

Module One:

Register to Vote or Pledge to Vote

Objective:

Students will register to vote and understand the power of the vote in expressing their voice in, and after, elections. Students will be empowered to help their peers register to vote and create a culture of voter engagement at their high school and in their community.

A student volunteer(s) will lead a class exercise and discussion about voting and what it means for young people then assist students to register to vote.

Outcomes:

In the classroom, school, and community, students will be able to:

CLASSROOM

1. Identify at least three reasons voting matters to our democracy.
2. Explain why it is important to develop a lifetime habit of voting.
3. Identify obstacles to voting as well as actions that may improve voter turnout among all eligible citizens.
4. Register to vote or pledge to register if they are not yet eligible.
5. Identify two societal issues they care about and complete a Pledge to Vote card to remind them why it is important to vote.

SCHOOL

1. Help their eligible peers register to vote.
2. Establish an official Inspire2Vote Club at school.

COMMUNITY

1. Engage family, friends, and other adults in their community to ensure they are registered to vote.
2. Identify at least one local or state election that was decided by fewer than 300 votes.
3. Research and understand their state's voting laws as outlined by Board of Elections or Secretary of State office and understand youth voter turnout.

Time Requirement:

20 - 30 minutes, depending on depth of discussion and Q&A

Materials Needed:

1. Voter registration forms
2. Register to Vote in Your State Guidelines (see Helpful Resources)
3. Pledge to Vote cards
4. Voter Registration Event Summary
5. Voter Registration Form Poster (highlights all required fields)
6. Inspire2Vote stickers

Students will also need their state issued ID (or driver's licence) and/or Social Security Number

Tips for Facilitation

Each activity is written to give presentors the words to use and actions to take. Text in black is the intended script and the red text is the action to take.

- 1. Tell students a few days ahead of time** that you will be doing this activity (use the Objective as your summary). Remind them to bring their driver's license and/or Social Security number to register to vote. (Be sure to review state-specific guidelines.)
- 2. Keep this interactive.** Just as voting is an expression of one's voice, it is important for students to share their perspectives about their responsibilities as voters and to understand that every vote matters.
- 3. Be nonpartisan.** Do not signal your support or opposition regarding any candidate, party, or policy issue. If they ask who to vote for or which party to choose, suggest that they consult resources like Vote411.org for a nonpartisan voter guide, read candidate websites or the newspaper, and talk to friends and family. Advise students can select no party affiliation and may change this selection at a later time. Remind them that they do not have to be a member of any political party to have their voice heard.

ACTIVITY: YOUR VOTE = YOUR VOICE

Class Participation: Homework Policy - The Great Debate

Look for the next general election date provided in the Inspire2Vote Modules “elections update” page to find out the birth date cut-off for voter registration.

► *Write in BIG letters on the board: “Born on or before [BIRTH DATE CUT-OFF], and a U.S. citizen?”*

Let’s assume that we are going to put the homework policy up for a vote ... not just in this class, but for the entire school.

A “Yes” Vote means—

- Every teacher of core classes would give a minimum of 2 homework assignments per week.
- Homework assignments must be turned in at the end of each week.
- Homework will be included in your grade. (Teachers have the option to grade your assignments or give a grade simply based on whether or not assignments were completed.)

A “No” Vote means—

- Homework is not required. There should be adequate time in class to complete all assignments.

Everyone stand up. As a student of this school, each of you has a right to express your opinion in this decision.

Starting with (Student’s Name), please count off one, two, one, two. Now, all the “twos,” please sit down.

Those who sat down represent all the young people in the United States who did not register to vote. They won’t have a chance to use their voice.

Everyone who is still standing, count off again, one, two, one, two. Again, all the “twos,” please sit down.

Those who sat down this time represent all the young people who are registered to vote, but didn’t actually vote. They are the ones who stayed home and watched TV, played video games, or were too busy with work or school. They could have voted, but chose not to do so.

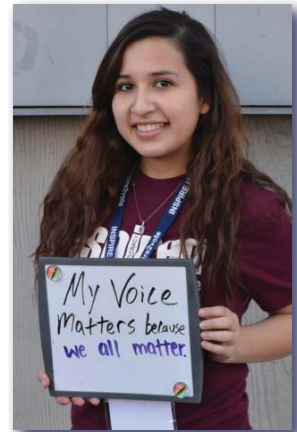
Guess what? The quarter of you left standing get to decide on the homework policy for the entire school. You’re the ones who registered AND showed up to vote.

► *Poll the remaining students on how they would vote on the Homework Policy and record the numbers on the board.*

How do those of you who are sitting feel about this decision? Do you feel like your views on the Homework Policy were represented? What impact will this decision have on you?

What we just did – this exercise – represents voting in a **presidential** election year.

During a year when only congressional representatives, state, or local candidates are running for office, the number of you left standing would be even fewer. More than likely, there would be about half as many to show up to vote.



Discuss: Why Do Young People Not Vote Very Often?

Think about it. Think about the issues that face our country. Very few people are making decisions on behalf of ALL of us. Statistics show that young people typically don't vote. **In fact, people older than 45 are twice as likely to vote as people under 45.**

Elected officials know this. It's part of the reason that issues of special concern to young people get relatively little attention in Washington and in our area.

- **What are some of the reasons you hear people say about why young people don't vote?**
- **Do you feel that these assumptions are accurate?**
- **What do you think you and your generation can do to change these assumptions?**

Discuss: Voter Apathy

Voter apathy -- meaning they just don't care -- is the most common hurdle young people face when helping their peers register to vote.

- **Can you identify other examples of apathy in our school?**
- **What can you say to your peer who is apathetic?**

Discuss: How Do Young People Make a Difference?

➤ *Before this discussion, find other state-specific examples of young people making a difference, small or large.*

Young people have made a difference--in the U.S. and in our state--many times throughout the years.

- The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s started with students sitting in restaurants that refused to serve people of color.
- In the early 1960s, pressure from young people being drafted into the military at 18 years old because they were old enough to die for their country, but too young to vote, resulted in the lowering of the voting age.
- In 2014, Saira Blair became the youngest member to ever be elected to the House of Delegates in West Virginia at 18 years old, beating out her opponent who was more than 25 years older. She decided her senior year of high school to run for office because she believed that her generation's voice offered fresh perspectives and ideas to improve our communities and our nation.

**As of November 2015, there are thirteen state legislators age 25 and younger.*

All of these young people realized the impact their voice and their vote can have. And just like them, your influence begins with one simple step: registering to vote.

➤ *Stop here to finish in 20 minutes. For more discussion topics, see the Extended Discussion section at the end of this module.*



ACTIVITY: REGISTER, PLEDGE & GET OUT THE VOTE

STEP 1: Register to Vote or Pledge to Register

As you know, the next presidential election will be in 2020. However, there are several important elections before then.

➤ *Review “Elections Update” for state and local elections.*

If you are a U.S. citizen and will be 18 on or before **the next general election date**, you can register to vote. That’s right. **Even if you are 17 now** but will be 18 before then, you CAN REGISTER today.

If you will not be 18 by the general election, you can Pledge to Register today. You’ll receive a reminder by email or text when you are eligible to register.

➤ *Pass out the **Voter Registration Forms** and **Pledge to Vote cards** to all students. Some students may not be eligible to vote and others may have already registered. Have them wait for instructions on how to complete the Pledge to Vote card.*

Here is our state’s registration form. Let’s begin by pointing out a few very important reminders:

- You are not officially registered to vote until this application is submitted and approved.
- If you do not receive a voter registration card within **30 days** after mailing this form, please contact your city or county voter registration office or the Department of Elections.
- This is an OFFICIAL government document. Fill out the form **completely** in your **best handwriting**. If it is illegible, it won’t be processed.
- Use blue or black ink only!

Make sure you look at the form and carefully fill in the boxes or check each of the **required** items.

You will need your **Social Security number AND/OR your Driver’s License number**.

➤ *Display the poster size Voter Registration Form highlighting **REQUIRED INFORMATION**.*

Remember, this is an OFFICIAL government form. Use a blue or black pen only and print as clearly and legibly as possible. No pencils. Make this count. Start filling out the form now. Does anyone need a blue or black pen?

➤ *Pass out Inspire2Vote pens to students who need one.*

I’ll be walking around to help you. If you have any questions about any of these forms or cards, raise your hand.

When you are done, raise your hand, and I will quickly check your form before we officially submit it to the registrar.

STEP 2: Pledge to Vote

A pledge is a promise. By **Pledging to Vote**, you are making a commitment to participate in our democracy and ensure that your voice is heard on election day. Voting is your right and privilege. Today you will check one of these boxes

- I **registered** to vote today!
- I'm **already** a registered voter!
- I **will** register to vote when eligible!

Instructions: Pledge to Vote Card

1. Check one of the three boxes listed on the card
2. Please fill out all information (first and last name, address, email, phone number, school, grad year, etc.)
3. If you want to become involved with Inspire, check the appropriate box and we will contact you.

► *Pass out the "I am a Voter" Stickers*

Inspire U.S. Promise

Information collected on Pledge to Vote cards is used solely for the purpose of reminding people to register when they become eligible or informing them and reminding them of upcoming elections.

We do not share this information with others.

Pledge to Vote cards may be mailed back to students before the next election to remind them to cast their ballot.

Inspire U.S. will provide you with updates regarding upcoming local elections, deadlines, and voter information.

We encourage students to develop a lifetime habit of voting because a true democracy depends on it.

STEP 3: Celebrate Your Right to Vote!

► *Write #inspire2vote on the board.*

You may think "no big deal...I filled out a form." But remember, it's not just any form. This represents a law that was passed FOR YOU.

Your voice matters. Take a selfie and post it to Twitter and/or Instagram (don't snap a closeup picture of your form because there is personal information on it). **Add #inspire2vote**

Follow this hashtag and Inspire on social media. There will be information posted about upcoming elections, deadlines, and opportunities to meet and learn about candidates.



ACTIVITY: HELP PEERS REGISTER TO VOTE

STEP 1: Identify Friends Who Should Also Register

Now that you have registered to vote, you can see that the process is simple. What if everyone in this classroom each helped five people register? How many new voters would we have just at our school? What if each of them reached out to five more people? How long would it take to get all of the seniors registered?

- **Do you think it's important for your peers to register? Write down two or three reasons they should.**
- **Can you think of five friends who would agree that registering to vote is important? Write down their name(s).**

Would you be willing to talk to the people you listed and encourage them to register to vote tomorrow? (Provide school location & time.)

Every voice matters. You have the power and the right to make sure your voice and the voices of your generation are heard.



Inspire Fact: In most states, 17 year olds can register to vote as long as they will be 18 by the next general election. In some states, individuals can pre-register as early as 16 years old.

Step 2: Craft Your Pitch

Let's think about how this class could take the lead in helping all eligible seniors at our school register to vote.

First, think about some of the issues you already brought up in our earlier discussions. Do you think these same issues would motivate other students to register and go to the polls?

- Take a few minutes to jot down what you might say to one of your friends in two minutes or less to encourage them to register.
- In groups of two, pretend you're talking to this friend and share what you'd say. At two minutes, switch and have your partner read his/hers.

➤ *Repeat the role play two to three more times with new partners if time allows so students can practice.*

Who would like to share one of the pitches you heard, and tell us why it would compel you to register to vote?

Pitch Discussion Topics

- What would you say to someone who tells you he doesn't want to vote because he doesn't care about politics?
- What would you say to someone who says "Why should I vote now? I'm moving away to attend college next year."
- What would you say to someone who says "I'm not old enough to vote?"

Give students a few minutes to refine their pitch or ask them to complete this as homework.

Step 3: Prepare for Senior Class Presentations

As we prepare to do voter registration presentations in other senior classes, we want to get right to the point. That's why you drafted a two-minute pitch! If you only have 10-15 minutes to register everyone in a class, it's important to allow enough time for people to complete the form(s) and ask questions.

Some teachers may give you more time to speak. If so, we have a PowerPoint presentation and YouTube video that you can use, or you might want to incorporate one or two of the activities we used when we first started talking about the youth vote (e.g., "Homework Policy Vote"). You might even want to create a Kahoot! or Quizizz interactive game to kick off your presentation.

- *To download the PowerPoint template and view the YouTube video visit www.inspire-usa.org/i2v and select **Inspire2Vote PowerPoint Template and Why Vote? Video**.*

Inspire Fact: Classroom presentations by students have been shown to be the most effective way in getting high school students to register to vote.

Awareness—Anticipation—Action

You now know how important it is to register to vote, but your peers may not. Before we kick-off classroom presentations, what are some ways that we can encourage other students to care about voting?

Ideas may include:

Create posters around the school campus:

- Why voting matters
- How to Register to Vote
- Pledge to Register/Pledge to vote

Near the Social Studies and Government classrooms, set up a 2018 election display to share information about the candidates and their platforms.

Work with the student news channel or multi-media department to create a "Let's get ready to vote" presentation.

- Identify student leaders on campus and recruit them to make PSA's about the issues that concern them and why they are going to register to vote.
- Each video should end with a call to action for students to register to vote or pledge to register when they become eligible.



Classroom Presentation Checklist

1. Contact the teacher whose classroom you'll be addressing to confirm the date/time of your presentation.
2. Adjust your presentation script as needed to make sure you stay on task and on time.
3. Secure your hall pass (if needed).
4. Check to be sure you have all of your materials:
 - a. Voter registration forms
 - b. Step-by-step form completion instructions
 - c. Inspire Registration Event Summary sheet (IRES)
 - d. Voter Registration Form Poster
 - e. Inspire Pledge to Vote cards
 - f. Inspire2Vote Stickers
 - g. Inspire2Vote Pens
 - h. PowerPoint presentation file/laptop/projector (if you intend to show this)
5. Do the presentation.
6. Review step-by-step form completion instructions with the class, and hand out forms and cards for everyone to complete.
7. Collect the completed voter registration forms and Pledge Cards.
8. Review forms quickly to be sure they are complete.
9. Fill out the IRES sheet.
10. Turn everything in to me.
11. Send the teacher a "thank you" email for allowing you the time to help your classmates to register to vote.

Presentation Discussion Topics

- What other ideas do you have for getting all seniors to register to vote?
- Could we create a competition at our school to encourage voter registration?
- Would a lunch time presentation and tabling event be a good way for seniors to register?
- Would it be a good idea to go to school club meetings to help students register to vote?

Extension Activity: Create a Student-Run Inspire2Vote Club

One way to empower students to vote is by creating a club to help your peers register and support them to their first vote. Many high schools across the country have done this as a way to mobilize high school students.

Here's an example of a high school club constitution.

Inspire2Vote Club - High School Name Sample Constitution

Purpose: Help students to shape the future of (STATE) and turn their inspiration into action; help students by giving them the opportunity to vote and express their opinions by helping them register to vote and keeping them informed about upcoming elections and issues that impact our community.

Mission Statement: To create and instill a culture of participation in our democracy among all students at our high school.

Executive Board and Responsibilities: (2018-19 School Year) Club Officers make up the Executive Board

- **Advisor:** (Name of Teacher) Oversees/provides advice to club members. Only votes in case of a tie.
- **President:** (Name of Student) Keeps the entire group focused and maintain the most communication with Advisor to ensure that the club's agenda is met and to discuss group concerns.
- **Vice President:** (Name of Student) Assistant executive officer and President pro tempore who acts as the networking person within the group.
- **Secretary:** (Name of Student) Records and distributes primary club information and is responsible of creating the agenda along with maintaining the notes for every meeting.
- **Form Keeper:** (Name of Student) Collects the voter registration forms and contacts students if they are missing items within the voter registration forms.
- **Public Relations:** (Name of Student) Maintains the social media pages for the club and creates new ways to advertise for voter registration, such as flyers and posters.
- **Data Collector:** (Name of Student) Maintains the Excel sheet with information about the students' status pertaining to voter registration.

Elections: Members will nominate candidates for board positions. After the nominations, we will vote, starting from the bottom positions all the way to the president position. Once a member is selected they will choose whether or not they choose to accept the nomination.

Attendance: Executive board members are expected to attend all officer meetings and general meetings. Attendance is expected, but different circumstances will be taken into account.

Recalling an Officer: If, in the course of the school year, an officer is deemed as derelict in his/her duties, including, but not limited to, conspicuous and habitual absences of regular officer meetings, club meetings, and/or activities, particularly without good excuse to cause, mismanagement, or gross incompetence, either by the club advisor, or the majority of the Executive Board, then a special Executive Board meeting shall take place to determine if the officer in question shall be recalled. A two-thirds majority agreement is necessary either to remove or retain the officer in question, with the advisor voting only to break a tie.

Amendments: Any amendments to the Constitution must be approved by two-thirds majority of the executive board and approved by the Advisor.

Meetings: All meetings will take place in room (#), with the exception of special meetings. Meetings are every other Friday, starting at 2:15 p.m. and ending by 3:30 p.m. approximately. Special action meetings may be determined at regularly scheduled meetings. We will discuss new action plans to help more seniors register and go over the agendas during the regular meetings.

Extension Activity: Engage Your Community

You probably know of many young people in your community who do not attend your high school. Consider how you can reach out to them and encourage them to register to vote and pledge to vote at election time. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Take a look at your Board of Elections and/or Secretary of State's website. Research an election in your state that was decided with fewer than 300 votes. How does this affect your community?
- Consider setting up a voter registration drive at a high school sporting event or a neighboring high school.
- Are there groups or organizations to which you belong where others your age may be eligible to register to vote? Reach out to set up a time to give them your two-minute presentation and help them register to vote.

➤ ***IMPORTANT: For all voter registration or pledge events, it is imperative that you, the teacher, review all forms promptly to be sure they are accurate and complete. Within 24 hours, contact Inspire Staff to coordinate pick-up and delivery of completed forms to local registrar.***



EXTENDED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Important Issues to Students

The example of homework that we used earlier might be a trivial issue but nonetheless, there were some pretty strong opinions in this classroom.

- ▶ *Reinforce the fact that even though students may have differing opinions on some issues, the point is, as citizens who are or will soon turn 18 years of age, they have an opportunity to express themselves through the power of their vote.*

What are some issues that face our state or country that you'd like to have a say in?

Examples of possible issues:

- Elected officials make decisions that impact how much public universities charge tuition, what kinds of financial aid is available, what colleges have to report about crimes on campus, and many other issues affecting the health of universities.
- Politicians make decisions that impact the kinds of jobs and companies that come to our area. They mandate laws around safety in the workplace. They also set the minimum wage.
- Regarding the military, elected officials decide policies on pay, health benefits, and education benefits for our more than 1.4 million men and women in uniform. And of course elected officials also decide when we go to war and when we attempt peaceful approaches to conflict.
- Environmental concerns are addressed at all levels of government. Air and water quality, global warming, clean energy, and recycling are among the issues repeatedly drawing attention from lawmakers and will continue to do so throughout our lifetimes.

Thinking about these issues, why do you think it's important for young people to vote?

The History of Voting Rights in the U.S.

When America was founded, those who could vote were white males who were 21 years old or older and owned property.

Over the last 200 years, we have gradually expanded voting to include other groups:

- Property requirements fell away in the early 19th century.
- African American men were given the right to vote in 1870 – but they were effectively kept away from the polls by Jim Crow laws until the 1960s. It took the sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of young people in the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement to deliver these rights.
- Women were granted the right to vote, nationally, in 1920. State by state, women moved the movement forward until they finally gained the right with the 19th amendment.
- Young people 18-20 were given the right to vote in 1971, as they were serving in the Vietnam War. “Old enough to fight, old enough to vote” was the driving message behind passage of the 26th Amendment.