2015 Professional Practices Program

Let's Take this Show on the Road

Fairfax County, Virginia

Submitted by:

Cameron P. Quinn
General Registrar, Fairfax County
12000 Government Center Parkway
Suite 323
Fairfax, VA, 22035
703-222-0776
Cameron.Quinn@fairfaxcounty.gov
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ elections
Let’s Take this Show on the Road!

Fairfax County, Virginia, is a diverse and thriving county located in Northern Virginia. The County’s population of more than 1.1 million residents exceeds that of eight states and the District of Columbia. Surveys indicate that as many as 174 languages are spoken by this diverse population. Covering 406 square miles, nearly 700,000 registered voters cast their ballots at 241 precincts, where there are at least three elections every year; in most years there are additional special elections.

Election management is a challenging endeavor under the best circumstances. In 2014, two new elements were added: how to introduce a brand new, state of the art integrated voting system while ensuring that voters were prepared for Virginia’s new photo identification requirement. Finding a convenient, cost-effective way to reach voters across Fairfax County’s very diverse population and broad geographic area presented a challenge.

In 2014, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors authorized the purchase of new voting equipment – a 6.4 million dollar integrated voting system including 1,125 state-of-the-art voting machines. The 525 Digital Scan voting machines and 600 ExpressVote machines provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access to voting while ensuring a paper ballot for all voters in case a recount is required. Voters mark a paper ballot and insert it into the DS200 Digital Scan machine. To the average voter used to optical scan equipment, the process is not very different. (The prior optical scanning machines were acquired in 2007 to ensure sufficient voting equipment when the State no longer allowed the purchase of additional DREs.) The ExpressVote machines are a very different set of technology. Fully compliant with the ADA, they feature assistive devices such as audio instructions, magnifications, and puff technology so that differently-abled voters can mark a ballot. This ballot is also then inserted into the DS200 to complete the voting process.

Posing a separate challenge was Virginia’s new photo ID law, which became effective July 1, 2014. To address concerns regarding possible disenfranchisement of voters without picture identification, the legislation allowed registered voters to receive a free photo ID from the office of the General Registrar from any locality in the state. Because these voter IDs were linked to data in Virginia’s secure Virginia Election and Registration Information System (VERIS), the ability to create such IDs was limited by access to secure data lines, such as those found at the offices of general registrars. This presented a significant technical hurdle.

Fairfax County’s Office of Election’s Outreach Team recognized the unique possibility for outreach to voters on these two distinct projects. A combined effort to introduce voters to the
new voting equipment and also ensure that voters had the necessary identification to vote on Election Day resulted in Fairfax County’s “Roadshow.”

The Roadshow began with visits to the County’s regional government centers and libraries (which already had the requisite VERIS access). Outreach teams demonstrated the new equipment by allowing voters to cast practice ballots in a mock election for the mayor and council of Mount Rushmore. “Are You Election Ready?” signs promoting the new voter ID law were also prominently displayed. Voters without the necessary ID could have a photo taken and ID generated on the spot (to be mailed to the voter at their listed address, a safeguard to prevent fraud).

Technical and access issues were resolved allowing the Roadshow to become more mobile and visit a broader range of localities around the county. Recreation centers, senior communities and shopping centers were added as demonstration sites. Information about these events was promoted on the County website, in community bulletins and in Office of Elections materials. Many of our election officers also visited the roadshows enhance their familiarity with the equipment prior to the general election. In only seven weeks, 90 Roadshow events were conducted across the county. During this period, 299 voter IDs were issued, including 120 temporary IDs (printed within 30 days prior to the election).

Perhaps the best measure of the success of this program was seen on Election Day. Lines flowed freely. Voters appeared to have minimal difficulty with the new equipment. Out of 308,397 votes cast, only 81 voters lacked a proper ID. Many of those voters were able to provide an ID within the timeframe for their votes to be counted.

The Roadshow model has been an overwhelming a success in Fairfax County. We will continue this model as we approach the presidential elections so that voting will continue to be a seamless process for our citizens.