2013 Professional Practices Program

Vote By Mail

Martin County, Florida

Submitted by:

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Countdown to Choose. Vote by Mail in 2012!

RESEARCH: For the first time, voters in Martin County were faced with a two-page ballot due to 11 state constitutional amendments. Additionally, the Legislature passed House Bill 1355 which reduced the number of early voting days from fourteen days to eight. Knowing turnout for presidential elections in Martin County exceeds 75% the Supervisor of Elections and staff anticipated long lines at the polls on Election Day, unless voters took advantage of Voting by Mail. In an effort to reduce the number of voters waiting until Election Day to cast their vote and to avoid waiting in long lines at the polls a “Countdown to Choose. Vote by Mail in 2012” campaign was created.

OBJECTIVES: To educate Martin County voters about the two-page ballot and the vote by mail process, and as a result, increase voter participation and total voter turnout, the following 3 objectives were established: (1) To increase the absentee/vote by mail request by 20%. (2) To increase total voter turnout by 5% based on voter turnout in the 2008 General Election. (3) To increase voter education and awareness by implementing 3 new creative approaches as compared to 2008 General Election when only news releases, vote by mail request cards, radio ads, and Elections Center website were used.

IMPLEMENTATION: The first phase was to develop a campaign that would effectively communicate to all registered Martin County voters their option to Vote by Mail. Outreach for the 2008 elections included radio, press releases, and the Elections Center website as forms of communication to educate voters. These forms of communication were effective, but additional voters could have been reached. During a staff brainstorming session, it was determined that we should reach out to our business community and try new and different forms of media to reach voters. A utility billing insert was created reminding voters there would be a 2-page ballot and mailed to 94,000 homes four times leading up to the last day to request a vote by mail ballot for the Presidential Election. A partnership was formed with the local United Way’s Character Counts! program to utilize four of their billboards at highly visible traffic intersections using the pillar of “citizenship” to remind voters “Citizenship. Exercise Your Right to Vote by Mail.” Vote by Mail street pole banners were displayed throughout the county. A local restaurant in a highly traveled area displayed a “Vote by Mail” banner for three months. Through a partnership with a local known attorney, digital billboard space was donated with our “Countdown to Choose. Vote by Mail” message for four months. Six plasma televisions were placed in public libraries, next to the checkout counter with a Vote by Mail video and Vote by Mail request cards that could be completed and mailed. In addition, Vote by Mail request
cards, were available in five local banks, all five chambers of commerce, Boys and Girls Club, and both hospitals. Vote by Mail buttons were worn by Elections Center staff in the office and during community events and voter drives. To ensure our youngest eligible voters were aware they could Vote by Mail, request cards were placed in diploma covers of all graduating high school students, so they could participate while away at college. From January 2012 through October 2012, the outreach department conducted more than twenty voter registration/awareness drives and fourteen Vote by Mail presentations to HOA’s, churches, and community groups. Over 2,000 newsletters were distributed with information reminding voters of the option to Vote by Mail due to a two-page ballot. A guest column was written by the Supervisor of Elections, outlining the advantages of Voting by Mail. The newsletter was placed on the Elections Center’s website, strategically placed throughout the county, and mailed to all elected officials, active poll workers, political parties, and citizens who requested the quarterly newsletter.

**EVALUATION:** At the completion of the campaign objectives were accomplished. (1) In Martin County the 2012 General Election generated 31,433 absentee/Vote by Mail votes - a more than 82% increase compared to the 2008 General Election. (2) In addition, 2012 overall voter turnout increased by .56% to 79,453 compared to 2008 turnout of 79,005. (3) Advertising was boosted by the implementation of five new creative approaches to reach voters as compared to, the 2008 Presidential Election, where only newspaper ads, press releases, and radio were used and reached less than half of the voting public. At the completion of the campaign, the Martin County Elections Center made the voting public aware of the two-page ballot, thereby avoiding long lines on Election Day.

**Budget:** Projected budget of campaign $20,000. Street pole banners-$3,500; Utility bill inserts-$1,547.75; Promotional items (chip clips, buttons, quick screen) $1,500; radio advertising $1,200; newspaper ads-$1,200; Banners-$1,040; Video-no cost done in house; Postcards-$5,128. The breakdown of staff time was equivalent to one full-time employee working 40 hours a week for an eight month period. Total cost of campaign = $15,115.75, coming in under budget. The price of Martin County voters avoiding long lines at the polls on Election Day = Priceless!
Vote by Mail Request Card placed in all high school diploma covers

Vote by Mail Street Pole Banner placed in downtown area to encourage voting by mail

Vote by Mail Billboard Space donated by local United Way Character Counts! Program for entire 2012 Elections Cycle

Vote by Mail Banner placed in highly traveled areas in the county

CITIZENSHIP

Exercise Your Right, Vote by Mail

MartinVotes.com
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