

THE U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

National Competition for Best Practices



2016

Successful **RETENTION** *Practices*



Submitted By

New Hanover County Board of Elections

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Category: *Best Retention Practices*

I. INTRODUCTION

The New Hanover County Board of Elections welcomes the opportunity to submit our entry titled “*Successful Retention Practices*,” in the **2016 National Competition For Best Practices**, sponsored by The U.S. Election Assistance Commission. Our election worker retention efforts have been highly successful and, in our humble opinion, have reached a level of excellence deserving of your judicious consideration. In addition, we believe all county and state boards of election, and related entities, form an elections franchise of which we are proud to be a part. Thus, we are eager to share and exchange best practices with our peers, for the good of the franchise and enhanced services to citizens throughout the U.S.

II. AGENCY BACKGROUND

The New Hanover County Board of Elections is located at 230 Government Center Drive, Suite 38, Wilmington, North Carolina 28403. The agency is governed by a three-member Board of Directors, in accordance with N.C. General Statute 163. *(See attached Board of Elections)* Elections Director Derek L. Bowens serves as the chief executive and is responsible for elections administration and day-to-day operations. With the assistance of five full-time staff and projected 500+ temporary election workers and election officials, the Elections Director ensures that the citizens of New Hanover County receive quality comprehensive voter and election services, with the following overarching mission as a guide:

The mission of the New Hanover County Board of Elections is to provide the highest level of professional standards to ensure accurate, honest, and fair elections through accountability and integrity, and to provide all citizens our services in the most efficient, effective and timely manner.

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III. SUCCESSFUL RETENTION PRACTICES

A. Election Official Service Awards



Some of the 78 election officials (accompanied by board members and staff) who were recognized for 10, 15 and 20 Elections served, on June 24, 2016, in New Hanover County. –Photos by Brett Cottrell

Probably one of the most important efforts to be undertaken by the New Hanover County Board of Elections is the collective recognition of election officials for service longevity. In checking historical documentation, as far back as 2006, and through inquiries with veteran staff and precinct volunteers, the Elections Director determined that there had never been any formal awards program to recognize precinct workers for service in New Hanover County. We were surprised to learn that some election officials had worked as many as 20 consecutive elections over the past 10 years following final data compilation and validation.



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Event planning took place over a two-month period. The result was a well-organized and professionally-executed awards banquet and ceremony. Approximately 80 individuals, including election officials, board members, State and Party representatives, and staff were in attendance.

The event was held at the County Executive Development Center. It was an outstanding and long-overdue occasion, at which many encouraging remarks and accolades were given. At the designated time, Director Bowens called each recipient to receive his or her award, which consisted of a framed certificate indicating the amount of elections served, a service pin and a photograph with members of the Board. An attached summary titled *"Election Official Service Awards"* describes the implementation, process and program results. We look forward to the next biennial event.

The following photographic highlights of the **2016 Precinct Official Service Awards** give a glimpse and sense of the special time that was enjoyed by all.

Award Recipients - 20 Elections Served



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Ceremony Photos

June 24, 2016



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A Diversity of Election officials--An Abundance of Experience



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At various times, during the Election Official Service Awards, there was intense focus on the speakers' remarks. There were also emotional moments of smiles and tears. Such was the case, when one of the election officials presented a custom-made political parties quilt that she made, just for the New Hanover County Board of Elections. All-in-all there was an obvious common bond and sense of dedication and pride that permeated the room. Retention initiatives, such as the Election Official Service Awards, are the lifeblood of the New Hanover County Board of Elections and its ability to provide increasingly excellent voter and elections services to the citizens of New Hanover County.



(See Web Links Attachment to access more photos from the

2016 Election Official Service Awards.)

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B. Retrospective Meetings

The New Hanover County Board of Elections conducts “Retrospective” meetings, following Primaries and each General Election, to collectively reflect on precinct-level accomplishments and lessons learned. These optional meetings are primarily attended by Chief Judges and Judges, to engage in discussion with the Elections Director (and Board members, when available) about the positive and not-so-positive experiences that occurred at their precincts on Election Day. Election officials are encouraged to give open and honest feedback, constructive criticism and suggestions, for how to improve precinct-level quality and efficiency. The Elections Director also gives a preview of future plans and new releases. Meetings are typically scheduled for two-and a half-hours, during the early evening, in one of the large training rooms at the New Hanover County Government Center. Appetizers and beverages are served. On average, 75 election officials are in attendance. Election officials sign up for the Retrospective through the NHC Board of Elections Training Portal.



(See Web Links Attachment to access the
Elections Retrospective PowerPoint Presentation.)

C. F.O.C.U.S.

Another successful, innovative, and popular practice, utilized by the New Hanover County Board of Elections is *qualitative* group feedback. Previously, following each election, feedback was received from election officials in several typical ways—i.e., via emails, telephone calls, in-person, and through survey questionnaires. In an effort to find more efficient and effective means of gathering, discussing and relating feedback, the *interactive focus group* method was adopted. Subsequently, “**FOCUS**” was the name chosen to convey the group’s purpose and intent. And the full meaning of the F.O.C.U.S. acronym was decided to stand for “***Finding Order,***



Consistency, Understanding, and Simplicity.” By definition, a focus group consists of people who share opinions, experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward specific processes, policies and procedures. Our FOCUS group concentrates primarily on training and implementation of procedures. The FOCUS group consists of ten Chief Judges and Judges from more than 40 large to small precincts. Each was invited, through a FOCUS Survey, to serve yearly appointments. Each one who participates in the group has the following:

- Access to draft procedures and precinct level implementations (i.e., recommendations to add additional provisional voting booths, etc.)
- Ability to request precinct level enhancements by majority vote
- Compensated meetings for attendance at the Board of Elections

The initial FOCUS encounter began with a kick-off luncheon meeting for which each group member was compensated. Meetings are limited to no more than two hours.

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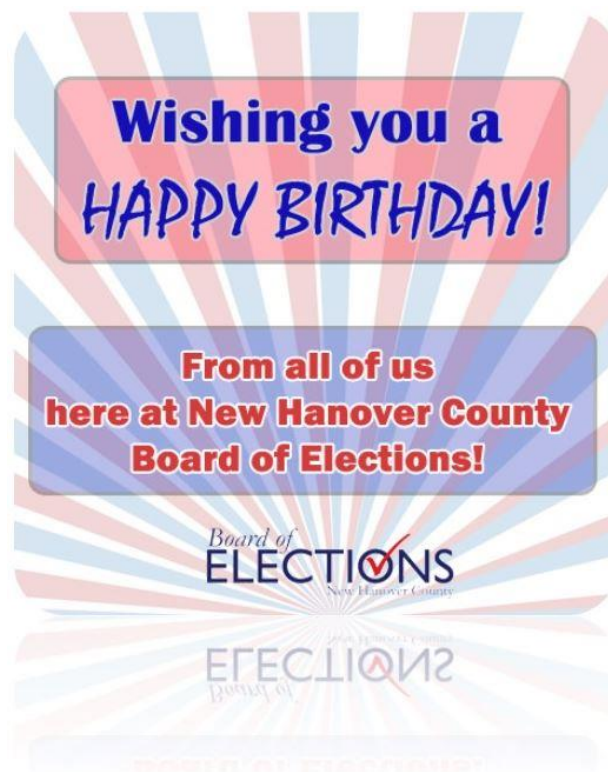
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The goal of each FOCUS group meeting is to recommend quality assurance changes to the Elections Director. This program ultimately ensures that our election officials have a voice in our administrative ideas that affect their Election Day experience.



D. Birthday Recognitions

Extending birthday greetings throughout the year is a simple, but meaningful, act that serves as a reminder to election officials that they are thought of and appreciated, not just during the elections. This additional outreach to election officials is part of the New Hanover County Board of Elections' overall efforts to retain their service commitment and express that they are valued. Birthday recognitions also generate important exchanges between election officials and the Board of Elections. For example: If an electronic Birthday Blast is returned as *"Undeliverable,"* this notifies the Board of Elections that the precinct official's email address may no longer be valid or that there may be an interruption in their internet service. In which case, the Board of Elections will follow up with a phone call and, if contact cannot be made, a letter of inquiry may be sent in hopes that the precinct official will respond to update the contact information. Based on positive feedback from election officials, this qualitative effort will be continued.



IV. INNOVATION AND DUPLICATION

The New Hanover County Board of Elections constantly evaluates customer service, staff and material resources, to assure that proper attention is given to the details that make for good governance and implementation of best practices. This requires a commitment to developing and fine-tuning administrative and operating procedures, as well as a willingness to try new approaches; create and share new ideas and methods, which result in exceptional Elections Administration. To this end, the New Hanover County Board of Elections is pleased to highlight four of our successful retention practices, which have been tried and deemed a great success! We know this, because of the positive feedback from election officials, and because of improved operations and the significant number of them who have chosen to return to service for the 2016 General Election.



Duplication of all of the successful practices described, herein, can be accomplished by any county board of elections, with the proper commitment of time and minimal amount of resources. We have endeavored to describe our efforts, and the processes we use, in such a way as to facilitate easy conveyance of the information. Additionally, we have provided links to the specific web pages that show forms, videos if applicable, and information related to this competitive presentation. We hope our successful practices will serve as examples of, and a catalyst for, new developments and retention efforts by county boards of election throughout the U.S.

V. SUSTAINABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

The New Hanover County Board of Elections assessed each of the successful practices submitted for consideration to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. How and whether each initiative could be maintained and readily adapted, if necessary, were primary considerations. We recognize that several key elements must be present throughout, in order to sustain the initiatives or reinstitute them when needed. In a white paper by Peter York, Senior Vice President and Director of Research for the TCC Group, titled ***“The Sustainability Formula: How Nonprofit Organizations Can Thrive in the Emerging Economy,”*** he asserts the formula for sustaining a viable program as: ***Sustainability = Leadership + Adaptability + Program Capacity***. Although not all-inclusive, we agree. As for adaptability, each of the initiatives can be modified, suspended, and re-launched, with little to no disruption or impact on service delivery, operations, or cost. In fact, the benefits of the Precinct Official Service Wards, Retrospective Meetings, FOCUS meetings, and Birthday Recognitions, far outweigh the cost of implementation (“bang for the buck”). The Elections Director has readily determined that Program Capacity is more than adequate to undertake each initiative. And, the budget and number of assigned staff are adequate to maintain all requisite responsibilities, for continuance of our best successful practices on an ongoing basis.

The effectiveness of each retention effort has been proven. Overall, we are experiencing a new level of retention success, largely due to support from our Elections Board, the ingenuity of the Elections Director, and a significant time commitment from our staff. As with all aspects of operations, election officials are encouraged to provide constructive feedback as well as open and honest suggestions for continued success.

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NHC Elections Board and Director



Jonathan W. Washburn
Chairman



Jamie S. Getty
Secretary



Thomas C. Pollard
Member and Parliamentarian



Derek L. Bowens
Elections Director

WEB LINKS

(Click on the following links to access the web site or web page for each associated topic.)

[New Hanover County Board of Elections](#)

[2016 Election Official Service Awards](#)

[New Hanover County – Flickr Photo Gallery](#)

[Retrospective PowerPoint Presentation](#)

[2016 Judicial Primary Post Election Survey](#)



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Election Official Service Awards

1 IMPLEMENTATION

Beginning in 2016, the New Hanover County Board of Elections staff began to formulate ideas on how we could show appreciation to election officials that work in New Hanover County precincts on a consistent basis. We came to the conclusion that the most valuable means by which to honor election officials and recognize service milestones, was to implement an Election Officials Service Awards ceremony.

2 PROCESS

Beginning in January of 2016, prior to the Primary Elections in North Carolina, the New Hanover County Board of Elections engaged in several processes to determine recipients of election official service awards. The following was accomplished:

1. Established service benchmarks for award eligibility and ceremony recurrence cycles
 - We came to the determination that we would honor officials in a special ceremony for 10, 15, or 20 elections of service on a biennial basis.
2. Established deliverables to be provided to eligible recipients
 - We determined that each official would receive the following:
 - Service pin indicating the number of elections served since the base year
 - Framed Certificate of Appreciation indicating the amount of elections served since the base year
 - Catered meal in a formal venue
 - Individual photograph with the Board of Elections by professional photographer
 - Group photograph with all recipients
3. Compiled service history data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections Statewide Elections Information Management System (SEIMS) and the New Hanover County Board of Elections Precinct Official Management Database (POMD)
 - In North Carolina, service history is tracked by a unique identifier (voter registration number). We were able to compile electronic service history records from 10 years prior (2006). 2006 became our base year for service calculations.
4. Imported data into an access database to create a count query on voter registration number
 - This gave us the amount of elections served for each official in our active directory

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5. Developed a report and used Google forms to send out the invitation to all election officials that were eligible based upon the analysis
 - In total 78 people were honored (58 for 10 elections served since 2006, 18 for 15 elections served since 2006, and 2 for 20 elections served since 2006.)

3 RESULTS

Recipients of the 2016 Service Awards were very appreciative and many of them indicated that they had never been honored for their service over the years. We have received countless compliments on the event and it inspired many officials to continue with their service to the elections industry in North Carolina.