

United States Election Assistance Commission Public Hearing on
Pollworker Recruitment, Training, and Retention

**Recruitment, Retention, and Training of College Pollworkers
Public Testimony**

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The Center for Election Integrity (CEI) at Cleveland State University is a partnership of the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs. It draws upon the long-standing expertise from both colleges in electoral and regulatory law, public administration and civic education. CEI provides research, training, consultation, and public education to assist transparent, legal, efficient and accurate elections nationwide.

The Center for Election Integrity of Cleveland State University was awarded this EAC contract in October 2005 to research effective practices and subsequently to develop a guidebook on the Recruitment, Retention, and Training of College Pollworkers.

Why College Pollworker Programs?

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) brought to the forefront a major issue that has been plaguing many election jurisdictions across the United States: a shrinking pool of qualified pollworkers and an increasingly technology-driven Election Day system. Recruiting college students to serve as pollworkers helps address this problem on many levels:

- College students are well educated and used to learning new things.
- College students tend to be comfortable with computers and other new technologies and may bring skills to help solve technology-related problems.
- College students are generally younger and have the energy and enthusiasm to make it through a long day at the polls.
- College students are generally physically able to carry needed supplies and set up heavy equipment.
- College students often have flexible schedules.
- College students are more likely to vote and adopt a lifelong commitment to civic involvement if they are encouraged and integrated into the democratic system at an early age.

However, there is a major caveat. College students are not a panacea to the pollworker shortage problem. College students are an excellent resource but they are not likely to make up the core group of pollworkers for most election jurisdictions. They are not always registered to vote in the same state where they study, most will only work for one

or two elections, and classes and assignments can conflict with working a full Election Day. We will discuss these limitations further within this presentation.

Methodology for Creation of Guidebook

We completed the *How to Recruit College Pollworker Guidebook* in December 2006. After gathering and verifying all the information to be included (methodology described below), we worked with an adult education expert to design the presentation of the information. Our objective was to make the guidebook as user-friendly, easy to read, and helpful as possible. It is written for two audiences: election officials looking to recruit more college students as pollworkers and colleges/universities interested in involving their student body in the electoral process in a meaningful way. The strategy is to create a partnership between election jurisdictions and local schools to implement the program together.

Project Working Group (PWG). We had a seven-person working group that provided external advice on the project. They were selected for their individual areas of expertise and experience as well as an attempt to have bi-partisan or non-partisan input. They reviewed the contract deliverables for content and provided their input based upon their knowledge.

Members included election officials from around the country, professors and administrators from colleges and universities that have implemented college pollworker programs, and a college student to provide a student's perspective.

Collection of Effective Strategies. We collected lessons learned and effective strategies from existing college pollworker programs from around the country. There were surprisingly few on-going, structured programs. Several election jurisdictions try to recruit college students but do not have a formal partnership with the schools. A few states have or are developing statewide initiatives. For our strategies, we reviewed:

- Materials from the 15 schools that had EAC grants in 2004 to run college pollworker recruitment programs
- New Millennium Best Practices state survey (July 2003)
- NACO Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention Survey (April 2006)
- Materials from other independent programs.

We then followed up with hundreds of phone calls to many of the above programs to learn more about their strategies and experiences. We used a structured interview to parallel collect information. We also held focus groups (explained below) to further assess our findings. Given the lack of broad experience running college pollworker programs, we are not comfortable using the term "best practices" as they have not been implemented enough to compare outcomes. Our criteria for inclusion in the guidebook are strategies that are:

- Practical
- Feasible
- Sustainable

Our project working group, the focus groups, and the pilot projects were all set up to help determine if our strategies met these three criteria.

Focus Groups. We completed focus groups in four sites in February and early March 2006. Where applicable, we had one focus group with students that had participated as pollworkers in the past and one with students that have not been pollworkers. We also did in-depth interviews with participating college administrators and election officials. The findings by and large reiterated the best practices and strategies we had already documented. Our goal was to test if the strategies were practical and feasible.

The focus groups were selected to reflect regional diversity and a diversity of school types (state universities, private colleges and community colleges):

- Roxbury Community College, Boston, MA
- Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH
- California State University Long Beach, CA
- Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

State Statute Compendium of Requirements to be a Pollworker. We collected all of the relevant state statutes on pollworkers from the 50 states, Washington, DC and four territories. That data was synthesized into individual state sheets which summarize the requirements including: place of residency, registration status, age, political affiliation and training. These state summaries will be available on the EAC's webpage. A quick reference chart for the data is included in the Guidebook. Multiple efforts were made to confirm all of the data with every state and territory. The EAC should treat the Compendium as a living document that will need updating every year.

The most interesting findings from the Compendium are the potential legal impediments to implementing college pollworker programs. These are discussed in detail below. Also, it's important to note that there are also some discrepancies between state policy and how some counties administer their pollworker programs in practice. We will advise all schools that wish to run a college pollworker program to review the regulations with their local election jurisdiction and to determine local variations.

Pilot Programs. We ran three college pollworker pilot projects from June through November 2006. The goal of these pilots was to field test the draft guidebook and gather feedback on how to improve it. Participants were asked to provide input such as: what may be missing, what is most helpful, what is not clear, what worked best. We used Survey Monkey, an online survey tool that made requesting and receiving regular feedback very easy. The pilots also provided final reports on how many students were recruited, how many served and what strategies were most effective.

The three pilots were:

- Suffolk University and the City of Boston Election Department
- Grand Rapids Community College and Grand Rapids City Clerk
- Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga County Board of Elections

These pilots were selected because both the election official and the school expressed a strong interest in participating (a crucial factor to establish a successful program), they represented large and small jurisdictions, and they represented a community college, a state school and a 4-year private university. Minority representation was also a consideration.

Highlights from the Guidebook's Findings

Below are a number of the findings from the Guidebook:

- Start early. For a new program, it is advised to start planning in January to allow a full 10 months before the general elections. This allows time for the election jurisdiction and the partner school to develop a strong working relationship before the mad rush of final election preparations.
- Identify a campus champion and one main liaison from the election jurisdiction to implement the program. These two individuals will serve as the program's main designers and advocates. It will also facilitate communication between institutions.
- Clarify how many pollworkers are needed and all requirements for the students. Clarify the process from the beginning to end. Consider signing a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions that establishes clear roles and expectations.
- Promote a college/university policy of excused absences on Election Day for any student pollworker. Encourage faculty not to schedule exams or assignments on Election Day.
- Take advantage of students' special skills. They express particular interest in Election Day jobs that require them to be active, moving between precincts, and using special technical or language skills they may have to really feel they have contributed something vital to the electoral process.
- Retaining students from their initial interest through Election Day can be challenging. Make it easy for students to apply and keep in close contact with them. They may be easily discouraged so try to make the application process a one-step process, let them know their application was received and tell them the expected timeline for training and placement. If possible, provide reminders for training and Election Day (e-mail is fine).
- The best way to recruit students is through personal contact. Being asked to participate by a professor, friend, trusted advisor, the student life director or student leader has shown to be very persuasive for students.
- Raise campus-wide awareness of the opportunity. Introduce a "cool factor."
- The two best incentives for convincing students to be pollworkers are: money and extra credit/class credit.
 - Recruitment materials should let students know that working on Election Day is a paid opportunity. For some cash-starved students, that's all the convincing it will take.
 - Work with faculty to integrate working the polls into their class curriculum – either as an extra credit option, as a service learning

assignment, or as an integral part of a specially designed class on the electoral/political process.

- Offer pollworker training on campus, scheduled around students' class schedules. Bring examples of Election Day equipment and materials to make the training as hands on as possible including role playing. Encourage the students to ask lots of questions to ease any concerns they may have about serving. Include a discussion of etiquette and inter-generational communication.
- To retain students for future elections, keep track of their email addresses and cell phones. Students often change addresses each year so the traditional approach of sending a snail mail request to past pollworkers is not effective.
- Election officials should evaluate their programs post-election to see how they can improve their process. Track how many student applications are received each year, how many actually serve, and how students heard about the program. Knowing how well different recruitment methods worked is useful so future efforts can focus on the most effective pathways. Knowing how many students you can expect to serve based upon how many applications you receive is also vital planning information.

Unfortunately, recruiting college pollworkers is not the panacea for nationwide pollworker shortages. There are multiple legal and structural impediments to using college students in this capacity that need to be addressed before students can become a major force on Election Day. The Guidebook includes an entire section on the legal impediments to college students' participating in pollworker programs.

Additional Consideration for College Pollworker Programs

Not Every Election is a National Election. There is naturally more excitement on campuses about national elections, especially a presidential election, than local and state elections. It is easier to recruit students as pollworkers when they are engaged in the political drama of a presidential race. Fortunately, jurisdictions may require fewer pollworkers for local elections because voter turnout tends to be lower. Some jurisdictions opt not to use college students for small elections or primaries because they do not want the students to be turned off by the less exciting experience.

Local Registration Requirements. Every state has its particular requirements and time frame to be a pollworker (detailed in the Guidebook's State Compendium). Students who live or vote in a different county (or state) are often not eligible to be a pollworker in the city or county where their school is located. Some jurisdictions will get a special disclaimer allowing them to use non-residents, or they can create special roles that do not require residency. Several states have changed their laws in recent years to allow state residents to work in any county, regardless of where they are registered to vote.

Election Officials Want Pollworkers to Work Multiple Elections. Jurisdictions generally prefer training workers whom they will be able to use over and over. Students are seen as one-shot workers or, at best, providing a maximum of four years

of service and are thus less worth the recruitment and training investment. Jurisdictions also generally prefer to have workers who can work both the primary and the general elections. Many states have primaries and local elections when students are not on campus.

Students See Poll Work as a Major Time Commitment. Most students name time commitment as the biggest hurdle to being a pollworker. They worry about missing classes, work, and, in some cases, childcare. The 12 or more hours commitment on Election Day is too much to handle. Although not yet widely tested, most students welcome the option to split shifts. They believe only having to serve a half day will increase participation. Jurisdictions that permit split shifts may want to consider pitching this to students.

Students Need Permission to Miss Classes. Students will often miss multiple classes by serving as a pollworker. They need to be assured of an excused absence by their professors and that they will not be penalized for missing their classes. The best solution is to get faculty cooperation at the onset. The Guidebook provides a sample University Excused Absence Policy for pollworkers.

Faculty Cooperation is Important. Offering class credit or service learning opportunities is a great way to encourage students to volunteer as pollworkers. However, this takes time and effort on the part of faculty who may not welcome the additional work. Give them plenty of lead time so they can integrate the credit or assignment into their curriculum before classes begin. Make sure they know there is someone else on campus who can be the trouble shooter and liaison with election officials so when a student has a problem, the faculty member doesn't feel burdened trying to solve it.

Political Party Buy-in. Some states require political parties to recruit, select, and place pollworkers. Parties may be resistant to using new people with whom they are unfamiliar. They prefer local people who have been part of the political system for years. Schools have successfully recruited students only to find the local political parties were not necessarily interested in placing them all at polling sites. Buy-in from local and state political parties is extremely important in these situations.

Students Want to Work with Friends. Many students want to work with friends. Their reasons are varied: they prefer the social aspect of working with a friend; they don't want to spend 12 hours with strangers; or they are too intimidated to go alone. They believe signing up in pairs would be an attractive option. Being asked to work by a friend can also be a big incentive. Some jurisdictions have found that if friends were not placed together at the same precinct, they both dropped out. However, many election jurisdictions don't want to place students with friends because they fear the students will not pay attention to the job. They also want to have experienced workers overseeing new workers. Seeking balance is probably the best approach.

Location, Location, Location. Students frequently do not have cars, and if public transportation is not available, they need help getting to and from their poll assignment. A 45-minute commute at 5:30 am can be a major disincentive to showing up. To facilitate participation and to reduce no-shows, try to assign students to polling sites close to their homes or campus.