



Millions to the Polls

PRACTICAL POLICIES TO FULFILL THE FREEDOM
TO VOTE FOR ALL AMERICANS

**POLL WORKER
RECRUITMENT & TRAINING**

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POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

- States should provide uniform poll worker training before Election Day to ensure Election Day runs smoothly.
- Poll workers should receive a uniform wage across the state.
- Poll worker recruitment should target public employees and high school and college students.

The formula for a well-run polling place is not complicated. At the heart of it, a sufficient number of properly trained poll workers is necessary to smoothly run an election process. Poll workers undertake a full spectrum of responsibilities from checking voter registration to directing voters within the polling place to ensuring that equipment is properly running and ballots are safeguarded. They are a voter's first stop if there are any questions or problems on Election Day.

Yet, although poll workers are key to a smoothly run polling place, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration found that “one of the signal weaknesses of the system of election administration in the United States is the absence of a dependable, well-trained corps of poll workers.”¹ There are no uniform standards for poll workers nationwide, and often not even within a given state. Pay, training requirements, and recruitment processes vary widely from state to state and sometimes from county to county. Remarkably, some states do not even require their poll workers to be trained. Only 30 states require that all of their poll workers undergo training and the remaining states have different requirements as to which poll workers must be trained.² The result is that poll workers may not have the tools to solve problems or crises that arise at the polling place, which leads to delays, confusion and frustration.

Even if training is mandated, it is often inadequate. Poll workers receive 2.5 hours of training, on average.³ In a survey of poll workers in New Mexico, just 43 percent said that their training included enough hands-on work with voting machines and roughly 35 percent said that their training did not spend enough time on election laws and procedures.⁴ Overall, only 22 states develop training materials for every jurisdiction within the State, leaving more than half of the states without any uniform training materials or guidelines.⁵

The states that do have proper training protocols provide great examples for other states. North Carolina has extensive guidelines and opportunities for poll worker training. The state has written materials and instructional video developed by State Board of Elections staff with pro

bono assistance from the Community College System, which reaches all 100 counties.⁶ The state also offers a Precinct Official Certification Program whose goal is to have at least one certified precinct official in every polling place in the state.⁷ North Carolina's training program requires poll workers to attend one large symposium, followed by two statewide training sessions.⁸

North Carolina's guidelines also require local elections offices to use the statewide uniform poll worker training program⁹ and training before each election,¹⁰ offer two hour training sessions with additional sessions as necessary, and engage in training of county elections staff by the state Board of Elections. The trained staff, in turn, trains poll workers,¹¹ provides stipends to attendees & distributes instructional DVD/VHS tapes,¹² and offers statewide training seminars, online poll worker training for all of the counties, and special workshops.¹³

Maryland requires training for all poll workers before presidential and gubernatorial primaries and again before the general election.¹⁴ Texas's Secretary of State's office develops web-based training that is made available to all counties, which makes access to the materials easier.¹⁵

In addition to implementing uniform training requirements, states should also establish uniform pay for poll workers and uniform staffing requirements for polling places. Twenty-seven states establish minimum pay rates for poll workers.¹⁶ Of these states, 14 states tie pay to the state or federal minimum wage and the remaining 13 establish a basic minimum pay rate. One of the best examples of poll worker pay is Alaska.¹⁷ The state has several pay options. Elections workers, language assistance workers, and youth vote ambassadors all receive \$9.50 an hour, which is significantly higher than the state's minimum wage of \$7.75 per hour.¹⁸

Adding to lack of training and poor pay, understaffed polling places can create confusion for both poll workers and voters, contributing to long waiting times at the polls. To address this issue, the Election Assistance Commission began the Help America Vote College Program in 2004, which distributes grant money for poll worker recruitment initiatives at the state and local level. Since the program began, the EAC has awarded more than \$1 million to 34 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations.¹⁹

States with the best practices on staffing polling places base their allotment of poll workers on the number of registered voters served by the polling place, rather than a fixed number for all polling places of any size. South Carolina, for example, requires three managers for the first 500 registered voters and then three additional poll managers for every additional 500 registered voters, or fraction of 500, thereafter.²⁰

Wide recruitment also helps bring more interest in serving as a poll

worker. The majority of states have a preference for poll workers to be residents of the precincts in which they work.²¹ California and Massachusetts open the door for more poll workers because they allow state residents to serve anywhere in the state.

Also allowing municipal, state or federal employees to serve as poll workers without any penalty would increase the potential pool of poll workers. The Department of Agriculture, for example, changed its policy to allow employees to serve as poll workers without penalty.²² California also permits all state employees to take time off to serve as poll workers without loss of pay.²³ Going even further, Orange County has a program that set a goal of 10 percent of poll workers being staffed by county employees and pays county employees a full day's pay plus a \$50 stipend.²⁴

In addition to government employees, students are another population that should be encouraged to serve as poll workers. Engaging in civic activity at an early age can lead to increased political and electoral participation.²⁵ Half of the states allow 16 and 17 year olds to work at the polls.²⁶ Alaska's Student Election Assistant program engages students 16 or older by appointing them to the youth vote ambassador program by the director of elections, offering a training program and providing compensation for the youth vote ambassadors.²⁷

The Missouri Youth Election Program allows students aged 15-17 to participate on Election Day and aid the local election authority and poll workers at the polls.²⁸ New York City's Poll Worker Initiative recruits and trains students to serve as poll-workers and provides for on-campus poll worker trainings at select City University of New York campuses across the five boroughs.²⁹ California's Student Poll Worker Program allows eligible students to be appointed as poll workers on Election Day and pays them between \$65 and \$150 for service.^{30, 31}

In Franklin County, Ohio the Board of Elections has partnered with Kids Voting Central Ohio to promote high school seniors serving as poll workers. Students who are seniors, in good academic standing, and at least 17 years and older may participate with the permission of their school district, teachers and parents. Every year, new students become involved.³²

Encouraging young people to get involved in election administration increases the likelihood that they will continue to be engaged in future elections. In Virginia, for example, the University of Virginia Center for Politics (CFP) received funding from the EAC to expand its Student Poll Worker Program and all of the University of Virginia participants said that they were likely to serve as poll workers again in the future.³³

Finally, allowing poll workers the option to work a full or split shift, like California and Nebraska, helps to encourage more participation because people with less flexible schedules can choose to work a split shift and still be able to participate in Election Day.^{34 35}

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure a smooth Election Day, local, state and federal elections should adopt the follow policies:

- States should provide uniform statewide poll worker training before Election Day and standardize poll worker training hours, curriculum, assessment for poll worker proficiency, and materials to be completed before each election. Additional compensation should be provided for training.
- Establish uniform minimum poll worker wages no lower than the state or federal minimum wage (whichever is higher).
- Adopt uniform staffing requirements for workers, including split shift and/or half days options, and a formula for adequate staffing at the polls based on registered voters in precinct before the election.
- Implement poll worker recruitment, advertisement, and incentives to increase the number and quality of poll workers.
- Provide comp time to public employees who work as poll workers.
- Provide incentives for high school and college students to work as poll workers. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA), *The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration* 17 (Jan. 2014) available at <http://www.supportthevoter.gov/>.
2. These states/territories include: Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming. *House Bill 13-1303: the Voter Access and Modernized Elections Act*, (2013), available at http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2013a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont/0F25BA96A1C5D81E87257AEE005819A6?Open&file=1303_enr.pdf.
3. PCEA, *The American Voting Experience* 48.
4. R. Michael Alvarez, Lonna Rae Atkeson & Thad E. Hall, *The New Mexico Election Administration Report on the 2006 November General Election*, (August 2, 2007), available at http://www.vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/NM_election_admin_report.pdf.
5. The Pew Center on the States, *Helping Americans Vote: Poll Workers*, (Sep. 2007), available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Election_reform/ERIPBrief19_final.pdf.
6. Project Vote, *Issues in Election Administration: Policy Brief Number 9, Elements of a Successful Pollworker Training Program*, (Feb. 8, 2007), available at http://projectvote.org/images/publications/Policy%20Briefs/Project_Vote_Policy_Brief_9_Elements_of_Successful_Poll_Worker_Training.pdf.
7. North Carolina State Board of Elections, *Precinct Official Certification Guide*, (2013), available at <http://www.ncsbe.gov/contente106.html?id=144>.
8. Project Vote, *Issues in Election Administration: Policy Brief Number 9*.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
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13. The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, *North Carolina Pollworker Training*, (2008), available at <http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/projects/maps2008/info.php?ID=77&state=65>.
14. United States Election Assistance Commission, *State Compendium of Pollworker Requirements: Maryland*, (Aug. 2007), available at <http://www.eac.gov/VMRstateDocs/MarylandCEICorrected.doc>.
15. Pew Charitable Trusts, *Helping Americans Vote: Poll Workers—Electionline.org Briefing*, (Sep. 2007), available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Election_reform/ERIPBrief19_final.pdf.
16. The lowest-paid poll workers are in some Vermont jurisdictions where they are volunteers.
17. State of Alaska Division of Elections, *Polling Place Workers*, (2013), available at http://www.elections.alaska.gov/ew_poll.php.
18. State of Alaska Department of Labor, Division of Labor Standards and Safety, *Minimum Wage Standard and Overtime Hours*, (Jul. 17, 2009), available at <http://labor.alaska.gov/lss/whact.htm>.
19. Pew Charitable Trusts, *Helping Americans Vote: Poll Workers*.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. California Secretary of State, *Pollworker Information*, (2013), available at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/pollworker.htm>.
24. Steven P. Rodermund, *County Poll Worker Information*, (Sep. 1, 2004), available at <http://www.costamesaca.gov/ftp/council/agenda/2004/2004-10-04/100404%20Pollworker%20Attachment%202.pdf>.
25. Eric M. Uslander, *Civic Engagement in America: Why People Participate in Political and Social Life*, (2013), available at <http://www.gvpt.umd.edu/uslander/democracycollaborative.pdf>.
26. PCEA, *The American Voting Experience* 46-47.
27. United States Election Assistance Commission, *State Compendium of Pollworker Requirements: Alaska*, (Aug. 2007), available at <http://www.eac.gov/VMRstateDocs/AlaskaCEICorrected.doc>.
28. Missouri Secretary of State, *Student Involvement*, (2013), available at <http://www.sos.mo.gov/pollworker/students.asp>.
29. The City University of New York, *PollWorker Initiative*, (2013), available at <http://www.cuny.edu/employment/student-jobs/jobs/poll-worker-initiative.html>.
30. In order to eligible to be appointed as a poll worker, a student must be: a United States citizen, at least 16 years of age at the time of the election, and either a high school student with a grade point average of at least 2.5 (based on a 4.0 scale), or a student in good standing, attending a public or private secondary educational institution.
31. California Secretary of State, *Pollworker Information*.
32. Pew Charitable Trusts, *Helping Americans Vote: Poll Workers*.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid*; Freddie Oakley, *Task Force on Uniform Poll Worker Training Standards, Final Report*, (2005), available at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/pwt_taskforce/pwtf_final_report.pdf.
35. The Canvas: States and Election Reform, *Poll Workers: Everybody's Concern*, (May 2012), available at <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/the-canvass-may-2012.aspx>.