

PART III.

**Winning at the Ballot Box:
Voter Engagement and
Getting out the Vote (GOTV)**



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Passing a law is only half the battle – now it’s time to make sure young people show up to cast their ballots. When young people vote, they send a powerful message: we’re here and we’re paying attention.

This section walks you through how to register 16- and 17-year-olds to vote and turn out young voters when Election Day arrives.

STEP 5 – Turning New Voters into Active Voters

Kicking Off Voter Registration

Once 16- and 17-year-olds are eligible to vote in your community, the next critical step is making sure they are registered.

But voter registration isn’t just about handing out forms – it’s an opportunity to start building up a culture of civic engagement and pride in your school and community. Think of registration not as a one-time event, but as the launch of a voter engagement campaign with multiple phases.

Start with a Kickoff Moment

Plan a visible and celebratory launch event to generate excitement and awareness. Young people should have a sense that there is something special about becoming eligible to vote at 16.

A kickoff event could include:

- A voter registration pep rally with music, student speakers and local influencers
- An announcement over the school system or in homeroom explaining the new voting rights for young people
- “I Registered to Vote” sticker giveaways and selfie stations to celebrate young people who sign up
- A visit from a guest speaker (like a city council member or young activist) to inspire action

Make It Easy and Accessible

Young people are more likely to register when it’s simple and available right where they are.

- Embed registration opportunities into the school-day and social activities:
 - Set up a table in the cafeteria, school hallway or during a school fair

- o Visit classrooms (especially social studies or government classes) and walk students through the process
- o Use QR codes or tablets to access the online voter registration form and have them register then and there
- Make sure to explain the process clearly – what forms of ID are accepted, where to turn in forms and when registration closes

Partner with Student Groups

Youth-led, peer-to-peer outreach is the most effective way to reach new voters.

Work with clubs, teams and organizations that already bring students together:

- Collaborate with student government, National Honor Society, Black Student Union or other groups to co-host events
- Ask club officers to take a leadership role in spreading the word and helping peers register
- Offer incentives or recognition for clubs that get the most members registered

Infuse it with Culture and Fun

Make voter registration an exciting and memorable experience, not a chore. Include music, snacks, photo booths or other incentives to draw students in, such as:

- Raffles for those who register or pledge to vote
- Giveaways like custom pins, t-shirts or stickers
- A music playlist curated by students playing in the background



Governor Phil Murphy, state and local officials and rapper A Boogie Wit da Hoodie joined students at the Newark School of Data Science to celebrate young people voting and register students to vote ahead of the school board election.

Courtesy of Governor's Office

Track and Celebrate Progress

Track how many students have registered to build momentum and encourage others to join.

Share this progress with your school and community by:

- Creating a public poster or digital tracker showing progress toward your registration goal
- Recognizing milestones during morning announcements or on social media
- Celebrating when you reach big targets (e.g., 100 students registered)

Planning High-Impact GOTV Events

GOTV is about energy, repetition and accessibility. Your goal is to create touchpoints and moments that make voting exciting and achievable for young people.

Successful GOTV events should be:

- *Highly visible*: Use school-wide announcements, hallway posters and assemblies to make voting unavoidable
- *Social and celebratory*: Turn out voters with music, food, photo booths and public recognition
- *Peer-powered*: Mobilization is most effective when it's friend-to-friend. Create squads or teams that commit to voting together and bringing others to the polls

Ideas to consider:

- A school-wide "Get Out the Vote" rally
- Voter pledge drives with prizes
- "Ballot drop walks" to deliver vote-by-mail ballots to local drop boxes
- Class competitions with pizza parties for the highest participation
- Early voting or Election Day countdown posters in the school hallway



The Vote16 Rock the Block Party brought Newark's young people together for music, food, art and action – celebrating young people's power to shape their future.

Mobilizing Through Digital Outreach

Your online strategy should focus on engagement over broadcasting. Instead of pushing out information, use digital tools to spark interaction, build community and move community members to take action.

Core Tactics for Digital Outreach

Direct Messaging and Texting

- Equip student leaders to send personalized reminders to their peers via direct messages, texts or chat apps
- Use relational organizing platforms like Reach or Movement to organize voter outreach lists
- Peer-to-peer texts are more trusted and more likely to be read than mass emails or robo-texts

Visual Content for Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat

- Create countdown graphics to the registration deadline or election day
- Use filters, memes and popular trends to frame messages in a youth-friendly way
- Share behind-the-scenes videos from your events or organizing meetings to humanize the campaign

Shareable GOTV Content

- Make graphics with how to vote instructions, school-specific voting dates and motivational quotes
- Host an “Instagram Live” or TikTok question and answer session with young organizers answering common voting questions
- Encourage students to create their own content explaining why they’re voting and tag their friends

Group Chats and Micro-Communities

- Start or tap into school-based group chats on platforms like WhatsApp, GroupMe or Discord
- Assign “GOTV captains” in each chat who are responsible for sharing key reminders and links
- Consider running a friendly competition between group chats or schools based on engagement

Email and Link-in-Bio Tools

- Use a simple email list or newsletter for weekly updates to students, teachers and community allies
- Build a Linktree or Carrd page with everything in one place: registration links, FAQs, voting deadlines and event RSVP forms

Best Practices for Digital Outreach

- Keep it short. People scroll fast – make every word count.
- Ask young people what they want to see. Let them drive the tone and design.
- Use bright, bold visuals. Youth-led graphics go further than polished, corporate-looking designs.
- Post often, but with intention. Quality over quantity.
- Always include a clear call to action (CTA): “Register here,” “DM us to get involved,” “Tag three friends.”

STEP 6 – Sustaining the Momentum

Measuring the Impact

Tracking your campaign’s results helps you improve, celebrate and make the case for expanding young people voting for other offices. You should collect two types of data: quantitative and qualitative, to measure your impact on civic engagement.

Quantitative Metrics

- How many young people registered to vote?
- What was the turnout for young people (if available)?
- How many GOTV conversations or pledges did you collect?
- How many schools, clubs or students were reached?
- How many social media views or press mentions did you receive?

Qualitative Metrics

- What did students say about voting for the first time?
- What did teachers or administrators notice?
- Were there any unexpected wins or barriers?
- For students who didn’t vote – why did they not vote?

Create a short impact report with charts, testimonials and photos. Share with partners, elected officials, media and potential funders to build continued support.

Tip: Make a feedback form for every event and encourage young people to write journal entries or video reflections about what the experience meant to them.

Keeping Young Voters Engaged

Voting should be the beginning of a civic journey, not the end.

Keep young voters engaged by creating long-term pathways for involvement:

- Host post-election celebrations or reflection events to process what happened, share lessons learned and recognize contributions
- Offer continued leadership roles through youth advisory councils, event planning committees or speaker opportunities
- Connect young people to ongoing local issues, like the school budget, education policy, public safety and climate justice – where they can use their voice and organizing power
- Help engaged young people support their friends in other municipalities who are interested in lowering the voting age in their area
- Maintain year-round organizing spaces like a Vote16 club or civics club that meets regularly and trains new student leaders each semester

Tip: Introduce an annual Vote16 Leadership Award or “Young Civic Leader of the Year” recognition to incentivize and celebrate continued engagement.

You can use this section to plan your voter registration and turnout efforts in a way that fits your school and community, and if you need support, the **Institute’s Vote16 Team** is always here to help at justice@njisj.org.



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