



Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Civic Engagement Boot Camp Agenda
Friday, September 12, 2025
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.: Check-in

9:00 a.m. – 9:03 a.m.: Welcome and Introductions

Jessica Ruland, MPP
Program Director, Internships
Lecturer, Public Policy
Hobby School of Public Affairs

9:03 a.m. – 9:55 a.m.: Opening Keynote & Civic Storytelling Workshop
“Why Your Voice and Story Matters”

Annie Benifield Johnson, Ph.D.
CEO & President
Houston Voting Initiative

10:00 a.m. – 10:55 a.m.: “Civic Engagement in Action” Panel Discussion

Katie Campbell Shumway
Executive Director
League of Women Voters of Houston

Chris Pino
Manager of Voter Engagement
BakerRipley

Avery Spranger
Civic Engagement Coordinator
Harris County Department of Education

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.: Voting 101 + Mock Voting Booths

Kortni Montgomery, MBA
Outreach Community Coordinator
Office of Harris County Clerk, Teneshia Hudspeth

Ashley Lawson
Outreach Coordinator
Office of Harris County Clerk, Teneshia Hudspeth

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.: Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.: Civic Skills Lab: From Concern to Action

Sarah Syed
Policy Manager
Woori Juntos

2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.: VDVR Training

James Lovell
Deputy Specialist – Voter Registration Outreach
Office of Annette Ramirez, Tax Assessor-Collector
& Voter Registrar

MEET THE FALL 2025 SPEAKERS



Jessica Ruland, MPP
Program Director, Internships
Hobby School of Public Affairs

Jessica Ruland O'Connor is the director of internship programs at the Hobby School of Public Affairs. She oversees the school's undergraduate internships in Houston, Austin and Washington, D.C., leads civic engagement projects and builds relationships with alumni and community partners. Ruland O'Connor is a two-time University of Houston graduate with a Master of Public Policy degree and an undergraduate degree in political science. She started her public service journey as a Civic Houston Intern in the office of former Houston City Council Member Michael Kubosh and later as a Leland Fellow in the Washington office of former U.S. Rep. Gene Green. Previously, Ruland O'Connor worked in the public policy division at the Greater Houston Partnership.



Annie Benifield Johnson, Ph.D.
CEO and President
Houston Voting Initiative

Annie Benifield Johnson, Ph.D., is the CEO and president of the Houston Voting Initiative and a lifelong advocate for civic engagement. She was the first woman of color to serve as president of the League of Women Voters of Houston and has spent more than 30 years advancing civic education and voter outreach. A professor emerita at Lone Star College-Tomball, Johnson has led voter registration efforts at naturalization ceremonies and served in leadership roles on advisory boards and committees focused on equity and participation. She has received numerous honors, including the Yellow Rose Award from the Texas governor's office. Through education, advocacy and collaboration, she remains committed to empowering communities and ensuring every eligible citizen has the opportunity to shape their future through the democratic process.



Katie Campbell Shumway
Executive Director
League of Women Voters of Houston

Katie Campbell Shumway is the executive director of the League of Women Voters of Houston. With a steadfast commitment to voting rights, civic education and election integrity, Shumway has led the chapter through significant growth, making it the fastest-growing league in the nation. Under her leadership, the organization has expanded its full-time staff, embraced cutting-edge digital tools and launched innovative programs to mobilize voters across Greater Houston. From youth activation campaigns in schools to interactive voter guides and lifelong voter engagement strategies, her work empowers individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in the electoral process.



Chris Pino
Manager of Voter Engagement
BakerRipley

Chris Pino serves as the manager of voter engagement at BakerRipley, where he leads a robust nonpartisan initiative focused on empowering everyday people to participate in the democratic process. In the past year alone, his team has reached voters nearly 300,000 times and helped thousands cast their ballots. A decade-long veteran of Greater Houston politics, Pino began as a student organizer in Katy ISD and has since worked with elected officials and campaigns at the local, state and national levels. His experience includes roles with Fort Bend County Commissioner Dexter L. McCoy, Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher and digital strategy firm DSPolitical. Pino holds degrees in political science and music from The George Washington University and remains deeply committed to mobilizing communities and expanding access to civic participation.



Avery Spranger
Civic Engagement Coordinator
Harris County Department of Education

Avery Spranger is the civic engagement coordinator at the Harris County Department of Education and a lecturer in the political science department at the University of Houston. She began her work in civic education as a student at Illinois State University, where she discovered a passion for advocacy and community involvement. Since earning her master's degree in political science, Spranger has focused on empowering individuals to engage in the democratic process. Her work centers on expanding access to civic knowledge and encouraging active participation in elections and public life.



Kortni Montgomery, MBA
Outreach Community Coordinator
Office of Harris County Clerk, Teneshia Hudspeth

Kortni Montgomery is the outreach coordinator in the office of Harris County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth, conducting elections for the nation's third-largest county. Election information is available at [harrisvotes.com](https://www.harrisvotes.com).



Ashley Lawson
Outreach Coordinator
Harris County Department of Elections

Ashley Lawson is the voter education outreach coordinator for the Harris County Department of Elections, where she works to promote civic engagement and expand access to the electoral process. Her career began at the Houston Food Bank, where she served as an economic coordinator for the Food for Change program, developing strategies to combat food insecurity and support local families. Lawson later joined the City of Houston's Housing and Community Development Department as a communications administration coordinator, helping connect residents with housing resources and programs. With experience in both nonprofit and government sectors, she brings a deep understanding of community needs to her current role. Lawson is committed to fostering collaboration, improving public communication, and empowering residents to participate actively in civic life.



Sara Syed
Policy Manager
Woori Juntos

Sarah Syed is the policy manager at Woori Juntos, a Houston-based nonprofit focused on empowering Asian and immigrant communities across Texas through advocacy, education and organizing. A Houston native, Syed previously served as organizing manager and senior community organizer for the organization. She leads issue-based advocacy efforts that center the voices of those most affected, using storytelling to build empathy and shift public narratives. Her work has helped mobilize more than 200,000 Pan-Asian and Latine voters across Houston and surrounding counties in under three years. Syed is actively engaged in policy areas including language accessibility, disaster preparedness and health equity. Her advocacy has contributed to the creation of a Language Access Office in Harris County and the hiring of a Language Access Coordinator in Houston. She also supported the passage of House Bill 4838 in the Texas House.



James Lovell

Deputy Specialist-Voter Registration Outreach

Office of Annette Ramirez, Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registration

James Lovell is a voter outreach representative for the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar's Office. A Houston native, Lovell's early experience with the county's voter registration outreach team shaped his commitment to increasing civic participation. He promotes voter registration and engagement across Harris County, the third-largest county in the United States, through public education and community events. As an appointed deputy voter registrar and certified trainer, Lovell is well-versed in Texas election law and works to ensure eligible residents have the tools and knowledge to register and vote.
