

**Cost Saving Practices for Election Management**  
**Wednesday, April 15, 2009**  
**Denver, Colorado**

**Jill LaVine**  
**Registrar of Voters, Sacramento County**  
**916-875-6558**

Good Afternoon, Chairwoman Beach, Commissioners Hillman, Davidson, Executive Director Wilkey and members of the Election Assistance Commission staff. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Election Commission regarding cost saving practices for elections.

My name is Jill LaVine. I am the Registrar of Sacramento County, California with 677,603 registered voters. I have been the Registrar for almost six years, but have worked in the office for over 22 years, starting out as a temporary worker.

On Friday April 3, I received our budget numbers for next fiscal year 09-10 and promptly broke out my stash of chocolate. I knew this would not be a good year, but I was hoping it would not be this bad. We had over a 26% reduction in our budget allocation and it does not look like there will be any magic rabbit pulled out of the hat to save us. I appreciate this opportunity to share ways that we use to cut costs and look forward to the other speakers to learn new ways to help our office.

As we look at any cost saving practices, our goal is to keep our customer service at a high level and our employee morale high.

Many of our cost saving opportunities come from the changes in technology and the use of automation.

**WEBSITE AND ONLINE SERVICES**

Our voters really like to get their information online, it is quick and fast. We like that they don't come to our office; it saves us time and usually copying charges.

Voters can get information about everything from our website as to whether they are registered, if we have received their VBM ballot, to one of our many "How To Guides" such as - How to Place a Measure on a Ballot, Recalling an Elected Official or Important Filing Dates. I have directed more than one member of my Board to our website to review the candidate's guide, a very helpful book when running for office.

Also available during an election is polling place location information, (including directions and a picture of the building), a copy of their ballot and voting information. I was very impressed that during November we had 50,948 visits to our website, with 7,000 looking at their sample ballots on line. This saved staff time and postage costs in sending out the requested information, especially since some of the inquiries came from Fiji, Turkey and even South Africa and our military.

Our election night results are posted after each update, while we have staff available on the phone in case someone calls in, they are the most bored employees, we have dropped our phone staffing from four to one.

If you can't find your answer on our "Frequently Asked Question" page with 43 FAQ's - there is always the option to e-mail our office. This is a cost savings because it cuts the number of phone calls to our office and allows our staff to answer the questions by return email at times when it is not as busy, which allows a more efficient use of staff time.

A voter can apply for a Vote by Mail (VBM) ballot on line. In November we had over 300 voters use this method. This file is automated so there is no additional data entry for our staff.

We also have poll worker training online. This cut the number of classes offered for November, saving 50 hours of the Instructors' time.

## **AUTOMATION**

In California, we are required to report the Vote by Mail (VBM) ballots at the precinct level, which with close to 300,000 VBM ballots sorted into 900 precincts is a huge sorting job. We were setting up large trays and using the entire training room and over 30 people daily to accomplish this task, with some accuracy problems.

With our HAVA funds we were able to buy automated mail sorting equipment. This equipment not only sorts the ballots but also will capture the signature of the voter. Now instead of having 20 people checking signatures with ballots spread out all over the building and 30 people getting dizzy from sorting, we now have 3 staff members verifying the signatures for half a day, while the ballots are securely locked up. The sorting is all done by the machine and it only requires two people to operate it. The accuracy has increased and the costs have decreased. We did a study of the time savings using 180,000 ballots. The

difference between manually processing and using the automation was a savings of 890 hours.

We also use ICR, Intelligent Character Recognition, to process our voter registration cards. Instead of staff inputting the data from the voter, it is scanned in, checked by staff for accuracy and then added to the file. This saves key strokes and staff time while increasing accuracy.

## **GIS**

We are very fortunate to have a GIS technician in our office. This was a long fought battle with our HR department but has proved to be worth it. Now updates to maps can be done instantly and printed in house. We have sold over \$5,000 worth of maps just this last year; some of them specialty maps ordered by campaigns.

Internally we have maps made for equipment delivery routes, technician routes and of course our big wall map that shows all the polling places in the county. In the past, these delivery routes were done by hand with our Thomas Guide map books.

Not only is our GIS technician saving us money, he is also making money.

## **BALLOT ON DEMAND**

Sacramento County uses an optical scan ballot and it is always a guess to order enough ballots but not too many ballots. Using our numbers from the Primary and General election last year, we destroyed 799,000 unused ballots at a cost of \$.49 each for a total of \$391,510. We have started to use ballot on demand. While we still send ballots out for at least 75% of our precinct registration as required by code, we now only stock our VBM shelves with the bare minimum and we print ballots as needed. Sacramento County had to be approved as a ballot printer by our SOS but it has shown to be a cost saver and as my comfort level increases with this process, I know it will save even more. The estimate we did showed a potential savings of \$297,710.

## **GRANTS**

Another area where I try to cut cost is by looking for and applying for grants. In January, our SOS invited the counties to apply for a HAVA accessibility grant. Our office put together two requests, one for an accessible video voter pamphlet for our website, and the other to enhance the accessibility of the website

functionality. I am pleased to report that with the help of our Disability Compliance office, we were awarded \$250,000 for these projects.

We have also used grant monies to save approximately \$286,000 for such items as luggage carts, surveying tools and training equipment.

### **POST OFFICE**

One cost that it seems an election office does not have much control over is postage. I have found that working closely with our Postal Representative can be a cost savings. We make sure any materials such as post cards and envelopes are printed correctly, the size is checked to get the best discount. We have met the requirements of Move Update so we get the best rates possible. We are moving towards the Intelligent Mail barcode and will soon be taking advantage of those savings.

### **IN THE FUTURE**

For the upcoming May election we will be implementing a new way to capture voter history. In California, it is necessary to record voter history by scanning the roster books for each signature before we can process provisional ballots to ensure no voter voted twice. This process in November took 29 people seven days to complete, slowing the canvass process. We have worked with our election vendor and they have developed a way for us to scan the entire page at one time, changing the process to require only two people and four days.

I have also worked with my Board of Supervisors and presented the cost savings of conducting an all mail ballot election. For a state wide election, I have estimated the savings of \$500,000. I now have my Board's support to pursue legislation similar to that in Washington State.

### **CONCLUSION**

While these cost saving ideas have not solved all my budget woes, I feel that with them, we are a step ahead.