PRECINCT ELECTION OFFICIAL (PEO) RECRUITMENT AND VOTER OUTREACH PROGRAMS

BACKGROUND

In March 2019, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose expressed his vision for the 2020 election cycle. At the top of his priority list was recruiting a new wave of precinct election officials (PEOs) for the 2020 elections. Secretary LaRose formed the Precinct Election Official Working Group -- a group of select leaders from Ohio's 88 county boards of elections. This group met monthly to discuss new, innovative ways to recruit election officials.

With 65% of Ohio's poll workers over the age of 60, the dangers of COVID-19 pushed recruitment ideas to be a crucial part of the Secretary's efforts to ensure polling locations were fully staffed on Election Day. COVID-19 also prompted additional outreach methods to Ohioans on how to register to vote, how to request an absentee ballot, and the safety procedures of voting in person.

POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT:

In July, when it was evident the COVID-19 global pandemic was here to stay, Secretary LaRose encouraged the Supreme Court of Ohio to make a temporary rule change allowing licensed attorneys who trained and served as a PEO from 5:30am – 7:30pm on Election Day to earn four free, continuing legal education credits (CLE's). Ohio was the first state to allow attorneys statewide to earn CLE credit for participating in the election. This innovative partnership, called Lawyers for Liberty, helped ensure a ready supply of high-quality precinct election officials.

RESULTS OF 'LAWYERS FOR LIBERTY':

- Over 1,065 attorneys served as precinct election officials on election day

- 64 counties had attorneys who served as precinct election officials

- Cuyahoga County had the largest number of attorneys with 293 attorneys participating

- The feedback from the attorneys and the boards of elections was extremely positive

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOLLOWED:

The innovative Lawyers for Liberty recruitment campaign, and the publicity that came with it, inspired other professional organizations to create similar programs encouraging members of their professions to serve as Ohio poll workers.

- The Accountancy Board of Ohio allowed Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) to obtain 4.8 hours of continuing public education general credit for serving as a poll worker on Election Day

- The Ohio Real Estate Commission awarded 3 hours of core law continuing education credit to active and inactive Ohio Real Estate Licensees who served as poll workers on Election Day

- Social workers earned Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credits through the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) for serving as poll workers on Election Day

- The Ohio Library Council approved 6 hours of continuing education credit for the Ohio Public Librarian or Ohio Public Library Staff certification program for librarians serving as poll workers on Election Day

The Secretary of State's Office, in conjunction with the PEO Working Group, identified groups and professional organizations to include in the outreach. Staff created various toolkits that organizations and boards of elections used to help with PEO recruitment. The toolkits included draft social media posts, sample recruitment letters, creative stickers and posters, and sample recruitment commercials. Organizations and businesses utilized the specific toolkits to reach new groups of Ohioans with the message that a new generation of poll workers was needed. Boards used these toolkits throughout their counties to recruit as well.

We furthered our reach into untapped populations by utilizing national cooperation with groups such as Poll Hero and Power to the Polls. The Secretary zoomed with young leaders attached to these projects to encourage recruitment in their schools and communities as part of national efforts. Poll Hero reported that more than 5,000 Ohioans signed up to be a poll worker through their website.

As a final tool available on our website to allow counties to be held accountable as the election approached, our office provided Ohioans with weekly poll worker number updates as reported by the 88 county boards of elections. This was the first state 'poll worker tracker' that set a goal for committed and trained poll workers and updated weekly. More information is available in our release.

OTHER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGNS:

- **Give a Day for Democracy**: Partnering with businesses to offer employees the day off to be poll workers. Secretary LaRose announced this initiative with an event in Cincinnati -- Western & Southern Financial allowed employees to work the polls with a paid day off and kicked off a trend followed by many other companies statewide. Click here to watch the video. Many business, non-profit and public-sector entities around Ohio joined this effort, including The Ohio State University. Click here to view the toolkit.
- **Second Call to Duty:** This initiative is asked veterans who took an oath to defend their country to again defend democracy on November 3rd by being a poll worker. Click here to view the toolkit.
- **Work the Day, Share Your Pay:** During a year that was hard to host fundraisers for many charities, poll workers were encouraged to donate their earnings to a nonprofit or charity of their choice. Click here to view the toolkit.
- **Youth at the Booth:** In Ohio, 17-year-old high school seniors can serve as poll workers! This is a great way to engage high school students in the voting process. The Secretary hosted multiple Zoom calls with high school classes from all over the state to promote this effort. Click here to view the toolkit.

VOTER REGISTRATION OUTREACH PROGRAMS

In 2015 as an Ohio State Senator, Secretary LaRose introduced legislation that would allow eligible Ohioans to register to vote online. After all, Ohio is stronger when voices from every generation are heard. To help bridge this gap in the 2020 election cycle, we asked businesses who have a unique capability to reach younger Ohioans to partner with the Secretary of State's office to increase the number of registered Ohio voters. According to the Harris Poll/Nielsen, more than half of 21- to 44-year-olds have said they drink craft beer.

The **"Raise a Glass to Democracy"** voter registration campaign began as a brainstorm between the Secretary of State's office and Rhinegeist Brewery. With Rhinegeist's creative support, more than 50 Ohio breweries signed up to encourage civic engagement and boost voter registration by creating a new beer and/or using the program labels. Many breweries had their beers ready for sale at their respective locations by early September, well ahead of the October 5th registration deadline. The label promotes the VoteOhio.gov website while also allowing each brewer to include their own branding.

Partnering with craft breweries, an important representation of Ohio small business, not only expanded outreach on the message of voter registration and updating current registration information, but also helped brewery owners and employees weather the COVID storm that many small businesses are facing. An updated map of each participating brewery was published for Ohioans to know which breweries were participating.

Knowing that breweries reached a specific targeted audience, Secretary LaRose launched **"Styling for Democracy. Now Vote!"** - a partnership with barbershops and salons, and the schools that feed into them, to reach more Ohio communities. For generations, beauty salons and barbershops have served as special places in neighborhoods of color – as much a social hub as they are an economic engine. They are places not only to get hair care services, but sanctuaries where neighbors can discuss politics and the issues of importance in the community. The partnership was designed to encourage members of their community to sign up to be a poll worker on November 3rd, register their family and friends to vote, and educate the community on requesting and completing absentee ballots. Resources were sent more than 100 barbershops, salons, and schools across the state.

MEDIA BUZZ

Because of Secretary LaRose's unique and innovative poll worker recruitment and voter registration programs, major media markets statewide wanted to share these efforts with Ohioans who wanted to demonstrate their civic engagement – this happened through the form of hundreds of print, radio and television hits.

EXAMPLES:
- **"Raise a Glass for Democracy"** press event garnered earned media in Columbus, Toledo, Mansfield, Cleveland and more. The Columbus Dispatch Editorial Board wrote an editorial with the headline ["Engaging Ohio voters during COVID-19 takes creativity"](link) to discuss our outreach efforts.

- **"Styling for Democracy. NOW VOTE!"** was featured in [newspapers](#) and [broadcasted](#) on television stations around the state.

- **"Second Call of Duty"** was featured on [various Military organizations](#) statewide.

- **"Lawyers for Liberty"** was heavily advertised in [legal news publications](#).

THE OUTCOME:

As a result of these efforts, 56,789 Ohioans were trained and ready to serve poll workers on Election Day, and most importantly, none of Ohio's thousands of polling locations was understaffed These efforts, and the hard work of the 88 county boards of elections, helped Ohio recruit a new generation of poll workers, many of which will continue to serve their fellow Ohioans for years to come. Thousands more Ohioans learned about the importance of civic participation and "defending democracy."

The above programs also led to all-time record-breaking voter participation -- making one of the most difficult elections in our state's history also the most accessible and successful, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The nearly 6 million votes cast are 200,344 more votes than the all-time record of 5,773,777 set in the 2008 general election.
- The record 74% turnout surpasses the average of the presidential general election average from 2000-2020 of 65%.
- All 88 counties had a higher turnout than in 2016
- Eight counties had a turnout rate above 80 percent. The previous record of two was set in 2000.