



Board of Elections

EAC Clearinghouse Award Submission

Category: Best Practices in Recruiting, Retaining, and Training Poll Workers

Wake County Board of Elections

Written by the staff at the Wake County Board of Elections

1200 N. New Hope Rd. Raleigh, NC 27610

Wake County, North Carolina, is home to more than 798,000 registered voters. During the 2020 General Election, 643,423 voters cast their ballot in Wake County, with over 459,000 casting their ballot in-person on Election Day or during the seventeen-day Early Voting period. With 206 Election Day precincts and 20 early voting locations, it takes thousands of Election Officials to conduct a successful election in Wake County.

After the March 3 Primary Election, we immediately began brainstorming ways to conduct a successful election in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. We knew that one of our biggest challenges would be the recruitment and management of Election Officials. From this aspect of election management, we discussed the following problems:

- The need to recruit more Election Officials to offset our veteran Officials who would not be willing to work due to COVID-19 concerns
- How to instill confidence in our Election Officials that we would be taking the appropriate precautions to keep them and our voters safe
- How to transition thousands of Election Officials from our typical in-person training sessions to virtual training

Our answer to these problems was "*Coffee with Nick*." The idea for *Coffee with Nick* was simple – host a weekly virtual talk show for our Election Officials. We planned to host episodes featuring our COVID-19 plans, election timelines, when and how training would be conducted, and other relevant topics to our pool of Election Officials.

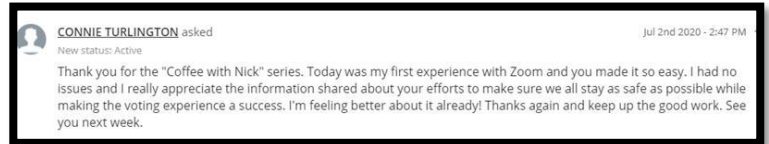
Knowing that we would be transitioning our Election Official training to a virtual format via Zoom, the main goal of *Coffee with Nick* was to get our Election Officials acquainted with Zoom, and we believed *Coffee with Nick* would be a friendly and low-stress opportunity for our Election Officials to do just that. However, *Coffee with Nick* turned into something bigger than we ever could have hoped or imagined.



Board of Elections

Our first episode was held on July 2, four months prior to Election Day, and it focused solely on COVID-19 and our plans to keep our Election Officials safe. We knew it was extremely important to get our plans out to our Officials so that they could see how seriously we were taking their safety and wellbeing, and we recognized that our Election Officials are our best messengers. Keeping them in the loop with our plans would allow them to spread the word to their friends, family, and neighbors.

We quickly learned that we created a unique platform to communicate directly to our Election Officials. In the inaugural episode, 539 Election Officials tuned in, and we received 139



Feedback from an Election Official

questions. These questions gave us unique insight to what issues were important to our Officials, and it allowed us to adapt some of our plans to coincide with what they wanted.

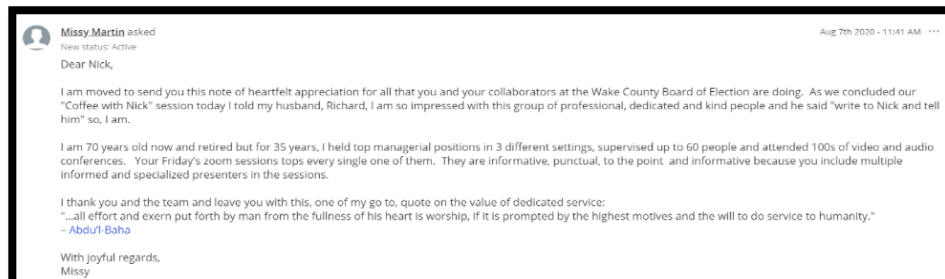
In total, we hosted eight episodes of *Coffee with Nick* from July through the end of August. Our episodes varied from addressing COVID-19, to explaining when and how Election Officials would be notified of their Election Day and/or early voting assignments, to an episode where our Director did a deep dive into the process for Absentee by Mail voting in North Carolina.

The episode featuring Absentee by Mail voting is a great example of *Coffee with Nick* transforming into something bigger than we originally anticipated.

What started out as a simple idea to get our Officials acquainted with Zoom turned into an outlet to spread correct and accurate election information, keep our Officials up to date with what we were doing, and, most importantly, create a culture where our Officials knew that they were more than Election Officials to us – they were a part of our Elections Family.



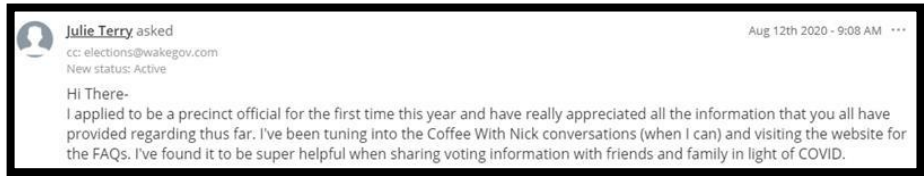
Feedback from an Election Official





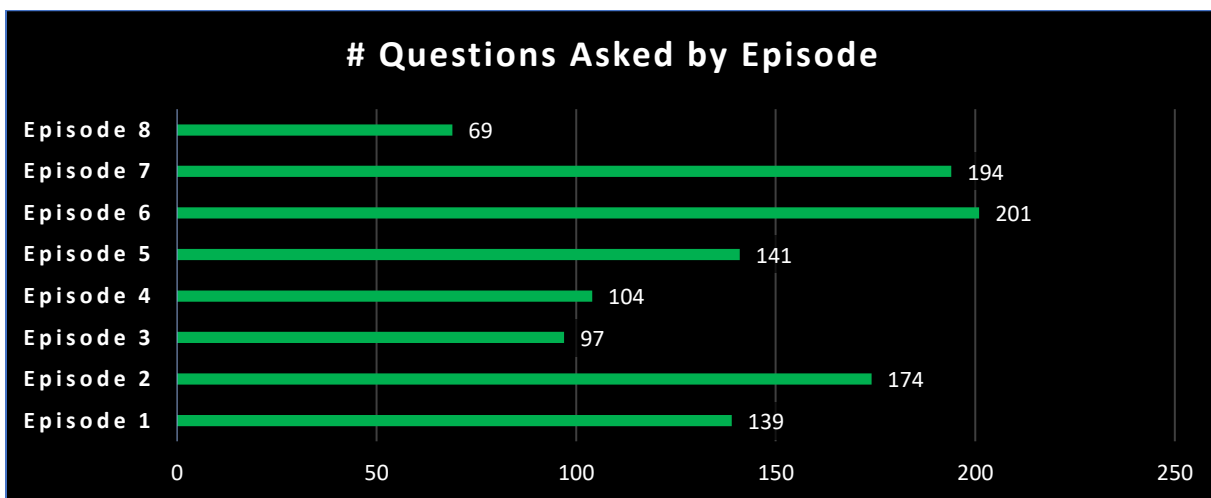
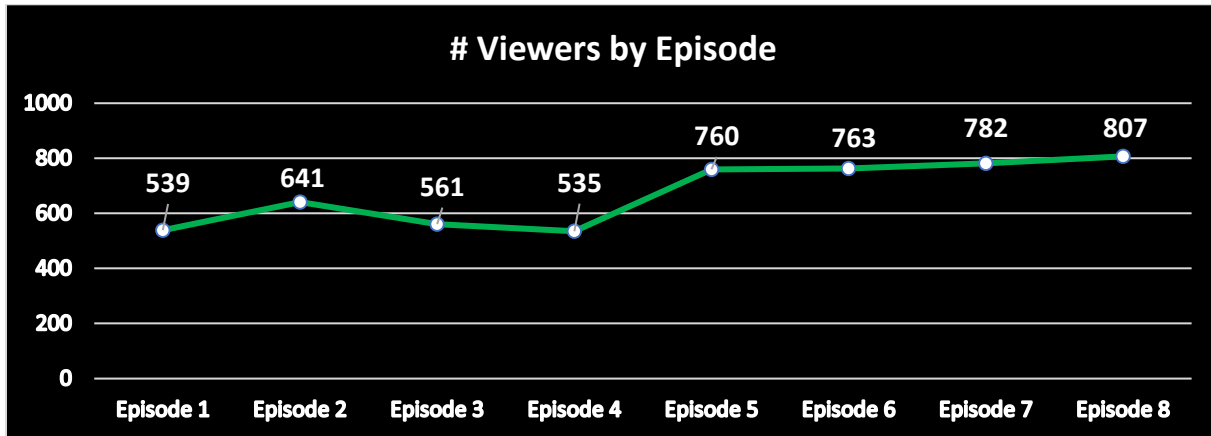
Board of Elections

Through those eight episodes, we averaged 673 viewers (5,388 total) and received a total of 1,119 questions. To keep up with all of the questions and to provide a resource for Election Officials who may have been unable to attend the live episodes, we created an FAQ document that we posted to our dedicated



Feedback from an Election Official

website for our Election Officials, www.WakePrecinctOfficials.com. In the end, our *Coffee with Nick* FAQ document grew to 28 pages of questions and answers, which we used as a go-to resource to send to new Election Officials and even new full-time temporary staff members who worked at our office.





EAC Clearinghouse Award Criteria

Innovation

- *Coffee with Nick* may be the first election “talk-show” created and targeted for volunteer Election Officials in the history of the United States. *Coffee with Nick* reached thousands of Wake County Election Officials, and it helped recruit hundreds, if not thousands, of new Election Officials in an unprecedented time where Election Official recruitment was paramount.

Sustainability

- Due to the overwhelmingly positive response we received from our Election Officials, we plan to host monthly episodes of *Coffee with Nick* going forward. Prior to the New Year, we hosted a special holiday episode of *Cocoa with Nick* to thank our Election Officials for what they did during the 2020 General Election.
- *Coffee with Nick* is easily sustainable. Only 2-3 staff members are needed for the preparation and execution of each episode. The show itself is casual and discusses topics our staff are familiar with, and the benefits we receive are exponentially greater than the time and effort it takes to host an episode.
- We are currently considering a spin-off version of *Coffee with Nick* as an orientation type session for new Election Officials. This is just one way of expanding *Coffee with Nick* to different audiences and to solve different problems.

Outreach Efforts

- *Coffee with Nick* was extremely successful in engaging our pool of Election Officials. Our eight episodes totaled 5,388 viewers. This number does not include the unknown number of viewers who watched a recorded version of *Coffee with Nick*.
- *Coffee with Nick* allowed us to be a source of accurate election information. We knew our Election Officials were our best messengers in the community, and *Coffee with Nick* was a fantastic vehicle for us to help combat common misconceptions regarding the voting process.
- *Coffee with Nick* also served as an excellent tool to recruit new Election Officials. In our episodes, we highlighted our need to recruit new Election Officials, and we asked our current



Board of Elections

pool of Officials to give us a hand. It is hard to say how many new Officials were recruited as a direct result of *Coffee with Nick*, but July through October were the most successful months of Election Official recruitment in Wake County history. We received 7,609 Election Official applications during this time period, effectively doubling our number of active Election Officials. For context, our previous record high for applications in an entire year was 2,210 in 2016.

Cost-Effectiveness

- *Coffee with Nick* was hosted through Zoom, a video conferencing platform. In 2019, we purchased a Zoom account for the purpose of conducting election training in the event of severe weather where in-person training may be cancelled. As a measure to keep our staff and Election Officials safe, we planned to host the vast majority of our election training sessions via Zoom for the 2020 General Election. Being that we already had this product for other purposes, *Coffee with Nick* cost no additional expense and was simply an additional use of a current resource.
- A similar program to *Coffee with Nick* could be created using resources that most jurisdictions already possess, such as Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, Cisco Webex, etc.

Replicability

- *Coffee with Nick* can easily be replicated by other election jurisdictions. The beauty of this project is that you can tailor the episodes to feature different topics that are pertinent to the audience that will be tuning in. In our example, we solely focused on our Election Officials, but our blueprint could also be adapted to reach the public at large and provide important election information and updates.
- This program can be replicated with very minimal staff and technical expertise. We used the stock webcam and microphone that came with our staff members' laptops.

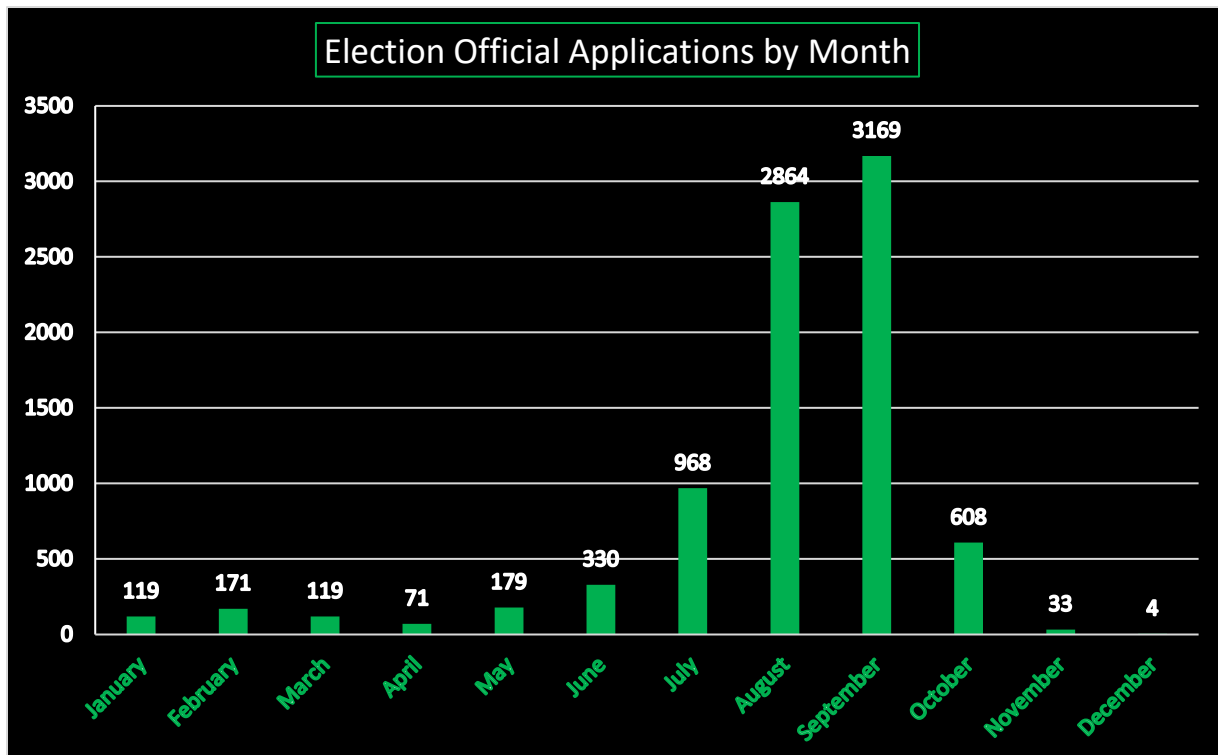
Generating Positive Results

- *Coffee with Nick* is the most successful Election Official communication endeavor in Wake County history. Not only did we accomplish our main goal of familiarizing our Election Officials with Zoom, we created a platform that:
 - Kept our Election Officials up to date with our plans and timelines



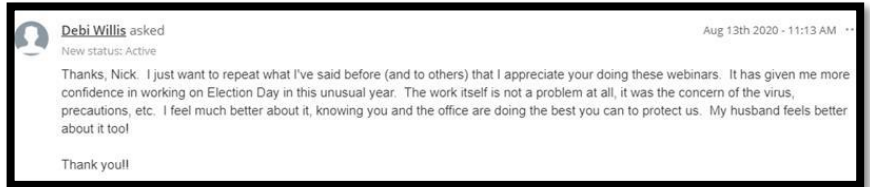
Board of Elections

- Allowed Election Officials to provide feedback and share ideas concerning how to conduct an election in a pandemic
- Created a new level of transparency where our Election Officials could hear exactly what we were working on and the processes and procedures that go into conducting an election
- Dispel misconceptions regarding the voting process by featuring topics such as absentee voting. This had an additional benefit of empowering our Election Officials with accurate information, which they could then share with the outside community.
- Our Election Official recruitment efforts skyrocketed immediately after the launch of *Coffee with Nick*. In an election where we knew we would have more first-time Election Officials than ever, *Coffee with Nick* was a tremendous tool to explain the inner workings of elections and the timeline for when Election Officials could expect to receive their election assignments and training information.



Conclusion

The 2020 General Election presented unprecedented challenges to election administrators across the country. One of the biggest hurdles was to ensure adequate poll worker staffing at each voting place. To successfully meet this challenge in Wake County, we had to: 1) Communicate our COVID-19 plans to our Election Officials in a reassuring and transparent way; 2) Familiarize our Election Officials with Zoom’s video conferencing platform prior to the beginning of election training; 3) Recruit new Election Officials to cover the number of veteran Election Officials who would choose to sit this election out due to COVID concerns.



Feedback from an Election Official

Coffee with Nick was able to do all of these things, while also providing benefits we did not foresee when we began putting this program together. Our Election Officials were able to see “behind the curtain” into our office, and, in a way, it tightened the bond between our staff and them. To us, our Election Officials are like our family, and *Coffee with Nick* was an incredible outlet to show them how important they were to us and how much their work really mattered.

We plan to continue *Coffee with Nick* indefinitely. What started out as a simple way to help our Officials get accustomed to Zoom turned into something so much more, and we had a whole lot of fun throughout the process.



Special Episode of *Cocoa with Nick*



Board of Elections

Coffee with Nick Episodes

Episode 1 (COVID-19 Prep): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn1.mp4>

Episode 2 (Election Timeline): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn2.mp4>

Episode 3 (Early Voting): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn3.mp4>

Episode 4 (Polling Places): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn4.mp4>

Episode 5 (Training Update): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn5.mp4>

Episode 6 (FAQs): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn6.mp4>

Episode 7 (Absentee-by-Mail): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn7.mp4>

Episode 8 (Thank you): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn8.mp4>

Episode 9 (Special Holiday Episode): <http://msweb03.co.wake.nc.us/bordelec/downloads/cwn9.mp4>

Coffee with Nick FAQ Document: [FAQs](#)