

# HBCU STUDENT ACTION ALLIANCE

## 2020 END OF YEAR REVIEW

### Campuses

Bennett College  
Elizabeth City State University  
Fayetteville State University  
Johnson C. Smith University  
Livingstone College  
NC A&T State University  
North Carolina Central University  
Saint Augustine's University  
Shaw University  
Winston-Salem State University

### Mission and Pillars

The Common Cause NC HBCU Action Alliance aims to strengthen North Carolina's democracy by activating, training, supporting, and uniting the next generation of civic leaders at our state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities as they work to hold power accountable at every level.

- Holding Power Accountable
- Organizational Development
- Political and civic education
- Skill-based leadership development



### Introduction

The 2020 election year was a rich and challenging environment for our program. Our campuses, fellows, and organizers were forced to constantly adapt to an ever changing environment in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, the core goal of our mission and our commitment to it remained strong. This year the HBCU Student Action Alliance staff and fellows were able to continue a robust program which included a permanent expansion to two campuses, in spite of the ongoing pandemic.

This year our team was able to distribute thousands of nonpartisan voter guides in majority-minority communities, host textbanks to mobilize young black voters, hire additional Democracy Fellows to organize campuses throughout the state, and increase the stipends of current and new fellows. Additionally, we were able to work with new coalitions and partners on voter mobilization initiatives.

### Our Story

The Common Cause state chapter in North Carolina was founded more than 45 years ago and began a HBCU outreach program in 2005. With several organizations leading GOTV efforts at public Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) throughout the state, Common Cause NC started a program at public and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to elevate those voices that were—and remain—politically silenced.

Our program currently includes three full time staff: one College Outreach Program Manager, one regional College Outreach Coordinator, and one Civic Engagement Organizer focused primarily on community engagement in the Charlotte Metropolitan Area. In addition to our professional staff, our work is made possible by a talented and passionate group of student Democracy Fellows. We currently have representation from every HBCU in the state.



- **January: Start of a new semester** - At the beginning of 2020, our returning Fellows prepared for a semester of campus outreach with an emphasis on the census and the primary Elections.
- **March: EP during primaries and marches to the polls** - The North Carolina Primary Elections were held on Tuesday, March 3 - less than a month before the COVID-19 pandemic would shut down the state and have a huge impact on campus engagement. Students participated in marches to the polls on several campuses, celebrating the joy of voting and encouraging their peers along the way.
- **March & April: Census webinar series** - The original deadline for completing the 2020 Census was extended due to Covid-19, but students still participated in educating the community to coincide with Census Day on April 1st. Our Census Fellows created social media videos and led a virtual webinar series to discuss the significance of completing the census.
- **August & September: Think Tank series; a new semester begins** - The start of a new semester came with the additional challenges of a national outcry for racial justice and the ongoing effects of COVID-19. The 6th annual North Carolina HBCU Think Tank in partnership with the NC Black Alliance was presented in a virtual format for the first time - allowing more student leaders to gather and learn civic engagement strategies from partners across the state.
- **September & October: GOTV work begins; First HBCU Voters Day** - NC voting by mail started in September, which is when our GOTV plans officially began too. Democracy Fellows on every campus worked to distribute nonpartisan voter guides, text voters and hold virtual events to get their peers to the polls. On October 3rd, the first HBCU Voters Day in partnership with Black Voters Matter was celebrated with safe voter registration drives and a virtual event to commemorate the importance of HBCU student voting.
- **November: Election Day** - Election Protection work on November 3rd took many shapes this year, and for the first time ever our Democracy Fellows served as driving Poll Monitors to check on voting sites in addition to Social Media Monitors to combat online disinformation.

## GET OUT THE COUNT: SPRING CENSUS WORK

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, CCNC was planning to implement a massive canvassing program to ensure an accurate count in North Carolina. A cornerstone of the work of Common Cause NC has been to end partisan and racial gerrymandering, and it is critical that we ensure that North Carolina has a count that accurately reflects the communities we serve. At the beginning of the year, we hired five census fellows to craft and execute a comprehensive strategy of canvassing, education events, and coalition building.

In response to no longer being able to host in person programming due to the pandemic, our fellows worked quickly to shift their attention to the digital sphere. Our students hosted a three part webinar series to educate peers and the community on the importances of participating in the upcoming census. Common Cause NC also implemented paid digital geofencing to distribute Census web ads.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE

This year provided a unique challenge for us as well as new opportunities for the HBCU Student Action Alliance. The 2020 election cycle and the 2020 Census were in full gear as Covid-19 quickly forced us to rethink our entire strategy. We moved the rest of our fellowship program online. We created a digital strategy that served as a blueprint for the rest of the year. We connected with our HBCUs to provide them with election updates related to Covid-19, to ensure the black and brown communities that we work with every year were safe.

Our fellows were able to participate in several digital organizing and campus readiness trainings before the semester began. Our digital strategy included several key strategies in lieu of in-person organizing efforts, to ensure that we are still engaging voters during stay-at-home or quarantine orders. We hosted online education events; webinars or trainings; utilized targeted social media outreach; ensured social media monitoring during election day; engaged in peer to peer texting initiatives; and used an expanded Relational Voter program.

# ELECTION WORK

## "Snapshot"

### Spring Primaries

This year North Carolina was a Super Tuesday state, and it allowed us the ability to more effectively engage students during the primary election. Common Cause staff focused on educating students through several different mediums and on ensuring students' knowledge about issues that related to their communities. Additionally, our students attended HKOnJ, organized marches to the polls, hosted voter registration drives, and ran digital campaigns.

- Hosted **8** voter registration drives
- Sponsored **7** voter education events
- Helped two of our campuses restore their voting precincts on campus
- Organized **5** marches & bus to the polls events
- Hired **10** HBCU fellows
- Held **5** census events to encourage off-campus students to fill out the census



### Fall GOTV Work

This Fall the HBCU Student Action Alliance was presented with a distinct set of challenges; most related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Following the primary elections in the spring, we were immediately confronted with the disruptions of the pandemic and were forced to shift our census programming to a virtual realm. This brief period of having to run our program virtually this spring, gave us an advantage on how to operate a successful virtual program for an entire semester this Fall.

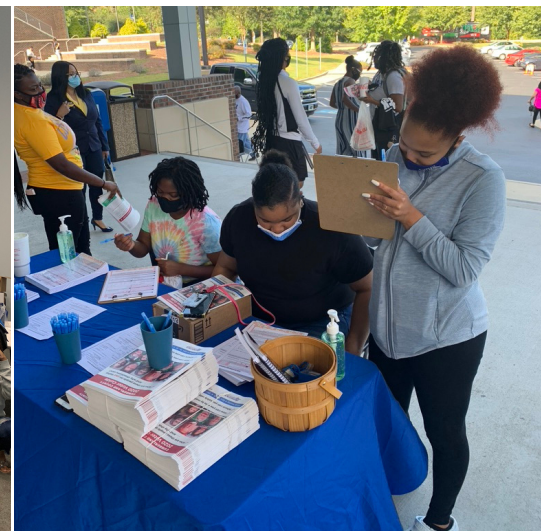
- Hired **14** student Democracy Fellows with representation from every North Carolina HBCU.
- Hosted several peer to peer textbanking events - messaging over **131,373** contacts
- Program staff and fellows worked to register over **500** students this semester.
- Distributed **70,000** physical voter guides
- Conducted targeted outreach within our key counties
- Sponsored over **10** online events related to Voter education



# MOVING INTO 2021

The Common Cause NC HBCU Network will continue to work towards our mission of strengthening North Carolina's democracy by activating, training, supporting, and uniting the next generation of civic leaders at our state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities as they work to hold power accountable at every level. In 2020, the HBCU Student Action Alliance worked to engage students and the community in Get Out the Count work and Get Out the Vote initiatives. We encountered and overcame various challenges due to COVID-19 and are now poised to enter into 2021 prepared to continue the work. Our staff have developed a Beyond Voting strategy that is focused on broad civic engagement. We have broken this strategy into the following areas:

- **Leadership Development:** Our program will continue to educate students using the Social Change Model on how to create positive sustainable change in their communities. We will serve as a bridge for students to advocate for their initiatives in the legislature or with their local representatives.
- **Advocacy:** Our work to protect the vote and strengthen our democracy will have direct implications and benefits for the communities nearest our campus. We will continue to expand on this more intentionally in the coming year.
- **Scholarship:** At the beginning of Summer 2020 we worked with campuses on developing academic incentives to recognize the civic work students were doing. This started by trying to find academic avenues to recognize students for possibly working as poll workers during the election. Eventually, we moved away from recruiting student poll workers, however the model of forming academic pathways to recognize students civic engagement work beyond their campuses is something we will continue to explore.



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