"Successful Practices for Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention: A Guidebook"

Written testimony prepared for the
U.S. Election Assistance Commission
July 19, 2007
Charlotte, North Carolina

Report on "Successful Practices for Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention"
Guidebook, Presented to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, July 19, 2007

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Dear Members of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission,

T hank you for this opportunity to present this final report and recommendations for a 17-month applied research study commissioned by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in the fall of 2005. The project was implemented through a partnership between IFES, the Pollworker Institute and the League of Women Voters. The IFES/PI/LWV team has greatly appreciated the opportunity to work with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission in creating this "Successful Practices in Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention" Guidebook and hopes that the EAC will use this opportunity to reach out to its constituents – State, County, City and Territories and other election stakeholders across the country - in sharing these successful practices. We stand ready to partner with the EAC to help facilitate the delivery of this valuable asset as broadly as possible.
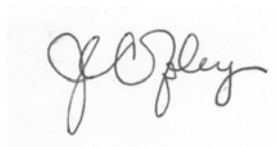
Three members of our team will provide testimony at today's Public Hearing:

- Jennifer Collins-Foley, President, PI
- Connie Schmidt, CERA and Senior Consultant, PI
- Susan Edman, Executive Director, Milwaukee Election Commission

We will provide information on the Approach and Methodology we employed in developing the Guidebook, some highlights from the Guidebook, the experience of one pilot jurisdiction, and the attached Findings and Recommendations.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the hundreds of election officials and stakeholders, with particular thanks to the Working Group and members of topic-specific roundtables, who responded to endless emails, phone calls and requests for information, and who responded with invaluable models, guidance and feedback.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Collins-Foley
President, The Pollworker Institute
www.ThePollworkerInstitute.org

"Successful Practices in Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention" Guidebook: Background, Findings and Recommendations

Objectives:
The overall objectives of this project - each of which were met - were to:

- collect nationwide, for the first time, information on relevant State requirements; issues, options and methods in pollworker recruitment, training, and retention including sample materials used in these efforts;

- develop and produce a user-friendly guide for election officials involved in recruitment, training, and retention of pollworkers that includes outreach and training materials easily adapted for use by key stakeholders;

- plan and conduct pilot programs during the 2006 election in a minimum of three election jurisdictions using strategies and materials from the guide; and

- provide recommendations for future activities to benefit efforts to recruit and retain qualified pollworkers.

Working Group:
The IFES/PI team worked with the EAC to identify and recruit a working group composed of individuals considered experts in the field of elections (from large and small jurisdictions), training, adult education, advocacy organizations, and experienced researchers and analysts. They assisted in identifying successful practices and also reviewed and provided feedback on various versions of the guidebook and related initiatives.

Focus Groups:
The League of Women Voters Education Fund led an IFES/PI/LWV initiative to conduct focus groups across the country with election officials, pollworkers, the general public and stakeholders. The final report provided a nuanced picture of the challenges facing election officials. At the same time, the focus group report provided an important perspective on the motivations for serving and potential strategies for reaching key audiences with effective recruitment messages.

NACo Survey Instrument:
In collecting information and practices, the IFES/PI team also relied heavily on a nationwide survey of local election officials conducted by NACo, the Election Center and the International Association of County Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers (IACREOT). The NACo survey provided a benchmark of current practices in the area of recruitment, training and retention. It also provided

important leads, guiding the IFES/PI research team to those election officials who are actively raising the standards for pollworker administration with new programs and approaches.

Review of State Laws:
The IFES/PI team worked collaboratively with Cleveland State University, to compile a compendium of state requirements governing who may serve at the polls. This task provided a framework for exploring the legal limitations in many states.

Review of Literature:
The IFES/PI team conducted a review of existing literature including newspaper articles, research analyses and election discussion forums to identify most important themes and issues. U.S. Election Assistance Commission Final Report January 31, 2007 Successful Practices for Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention 3.

Maximizing Available Resources:
In seeking to tap the expertise of elections officials, the IFES/PI team also relied on at least three important sources in compiling "successful practices" in the area of pollworker management:

- The Elections Center Professional Practices program

- National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Awards

- EAC's Best Practices in Election Administration

Roundtable Discussion Groups:
The IFES/PI team organized and conducted a series of in-person and conference call style roundtables with usability experts such as *Democracy for Design*; adult learning experts from the private sector; community based organizations / volunteerism experts from Rotary Clubs, Corporation for National and Community Service, etc.; representatives from disability organizations such as *American Association for People with Disabilities* and the *National Disability Rights Network*; as well as an extensive roundtable discussion with election officials to identify special challenges particular to hard to reach communities. These roundtables were invaluable to the development of this comprehensive Guidebook.

Guidebook Development:
Over the course of nearly seventeen months, the IFES/PI team developed a user-friendly "recipe book" of successful practices and models. In developing the guidebook, the IFES/PI team sought information that would help in evaluating practices and tools according to three important criteria: measurability,

sustainability and replicability. In extensive interviews with election officials, the team attempted to gauge the political will necessary to implement a practice, whether the jurisdiction had quantified the costs and the benefits of implementation, identified necessary resources and the level of risk involved. The effort to provide a framework for evaluating election administration practices is complicated by the fact that the information collected by the IFES/PI team provides a snapshot in time. A means to monitor change over several election cycles was not available. Nevertheless, the IFES/PI team believes that by providing individual users with a first-time ever, comprehensive snapshot in time, full of content-rich information about measurability, sustainability and replicability of practices, the usefulness of the guidebook is greatly enhanced.

Pilot Jurisdictions:
In June of 2006, the IFES/PI team selected three jurisdictions to pilot the guidebook. The jurisdictions chosen were: Milwaukee, WI; Santa Fe, NM; and Hamilton County, OH. Selection criteria included the following: at least one jurisdiction covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, at least one jurisdiction with a partisan representation requirement, and at least one jurisdiction introducing new voting system. The participating election offices were both large and small and geographically diverse. We asked sites to test both the contents and the usability of the guidebook. Election offices were asked to implement practices from each of the three sections of the guidebook and to track the results. Tracking the results gave the IFES-PI team objective, quantified information about the effectiveness of the practices and at the same time allowed us to develop and refine models for use in the guidebook. The IFES-PI team decided early-on to take a hands-off approach to the pilot projects in order to replicate the likely experience of typical election officials receiving a copy without extensive personal guidance.

In a post-pilot survey of the practices implemented, we asked the election officials to report on the following:

- Impact on staff

- Impact on budget

- Management challenges

- Sustainability

The survey also asked the election officials several questions to gauge the usability of the guidebook: Could they find practices to address specific needs? Did they browse the guidebook? Was the table of contents useful?

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Snapshot of Pilot Program Successes

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Chapter 7: Recruiting Government Employees as Pollworkers: With the support of the mayor and city agencies, recruited 320 management-level city employees (16% of the total number of pollworkers) provided valuable professional assistance in polling places on Election Day. These specialty pollworkers brought a high level of management and problem solving skills to the polling place operations, contributed to building wider public support for the U.S. Election Assistance Commission Final Report January 31, 2007 Successful Practices for Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention 5 elections office, and, for participating citizens, broadened knowledge of the voting process.

Chapter 10: Offering a Split Shift Option: When the election office offered the split shift option, 350 pollworkers chose to take advantage of the option. The election office then recruited another 350 pollworkers to cover the second shift. Many of these were new recruits who might have been otherwise unwilling to serve. It appears that many of these new recruits enjoyed their experience and are now willing to serve the whole day.

Santa Fe, New Mexico
Chapter 1: Recruiting the General Public: Santa Fe leveraged a relationship with a local reporter who published a notice about the need for pollworkers three days running. Over 200 people responded to the notice – nearly overwhelming the election office.
Chapter 1: Recruiting the General Public: Santa Fe posted bright orange pollworker recruitment sign-up sheets in the polling place. Twenty precincts returned the sheets with a total of 50 names.

Hamilton County, Ohio
Chapter 1: Recruiting the General Public: Hamilton County developed a method for tracking the source of each pollworker, both new and old, and tracked the source of each pollworker who worked in the election.

Impact on the Guidebook

> • Pilot offices requested specific models and how-to instructions. We both searched for existing models and ultimately were able to use models developed by the pilot jurisdictions in the guidebook.

> • Jurisdictions appeared to be less likely to use the guidebook to plan a complete overhaul and much more likely to make incremental changes over a longer period of time. We changed the guidebook to include more simple and easy-to-implement changes.

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FINDINGS

New pollworkers who bring different skills and abilities are needed to augment the experience and skills of traditional core of pollworkers.
For years, election officials have been able to rely on a steady pool of veteran pollworkers. New voting equipment, new procedures, increased public scrutiny, have all increased responsibilities of the polling place workforce. Election officials find they need more pollworkers with a broader array of skills: familiarity with computers, bi-lingual capabilities, and attention to accounting details, among others. Election officials are beginning to develop a new and supplemental workforce that can meet current and future demands.

Election officials are hampered by limited staffing and resources
Both in the focus groups and in the pilot programs, election officials and other stakeholders cited limited resources, staff, time, and competing priorities as obstacles to implementing new programs. Even when new programs hold out the possibility of maximizing or expanding resources, the risk and effort required for implementation seems to pose insurmountable challenges.
Resource limitations take different forms:

 • Budgets are limited. Even minor expenses as mailing costs, advertising costs, or equipment costs can put some programs beyond the reach of election officials in smaller jurisdictions.

 • Staff is limited. In one pilot jurisdiction, when a newspaper ad proved more successful than anticipated, the success created a new problem: the volume of calls overwhelmed the available staff time. In most offices, a decision to devote staff to implement a new program means diverting that staff from an existing program.

 • Election officials, especially in smaller jurisdictions, often lack the tools to begin to build more sophisticated and effective pollworker programs. Until recently, many local election officials in rural jurisdictions were not connected to the Internet. Pollworker records were stored on 3x5 cards or in the election official's head.

 • Election officials lack the ability or means to communicate with peers. Sharing ideas and practices can be enormously valuable. Election officials also may be more willing to experiment and innovate if there is a support network available. In one pilot jurisdiction, the election director said just knowing other election officials had experienced similar challenges was helpful.

Election officials are more willing to implement change in small increments
Elections are at the intersection of politics and government administration. An election is like no other administrative function. First, elected officials have a profound interest in how elections are conducted. Elections take place in a politically-charged environment, making election officials more vulnerable than other administrators to political controversy. There are few opportunities to pilot change…..and there are no "do-overs." Mistakes that occur on Election Day cannot be corrected. As a result, election officials are necessarily cautious and more likely to follow tried and true methods. From an election official's perspective, new recruitment and new training methods may introduce unknown risks and unintended consequences.

Implementing change in small doses reduces risk. Too many new factors – such as, for example, new pollworkers or new training materials -- increase the possibility for mistakes. In the absence of a total melt-down or other crises that demand radical change, election officials are pre-disposed to look for small improvements or changes that can be piloted in a small election.

The catalysts for change are few and the risks are many
Because the risks of change are many, catalysts that produce change in election administration are few. Typically, the following situations can produce a demand for change:
- An election "melt down." A disastrous election can result in a demand for change. If, as a result, the election comes under close scrutiny, potential positive outcomes may include increased funding, community support, and tighter or altered procedures.

- New management, new staff and/or objective consultants often see an elections operation with a fresh eye and are more willing to try or suggest new approaches or assist with establishing a workable environment.

- New laws and procedures will necessarily lead to change in the elections operation.

2007 presents a unique window of opportunity for implementing change
Election officials need to be able to develop and plan for implementing new practices at least one year in advance of the election. Election officials have a short span of time in which to contemplate changes in the election. Once the election calendar is set, introducing changes becomes very difficult and raises the risk level. Therefore, 2007 will be a critically important year for all stakeholders seeking to support positive change in pollworker management.

One Size Does Not Fit All
The tremendous variation in the size, structure and needs of local election operations means that one, single model of any given practice will not work for all

jurisdictions. Some election officials attest that a targeted recruitment mailing to registered voters brings in all the pollworkers they need, while other officials found such mailings were not worth the time, effort and cost. Some localities have strong corporate pollworker programs; others have strong civic organization partnerships but no corporate partners. One size definitely does not fit all.

Since success or failure is determined by so many different factors, it is almost impossible to predict which practices will succeed in a particular jurisdiction. Sometimes key factors are intangibles, such as the support of elected officials or the energy of a new staff member. Accordingly, election officials must be willing to experiment – and evaluate the results.

There is a growing interest in moving toward vote-by-mail as an alternative to Election Day voting and the related costs of pollworkers.

In a review of election literature, a growing interest in exploring realities and details associated with alternative voting methods including vote-by-mail, Early Voting and Vote Centers was identified. Inadequately trained pollworkers or too few pollworkers can spell disaster in an election. In some jurisdictions, the pollworkers represent the election officials' biggest liability. Accordingly, methods such as vote centers and vote by mail that reduce the need for pollworkers have generated significant interest.

As if the task of recruiting pollworkers weren't difficult enough, state laws – often antiquated – sometimes impose additional constraints on those who may serve on Election Day.

Analysis of the collection of state laws regarding the recruitment of pollworkers as well as discussions with election officials points to a need to consider flexible statutory requirements for pollworker recruitment. Innovative recruitment methods and strategies are often times inhibited by such statutory requirements as residency, age and political party affiliation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the EAC consider the following issues and recommendations toward improving recruitment, training, and retention of pollworkers in jurisdictions across the country and thereby improving the conduct of elections and the Election Day experience for all voters.

Use windows of opportunity to innovate and manage change.

The pace of change in elections in the last decade has been nothing short of breathtaking. Since enactment of the NVRA and HAVA of 2002 changes in policies, rules, and procedures have been extensive and nearly continuous. This presents a tremendous challenge to local election officials across the country who with limited resources, under innovation-sapping restrictions, must ensure that nearly 1.5 million citizen-volunteer-pollworkers implement the changes. U.S. Election Assistance Commission Final Report January 31, 2007 Successful Practices for Pollworker Recruitment, Training and Retention 9

Rigorous and innovative pollworker recruitment, training, and retention practices are the foundation for preparing for the 2008 Presidential Election by using 2007 to reinforce and stabilize Election Day procedures.

Distribute and facilitate use of the Guidebook produced for this project.

EAC has this opportunity to facilitate improved pollworker recruitment, training and retention practices in all jurisdictions by providing resources and support. In particular, establish and encourage use of this Guidebook as a dynamic "go-to" model, and expectations based on production of an annual update of the Guidebook providing additional models of effective practices in jurisdictions of different sizes and with various amounts of resources. We encourage use of the Guidebook as a problem-defining, problem-solving focus workshop resource.

We encourage the EAC to use the Guidebook to mentor new election officials and set an expectation that they use high quality and effective recruitment, training, and retention practices such as those described in the Guidebook; conduct interactive workshops at statewide election conferences during 2007 to expose officials to the effective recruitment, training and retention practices contained in the Guidebook; and further, assign a state champion or mentor to support election officials to implement these practices and encourage peer-to-peer sharing of practices. The Guidebook can also be shared a resource for legislative committees and county associations.

Support information exchange among election administrators and staff.

EAC should use the widely available technology of the internet to help election officials readily learn from one another's experiences recruiting, training, and retaining pollworkers. For example, disseminate an on-line newsletter or manage a list-serve for election staff. Technology presents the best avenue for communication and how-to sharing to reduce the isolation in which many election officials and workers operate. Few, if any, professional development opportunities are accessible and available to the "line workers" in elections

offices. With access to something like an online newsletter or a list-serve, they can learn from and share effective practices with colleagues in other jurisdictions with minimal impact on their operating budgets.

Strengthen the EACs clearinghouse library of highly effective pollworker recruitment, training, and retention materials.
This project uncovered usability standards and adult learning practices developed by experts in those fields that should be employed to maximize effectiveness of pollworker recruitment, training, retention. EAC should build on the Guidebook produced for this project by creating a library of sample materials, forms, making them accessible via the internet, and facilitating their adoption through presentations at state conferences.

Conduct additional research and testing on pollworker recruitment, training, and retention practices.
The Guidebook produced for this project describes a number of innovative pollworker recruitment, training, and retention practices which have been found to be effective where they are practiced. The EAC should conduct further research and testing necessary to determine factors that impact the replicability of a particular practice and formulate approaches to adapt particular practices to a different jurisdiction with a different set of factors. The EAC should also conduct research on the possible cultural and social impacts of heeding premature rallying calls for the dilution or elimination of in-person voting and potential effect on civic participation in our democracy.

Create partnerships with and among organizations to foster support of election officials' adoption of innovative practices.
EAC and election-focused organizations should work together to champion and facilitate adoption of effective practices in pollworker recruitment, training, and retention in a stable policy environment.
EAC and government associations should work together to educate stakeholders about election administration, support greater participation in the elections process through employees-as-pollworkers and other programs, and support election officials with change and risk management education and training programs.

Champion flexibility in pollworker qualifications and precinct board composition.
EAC should encourage use of waivers and special programs to overcome the restrictions on eligibility of individuals to serve as a pollworker (e.g., age, residency) and restrictions on precinct board composition (e.g., party affiliation, minority-language proficiency) that jeopardize "full staffing" of polling places and infringement on voting rights on Election Day. This may require educating policy makers and the general public about this aspect of election administration.

Support development and implementation of sophisticated pollworker management tools.

Pollworker management tools are not keeping pace in their sophistication with the requirements of the job. Many elections offices rely on individual staff members for "institutional knowledge and history" and good old index cards to keep track of pollworkers, precinct boards, and training records while what they need are flexible, adaptable, accessible technology tools. Increasingly, people who serve as pollworkers expect, for example, access to information online. Election officials are poised to use industry-developed tools customized for their needs, for example, databases to track recruitment sources and individual pollworker performance, and online training programs to supplement face-to-face training (Texas is an example). Research needs to be conducted to identify other tools that would be most useful.