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Pay for Performance: An Experiment With Providing Performance Bonuses to Pollworkers

Washington, DC

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Pay for Performance:

An Experiment With Providing Performance Bonuses to Pollworkers

After its first election implementing new voting equipment, electronic pollbooks, same-day voter registration by provisional ballot, and a variety of other changes to the polling place environment, the D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics faced a significant amount of criticism for difficulties that pollworkers faced opening the polls. Materials were delayed and in disarray when they got back from the polls, contributing to a slower-than-expected release of results on Election night. In addition, a post-election review of precinct paperwork identified additional gaps in training that needed to be remedied with less than two months before the next election.

The Board felt it necessary to take bold steps to improve its performance in the November election. Board staff was concerned, however, about the further strain on pollworkers, who had already faced an increased training burden for the September primary and are paid less than in other area jurisdictions.

After considering several approaches to staffing, training and compensation, the Board decided to experiment with providing performance bonuses to the Precinct Captains responsible for each polling site on Election Day. Staff saw several potential benefits in the experiment including:

- Providing an incentive for pollworkers to attend more hours of training;
- Increasing pay without making a long-term commitment to raising stipends;
- Encouraging Precinct Captains to take responsibility for the performance of pollworkers doing key tasks under their supervision;
- Rewarding strong performance; and
- Disciplining both staff and pollworkers to the key areas most in need of improvement before the next election.

The Board enlisted the assistance of Thad Hall, a professor at the University of Utah, to debrief Precinct Captains and help identify a list of areas for improvement from the pollworkers' perspective to compare with the areas identified by staff. The Board then "doubled down" on the Precinct Captains, targeting scarce resources to provide an eight-hour training class for these workers. This required the Board to reduce its training burden on other workers, including permitting workers in some positions to simply complete a ten-minute walk-in training refresher exercise.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the exercise was that it forced the Board to identify the specific, measurable outcomes that Precinct Captains' performance could be judged based on, and then to target the eight-hour training class to those outcomes. With such a broad array of new procedures and other material to cover in training classes, this exercise disciplined staff to focus on the most important outcomes of the election, and to adjust the training curriculum and precinct paperwork and other materials appropriately with a shared sense of priorities.

To earn a performance bonus, Precinct Captains had to:

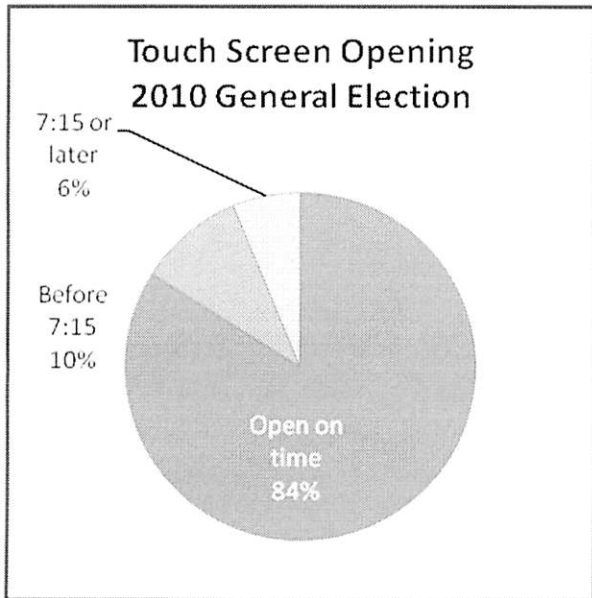
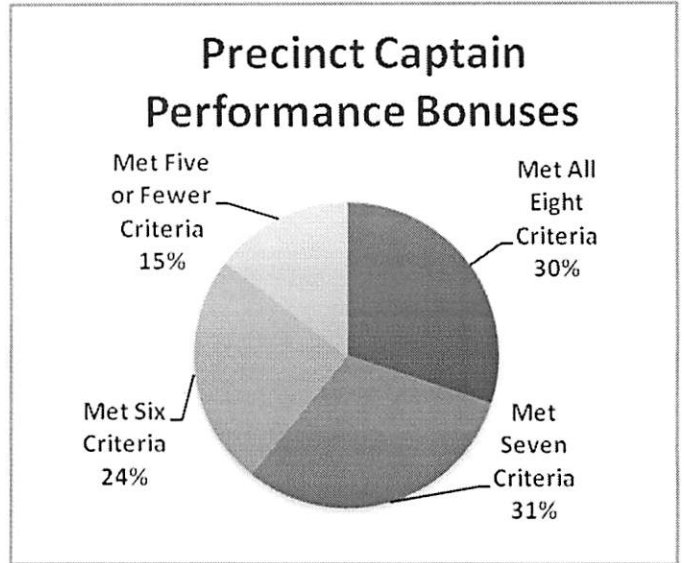
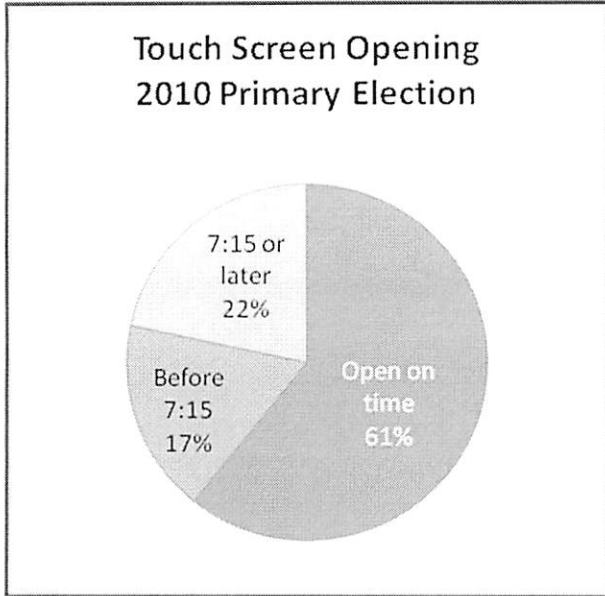
- Satisfactorily complete the required training class, including a hands-on demonstration of opening and closing procedures for the voting equipment;
- Return all critical Election night materials to the Board in the designated bag;
- Complete opening procedures for the voting equipment, as indicated on printouts the morning of the election, no earlier than 5:00 a.m. and no later than 7:00 a.m.;
- Make sure that their staff processing provisional ballots did not make critical errors in paperwork;
- Return all ballots and voter-verifiable paper audit records in the designated bag;
- Fully complete the ballot accounting paperwork for audit purposes; and
- Return all other paperwork in the designated location, including checklists for opening and closing the voting equipment and the pollworker payroll sign-in sheet.

Instituting performance pay had a dramatic effect. Because these requirements were identified and communicated clearly to the Precinct Captains, they were able to focus clearly on a short list of key tasks and the Board was able to more clearly identify critical shortcomings. While the bonus amount of \$140 did not fully close the gap in compensation between the District and neighboring jurisdictions that pay their pollworkers a higher stipend, it brought payment for Captains who met all of their performance goals up significantly for this election. Partial bonuses were awarded; payments were prorated in \$10 and \$20 amounts for each requirement. Assistant Captains were awarded bonuses of \$60, with each item worth a commensurate amount, as they were also required to participate in the full eight-hour training class.

Although there were complaints from many pollworkers who did not earn a full bonus, feedback was generally positive. In many cases, Precinct Captains received a reduced bonus for improperly completing a task that they did not realize they had been doing improperly for more than one election. Nearly half of the precincts did not complete all of the information required on their Ballot Accounting Form, a tedious but important task that there had been no repercussions for leaving incomplete in the past. Several Precinct Captains who had not previously taken personal responsibility for tasks such as operating the voting equipment or ensuring that provisional ballot paperwork was completed properly, leaving it to another position in the precinct, took that responsibility on since their bonus depended on it.

The attached charts from the Board's After-Action Report on the 2010 election season highlight the dramatic improvement in precinct performance that occurred between the September primary and the November general election. While it will never be possible to determine how much of the improvement was a natural consequence of practice and improvements in training, and how much was due to incentive pay, the Board considers performance bonuses to have been a worthwhile exercise for staff and pollworkers. Over time, the Board hopes to expand this exercise in performance measurement and incentive pay through the entire Election Day workforce.

Charts from:
Making Reform a Reality:
An After-Action Report on Implementation of the Omnibus Election
Reform Act



Performance Bonus Ratings

Open Optical Scanner by 7:00 am	95%
Open Touch Screen by 7:00 am	90%
Meet Special Ballot Standards	71%
Return of Election Results	97%
Return of Ballots and Paper Trail	82%
Other Election Night Supplies	86%
Other Paperwork Return	97%
Accurate Ballot Accounting Form	52%

Precinct Performance Assessment and Bonus Report

General Election - November 2, 2010

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Precinct: 6
Position: Captain
Name: Trovonder Wray

This report assesses the performance of individual precincts during the DC General Election for the purpose of providing Captains and Assistant Captains with details on whether they met the requirements to receive all, part, or none of their performance bonus.

Prerequisite: Trainer Certification

To be eligible for the performance bonus, you must have completed the 8-hour Certification Class and signed the Performance Bonus Acknowledgment.

Training Status: Training completed
Eligible for Bonus: Yes

M100 Machine Opening Procedures

Requirement: The precinct must successfully open the M100 Optical Scanner by 7:00 AM.

Result: Precinct 6's Zero Tape indicates the M100 was opened at 6:48:00 AM.

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes **Subtotal:** \$20 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

iVotronic Machine Opening Procedures

Requirement: The precinct must successfully open the M100 Optical Scanner by 7:00 AM.

Result: Precinct 6's Zero Tape indicates the iVotronic machine was opened at 6:26:00 AM.

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes **Subtotal:** \$20 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

Precinct Performance Assessment and Bonus Report

General Election - November 2, 2010

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Name: **Trovonder Wray** Precinct: **6**

Special Ballots

Requirement: The precinct must have completed special ballots accurately without a significant number of errors or errors that caused ballots to be invalidated.

Result: Our review of the special ballot envelopes from your precinct indicates that a significant number of envelopes were completed incorrectly and/or a mistake was made that may have caused a ballot or several ballots to not be counted.

Total Number of Special Ballot Errors: 4

Type of Special Ballot Errors: For same-day registration, the name and address from the identification is not listed.

Bonus Requirement Met: No **Subtotal:** \$0 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

Election Night Materials – Blue Election Equipment Bag

Requirement: The precinct must have returned all of the materials below in the proper bag. Precinct leaders were allowed to have one item from the list below in the wrong location, so long as it was returned to the Board.

Result: Our review indicates that the precinct successfully returned each of the following critical items in the Black Ballot Bag on Wheels on Election night.

Results Pickup Form: Yes
Open/Close PEB: Yes
Ballot PEB: Yes
iVotronic Zero Tape: Yes
M100 Memory Card: Yes
M100 Zero Tape: Yes

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes **Subtotal:** \$20 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

Precinct Performance Assessment and Bonus Report

General Election - November 2, 2010

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Name: **Trovonder Wray** Precinct: **6**

Ballots and Paper Trail

Requirement: The precinct must have returned all of the materials below in the proper bag.

Result: Our review indicates that the precinct successfully returned each of the following critical items in the Black Ballot Bag on Wheels on Election night.

Ballots: Yes

Paper Trail (Opening) Yes

Paper Trail (Closing) Yes

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes **Subtotal:** \$20 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

Ballot Accounting Form

Requirement: The precinct must have completed the Ballot Accounting Form in its entirety (leaving no blank boxes) and the totals must be within a reasonable range of accuracy to the actual ballots cast.

Result:

Was the Ballot Accounting Form filled out completely? Yes

Detail: Precinct filled out entire form.

Was the Ballot Accounting Form filled out accurately? Yes

Detail: Minor errors in math were present on the form, but within a reasonable error rate for this task.

Additional Notes: None.

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes **Subtotal:** \$20 out of \$20 Capt./\$8 Ass. Capt.

Precinct Performance Assessment and Bonus Report

General Election - November 2, 2010

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Name: **Trovonder Wray** Precinct: **6**

Election Night Materials – Blue Bag with Red Handles

Requirement: The precinct must have returned all of the materials below in the proper bag.

Result: Our review indicates that the precinct successfully returned each of the following critical items in the Blue Bag with Red Handles.

Yellow Voter Registration Update Cards	Yes
Cell Phone	No
Ask Ed	No

Bonus Requirement Met: No Subtotal: \$0 out of \$10 Capt./\$6 Ass. Capt.

Materials Left in the Precinct – Gray Box

Requirement: The precinct must have left all of the items below in the Gray Box inside the precinct. Precinct leaders were allowed to have one item from the list below in the wrong location, so long as it was returned to the Board.

Result: Our review indicates that the precinct successfully returned the following items in the Gray Box.

Paper Pollbook	Yes
M100 Machine Opening & Closing Forms	Yes
IVotronic Opening & Closing Forms	Yes
Delivery Confirmation Form	Yes
Payroll Form	Yes

Bonus Requirement Met: Yes Subtotal: \$10 out of \$10 Capt./\$6 Ass. Capt.

TOTAL BONUS AMOUNT EARNED = \$110

(out of a possible \$140 for Captains and \$60 for Asst. Captains)