

# Hamilton County BOARD OF ELECTIONS

TIMOTHY M. BURKE  
Chairman

824 Broadway  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202-1345

SHERRY L. POLAND  
Director of Elections

ALEX M. TRIANTAFILOU  
CALEB A. FAUX  
CHARLES H. GERHARDT, III

513 632-7000  
Fax 513 579-0988 or 513 744-9038  
[www.VoteHamiltonCounty.org](http://www.VoteHamiltonCounty.org)

SALLY J. KRISEL  
Deputy Director of Elections

## **EAC National Competition for Best Practices for Recruiting, Training & Retaining Election Workers**

The Hamilton County Board of Elections, located in Cincinnati, Ohio, serves approximately 568,000 registered voters in 556 precincts. In countywide elections, the Board employs over 2,500 Precinct Election Officials (PEOs) to serve at 365 polling locations throughout the county.

### **Recruiting Election Workers**

Like all election administration offices, the Hamilton County Board of Elections puts a significant amount of time and effort into recruiting a full complement of competent Election Workers to ensure a fair and orderly election process. It's a task that has become increasingly difficult in recent years. With the necessary complication of election processes required to meet changing law, and the introduction of new technology, we are asking more of our PEOs than ever. The Board realized that we needed to examine new approaches that combine our successful past practices with new and innovative techniques so we could reach every segment of our diverse population to provide the best election workforce possible.

Several years ago, we enacted a Youth at the Booth (YATB) program to recruit high school students to work the polls. Ohio law specifically allows for 17 year olds who are enrolled in the senior year of high school to serve as PEOs. After our implementation of electronic poll books in 2015, we learned the importance of adding younger PEOs to our election workforce. Our Youth at the Booth participants played an important role in the successful transition to the new electronic poll books, as participants often have a greater familiarity and understanding of technology.

By pairing our technologically savvy high school PEOs with our long term, older PEOs who have a better understanding of election processes, we were able to provide the perfect combination of technological comfortability and experience at the polls.

In the March, 2016 Presidential Primary, we greatly increased the number of students participating in the Youth at the Booth Program, with 178 students from 28 area high schools participating. The Board approved the creation of two new full-time PEO recruitment staff positions to aid in the expansion of the Youth at the Booth Program. Our goal is to recruit 365 Youth at the Booth participants by the November Presidential Election using the assistance of newly added Board staff positions. This will allow us to place one high school senior in every polling location in the county.

For the November 8, 2016 Presidential Election, we also created a Youth at the Booth Challenge. Board staff is collaborating with area high school principals and government teachers to create an incentive program to drive student participation. The school that provides the most students to work the polls will be treated to a Pizza Thank You Party by a popular local restaurant.

In addition to our efforts to recruit high school students as PEOs, the Board instituted a new program to engage the business community and government agencies in the election process called "Partners in Democracy". Participating businesses and agencies are encouraged to give their employees a "day off for democracy" to allow them to serve as election workers. The largest privately held business in Hamilton County, AdvancePierre Foods, was our inaugural corporate partner. In addition, 9 separate county government agencies signed on to the effort. The participating groups provided us with highly qualified and easily trained PEOs as well as important Troubleshooting and Help Desk staff.

While not required, the participating agencies and businesses are encouraged to give their employees time off with pay as a further incentive to participate. All of the groups who took part in Partners in Democracy in the March 2016 Primary Election followed that model. Following Election Day, the Board publicly recognized those who took part in Partners in Democracy at a public meeting with a plaque recognizing their contributions. We further recognized their support through the Board's social media and website. The two new previously mentioned PEO recruitment staff members will also focus their efforts on expanding our Partners in Democracy program to include new businesses and government agencies.

### **Training Precinct Election Officials (PEOs)**

Over the course of 4 weeks leading up to countywide elections, the BOE conducts 120 separate PEO training classes to train approximately 2,500 Election Workers. Classes are held Monday through Saturday, with morning, afternoon, and evening options available. Each class incorporates live instruction with PowerPoint presentations, instructional videos, and hands-on practice with voting equipment. Classes are 4 hours long, and comprehensively include everything we require PEOs to know to successfully run their voting locations on Election Day.

As Election Administration has become more complex, we felt that we had the need for a tool to provide additional training to PEOs in a more flexible and cost-efficient manner that also was less labor intensive for our busy staff. It was even more important that we offer additional training options to those PEOs who were trained at the beginning of our in-class training period, as it could be nearly a month between their training class and Election Day.

As a remedy, this Fall, we are implementing our own online PEO training course for PEOs who feel the need for additional training. The online training has 4 components:

- 1) An overall refresher of the PEO class
- 2) Set up and instructions on the electronic poll book
- 3) Set up and instructions on voting equipment
- 4) Set up and instructions on proper use of Disabled Access Units

PEOs can review all of the above, or just the section(s) they are interested in revisiting. At the end of each section, participants are able to take a short quiz to test their knowledge on the particular material to ensure they have a complete understanding of the equipment and processes involved.

The Board partnered with the entity that already provides our website service to create the on-line training at a reduced rate. In addition, the videos used in the online training were created in house by Board staff using a cost-effective, easily navigated, off-the-shelf video editing tool.

To complement our online refresher course, we also instituted and expanded a “Practice Makes Perfect” option for PEOs who want to gain experience and familiarity using our new electronic poll books. PEOs are able to schedule a time with one of our PEO Coordinators and can come to the Board of Elections office to go through a series of practice set ups and voter scenarios on their own time, at their own pace. Numerous PEOs took advantage of the option and reported an increased comfortability with the electronic poll books.

### **Retaining Election Workers**

We believe that the most effective way to retain high quality election workers is to provide them the proper tools and resources to administer a successful election. Properly equipped, trained, and prepared PEOs who feel engaged in the process and empowered to provide the best service possible are more likely to feel that they’ve have a meaningful and enjoyable election experience. We strongly believe that it is also vitally important for PEOs to know that their participation is valued and appreciated.

We interact with our PEOs in several ways to make sure they keep coming back. First, we have developed post-election surveys. Packets are mailed out to PEOs after the election seeking their input on ways the election process could be better run, as well as processes at the Board that we could change to make their lives easier on Election Day. Some of our best ideas have come from PEOs who were engaging in dialogue with us through these surveys.

We also bring in experienced PEOs to take part in focus groups when we are developing new processes and procedures. The input we received from these PEO focus groups, both pre and post implementation of our electronic poll books, was vitally important in our implementation plan. As important as the information gathered; PEOs that participated were excited to be engaged in the process, and were delighted at the idea that BOE staff wanted and welcomed their opinions. What was even more satisfying for us was the thank you letters we received after the next election when they realized that we not only listened to their concerns, we acted on them and made changes.

Following the trend of integrating technology into election administration, we established social media accounts on both Face Book and Twitter, and used those platforms to recognize and thank our PEOs for their dedicated service. In addition, the Board place special messages of thanks for PEOs on our website to let them know that their hard work is appreciated.

The Board is developing a program to recognize long-term PEOs as they reach milestones in their election service. We are also purchasing a commemorative lapel pin that we will give to each PEO to memorialize their service in the 2016 Presidential Election. These measures will have the combined effect of showing PEOs that their service is appreciated while at the same time giving them a sense of pride and distinction for the important work they do to further our democratic process. The minimal budgetary impact will be far outweighed by the positive results we will receive by more intimately engaging our PEOs in the act of administering elections.