

**NASS IDEAS AWARD
APPLICATION**

NEXTGEN ELECTIONS

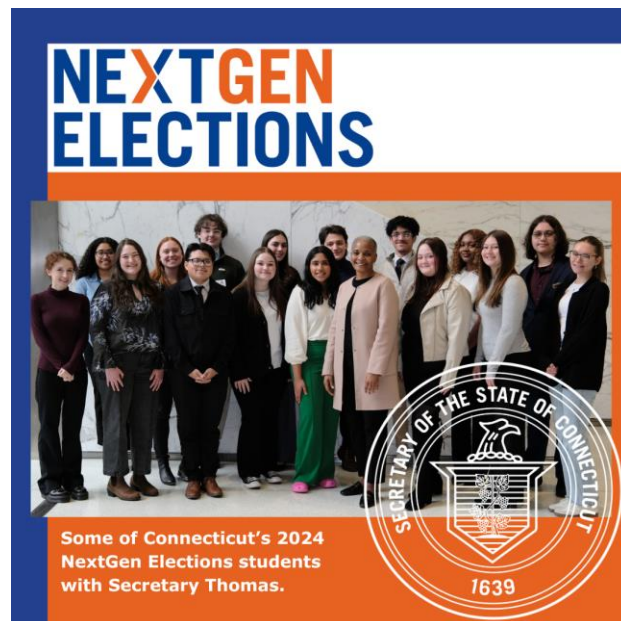
Project Title: Next Gen Elections: College Students Powering the Polls

Submitted by: Connecticut Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas

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General Subject Areas: Elections and Civic Engagement



Project Description: Next Gen Elections strengthens Connecticut's election workforce by connecting civic-minded students with towns that need trained, tech-savvy poll workers. When the addition of early voting created a surge in staffing needs, the Connecticut Office of the Secretary of the State launched a statewide program to recruit, train, and place college students in polling locations across the state. Over two years, Next Gen students worked a combined 2,000 hours in Connecticut's polling locations, introducing them to new careers in election work and strengthening the Office's existing relationships with

town elections officials, colleges, and universities. While polling locations have benefited from this new workforce, students in turn have learned the behind-the-scenes of elections and have gained hands-on résumé building experience.

Next Gen Elections in the News

[Next Gen Elections Program brings young talent to Connecticut's election process | fox61.com](#)

[Voter Registration Push Comes to Campus Ahead of Early Voting, Election Day 2024 - UConn Today](#)

[In CT, a push to get college students to vote – and staff the polls – during this year's election | Connecticut Public](#)

[Next Gen Elections seeks civic-minded students, applications to close Friday | The Daily Campus](#)

[CT's Secretary of the State wants to inspire college students to work elections](#)

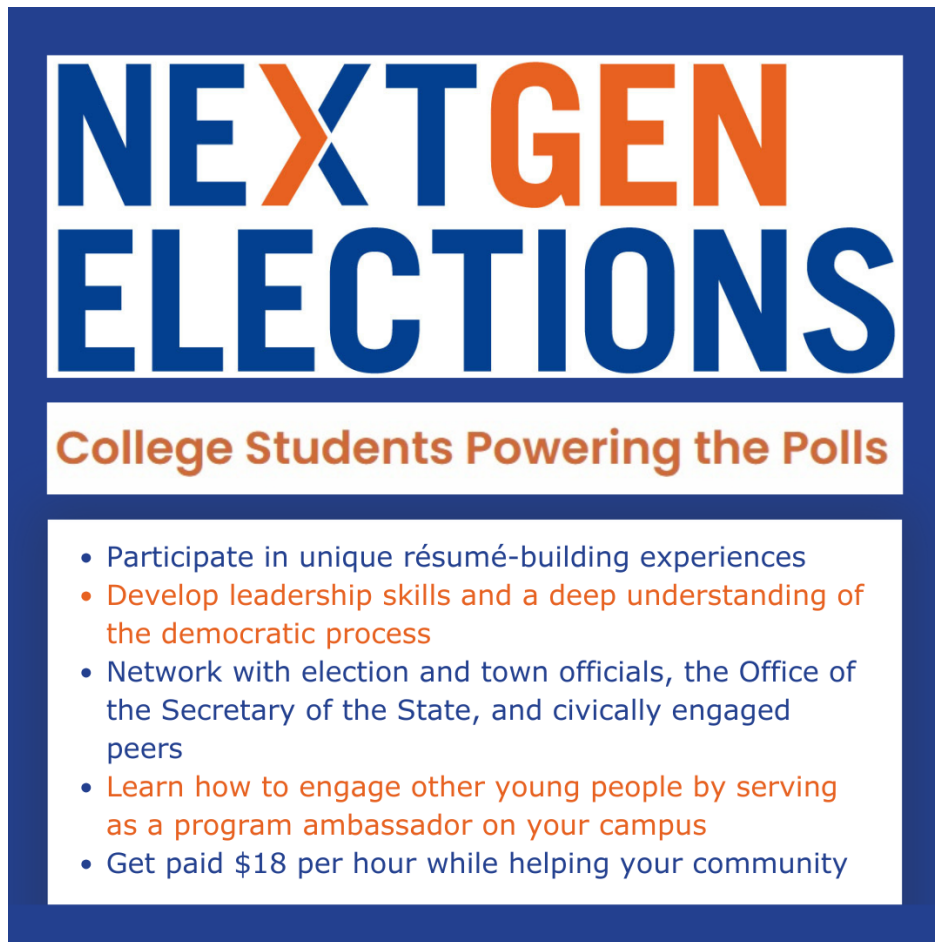


Executive Summary

History

Connecticut elections in 2024 saw a major change with the introduction of in-person early voting and an investment in new state-of-the-art voting tabulators. Connecticut elections

are run at the municipal level, not by county, which meant that all 169 towns had to identify, recruit, train, and assign thousands of additional people for the two weeks of early voting. Plus, poll workers needed to be more tech-savvy than ever before. Anticipating the burden this would place on each town's two Registrars of Voters, a majority of which only work several hours a week, our office made the commitment to assist in this monumental recruitment task.

A poster for 'NEXT GEN ELECTIONS' with a blue border. The title 'NEXT GEN ELECTIONS' is in large, bold, blue and orange letters. Below it, the subtitle 'College Students Powering the Polls' is in orange. A list of six bullet points is at the bottom, alternating between blue and orange text.

**NEXT GEN
ELECTIONS**

College Students Powering the Polls

- Participate in unique résumé-building experiences
- Develop leadership skills and a deep understanding of the democratic process
- Network with election and town officials, the Office of the Secretary of the State, and civically engaged peers
- Learn how to engage other young people by serving as a program ambassador on your campus
- Get paid \$18 per hour while helping your community

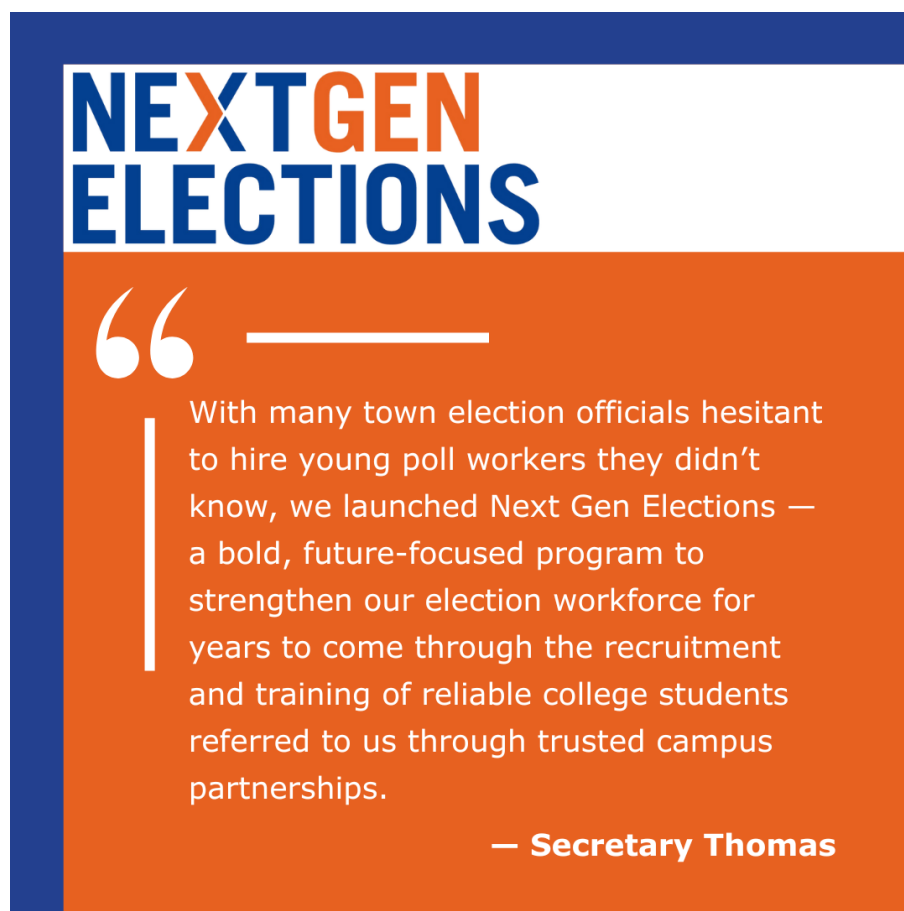
We knew, however, that this recruitment would have to be sustainable to be effective, and this meant looking to a different cohort of poll workers. Election workers nationally have been aging, a problem reflected in Connecticut and compounded by the hesitancy to hire young poll workers not already known to town election officials.

To meet these challenges, we envisioned a program that would recruit civically engaged students that our office could vouch for through an application and training process. Leveraging existing partnerships with colleges, universities, and community organizations, we created Next Gen Elections to do just that. In carrying out this program, our office

marketed the opportunity to college students, selected a diverse cohort of participants, trained them to a level higher than standard poll worker training and assigned them to polling locations across Connecticut.

Training included: our 4-hour statewide poll workers training program, a 4-hour moderator's class, training in the Centralized Voter Registration System, and specialized training in each town once assigned.

With a grant awarded by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, we were able to offer paid training and travel reimbursement to students to ensure the program was accessible to all interested students. Participating towns were paid a stipend to offset the costs of hiring Next Gen students as poll workers.



**NEXTGEN
ELECTIONS**

“ —

With many town election officials hesitant to hire young poll workers they didn't know, we launched Next Gen Elections — a bold, future-focused program to strengthen our election workforce for years to come through the recruitment and training of reliable college students referred to us through trusted campus partnerships.

— **Secretary Thomas**

We also brought on five experienced Registrars of Voters, from all parts of the state and both major political parties, to serve as paid mentors for the students. Selecting Registrars as mentors was strategic as they helped promote the program to other Registrars in the state and encouraged them to hire Next Gen students. Because the students had already

been through rigorous training, and were being mentored by experienced election officials, towns were excited to participate in the Next Gen Elections program. In 2024, 24 municipalities asked to participate. In 2025, that number nearly doubled to 45 municipalities.

After program completion, Next Gen students attend a post-election convening at our Office. Here, they receive a certificate of completion and learn about future careers in election work and government from a panel of experienced election workers, municipal figure heads, and state officers. This serves as an opportunity for students to network with others in the program, allows them to meet Secretary Thomas in person, and assists us in our long-term goal of recruiting a younger, more diverse elections workforce for Connecticut.

Each aspect of our program, from recruitment to training to placement in towns, has been designed with young people in mind. Over the two years of the Next Gen Elections program, we have seen a growth in student civic engagement, trust built between Registrars and young poll workers, and a commitment to keep the momentum going in the years to come. Plus, Registrars have benefited by having these highly trained and trusted poll workers in their network, and many have hired Next Gen students for other elections such as a primary or referenda outside of the program.

NEXTGEN ELECTIONS

Launch Your Own Program

With the right partnerships and some coordination, it's easier than you think. Plus, it can be adapted to any state, big or small!

Build your team

- Recruit college students across the state.
- Promote the program to municipalities.
- Recruit election officials to serve as mentors.

Prepare and pair your poll workers

- Train students to the highest level of poll work.
- Gather requests from towns.
- Request students' availability.
- Match students to towns by geography and schedule.

Celebrate and learn for next time

- Host a post-election convening for students.
- Send a short end-of-program survey to officials and students.

Simple. Scalable. Transformative.



Significance

Next Gen Elections shows how states can sustainably build the foundation for the next generation of election workers while at the same time engaging young voters.

The Next Gen Elections program is:

1. Easily Adjustable:

- While Next Gen Elections is best suited for states that have higher education locations in diverse geographic regions, it can be tailored to operate only in a specific city or county.
- If your state does not have Registrar of Voters positions, mentors can be selected from election officials at any level, from municipal to county.
- Program costs can be reduced by limiting or removing certain payments such as travel reimbursements, especially if polling locations are located near or on college campuses.

2. Cost Effective:

- Building a young base of election workers means less time and fewer resources will be needed in the future for training and recruitment.
- The students can help promote elections for you, serving as voting ambassadors on their campuses and encouraging their peers to cast their ballots.
- Diversifying the election workforce can save voting locations in translating services.

3. A Partnership Between the Government and Community:

- Encourages students in various areas of study to explore careers in election work, gives them hard skills to use in their future employment, and provides opportunities to network with elections officials and like-minded peers.
- Breaks down misinformation by providing students with a lifelong understanding and appreciation of the election system.

Impact / Results



[Hear from Christina about her experience as a NextGen student.](#)

By entrusting young people with leadership roles in our democracy, the positive outcomes of Next Gen Elections are numerous. Since its conception in 2024, the program has expanded its reach in numbers, as well as geographically and culturally. The number of languages spoken other than English nearly doubled from 2024 to 2025. This helped break down the barriers non-English speaking people face when going to the polls, and students enjoyed adding value by using a skill others didn't have.



Moreover, the number of towns represented, and students involved has increased. This is especially notable considering the program's first year in operation was during a presidential election cycle, whereas the second year was in a municipal one, when voter turnout decreases.

- The number of campuses represented increased from 13 in 2024 to 19 in 2025.
- The number of municipalities where students worked increased from 23 in 2024 to 45 in 2025.
- The number of languages (other than English) spoken by students nearly doubled from 7 in 2024 to 13 in 2025.

The desire of both students to continue working at the polls and municipalities to continue hiring students has also stood as a testament to the success of the program. 60% of the 2024 cohort of students said they were very likely to return to election work. Elise Wood, Registrar of Voters in the town of Seymour, expressed the positive impact of the program:

“The program you initiated worked out splendidly for us once again. We welcomed back one of our Next Gen students from last year, Nick, who was wonderfully helpful once again. And Next Gen student Gavin impressed all of us—first the Registrars during Early Voting, and then his Polling Place Moderator on Election Day. We were so impressed, in fact, that he is now helping us out in our office! [He] will help us with general office work, including filing, and, because he is adept at working with CVRS, the current Elections software, he will help us with such tasks as entering ‘Who Voted’ for instance.”

Elise's words incapsulate the lasting impression that NextGen Elections has had on Connecticut's youth and election workforce. A program first designed to help supplement the number of tech-savvy workers in Connecticut's polling locations was ultimately able to connect college students to their civic role in society, providing them with short-term employment and résumé boosting experience, and strengthening the partnership between our office and Connecticut's schools and towns.

A Collaborative Process

Student Recruitment

Our office developed and distributed a series of targeted flyers to engage college students and encourage their participation in the program. These materials were designed to be both inviting and informative by highlighting key program details. This outreach played a central role in raising awareness and attracting a diverse group of student applicants. We created a page on our website, NextGenElections.CT.gov, where students could obtain program information and submit an application online.



NEXTGEN ELECTIONS

College Students Powering the Polls



Are You...

- 18 years or older
- Registered to vote in CT
- Eligible to work in the U.S.
- Attending a CT college or university during the 2025-2026 school year?

Do You Want...

- Networking opportunities with the Office of the Secretary of the State, town leaders, election officials, and other civically-engaged students?
- Résumé-building experiences?
- Paid training & work hours (\$18/hr)?



Questions?
Email: civics101@ct.gov

Ready to apply?
Scan here:



What is Next Gen Elections?

The **Next Gen Elections** program trains college students to be poll workers at the Moderator level throughout the state of Connecticut.

What Does a Moderator Do?

Moderators ensure election laws are followed, support poll workers at their site, and make the voting process as smooth as possible for every eligible voter.

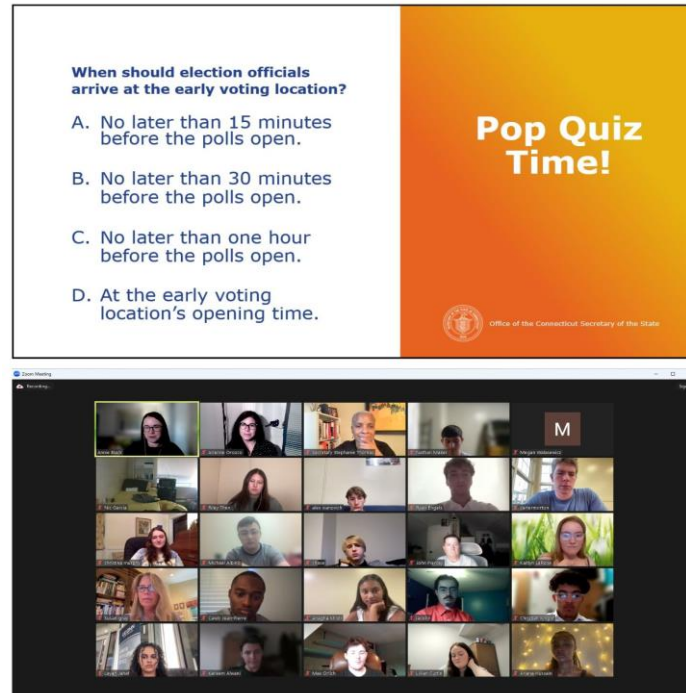
What You Need to Know

- Applications are due by midnight on **March 28, 2025**. Final decisions will be sent out by **April 25, 2025**.
- All **Next Gen** participants will be paired with an experienced Registrar of Voters who will serve as your mentor.
- Participants will work at least **20 hours per year** during the 2025 general elections. Training and working primarily takes place during each fall election season (late August - early November).
- Transportation costs to and from your assigned location(s) will be reimbursed, including gas/mileage (if you drive yourself), public transportation, and/or ride share services.

Funded by: U.S. Election Assistance Commission's Help America Vote College Program

Training Sessions

To accommodate the students' varied schedules our office designed both virtual and in-person training sessions throughout the program. These sessions provided Next Gen students the opportunity to get trained to the moderator level, the highest available in the state, while connecting with election staff and receiving individualized support.



Students in Action

Next Gen students worked directly alongside election workers at their polling sites. Students served in a variety of positions such as moderators, assistant registrars, official checkers, ballot clerks, greeters, or tabulator tenders! This hands-on experience allowed them to apply their training in real time while contributing meaningful support to their local election offices.



Post-Election Convening

In January, the hard work of Next Gen students was commemorated as they were presented with leadership awards and program completion certificates at our Office. Secretary Thomas met with participants to record student feedback and joined a panel to discuss careers in election work followed by food and refreshments.



Testimonials

Students



“As college students I feel like we are often in a bubble at our schools, so getting involved in the community felt like a very important experience. I also felt like the work I was doing was very appreciated which was an amazing feeling.”

- *Lennon, student at Wesleyan University*



“I found myself teaching people how to operate CVRS only a day after I learned how to do so myself. That’s a reflection of both my preparation throughout the program and the support system I had to help me along the way!

- *Riley, student at Quinnipiac University*



“It did feel satisfying to be contributing to the process of democracy. Helping people who were voting for the first time, in particular an older (60-70s) women, register and vote made the stress of the work all worth it.”

- *Alexa, student at UConn Storrs*



“The greatest aspect was helping voters feel confidence in the overall process of the elections. Many people came in worried about the possible issues with the election integrity and security, and being able to reassure and help make the experience smooth and secure for them was valuable for me.”

- *Nicolas, student at the University of Hartford*

Registrars of Voters

“The students were beyond wonderful! We are huge fans of this program and look forward to participating again in the future.”

- *Registrar in Seymour, CT*

“Caleb far exceeded expectations, especially on the first day. We could not have had the success we had without his help. Simply outstanding! Thank you for this program. I think it’s a great asset to election work to have younger student workers.”

- *Registrar in Milford, CT*

“I have to tell you that Jonathan was an absolute joy to work with! In addition to working Early Voting, we had a moderator cancel the Friday before Election Day due to illness. He stepped up and ran that poll location like a BOSS! I told him that we have had moderators that have been working for years for us that could learn a great deal from him”

- *Registrar in Waterbury, CT*

“I also want to share that this was a truly wonderful experience for us. This was our first time participating in New Haven, and I absolutely loved working with our student. Mirabel was exceptionally well-trained, attentive, and carried herself with confidence throughout... I would have gladly welcomed additional students—this program was fantastic... Thank you again for opening this opportunity to us. I look forward to participating in the program in the future.”

- *Registrar in New Haven, CT*

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etc. Must know how
to start

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Help Wanted: Create a Next Gen Elections Program & an Election Workforce Pipeline

Seeking Secretaries of State ready to strengthen their election workforce by investing in talented college students. Connecticut's Next Gen Elections program has shown the power of our young people and eagerness of election workers to tap their potential. **What's required?** A belief in students as leaders, local officials who share this belief, and an interest in building a stronger, more sustainable election system.

We'll share the playbook. You bring the students. Together, we'll build the Next Generation of election leaders.

**Next Gen Elections
College Students Powering the Polls**