2013 Professional Practices Program

VOTE CENTERS:
Revitalizing Voters in Yavapai County

Yavapai County, AZ

Submitted by:
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Mixed Model Vote Centers
Yavapai County – 2013
“Vote where you work, vote where you play, vote wherever life takes you on Election Day”

ABSTRACT OF THE PROGRAM

The Yavapai County Recorder’s Office, Voter Registration and Elections Departments were blazing a new trail in Arizona when they decided to propose, legislate and implement a new type of voting experience for registrants in Yavapai County. For the 2012 Presidential Preference, Primary and General Elections, a mixed model vote center concept was implemented in Yavapai County, the first of its kind in the State of Arizona.

The unique geographical make up of Yavapai County (consisting of 8,000 square miles) offers some distinct disadvantages for voters on Election Day. With the ever growing population and rise in voter registrants to an estimated 125,000, it was not surprising that the pioneering spirit of the Recorder, Voter Registration and Elections staff gave birth to a new mixed model vote center concept. The mission was to allow voters in Yavapai County to vote at any polling place, “vote center”, of their choosing. The result was two different types of vote centers: urban (19 locations) and rural (11 locations). Urban Vote Centers would have up to 4 check-in stations, a ballot on demand printer (to print all ballot styles), and would be located in high traffic metropolitan areas. Rural Vote Centers would have 2 check-in stations, paper ballots for the local precincts (out of precinct voters would utilize touch screen voting equipment), and would be located in outlying lower traffic areas. This concept lessens confusion for the voters as they could go to any voter center and receive their ballot. In addition Yavapai County’s GIS department created an interactive mapping application available both on line and for smart phones which allows a voter to enter their current location and directs them to the closest vote center. Therefore, rejected provisional ballots for voting at the wrong place have been totally eliminated in Yavapai County. Additionally, this concept has proven to provide some cost savings (General Election savings over $77,000) while allowing more votes to be counted by providing a more efficient, convenient voting experience for the voters of Yavapai County.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAM

The road to success is often filled with obstacles and hurdles and it takes true determination to persevere in the name of progress and evolution. This was true for Yavapai County staff when they set out to make a change in the voting processes within the county. It began in 2009 when the Yavapai County Elections Director, Lynn Constabile, saw the Vote Center concept at an Election Center Conference. In partnership with then Yavapai County Recorder, Ana Wayman-Trujillo, they ventured into uncharted waters when they developed and wrote legislation for the implementation of Electronic Poll Books (EPBs) and Vote Centers in Arizona, specifically for use in Yavapai County.

The need for new technology was coming to the forefront as the growth of Yavapai County’s population and voter rolls were hitting all-time highs. Additionally, the growth of the Permanent Early Voting List accounts for 63% of today’s registered voters. Electronic Poll Books (EPB) were new to Arizona but had been quite successful in several other states nationwide. Yavapai County took the initiative to work with the Arizona Secretary of State’s Office, participate in an EPB pilot program and ultimately demonstrate to the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors the efficiency and necessity of developing this concept in their county. However,
even after receiving approval from the Board and the State’s office, there was still two items left to be addressed: the law and US Department of Justice preclearance. New legislation would need to be written for the use of EPBs and Vote Centers in Arizona and a sponsor would need to be found to carry the legislation forward. Countless hours of research, investigation and networking with local legislators were spent by staff writing and developing the language that would ultimately provide Yavapai County with the needed law changes and US Department of Justice approval allowing this concept to become reality. The language as it reads today in the Arizona Revised Statutes was authored by Lynn Constabile.

RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

Finally, the hard work and dedication to the mixed model vote center concept came to fruition. Legislation was passed, EPBs were purchased and voters throughout Yavapai County became revitalized by the convenience and efficiency of vote centers. Gone are the old printed signature rosters as they were replaced with more efficient electronic versions, gone are the confused voters unable to find their correct polling place, gone are the long voter lines as the mixed model concept proved to process more voters more efficiently. The longest wait time reported was one hour at the end of the night, typical in a Presidential Election.

Budget constraints and funding are always high concerns when changes are initiated, while there were some startup costs; ultimately, Yavapai County will be seeing continual cost savings from the implementation of vote centers. Yavapai County was able to significantly reduce the number of polling places previously required prior to vote centers. They went from 95 in 2008 polling locations down to 30 vote centers in 2012. This enabled them to save on additional delivery/pick-ups costs, rental fees, ADA equipment, signage, and a reduction from 600 to 300 poll workers, just to name of few.

Security is another vital and pertinent piece of the puzzle for vote centers. Staff worked very closely with the equipment and software vendor to help develop a secure system that was tailored specifically for the needs of Yavapai County. Many hours were spent learning and coding the system with the vendor to ensure all laws, safeguards and security standards were met and/or exceeded. The software security measures allow for real time updates to every vote center; therefore, it is virtually impossible for voters to vote at multiple vote centers. While similar software may exist, this system is truly Yavapai County’s own.

Due to the ease and convenience of vote centers, Yavapai County has found an increase in ballots counted. As reflected by the highest percentage of voter turnout in the State of Arizona for the 2012 General Election at 81.57%. Additionally, more voter outreach and education have been implemented throughout the county to inform voters of the new voting methods. Yavapai County has received multiple accolades from their Board of Supervisors, the Arizona Secretary of State’s office, media, local parties and most importantly voters!

Yavapai County has successfully demonstrated that with the ingenuity, courage and hard work of dedicated staff nothing is unattainable or impossible. Additionally, several other counties within the State of Arizona are now following down the path Yavapai County prepared, more vote centers may be developed as a result of the tireless efforts of the Yavapai County Recorder’s Office, Voter Registration and Elections Department.
An excerpt from THE DAILY COURIER EDITORIALS (11/27/2012):

"Thanks also to the new concept of vote centers. Those were the polls at which Yavapai County registered voters could cast ballots anywhere in this county on Election Day."

An excerpt from THE DAILY COURIER EDITORIALS (11/29/2012):

"Complements to Y-County on the ease of voting."

LETTER TO EDITOR THE DAILY COURIER EDITORIALS (03/10/2012):

A special thank you to our voters throughout the county who participated in the first ever Vote Center Election in Yavapai County. The Vote Centers were a success and well received.

Leslie M. Hoffman
Yavapai County Recorder
MIXED MODEL VOTE CENTERS

URBAN VOTE CENTER

RURAL VOTE CENTER
LIVE ELECTION DAY REPORTING CAPABILITIES FROM THE ELECTRONIC POLL BOOK SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY

Ballots for election

Turnout by Hour

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ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAPPING APPLICATION:
ALLOWS VOTERS TO SEARCH NEAREST VOTE CENTER LOCATIONS

AT A GLANCE:
- Total Area of 8,127.78 Square Miles
- Population 211,888
- Larger than 3 US States
- Contains 3 Cities, 7 Towns, 29 other unincorporated communities
- 4th Largest County in Arizona