

Ask Every Student Conversation Guide

Preparing students to confidently navigate the democratic process beginning with voter registration

This conversation guide is meant to help campus voting organizers develop scripts, trainings, and touchpoints for talking to students about democratic engagement, with a focus on voter participation.

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Conversation Outline

- Step 1 // **Setting the stage**
 - Introduce yourself and briefly explain what you're here to do today.
 - Ask students about which issues or topics they care about.
 - Transition to talking about voting.
- Step 2 // **Opting in to voting**
 - Explain who is eligible to vote in the United States.
 - Ask if the student has updated their voter registration to the address they want to vote at this fall.
 - Decide which step to turn to based on their answer.
- Step 3 // **Checking registration status**
 - Make sure to check the student's registration status just in case they are marked inactive, have an incorrect address listed, or are simply not registered to vote.
 - Decide which step to turn to based on whether or not their registration info is correct.
- Step 4 // **Registering students to vote**
 - First, discuss their options about where to register to vote.
 - Then, help them register to vote.
 - Make sure that the student avoids common mistakes people make on their form.
- Step 5 // **Making a voting plan**
 - Explain how to vote by mail.
 - Explain what in person voting might look like this year and what their options are.
 - Give students the information they need to take next steps.

- Step 6 // **Participating in our democracy**
 - Show how anyone can be a voting advocate.
 - Share other non-voting related democratic opportunities that you would like to promote.
 - Ask them how they plan to get engaged.

Step 1 // **Setting the Stage**

Introduce yourself and briefly explain what you are here to do today.

Example statement: *Hi, I'm <name>, and I'm part of <campus coalition name>, an initiative on campus that's focused on making sure every student is able to participate in our democracy.*

Admit that you don't have all the answers, but you can direct them to the resources that will have answers if needed.

Normalize the unknown of these times.

Tie voting into part of your school identity, highlight how it is relevant to your campus culture.

Ask students about which issues or topics they care about.

Example statement: *First, what issues matter to you? What are you passionate about? Did you know that...?*

Connect the issues they care about to the democratic process. This can include things as simple as connecting a passion for soccer to funding for soccer fields in their community.

Highlight school specific issues such as school funding and how voting affects them.

Make sure to keep the conversation nonpartisan by not discussing particular candidates, political parties, or partisan leanings.

Transition to talking about voting.

Example statement: *So, what's your experience with voting? What do you know about the voting process?*

Here's some scenarios for pushback and how you can respond.

If they're interested in change making and activism but less interested in voting, explain how voting is part of the process as a strategic tactic. Another way of using your voice. Explain the tangible ways in which voting affects issues.

If they're confused about participating in the democratic process in a place they don't consider their "hometown", explain that they can register where they feel connected and that it's a great first step to become more engaged.

If they feel like one vote won't matter, let them know that there are hundreds of local elections every year that are determined by less than 5 votes (extra points for keeping it local!) You're part of something bigger that can really tip the scale!

If they feel like this is just a ploy by a particular party, explain the intent is not to build power for a party but to increase participation in the democratic process so elected officials have to work harder to represent their constituents and earn their votes.

If they feel like voting is rigged, explain that this year young people have the opportunity to be the largest voting bloc in the country, and voting in this election means taking part in a movement to center young people's interests and change the system. Voting at least can't hurt, and the more people who participate the more we can tip the scale to elect representatives who can improve the system.

Step 2 // **Opting into voting**

Explain who is eligible to vote in the United States.

Example statement: *To be eligible to vote in the United States, you must be 18 by Election Day, a U.S. citizen, be registered to vote, and meet your state's residency requirements. If you have a felony conviction, your eligibility differs state to state.*

Don't ask students whether or not they are eligible to vote, just ask them if they would like to register. It's important that students who don't want to disclose personal information don't feel any pressure to do so.

Don't register anyone whose U.S. citizenship status isn't final. Even if they say they believe they will have citizenship status by Election Day, advise them to wait so that they don't accidentally commit a crime.

Don't mention anything in the news related to immigration. Topics such as family separation and ICE can be triggering to many students.

→ The student's answer to this next question will determine which step to transition to next. ←

Ask: *Have you updated your voter registration to the address you want to vote at this fall?*

If they say yes, go straight to **Step 3 // Checking your registration.**

If they say no, but want to register to vote, go straight to **Step 4 // Registering to vote.**

If they say no and opt-out of voting, go straight to **Step 6 // Participating in our democracy.**

TIP! To quickly check a student's voter registration status, go to sls.vote/checkmystatus.

Step 4 // Registering to vote

First, help them decide where they should register.

Example statement: *Where would you like to register to vote?*

Make this choice as easy as possible for students. The more simplified this conversation is, the more confident they will be about voting in that place.

Prioritize access. When you help students make this decision, especially during COVID-19, you want to encourage them to vote in the place where they will have access to voting options.

Where will they likely be living in October?

Bring it back to what they care about. You can also encourage students to vote in the community in which they feel most connected.

Then, show them how to register to vote.

Example statement: *Great! To register in <chosen state>, you can...*

This will depend on the state context, so make sure to refer to a state-by-state voter registration guide or follow your own state's voter registration processes for in-state students. Ask them to get out whatever materials they will need before beginning (e.g. state ID number, social security number, etc...).

If you have the time, you should walk them step by step through an online voter registration portal if available or through the paper form.

Make sure to highlight common mistakes that people make when registering to vote. This is especially helpful if you are low on time and don't have the ability to walk them step by step through the form.

Make sure that:

you mark that you are at least 18 years old and a U.S. citizen.

your signature is clear, matches your ID, and stays within the box.

you write the correct dates. Don't mix up your birth date and today's date.

you include hyphens and special characters as they are listed on your ID.

your residential address is the address where you want to register to vote, not necessarily the same as the address you want mail delivered to.

your mailing address is where you want mail delivered to, not necessarily just the same address for where you are registering.

Step 5 // Making a voting plan

Explain how to vote by mail.

Example statement: *Did you know that you have the option to vote from home in your pajamas? What do you know about voting by mail? In <state>, you have to option to...*

Vote by mail options vary from state to state. First explain what voting by mail looks like in their state. Do voters automatically receive a ballot or application in the mail? Is there no-excuse absentee voting? Do ballots require a notary or witnesses? Are voters required to submit a copy of their photo ID?

Make the student aware of ways they can ensure their mail in ballot is counted successfully. Write neatly with a black or blue pen on your application and your ballot. Make sure that you sign your ballot where requested. Make sure that your signature matches the signature that you used for your voter registration. Note that the USPS may take 14 days to send in your ballot, so you should request and mail in your ballot as soon as you possibly can. If you're voting by mail, this year especially, it'll be helpful to imagine that Election Day is October 20, not November 3.

Explain what in person voting might look like this year and what their options are.

Example statement: *If you plan to vote in person, it's important to be extra prepared this year.*

Caution but don't rule out voting in person, especially in states where voting by mail is difficult. It's very possible that voting in person may be more difficult this year. While you do have the option to vote in person, make sure that if you do, you have a plan to do so safely, [following public health guidelines](#).

Encourage early voting. When you vote early, you ensure that school, work, long lines, or a bad commute on Election Day won't stop your ballot from being counted!

Let students know that they can still request a ballot even if they plan to vote in person. Even if you do prefer to vote in person, you can still request a mail-in-ballot. If you take your mail-in-ballot with you to the polling site, they will void it and let you vote in person. Also, if your ballot does not arrive in the mail, you can still vote in person.

Provide students with the information they need to make a voting plan.

Example statement: *So, what is your voting plan?*

If they registered or reregistered today, tell them to check their registration status again in 2 weeks.

If they requested a main-in-ballot today, tell them to check the status of their ballot application by October 3 latest and ensure they mail their ballot in by October 20 latest.

Ask if they need any information on key local offices or local measures that will be on their ballot. You can refer them to the League of Women Voters' ballot guide website vote411.org or BallotReady.org for more information.

Step 6 // **Participating in our democracy**

Show how anyone can be a voting advocate.

Example question: *Which three friends or family members will you help vote this year?*

Tell them that they can triple their vote. If everyone makes sure that three friends or family members are able to vote, voter participation can be tripled!

Advocate for others to vote. Whether or not you are able to vote, you can still encourage others to vote through personal conversations or social media.

Share other non-voting related democratic opportunities that you would like to promote.

Example statement: *Yes, voting is an important part of democratic engagement, but we also invite you to take part in other ways. Some opportunities we have right now are...*

Share three options for students to plug into. This can include promoting the next virtual town hall in the town or city where your campus is located, ways to get involved with different student organizations, or sharing contact information for local elected officials.

Ask them how they plan to get engaged.

Example statement: *How do you plan on participating in our democracy in the next month? What is one democratic participation goal for the next 6 months?*

Ask them what their plan is. Make sure to be affirming towards whichever level of engagement or whichever kind of tactic they respond with. Do make sure that you maintain nonpartisan language even if they respond with partisan answers.

If you have time, ask if they have any lingering questions about anything covered

Thank them for their time and action and let them know that they can reach out to your organization with any questions.