

2024 CLEARINGHOUSE AWARDS

20. Contingency Planning: Please provide a brief summary of your program.

The Coconino County Elections Department, in partnership with the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, launched an innovative training program to enhance situational awareness and emergency preparedness at polling locations across the county for the November 2024 General Election. This program tackles the unique challenges faced by Coconino County, the second-largest county in the United States by land area, encompassing remote communities and vast distances. The vast land area poses significant security risks during multiple polling emergencies that could overwhelm the county's resources. This two-pronged initiative exemplifies the county's unwavering commitment to empowering poll workers, ensuring they are prepared to create a safe, secure, and professional voting experience for voters, political observers, and the public.

Program Overview

It is common for election workers to ask election administrators for a plan on where to take cover if an incident occurs at a polling location. However conditions at polling places vary significantly, and a standardized checklist is insufficient for addressing dynamic situations. Balancing the safety of election workers and voters requires establishing a proactive and well-structured training program. Through collaboration and expertise, the Elections Department and Sheriff's Office developed a training program to meet the unique needs of election workers.

The training program was designed in two phases to provide both foundational knowledge and advanced preparedness. The first phase focused on integrating the CLARA model—Calm, Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add Information—into the standard training curriculum for all poll workers. The second phase offered in-depth situational awareness and emergency response training to specific, lead poll workers. The Sheriff's Office played a central role in delivering this specialized training. This dual approach ensured that all poll workers, from first-time participants to seasoned leaders, were well-prepared to handle routine operations and crisis situations.

Phase 1: The CLARA Model

The CLARA model served as the cornerstone of the general poll worker training. This model was designed to provide poll workers with a simple yet effective method for addressing a wide range of scenarios that might arise at polling locations.

1. **Calm:** Workers were trained to remain calm and composed in all situations, projecting confidence and control even in high-pressure moments.
2. **Listen:** Active listening skills were emphasized to ensure that poll workers could accurately understand and assess voter concerns or questions.

3. **Affirm:** Workers were taught to acknowledge voters' concerns empathetically, reinforcing trust and rapport.
4. **Respond:** Practical response techniques were provided to equip workers with tools to address issues efficiently and effectively.
5. **Add:** Workers were encouraged to offer additional resources or solutions as appropriate, enhancing the overall voter experience including escalating to the polling locations Inspector and providing Arizona State Law handouts for specific legal requirements for the voter to review outside of the poll.

The Elections Department integrated the CLARA model into the training program of all poll workers, providing them with a comprehensive and structured framework. This model equipped poll workers to effectively navigate the complexities of interpersonal interactions while addressing various challenges that may arise. Through this approach, they could respond to situations with professionalism, ensuring a positive and respectful experience for colleagues and voters alike.

Phase 2: Advanced Situational Awareness and Emergency Preparedness

Recognizing the critical role of lead poll workers in maintaining a secure and well-functioning polling place, the second phase of the program focused on advanced training. The Coconino County Sheriff's Office developed and delivered a specialized curriculum for lead workers, emphasizing situational awareness, threat identification, and emergency response strategies. This training included:

- **Situational Awareness:** Lead poll workers learned to assess their surroundings continuously, identify potential risks, and recognize early signs of conflict or disruptive behavior.
- **De-escalation Techniques:** Workers were equipped with strategies to defuse tense situations, ensuring that incidents could be resolved without escalation.
- **Emergency Communication:** The training emphasized clear and effective communication protocols for reporting incidents to law enforcement, emergency responders, and the elections department.
- **Scenario-Based Exercises:** Interactive and experience-based scenarios were discussed based on poll workers' previous experiences. These allowed participants to practice their skills in realistic scenarios, build confidence, reinforce key concepts, and build a more robust poll worker force based on learned experiences.

Overcoming Geographical Challenges

A defining feature of this program was its unwavering commitment to accessibility and safety, empowering poll workers throughout Coconino County. Despite the county's vast size and remote communities, the Sheriff's Office rose to the challenge, demonstrating

remarkable dedication by traveling to the most northern city in the county, Page, over two and half hours from the county's administrative center in Flagstaff, to conduct a regional wide training session for poll workers.

Conducting the training in Page, the Sheriff's Office ensured that lead poll workers in remote areas received the same exceptional, in-depth training as their peers in urban areas. This effort embodies the program's commitment to equity and honors the essential role that every poll worker plays in the electoral process, no matter where they are.

Results and Impact

The two-pronged training program yielded significant benefits, both immediately during the election and in the long-term development of poll worker capabilities. Key outcomes include:

1. **Enhanced Poll Worker Confidence:** Poll workers reported feeling more prepared and confident in handling both routine and challenging situations at the polls.
2. **Improved Voter Experience:** The emphasis on professionalism and empathetic communication contributed to a smoother and positive voting experience for voters across the county.
3. **Strengthened Collaboration:** The partnership between the Elections Department and the Sheriff's Office fostered a strong collaborative relationship, creating a model for future joint initiatives.
4. **Increased Safety and Security:** The advanced training provided lead poll workers with tools and techniques to deal with safety and security issues at polling locations, ensuring a secure environment for voters and staff alike.
5. **Equity in Training Access:** The program's efforts to reach remote areas, such as Page, demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and equitable access to resources.

Lessons Learned

The program also provided valuable insights that can inform future initiatives. Key lessons include:

- **Importance of Collaboration:** The success of the program highlighted the value of partnerships between elections departments and law enforcement agencies in addressing complex challenges.
- **Need for Flexibility:** Adapting training delivery methods to meet the needs of remote communities proved essential in overcoming geographical barriers.

- **Continual Improvement:** Feedback from poll workers and trainers was invaluable in identifying areas for refinement and enhancement in future training cycles.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for election workers to ask election administrators for a plan on where to take cover if an incident evolves at polling locations. As polling places and conditions are dynamic, the best approach is to empower election workers to assess situations by increasing their situational awareness. The Coconino County Elections Department and the Coconino County Sheriff's Office's two-pronged training program exemplifies best practices in contingency planning and emergency preparedness. By integrating the CLARA model into general training and providing advanced situational awareness training to lead poll workers, the program ensures that all polling locations were staffed with knowledgeable and prepared individuals. The additional effort to deliver training in remote areas, such as Page, further underscores the commitment to inclusivity and excellence. This initiative serves as a model for other jurisdictions seeking to enhance the safety, security, and professionalism of their election processes.

21. Creativity and Innovation (Contingency Planning): Does the program demonstrate new ideas or use existing tools in creative ways?

The Coconino County Elections Department and the Sheriff's Office collaboration demonstrates a creative and innovative approach to enhancing election security and preparedness. By combining the expertise of election officials with law enforcement, we are leveraging existing resources in a novel way to address the unique challenges of current election activities.

This partnership showcases a forward-thinking strategy that goes beyond traditional election administration. By providing situation awareness training to poll workers and offering specialized elections training from the Sheriff's office, Coconino County is taking proactive steps to ensure a safe and secure voting environment.

This initiative strengthens the county's election infrastructure and empowers poll workers with valuable skills that can be applied beyond their election duties. It exemplifies how local government agencies can work together synergistically, pooling their knowledge and resources to serve the community better.

This training model facilitates proactive collaboration among law enforcement agencies in the lead-up to elections, allowing them to address and coordinate legal strategies in anticipation of potential challenges. By aligning their efforts, agencies can effectively tackle pressing issues such as voter safety, election integrity, and the management of public demonstrations, ensuring a smoother electoral process and enhanced public confidence in the democratic system.

Coconino County sets a commendable example for other jurisdictions by fostering this interdepartmental collaboration. This approach enhances election security, elevates Coconino's responsiveness to our poll workers' needs, ensures retention, and builds public trust in the electoral process, which is crucial for a thriving democracy.

22. Cost Effectiveness (Contingency Planning): Does the program provide a good return on investment? This may be demonstrated by providing the overall cost (in time or resources) of running the program, or by comparing the overall cost with the number of voters served, staff time saved, or another metric.

The collaboration between the Coconino County Elections Department and the Sheriff's Office exemplifies a program with an exceptional return on investment, both in tangible and intangible ways. This innovative approach to election security and preparedness yields dividends that far outweigh its costs, creating a ripple effect of positive outcomes for the entire community.

Consider the following returns on this investment:

1. **Enhanced Security:** By implementing more robust security protocols, the program safeguards the integrity of elections, which is priceless in maintaining public trust and democratic principles.
2. **Voter Confidence:** As voters feel more comfortable and secure, participation in the democratic process may increase, strengthening the very foundation of our society.
3. **Skilled Poll Workers:** The specialized training cultivates a highly skilled group of election workers. Their expertise is instrumental during elections, enhances our community events, and effectively addresses emergencies.
4. **Retention of Poll Workers:** As poll workers feel more confident and valued due to their enhanced skills, they are more likely to return to future elections, reducing recruitment and training costs and ensuring a more experienced workforce.
5. **Interdepartmental Efficiency:** Departmental collaboration maximizes the use of existing resources, reducing overall costs and improving the efficiency of both the Elections Department and Sheriff's Office.
6. **Community Resilience:** The skills acquired through this training significantly enhance the community's overall preparedness for various situations, extending far beyond elections.
7. **Reputational Benefits:** Coconino County's innovative approach will undoubtedly attract positive attention, paving the way for increased funding opportunities and establishing a model for other counties.

While the initial investment of time and resources may appear daunting, the long-term benefits to election integrity, public safety, and community trust are undeniable and far-reaching. This program demonstrates that safeguarding our democratic processes requires a well-planned investment that delivers returns extending well beyond the polling place, ultimately strengthening the very fabric of our society. In truth, this program represents not just an investment in election security; it is a bold commitment to the future of democracy itself. Coconino County's innovative training program is a return on investment that will benefit us all.

23. Can be Replicated by Other Offices (Contingency Planning): Can the program be easily adapted to meet the needs of communities in other states?

Yes, absolutely! The collaborative program between Coconino County's Elections Department and the Sheriff's Office is innovative and highly adaptable, making it an excellent model for communities nationwide. This program's strength lies in its fundamental principles: interdepartmental cooperation, proactive security measures, and comprehensive training. These elements are universal and tailor-made to fit the unique needs of any community, regardless of size, location, or specific challenges.

The advantages of this approach are its scalability and flexibility. Whether it's a small rural county or a large metropolitan area, the core can be adjusted to local needs. Each community can customize the training content, adapt the security protocols, and scale the resources according to their specific needs and available assets.

Moreover, the program's focus on situation awareness and specialized election security is relevant everywhere. As election integrity concerns remain national, this model provides a robust framework that any state can build upon.

By implementing such a program, other communities can:

1. Strengthen their election security
2. Boost voter confidence
3. Enhance inter-agency cooperation
4. Improve overall community preparedness
5. Establish rapport with law enforcement agencies.

This program's adaptability is not just about replication; it's about inspiration. It shows other communities that innovative solutions are possible when different departments collaborate creatively.

Coconino County has lit a beacon that can guide election offices nationwide. Their program is a testament to what's possible when local agencies think outside the box and collaborate for the greater good. It's a shining example of how a local initiative can have far-reaching impacts, potentially transforming election security practices nationwide.

So yes, this program can be easily adapted to meet the needs of communities in other states. It should be a call to action for election officials everywhere to explore new partnerships, embrace innovative training methods, and continuously strive to safeguard our democratic processes. The potential for positive change is limitless, starting with programs like this one.

24. Meets Category Requirements (Contingency Planning): How does the program relate to the category in which it was entered?

The Coconino County Elections Department and Sheriff's Office collaboration exemplifies the essence of the new "Contingency Planning: Exemplary Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Efforts" category in the EAC Clearinghouse Awards. This innovative program perfectly embodies the spirit of proactive preparedness and inter-agency cooperation that the category seeks to recognize.

This initiative demonstrates exceptional foresight in preparing for potential emergencies during elections by providing situation awareness training to poll workers and offering specialized elections training from the Sheriff's office. The program's focus on enhancing security protocols and empowering election workers with critical skills showcases a comprehensive approach to contingency planning.

Moreover, this collaboration highlights the effective partnership between election officials and law enforcement, a key aspect of the category's criteria. By fostering this interdepartmental synergy, Coconino County has created a robust framework for rapid and coordinated responses to potential emergencies during elections.

The program's emphasis on preparation and response aligns perfectly with the category's dual focus on contingency planning and emergency preparedness. It serves as a shining example of how election offices can work proactively to safeguard the democratic process while being ready to act swiftly and effectively in the face of unforeseen challenges.

This initiative meets and exceeds the category's expectations, setting a new election security and emergency preparedness standard. It stands as an inspiring model for other jurisdictions, demonstrating how innovative thinking and collaborative efforts can significantly enhance the resilience and integrity of our electoral system.

25. Improves Outcomes for Voters and Election Officials (Contingency Planning): Does the program improve outcomes or provide excellent customer service to voters? Alternatively, does the program improve outcomes for election officials or staff members who adopt it?

The collaborative program between Coconino County's Elections Department and the Sheriff's Office shines as a beacon of excellence, transforming the experience for voters and election officials alike. This initiative elevates the voter experience by fostering a safer, secure environment. Enhanced security protocols and well-trained poll workers inspire confidence and trust in the electoral process. Voters can cast their ballots with peace of mind, knowing a dedicated team is protecting their right to vote. This heightened sense of security has the power to empower voter confidence, reinforcing the very foundation of our democracy.

The benefits are equally transformative for election officials and poll workers. The specialized training equips them with a unique set of skills that goes beyond traditional election administration. They become more than poll workers; they become guardians of democracy, armed with situation awareness and emergency response capabilities. This empowerment enhances their effectiveness during elections and boosts their confidence and job satisfaction.

The program's holistic approach to election security creates a ripple effect of positive outcomes:

1. Enhanced preparedness for various scenarios
2. Improved communication and coordination between departments
3. Increased ability to handle potential crises swiftly and effectively
4. Greater public trust in the election process

Moreover, the Elections Department and Sheriff's Office collaboration sets a new standard for inter-agency cooperation. It breaks down silos, fostering a culture of shared responsibility for election integrity. This collaborative spirit can permeate other aspects of local governance, leading to more efficient and effective public service.

In essence, this program improves outcomes—it revolutionizes them. It transforms election administration from a routine process into a dynamic, security-conscious operation that prioritizes voter confidence and staff empowerment. By adopting this program, election officials are not just running an election; they're safeguarding the very essence of our democratic system.

This initiative is a shining example of what's possible when we approach election administration with innovation, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to excellence. It's more than just a program; it's a movement towards a more secure, trustworthy, and resilient democratic process.