

2011 Election Administration Best Practice Application

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NACRC 2011 BEST PRACTICE SUBMISSION

TAKING IT BACK TO DEMOCRACY: REBUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE CITY OF BELL

Background

This submission is not about technology, social media, or some innovative campaign. This submission asks you to recognize the power of a well run election that reminds us of the role, power and importance of what we do as Election Officials. The most fundamental building block to good government and strong public confidence is a fair and transparent electoral process that citizens trust to accurately convey the will of the people. Without a functional electoral process government cannot command legitimacy and the public's confidence. This is a fundamental principle that is often overlooked or not fully appreciated. On March 8, 2011 the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) helped to rebuild the confidence of the citizens of the City of Bell in our democratic process. We ask for recognition of the power of a well run election premised on the fundamental principle of voter engagement, accessible services, and transparency.

The Problem

Last year the City of Bell was rocked by scandals accusing top city officials of mismanaging city resources for personal gain. The nation was captivated by reports that city officials had approved outrageous salaries of nearly one million dollars, in a working class city with a median annual income well below \$50,000. The city's 40,000 residents were shocked and disillusioned with government and the democratic process. Many residents felt the democratic process had been manipulated to prevent the will of the people from being heard; allegations of voter fraud and special elections, in which only 400 of the 10,000 registered voters cast ballots gave citizens ample reasons for mistrust.

As citizens mobilized a grassroots effort to recall the City's elected leaders, the mistrust in local government gave citizens great anxiety. The recall effort moved forward and successfully qualified to be on the ballot. This, however, still left the question of whether citizens could trust the democratic process. With anxieties over a fair and transparent

electoral process running high, citizens in the City of Bell sought to retake control of their city.

On November 1, 2010 the City of Bell qualified the recall election and called the city's regularly scheduled General Municipal Elections to be held on March 8, 2011. Recognizing the challenge to democracy that this election represented, the County of Los Angeles partnered with the City of Bell's City Clerk, Interim City Manager, and Interim City Attorney and agreed to have the RR/CC conduct the Special Recall and General Municipal Elections. The challenge of the partnership was the opportunity to start rebuilding public confidence in government by conducting a fair and transparent election.

Program Description and Objectives

While technology and other innovations have significantly expanded voter participation and enhanced the administration of elections, our efforts simply identified three basic principles that our election process should provide: 1) Empower citizens and work collaboratively with the community; 2) Be visible and actively bring services to the citizens; 3) Make sure the process is fully transparent. The following activities highlight the exemplary efforts that helped to provide citizens in the City of Bell a historic election and first step in rebuilding their city.

1. **Candidate Filing Training** The historic nature of this election generated a real interest among grassroots leadership to seek an opportunity to help represent their fellow citizens on the City Council. This meant that a number of people would encounter the candidate nomination process for the first time. In partnership with the City Clerk, the RR/CC conducted a community training on how to file to be a candidate in the election. The training was open to the public and walked interested citizens through the various forms necessary to file and important deadlines. Staff was available to answer individual questions. (See APPENDIX A)
2. **Voter Empowerment Workshop** The office sought to increase voter confidence by training voters on their rights, how to protect their vote, what to expect on Election Day, and how to easily access other election information (e.g. requesting a Vote By Mail ballot, locating your polling place, casting a provisional ballot). The workshop was held at the local community center and was conducted in collaboration with the City's State Assemblymember. The event was promoted by the Assemblymember's office and other local community organizations. (See APPENDIX B)
3. **Community Presentations** In an effort to bring information directly to voters, the RR/CC attended a number of community meetings where we worked one on one with voters to answer questions, assist with voter registration, or with requesting a vote by mail ballot. The RR/CC also conducted a number of voter registration trainings for local organizations with local resident volunteers newly engaged in the process.
4. **Transparent Ballot Processing** Live streaming video of Election Night ballot processing and tabulation was made available for citizens to observe freely and openly.

Project Implementation

The following is an outline of the program implementation plan:

- Conduct community training on how to file to be a candidate in the election;
- Co-sponsor and conduct a series of Voter Empowerment Workshops;
- Attend a number of community meetings to bring information directly to voters;
- Live stream video of Election Night ballot processing and tabulation;

Technology Required

The program required a minimum investment of technology. More importantly, implementation utilized existing technologies:

- Live streaming video via internet connection and stationary computer cameras;
- Email access

Program Costs

No additional costs.

Program Success and Best Practice

Our efforts in the City of Bell election demonstrate the power of an election process that values every voter by placing a high value on voter engagement, accessible services, and transparency. The success of our efforts is demonstrated by the following results:

- In a hyper sensitive and politicized environment the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk's office developed a strong level of voter confidence. Media coverage was positive, focused on the power of democracy and the will of the people as opposed to the administration of the election.
- Voter turnout in the election increased by ten percentage points compared to the previous election 34% versus 24% in 2009. The 34% turnout was even more remarkable when you consider that adjacent City of Los Angeles who was conducting an election on the same day had just over 10% turnout.
- An unprecedented 18 candidates qualified to be on the ballot. Nearly 50 participants attended our "Candidate Filing Training."
- Nearly 300 voters attended our Voter Empowerment Workshop.

APPENDIX A



VOTER EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOP
TALLER DE VOTANTES

Thursday, March 3, 2011
6–8PM

BELL COMMUNITY CENTER
6250 Pine Avenue
Bell, CA 90201

NON-PARTISAN VOTER EDUCATION FORUM

Assemblymember Ricardo Lara and the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk invite you to participate and discuss important legislative issues concerning voting.

This workshop will provide attendees with important information that will help them get ready for the upcoming March 8th election, from what is on the ballot, to how to protect one's vote. The County Election's Office will be on hand to also assist residents with registering to vote or with any other registration issues.

For more information, please call the Assembly District Office at (562) 927-1200



DEAN C. LOGAN
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk



RICARDO LARA
Chair, Assembly Joint Legislative Audit Committee
Assemblymember, Fiftieth District

ATTEND THIS VOTER EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOP TO:

- 1 How to request a "Vote by Mail" Ballot
- 2 Important Dates
- 3 What you need to know for the March 8, 2011 Election
- 4 What voters can expect on the ballot
- 5 How to locate your polling place
- 6 Helpful tips on election day

ASISTA ESTE TALLER PARA CAPACITAR AL VOTANTE PARA SABER:

- 1 Como solicitar una Boleta electoral de voto por correo
- 2 Fechas Importantes
- 3 Lo que necesita saber para la eleccion municipal del 8 de marzo
- 4 Lo que estara en la boleta
- 5 Como encontrar su casilla electoral
- 6 Puntos utiles para el dia de la eleccion

APPENDIX B

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Voter workshop series offered to southeast LA residents

Oct. 15, 2010 | [Debra Baer](#) | KPCC

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Web Resources

- [Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk](#)
- [League of Women Voters of Los Angeles](#)
- [What experiences will shape your vote on legalized marijuana? Tell us.](#)

The political scandal in Bell has prompted new scrutiny of municipal officials in many small cities in Los Angeles County. Now the county registrar-recorder's office and voter education groups are offering workshops to help citizens get a grip on government.

Efrain Escobedo with the registrar's office says the voter empowerment workshops will teach residents about the basics of registration and voting, as well as how to spot irregularities at the polls.

"To encourage them and remind them of their right on election day to be able to, as citizens, monitor the election. And if they see irregularities, if they see something going on that just doesn't add up or just doesn't feel right, that they have a direct line to us and we can work together to resolve that."

Escobedo says the Bell scandal and allegations of cheating in past elections have hurt voter confidence. The coalition of groups organizing the workshops include The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles, California Common Cause, California Participation Project, and the NALEO Educational Fund.

The first workshop is at 10 a.m. Saturday in Bell at the South Region Middle School No. 2.

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