

Innovation Clearie Award Proposal
Native American Outreach Program
Coconino County, Arizona

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Summary

By today's standards, innovation in an industry means applying technology to improve a process. However, as research in political science has shown, what is most effective in getting people to vote is not fancy technology or data-driven algorithms but face-to-face communication. In elections, you need both an effective personal communications strategy and a service delivery model that recognizes that different populations of voters in the jurisdiction may need different levels of election services.

In Coconino County, the *Native American Outreach Program* has developed into an innovative hub for implementing our communications and elections service delivery to the four Native American populations who reside in the County: the Havasupai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, and San Juan Paiute Tribe. This program coordinates all aspects of County elections on tribal lands. They develop voter outreach messaging, select polling locations, hire and train election workers, manage and implement in-person early voting, manage polling locations on election day, and manage the County's largest election day vote center. This *Outreach Program* is coordinated by Coconino County employees who are also Native American. The insight and physical presence of Native American staff increases community member's confidence in their election administration.

Other local election jurisdictions can benefit from also developing a focused outreach program the *Native American Outreach Program* that addresses the needs of specific populations in a county and communicates in a manner that addresses local cultural norms. These special populations could include older registrants, registrants with disabilities language minorities, or populations with a history of exclusion in the jurisdiction.

The *Native American Outreach Program*

The *Native American Outreach Program* was created in the late 1970's, when County Recorder Helen Hudgens hired a staff member to conduct voter registration drives on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations, to ensure more eligible Native American citizens were registered to vote. The program expanded under subsequent county recorders and is a critical component.

Over the past decade, the *Native American Outreach Program* has expanded dramatically under the guidance of two full-time staff members who have over 50 years of combined elections experience. Alta Edison, the Native American Outreach Manager, has been working for the Coconino County Recorder for more than 40 years, and Ray Daw, the Outreach Lead, has been with Coconino County Elections for more than 10 years. Every election year, Alta Edison and Ray Daw supervise three to four temporary employees who that support election operations by conducting additional voter registration outreach, serving on special boards to help homebound voters vote, and providing translation and constituent services.

This *Native American Outreach Program* is based in Tuba City, the second largest city in the Coconino County and almost 78 miles away from the main election's office. It is centrally located on the County's portion of the Navajo Nation and next to two Hopi villages, Upper Moenkopi and Lower Moenkopi.

The program is built on six pillars:

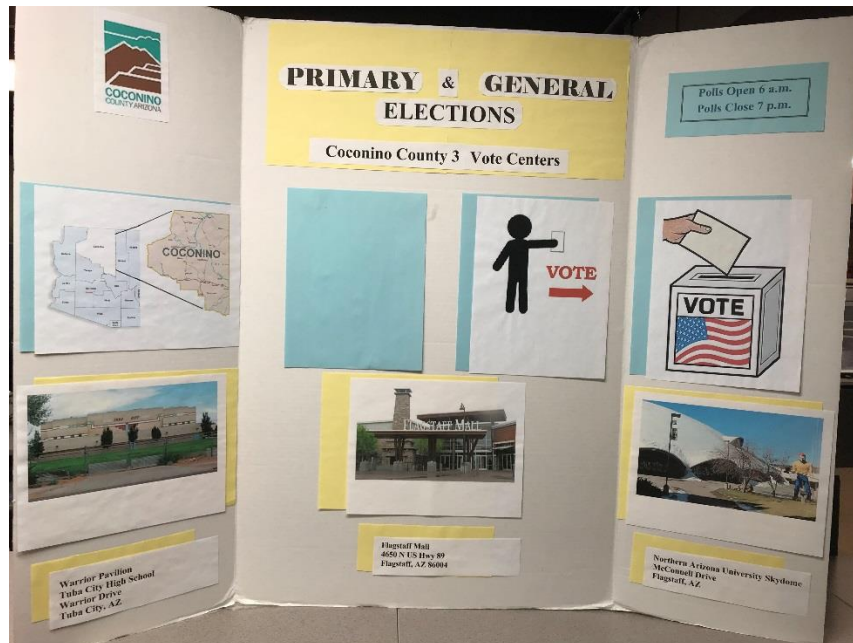
1. Effective leadership by members of the local community. The success of this program is due to the efforts of the staff who understand the local milieu. Alta Edison and Ray Daw, the two staff members who run the program, are both from Coconino County and grew up on the Navajo reservation. This team works year-round with key community leaders to provide consistent, correct election information. During election years, this team is supplemented with temporary outreach staff who represent other Native American communities within Coconino County. The staffs' awareness and consideration of tribal customs and processes makes our office well-respected by members of all local Native American communities.



Outreach worker Ray Daw conducting a presentation at a Tonalea Chapter meeting.

2. A sustained commitment by the County to be involved in the community. The Tuba City Elections Office allows community members to receive the services—voter registration, voter education, and early voting—that are fundamental to the electoral process. The Tuba City Elections Office hosts early voting during the entire 27-day early voting period prior to every election. Since the office was opened in 2007, the number of people voting early in-person there has increased dramatically. This location is very beneficial for elderly Navajo voters; many want individualized language assistance in a less stressful environment than Election Day.

3. Knowing the language. Our outreach staff are recognized experts in translating election materials from English to Navajo. They coordinate with other counties in Northern Arizona each election to ensure that every county uses the same translation for initiatives and referenda on the ballot.



Presentation Materials used to explain our new Vote Centers.

Dine is a very descriptive oral language. Words that may be easily translated into Spanish can become a long description when translated into Dine. Our Outreach staff work closely with the Navajo Nation Election Administration to develop a glossary of current, shared election terms. The Dine Election Glossary ensures that the Dine translation used in Coconino County is the same as the translation used in New Mexico and Utah. Outreach staff members work similarly with the Hopi tribe for language interpretation.

For each election, the outreach staff design a handbook—containing both translations and graphics that help voters understand the candidate races or ballot questions—that is used by all election workers so that correct and consistent translations are provided to Dine-speaking voters. The outreach staff also work with part-time staff who are fluent in Hopi to create a handbook that is used at our polling location on the Hopi reservation. (A sample of this handbook is included as a separate document sent with this submission.)

4. Ongoing, culturally appropriate outreach. Outreach in Coconino County goes beyond conducting voter registration drives—which are done regularly at the community flea markets and cultural events—but also involves attending Navajo Chapter meetings and Hopi tribal meetings. There, staff present information about upcoming elections and educate voters on procedural issues, such as how to correctly complete and return a by-mail ballot. They create and distribute fliers throughout the various Native American communities, in locations like senior centers, chapter houses, medical clinics, and convenience stores. These meetings provide residents an opportunity to make recommendations about how to improve the voting process in their community. The staff present in both English and Dine, the Navajo language, to ensure that all community members are aware of key election information.

Culturally appropriate outreach also extends to providing election materials in alternate language formats. Our outreach staff worked with Navajo County, our neighbor to the east, to design a Dine language “I Voted Sticker,” which are handed out to voters at our Navajo Nation polling locations. This sticker is extremely popular and shows our Navajo voters that we appreciate their community and want to tailor services that meet their needs. We have received numerous compliments on the sticker, with community members saying that it instills community pride when they wear it on Election Day.



Because Dine is an oral language, the Outreach staff determined that radio is the best way to reach our Dine-only language speakers. These Dine language radio ads are written and recorded by Native American Outreach Program staff, and provide voter registration, early voting, and Election Day information. When replicating this model, local election offices will need to understand the nuances how information is communicated in their communities.

5. Recruiting community members as election workers and respecting cultural sensitivities. Research has shown that when voters go to the polls, they typically want to encounter an election worker who looks like them. In the Hopi and Navajo communities, it is especially critical because the election workers need to be able to be fluent in the tribal language. The outreach staff ensure that at least two election workers at each voting location speak the tribal language. Staff at the Tuba City office speak both Navajo and Hopi, as do Election Day election workers in Tuba City.

The outreach staff also are acutely aware of cultural sensitivities election workers face in dealing with members of their clan or close community. For example, it would be culturally insensitive to ask a clan member or neighbor for identification before voting; they are members of your extended family. Because of this, our outreach staff recommended that we send County employees to all polling locations—on and off reservation—to serve in the role of checking in voters and asking for identification. This ensures that no Native American election worker must do something that would be disrespectful in their culture.

6. Coordinating polling locations, early voting, and vote centers. The Navajo Nation's elections are held concomitant with Arizona's elections. This makes Election Day a very festive and social time but also means that a great deal of coordination must be done to ensure that there is appropriate space for County polling locations on the Navajo Nation. We try to have voting at the Chapter Houses on the Navajo Nation—or in buildings adjacent to the Chapter Houses—because these are the locations that the Navajo Nation uses for its election polling locations. This coordination makes it more convenient for our Navajo voters to be civically engaged.

Because we share polling location locations with several of the Navajo Nation's Chapters, our outreach staff must work closely with the Navajo Nation Election Administration to ensure we do not hire any election workers who may be related to Navajo Nation candidates on the ballot. Doing so would be a violation of the Navajo Nation's election laws.

When Outreach is more than Outreach

One of the ways that outreach can make an impact is when our outreach staff go the extra step to serve their communities. In Coconino County, our outreach staff make special arrangements for delivery of non-typical supplies at some reservation polling locations. For example, our Native American Outreach staff even rebuilt the structure where for our Navajo Mountain polling location.

One of our most challenging polling locations is the Havasupai Tribe's village, Supai, located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. The only way to reach the village is to hike, ride a horse or mule down an eight-mile trail, or fly in via helicopter. Our Outreach staff members helicopter to the village to conduct training for our Havasupai election workers. They also coordinate flying the polling location supplies to the village the weekend prior to the election and having it picked up by a village member and carried to the voting location. After the election, the supplies are taken to the helicopter landing location and air-lifted out.

Sensitivity to Native American Cultures

Coconino County, located in northern Arizona and home to the Grand Canyon, is a diverse, unique, historic, sacred, and beautiful place. According to archival records at the Museum of Northern Arizona, the name "Coconino" is derived from "Cohonino," the Hopi word for the Havasupai and Yavapai people. The county is the second-largest county by area in the contiguous United States, behind San Bernardino County, California, at 18,661 square miles (48,300 km²), making it larger than nine states. Not surprisingly, Native Americans comprise

approximately 30% of the county's total population. The Navajo population is by far the largest segment of the Native population.

It is important to remember that Arizona has a history of discrimination against Native Americans. After much legal wrangling, in 1948, Arizona no longer officially discriminated against Native Americans. However, the State has a history, much like that of the Jim Crow South, where poll taxes, literacy tests, and English language tests were used to disenfranchise Native Americans. In addition, Counties typically would not put polling locations on tribal land or close to Native American communities. The history of this discrimination is noted in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Several counties in Arizona, including Coconino County, were covered under Section 5 because of a history of discrimination against Native Americans.

Conclusion

The concept of the *Native American Outreach Program* is easily replicable in counties with diverse populations, especially those where there is a history of (or perception of) discrimination. Having staff from the community means that they can teach their coworkers about the cultural differences across a local community. Our office places great importance on understanding these differences and learning to respect them.

This program informs the decision making throughout the office. For example, modern methods for registering and voting have not been widely embraced on our Native American communities. Many people living on a reservation do not have access to the internet, mail delivery to their home (or even close to their home), and standardized street addresses. Instead, these individuals prefer to conduct business—including voting—in person instead of by mail. For this reason, we provide extensive polling location voting across the reservation, even when precincts could be made into vote-by-mail precincts.

One key criterion for evaluating the success of any program is cost-effectiveness. The Native American Outreach Program is cost-effective in a variety of ways. It reduces transportation costs by having outreach based on the reservation during election years and increases our efficiencies associated with recruiting and retaining poll workers.

This outreach program has been a great success because of the close coordination between our office and the Native American population. We recognize that Native American citizens take great pride in voting. Election day is a celebration and a community event at the various reservation polling locations. It is important to remember that many Americans have had to fight hard for their right to vote. Election officials can build trust with important communities by listening to their members and working with them to develop and implement election services that work best for their needs. In Coconino County, we have done the hard work to build a successful Native American Outreach Program that continues to evolve and improve so we can address the unique needs of our Native American voters.