Empowering Youth Voters in Precinct 1-9:
Strategies for Increasing Youth Voter Turnout with a Racial Equity Framework

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The project on which this report is based was completed in collaboration with Ramsey County as part of the 2018–2019 Resilient Communities Project (RCP) partnership. RCP is a program at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) that connects University faculty and students with Minnesota communities to address strategic projects that advance local resilience and sustainability.

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Empowering Youth Voters in Precinct 1-9:

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April 25, 2019
Context

Research Questions
The research questions that guided our inquiry and recommendations were:

1. What are the barriers preventing young voters from participating in elections in this precinct?
2. Who is doing voter engagement or significant community engagement work in the geographic area and how could these connections be coordinated with Ramsey County?
3. How can Ramsey County utilize social media to improve young voter turnout?

Methods
Building off of the research produced by the previous work by Heather Heyer and James Hove, as well as the findings of the undergraduate Fall 2019 course POL 1914, our team conducted community organization interviews, an implementation capacity focused interview with Ramsey County, and extensive literature review. These methods are expanded upon in a later section of the paper.

Scope
The analysis and recommendations pertain to narrow, actionable steps Ramsey County can implement for the 2019 local elections and 2020 elections to increase voter turnout among youth 18-24 in Ward 1 Precinct 9. The recommendations will focus on social media strategies and community engagement with organizations and candidates.

Recommendations
To increase engagement and voter turnout in 1-9, we recommend the following:

- Invest in community partnerships for voter education work by creating advisory committees with community organizations and representatives.
- Run three engaging social media campaigns during election season.
- Create Ramsey County Elections social media accounts and build a following among community members.

Background

Context
Ramsey County, in partnership with Resilient Communities Projects (RCP), University of Minnesota, identified low registration and voting among youth in Frogtown neighborhood (district 1-9) as a priority project during the 2018-2019 academic year. While Minnesota historically has the nation’s highest voter turnout rates, Ramsey County, and Precinct 1-9 in particular, has shown a lag in comparison to its neighboring districts. In contrast to predominantly black neighborhoods in the adjacent districts, Precinct 1-9 is home to predominantly Southeast Asian families especially those of Hmong and Lao descent as shown in purple areas in Appendix A. Frogtown has, historically, been home to new waves of immigrants
and since the late 1970s, Southeast Asians have settled in neighborhoods along University Avenue and Northeast boundaries of St. Paul, Ramsey County. Interestingly enough, precincts with lower voter turnout percentage points besides Ward 1 Precinct 9 shown in pink areas in Appendix B, are predominantly Asian neighborhoods in Ward 5, Ward 6 and Ward 7 shown in Appendix A.

**Barriers to Voting for Asian Minnesotan Youth**

Literature suggests that early voting habits developed by their parents and family are the strongest indicator of continued civic engagement. However, Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese, and Southeast Asian Americans, who are the targeted demographic in our focused district, tell a unique story. While children of families that lack a history of voting are less likely to participate, cultural nuances are unique to this population. Older generation Southeast Asians residing throughout Ramsey County highly value participating in the democratic processes. Many who are naturalized citizens, go through the process of learning about American democracy and become to appreciate it as they seldom experienced it back at their country of origin. While younger generation Southeast Asian Americans watch their parents vote, the language barrier between generations makes it difficult to engage in conversations about voting and civic engagement in their homes. Youths who grew up in a democratic society with less appreciation of the process, compounded with lack of communication, lack of outreach to the youth, and lack of representation further isolates Asian American youth from gaining interest in civic engagement and voting.

When we consider the fact that Asian Minnesotans are the fastest growing population in Minnesota, this report cannot be a more timely study to prepare Ramsey County with an emerging challenge.

**Methods**

The methods used to collect data and form recommendations was a comprehensive scope analysis and literature review on social media practices. The social media literature review focused on government and elections offices across the country doing innovative social media work. Our team also met with stakeholders and community organizations to better understand

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Ramsey County Elections office capacity for program implementation and the expertise of organizations working in the areas of voter engagement and service provision in Frogtown.

GARE Racial Equity Tool and Framework
The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is a network of government entities committed to achieving racial equity; the GARE Racial Equity Tool is designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in policies, practices, and programs. Our team believes it’s essential to use a racial equity framework for voter engagement work and implementation of social media strategies in 1-9. The GARE Racial Equity Tool will guide our analysis and recommendations and provide a structure for institutionalizing considerations of racial equity.6

Part 1: Proposal
Ramsey County can better utilize social media to engage youth voters on issues they care about and incentivize candidates to invest time and resources in the Frogtown neighborhood. Previous research on this project suggests that young voters frequently use social media and many Frogtown residents in exit polling suggested that social media was their top source for news. The POL 1914 team suggested taking advantage of this platform by reaching young audiences through social media; it’s important that the messaging on social media is thoughtful, respectful, and relevant to primary concerns of voters. Establishing an advisory committee with Frogtown youth and other community organization representatives creates a process of stakeholder engagement and would allow Ramsey County to propose social media content to an advisory group and receive feedback on the language and messaging. The POL 1914 team also found that voting information matters but is not equally distributed. Social media posts should prioritize the distribution of voting information, such as voting eligibility requirements, early voting options, and how to find information on candidates.

The desired results of this policy are increased awareness of the elections process and increased interest from candidates in engaging Frogtown residents. The long-term goal is responsive representation for the Frogtown community and high voter turnout and engagement.

Part 2: Data
Elections Offices & Social Media Analysis
Through researching and analyzing the social media presence of county elections offices throughout the United States, the following findings were made clear: (1) social media accounts are one of the following three types of account - election administration officials, the elections office itself, or the broader county page; (2) elections offices connect their social media campaigns with other outreach campaigns, creating a brand; (3) election office social media is used by the office to share election results, promote upcoming elections, and acknowledge

community partners. The methods for data collection for this section of the analysis were to analyze some of the largest counties across the United States and their elections office social media (or the official responsible for elections administration). The social media pages analyzed were primarily Facebook and Twitter, although Instagram was included when there was an available account. Additionally, the website of the elections offices were tracked and noted if they have links to social media pages. A complete list of the counties analyzed and links to the social media accounts can be found in Appendix C. In addition to analyzing county elections offices, the social media of some state elections offices were also analyzed, to ensure a wide array of examples. These state offices are also listed in Appendix C.

Administration of Social Media Accounts
Several of the counties analyzed had elected officials who are responsible for election administration and outreach. The titles of these officials include “Clerk,” “Registrar,” and “Recorder.” There are a few significant takeaways with this finding. First, there is a connection on social media between elections administration and a person (the elected official). This is significant because it provides a public figure that can be held accountable for elections administration choices and controversy. Second, the elected official could be partisan (if not officially, then potentially advertise themselves as a member of a particular party), which could lead to policy and procedural decisions reflective of their party’s ideology. Lastly, these offices are often responsible for other duties, including issuing marriage licenses and maintaining public records. The other duties mean that elections may not always be the priority of their social media presence, however by looking through the last six months of posts, it appears that elections do take the forefront.

About a third of the counties analyzed have social media sites specifically for their elections office. These focus primarily on advertising upcoming elections, providing information about voting access, and other elections related content, which will be discussed in more detail in a later section. Several counties analyzed had similar social media presence as Ramsey County – the large county government has a social media presence, but there are no specific accounts for the elections offices. Although some elections information was included, this was usually near Election Day, advertising the elections and giving registration and polling place information, or soon after elections, providing the results. Other content on these pages included human services, public health, transportation, and other county government service information. The elections office specific social media is at an advantage compared to county-wide, as there is a clear focus and consistent messaging. The elections office specific pages allowed for direct links to registration or polling information to be within bios.

On the state level, the social media accounts are either the account of the official Secretary of State for the state, or are clearly linked to the office of the Secretary of State. These are very similar social media pages to the counties with independent social media for their elections
offices. The pages focus on promoting upcoming elections, providing voting information, and posting election results. The statewide nature of these accounts means they have a much wider population to engage with, which is important to acknowledge.

Social Media Campaign Examples
Elections offices utilize marketing techniques – such as specific messaging and campaigns – to create a brand across both their physical presence in communities and their social media presence. There are several examples of these campaigns, and this report will analyze two unique and highly engaged messaging strategies.

1. The Miami Dade County Elections Department utilizes the campaign message of “Be Election Ready.” The messaging that is on much of their social media posting is “BE Informed. BE Involved. BE Election Ready” or simply “BE Election Ready.” When they post about their events – registering voters or conducting outreach - they utilize these slogans within hashtags, and the messaging is on the physical materials they distribute to voters. Their website also uses this same messaging “iamelectionready.org” to continue the consistency.  

2. Arizona’s Citizens Clean Election Committee, a government commission, launched the election education and voter engagement campaign “18 in 2018” to engage with young voters, ages 18-29. The campaign is comprised of a combination of an augmented reality mural installation in urban communities and an Instagram page with social media advertising. The mural is a pair of wings that, when photographed with a particular application, will connect the young person with a website on which they can register to vote.

Standard Social Media Use by Elections Offices
Social media platforms are used to advertise and promote upcoming elections. The posts on focus on many different aspects that are crucial to voter turnout, and examples of these are shown in Appendix D. Content regularly includes voter registration information – including links to online registration, deadlines, and information on how to register. Additionally, voter frequently asked questions, polling place information, and sample ballots are often promoted in the posts. After elections, these pages will post links to the election results page on their own website, the Secretary of State’s website, or other relevant elections offices’ websites.

Another use of social media pages is to acknowledge and promote the work of community partners. The LA Registrar photographs and posts information regarding awards to acknowledge longstanding and impactful individual volunteers with the office. Elections office social media

pages also repost information regarding elections from community organizations that they partner with. This promotion allows for partnerships to grow and for social media engagement numbers to increase.

**Part 3: Community Engagement**

We have identified potential community organizations for Ramsey County elections to partner with, the opportunity for teacher liaisons in the public schools to improve voter engagement efforts, the value of advisory committees, and areas of future exploration for community engagement.

*Community Organization: Asian American Organizing Project*

Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP) is a youth voter engagement 501(c)3 with the mission to advance Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) participation in democracy for an equitable and just society. It’s foundation stems from research that young Asian Americans voters are least likely to be reached out to and leaving them to be the least likely to participate in democracy. AAOP’s election work under the civic engagement umbrella includes weekly phone banking to young Asian Minnesotans, assessing awareness and engaging youth with information about voting methods and voting locations, door knocking with voter guides to all Asians regardless of age and engaging people to pledge to vote. AAOP is currently actively engaging Precinct 1-9 youth for the upcoming St. Paul City Council election. In partnership with CAPI and 10+ organizations, AAOP launched the Ignite Minnesota Asian Power (IMAP) coalition to activate AAPI voters. AAOP acknowledges the urgency of engaging AAPI communities and expressed an interest in establishing a relationship with Ramsey County with IMAP to increase AAPI voter turnout. AAOP also has a full-time staff dedicated to communications and social media coordination.

*Community Organization: Minnesota State Voices*

Minnesota State Voices is a coalition of organizations working towards civic engagement and voter participation across the state. Their engagement includes advocacy for new immigrant families, providing training on voter engagement strategies using a racial justice lens, and promoting best practices in the use of technology and communication with diverse communities. Many underrepresented local organizations engage MN State Voices as their source of voter engagement data and access to the Voter Activation Network (VAN). MN State Voices would be an outstanding partner to gain insights on how to better serve diverse communities in their network and in developing targeted engagement strategies for others who are underrepresented.

*Community Organization: The League of Women Voters*

The League of Women Voters (LWV) Minnesota has an office on the edge of 1-9 and the League of Women Voters St. Paul is the local League in the area. While the League is not planning on creating voter guides with Ramsey County for the 2019 elections at this time, there
is still ample opportunity for Ramsey County to support a voter guides project. This would likely require financial and resource support. Ramsey County should explore this partnership further and stay in communication with LWV MN and LWV St. Paul on their intentions for 1-9 voter education. The LWV St. Paul is also a promising partner for candidate forums, given their expertise in the area.

Community Organization: Model Cities
Model Cities is a human-service organization and community developer that provides a range of housing and financial services for families and youth in the Frogtown area. The organization currently does minimal voter engagement but does participate in advocacy activities, such as Homelessness Day on the Hill. Model Cities participated in a listening session with new Attorney General Keith Ellison at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center and indicated that attendance at the event was quite high, despite extreme cold temperatures that night. Staff suggested that the high turnout and success of the event proved Frogtown resident interest in listening sessions with candidates or elected officials. At the core of this success was the emphasis on building relationships between elected office holders and Frogtown residents. Model Cities expressed interest in partnering with Ramsey County elections on voter engagement efforts, including leveraging their business relationships with shops that rent from their community development wing and other community partnerships.

Teacher Liaisons in Public Schools
Ramsey County teacher liaisons served a primary purpose for recruiting student election judges in the schools. In 2018, there were 17 teacher liaisons. Our team sees great value in training teacher liaisons on voter registration and frequent voting questions and answers. If there is capacity, the teacher liaisons could identify high school seniors (age 18 or will be 18 in November 2019 or 2020) and provide the students with voter registration information. If voter guides are available, teacher liaisons could distribute these at school as well. Teacher liaisons could coordinate voter registration tabling with the League of Women Voters St. Paul if they are not already doing so in the Frogtown-area schools.

Advisory Committees
We recommend establishing a “Racial Equity” Advisory Committee to seek feedback from and screen potential social media and voter education materials. Input from community members, particularly those who face barriers in getting to the polls or voting at all, is invaluable. Language in materials and social media posts should be culturally competent and cognizant of the systemic inequities that impact voting and equal rights. The advisory committee should meet at least once before and after the election season to offer feedback.

Advisory Committees exist in counties and states across the United States, and have been utilized to improve voter outreach and accessibility. California counties have both language and
disability issues advisory committees. The California Secretary of State has defined the role of language accessibility advisory committees to advise the office on language accessibility materials and outreach, with regard to state and federal laws. Disability Rights California has developed a document to aid counties in establishing voting accessibility advisory committees.

Participants in advisory committees, particularly community engagement or civic organizations, stand to benefit from the knowledge-sharing as much as Ramsey County elections would. Encouraging collaboration between organizations is an added benefit of this model. If Ramsey County does seek consultation from organizations and individuals through an Advisory Committee, it is important to follow-up with stakeholders, share next steps, and build a lasting relationship with organizations. Working to make the benefit equally shared between parties will help community members feel invested in the Advisory Committee and voter engagement work.

Part 4: Analysis and Strategies
Given what we have learned from the demographic data of Precinct 1-9 and interviews with community organizations, the proposal to support and partner with AAOP, IMAP, and MN State Voices to increase youth voter turnout in Precinct 1-9 will increase racial equity. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been underrepresented in youth voting patterns and this recommendation of partnership seeks to remedy the historic suppression. This partnership will shed light on the fact that AAPI voter engagement is an issue Ramsey County is prioritizing and could regain the public interest of some 90,000 Asians residing in Ramsey County and potentially increasing voter turnout in predominantly Asian districts, that regularly have had lower voter turnout rates.

Unintended Consequences: Criticism of Targeted Approach
Partnership with AAOP to increase youth voter turnout in Precinct 1-9 is a targeted approach to increase Asian American Youth voter turnout rates. Targeted policies provide benefits or protections based on group membership or status approach, targeted approaches are vulnerable to the critique that they unfairly favor constituent groups over the public good by directing resources to marginalized groups who are already subjected to unfair stereotypes. While treating everyone the same universal approaches can’t root out group-based discrimination and may actually deepen inequality between groups rather than reduce it, we recommend the Targeted Universalism approach below to remedy the unintended consequences,
**Complementary Strategy: Targeted Universalism**

We recommend Targeted Universalism as a complementary strategy to ensure advancing race equity in strategically implementing our recommendations. Targeted Universalism means setting universal goals that can be achieved through targeted approaches.

5 Steps to accomplishing Targeted Universalism

1. Set a Universal Goal
2. Measure how the overall population fares relative to the universal goal
3. Measure the performance of population segments relative to the universal goal
4. Understand how structures and other factors support or impede groups progress towards the universal goal
5. Implement targeted strategies so that each group can achieve the universal goal based upon their needs and circumstances

While rejecting a blanket universal, which may be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently, Targeted Universalism targets the varying needs of each group while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric. Targeted Universalism empowers targeted strategies capable of achieving those goals while moving us beyond concerns over disparities along and toward our highest aspirations for all.

**Establishing Equitable Partnership**

When establishing partnership between a community based non-profit and a larger government institution, we should be mindful of the power dynamics and precautions to take in order to build true partnership that doesn’t tokenize the community organization.

Stories that are similar to the barriers to voting for Asian American Youth are not uncommon. While Ramsey County has shown good faith in creating resilient and sustainable communities, following steps are critical in establishing a true partnership with community organizations that does not tokenize the relationship.

According to Brad J. Hall, Assistant Professor from the University of New Mexico, tokenism involves “the giving of a token or relatively unimportant, but positive item while withholding more substantial or significant assistance or involvement. The giving of the token is argued to be proof that the person is not prejudiced and allows the person to avoid engaging in more meaningful acts of equality”.

- Be transparent and communicate: Silence is the privilege of the powerful.
- Acknowledge that Community Organizations are the experts and be mindful of the community voices they bring to the table
- Be willing to change and implement change recommended by the communities

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Part 5: Implementation
Below are actionable steps for implementation of a Ramsey County Elections social media platform and campaign.

Invest in community and candidate engagement
☐ Promote community organization partners on social media and ask them to do the same. One strategy for working with community organizations is partnering with the MN Council of Nonprofits for their #NPVoterChat which highlights the voter engagement work of local nonprofits.
☐ Partner with the League of Women Voters St. Paul and/or other community civic engagement organizations to host a candidate forum with live audience engagement in-person and through a Facebook live video. The forum should be held at a community center or school.
☐ Establish an Advisory Committee for feedback on social media strategies, general messaging, and other voter engagement initiatives. Suggested membership for the Advisory Committee is: 4-5 representatives from community organizations, such as Asian American Organizing Project, the Aurora-St. Anthony Neighborhood, the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, and Model Cities St. Paul, an elected official from 1-9, 1-2 previous or current teacher liaisons in Frogtown area schools, and 1-2 youth clients of the community organizations.

Conduction election-related social media campaigns
☐ Promote National Voter Registration Day.
☐ Promote early voting when voting opens and again with one week until the election. Share information on voting eligibility requirements, FAQs, and early voting hours and locations.
☐ Promote Election Day with get-out-the-vote materials.

Build a social media following
☐ Build capacity for social media by promoting social media platforms throughout Ramsey County services.
☐ Use school contacts to promote social media through prize drawings or an incentive structure.
☐ Design and use a Snapchat filter in the geographic area for a day of concentrated social media campaign to raise awareness. Ramsey County can also sponsor advertisements and posts on Instagram and Facebook.
☐ Explore partnerships with community organizations and leaders to promote social media accounts and materials.
Create institutional knowledge on social media strategies by sponsoring a Ramsey County Elections staff member to pursue the University of Minnesota Certificate in Digital Marketing.

Part 6: Accountability and Communication

Accountability & Communication
To ensure social media implementation accountability, the social media strategies recommended in this report should be added specifically to the work plan of the Ramsey County Elections Office liaison (Emily Hunt) with the broader Ramsey County Communications Department. After this has been added to the work plan, regular check-ins with supervisors and updates during annual reviews should be conducted.

To ensure community engagement accountability, Ramsey County Elections Office should have a clearly designated liaison between the office and community partners.

Evaluation
Social media strategies that are implemented should be evaluated following implementation in 2019, to prepare and make alterations to the implementation strategies for the 2020 elections and beyond. The following is a brief evaluation plan to be used as an outline and further expanded based on specific decisions regarding messaging.

- Main Evaluation Questions:
  - Has social media engagement increased?
  - What types of posts receive the most engagement?
  - How effective are sponsored posts at reaching the target population?
  - What are the engagement levels?

- Data Collection Tools:
  - Analysis tools on social media platforms (Facebook & Twitter Metrics)
  - Track engagement throughout implementation in a separate document

- Other recommended evaluation steps:
  - Engage with the Advisory Committee throughout the evaluation in order to properly scope the project, interpret the data, and make decisions regarding particular strategies.
  - Evaluation data collection should take place throughout the 2019 Election social media engagement and analysis should be conducted immediately after, in order to create recommendations and shift implementation for 2020.
  - Evaluation data collection should take place throughout the 2020 Election social media engagement and analysis should be conducted immediately after, and utilized to grow or change strategies for the next several years of elections.
The partnerships with community organizations will require qualitative analysis and clear communication with the partners. The evaluation questions and plan should be adjusted to fit the activities and partner.

● Main Evaluation Questions:
  ○ What activities have been held in partnership with X Organization? How successful were the events?
  ○ How many Advisory Committee meetings were held? How many strategies were they consulted on and gave approval?
  ○ What does X Organization think of this partnership?
  ○ What does Ramsey County Elections Office staff think of the partnership?
  ○ How do community members view the partnership?

● Data Collection tools:
  ○ Track events and success based on numbers of:
    ■ Attendees, newly registered voters, voters with a voting plan
    ■ Satisfaction surveys could be distributed at the end of events
  ○ Interviews or surveys:
    ■ With county staff, community organization staff, and community members
    ■ Interviews may require an external evaluator, to ensure neutral and productive conversation; Surveys could be distributed electronically to more staff members

● Other recommended evaluation steps:
  ○ Utilize the Advisory Committee to finalize questions for interviews or surveys, to interpret results, and to help create recommendations for improved partnerships.
  ○ Ensure that community organizations are involved in the evaluation process, as this will help to build a strong relationship with open communication.
Appendix A: Predominant Racial or Ethnic Group Between 2013-2017, Estimate Based on 2010 Census Data
Appendix C:
This table shows the counties analyzed and provides the link to their Twitter and Facebook social media pages. Additionally, it explains if the account is run by an elected official, the elections office, or the county generally.

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Appendix D:

Example of post celebrating poll workers and providing application link from Miami Dade County Elections:¹²

Example of post with election result information and link:¹³

Example of post with registration deadline and link with information:¹⁴

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¹² Miami-Dade County Elections Department. (2019, April 10). We are grateful to have #ProudPollWorkers like Mayling [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/MDCElectionsDepartment/photos/a.951972338191740/2211389895583305/?type=3&theater

¹³ San Diego ROV. (2019, March 19). Unofficial election results are now posted for the Julian-Cuyamaca Fire Protection District Special Mail Ballot Election. senvote.com/content/dam/ro ...

¹⁴ King Co Elections. (2019, April 15). Today is the in-person voter registration deadline [Tweet]. Retrieved from: https://twitter.com/kcelections/status/1117819879057436673