

## **Professional Practices Paper**

### **Metropolitan Kansas City's Making Voting Popular Program**

**Making Voting Popular (MVP)** is a bi-state cooperative effort involving election officials in six jurisdictions in the metropolitan Kansas City, Missouri area: The Kansas City Board of Election Commissioners, Jackson County Board of Election Commissioners, Clay County Board of Election Commissioners and Platte County Board of Election Commissioners in Missouri, and the Johnson County Commissioner and Wyandotte County Commissioner in Kansas. The program was designed to create a public/private partnership between election officials and the business and volunteer communities throughout the metroplex to meet election day human resource needs.

Businesses are asked to either release employees, on a paid basis when possible, or to encourage their employees to use vacation (or similar paid time off), to serve as election day officials. Members of organizations are invited to work as poll workers and donate their day's salary to their group, rather than retain it a personal income. Each participant receives the regular wage rate for poll workers and verification of their participation is sent to the sponsoring organization.

**Problem/Need for the Program:** There are over 914,000 registered voters in the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area. Public elections for the voters are conducted by six election offices who utilize over 929 voting locations during major elections. A combined total of approximately 5,900 workers are employed by the election officials to oversee the voting process. With the current unemployment rate at less than 4% in the bi-state area, finding personnel to meet human resource needs became increasingly difficult. By tapping the resources of the working and volunteer communities, election officials anticipated they would have the opportunity to increase the quantity and skill levels of workers used.

**Program Description:** The primary objective of the **Making Voting Popular** program is to recruit election day workers, however there are a number of ancillary objectives:

- To educate the working public about the voting process.
- To create opportunities for individuals and organizations to commit to and meet civic responsibilities.
- To create channels that can be used for other election related outreach programs.

The benefits of the program are more extensive than the objectives:

- It will create a pool of election workers who bring unique skills to voting locations.
- It will result in improved operating efficiencies at polling places.
- It will increase public awareness of the voting process.

- It will create more public trust in the voting process.
- It will provide a medium for organizations to receive public recognition for meeting a civic responsibility.
- It can serve as a fundraising mechanism for civic and social organizations.

Program development included securing the endorsement of the Secretaries of State of Missouri and Kansas. Their approval underpinned the proposed concept and sanctioned the activities of the election authorities. The Secretaries wrote letters expressing their appreciation to those organizations and individuals who participated in the program. Election officials also selected two highly visible, prominent people, the president and publishers of the region's daily newspapers, to serve as honorary co-chairs of the campaign. Their acceptance ensured a high media profile for the initiative.

Sources used to identify the organizations that were invited to participate in the program included Chambers of Commerce listing, Yellow pages and listings of non-profit and volunteer organizations.

To kick off **MVP**, election officials held a press conference which was hosted by representatives from the governor's office, the secretaries of state and/or their representatives, the **MVP** co-chairs and other election officials. Following the press conference, the program was promoted by (1) sending letters which described the initiative, along with a packet of information, to businesses and organizations, (2) printing an open letter in area newspapers, and (3) election officials appearing on television and radio talk shows. Copies of a few of the forms used in the program are attached for your review.

**Cost of the Program:** Costs of the program were minimal and included printing of forms, logo stationery and postage expense, for a total of approximately \$2,419.

**Results/Success of the Program:** The **Making Voting Popular** initiative was implemented with the November 3, 1998 election with tremendous success! Over 275 new workers were recruited as a result of the campaign. Of that number, 170 people heard or read about the program through the news media – TV, radio or newspaper. The remaining workers were members of 28 businesses and organizations.

In addition, the program generated over 200 telephone inquiries, and commitments from Sprint and Hallmark Cards for future participation in the program. Surveys completed by **MVP** participants indicated that 100% of the respondents plan to work for election authorities in the future.

As a result of our success, the Bi-State Election Officials Committee currently is discussing the need to expand the energy of the organization to accomplish other non-partisan objectives. Plans include promoting voting activities in schools and possibly linking with other voter education organizations to increase public awareness of, and generate interest in, the election process.