Building Team Democracy

Cook County, Illinois

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Building Team Democracy
Cook County Clerk-Loyola University Partnership to Recruit and Train Election Day Equipment Managers
Cook County Clerk David Orr

Our Challenge: Bring technical expertise into the polling place
To comply with the Help America Vote Act, Cook County began using touch screen equipment in March 2006. However, many of the judges who had served our office for years were somewhat uncomfortable with this new technology. Therefore we created a new category of judges (Equipment Managers) and gave them specialized training on our voting equipment.

Our Motivation: Equipment Managers proved invaluable to Election Day efforts
A polling place depends upon its assigned Equipment Manager (EM) to function smoothly. EMs have all the responsibilities of an Election Judge (i.e. opening and closing polling places, verifying voter qualifications, certifying vote totals, etc.) but are also asked to insure the proper set up of the voting equipment, maintenance of the equipment throughout the day and the consolidation and transmission of results from the precincts after the polls have closed.

Due to the wide range of skills necessary for the job, college students are ideally suited to it. They are more likely to feel comfortable with computer technology than many of the senior citizens who commonly serve in polling places.

Our Goal: Recruit college students to work as Equipment Managers
Since college students incorporate technology into all areas of their life, they are particularly qualified--upon completion of training--to set up and troubleshoot electronic voting equipment. The Cook County Clerk’s office partnered with Loyola University in the fall of 2007 hoping to recruit 50 Equipment Managers to serve for the Feb. 5, 2008 Presidential Primary. We were ecstatic when nearly three times as many students expressed interest, completed an extensive training, and worked on Election Day.

Our Strategy: Involve student organizations, set up a challenge, and provide tailored training
The Cook County Deputy Clerk initiated a partnership with Loyola University’s Vice President of Public Affairs. Because of his status as a key administrator, the Deputy Clerk was able to eliminate red tape and quickly build support for the program within his office. Staff members from both the Clerk’s Office and Loyola University were assigned to the project.

An October 17 information session for student leaders kicked off the campaign. The Clerk’s representatives outlined EM requirements and pay. A Loyola student with Equipment Manager experience spoke passionately about his experience and the position’s importance. As an added incentive, Loyola officials challenged the student organizations to participate and offered a $700 prize to the group who recruited the most participants.
We were overwhelmed by the response. Thirteen diverse student organizations accepted the challenge and together collected over 180 student applications. Of those, 150 went through the training process and served on Election Day.

To accommodate them, the Clerk’s office organized EM training sessions exclusively for Loyola students on Jan 26 and 27 2008. Loyola University provided students with transportation to the training site and lunch for the students and trainers. Clerk David Orr attended the training and applauded the students for their valuable service. The local media coverage of the training also drew attention to the county’s Election Day needs and encouraged other citizens to serve.

**Our Structure: Centralize student contact and offer extra support**

While the Clerk’s office manages the placement and training of over 11,000 Election Judges at nearly 2,300 precincts, it was crucial that the 150 Loyola EMs were given additional support to guarantee their success and the longevity of the project. The Clerk assigned a coordinator to assist the students and act as their primary contact. In some cases, special accommodations were made to allow a student to serve. For example, the coordinator matched students who lacked transportation with a student who had a car. Those two students were then asked to serve in the same polling place. Also, requests for specific polling places were met with very few exceptions.

**Our Results: Success on four fronts**

A surge of 150 Equipment Managers made a big impact on the Clerk’s office Election Day performance. All 150 EMs who served achieved or exceeded expectations; all will be asked to serve again in November 2008.

Loyola’s Vice President of Public Affairs attended trainings and visited Loyola Equipment Manager’s on Election Day and declared the program a success.

Students also savored the experience, according to completed surveys after the election. The Clerk’s office asked students if they benefited from the experience, whether they would serve again, their view on the training process and if they are willing to promote the program in the future. Nearly all of those who responded completed the survey replied favorably.

With knowledgeable college students on hand, the voting process goes more smoothly and efficiently. Our office believes that voters are the biggest beneficiaries.

**Our goals for the future**

The Cook County Clerk-Loyola University partnership is far from over. Shortly after the primary, we met with our Loyola partners to assess the collaboration and prepare for the General Election in November. We prepared a summer recruitment strategy. We also teamed up to submit a grant proposal to expand the project at Loyola and reach more students. We have increased our goal: to recruit 300 Equipment Managers from Loyola University for the November 4, 2008 Election.

*Contact: Cook County Clerk David Orr  312.603.0996  clerk.david@cookcounty.gov.com*
April 29, 2008

Dawn Williams, CERA, Chair- Professional Practices Program
Marshall County Assistant Auditor/Election Division
1 E. Main St.
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Dear Ms. Williams,

I would like to highly recommend the Cook County Clerk’s office for the Election Center’s Stars and Stripes Award for outstanding partnerships.

My office partnered with the Clerk’s office for the February 5, 2008 Presidential Primary to recruit and train Equipment Managers to serve at suburban polling places in Cook County. Through these joint efforts 150 college students were trained and served as Equipment Managers on Election Day.

Throughout our partnership, the Clerk’s office provided Loyola students with exemplary individual service, including personal phone reminders and emails, which encouraged student participation. Their office was always willing to accommodate our students’ scheduling and travel needs. The Clerk’s office was also excellent in following up with our students who served at the polls through phone calls and email surveys.

I look forward to working with the Cook County Clerk’s office again in the November General Election. We will be expanding recruitment efforts in November to recruit 300 students. I am confident that through our partnership with the Clerk’s office, our students will be encouraged to promote democracy in Cook County in a highly unique and satisfying manner.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Philip Hale
Vice President
College Programs

Equipment Managers

Equipment managers have all the responsibilities of election judges, but they must also set up and maintain the voting equipment, transmit results after the polls close, and return materials to the receiving station.

Students who participate must attend and pass required training classes, be registered to vote, and have access to a vehicle and a cell phone on Election Day.

All equipment managers serve in suburban Cook County polling places. You can participate even if you attend college or live in Chicago.

For more information, call (312) 603-0988.

Video: Building Team Democracy

Watch this video to learn about Loyola University students who worked as equipment managers for the Feb. 5 Presidential Primary.

Deputy Registrars

Get out the vote! You can register your friends and classmates by serving as a deputy registrar.

Students who participate must live in Cook County, be a registered voter and complete a brief training.

For more information, call (312) 603-0988.
Equipment Manager Training Day at Loyola University, Jan. 26, 2008