the reports to see what your campus' voting rate was in 2018, 2016, and 2014. Do your students tend to vote in-person? By mail/absentee ballot? Building this understanding will help as you customize Campus Canvass to meet your school's needs.

Campus stakeholders and existing plans

Survey current efforts at voter engagement on campus. Make a list of other organizations (student-run or administration-powered) and the methods they're employing to register and turn out students. Campus Canvass is designed as a central, all-encompassing strategy, but it also works well alongside other approaches.

Existing partnerships

Is your campus a member of the All-In Campus Challenge? Do you have a partnership with Turbovote? These organizations lay the groundwork for voter engagement. If you're not already working with them, we encourage you to do so. And if your campus already is, that's awesome - Campus Canvass integrates with both! Visit our [Resources](#) page for more info on non-profit organizations with tremendous tools.



STEP 2: BUILD A TEAM

I. Identify leaders

Campus Canvass replicates the structure of campaign field teams. Each of those teams has a leader - the field director. So too with this strategy. Therefore, before recruiting volunteers, it's important to choose and find their leader. Bear in mind that multiple people can share this role. No matter what, that person, or that group, should be eager to commit to the full execution of this program. The field director(s) will be responsible for:

- Leading **recruitment for volunteers** and **managing them**
- Setting the **goals and scope** of the outreach campaign
- Answering **questions** about registration / voting
- Working with the school administration/existing student groups to **ensure support for and institutionalization** of Campus Canvass

II. Recruit volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of this strategy. They're responsible for initiating and maintaining contact with their peers. It's vital that you recruit volunteers deliberately, and widely. Let these three principles inform recruiting:

- **Advertise Widely:** The more volunteers you have, the more students you'll be able to contact and help. Utilize Facebook, Job Hiring Listservs, faculty and department contacts, sports teams, student organizations, and any other avenues you can think of to build your volunteer base.
- **Be Deliberate:** Make sure your volunteers come from as many corners of campus as possible. It's great to have lots of Political Science majors as volunteers, but you should make sure to recruit Engineering majors too. Think critically about the various communities on campus, and ensure that your volunteers match the diversity of your school.
- **Drive Excitement:** Volunteers will be excited by the prospect of helping their friends vote. But promising them pizza helps, too! And if your school has the means, offer class or volunteer credit, or even payment. This work can be a form of on-campus employment.



STEP 3: PREPARE

I. Make lists

This step is simple but crucial. Without a goal, you can't score.

First, ask your school's Registrar (or Dean of Student's Office) to prepare a CSV file of all eligible students. If the Registrar can't provide the list, you'll need to generate one on your own. Use your school's directory or Facebook group lists. Divide the master list by class and if you're at a large university (8000+), by school or degree.

Second, have your volunteers commit to contacting a certain number of students. Ask them to go through the master list and choose 50-100 names they know. Those names should be friends, classmates, dormmates, or just acquaintances. If you're at a large school with a limited number of volunteers, assign volunteers large blocks of voters (in the range of two to four-hundred). This is a much higher number and that's okay; contact should shift from text messaging to email to accommodate the increased load.

Third, equip your volunteers with spreadsheets containing their chosen list of names. They'll take responses there. See and download a sample on our [Resources](#) page.

II. Write scripts

Your volunteers will use pre-written scripts at each stage of contact. The scripts follow a **clear "if-then" format** in response to a series of yes or no questions. For example, the question, "Have you registered to vote?" should be followed by two follow-up responses, one for "Yes, I have" and another for "No, I have not". The scripts are guides, so volunteers should feel free to be casual with their friends and peers, as long as the key points transfer.

You should have unique scripts for each stage of turnout -- registration, plan-making, and pre-election reminders -- as well as for both in-person and absentee/mail-in ballots.

We've created sample scripts that you can use. View them on our [Resources](#) page.

III. Identify resources

Your field director and volunteers should be equipped with digital tools for voter registration and education. See the [Resources](#) page for our perspective on the best, and most critical tools available.



STEP 4: CONTACT

Our approach to voter engagement is built on the idea that sustained, deliberate, peer-to-peer contact is the most effective way to drive turnout. There is no set timeline for that contact, only certain intermediary goals. So whether you choose to start one month before the election, or six months before, you should make sure to include each of these four outlined stages.

STAGE 1: Raise Election Awareness + Registration

- Make sure students are aware of the upcoming election
- Ask students if they are registered; if not, help them navigate the process of registering; direct them to resources to help decide whether to register in their home state or in the state they attend school

STAGE 2: Acquire Ballots & Enable Voter Education

- If students plan to vote in person, check back in and offer resources about candidates and ballot issues.
- If students are voting by mail, help them navigate the process of getting an absentee ballot in their state.

STAGE 3: Plan Their Vote

- Ask absentee voters if they have received and returned their ballot; if not, walk them through the process of doing so and offer support.
- Help in-person voters plan for Election Day. Ask if they know where their polling location is, when they plan on going there, and how they'll do so.

STAGE 4: Get Out The Vote

- A few days before the election, check in with your absentee voters; make sure they have mailed their ballots.
- On Election Day, send final reminders to in-person voters.

Two things remain constant across each step.

- 1. Verification.** Consistency is the name of the game. So if a student tells a volunteer that they're going to register during Stage 1, the volunteer should confirm they did at Stage 2. That practice should be applied to each stage
- 2. Appreciation.** "Thank you for being a voter." Research tells us that expressing gratitude and affirmation to voters boosts turnout. At each stage, volunteers should reinforce their appreciation and acknowledge that voting is to be celebrated.



STEP 5: FINISH STRONG

Celebrate

Throw an Election Day party to celebrate with your team! Congratulate them on their effort, and be sure to pat yourself on the back, too.

Analyze

Reflect on the process with your team. Hold a de-briefing session with the volunteers to understand what went well, what didn't, and what improvements could be made. Record these reflections and suggestions.

When available, analyze your school's NSLVE data. It's the ultimate source of truth on voting data, offering a window into your performance, and how it compares to years past. Before NSLVE is ready, analyze your own data: how many students you contacted, how many indicated they voted, how many are registered out of state, etc. to get the clearest possible picture of your performance.

Institutionalize

Democratic engagement is a perennial effort. Embedding this strategy into your campus is the most effective way to ensure that the effort continues year after year:

- Refine and document your strategy. Store all the resources you used (scripts, voting law info, etc), and all of the data you've collected in one place online.
- Make efforts to embed Campus Canvass in your school's administration, or student government. This might mean finding support among administrators or creating an organization devoted to voting and civic engagement like at Columbia and Stanford.

Set up a meeting with our team to learn more and discuss next steps.

Contact us here.