

voting: neu voters

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2019.12.05

background

College students ages 18-24 seem **misinformed and uninterested** about voting, and face barriers that exacerbate engagement in civic duty. This consequently brings down the voter turnout in local and state elections among young voters. In addition, many college students are **uninformed** about absentee ballots.

Through our research, we hope to find a solution for young voters to be more engaged with their government through user-centered designs (e.g. infographics, posters). We think that our uninformed demographic feel that they could benefit from information on absentee ballots, voter registration, and the importance of voting in the United States. This can be achieved through an interactive experience which not only provides this information, but also addresses more logistical obstacles throughout the voting process.

Goals

1. We want to **understand** why college students (ages 18-24) are not involved in politics and the barriers preventing their involvement.
2. We will **evaluate** the reasons that people within the demographic are uninformed about the topic of absentee ballots.
3. We want to **understand** why people think that their votes don't matter.

research methods

Data Collection and Analytics

With numerical data collected from a survey administered online, we determined how out-of-state potential voters currently act, as well as factors which affect their decisions.

Case Studies

We compiled several examples of various countries' initiatives to increase voter turnout among a range of demographics.

Interviews

We spoke with a spectrum of students, some from Massachusetts and some from out-of-state to compare their behaviors. One of our goals was to obtain information about their voting habits and interactions with information regarding voting, candidates, etc. Another goal was to understand what obstacles they face in the voter registration process and the absentee ballot application process.

Prototype Testing

We designed and printed out prototype iterations that we showed to an array of students and asked them to evaluate, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the effectiveness of the prototype. We asked students the chance that they would follow up with the prototype and whether or not the design iterations would benefit them in terms of removing the barriers that hinder their participation in their local and state elections.

research

Survey Summary

The online survey administered asked a variety of questions regarding the registration process, voting, processes for voting, and information students received during the process.



Survey Questions

QUALIFICATIONS

We asked students their age, country of residence, and state of permanent residence (if residing in the United States) to confirm that they were within our target demographic age of 18-24 years old and were eligible to vote in the United States by government-imposed criteria.

REGISTRATION AND BARRIERS OF VOTING

Responders were then asked to state whether or not they were a registered voter in the state that they are a permanent resident of. From the survey's 44 responders, about 77% (34) stated that they were registered voters.

If they were not a registered voter, students were asked to select as many options from a list of potential reasons as to why they were unregistered.

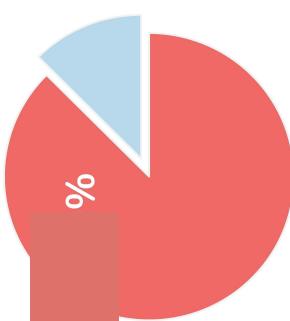
Of the 17 responses, the most popular response

23% Unregistered

was that students

forgot to register to vote.

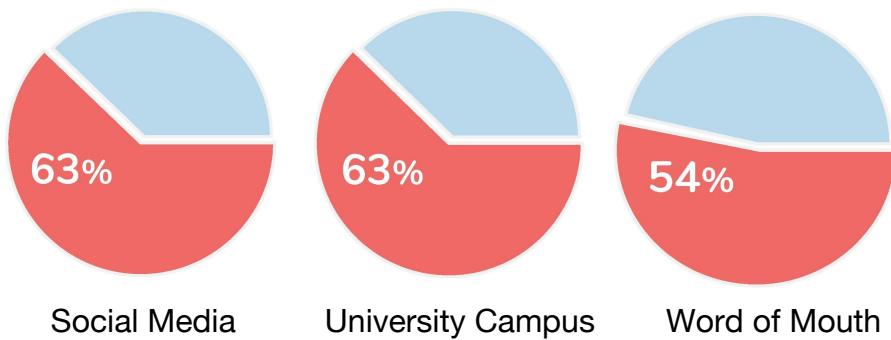
Students also did not know they could register to vote or request absentee ballots, and some stated that they had a lack of interest in the voting process.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION

To identify how we can best reach students, we asked where they have previously turned to for information.

The majority of students heard information from a [variety of sources](#). Some of the most common responses were that students received information from:



Other significant numbers came from sources in their home state:

- their high school (31 students, 70.5%)
- their parents (29 students, 65.9%)

Competitive Research/Case Studies

BELGIUM

Belgium has one of the highest voter turnouts in the world; in its 2018 election, 90% of Belgium's registered voters cast a ballot. This has been attributed to the country's mandatory voting policy, which over the course of several decades has established voting to be a civic duty. The European, regional, and national elections are all held on the same day as well, making voting a social event that especially attracts young people.



SWEDEN

Sweden also has one of the highest voter turnouts. Part of the reason for such high participation might be the generous voting regulations in place. For example, second voting allows someone who voted early to change their vote in person on Election Day, alleviating the fear of voting for the wrong person.

From 2011 to 2014, a number of initiatives were implemented to improve Swedish voter participation as well, including a push for accessibility and inclusivity. Informational pamphlets were translated, and new voters were invited to events that encouraged interaction between them and elected officials.

Turnout was further increased by fostering a sense of community and activism. In the European Elections, it increased from 45% to 54%, while in the parliament elections it increased from 82% to 87%.

CANADA

To take advantage of the surge in young voter turnout, various organizations in Canada began campaigns to encourage student votes. This past October, *Get Out the Vote* from the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations had nearly 30,000 votes pledged within a week, while student-led National Student Letter had several student organizations across the country pledge to raise awareness about election issues relevant to students.

There was also pilot project rolled out by Elections Canada that opened temporary voting offices on 40 campuses nationally. 70,000 college students cast ballots through these offices instead of having to go home and vote.

These organizations are attempting to improve turnout by increasing awareness of the elections and making it more convenient to be a part of the process, with promising results.

THE UNITED STATES

Several states across the U.S. have used Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) as a means of increasing voter turnout. AVR bypasses obstacles such as lack of motivation to register to vote, or simply forgetting to; once someone becomes eligible to vote, upon interaction with a government agency, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, they are automatically registered to vote.

Interviews

We spoke with both out-of-state college students and Massachusetts State residents to establish a control variable for the experience of voting.



MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS

Massachusetts residents who attend Northeastern University are the least likely to request and send absentee ballots, but are the most likely to receive regular information on local and state elections.

We found that Massachusetts residents had a variety of responses when it came to their voting process. Some students were unfamiliar with the voting process and others had voted in local elections in the past.

“I registered as soon as I could. My friends’ and teachers’ constant harassment was motivation to register.”

— Angelina, 18, Massachusetts

“No, I have not yet registered. I keep forgetting to do it since it is pretty inconvenient to register on my own but I know that eventually, I have to.”

— Lauren, 18, Massachusetts

OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTS

While conducting interviews on out-of-state residents, we quickly established that there was no one standard persona who fit the cookie-cutter mold for the voting out-of-state experience.

We found that out-of-state residents came from a variety of different backgrounds; some were unaware of the absentee ballot process, only having heard about it from us.

“I’m waiting to register as a voter in the state of Washington [since I moved addresses] but immediately afterwards, I’ll request an absentee ballot be sent to my new address here in Massachusetts. I now know the absentee ballot process and know my vote counts.”

— Shreya, 18, Washington

Others, when asked about having to go through the postal system to engage in registration and voting in general, showed some reluctance.

“[Going to the post office to register to vote] seems annoying, but not annoying enough that it would stop me from doing so...[it] feels like I shouldn’t have to pay for [postage].”

— Anonymous, 18, New Jersey

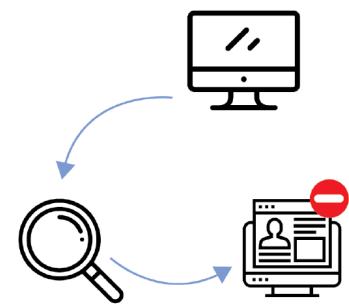
experience mapping

Experience Map

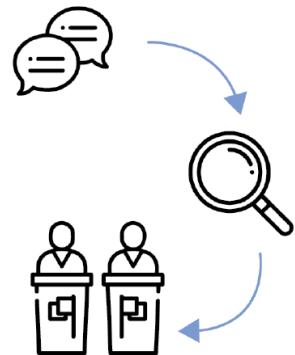
We used experience mapping to figure out where exactly our solution thinking should be focused, as well as to [visualize](#) our qualitative data in a more easily digestible way.

Our experience map detailed out the four stages of voting process that an average unregistered college voter would go through. These stages were registering, researching, requesting a ballot, and then finally casting that ballot. There were three pain points that we highlighted in the journey that would then be the focus of our intervention.

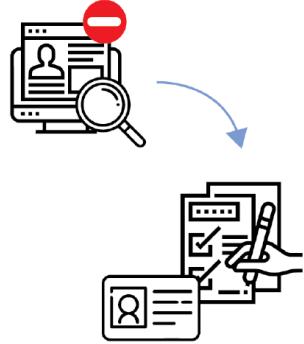
The first pain point occurred in the first step— registration. The process would entail going online, researching how to register, and then going to your state government website. We found through our research that students had difficulty navigating the government websites, and needed a better way to comprehensively understand the registration process.



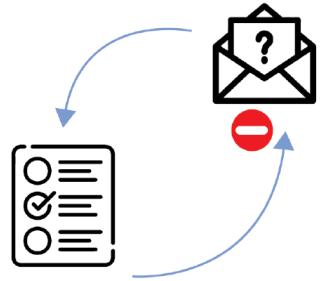
The second step was to research candidates. Our interviewees explained that they would first hear about candidates through word of mouth, and then research on their own the candidates they were interested in. This included online research as well as visiting town halls/watching debates.



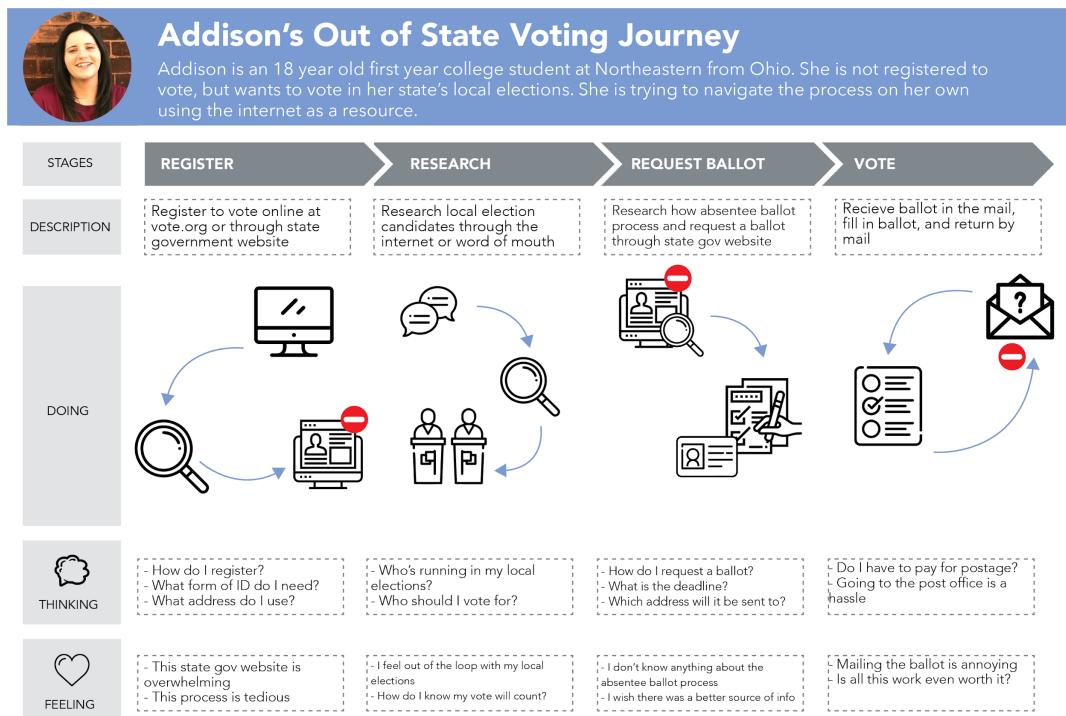
The third step encountered the same pain point as highlighted in the first step. This step was to request a ballot, which required students to revisit the same government website. Almost every student we interviewed had no idea about the absentee ballot process, and the government websites did not make it any easier to understand.



The final pain point was during the casting ballot step which required students to mail in their ballot, which may or may not require them to purchase postage. This highlighted an issue of convenience—students did not want to have to go out of their way to physically mail in their ballots, or any materials required of them. Since this was the biggest impediment for students, we decided to focus on making the process more convenient via our intervention.



The final experience map is below:



research conclusion and prototyping

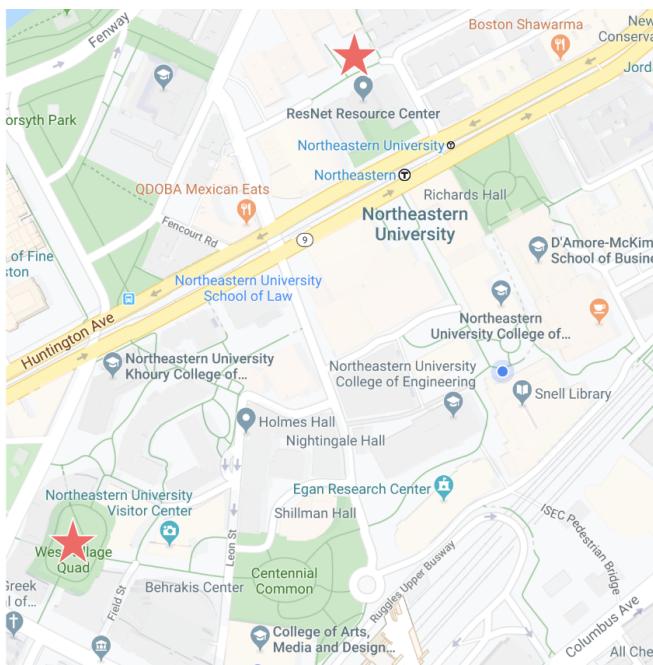
Research Summary

From our research, we found a major obstacle to voting in elections is the overall inconvenience caused by disconnected resources and lack of accessibility. We decided that there are many resources online to help with the process, but they are not necessarily digestible or known amongst young people. To address this, we decided to create a campaign which would set up booths on a college campus around the time of the elections. These booths would be run by volunteers and would have colorful and eye-pleasing infographics which break down and simplify the processes of registering to vote and requesting an absentee ballot. Additionally, the booth would have free envelopes and stamps to help students who most likely do not have, and are unwilling to buy, postage.

Prototypes

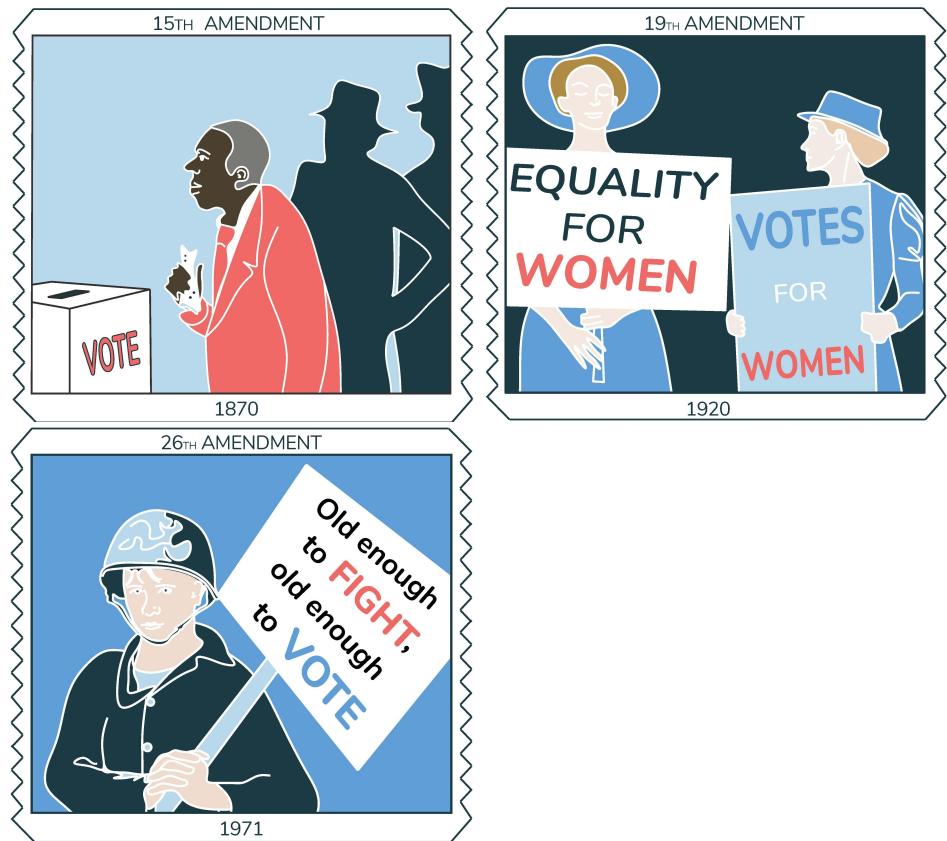
BOOTH

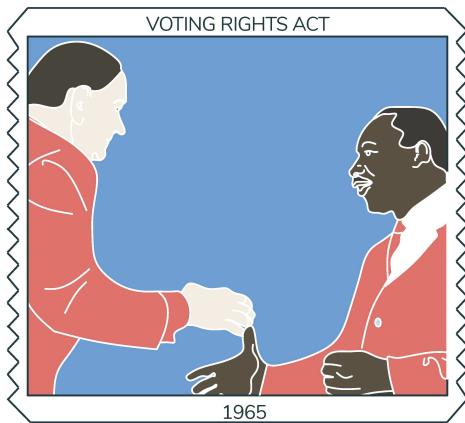
The booths would be **centrally located** at the residential quads where students were likely to leisurely pass by on their way to their dorms. Much of the booth's design is meant to encourage the students to actually approach it, such as the "Aoun Wants You" poster.



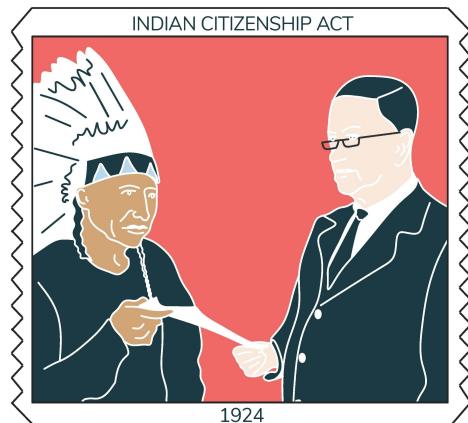
STAMPS

At the booth, there would be free stamps with all the major voting expansions in history. They will act as an *incentive* to mail in ballots and a reminder of the struggles the American people endured to gain the vote.



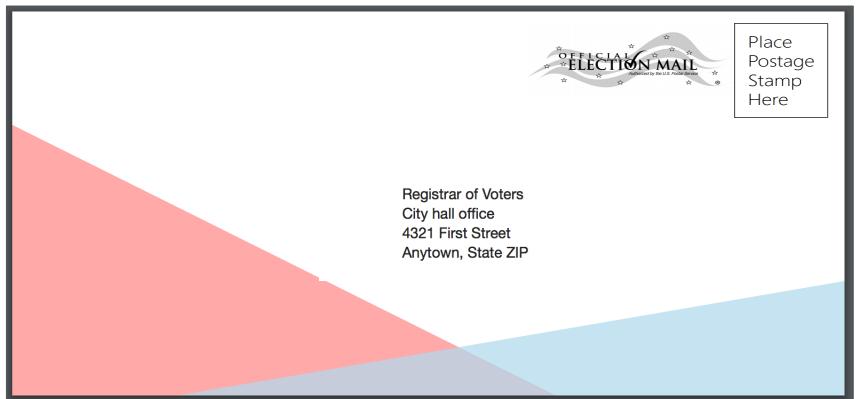


People who approach the booth are allowed to choose their favorite stamp to mail in their ballot with; as all stamps speak to different audiences across race, gender, and age. The envelope and the stamp will remove the **inconvenience barrier** for a large number of people.

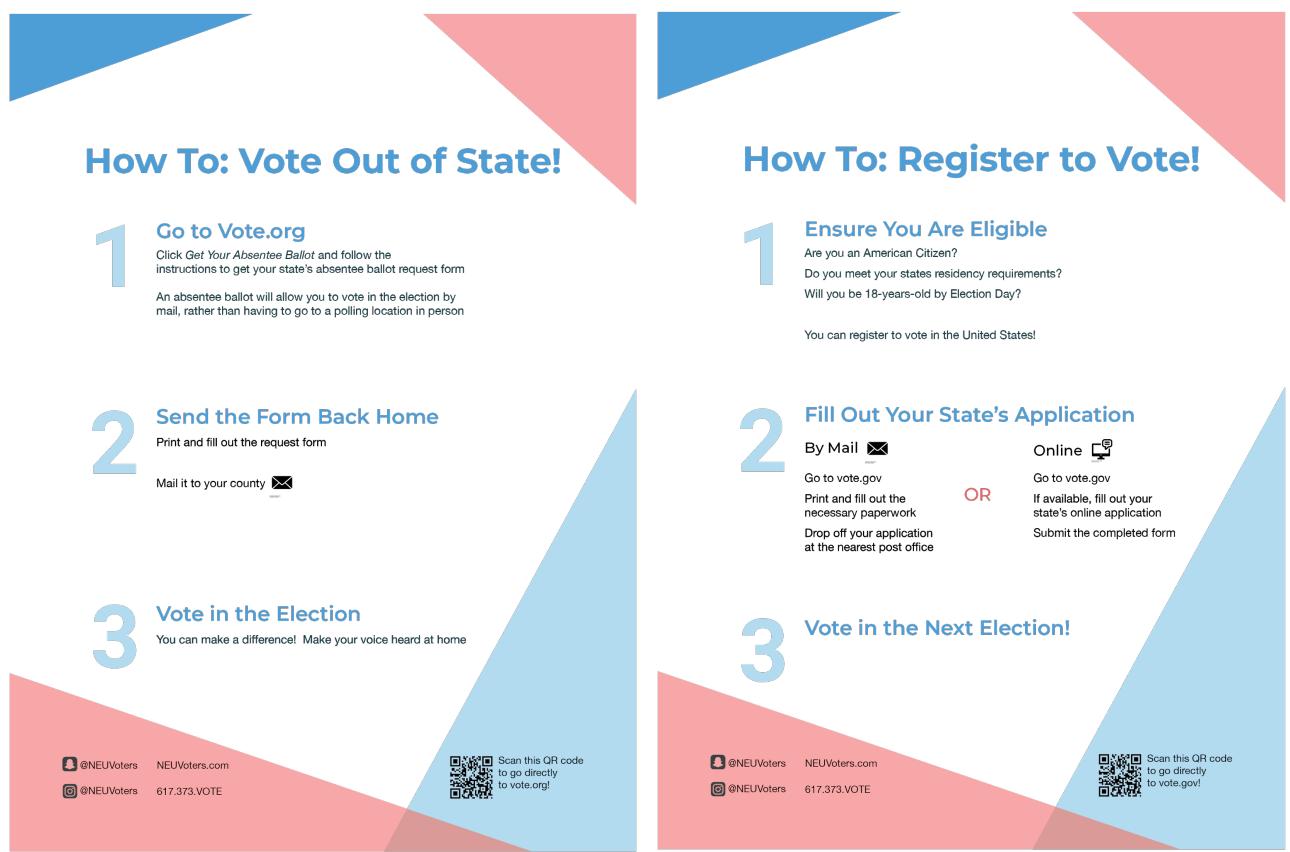


ENVELOPE

The envelope features a **simplistic and colorful** design that varies from the traditional monochrome voting envelope. This envelope adheres to the brand of NEU Voters and further incentivizes students to mail in absentee ballots.

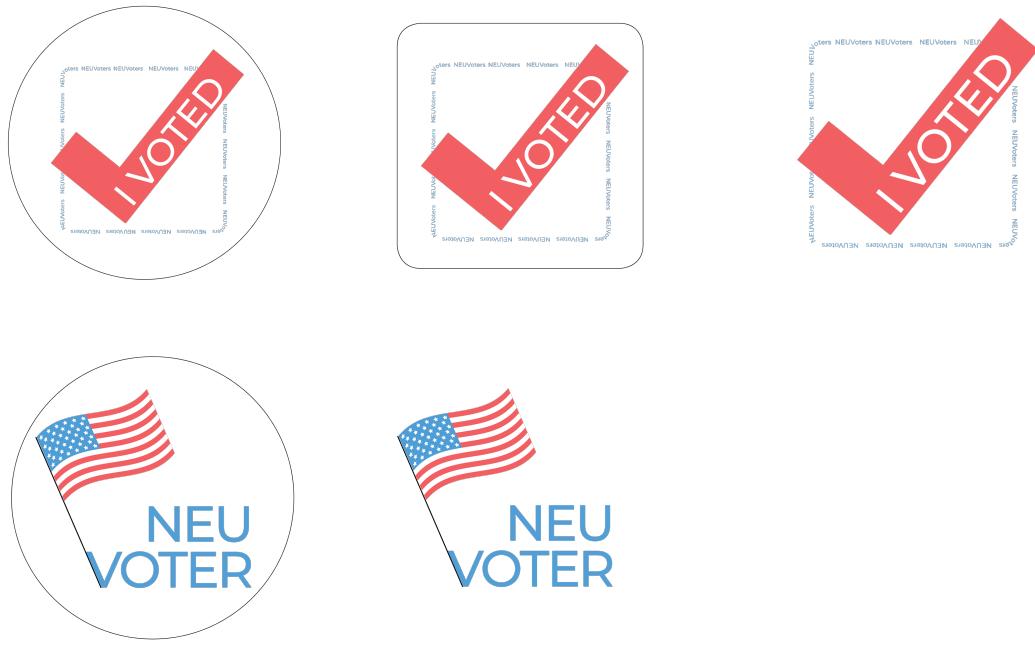


INFOGRAPHICS



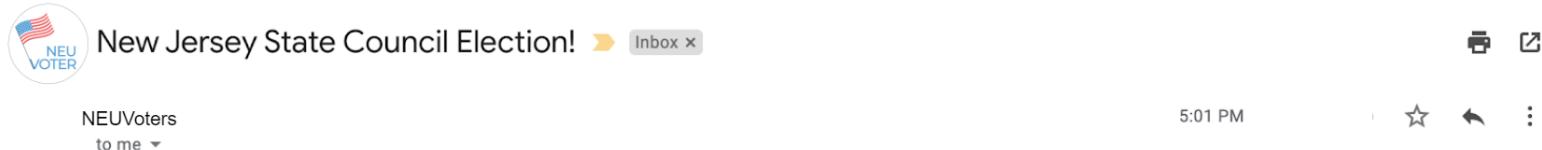
These infographics are intended to be simple and quick reads that guide students through the process of voting out of state. Easy instructions, short links, and a convenient QR code remove possible confusion of what resources are at their disposal and improve those resources accessibility.

STICKERS



We also created stickers inspired by the popular “I voted” stickers in order to create a social pressure and community to incentivize participation. Additionally, we tapped into a new group of participants with stickers for those who just registered to vote.

ONLINE INTERVENTION



The screenshot shows an email inbox with one message from "NEUVoters" to "to me". The subject line is "New Jersey State Council Election!". The email body contains a greeting, a message about voter turnout, a request for participation in a survey, and a closing statement. It includes a logo for NEUVoters.

New Jersey State Council Election! ▶ Inbox ×

NEUVoters
to me ▾

5:01 PM star print check ⋮

Cassandra-

Happy Election Season!

We hope you voted during the New Jersey State Council Election! This year, we had a total of 6 million local voters New Jersey who contributed to our state election. This record-breaking number is only possible because of the 400,000 absentee ballots sent in!

NEUVoters would request that you take a few seconds of your time to answer an anonymous survey for our statistical purposes. Thanks for being a member of NEUVoters!

Did you register through NEUVoters?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Did you vote in the New Jersey State Council Election?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Thanks for your participation and we'll see you at our next booth in **Speare and Stetson East Quad on April 3rd, 2020.**

- Your friends at NEUVoters

As a final component of the intervention, students at the booth would be asked to provide NEU Voters with their email and state of residence. During election season in their home state, they would receive a customized email with instructions on how to vote and resources they can check out. At the end of the email, there would be a simple survey that would be used for data collection purposes.

We plan to measure success using this survey. Participants in NEU Voters' booth would be asked to respond to two questions:

- a. Did you register through NEU Voters?
- b. Did you vote in the [State Name] Election?

This would allow us to estimate the number of students who found the NEU Voters service helpful. The total amount of emails collected at the booth would be the total visitors of the booth.

Conclusion

College students in the United States, ages 18-24, are a largely [uninformed](#) voters. Their [lack of knowledge](#) about politics and their local community consequently brings down the overall voter turnout in local and state elections. In addition, students are misinformed that their votes, while studying out-of-state, do not count.

Many students, interested in the absentee voting process, are burdened with the challenge of combating the registration process solo. This multifaceted process is comprised of large amounts of text-heavy directions, which is a [pain point](#) for students navigating this process alone. Specific pain points that we are addressing with our solutions are [awareness of an election](#) they can participate in, knowing [where to register/request their ballot](#), and being able to [mail-in their ballot](#) without hassle.

Students want a [simplified](#), [aesthetically pleasing](#), and [quick](#) solution to their problems of registering, requesting an absentee ballot, and acquiring the appropriate resources to mail in absentee ballots. Our prototype, the NEU Voters Booth, allows students to pass by residential quads leisurely, learn about the process of voting, register on the spot, gather the right materials to mail in their voting documents, and pick up free stickers that certify completion of their civic duty.

With college students being the next leading members of our society, it is imperative that they are not only [well-informed](#) about the various components of the voting process, but also that they are contributing members of their communities. By fostering students' interest in this civic process early, students become more interactive with their community and are more likely to make this a habit even after they leave college.

NEU Voters, a prototype centered around Northeastern University, is one that can be easily applied to every university. Students everywhere in this misinformed demographic can benefit from easy-to-read resources that simplify this challenging task.

Our hope is that students involved in any part of the NEU Voters prototype continue to learn more about how they can impact their community while voting in crucial local and state elections.