2009 Professional Practices Program

Workspace Plan For Optimal Work Flow

Cass County, NE

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With all the changes since the implementation of HAVA we have all felt the crunch, not only in our budgets, but in our workspace. We talk to our election workers about the need to address the flow of the voters entering and exiting our polling sites. We talk about ballot security and the set up of our polling sites, but what about our offices where we must administer our elections on a daily basis, preparing months for Election Day?

First you must look at the problems that you may encounter. My office is in an old jail building. We were fortunate to get this space when another office moved, but with concrete walls remodeling is not an option, financially or structurally.

Problem #1
We were all given a heads-up about the likelihood of Observers coming into our offices during our elections. That would mean these individuals would literally need to stand in the doorway of our tabulation area on Election night. (We are a paper ballot, optical scan county)

Resolution
As we examined our options we found there was a portion of the concrete wall that was actually wood and drywall. We were able to cut in and install a stationary glass window. This allowed the Observers to stand in a small entry and look into the tabulation room. As the Observers peer into the window they look directly at the 650 scanner and watch the ballots run through. They don’t even need to enter the office workspace!

Problem #2
Another issue with our space is the desk/counter in the main area where voters come into the office. The desk/counter is built-in and not movable. If the employee moved from the desk to retrieve some paperwork for the voter they would need to walk behind the voter back and forth. If they had children or they had a cane we could easily bump into them. Not a good flow at all!
Resolution
By examining the problem and evaluating our options we decided to cut a portion of the built in counter out from the wall. This allows a different access for the employee to come and go from their desk without squeezing around the public, simple and inexpensive.

Problem #3
Affecting all of us is a new issue, the large volume of Absentee or Early Voters. We do not have satellite offices so all of this public traffic comes into our office. We had lines, we ran out of voting areas, we had voters entering and exiting without a good flow. Voters and children would enter the office area and start wandering deeper into the workspace. Adult voters would begin conversations with the staff causing a delay and disrupt the flow for processing the Early Voters. Although the ballots are in a secure area this is not conducive to a good workspace.

Resolution
As we thought through countless scenarios of how to manage this large flow of Early Voters in our office we have come up with a very simple, low cost solution. There is an open doorway right as you come up to the front desk in the election office. We have installed a hinged counter. We can lock the counter in an upright position which allows the public to come into the office during slow times or when we transport election supplies and equipment in and out of the office. When Early Voting begins and voters start flowing into the office to cast their ballot, we can lower the counter to keep the crowd out of the workspace of the office. This will allow us to direct the voters to form a line for a more orderly flow and allow us to process that voter more promptly and efficiently.

We all have our own unique workspace issues. As the election processes change we need to determine the affect it will have on our office workflow, you may be surprised how simple and effective the solutions may be.
Problem #1
We were warned Observers may come to our offices on election night watching our processes and counting of the ballots. This doorway is the only entrance to our tabulation room which meant the Observers would need to stand in the doorway to observe.

Resolution
Although we thought the wall was all brick we found just enough area that was not brick to install an inexpensive stationary glass window. From this view you can see the scanner and the door where the Observers would have been standing had we not installed this glass window.
Problem #2
Above is the front counter in our office. You can see a voter sitting in a chair and one standing in the white top to the left. The only way to move from the desk built-in behind the counter was to walk around the end by the flag and through the voters; very awkward.

Resolution
We cut away the wall on the opposite side of the desk which keeps us from walking through the voters, simple solution.
Problem #3
The above doorway is where the public enters the office coming up to the front desk. As more and more enter they begin to flow into the main office workspace, children and adults. This is a concern for many reasons, security being the most important but also disrupting the process to efficiently and quickly deal with the growing number of Early Voters that now come into our office.
Resolution
We installed a simple hinged counter. This allows us to stop the flow of public from coming into our workspace and also aids in creating a line for better flow to process our voters. If necessary, we can lock the counter up for moving election supplies in and out of the office, or during the slower times when it is acceptable for the public to walk further into the office workspace. I just wish we would have thought of this before the 2008 General Election.