

ASSIGNMENT ON TIPS AND TECHNIQUES TO SHARE

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Question 1.

If you've applied a practice covered in this presentation, please describe in detail *how* it's been implemented in your county. Explain *why* it has been successful (or why not). How do you know it was successful? What have you learned.

PHONE BANK.

During the Presidential Election, Clark County brings in three to six seasonal employees to answer phones beginning on the 29-day cutoff period. Working with our Telecommunications Department, we created a recorded "day script" and separate "night script" to answer common questions voters may have. The day script provides general information and different question options to choose, allowing a voter to have their question answered immediately. Of course, at any time, they may choose to hit "zero" and talk with an Elections staff. The night script has the same question options, but allows the voter to leave a detailed message to be answered by staff the next working day. The phone bank personnel also have computer capabilities to research information in our election management system and to look up information in the VRDB.

The phone bank personnel will print out a screen shot of the voters' registration information and write down transfer information and contact phone numbers. The transfers are given to permanent Elections staff to complete.

This practice works very well in Clark County. It allows our permanent staff to process ballot requests online and at the counter to concentrate on their task at hand. It also frees up our staff to work with the challenged ballots' correspondence that must take place and the subsequent curing process.

This practice was first implemented in 2008 and was very successful. It allowed us to keep key personnel available to issue ballots, thereby assuring a correct ballot being issued and giving our voters great customer service.

After the first election with phone bank personnel, we learned it was wise to provide them with a notebook of pertinent information easily flipped through in a binder. This information at-hand kept many phone calls from being transferred to fulltime personnel. We also learned it was wise to test the equipment and practice with a "test" phone number to ensure all personnel were up to speed on proper procedures. We quickly realized a dedicated printer must be located very close to the phone bank personnel allowing them to quickly retrieve their photocopies and write down new information provided by the voter.

Question 2.

Describe a practice *not* covered in this presentation that's been successfully implemented in your county. *Why* was the practice implemented? *How* has it impacted your process?

SECONDARY INSPECTION BOARDS AND WEIGHING BALLOTS.

After our inspection boards have finished inspecting a batch of ballots by precinct, they are separated into stacks of good ballots, ballots with over votes, ballots to be duplicated, and ballots with write-ins. They are counted by the inspection board and sent on to a secondary inspection board.

The secondary inspection board will look through each stack to make sure this ballot, is indeed, in the correct stack. These stacks are then placed into separate bins. This is done so all of the ballots with duplication needed, write-ins and over votes can be in batches apart from the good ballots. This makes resolution much more streamlined. But because we have now sorted them out of batches by precinct, the count is unknown.

So before each election, we take a sample stack of test ballots, count the number of ballots in them, caliper a scale so it correctly shows how many ballots are in the stack. Throughout the day, we will recaliper the scale, as heat and humidity can change the weight of each ballot. We will weigh these batches to get a count of how many ballots to expect from the report from the scanner.

This process with a secondary board and weighing ballots was implemented to streamline the process of resolution. An entire batch that is known to have write-ins or over votes on every ballot can be resolved by a team that knows every ballot has a resolution issue and must be resolved.

We feel this process ensures our ballots have been thoroughly inspected, and are placed in batches with the same resolution issues. Our resolution team knows that in certain batches every ballot has something to be resolved. It reduces the error rate and speeds up the process. Weighing the ballots lets us know the report is correct and there is no possibility of two ballots stuck together.

Question 3.

Select a technique in this presentation that's not currently practiced in your county, but one that you would like to try. Explain *how* and *why* you would like to implement it. How will you measure its success?

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION FOR PCO CANDIDATES.

I think a powerpoint presentation to help PCO candidates understand how to file online would be a **WONDERFUL** idea! PCO candidates are not career politicians, and very often, only run once. It would be great customer service to provide a tutorial in the complicated WEI online filing.

Since the online system is through WEI, and almost all counties are WEI counties, it would make sense for the technical people in WEI to create it for all of the counties. This way, it would be consistent throughout all Washington counties.

If SOS's WEI group could create the powerpoint, it could be put directly on a county's website, as a video or a powerpoint, OR, it could actually be a tutorial on the WEI site for the candidate right before they start filing.

It would be hard to measure how successful it actually is, other than by tracking how many candidates call for help, or do it incorrectly. But, it's more about customer service. The candidate will feel confident in their filing, not be overwhelmed, and could even increase participation from voters.

Something to think about!

Garth Fell

Elections Practices, Tips and Techniques (aka Elections Ferris Wheel of Fun)
2012

1) If you've applied a practice covered in this presentation, please describe in detail how it's been implemented in your county. Explain why it has been successful (or why not). How do you know it was successful? What have you learned?

In Snohomish County we have implemented many of the design principles outlined in the American Institute of Graphic Arts Design for Democracy program. This practice was described in Ballots (Ballots & Forms) section of the presentation.

Specifically we have been utilizing Design for Democracy's 10 Election Design Guidelines. Every letter, form, ballot instruction or other printed material we create we review against the 10 Election Design Guidelines. The guideline serves as a checklist and reminds us, among other things, to use lower case letters, to avoid where possible centered type, to select consistent sized sans-serif fonts, to explain instructions in clear simple language and to design with a conscious focus on what is most important. The design guidelines have helped us create materials that are more readable, simpler, and consistent. Consistent use of the guidelines has established an identity for election materials that makes them quickly recognizable to voters.

We know that the use of the design democracy principles have been successful because there has been a decrease in the number of ballot issues, signature issues and other voter concerns. While there is still room for improvement, the election design guidelines and the design for democracy principles have been critical tools creating usable materials.

In addition to the improvements in our materials, design for democracy has helped us as an organization recognize that there are a number of professionals and specialists that can be resources for election administrators - people with facility management skills, signage and traffic specialist, training specialist, etc. We are much more apt to ask who are the experts in a particular area and seek them out rather than think we need to have the expertise or skills ourselves.

2) Describe a practice not covered in this presentation that's been successfully implemented in your county. Why was the practice implemented? How has it impacted your process?

A practice we have been using for a number of years that is critical to our success is our daily stand-up meetings. Each morning at 8:05am our election team meets to review activities for the day, to share information about the upcoming election such as common calls from voters, and to cover staff schedules. The meeting lasts from 10 – 20 minutes and is informal in its flow.

This meeting time is critical to ensure we are operating with the same information and following the same processes and procedures. If necessary, we can adjust priorities or re-establish standards. It is also an opportunity to connect as team members and gives every member a better understanding of the big picture and how their activities help achieve our common goal of an accurate and timely election.

The morning meeting has had a positive impact on our operations. Staff feels more connected with what is going on and are much more comfortable talking about issues in positive, constructive ways.

3) Select a technique in this presentation that's not currently practiced in your county, but one that you would like to try. Explain how and why you would like to implement it. How will you measure its success?

I will be working to implement usability testing as suggested in the Ballots section of the presentation. While we have always asked coworkers and people around the office for feedback, we have not gathered feedback from people that do not have day-to-day familiarity with elections and voting. Voters call each election with questions on how to complete our ballot or how to find information in our voters' pamphlet. Usability testing may help us identify why some voters continue to struggle with our instructions and materials. Usability testing may also ensure that the changes we implement to help voters actually make things better.

To implement usability testing, I will identify four or five locations that will give us a representative sample of people. For example, we may go to our local community college, the local mall, the senior center or the library. This will ensure that we get a good cross section of people with varying education and experience levels. We will perform usability testing on our ballots to learn how people naturally vote and how they communicate correcting a ballot and voting for different candidate.

Success can be measured by looking at the percentage of ballots we need to duplicate, the number of people that fail to sign the ballot envelope, and the number of phone calls we get regarding information that is covered in the instructions.

Election Practices, Tips, and Techniques

Practice Applied Covered in Presentation.

Cowlitz County has addressed its staffing shortfall by hiring and training “extra help” employees. The employees are hired through Employers Overload, a local employment agency. The agency is responsible for the overhead costs related to these employees, e.g., payroll. The County uses this employment agency to hire all admin/clerical extra help and has negotiated a reasonable rate for this service. The Elections Department has established a great working relationship with this agency, which has been helpful in identifying employees quickly to meet any Election requirement.

About a year ago, the hiring of “extra help” became very important with the frequent absence and ultimately departure of the Elections Deputy. After several attempts, the Elections Department and agency found the right people with the skill sets and customer service expertise needed. Several of these people have been with the Elections Department, primarily during Elections, for over a year. These extra help people have attended training along with the new Elections Deputy and Elections staff and have learned how to respond to the questions that are raised by voters during Elections. They also have become knowledgeable of the overall Election processes and very capable of performing many of the ballot processing functions. They have the ability to assist with most parts of the ballot processing functions during Elections, which has allowed the Elections Supervisor and Deputy to focus on the key ballot processing and accountability procedures.

Practice Not Covered in this Presentation that has been Successfully Implemented by Cowlitz County.

For the Presidential Election, Cowlitz County added a “ballot inspector” to Opening Board. In addition to helping facilitate Opening Board, the ballot inspector had several duties.

The ballot inspector began each Opening Board session with verbal guidance on specific questionable occurrences the Opening Board members should look for when reviewing the ballots and answered Opening Board member questions as they encountered these questionable occurrences. To assist Opening Board members, examples of these occurrences were laminated and placed on the wall in the Opening Board room. The occurrences were things the ballot scanner would not easily catch or read, or would slow down the tabulation process. They included: light pencil marks (vote may not be counted); write in, but box not marked (write in vote may not be counted); correction of an error, but no new box filled in (erroneous vote may be counted); and tears, rips or marks on the barcode that will cause the

scanner to not read the ballot. Opening Board members put the ballots with these questionable occurrences on the top of each batch they reviewed and identified the number of questionable ballots on the Accountability Form (e.g., 2 questionable ballots).

After the Opening Board members completed their review, the ballot inspector reviewed their work and reviewed each ballot in the batch as a double check to make sure all questionable occurrences on the ballots were identified. If there was a discrepancy with what Opening Board found, the ballot inspector discussed it with the Opening Board team that reviewed those ballots. The true questionable ballots were placed on top of the batch along with the number of questionable ballots on the Accountability Form. Also, any ballot the ballot scanners would have to review to determine voter intent was placed near the top of the batch.

Before scanning, the ballot scanners checked to determine the number of questionable ballots recorded on the Accountability Form and each ballot with a question to insure the vote will be counted properly. Ballots that could not be scanned were duplicated. Then the batch was scanned and tabulated.

While the cost of adding the ballot inspector to Opening Board for the Presidential Election was quite high, it did help to speed up the ballot scanning and tabulation process and helped ensure accurate counting of the votes. In addition, the ballot inspector helped to keep ballots flowing to the 6-8 Opening Board teams so there were no wait time delays for the Opening Board. The ballot scanners gave the Opening Board members feedback each day on how they did. This made the Opening Board members strive very hard to review each ballot carefully and identify all questionable occurrences, and made them feel more connected to the Election process

Technique in Presentation Not Currently Practiced in Cowlitz County, but One We Should Try.

Cowlitz County currently communicates with our local jurisdictions, but not by email on a monthly basis. Monthly email communications seems to be a good idea for several reasons. First, monthly emails could help identify point of contact turnover and keep our contact list more current. Second, monthly emails could serve as a reminder for the local jurisdiction to inform the Elections Department when there are changes, e.g., elected official resignations, appointments, etc. Sometimes we do not become aware of changes on a timely basis, and find out about the changes from the newspaper or sources other than the local jurisdiction contact. Thirdly, monthly emails could remind the local jurisdictions of the Election timelines so they are better prepared to submit any resolutions, and would open the door further for any election related questions the local jurisdiction may have.