

Division C-Category 5

“Count Me In Too, 2016!” Accessibility Outreach Campaign For Voters With Disabilities or Special Needs

Research/Situation Analysis: The right to vote is granted to all United States citizens, 18 years of age or older.

However, voters with disabilities and special needs may require additional assistance to ensure their voice is heard and their vote is counted. Anticipating a record voter turnout for the 2016 Presidential Election, with many first time voters, the Martin County Supervisor of Elections wanted to ensure all citizens eligible to vote were educated and equipped with necessary information to cast their vote. In February of 2015, the Supervisor of Elections and identified staff met with over 10 community leaders representing various voter demographics in Martin County. These groups included the Coalition of Independent Living Options, the NAACP, members of the Martin County Republican Party and the Martin County Democratic Party, the Black Democratic Caucus, the Martin County League of Women Voters, the local School Board, Church Leaders, Latino Groups, the Council on Aging, local Chambers of Commerce, Helping People Succeed, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of the Treasure Coast. Each group expressed accessibility concerns, including voters with special needs. After reviewing feedback from meetings with community partners and reviewing election data reports (the number of registered voters who indicated they needed assistance at the polls), it was concluded there was a need for outreach efforts directed specifically to voters who were deaf and hard of hearing. Additional research found no other elections office in the state had developed a Disability Resources page on their website or offered accessibility videos for deaf and hard of hearing voters. Research did, however, indicate several counties offered a sample ballot for those who are sight impaired. Elections Center staff began brainstorming sessions to determine how to better assist this population of voters in the elections process. The team came up with the “Count Me In Too, 2016!” accessibility campaign, which would provide a Disability Resources tab on MartinVotes.com; produce videos providing step-by-step instructions to voters with special hearing needs how to register to vote and the three ways to cast their vote; and, to provide an audio sample ballot for voters who are sight impaired.

Objectives: To make the elections process accessible to all voters by increasing education and voter turnout in 2016, by focusing on voters with special needs, based on primary research from meetings with community leaders and secondary research from Elections Center data reports. The following four objectives were established: 1. Develop and launch a Disability Resources tab on MartinVotes.com; 2. Create and release two videos outlining the voter registration process and three ways to vote (with an average of 50 views per video) for the hearing impaired; 3. Partner with Democracy Live, an election vendor, to provide an audio election ballot for voters who are sight

impaired; and, 4. Increase voter registration and election turnout by 5% for voters who are hearing impaired (based on 1,600 special needs residents in the county).

Implementation: The first phase of the campaign was to research disability links to display on a Disability Resources page on the Election Center's website; partner with The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of the Treasure Coast; and, enter into discussions with Democracy Live for audio sample ballot services. Elections Supervisor and staff immediately began working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of the Treasure Coast, and staff from Martin County Television (MCTV) for the opportunity to create two educational videos for voters who are deaf or hard of hearing, to ensure these voters have access to the voter registration and voting processes. It was decided a member from the deaf and hard of hearing community would sign both videos in American Sign Language, while a member of the Elections Center staff would narrate the script, and MCTV would record the videos. It was also decided the videos would include closed captioning so no voter would be left behind. Completed videos were then posted on the newly created Disability Resources page on the Election Center's website, together with a link for access to the audio sample ballot.

Evaluation: The campaign surpassed all objectives: 1.) Following weeks of research and development a Disability Resources page was launched; 2.) Two voter accessible videos were completed and placed on the Election Center's websites new "Disability Resources tab and YouTube, with 72 (How to Register to Vote) views and 86 (Three Ways to Vote) views, The Elections Center Facebook page generated many likes and 4 shares. The videos were also aired daily on the MCTV Government Channel (through their Comcast signal, which reaches 150,000 who had the opportunity to view our video) 3.) The audio sample ballot was launched on the MartinVotes website; 4.) Voter registration and election turnout increased by 9%!

Budget: Implementing the Disability Resources page was no cost; to hire an interrupter to sign both videos \$500; recording and airing of videos, no cost; script writing, no cost. Staff time was equivalent to 60 hours for one full-time member. Audio sample ballot capability \$2,500. Voters with a hearing impaired disability, now provided with access to more resources than ever before – **priceless!**

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

As a gatekeeper of the democratic process, the Supervisor of Elections upholds the election laws of the State of Florida and the Constitution. The Supervisor and staff are committed to increasing voter awareness and education for citizens of all ages; enhancing public confidence; and encouraging voter participation.

The Elections Center is comprised of five full time staff members and the Supervisor of Elections.