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Poll Worker Recruiting on a Limited Budget

Sarasota County, Florida

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Poll Worker Recruiting on a Limited Budget

Finding the right poll worker for the job is always a challenge, no matter where in the country you live. Sarasota County, Florida, is a snow-bird community with many non-permanent seasonal retirees, and our elections don't always align with the seasons. It is, therefore, imperative that we tap into our youth and permanent residents as our major source of skilled labor. After years of designing and refining a practical recruiting program to employ up to 1800 poll workers, our hard work has yielded great dividends. Sarasota County had more poll workers than needed for the 2008 General Election!

The best source of leads for recruiting was our existing poll workers. People who work the polls usually volunteer in other community based organizations. If a poll worker is happy and proud to work at the polls, then word of mouth provides a positive advertisement. Our office is quick to offer poll workers thanks and appreciation at every opportunity. We also ask for their feed back in training and hold post election round-table discussions to improve our processes at the polls. If someone is valued as a team member, he or she will contribute to the recruiting process. The first step in the recruiting process...value your existing poll workers!

We provide each precinct and early voting site with a simple sign-up sheet for voters to list their names and addresses. The poll worker who greets incoming and departing voters often has the time to engage in a brief conversation about working the polls. The voter is encouraged to sign the sheet, so he or she may receive information about the recruiting process. A couple of weeks after the election, we mail brochures containing basic information to interested voters. The brochure contains the dates and locations of our poll worker orientation sessions. No reservation is required to attend. Our second step in the recruiting process...give the interested voter a testimony and provides the path to get involved!

Orientations are conducted approximately every quarter in locations countywide. Local library meeting rooms are scheduled in advance and are free. Library patrons are people who usually have a quest for learning. A poster is sent to the library approximately two weeks in advance of the orientation and is used as additional advertisement. In addition to brochures and posters, we also use a calendar on our Web site to publicize poll worker orientations. All of these are relatively inexpensive or free methods of advertising. The third step in the recruiting process...target your market and use your recruiting dollars wisely!

The orientation sessions last approximately one hour, beginning with a 20-minute presentation on the commitment required and the benefits of working at the polls. Depending on the availability of audiovisual equipment, we sometimes run a ten-minute video containing other poll worker testimonies. This video was produced in-house five years ago and was a relatively inexpensive project. The Poll Worker Guidelines and Job Descriptions for all poll worker positions are distributed. The prospective poll workers are also told that the chances of working are greater for those who are willing to work outside of their home precinct. At the end of the presentation, time is permitted for questions and answers. If a person chooses not to proceed any further, he or she is thanked for attending and exploring the opportunity. The fourth step in the recruiting process...provide the opportunity for the prospective poll worker to understand your expectations before the application process begins!

After the prospective poll workers are satisfied and comfortable with the expectations and the commitment levels required to work, the application process begins. A written quiz is administered to determine whether

the applicant meets the statutory requirements for working. The quiz also helps us to assess which poll worker position may be the best fit. Each person completes an application for working the polls and copies are made of the required identification to complete the hiring process. All new poll workers are personally welcomed to the team by SOE poll worker department staff as they depart. Thus the last step in the recruiting process...make the hiring process work for you and for the prospective poll worker!

Items worth noting:

- In the early days of orientations, there were times we advertised sessions and no one attended. Don't give up. Persistence and consistency are key!
- Newspapers, mail out flyers and television advertisements did not yield adequate results and were too expensive to use on a regular basis.
- Providing a sign-up sheet at the polls and mailing a brochure are the best ways to start the process. Passing out flyers at the polls created a littered parking lot, something our polling places didn't like!
- We accept applications at an orientation session for working the polls, and generally do not encourage walk-in applicants in our offices. During the busy election cycle, this policy has streamlined our hiring process while eliminating the disruption walk-in applicants create.
- We stress the importance of excellent customer service to all SOE office staff. This helps to create leads and makes the overall job of recruiting easier.
- Some of the orientation sessions conducted had over 100 people attend and it is a logistical challenge. But this is a great way to judge a person's patience. Is it not busy on Election Day?
- Do not be afraid to turn people down. If people are oppositional or rude and want you to do things on their terms, how will they interact with the voters or follow the procedures and election law at the polls?
- Raise the bar on poll workers! Set an example, communicate the commitment level expected, involve them in the Election Day processes and celebrate the successes! That is how an outstanding team is created!

We started using orientations for recruiting in late 2005. It proved to be an efficient way to handle the hiring process and provided us with some of the great poll workers we have today. Other than the cost of mailing a brochure, there is very little monetary expense or time on our part in managing the process. Success is turning away potential poll workers because you have recruited enough to create your outstanding team! Sarasota County Supervisor of Election had a very successful year in 2008.