

Getting Out the Vote – And Engaging Young Voters Hailey N. Johnston

Getting out the vote is more important than ever in Michigan, but where do we start and how do we activate our community to show up at the polls in November? If you are involved in politics already, it can be hard to understand why so many people do not vote. It may seem like the majority don't care, but the reality is that most people just don't know where to start or they have a hard time accessing the information and tools to participate. As an organizer, this can be frustrating and addressing the problem is daunting. However, if we start with understanding, we can lead with action. Understanding why people do not vote will be our greatest tool in supporting our community's participation.

Accessibility is a big deal. How are we mobilizing our community to register and then and cast their ballots once they do? How do we follow-up? Filling up their inbox with email reminders is not the solution. We need to be engaged with our high schools, churches, and community organizations. We need to organize ways to support people in voter registration, filling out their ballots at home and mailing them in, bringing their ballots to a drop box, or showing up on Election Day. We need to make this entire process as easy and accessible as possible. Maybe we could make it fun instead of just an obligation or civic duty?

During my work in organizing these kinds of efforts, one of the most effective ways of mobilizing my community to engage in elections was through voter registration drives, shuttles to the polls, marches to the polls, and debate watch parties. In 2016, all state universities in North Carolina also had a friendly competition to see who could get the most students on their college campus to vote. My alma mater UNC Asheville won. Which had me thinking—why don't we do this with the surrounding counties? On my college campus we were able to create this beautiful sense of unity among our student body with shared goals. Young voters want a process, like a competition, that matters. Could Democratic County parties in N.E. Michigan mount such a competition?

Most voters know why they vote. Maybe this is because they care about the way local, state, national, and global politics will affect their lives. Maybe it is because they care about other people in who may not have the same lived experiences, resources, or support as themselves? Maybe the reason includes both of these or the reason is because they want to beat the rival county in a voter turnout competition or just beat the "other" party? Empowering people to use their voice and understand the importance of showing up for elections is one of the greatest ways we can support the change in our country and in our communities. This is the message young people must believe.



Hailey Johnston is an advocate and organizer for the global cancer community. She lives in Lansing MI. Hailey has a B.A. in Political Science from UNC-Asheville. She is passionate about community development, rural organizing, justice and creating positive, meaningful change especially for marginalized people.