

Research/ Situation Analysis: Voter turnout in Indian River County for the 2014 Primary Election was at an all-time low of 16.7% in comparison to the last gubernatorial election which was 26.5% in 2010. Out of nearly 97,000 registered voters, less than 17,000 cast a ballot in the Primary Election. The preferred method of voting was by absentee ballot. However, of the 12,331 voters who requested an absentee ballot, only 53% returned their voted ballot. Even worse, 1,048 absentee ballots were returned to the Elections Office as undeliverable. By law absentee ballots cannot be forwarded by the post office. Therefore, absentee ballot voters who summer out of town or failed to provide the Elections Office with an updated address, did not receive their absentee ballot. Costs incurred from wasted absentee ballots were significant due to the multiple features of the package. Absentee ballot delivery includes all components listed in Item 1, equating to \$42,215 for the Primary Election.

The Elections Office strives to keep costs at a minimum in order to spend in the tax payer's best interest. During our post-election evaluation we identified that the voted and returned absentee ballot rate was lower than expected, largely due to the overwhelming number of undeliverable ballots. Realizing voters were not properly updating their records, the Elections Office set out to design a cost effective method to reach all absentee ballot voters regardless of forwarding restrictions.

Our solution was to mail a postcard that addressed multiple issues regarding absentee ballots to each voter with an absentee request on file for the upcoming General Election, at a cost of \$2,817.64. The most beneficial element of this technique was that the postcard could be forwarded to out of town residents.

Objectives: Our main objectives in sending the postcards was to increase the number of returned, voted absentee ballots and decrease the number of undeliverable ballots during the 2014 General Election. The postcard notified voters that their absentee ballot request had been received and that absentee ballots cannot be forwarded. It also listed the date their ballot would be mailed, directed voters to our website to verify their absentee ballot mailing address and provided them with our contact information should they need to update their mailing address.

Implementation: In our post-election meeting we discussed various ideas to address the poor absentee ballot response rate. Initially, we entertained the idea of publishing an advertisement in the newspaper to bring awareness to the issues. However, we decided this approach would not remedy the high rate of undeliverable ballots since many absentee voters were still out of town and would not read the paper. In the end, we decided to create a mass mailer postcard that would reach all of our absentee ballot voters. This was deemed the best solution because the postcard could be forwarded. We had two options. We could produce and process the mailing in-house, or we

contract with a third party vendor to handle the mailing. After receiving a quote for direct mailing services, we selected the third party option because of the low production cost and bulk mailing discount. We met with the Absentee Ballot Coordinator in order to establish key elements to include on the mail piece that would enhance the voted ballot return rate. An Elections Office employee created the postcard in-house and provided the file to the direct-mailing company for production, along with the absentee ballot request list of 13,000 voters for the 2014 General Election.

Evaluation: Following the General Election, the Elections Office reviewed the absentee ballot statistics to measure the success of our objectives, which include increasing absentee ballot submissions and decreasing the number of undeliverable absentee ballots. The results were overwhelming! The return rate of voted absentee ballots increased from 53% to 80% and the undeliverable ballot rate decreased from 8.5% to 3.7%. Not only did we achieve our main objectives of influencing absentee ballot responses, but we also inadvertently increased voter awareness. Sending the postcard to a household in which not all voters were on the absentee ballot request list, promoted the upcoming election as well as voting by absentee ballot. Between the Primary and General Elections an additional 5,800 voters requested to vote by absentee ballot. In conclusion, the postcard mailing was so successful that we plan to continue implementing this practice prior to all state and federal elections in the future.

Budget: Because the Election Office strives to keep costs at a minimum, we sought to create a low-cost mailing that would increase absentee ballot submissions and decrease the amount of undeliverable absentee ballots. Proactive steps were necessary to maintain a streamlined budget, since the cost of mailing an absentee ballot is approximately \$3.25 per ballot. If undeliverable absentee ballots are returned for the simple reason that the voter is temporarily away, the incurred cost can add up quite quickly. For the Primary election our office mailed 12,331 absentee ballots, 1,048 absentee ballots were returned as undeliverable and consequently 108 registered voters requested a second ballot. At the conclusion of the election, \$3,757 was spent on returned and duplicate ballots. Typically the Primary Election has a lower voter turnout than the General Election. Understanding this pattern, we knew we needed a proactive plan for reducing the number of ballots that would be returned as undeliverable. Instead of spending \$18,772 on un-voted ballots, we spent \$2,817.64 on an absentee mailer postcard that substantially reduced our undeliverable ballot rate and increased our voted ballot return rate. After the General Election, we were awestruck to discover that out of 18,201 absentee ballot requests only 671 ballots were returned as undeliverable and an astounding 14,628 voted ballots were received.

Organizational Overview

The Supervisor of Elections is an elected independent constitutional officer, duly elected from the county's registered voters. Employees of the Elections Office are neither employees of the State of Florida nor employees of Indian River County. They are employees of a constitutional office of the State of Florida, known as the Indian River County Supervisor of Elections

The Indian River County Supervisor of Elections office is responsible for maintaining voter registration records, administering elections, and acting as the filing officer for those who wish to run for office. Indian River County has a population of approximately 142,000 and about 98,000 residents are registered to vote. However, many of them are not full-time residents.

The Supervisor of Elections Office has a total of ten employees, nine full-time and one part-time. One full-time staff member is directly responsible for public relations activities. That person reports directly to the Supervisor of Elections.

Each year, the Supervisor of Elections goes before the Indian River County Board of County Commissioners to seek approval for the upcoming fiscal year budget. Monies in the budget are provided by taxes levied on the residents of Indian River County. At the end of each fiscal year, surplus funds are recirculated into the county's General Fund.