



# Recruiting Poll Workers in New York

## A Joint Endeavor

*Edited by Marge Acosta, Huntington League of Women Voters*

There are many ways activists can help in the implementation of new voting systems: working toward improved testing, security, auditing, transparency and oversight to name a few.

However, in looking at the many problems we face, one practical & effective area where activists can make a difference, and many boards of elections (BOEs) would appreciate support, is in helping to resolve the dilemma of insufficient & untrained poll workers.

“In many ways, the success or failure of the electoral process depends on the competence and dedication of the individuals who work at the polling places on primary and general election days.” (Dutchess County Website)

As our paper, *Recruiting College-Age Poll Workers*<sup>1</sup> states, there is a critical shortage of poll workers in the US which has directly affected the enfranchisement of many voters. The U.S. was 600,000 poll workers short of the number needed to run a smooth election in the November, 2004 presidential election, and new machines in NY may mean some poll workers will choose—in 2009 -- to opt out of working on Election Day because of their fear or unfamiliarity with the new machines. This will leave an even greater potential gap at the polls to be filled by new recruits.

The paper discusses various strategies and results presented in reports by The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the Citizens Union Foundation (CUF) on recruiting new, tech-savvy poll workers.

Following is a model, based on some of these strategies, which county LWV chapters can utilize in working with local county boards of elections. Naturally, the model would have to be customized to suit the number of League members available to work on recruitment, as well as the needs of the local BOE.

The implementation of New York’s new voting system is scheduled to take place in two phases: the introduction of Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) for voters with disabilities in 2008 and the replacement of lever machines by optical scanners in 2009.

While the timeline for recruiting tech-savvy poll workers for the 2008 BMD training is unfortunately limited, many counties will accept applications through October for the 2008 general election; and initiating programs now will, hopefully, ensure a sufficient number of trained poll workers for 2009.

### **A Model for Joint Collaboration**

*Help with poll worker recruitment:*

- Meet with your county commissioners to inform them of the many ways other states and counties are resolving the problem of insufficient numbers of poll workers & offer to help set up various programs.
  - Familiarize them with some of the many reports on recruitment. Two excellent reports are the EAC’s Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers & the Citizens Union Foundation (CUF), 2006 Poll Worker Recruitment Program. (See below)
  - Set up a liaison (perhaps one from each party) at the BOE who will be available to help with recruitment programs & endeavors. Help coordinate contacts between the BOE liaison and local colleges.

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*League of Women Voters of New York State, 62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207*

*Telephone: 518-465-4162*

*Fax: 518-465-0812*

*E-Mail: [lwnyny@lwnyny.org](mailto:lwnyny@lwnyny.org)*

*Website: [www.lwnyny.org](http://www.lwnyny.org)*

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- Find out what the poll worker positions, requirements, hours, & pay are in your county: While Election law says poll inspectors must be registered voters in the county or city in which they work and are required to be at the polls from opening to the close of poll sites, it seems counties have flexibility in filling various positions. For example, NYC has Information Clerks and Door Clerks as well as Interpreters, none of whom must be registered voters. They do not even have to be US citizens as long as they have resident status and live in NYC. The same is true for translators in other counties. However, all must be 18 years of age and fluent in English.  
Many counties are desperate for poll inspectors and, if necessary, will accept voters registered under any party or independent voters.
- Alert BOEs to problems with the database: What is /will be the policy for voters not on the registration rolls who may have been purged incorrectly? Will there be special training for inspectors handling sign in?
- Recruiting college poll workers:  
College students are usually highly intelligent, accustomed to learning new things, comfortable with computers and other new technologies and may bring skills that can solve technology-related problems.
  - Enlist the aid of local colleges to create programs for poll worker recruitment. If possible set up a contact person at each college.
  - Some programs that have been initiated at colleges include:
    - Making poll work a required service-learning assignment
    - Running a recruitment campaign with posters, information tables, mass e-mails, media coverage, and peer recruiters
    - Classes (e.g. Political Science) awarding extra credit points for any student who served as a poll worker
    - Creating semester-long courses or 4-week seminars around poll worker programs, including the required & additional election training, seminars on political participation and the democratic process, offering from one to three credits
    - Simply have related departments, such as career services, send an e-mail to all students announcing an Election Day job opportunity as a poll worker
  - Activists may offer to run workshops/meetings at the college, give presentations to classes or simply man tables & bring forms during recruitment campaigns. Naturally, much depends on what the college contact person is willing to do.
- Contact other organizations to recruit poll workers, such as Leadership organizations, Young Democrats & Republicans, Hispanic & Civic organizations. This may simply consist of asking officials of these organizations to forward a form letter to members or a flyer on becoming a poll worker.

### *Related Activities:*

- If possible, have BOE appoint League members as non-partisan poll site observers to report any Election Day problems directly to the BOE. (A specific BOE staff person would be assigned to receive such calls on Election Day.)
- Attend training sessions on the new machines & poll site procedures in order to give more informed presentations.
- Offer to help train volunteers to observe on Election Day.
- Develop a brochure, flyer and/or Power Point presentation for recruiting poll workers, which can be used in recruitment presentations and for distribution.

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*E-Mail: [lwvny@lwvny.org](mailto:lwvny@lwvny.org)*

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### **Citizens Union Foundation (CUF), 2006 Poll Worker Recruitment Program:**

The report by CUF, which received an EAC grant to recruit poll workers between the ages of 18 to 24, described some very creative strategies with quite interesting and successful results. CUF also gave some insightful recommendations for poll worker training and Election Day operations. Of the recruitment strategies listed below, surprisingly, the most successful required the smallest investment of time, manpower and money:

- Online recruitment proved to be their most successful method with this age group, yielding 63.2% of the total applicants in the 18-24 year old age range. Craigslist.org was the largest source for applications, having provided CUF with 41.6% of their 18-24 year old applicants.
- College campus recruitment
- Traditional methods: newspaper flyers, radio announcements & word of mouth

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<sup>i</sup> Recruiting College-Age Poll Workers, Edited by Marge Acosta, Huntington League of Women Voters



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*Website: [www.lwny.org](http://www.lwny.org)*

*\*\*The League of Women Voters of New York State is a unique, multi-issue, nonpartisan, political organization. It encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. \*\**