2011 Professional Practices

“Future Vote Module”

Montgomery County, Maryland

Submitted by:

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Future Vote Initiative

The Montgomery County Board of Elections (BOE) developed the Future Vote Initiative to train and assign 6th-12th grade students to county precincts to assist Election Judges, and voters, including those with special needs, dispense voting-related literature and sample ballots, pick-up trash, and, if possible, provide information in a second language or in American Sign Language. In 2009 the BOE in collaboration with the County’s Department of Technology Services developed and implemented an online user driven platform designed for two services, one, to facilitate recruitment, precinct placement, training and, two, implementation of the Future Vote (FV) Initiative.

Launched as a pilot program in 2004, FV expanded from 200 to almost 2000 students, grades 6-12, and their families. The program is designed to educate Montgomery County’s youth about the scope of volunteering for community involvement and civic duty. To date, over 7500 families and their children have participated and assisted the BOE in its voter empowerment efforts. Additionally they donated over 35,000 pounds of food and 3500 coats to local charities.

The program is available to all students residing within Montgomery County and attending public, private, independent, religious, home schooled and/or special needs settings. U.S. citizenship is not a pre-requisite to participate and students with bilingual and American Sign Language skills are encouraged to and do apply. To participate, students and parents attend mandatory training sessions to learn about polling place procedures, election law, history and expectations prior to serving on Election Day.

Future Vote Module Genesis

Prior to the launch of the online user-focused module, the FV program handled data entry, precinct placement and coordination manually which was labor intensive but manageable. As this successful program expanded, the challenge was maintaining effective communication between the BOE and Future Vote families via telephone and paper. Internally, a computerized, interactive web-based system for managing election judge recruitment and training, polling places and launching early voting was created making possible the genesis of the FV Module.

Guardian Empowerment

Immediate benefits of the FV Module were to reduce internal data entry and paper consumption by 98% or more and to empower Montgomery County families with access to new avenues of participation in the non-partisan election process. Now, guardians can review program expectations, guidelines, options for precinct placement, Election Day shift selection, and training dates and locations. All communication and coordination is conducted via e-mail which expedites response time and eliminates the need for hit and miss telephone communication efforts, printing, envelope stuffing and postage and reduces costs.

System Generated Reports and Efficiencies

Administratively, the benefits of the FV module include collecting demographic and statistical content, expanding recruitment efforts among the growing cadre of students and their parents as their potential to be election judge candidates is considered, developing internal e-lists by batching specific parameters (zip code, school district, gender, and ethnicity and/or language skills) needed to recruit...
volunteers for voter registration, demonstrating voting unit use, participating in election judge recruitment events and internal administrative endeavors (e.g. filing, large mailers, training reminders, equipment audits). Recruitment lists can be instantly generated showcasing relevant information needed to facilitate election judge recruitment (home address, contact numbers, date of birth and e-mails). If needed, voter registration, absentee ballot and election judge applications can be instantaneously e-mailed to prospective candidates with minimal administrative costs.

Bar-coding

Bar-coding and hyperlink embedding were essential requirements during module design and development. By incorporating bar-coding technology, data entry errors were drastically reduced, data recording was exponentially faster and record management was more accurate. The need to engage in program sequencing to open and update volunteer specific records and/or folders was eliminated with bar-coding by 98%. The FV module generates a volunteer and task specific (e.g. training, Election Day service) bar-code that appears on the all system generated documents (e.g. training confirmation, volunteer oath and Election Day precinct lists). Through bar-code scanning the appropriate record is updated instantaneously with nominal administrative effort and cost. Prior to the FV module, the following administrative requirements consumed 75% of the effort to manage the Future Vote Initiative.

Hyperlink Embedding

Hyperlink embedding played an invaluable role in the FV module by providing useful information to guardians as it pertains to Election Day training and service. A recurring request for driving directions absorbed valuable work hours needed for Early Voting and Election Day coordination. By embedding commonly used websites for directions within several hyperlinks, the need to provide turn-by-turn directions to participants was completely eliminated. Guardians and students alike were able to obtain directions to the appropriate location by “clicking” the corresponding hyperlink embedded within the “Training & Election Day Information Sheet”. Successful use of reciprocal hyperlinks to other websites enhances the credibility of the FV module and Board of Elections website (www.777vote.org).

Added Benefits

Valuing and investing time and training for students and their families while encouraging interest through hands-on Election Day activities is paramount for the continuance of our democratic legacy. The Future Vote experience replaces Election Day myths and waning participation with new participants, soon to be part of the voter rolls, motivated and now trained participants providing support and assistance through voter empowerment; registering voters, demonstrating how to vote, preparing supplies for voting and greeting voters on Election Day.

Since 2004, 12,500 students have participated in FV and have invested 3500 volunteer work hours saving County taxpayers an estimated $70,000. Not only has FV and its module streamlined efficiencies but has provided a tool towards voter empowerment for County residents and election administrators alike.
Dr. Zelaya successfully expanded volunteers’ per election cycle into neighboring precincts.

is nature and, including community involvement, and volunteering

where parent and child expanding program

while were exclusively paper based. The program expanded exponentially as student and community feedback about the program was overwhelmingly positive.

due to the internal development of a computerized, interactive web-based system needed for the management of election judges, polling places and the BOE mandates as it pertains to implementing Early Voting in Maryland for the first time.
were instantaneous.

It reduced nearly eliminated paper consumption by 98% while the system allows to while providing an array of as it pertains to Students are able to ...(broadly, step by step)

Additional Valuable data were collected while expanding our recruitment efforts by identifying viable amongst Future Vote Ambassadors, as they come of age and their civic minded parents/guardians. I can be developed