

Connecting with your Communities: Promoting Voter & Civic Engagement – Transcript of audio

Good afternoon and welcome to the FDL webinar. Promoting voter and civic engagement. My name is Karen and with me today is our presenter. The geography and global city at the University of Washington, Seattle. I will hand the microphone over to him will take it from here.

Hi, everyone. Thank you for that intro, Helen. Ashley said I and the librarian at the Washington in Seattle. The current chair of ALA government Roundtable. Thank you all for joining us today for a webinar on connecting with your communities. Promoting voter and civic engagement. Which will hopefully serve as a lead-in to registration day and spark ideas for celebrating that day and other ways to promote civic engagement in your library communities. I'm an academic librarian and will be speaking today from my experience as one. I have tried to highlight aspects of this topic in my experiences that will be relevant to all types of librarians. I hope this webinar will be helpful to you no matter what organization you are representing today. When I was looking at the attendees list before the webinar, it seems we have a good mix of librarians from different types of institutions today. That is exciting. Hopefully we will all get to learn from each other today. As I am presenting, please share your own anecdotes and experiences on engaging your communities to promote the engagement in the chat. At my library, I work with the data and statistics. It may not be surprise to you that I will kick off our session today with the quick recap of recent voting statistics from U.S. elections will hopefully illustrate the need for this work around civic engagement. We will start with the top lying numbers for the two most recent national numbers. The 2018 midterms and the 2020 general elections. It should not come to you as a surprise that general elections or ones that include a presidential race see higher turnouts than midterm elections. They generally receive more media attention and general interest from the population. These top lying numbers are actually some of us strongest voter turnout we have seen in recent elections. The 53.4% in 2018 was the highest turnout in the midterm election in four decades. The 66.8% in 2020 was the highest turnout in a general election since the 1900 election. Still-these numbers mean even in two strong voter turnout elections, nearly half of the voting eligible population does not go in the midterm. A third of the voting eligible population does not go in the general election. Which are facts that show and shock me who has been voting since 2008. Also obsesses around this time of year over every change in the election forecasts. These are the type of facts that motivate the creation of days alike national voter registration day. Have motivated some of the work that I've been involved in as part of that around civic engagement and our library communities. It is important to understand that there's a lot of variation underneath the surface of these top lying numbers. We probably already know that not all Democratic demographic groups vote at the same rate. Historically ages a big determinant in voting age. Younger voters being less likely to vote. It's a specially true in midterm elections. Less than 20% between 18 to 29 voters voted in the midterm elections. There has been recent dramatic improvement in voting rate among this age cohort in the last cycles. We can see in these numbers. Older voters still vote at much higher rates than younger voters. Not surprisingly, education levels are a huge factor, with people of higher-level education attainment voting at higher rates than those with lower education rates. Also not a surprise is income level. That influences how likely one is to. People with high incomes are more likely to vote than those with lower income. The statistics come from the Census Bureau of publication that is released after each election. It is titled voter and registration in the election of November. Fill in the blank with whatever year that publication has come out in and that is available online. It is a great source for voting and registration statistics if you would like to incorporate any of these type of statistics

into promotional materials or events for displays. This also shows how much people register to vote. This is often through the DMV, online forms but there's a insignificant amount of people who register through online or on campus. The Census Bureau also tracks what they give for not voting. Some of which are registration problems or lack of interest could potentially be addressed by civic engagement and awareness efforts at libraries. One of my favorite statistical fines for these releases is that people somehow tend to be busier in midterm elections and during general elections. We can see that while only one in eight people list being too busy as an excuse for not voting in a general election. Over one in 4 claimed that their busyness prevents them from voting in midterm. Either Treisman people happen to be too busy to vote during midterm elections or perhaps more likely people try our ties prioritize midterm elections less than general. This should increase the civic engagement around midterm elections to show our community the importance their votes have in midterm elections as well. That is all just a lead-in to get you to buy into why these efforts around voter registration and civic engagement matter. Why there is still work to be done. Here's an outline for today's presentation. I'll start out by talking about national voter registration day. Then I will talk a little bit about the voting and election toolkits. Putting links together to federal and state resources. We will also talk about the efforts underway on my own campus. Increasing's student engagement through democracy initiative. If you have questions or comments along the way, please feel free to put them into the chat. I will pause occasionally to answer any questions that come up. National voter registration day has been around since 2012. It is a nonpartisan civic holiday that takes place this year on Tuesday September 20th in the goal of these events is to reach nearly one fourth of eligible Americans who are not currently registered to vote. Nearly 4.7 million voters have registered to vote on this day in the past decade in the event is indoors in a number of different organizations including the national Association of secretaries of state. On their website you can find all of what you will need to take part in the day on your institution. From timelines and strategy guides. Sample text and graphics for your social media platforms. Of course, plenty of swag from shirts to posters et cetera. You may notice being represented on the stickers in the corner of each of these side so far. The different languages. As librarians, one thing we take will engaging with our community is through our list guys. This led us to create a toolkit to the lead up of the 2022 election. We are in the process of checking and updating them for the 2022 election cycle but they should be ready to go in time for national voter registration day. Toolkits feature both national level resources and state-by-state information on elections and voting. Including state specific information on I.D. and voter registration requirements. One benefit of creating these toolkits and guides is that they can use this on their own research guides which we have about a dozen take advantage with the last election. If you have any questions on how to do that, let me know. Over 20,000 views were received during the election cycle. If you are the major federal government voting resources that we .2 on the homepage of the voting in election focus guide our USA.gov and vote.gov. Each site provides authority of information on confirming that one is registered to vote. Changing the registration and finding one state or local election office. Also voter I.D. requirements. USA.gov includes links to voter guides and sample ballots. One can input their address and see the appropriate coders voters guide for the jurisdiction. We know from the statistics that I started with that not all of our potential audiences and eligible populations vote at the same rate. With our voting and elections tools get we also try to spotlight the efforts of organizations that are trying to mobilize population at risk of being disenfranchised. As librarians we are aware of these efforts and organizations can potentially connect our relevant community members with these groups. There is a federal voting assistance program that connects military and overseas members with their right to vote. While they are living outside of the country. There are vote writers which provide information and services for voters who may be confused or overwhelmed by voting I.D. requirements. That varies greatly state-by-state. Just as I was in the process of preparing for this webinar, Julie, a librarian who helped moderate a panel on civic engagement back in 2020 with me, she reached out with additional recommendations for efforts in

organizations to spotlight during this webinar. Including vote by mail in jail from spread the vote. It provides free tools to eligible incarcerated individuals to help ensure that this population does not lose their franchise. Spread the vote estimates that nearly half 1 million incarcerated Americans are at risk of being disenfranchised because the election cycle. Another recommendation was vote E.R.. It integrates voter registration into the healthcare system. Providing voter registration information at healthcare facilities much in the same way that libraries, DMV is and schools already do. Reaching a part of the population, the L and elderly that may not come across voter registration resources otherwise. We know that others that are focusing on increasing registration and participation in demographic groups that have low voter participation. We are open to between these organizations and their efforts on our voting and election toolkits. If you see any organization that are doing this work missing from our list on the toolkits then please feel free to talk them out in the chat or message me directly and we will include them in our toolkits. I hope Julie is here today because I'm sure she will have additional suggestions to add in the chat. I will pause there to see if there has been any questions in the chat.

We have two questions. The first one I will read out loud. State law regulations have limited what we can do to voting. How do we create nonpartisan participation?

That's a great question, James. I can only speak from my own experience as a librarian. This is coming from a state like Washington that doesn't have a restrictive restriction as other states or other places from academic librarian that might have a little bit more flexibility than other types of librarians. From my own experience, I think that really focusing on the educational aspect of any of the programming that you are doing and really leaning into that element. I'll have to look at the particular restrictions that are in place. I think if you make it about educating your community then I'd be surprised if there would be restrictions on that.

The second question is, what search terms work to find guide when searching in the community? The search tool is very finicky.

That's a good question. I don't know if Robbie answered the question in the chat. By linking to the guides. This could be an issue of when you're going to reuse content. I can work with you to find that but I believe if you search for the title of the guide which should be voting in elections toolkit with the and being --. I think it should come up but I haven't gone to try to reuse content from that guide in a little bit. I would have to double check on that. I'd be happy to follow up with you if you're having trouble finding that particular guide to reuse. I am seeing someone else comment that using voter in the search had Allstate's come up. I think I used to be listed as the owner that guide. I have since changed the ownership of the guide to another librarian. It may be under her name as well. I think when you search, use the owner of that guide and it will be away for you to know if you're using the right guide. I believe the current owner of the guides should be lies. Liza. Any other questions?

It looks like not at this time. If you have any new questions, please add it into the chat.

All right. Thank you. I will continue on. I have talked a little bit about the different organizations that are targeting specific populations that may be less inclined to be registered to vote or vote in elections. Now one of the most notorious groups for low voter engagement in turnout each election cycle that we hear so much about in the media are young voters. As I mentioned earlier, less than 20% of voters between the ages of 18 to 29 voted in the 2014 midterm elections. Those types of statistics are one of the reasons that a group of my colleagues at the University of Washington both staff members and students joined forces in the lead up to the 2020 election to form the group, Democracy Dawgs, that puts on

programming in the lead up to the election and were continuing to put on programming in between election cycles as well. One of the exciting things about this collaboration that was going into it. Each of us knew that a lot of folks on campus were excited about this work. It aligned with the University's mission vision and values to develop and educate the student to become more responsible and informed citizens. We are all concerned were creating the group about duplicating efforts elsewhere on campus and how we would be able to create partnerships on campus to work together in coordinated and non-silenced way. I realize you have a wide range of librarians joining us today. Each of our institutions is likely different from the organizational structure that we have here. I wanted to talk a bit about the collaboration that we pursued in case there are potential overlaps that you might be at your own institutions. The key in any case is to break down and reach out to both groups inside and outside organization. I will point out in a bit that they are going to be things that those other groups are able to bring to the table that you might not be able to. At the University of Washington, our collaboration feature representations from the library's come RF picnic cultural center. Our community engagement and leadership education. King County elections. Our student group. And the nonpartisan, nonprofit Washington bus. Going into this collaboration, we had our own individual plans for election related programming. By collaborating we were able to all play off of each other's drain. Reaching a wider audience on campus anymore thought full and coordinated way. We had a student group in Washburn which was helpful in pure peer to peer outreach to events. We have an off-campus group in the Washington bus whose mission is to specifically engaged college students in the political process. We had a representative from King County elections I can provide authoritative information. We had the library for our spaces and websites to host and get the word out about events. For 2020 we ended up posting presidential and vice presidential debate watch parties. They were better attended when we had posted them in the previous election cycle without collaboration from campus partners. We helped coordinate and advise on a King County election sponsored student engagement hub. Students can register and vote up to where the polls close on election day. We connected with specific campus communities like the athletics department and the Greek life community to encourage members of their communities to register and vote. We had a coordinated social media campaign complete with democracy dog graphics which you have seen on the last use slides. We advise on campus emails that pointed to some of the resources we had created. The library took the lead on the election look guide with resources targeted towards the student community. The long-term goals of the group going forward include making voter engagement effort institutionalized throughout campus. Increasing voter registration and voting rates each year until they are at 95% and 90% respectively. Establishing them as a well-known coalition across the campus that serves as a hub of voter and democratic engagement efforts. And encouraging students to engage in civic and other ways besides just for voting. For example, lobbying, boater examples et cetera. As a group, we have a lot of documentation on our work to date in our action plans going forward. If anyone is interested in taking a look at that, reach out to me via email and I can likely share some of our documentation and materials with you. I can also put you in touch with Fran Lowe who is the director of the center at University Washington. She has been the lead of the Democracy Dawgs effort on campus. I was upping that Fran could join us for today's webinar but unfortunately she had the scheduling conflict. She was very excited about this webinar and love to connect with others who are looking to start similar civic engagement campaigns in their libraries. Whether academic or otherwise. She has done a truly remarkable job building this coalition and developing partnerships across what could be a very big university. We have all the groups participating in Democracy Dawgs. They contribute to the coalition. I want to close today's webinar on another high note that underscores the importance of the civic engagement efforts. I know I have dwelled on the low percentage of young voters who cast their ballots in elections. There's also a lot of positive turnout news from the most recent elections celebrate as well. A colleague who works with me on our democracy dog team forwarded this Washington Post article to me last week. It highlighted not just the increase in

young voter participation in the most recent general and midterm elections but also the get out the vote efforts could be behind the surge of participation. When these unrepresentative voting demographic head to the polls, there elected leaders are tending to pay more attention to their issues. I hope that put someone in your sales that you can engage with your communities this year. Celebrating national voter registration day on September 20th. I hope some of the examples and resources that I've highlighted today will be helpful to you in your planning as well. I want to thank Helen and GPO for inviting me to speak today. I'm happy to speak and answer any questions. I would love to see your comments in the chat about how you are planning to celebrate national voter registration day at your organization. If you have any ideas that you'd like to follow up on or any more in-depth questions that you have then I highly encourage you to reach out to me as I would love to chat more.

Yes. Please start typing into the chat some experience you've had at your institutions. In the meantime we have four general topics of questions. Are you ready? Here we go.

I'm feeling a bit out of order. The first topic, I'd love to know what voters feel about lobbying or efforts to voting like making voting day a national holiday?

Off the top of my head-I would need to follow up a little bit on that one with the chair of our legislation committee. We also have our past chair on the call. I don't know if she wants to add any additional efforts. I'm still trying to get up to speed on the lobbying and legislative efforts related to voting. I could deftly follow up with you on any information that may be out there on those efforts. There was a recent question, is there a difference between national and federal holidays?

Yes. I would be another one. I believe the answer to that question is yes but I'd have to look up what the official definitions of those are.

Next question, does democracy dog engage in candidate advocacy? Do you only focus on voting? They are not to have candidate signs or any information in my university. Do you provide information on voting locations quite the

Yeah. That's a great question. The first part is that we deftly do not engage in any type of candidate advocacy or issue advocacy. It's all informational. When we host events like debate watch parties, we are there to create the space for students to come watch those debates and then for those who were in 2021-those are online. Students were free to express their opinions in the chat. Library staff and other members of democracy were there and the chat to moderate kind of. We wanted to make sure the discussion remained civil. There was no candidate advocacy or partisan nature to any of our outreach or educational efforts. No candidate signs or info displays. We do provide information on voting locations. As I mentioned, King County elections sponsors student engagement hubs. University campuses across Washington. We definitely provide information on where though student engagement hubs were for students to go. Register to vote and we also put together some pamphlets that we distributed around campus that had information on where voting drop boxes were. Washington is 100% vote by mail state. Is far as voting location. It about information about those dropbox locations. There is no restriction as far as how we can get the word out about things like that. On our campus. Yes. We are very strict about the nonpartisan and keeping things educational and informational.

And earlier topical questions. Did the libraries help students with app and see absentee voting and voter engagement restrictions?

To answer the first question. We have information on the research guy that we put together. We show you how to vote absentee if you are a student that is coming from another state and is registered to vote there. If you're not registered to vote in Washington or registered to vote in Washington from another address. We provide information on the guide. We made it for campus. Also we pointed to other websites and resources that have the information on absentee voting. I believe there are quite a few on the go for our voting election that made resources that have information on that. I believe the the two big ones. The USA.gov/voting provides information on absentee voting. And then the reactions to voting. Did the libraries help students organize-if I am undergoing understanding the question correctly, I wouldn't say we were helping with student reaction. Maybe Washington bus et cetera. As a library we did not organize any of the student responses. That would've happened organically through those student organizations.

The fourth topic of questions which is earlier. Pertaining to the situation from the legal voter group registration. I'll read out loud. We have been denied of-there was a follow-up with more information about the situation. Missouri law. Do you care to comment a little bit more about this particular situation or similar situation?

I haven't followed. I've heard the horror stories about the restrictions on voter registration events. I have not followed this one in particular. That closely or other ones that may be similar. I would have to look into that one a little bit. I don't have specific examples of if it is happened elsewhere. I am definitely saving all of the links that have been shared in the chat. Reviewing those afterwards. Maybe thinking about what some workarounds may be or what it should suggest to do. For cases like that.

A brand-new question, I'd like to join any efforts to make voting easier. If there are any organized campaigns about those through agencies, I'd love to hear about them.

Great. If you want-I have my contact info on the slide here. Feel free to shoot me a quick email with your interest. I will be responding to any of those emails today. I love getting opportunities to be engaged through the organization. We are always looking for volunteers to help keep our voting and election toolkit up to date. Accurate as well. We are looking for volunteers there. I can put you in touch with some resources as far as what other federal agencies might be doing around election and voter registration day. You might look like we don't have any more questions. We will give it about another few more seconds. Does anyone want to chime in with any similar experiences or they want to share with the group? Any new cautions that pop up? In that case, I will do the wrap-ups. Thank you Kian for your presentation that was both excellent and informative. We will share a survey link. Please take a moment to let us know how you feel about today's webinar. This webinar has recorded and you will be notified shortly thereafter when it is available to you. If you enjoyed today's webinar, please check out some of our up coming webinars. I will put two links in the chat. The first link is of the Academy and the second is our calendar of events. We have upcoming presentations by librarians from FEMA GPO, library of commerce, natural archives and administration. The U.S. Census Bureau as well. We will have three webinars and they will be our government resources for surviving economic times by James from the University of Perrigo. What to do when mold develops in the library? Any information about the Williams hand Center for Defense studies. We also have the upcoming fall 2022 depository library conference from October 17th to October 19. This conference will be held virtually and is free to attend. Here's a link for more information. Before I go, it turns out we have someone putting in the chat. Someone wrote in, or community college coordinates with the director of student life imaginable registration day each year. Awesome. Any other last-minute things we want to share the group? Any questions before I do the final sendoff?

Thank you again for a great presentation. Everyone, please have a marvelous day.

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