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Meeting the Need for Election Officers

Fairfax County, Virginia

Submitted by:

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Meeting the Need for Election Officers

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.

Fully staffing Fairfax County's 241 precincts with election officers ensures voting accessibility. For a November election, especially in a presidential year when turnout can be as high as 80%, more than 3,200 election officers are needed. Recruiting so many individuals for a one-day, grueling assignment – beginning at 5AM and ending after 8PM – has been getting more and more difficult (In 2012, 30% of Fairfax County's elections officer database was over the age of 70 while only 15% was under the age of 50). During the last two weeks prior to an election, more than 10% of election officers who commit to serving are forced to cancel for many reasons, including health, family issues and sudden work commitments. As recognized by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, jurisdictions should aggressively recruit and train officers of elections using a variety of tools, including those assembled by the Election Assistance Commission. In 2014, Fairfax County piloted another recruiting tool to add to its portfolio.

Because Virginia law requires a partisan balance in the precincts, it is not enough to simply acquire more than 4,000 officers; an equal number of Republicans and Democrats is required. Some precincts and areas of the County have much higher concentrations of one party, which is further complicated by officers' desires to work close to their homes. Juggling assignments is often to no avail because some people would rather quit than endure a lengthy commute, particularly after such a long day.

Although the work is a valued civic endeavor, it entails long hours, complicated opening and closing procedures, sometimes less-than-sanitary school gyms, cafeterias or other common-use rooms, and a seemingly endless line of voters, not all of whom are in the best mood. Many election officers have faithfully served for years, some for more 60 elections. Their service and loyalty is incredible. However, with the bulk of this workforce composed of pre-Boomer and Baby-Boomer generations, their number is diminishing due to advancing age and health issues. Finally, as elections become more technologically driven with electronic poll books and digital scanners, officers need newer skills. In communities where English is not the primary language, (an estimated 174 languages are spoken in homes in Fairfax County) multi-lingual officers are also needed.

Efforts to recruit and retain election officers have been multifaceted over the past three years. The daily stipend was increased from \$100 to \$175 per day. A position was created (filled in early 2015) to focus solely on election officer recruitment. A host of social (and old fashioned) media options have been used to spread the word. Election officers were urged to recruit family and friends. Yet, every November still seems to involve a mad scramble for officers.

An innovative tool – from existing County resources, in a partnership with a sister agency and using a method that could reach virtually every household in the County – was envisioned. Could an insert soliciting election officers be included with the notifications mailed by the Tax Administration Office to citizens?

The Fairfax County Department of Taxation mails tax bills twice yearly to over 400,000 households. In February, property owners are mailed their real estate property taxes. In July, citizens receive a bill for taxes on their personal property (e.g. a motor vehicle). By partnering, the Office was able to reach its target audience in a new way... and it WORKED!

Normally, once each year (twice during the presidential election year) the Office of Elections prepares a simple lightweight insert to be included with the tax mailings (See attached). In addition to basic election information, links to the County's web site and key fall election deadlines, a new section in 4 languages (English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean) was added noting that election officers are needed and links the reader to information available by phone or web site. Highlighting the daily stipend in red made the election officer information stand out and was highly effective.

The Tax insert has proven to be an overwhelming success. As a result of the mailing (most recently in February 2015), hundreds of inquiries have been received and a steady stream of new election officers has been coming in the door, citing the mailing to staff as they complete their employment paperwork. This uptick in officers cost only staff time to design the cards and nominal printing – less than 1¢ each. Postage was borne by the Tax Division, which is required to mail out these billings, at no additional cost since our lightweight mailing did not increase the amount of postage. Through these cooperative efforts, scarce County resources were successfully leveraged. And while no one enjoys receiving a tax bill, citizens were provided an opportunity to earn some funds (to pay the taxes) while assisting their fellow citizens with the voting process.

This partnership truly serves all voters of Fairfax County.



Voter Registration

- Update & Register Online:
www.vote.virginia.gov
- Confirm your registration status:
www.sbe.virginia.gov



Key Voting Deadlines—2014

General Election:	November 4 - 6 a.m.- 7 p.m.
Voter Registration:	October 14 - 5 p.m.
In-person Absentee	
Satellite voting begins:	September 27 (Saturdays only until Oct 14)
Last Day to request	
Absentee Ballot by mail:	October 28 - 5 p.m.



Election Officer Opportunities

Fairfax County needs 3,000 election officers to conduct elections. Please sign up to help!

Bilingual Citizens are Encouraged!

¡Se necesitan ciudadanos bilingües!

Ưu tiên cho Công Dân nói hai thứ tiếng.

이중언어 가능한 시민권자의 참여를 권장합니다

For more information:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/working

\$175 stipend for full day



Para información y materiales en español visite nuestra página de internet: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections

O llame a la Oficina de Elecciones línea en español: 703-324-4766

Election Information Insert – one side above, reverse below

Photo ID Required for Voting . Effective July 1, 2014

Take a Test Drive Before Election Day!
New voting machines starting this fall.

Voting machine roadshow begins in August!
See a schedule after August 1, at:
fairfaxcounty.gov/elections



Effective July 1, 2014

Voters must present one acceptable form of photo identification when voting.

- Valid Virginia DMV-issued driver's license or photo ID card
- Valid US Passport or other government-issued photo ID
- Valid employee photo ID card
- Valid college student photo ID card (issuer must be a Virginia institution of higher education)

If you do not have acceptable ID contact for assistance:

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For more information go to sbe.virginia.gov