



Voter Engagement Action Plan

I. Executive Summary

The Bethany Lutheran College Voter Engagement Action Plan began in 2023 and was extensively updated in Summer 2024. This version was drafted by Ryan Bolte (Dean of Students & Campus Vote Coordinator) with input from Ashley Casper '25 (Student Senate President) and Ellie Sorenson '27 (Student Senate Civic Engagement & Community Service Committee Chair). We will revisit this plan in Summer 2025 to transition to a 2025-2026 action plan.

Bethany Lutheran College is committed to developing students who will be engaged in the civic life of their communities. This action plan intends to provide the strategies, actions, and commitments that will build a strong foundation of voter engagement at Bethany Lutheran College

II. Leadership

Ryan Bolte, Dean of Students & Campus Vote Coordinator, and Ellie Sorenson, Student Senate Civic Engagement & Community Service Committee Chair, will lead the College's efforts to increase nonpartisan civic learning and democratic engagement. They will be supported by the Student Senate, as a whole, and, specifically, the Civic Engagement & Community Service Committee of the Student Senate.

The Student Senate holds weekly meetings open to the entire student body while school is in session. The Civic Engagement & Community Service Committee provides weekly updates to the entire Student Senate and any other attendees at these meetings.

The relevant duties of the Civic Engagement & Community Service Committee in cooperation with the Dean of Students and Student Senate include the following:

- Working as a team to implement the voter engagement plan
- Contributing creative ideas to engage all student populations in the voting process
- Planning and implementing voter registration events to provide students with the ability to register to vote
- Planning and implementing non-partisan voter education resources and/or programs
- Encourage the Student Body to engage in democratic practices and raise awareness of upcoming elections

III. Commitment

The Bethany Lutheran College mission statement reads: “Bethany Lutheran College provides Christian higher education in a challenging academic environment where personal mentoring guides students to pursue knowledge, truth, and discernment for productive and fulfilling lives.”

Bethany Lutheran College has a long-standing history demonstrating a commitment to teaching and encouraging civic engagement of its students and campus community. This is evident in the core Objectives of the College. Overarching Objective #3, states that students will “demonstrate an understanding of personal and public responsibility,” and includes sub-objective #3b. in that “students will be able to reflect upon your involvement as an engaged citizen in different communities and cultures.”

IV. Landscape

According to data from Fall 2023, of the 905 students enrolled at Bethany Lutheran College, 75.5% are degree/award-seeking undergraduates, 5.3% are degree/award-seeking graduate students, and 19.2% are non-degree/award-seeking (of which the majority are online, dual-credit students via their high school).

In addition, of the degree/award-seeking undergraduates, 14.8% identify as students of color and 65.3% identify as white. Additionally, 18.5% of the students are international. Among domestic students, 68.1% hail from Minnesota, reflecting a diverse geographic makeup. This diversity prompts several considerations: Firstly, given the significant international student population, our engagement strategies must be innovative to include those who cannot vote in the United States of America, educating them on ways to participate meaningfully in their democratic processes in their home country. Secondly, with a significant percentage of eligible students coming from outside Minnesota, our voting initiatives should provide resources and support to help students navigate the decision to vote in Minnesota or their home state.

For those who decide to vote in Minnesota, many external factors make it easier for them to access the ballot. Individuals must have resided in Minnesota for 20 days prior to an election (although they are allowed to register before the 20 day period has been met) and must also register to vote at least 21 days before Election Day or on Election Day at a polling place. For this reason, students are encouraged to register to vote shortly after they arrive on campus. Bethany Lutheran College is also located less than a mile from the nearest polling station and offers rides to the polling station throughout election day. This significantly reduces the stress that students may feel in finding the polling station or how to get to it. We also encourage students to consider alternative forms of voting to help reduce the occurrence of a large number of students physically present at the polls on election day.

V. Goals

We have identified the following goals for the near future:

- Create mechanisms to maintain voter registration and voting initiatives over time, ensuring consistency in our efforts.
- Work with faculty to discuss civic engagement in courses.
- Increase education surrounding Election Day.
- Engage international students on civic engagement in the United States and in their home countries.
- Continue to develop a website of resources that students can easily access.

VI. Strategy

Bethany Lutheran College is committed to pursuing multiple strategies to engage the student body in elections. The College is committed to re-evaluating current strategies, evaluating the effectiveness of voter engagement, and implementing new strategies to increase or enhance student engagement with their civic responsibilities and election participation.

Strategies for Voter Registration

- Distribute voter registration information to students via email with information, a link to the BLC Votes webpage, and a link to the state of Minnesota Voter Registration Form.
- Display information and a QR code to the BLC Votes webpage on campus monitors.
- Post flyers with information and QR code to the BLC votes webpage.
- Work with Blue Earth County election officials and the College's Student Senate to host tabling events to encourage voter registration in advance of elections.

Strategies for Voter Education

- Instruction during Parent Orientation and New Student Orientation events that includes information about requirements and process for registering as a voter in the state of Minnesota.
- Continue to add resources and information to the BLC Votes webpage.
- Create or obtain informational handouts that can be passed to the Student Body through tabling and on-campus mailboxes

Strategies for Student Senate

- Create a simple flow chart for all students with steps for voting options
- Post on social media to help with voter education
 - Include encouragement for absentee/mail-in ballots and early voting options

- Work with Blue Earth County election officials to host tabling events to educate students in advance of elections

Other Key Strategies

- Encourage faculty members to promote election engagement in their classes.
- Encourage extracurricular coaches and advisors to promote election engagement to the students in their programs.
- Provide a shuttle service to Christ the King Church and back to campus on election day.

VII. Evaluation & Future Considerations

Bethany Lutheran College is committed to regularly evaluating voter and civic engagement strategies, and will seek out best practices to continue to increase voter registration and turnout among the student body.