2009 Professional Practices Program

Election Outreach and Accessibility

Thurston County, Washington

Submitted by:
Kim Wyman
Thurston County Auditor
2000 Lakeridge Dr SW
Olympia, WA 98502-6090
360-786-5408
thorntl@co.thurston.wa.us
www.Thurstonvotes.org
2009 Professional Practices Program
The Election Center

Thurston County, Washington
Vote by Mail County
148,911 active registered voters
2008 Outreach

The Concept: Meeting the preparation and accessibility needs of voters

Traditional voter outreach campaigns have focused on whether a citizen was registered to vote or not. The focus missed the essential question of whether a citizen’s voter registration was current or not.

On Election Day each Presidential year, we found many citizens who were not registered to vote or had outdated voter registration information. They had moved or changed their names since the last time they had voted, but had failed to notify our office prior to the voter registration cut off date. This resulted in an increased issuance of provisional and replacement ballots and an increase in the number of voters who cast ballots based upon their former residences. We wanted to reduce these numbers and have the most current information on Election Day.

We wanted the campaign to also provide voter information in a wide variety of formats to more effectively reach citizens. Improving the availability of election information in easily understood and accessible formats is just one focus of Thurston County’s Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). A varied list of issues, including visual and hearing impairments, literacy, mobility, dyslexia, and mental illness present obstacles and hindrances to citizens’ efforts to access voter education information and to vote independently.

The Program: Are You Ready to Vote?

In 2008, Thurston County developed the campaign Are You Ready to Vote? The goal of our outreach campaign was to ensure citizens were not only registered to vote, but that their voter registration information was current and they had access to readily accessible election information.

The program asked citizens simple questions to check the status of their voting readiness. Are you registered? If you are registered, have you moved or changed your name since the last time you voted? Are you a military or overseas voter? Do you or someone you know need assistance or accommodation to vote?

Thurston County has produced and mailed a Local Voters’ Pamphlet in paper format to county residents since 1985. As part of our commitment to improving the level of accessibility to our programs, materials, and information we have added additional formats. In 2001, the pamphlet became available in an electronic version on the Auditor’s web page (www.ThurstonVotes.org). In 2006, to assist visually and hearing impaired citizens, the pamphlet was made available in Word, PDF and MP3 (Audio) formats.

Our VAAC suggested getting information on accessible voting and voter information out into the community in new ways. As part of the Are You Ready to Vote? campaign we translated our pamphlets into American Sign Language (ASL) on our website to continue outreach to
persons with hearing impairments. We provided ASL versions for the 2008 Primary, 2008 General, and 2009 February Elections.

Additionally, our office developed eight Public Service Announcements (PSAs) which aired on a variety of local stations provided by the local cable company (Comcast). They provided visual, audio, and ASL interpretation to reach our voters. In 2009, we added closed captioning to our PSAs to increase accessibility.

We distributed individual appointment cards to local retirement communities to bring our Disability Access Units (AutoMARKs) to the voters when it was convenient for them to vote. In addition to our PSAs, our web site, and print media, we used the campaign to reach restaurant owners in the community. We asked them to display table tents and coasters which asked the question: “Do you know someone who needs assistance reading & marking their ballot?” These tents and coasters were interactive and provided auditor’s office contact information.

The Costs of the Program:

Startup and initial implementation of these advancements were made possible by a Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grant. The total amount of the grant used was $24,739.

The break down of costs:

- Production of PSAs (one time cost) = $8,005
- Airtime of PSAs = $7,613
- Video recording equipment and software (one time cost) = $3,997
- ASL interpretation services = $1,669
- Table tents, coasters, appointment cards = $2,855
- Closed captioning PSAs (one time cost) = $600

The Program’s Overall Success:

The Are You Ready to Vote? campaign had many successes. Two benchmarks included more manageable workloads during the General Election and increased participation by our citizens. The best example of success in 2008 was that as we experienced increases in voter registration and election turnout over 2004, the amount of overtime for voter registration processing was dramatically reduced. In 2004, $27,000 was spent in overtime, compared to the $12,591 spent in 2008. Another benchmark was increased AutoMARK usage in the 2008 General Election, which doubled from 2006. The campaign also helped raise community awareness of the availability of the AutoMarks.

More significantly, in combination with these benchmark increases was the significant decrease in the number of undeliverable, replacement, provisional, and rejected ballots. In the 2004 General Election with 137,742 active registered voters, 4,974 provisional ballots were issued. In 2008 with 148,911 active registered voters, 351 provisional ballots were issued. Much of this was due to the switch to vote by mail from polling places, however the number of ballots rejected for non-registration was reduced from 808 in 2004 to 144 in 2008. Additionally, the number of address changes completed after Election Day was reduced from over 4,000 in 2004, to fewer than 3,000 in 2008.

In conclusion, the materials were very well received and marked a milestone in our county’s outreach capabilities. We are very proud of the hard work and dedication the VAAC members, interpreters, and staff put into the conception, implementation, and final success of the Are You Ready to Vote? campaign.
November 4, 2008
General Election

Online
Local Voters' Pamphlet

The Thurston County Local Voters' Pamphlet is being provided online in alternate formats, for individuals with disabilities.

Please click below for the format you would like:

PDF - This will look exactly like the printed version

MP3 - Audio Version of the Local Voters' Pamphlet

ASL - Video Version of the Local Voters' Pamphlet featuring American Sign Language

Ballots will begin arriving October 18, 2008

If you have not received your ballot by October 24, contact our office immediately. (360) 786-5408
TTY (360) 754-2933

Supporting Document #1, screenshot of Web Page - showing accessible pamphlet options
Coasters distributed to local restaurants

Appointment cards distributed to retirement communities and nursing homes

** We place individualized labels here with the dates we are going to be in the area and the name of the establishment.

The Thurston County Auditor’s Office has special voting machines. You may use them to read your paper ballot and mark your choices. Your ballot will be returned to you to place in your envelope, sign the voters’ affidavit, and deposit in a ballot drop box or mail box.

This is NOT electronic voting, these machines DO NOT record your vote. This is independent voting made possible through technology.

Vote On Your Own Again!

The Auditor’s Office will have a machine at this location on the dates and times listed on the back of this card. Please complete the card and return it to a staff member.

Name: __________________________
Room: ________________
Phone Number: ________________

Thank you. We will contact you to set up an appointment.
Test Your Elections I.Q.!

1. How old do you have to be to register to vote?
2. Give two good reasons to use a ballot drop box instead of the postal service.
3. List 3 common reasons for a ballot to be rejected (not counted).
4. When are ballots mailed out?
5. How long before an election do you have to register or update your information?
6. Can you still vote, even if you're not in your own county on Election Day?
7. On what percentage of ballots are the signatures checked?

1. 17:5. You can't vote until you're 18, but you can register at 17.5
2. No postage is required when using a drop box. If you use a drop box, you don't have to wonder if your ballot was received. Boxes are open 24-hours a day from the time ballots are mailed, to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
3. Identifying marks on the ballot, not signing the oath, signature not matching the signature on file, or postmarked after Election Day.
4. 18 days before Election Day. If you don't have yours 15 days before, call us.
5. 30 days before the election. If you are not registered in Washington, you may register at the Auditor’s Office up to 15 days before Election Day.
6. Yes. If you are not in your home county on Election Day, you may go to any voting location in the state and vote a provisional ballot.
7. 100%. We check every signature against the signature on the voter’s most recent registration form.

Do you know someone who needs help reading & marking the ballot?
Thurston County Elections offers:
- Audio files of the Local Voters' Pamphlet
- Video files of the Local Voters' Pamphlet and ballots translated to American Sign Language
- Large print copies of the Local Voters’ Pamphlet
- Special machines which allow people who cannot see, read, or mark their ballot to vote independently

Update your information at least 30 days before the next election!

Life Events Can Affect Your Voter Registration.
- Getting married or divorced may mean you've changed your name.
- When you move, your address changes, and so do the districts you should be voting on.
- Signatures change for many reasons: injury, illness, or just the passing of time. We can't count your ballot if we can't verify your signature. Make sure to keep it current!

Thurston County Auditor’s Office
Elections Division
(360) 786-5408
www.ThurstonVotes.org

Audio files of the Local Voters’ Pamphlet
Video files of the Local Voters’ Pamphlet and ballots translated to American Sign Language
Large print copies of the Local Voters’ Pamphlet
Special machines which allow people who cannot see, read, or mark their ballot to vote independently.

Vote independently!
Please see CD for Alternate Format #2.