



## Students, College Administrators, Faculty, and Election Officials Working Together to Overcome Barriers to Student Voting

### Bringing a Voting Site to Your Campus

On-campus voting sites effectively encourage students to register to vote using their campus address and make it easier for students to vote in elections. These voting sites allow students to avoid seeking transportation to (sometimes distant) off-campus locations and raise the visibility of elections, especially for primaries, specials, and off-year elections.

We recommend pursuing any on-campus voting site well in advance of the next election. Contacting local elections officials a year before a target election allows time for the planning and approval process. At any point you can reach out to the team at Campus Vote Project and Fair Elections Center for assistance at [info@campusvoteproject.org](mailto:info@campusvoteproject.org).

#### Using this Guide

This guide provides tangible steps, and general information, common approaches and options, and advice from campuses that have done this to help you bring a voting site to your college or university.

After reading this guide, we recommend contacting election officials or Campus Vote Project for further information and requirements specific to your situation during the steps below. You may wish to start with the chief election official for your state, which is usually the Secretary of State, or a State Board or Division of Elections. If you have an existing relationship with your local elections office you may start with them, otherwise, you should follow-up with local election officials for further details after contacting the chief election official's office.

An inconvenient polling location is frequently cited as a barrier for student and youth voting.<sup>1</sup> According to CIRCLE, 53% of young people with college experience who did not vote cited an issue with the polling location as the reason they did not vote.<sup>2</sup> Pursuing a voting site can be a long process that may take months or a year, however, the increased visibility and access to the democratic process will be invaluable to your campus community and is well worth the effort.

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#### Step 1: What types of voting sites are possible?

The two most common types of voting locations are early voting sites, which are open prior to Election Day, and polling places which are only open on Election Day. Additionally, a small but growing trend is to conduct all or majority by-mail elections. If you are in one of these jurisdictions you may still be able to request a ballot drop box be located on your campus or a voting center for those needing assistance or wishing to return their mail ballot in-person also be located on campus.

##### *Early Voting Sites*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://idhe.tufts.edu/resource/democracy-matters-guide-non-statutory-barriers-voting>

<sup>2</sup> <https://civicyouth.org/why-youth-dont-vote-differences-by-race-and-education>

Most states now offer some form of in-person voting in the weeks or days leading up to an election. It is most often referred to as early voting, and in some states, called absentee in-person voting. Absentee in-person voting generally follows the same state rules for requesting an absentee ballot through the mail but allows the voter to fill out the absentee ballot request in-person, submit it, and cast a ballot in one trip.

Early voting sites usually serve all voters in a jurisdiction, meaning any voter in the county or city where the early voting site is located can go there to cast a ballot. Due to the wider number of voters served by early voting sites, this can be a good option for campuses with a substantial number of commuters or any higher education institution with a student population spread across a larger geographic area.

### *Election Day Polling Places*

Most Election Day voting involves voters from a single precinct traveling to their assigned polling place, usually a public or semi-public building in their area like a school, fire station, or church. On-campus polling places are a good option for institutions with on-campus student residents or other compact student housing situations.

### **Step 2: Learn about the existing voting site(s) serving students at your campus**

It is important to understand how effective existing voting sites are at serving your student population. It is also helpful to familiarize yourself with the voting habits of your student population. Sign up for, or utilize, your college or university's NSLVE report to learn more about your students' registration and turnout rates.<sup>3</sup> When assessing the current voting sites serving students, consider the following questions:

- Is your campus more commuter or residential campus, in-between?
- Are a significant number of students registered to vote using their campus address? (Check your NSLVE report)
  - Depending on your student population and their voting access needs you can determine if and what type of on-campus voting site will be most beneficial
- Is early voting or absentee in-person voting available? If so where do students need to go to cast that type of ballot?
- How far/close are the Election Day voting sites to your campus?
  - Can students walk? If so, is there a sidewalk the whole way?
  - Do they need transportation to access the voting site? Is public transportation an option?
  - Does your institution provide accessible transportation?
- What are the operating hours of current voting sites serving students? When are lines the longest?
- Have any issues been reported from students about the voting sites in recent elections?
  - Have students been turned away from voting? Why?
  - You can usually find reports on provisional ballots cast by voting site on the websites of your local or state election officials. This is a good place to identify if there is an abnormal number of voters at student-heavy voting sites experience problems casting a regular ballot.

### **Step 3: Research specific requirements in your state or jurisdiction on types of locations, maximum/minimum voter amounts, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and technological compliance.**

Reference "Polling Place and Vote Center Management" from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for federal guidance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/Chapter\\_9\\_Polling\\_Place\\_and\\_Vote\\_Center\\_Management.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/Chapter_9_Polling_Place_and_Vote_Center_Management.pdf)

- Types of locations
  - The building should be located near voters who are served by the site
  - The property owner/school administrator must grant permission for the use of their building
  - The building must meet federal and state accessibility requirements
  - The location must have an adequately sized space to accommodate workers, voting machines, and voters waiting in line
  - The building must be able to remain open for polling hours and times for poll workers to set up and break down
  - There must be sufficient parking
- Maximum/minimum voter amounts
  - You must determine if your campus and potentially surrounding areas is home to enough voters to justify a new voting site, or are you seeking the relocation of an existing voting site
  - Check your state/district laws for more specific numbers
  - You may need multiple precincts and voting sites for larger student populations
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility
  - There must be handicapped parking
  - Voting site is wheelchair accessible
  - Curbside voting available
  - Wide-door frames for entrance
  - Ramps for sidewalks and entrances if there are high curbs or steps
  - Prop heavy doors open or have automated open buttons
- Technological Compliance
  - Find out what poll workers need regarding electrical power, phone lines, and internet connection

**Step 4: Contact the elections office that has authority over your jurisdiction.**

**The elections office that has authority in your jurisdiction will be the final decision maker on whether your campus will be able to host a voting site. Be prepared for your conversation with them by completing Steps 3 through 4 and coming to the meeting with thoughtful questions.**

- Contact your county/city clerk, board of elections, or local elections officials
- Form a relationship with them and share your mission/goals
  - Make sure you describe how your mission will benefit your students and the broader community
  - Prepare statistics showing the proportion of student voters using voting sites near campus
- Work with election officials to find out if redrawing precincts will be needed, which locations on campus work best, and what accommodations your voting site must provide

**Moving an Existing Voting Site or Adjusting/Creating Precincts**

**It is likely that you are asking to move an existing voting site to a location that is more accessible for students, but in some instances, you may need to adjust or create precinct boundaries.** Before 2014, Virginia Tech's campus was divided into four precincts. They went through the process to consolidate the campus into two precincts that only covered student housing and shared a common on-campus voting site making it easier for students to cast a vote.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2014/09/090814-vpa-votingchanges.html>

If you are asking to adjust or create a precinct, there are additional things you need to discuss with your local elections office and a longer timeline should be expected.

- Are you eligible for a voting site on your campus based on your student population?
- Will the boundaries of existing precincts need to be redrawn?
- Does your location meet the technology requirements?
- What are the burdens of the current polling location and how can a move to your campus help elections and poll workers serve voters? What are the benefits of a move to your campus?

### **Common Challenges**

Campus Vote Project interviewed several colleges and universities that secured an on-campus voting site voting or created and adjusted precincts. Each state and local jurisdiction have different processes and requirements but their experiences offer good advice when tackling this goal.

The biggest challenge was the lengthy process, and that sometimes the result can be dependent on one local election official who could swing the outcome. As voter advocates, we must respect the process while being strong voices for our communities.

Each campus stressed the importance of building relationships with local election officials. Many colleges and universities had participants attend local election office public meetings to learn and show election officials they were interested in elections issues beyond just voting sites.

Another valuable recommendation is to invite election officials to campus to meet with administrators, students, and other stakeholders to demonstrate how the campus is supportive of this movement.

### **Stories of Success**

**The examples below include a campus that worked to establish an on-campus polling place and another that brought early voting to campus.**

#### **James Madison University (JMU)**

JMU began pursuing a voting site for their campus in August 2015 and it went into effect in March 2016.<sup>6</sup> Student government leaders worked with campus administrators, city officials, and the local elections office, to redraw precinct boundaries and create a campus-specific precinct with an on-campus polling place. Since then, Dukes Vote has utilized the voting site to bring awareness to voting on their campus.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Western Carolina University (WCU)**

Students working with Campus Vote Project and Andrew Goodman Foundation put in months of research and work to bring an early voting site to campus.<sup>8</sup> The first year the early voting site as on-campus it was the most utilized early voting site in the entire county. WCU's Student Democracy Coalition continues to provide accurate voting information and engaging their peers around elections, including an annual celebration at the early voting site.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.jmu.edu/polisci/wm\\_library/CurrentsSpring2016.pdf](https://www.jmu.edu/polisci/wm_library/CurrentsSpring2016.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.jmu.edu/vote/index.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> <http://campusvoteproject.org/blog-posts/release-wcu-polling-place-approved>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-enrichment/center-for-service-learning/student-democracy-coalition/index.aspx>