



JUST VOTE

YOUTH REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN



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EDWARD M. KENNEDY INSTITUTE
FOR THE UNITED STATES SENATE

JUST VOTE: YOUTH REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN



GRADE LEVEL 8–12

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do citizens develop and encourage civic habits and democratic values?

This resource is a companion to the Edward M. Kennedy Institute's Just Vote website: justvote.org.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Students will compare and contrast historic voter registration campaigns.
- Students will determine the best practices for voter registration campaigns.
- Students will develop authentic, sustainable efforts to increase participation in the democratic process.

INTRODUCTION

Encouraging young people to engage politically is key for the health of our democracy. During a time of political upheaval and crisis, young people have led a massive global social movement in response to systemic racism and police violence. At the same time, young people may not vote or pre-register to vote just because an adult tells them to do so. Many young people don't see themselves reflected in the political system and see a lack of solutions to our most pressing problems, some of which have persisted and worsened over decades. Although a single campaign will not solve all of these problems, part of the solution is amplifying the voices of youth and encouraging their representation in our political system.

This lesson supports young people as they design, create, and implement their own voter pre-registration campaigns. Students will consider some reflection questions, learn more about voting as they consider what to include in their campaigns, study examples of past voter-registration campaigns, and apply what they've learned to create campaigns that engage current and future voters to participate in the democratic process.

First, help students reflect on the role of voting in the democratic process, using questions that connect to their prior knowledge about voting. Then, through the series of worksheets that follow, have students learn relevant vocabulary, analyze challenges voters face today, examine past successful voting campaigns, and create their new campaigns. After students launch their campaigns, consider creating a way for the class to track their success as a group.

Teacher Reviewer Damian Aufiero, History and Civics educator at Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers in Boston, member of the Massachusetts 2020–2021 Secondary Teacher & Principal Advisory Cabinet

1. REFLECT ON KEY QUESTIONS

Write answers in reflective journals or discuss them with classmates.



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- 1 Describe an experience that led you to believe **something needed to change** in your school or community. What did you learn about your own values through this experience?
- 2 Think of a piece of media (a commercial, TV show, movie, social media account, speech, or magazine ad) that **influenced you** in some way. What was it, and why do you think it had an effect on you?
- 3 Describe an experience that comes to mind when you think of **voting**. What did you learn from this experience?



2. LEARN KEY VOCABULARY



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VOTER REGISTRATION

A requirement that a person must enroll before they will be allowed to vote. In all states except North Dakota, people must register to vote in order to cast a ballot in federal, state, and local elections.



Joseph Sohn/Shutterstock

VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN

An effort organized by a group that aims to get as many people to register to vote as possible.



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VOTER SUPPRESSION

The practice of creating barriers that prevent people from exercising their right to vote, which in practice disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minorities, non-English speakers, and other groups.



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VOTER PRE-REGISTRATION

The practice of allowing young people to register as future voters before they turn 18 (typically at 16 or 17 years old). Upon turning 18, the person is added to the voter registration list and is able to cast a ballot.

3. ANALYZE THE CHALLENGES FOR VOTERS



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Your voter registration campaigns should consider the particular challenges faced by young voters in the election. Use the “Just Vote” web resource to learn and consider the unique questions voters face, as well as the historical scars that haunt Americans who have been prevented from making their voices heard at the ballot box. Here are some questions to consider as you use the “Just Vote” website to gather information for your voter registration campaign.

A voter registration campaign should build an answer to some or all of these questions.

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE? What should future voters understand about the history of voting? Explore the **“How has the vote been suppressed in the past?”**, **“Have American voters faced a crisis like this before?”**, and **“How have we expanded voting rights over time?”** stories. What is one historical fact that you would like to potentially include in your campaign?

WHY VOTE NOW? Your voter registration campaign should inspire future voters and give them a reason to pre-register to vote. Explore the **“What would it look like if we all voted?”** and **“Why vote?”** stories for some ideas about encouraging peers and family to vote. What’s an idea that resonates with you from this section and why? What’s an idea that you think would resonate with your peers? Why?

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES? If voting wasn’t important, people wouldn’t go to such great lengths to stop us from voting. Explore **“Is voter fraud a problem in the United States?”**, **“Who decides who I get to vote for?”**, and **“How does voter suppression work today?”** at justvote.org. We should all be aware of the tactics and realities that may be used to stop eligible voters from making their voices heard. What fact or method stands out to you from these sections to potentially share in your voter registration campaign?

3. ANALYZE THE CHALLENGES FOR VOTERS



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WHY SHOULD WE HAVE HOPE? You may decide to leave your audience with a message of hope. Our votes represent our dreams and expectations for the future: we vote for candidates and ideas that help move the world in a direction that we consider positive. Consider the stories about the **“What can young people do?”** and **“Will the voting age ever be lower than 18?”** Is there anything from those sections that you find hopeful? If yes, why?

4. ANALYZE CASE STUDIES

Before you design your own voter registration campaigns, take a look at some successful campaigns from the past. Take a look at one of these examples. Is it engaging? Persuasive? What does the campaign use to inspire new voters? What are they asking viewers to do? What do you think is the purpose of the campaign? Track your ideas as you review each campaign.



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A. ROCK THE VOTE'S "THREE FRIENDS" CAMPAIGN

<https://www.rockthevote.org/get-involved/get-three-friends-to-vote/>

Purpose: _____

Method: _____

Message: _____

Call to Action: _____

B. PLANNED PARENTHOOD'S WE DECIDE CAMPAIGN

<https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/elections>

Purpose: _____

Method: _____

Message: _____

Call to Action: _____

4. ANALYZE CASE STUDIES

(CONTINUED)



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C. TURBOVOTE & DEMOCRACY WORKS

<https://www.democracy.works/tools-for-voters>

Purpose: _____

Method: _____

Message: _____

Call to Action: _____

D. HEADCOUNT'S #THEFUTUREISVOTING CAMPAIGN

<https://tinyurl.com/y3pbgm4>

Purpose: _____

Method: _____

Message: _____

Call to Action: _____

5. CREATE A NEW YOUTH VOTER CAMPAIGN



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Now that you have some background information and have seen some examples of other voter registration campaigns, let's create a new campaign.

PURPOSE To encourage young people aged 16–18 to pre-register to vote and vote in the next election that they are eligible for. You may have other goals for your youth voter registration campaign based on your study of the issues. Write them here:

CAMPAIGN MESSAGES What are key messages that you want viewers to remember about voting?

1.

2.

METHOD How can you help viewers of your campaign internalize these messages? This is the “meat” of the campaign—where you have the chance to be creative. Here are a few questions to consider:

- **Online or In-person?** Many traditional voter registration campaigns host registration drives at community events and locations that reach large amounts of unregistered voters. Digital outreach has increasingly become a popular way of reaching potential voters.
- **Visuals?** Think about imagery, music, phrases, and facts that would help support the messages. You may choose to make a series of social media posts, memes, visuals or posters to display in your school. You might produce a short video, host a contest, write an open letter to your peers, or pursue another creative idea. What about a future voter poetry slam? Spend some time thoughtfully planning how you will reach potential voters.

5. CREATE A NEW YOUTH VOTER CAMPAIGN (CONTINUED)



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CALL TO ACTION After you've inspired potential voters with your messages in a creative way, what do you want them to do next? Pre-Register (or Register) to vote!

That is your "call to action." The easiest way to do this is to use the state's online system, the Voter Registration website. Another way is to fill out the Mail-In Voter Registration Form, or you can register to vote as part of applying for a driver's license. Make sure your campaign includes this call to action and also the voter registration deadline (in Massachusetts, 20 days before the election).

CREATE YOUR CAMPAIGN Use the information you learned about past campaigns and your design for your campaign to execute your plan. If you need help with video equipment, social media sites, or other technology, consult your school's technology office, or ask an adult in your community to help.

SHARE YOUR CAMPAIGN Your campaign is ready! It's time to share it. One measure of success is how many people see your campaign and pre-register to vote. Think of at least one other way that you can show your campaign is successful and write it here. Example: asking people to post on their social media with a specific hashtag after they pre-register to vote.
