

Fueling a Future of Civic Engagement: Charleston County Elections' College Program

**Charleston County Board of Voter Registration and Elections
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Introduction

An initiative designed to educate the nation's newest voters and cultivate a lifelong commitment to civic engagement has achieved notable success in Charleston County. Supported by county resources and federal funding from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Help America Vote College Program (HAVCP), our office partnered with the College of Charleston to provide students with a hands-on introduction to election administration. Over two years, with the potential to continue into Fall 2026, dozens of students learned about the history, structure, and importance of elections while gaining meaningful leadership and service experience at polling locations across the county.

Development

The program emerged in response to a clear and growing challenge. Ahead of the 2024 General Election, our office faced significant poll worker recruitment needs. Many longtime workers stepped away after 2020 due to age, safety concerns, and other personal factors. This mirrored an ongoing national trend: a [2018 EAC report](#) found that nearly 70% of jurisdictions considered poll worker recruitment "difficult" or "very difficult." Recognizing both the immediate staffing need and the long-term opportunity to engage younger generations, we sought a sustainable, forward-looking solution.

In late 2023, our office applied for Poll Worker Project funds through the HAVCP grant competition. In [February 2024](#), we were selected as a recipient for the two-year Poll Worker Grant Program. This support enabled us to establish a structured academic partnership with the College of Charleston's political science department. Together, we developed the Democracy in Action: Poll Worker and Election Administration course, which introduced students to election administration while giving them practical experience in recruiting, training, and managing fellow student poll workers.

To prepare the curriculum, two College of Charleston professors visited our headquarters in July 2024 for a behind-the-scenes look at election operations and to learn directly from our staff. Along with completing course materials, students ultimately served at a polling location on Election Day and were eligible to receive academic credit upon completing course requirements.

As part of the course, students created proposals outlining strategies to recruit additional college students as poll workers. A paid internship was awarded in 2025 to the student with the strongest proposal. Working closely with our Community Engagement Manager and Marketing & Communications Manager, she produced high-quality social media graphics, eye-catching signage, and coordinated on-campus outreach throughout 2025, including engagement with organizations such as the Black Student Union and the Multicultural Student Union. Her peer-to-peer approach proved especially effective. Students were more inclined to explore the opportunity when hearing about the benefits of service from someone their own age. Her recruitment signage, featuring a QR code for easy sign-ups, generated 168 responses.

One of her most impactful contributions was a social media advertisement that significantly expanded our reach. Across Meta platforms, the ad received more than 641,000 views and reached over 111,800 unique accounts. Its success drew the attention of a local news outlet, which [featured both the program and our intern's efforts](#) to involve more young adults in the election process. During the interview, she shared her intention to continue serving as an election worker after graduation, an early example of the program's long-term influence.



Left: College of Charleston student and Charleston County Elections intern Kirti Reddy poses with an election worker recruitment sign she had created.

Right: A student uses a smartphone to scan a QR code on an election worker recruitment sign placed on campus.



Results

Throughout its initial two-year funding period, the program demonstrated strong results, including increased student participation, expanded poll worker recruitment, and deeper community engagement.

- 16 students enrolled in the course.
- An on-campus poll worker training with 21 students took place in October 2024, attended by Charleston County Elections Executive Director Isaac Cramer and EAC Commissioner Thomas Hicks.
- In 2024, 28 students completed training, and 26 served on Election Day.
- Students received branded t-shirts and socks to boost visibility and recruitment.
- Course enrollees received \$400 stipends in addition to standard election worker pay.
- Continued recruitment in 2025 resulted in 13 students serving on Election Day.
- Our intern conducted peer interviews to capture student experiences, which are now used as promotional content on social media.

These outcomes highlight the value of investing in young adults as both learners and contributors to the democratic process.



Above: Students complete an online election worker interest form.



Left: Student election worker and political science major Chloe Stampfle discusses her service experience.

Program Longevity

In February 2026, our office received notice that the program had been granted an extended timeline to utilize uncommitted funds from the original grant period. With preparations underway for a high-interest midterm election cycle, this extension provides a timely opportunity to continue strengthening our poll worker pipeline. By tapping into the remaining funding, we can ensure that voters of all demographics are well represented at their polling locations and that students continue to gain meaningful civic experience.

Following the success of the 2024 course, the College of Charleston plans to offer the course again for the Fall 2026 semester. This course will be expanded from a one-credit course to a three-credit semester-long course. We hope to continue our partnership with the College of Charleston and make this course a permanent offering during statewide general election years.

Conclusion

We are proud of the program's success and the lasting impact it will have on participants, our office, and the broader Charleston County electorate. This initiative has not only addressed an operational need but has also helped cultivate a new generation of informed, engaged citizens who understand the importance of service in sustaining our democratic institutions. It demonstrates how intentional partnerships and early civic experiences can strengthen both our election workforce and the long-term health of our community's civic participation.



Left: An Election Day Team shirt is displayed featuring elements from the College of Charleston and Charleston County Elections.