

2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	PIP-7
Title of Program	Wake County Board of Elections' Voter Outreach Program
Program Category	
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Description of Productivity Improvement

Our voter outreach program improves departmental processes and productivity for the Wake County Board of Elections. The program educates voters about upcoming elections and different opportunities to vote, reminds voters to update their voter registration and assists with recruitment of precinct officials. With a population of over 720,000 registered voters and growing, each voter we reach with our outreach program is one more person who has a positive voting experience. When a Wake County citizen registers to vote, it is important that we receive accurate and up-to-date information. Sometimes when various outside groups perform voter drives, forms are returned incomplete. Working directly with the voter expedites the voter registration process. At our outreach events, we discuss voter information requirements and remind those who are already registered to vote to make sure their name, address and party affiliation are up to date. We assist voters in properly completing voter registration forms which in turn registers the voters at their correct polling place location.

By stressing the importance of accurate voter registration information, we minimize election day transfers and the use of provisional ballots. When a voter does not go to the assigned polling place for their current address, they may have to travel to the correct precinct to cast their ballot. If there are registration discrepancies, such as incorrect residential addresses, party affiliation disputes and first-time registrant identification requirements, a voter may have to cast a provisional ballot. Provisional

ballots must be researched after the election, which requires significant staff time and resources. Addressing these issues on the front-end greatly reduces the number of provisional ballots, which allows utilization of staff resources to carry out other required post-election duties.

Through voter outreach, we are also able to address various voting methods, including voting early, on election day or absentee by mail. This allows for voters to use their most convenient ballot casting option. Additionally, our program strives to minimize voter confusion by providing all necessary resources and answering voters' questions, which allows for transparency in the nonpartisan election process.

Another aspect of the program is precinct official recruitment. With 204 polling places, the Wake County Board of Elections needs to staff between 2,000 and 3,000 election day precinct officials per election. As Wake County's population grows and the number of polling places continues to increase, we focus on recruiting precinct officials to work election day. We have increased our number of precinct official volunteers by 51.5 percent over three years. At outreach events, we encourage voters to volunteer to become a precinct official and sign up to learn more. Through our outreach efforts, we are able to increase our pool of precinct officials to ensure we are fully staffed and prepared for each election.

Description of why this project was initiated

The Wake County Board of Elections kicked off its first outreach event in the lobby of our office in 2015. The program initially was designed to ensure that Wake County voters were registered and informed about upcoming elections. The event was such a success that our administration decided to expand our outreach throughout Wake County communities and establish partnerships with other intergovernmental agencies. Our desire was to push beyond the office walls to captivate public interest and expand the demographic area of our networking within the county. We wanted to visibly demonstrate our integrity and simultaneously show our commitment to the voting communities. We understood that the key to having an effective program was to invest our resources in outreach efforts to create meaningful connections with the Wake County voters.

Throughout the years, our mission has been to enhance knowledge and awareness of elections, build a rapport with our voters and ensure confidence in the democracy process. From conducting events at public libraries to setting up informational tables at local festivals, we strive to have a presence in our community and provide educational resources to county residents. Staff members attend county, municipal, school and university, and other community events to educate registered voters to enhance the transparency of elections. We provide hands-on activities, election literature, informational videos and promotional materials to ensure voters understand their options and have a smooth voting experience. We have actively developed partnerships with intergovernmental agencies and local resources to connect with people throughout the county.

Since the voter outreach program's inception, we have conducted numerous outreach events around the county and developed coalitions. In 2016, one of our marketing strategies was naming the outreach campaign "Around the County in 80 Days." A total of 35 outreach events in various areas around the county were held, which allowed us to develop partnerships with multiple local agencies, some of which are highlighted below.

Wake County Public Libraries- Our office partnered with Wake County Public Libraries to hold an outreach event at each of the 22 libraries.

City of Raleigh Museum- We hosted a two-day event at the museum for the 4th of July Celebration. This partnership was great exposure to over 10,000 residents of Wake County who attended the

event. At the outreach event, we were able to educate voters on upcoming elections' deadlines, current laws and processes.

North Carolina State University- Engaging and informing students is imperative to our office, as well. We hosted a week-long outreach event on NCSU's campus that concluded with an annual event called Packapolooza. This festival capped off WolfPack Welcome Week, which kicks off the start of the academic year. Over 8,000 people attended this event.

Town of Cary- We conducted a two-day outreach event at the Town of Cary's Lazy Daze Arts & Crafts Festival. At this event, we were able to educate over 12,000 people regarding the upcoming elections.

Wake County Public School System- Our Mock Election Program demonstrates our commitment to educating our youth in Wake County. We held a mock election at Martin Middle School. This was a great opportunity to educate over 800 students on how elections are conducted in Wake County.

NC Youth Summit- Within this year, we also hosted an outreach event at the NC Youth Summit that helped youth from all over North Carolina understand the dynamics of elections. The effort sent a positive message about the importance of young adults exercising their civic rights of voting in local, state and federal elections.

Wake County Public Libraries Annual Book Fair- With our Wake County Libraries partnership, not only do we focus on outreach events at the libraries, but at the annual book fair as well. This is a three-day event that our office has participated in each year. At this event, we crossed paths with 45,000 patrons.

In 2017, we further expanded our outreach activities by developing more partnerships and conducting over 40 outreach events. Our partnerships with local agencies continued to grow and more were developed. We implemented new and innovative ways to engage the public for the 2017 campaign using the theme "Are you Ready?" Some of the most effective additional outreach events were held at the Town of Garner's Independence Celebration, the Town of Wake Forest's Meet in the Street Festival and the Town of Morrisville's Community Festival, with over 15,000 people in attendance at each event.

In 2018, we are striving to expand our outreach efforts even more and establish additional coalitions with various agencies. Prior to the May primary election, we conducted over 22 outreach events. This year, we have developed new partnerships with the Junior League of Raleigh and Marketplace Events. Working with Marketplace Events, we hosted a series of outreach events at the Raleigh Home Show at the Raleigh Convention Center and Raleigh Southern Home Show at the N.C. State Fairgrounds. Both were large-scale events with 46,000 attendees total. Moving forward to the 2018 November election, we're planning to participate in an additional 25 outreach events.

By continued engagement within the communities, we have successfully increased awareness and voter turnout, but most importantly, we have educated the voters about upcoming elections and processes. Our outreach efforts have made a positive impact around the county. Additionally, our dedicated commitment to Wake County voters has improved how voters perceive the elections, which in turn increases the voters' trust in the democratic process.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The Wake County Board of Elections staff continues to evolve its outreach efforts, finding innovative ways to provide a higher level of service while sustaining partnerships with local organizations to address growth. Through our outreach program's civic engagement and voter education, our office minimizes discrepancies and misconceptions prior to the upcoming elections, therefore reducing pre-

election and post-election costs. Some of those cost savings are achieved through reduction in public inquiries, accuracy on voter registration forms which reduces undeliverable mailings, and decreased staff overtime needs. More complex and thorough audits can be performed by applying the accrued time savings.

Since the program began in 2015, voter registration totals have increased from 674,661 to over 720,000 voters. We have had nearly 23,000 new voters register in the past year alone. With growth, we continue to engage voters and apply our resources to recruit precinct officials necessary to run an election in a county with more than one million residents. At one recent event, 106 precinct officials were recruited. Our pool of community volunteers serving as precinct officials has increased from 3,900 to 5,910 since the program began in 2015. Using our outreach events to increase our pool of precinct officials has given staff more time to focus on quality customer service for this valued group of individuals. Approximately 47 percent of recruited precinct officials have worked five or more elections, a success we contribute to the increased level of customer service we provide.

During the 2017 elections, our staffing team was able to field 2,629 incoming calls, reply to 3,003 precinct official emails, successfully train 2,292 precinct officials and properly reassign 1,239 election day assignments from unexpected staffing drops. This was possible due to our diligent outreach efforts and having the available pool of qualified officials to pull from in the time of need. Outreach events held prior to staffing an election allows the staffing team to handle excess volume of work without using additional resources for assistance. Our staff can focus on a higher level of service to our precinct officials instead of spending time recruiting on an individual basis.

This program will continue to allow recruitment time savings, allowing staff to address horizon issues such as temporary staffing needs, implementation of new voting equipment at precincts, public records requests and potential changes in election processes due to law changes. Ultimately, these horizon issues will require major changes to our funding structure, but with our proactive outreach efforts we will be able to avoid some of those potential costs.

Other descriptive information

We believe it's important to not only educate active voters, but also the youth, about how Wake County elections are conducted. We are dedicated to promoting civic participation from our future voters. At our outreach events, we incorporate hands-on activities called Kids Voting to afford young people an opportunity to learn about election laws and processes. We hand out Future Voter stickers so kids can join in on the fun. Kids can fill out a demo ballot and then insert the ballot into the voting machine. We also have events where we attend different schools, youth programs and colleges to speak about election processes in Wake County.

We use many innovative promotional tools to let Wake County voters know that we are active in the community. Our current outreach campaign is "Are You Ready?" During events we ask voters "Are You Ready?" and when they inquire further, we ask if they are registered to vote and ready for the upcoming election. We print promotional materials and create graphics to place on our website and social media using the campaign logo. We have utilized the hashtag #ReadyToVote since 2016 to market our services. We wanted to brand our campaign with an easy-to-remember slogan that voters will associate with Wake County Board of Elections. At outreach events, Wake County voters are encouraged to use the hashtag when posting election-related photos and comments from the events, early voting and election day. We also have selfie stations with the hashtag for social media for voters to share their voice and further promote community engagement. We purchased the domain name for readytovote.com, which now redirects voters to our wakegov.com/elections website. By engaging

the voters and incorporating our website and social media outlets, voters will know where to find election resources.

Moving forward, our goal is to continue to increase public interest regarding all aspects of elections. When working with our partners in various communities, we are introduced to other groups, which allows us to expand our outreach efforts throughout the county. We plan on developing future partnerships with other agency resources around the county. We are working with local municipalities to create public service announcements through local news outlets to educate the voters.

We also are sharing the outreach strategies that have been successful in Wake County with others, such as neighboring counties. The Cumberland County Board of Elections was inspired by our outreach efforts and has begun to implement its own program. We want to continue to highlight how the use of local resources in combination with the board of elections can help counties connect with the community even further.