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Introduction

Misinformation about elections is a large concern for first-time voters and young adults. Many students do not know how to register or understand the voting style of their county or simply do not understand the election process. With this project, I want to reach as many students as possible to ensure they know their voting options, how to register, and understand the process of elections on a local, state, and federal level. Educating high schools on how their vote affects topics in government and why it is important is something touched in school, but they are missing physical voting and know how to register. I connected with Bloomington High School North in the 2024 General Election to work with them. I wish to work with more local high schools in the coming years and share my program with them to help the students who will be first-time voters. I plan to connect with the two school boards in Monroe County to help spread the word and educate with the Civic Student Network Program.

Project Goals

I will create a program that I want to call Civic Student Network, it could be used in high schools or universities across the nation to get students involved with the election process. This will be from registering to vote to working at a polling site/vote center on Election Day. I want to ensure all first-time voters feel confident and comfortable walking into a polling site to cast their first vote. This is more than just a civic duty but also ensures electing integrity and accessibility. I want this to be simple and something that any Election Administrator can adapt to their local school(s) and be a step-by-step guide or have a lesson plan feel to it. It is important to connect to the students on a level they will enjoy and find interesting, with mock elections, events/parties, and activities for them to be part of are just some of the ways to get young adults and students involved with democracy, local or federal.

Methods

One method I would like to take advantage of is a Voter Registration Drive where we could bring in iPads to get students who are 18+ registered to vote before the election. We held an event on the Indiana University campus and at Bloomington North High School in partnership with the PACE group and Indiana SOS Office on Nation Voter Registration Day. On campus, we played cornhole, had music playing, gave out free pizza and election merch to everyone, and were able to help students register or learn where to request an absentee by mail ballots. We registered 1,600 new voters before the 2024 General Election in Monroe County, with half of them being first-time voters and the other half being transfers from counties or out of state.

Another method I would like to take advantage of is hosting information events at the local high schools to educate the student on different ways to vote as well as how to register and learn where to find who is on their ballot. I found it helpful to work with local government teachers to help educate students about the election process and how it works. I held a mock election and recruitment day at Bloomington High School North. Students got to have a Q&A with the County Clerk and myself (Election Supervisor) where we answered many questions about the security and integrity of elections in Monroe County. Students also got to cast ballots from the current election in test mode, we had everything set up like an actual Election Day polling site. The students then got to learn more about working at the polls starting at the age of 16 with the Hoosier Hall Pass Program. We also had our recruiters there to get students signed up and gave them permission slips so they could have their parents and school staff fill them out. Many of the students even got signed up for a training class that day, which made it much easier to get them involved. We ended up having over 60 students help on Election Day and over 100 signed up to work as backups, this turnout doubled from the Primary Election. We sent the results of the student's election to the school, and they announced the results in the morning announcements. I was asked to come back each school year to make sure all the seniors get the opportunity to be a part of this day.

I believe incorporating social media into elections would increase the number of 18 to 29-year-old voters as 84% are active users in the United States. In Monroe County, I want to begin using Facebook and Instagram for the Election Central/Voter Registration office as they are the most used social media platforms in the US. Being a university county, I believe we could reach students at a higher volume with social media because they do not tend to use local newspapers, radio, or TV for news. Young Adults 18-29 get their news online or from social media platforms like YouTube (93%), Instagram (78%), Snapchat (65%), and TikTok (62%).

CEATS Principles & Tools

CEATS has been an honor and privilege to be a part of and to learn many tools and principles to implement in Monroe County elections. I have learned things from not only the sessions but also from the other counties that are also part of the current cohort. I have taken some procedures from counties and made changes to the way we handle different tasks in my county. Learning in-depth about the process of elections and the equipment we use has been very helpful to me as a new election supervisor. The sessions we have been through helped me with what could be the largest election I will ever see, with the 2024 election cycle being my first in this role. I am also thankful for being able to talk with the staff of VSTOP/CEATS to learn more about implementing social media with elections. I was able to better understand the pros and cons of having social media in a government office and learn some tips/tricks to use when we do add social media. Not only is social media a great tool to inform the public but it also engages them in the

election process. For Monroe County, we have a large University that could benefit from having their local elections/voter registration information available via social media. This would increase our level of accessibility with not only the young adults but also the seniors around us who struggle with mobility concerns. It would be beneficial to add links to public meetings that could be broadcast live for the use of the public as well as release live election results as they are coming in on there as well. We currently work with our county GIS department and developed a dashboard that is used for the results of the election and was first used in the Presidential General Election this past fall.

Conclusion

This will be useful for counties nationwide to ensure all eligible voters are educated and aware of all their voting options. I believe this program will increase the number of voters because it will also get future voters involved in the election processes at an earlier age. In Indiana, this would be in support of the Hoosier Hall Pass Program designed by the Secretary of State office. In the United States, 30 of the 50 states allow 16 plus to work at the polls and another 11 states allow 17 and up. This will be helpful to Monroe County because it helps us ensure we have enough poll workers on election day and that their vote counts on election day by getting them registered and educated before they turn 18. This program will be helpful to Monroe County to encourage young adults to become active in their local government and to educate them before their first vote is cast. Civic Student Network is designed to engage, educate, and empower the next generation of leaders.

Gratitude & Acknowledgments

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