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What Would It Take To Ask Every Student On Campus About Participating In Our Democracy? Local Leaders Are On It.

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Leadership

Maddie Wolf is the Social Designer for the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition and a Steering Committee member for Ask Every Student.

When it comes to supporting student voters, there's nobody more prepared and invested for the long term than local campus leaders at higher educational institutions. These trusted voices are faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders who are united by the nonpartisan goal of educating students to participate in our democracy– as people, not just as transactional votes. Local leaders are doing the work of making voting accessibility a reality for the campus communities that they know best.

Knowing that fact, leaders in the student voting space, the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, the Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition, have come together to create Ask Every Student, a new and innovative program that centers local leaders' needs by working directly with them to build strategies and tools to achieve full student voter participation, on every campus, in every election. Ask Every Student is built off the research-backed framework that full student voter participation comes down to integrating individualized conversations about voting and democratic participation into existing processes that reach every student. Each campus has its own context and ideal processes within which it can apply this framework.

126 campuses currently participate in Ask Every Student either as a Codesigner Campus or Commitment Campus - all who were eligible to apply for funding this year to support their Fall 2020 work. While both types of campuses commit to incorporating full-participation strategies into their campus democratic engagement action plans and receive support from nonprofit partners, the Codesigner Campuses work with the Ask Every Student team in designing tools and resources to be shared with the whole student voting network through a human-centered design process. After many ideation sessions, rounds of prototyping, and hours of active collaboration, the 2020 Ask Every Student Toolkit was developed and launched in August.

In a time filled with uncertainty and a rapid pivoting of tactics, Ask Every Student has fostered a space for these dedicated and passionate campus leaders to share, create, and connect on a regular basis. In a non-pandemic year, orientation might normally be the go-to spot for systematically engaging student voters. Many campus leaders had pre-pandemic plans to integrate voter registration into processes like ID card pick up and orientation sessions. However, with nearly all new student orientations turned virtual and orientation staff having a lot on their plate as is, many campuses needed to pivot to the one place where students showed up no matter what: the (most likely, virtual) classroom.

With that in mind, the Faculty Champion Toolkit was designed to strategically and tactfully engage faculty at scale through a customized menu of democratic engagement activities, a rewards and recognition program for participating faculty, and a systematized outreach process. This Toolkit structure was based on the University of Texas at Austin's original faculty engagement strategy, but through ideation sessions with campus leaders from Mesa Community College, University of Michigan, University of Nevada, Reno, Arizona State University, Sarah Baston (UT Austin, '22) and members of the Ask Every Student team refined the tested model into scalable design products any campus could adapt and utilize.
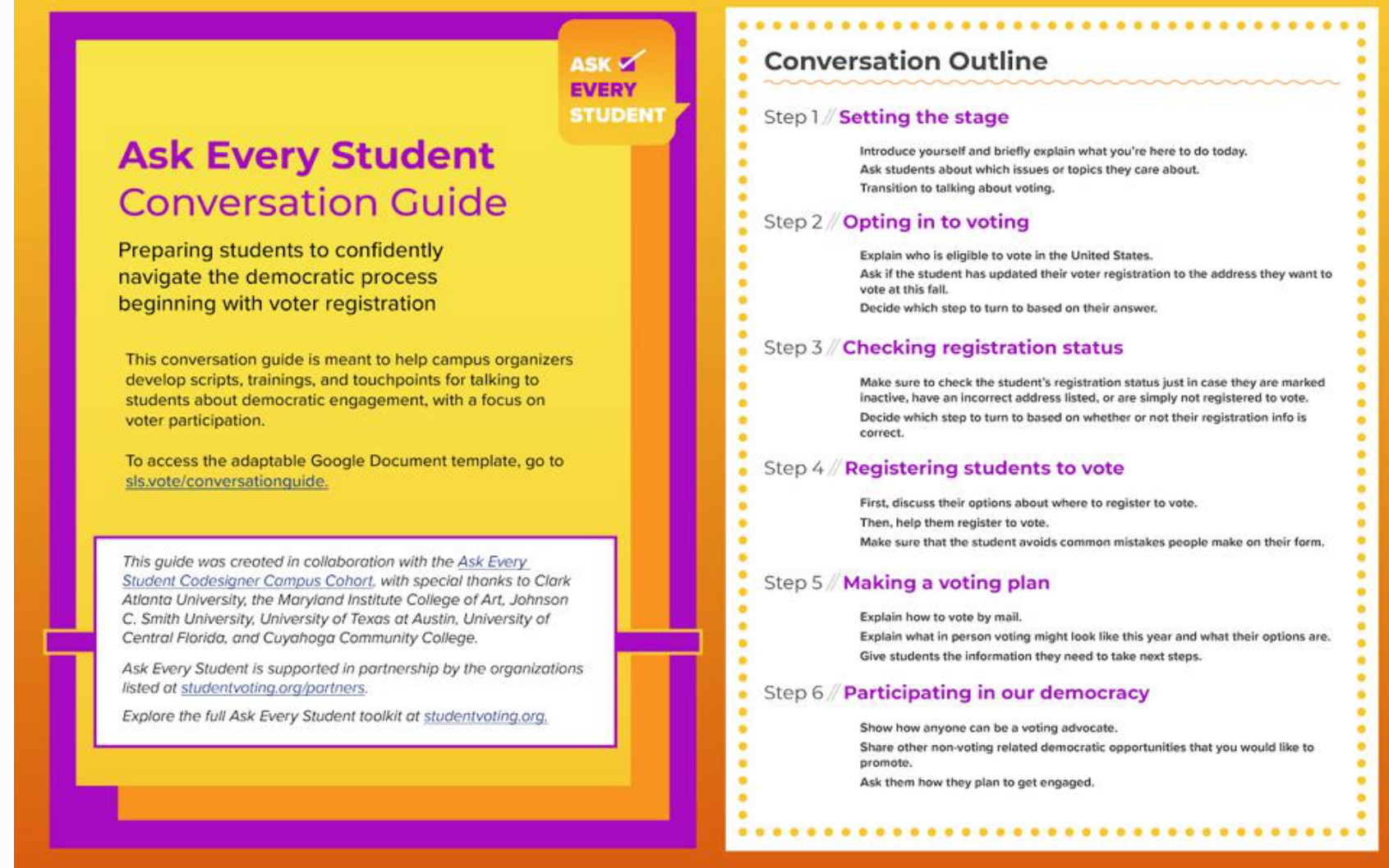

A preview of the Ask Every Student Faculty Champion Toolkit   ASK EVERY STUDENT

At Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, Leah Weber, Academic Director, Walker Institute, and Teresa Martinez, Student Engagement Coordinator, Student Involvement and Leadership, have expanded the Faculty Champion model by strategically encouraging a variety of campus stakeholders to engage students in different democratic engagement activities. In this program, faculty members, students, staff members, campus affiliates, and departments all receive a tailored menu of activities with point systems and awards corresponding to the different activities.

Angeline Vuong, Assistant Director, Public Service Programs, at the University of San Francisco, has been strategically asking student leaders to reach out to every professor they've ever had to coordinate "popping into" over 200 Zoom classes. During the time they have in the class, student leaders can answer questions on the spot and direct the students they're speaking with to follow up over email. This peer-to-peer model has proven successful. Not only does it increase student engagement and connection to their campus, but at the University of San Francisco, it has also increased student voter registration rates.

At Rogers State University, leaders from the Civic Engagement Project have collaborated with the Director of First Year Experience (FYE) to access 10 minutes from every FYE class. During that time in class, student leaders speak directly to pertinent Oklahoma-based issues and register every eligible student to vote. They know that after 4 years of this, they'll be able to reach 100% student voter registration.

Beyond the classroom, many campus leaders have found success in leveraging their access to student lists from the registrar and mobilizing student leaders to reach out to every student. The Ask Every Student Conversation Guide was created with Clark Atlanta University, the Maryland Institute College of Art, Johnson C. Smith University, the University of Texas at Austin, University of Central Florida, and Cuyahoga Community College. The Conversation Guide provides a framework to help student leaders have these conversations with their peers.

Teri Platt, Associate Professor of Urban Politics and Research Methodology at Clark Atlanta University, is leveraging the registrar's list of students to strategically ask every student about their voting plan. By using students' emails, phone numbers, and mailing addresses, CA Votes' Democracy Fellows are able to reach out to students where they're at, provide one on one support, and share reliable, state specific information to ensure their vote counts this Fall.

Monica Clarke, Service and Learning Communities Coordinator at Alabama A&M University, used the Ask Every Student Training Template to train 47 residential advisors to have conversations with their residents about voting, ensuring that every eligible student is registered to vote. These trained RAs have also gone on to register the entire band, athletics department, choir, and honors program. Through this process they've been able to register 1,000 new student voters (on top of supporting the hundreds of students already registered to vote). Now that the registration period in Alabama is over, the RAs have been chaperoning bus rides of 100 students a day to their jurisdiction's early voting site.
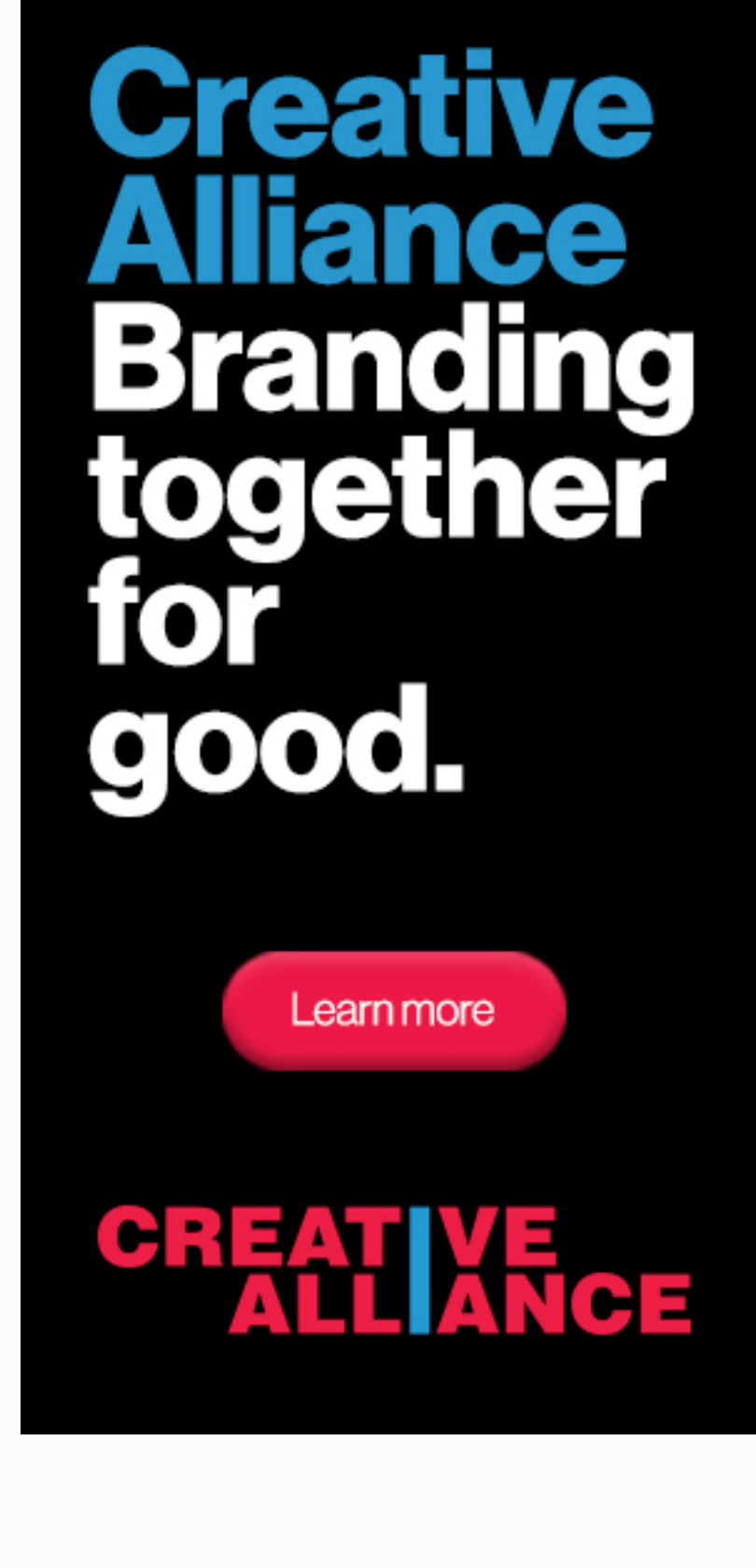
The work is happening, and it's *been* happening. The people behind the scenes– faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders– are the folks making it happen. These leaders are invested in helping students actively participate in our democracy this year, next year, and every year following. And with a deep commitment to engaging their campuses in the democratic process and a unique understanding of the distinct challenges and opportunities within their communities, these local leaders are ideally positioned to implement solutions most helpful to their specific contexts. The Ask Every Student program is prepared to support campus leaders through the next month, but is invested in supporting these leaders in institutionalizing their transformative work in 2021 and beyond.

More than 765 colleges and universities currently participate in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. Learn more about the Challenge and donate to advance our work here.
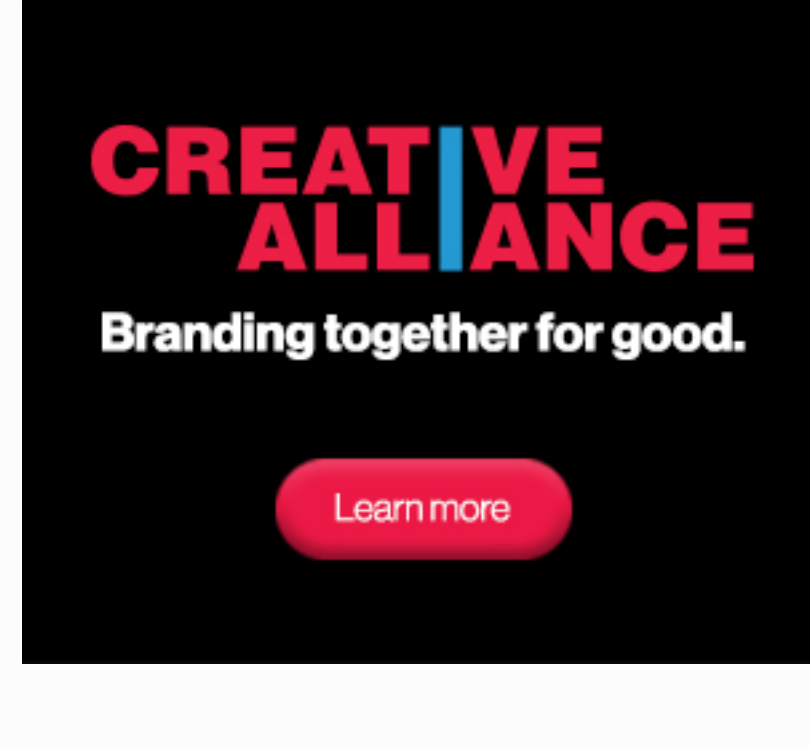
👤 **Maddie Wolf**

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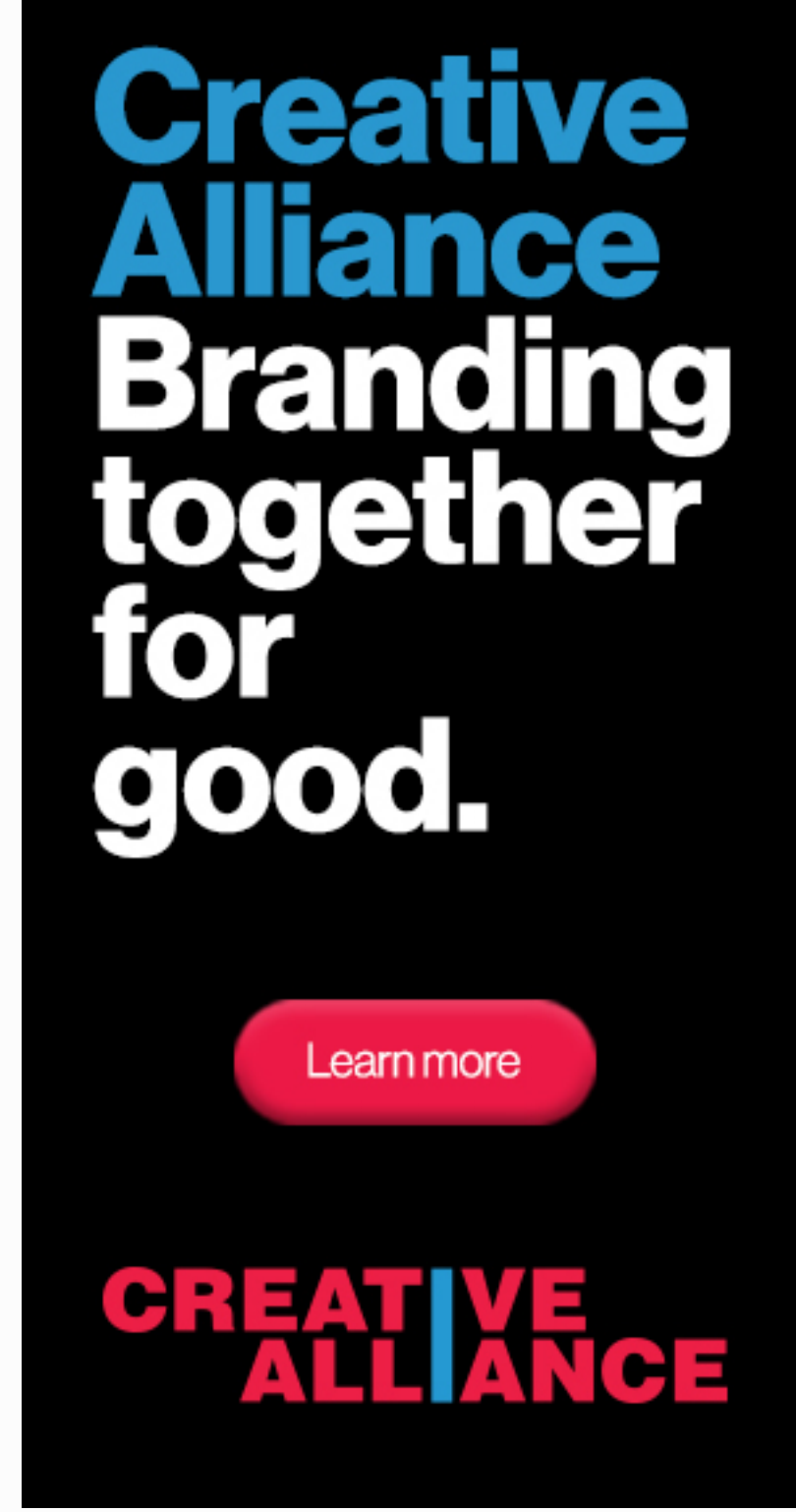
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