2011 Professional Practices Program

Problems Solved Within

Davis County, Utah

Submitted by:

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Election Administrators face a number of challenges. These challenges differ across every jurisdiction and are dependent on the size of the jurisdiction, and the type of election. Each of us needs to find solutions to the challenges we face, and it is best if we can do so without additional money or staff. Davis County focuses on finding internal solutions to our challenges by relying on the resources we already have within the County. Recently in Davis County, we faced challenges in our provisional voting process.

Background
A person is given a provisional ballot when their eligibility to vote is in question. In 2009, we converted the provisional ballot process from a paper ballot to an electronic ballot. Although there are great benefits associated with electronic ballots, such as cost savings for printing ballots and expediting the tabulation process, it has also created unforeseen problems. When voting a provisional ballot on a touch screen machine, the ballot must be flagged as provisional. This prevents the provisional ballot from being automatically counted and tabulated as a regular ballot.

The Problem
The County received over 2,000 provisional ballots during the 2010 General Election. Several of these ballots were not flagged as provisional, and they were counted automatically. It was fortunate that only a few of these ballots were improperly counted, and that none of the races were close enough to cause concern. However, we determined that these kinds of errors were unacceptable. Another issue that became apparent in this election was that our poll workers used incorrect forms, or used multiple unnecessary forms. This made the voting process for the voter longer, and more complicated than it needed to be. We realized that much of the required information was not being collected, and this caused some ballots to be disqualified.

Identifying the Cause
After each election, our staff meets and reviews the entire election. We discuss successful practices and areas that need improvement. After the 2010 election, we discussed the problems we had with the provisional process, and tried to identify why they had occurred. We reviewed the training to see if we had missed something, and we looked at the process to see if something wasn’t clear. We simply could not understand why the poll workers were having so many problems. We realized we did not have the answers, but perhaps the poll workers might.

In February, we invited eight provisional poll workers to join us for a discussion on the provisional process. We targeted some workers that we knew had problems on Election Day, and explained to them the problems we had experienced. We reviewed the process as taught during training, and then we opened the meeting for discussion. It was amazing the insight they were able to share, as they saw the training from a completely different point of view. They pointed out things that we could not see. They reminded us that we
spend weeks and months thinking about and preparing the training. In two hours we
dump all the necessary information onto them and expect them to remember everything
two or three weeks later on Election Day. We also were reminded that we are thinking
about elections every day, and as much as we think that everyone should eat, drink, and
sleep elections, our poll workers don’t. They brought to our attention the need for
something to help the poll worker through the process that would help them remember
the correct steps to take.

Solving the Problem
We came up with an idea of developing an electronic poll book program that could be
loaded on the laptop computers we already had, which would guide each poll worker
through the entire process. The program would remind the poll worker to gather needed
information, provide a list of acceptable identification, and would flag every ballot
created as provisional. Our idea was that the program would serve as an assistant to the
poll worker and help them remember all the steps to the process.

Our next step was to find out if we could create such a program in-house and avoid
having to rely on a vendor. We met with our IT director and two programmers assigned
to elections. We presented our proposal with a description of the problems we were
having, and the concept of the program. We had two questions; first, could this be done;
and second, how long would it take. Our programmers were confidential they could meet
the challenge, and in a matter of weeks had created a program ready for testing. The final
product – a completed workable electronic poll book; created from technology already
available within the County, and free programs from the internet.

Test the Solution
We invited the poll workers we met with in February to test our new computer program
solution. We gave them a brief training and then let them test it out. We wanted to find
out if the program was user-friendly, and if it effectively helped them through the
process. Their feedback was exciting, as all of the comments were positive. Most
importantly, they felt more confident in fulfilling their duties. “The program was a great
help. It catches everything,” one poll worker said.

Summary
Despite the many challenges we face as Election Administrators, the solutions can be
right at our fingertips. We just need to approach it in a different way or from a different
point of view. By involving the people in the trenches (our poll workers) we gained a
better knowledge and understanding of what was really going wrong. Through a great
partnership with our Information Technology department we were able to develop an
affordable, user-friendly program customized to our needs. Our challenge was overcome
through teamwork and cooperation between election administrators, poll workers, and
our IT staff. We will continue to seek out opportunities to work together in solving the
many challenges we will face in the future.

By first looking within, and identifying the resources each of us have in our
organizations, many of the problems we face can easily be solved from within.
The Process

Internal Evaluation
- Getting a clear understanding of what the problem is, and what caused it is the most important step.
- Many problems are caused from overlooking the obvious, and often times can be corrected with simple changes to policies or procedures.

Include Others
- Often time we are unable to see obvious, using others such as the public or poll workers for input is a valuable method in identifying causes and solutions.

Develop A Plan
- Many solutions exist to every problem, review each idea, weigh the pros and cons, collaborate together to develop a plan.

Identify Resources Already Available
- Building good relationships with other departments or agencies within your organization can give you access to a large variety of equipment, technology, and professional expertise.

Test The Solution
- Every solution should be thoroughly tested prior to implementation. If the solution you have developed does not solve the problem, it is of no use.
Timeline of Events

- Nov. 2010 General Election
- Jan. 2011 Staff Review of Election
- Feb. 2011 Meet/Provisional Poll Workers
- Mar. 2011 Meet/ IT Director and Programmers
- May 2011 Review/ Provisional Poll Workers
- Sep. 2011 Municipal Primary Election

Program Development and Testing