



End Election Day Chaos:

Fix New York's Voting Procedures

Marc Landis
District Leader
67th AD, Part C

Joan Paylo
District Leader
69th AD, Part B

Nick Prigo
District Leader
69th AD, Part B

The Democratic District Leaders of the Community Free Democrats

Acknowledgements

The District Leaders of the Community Free Democrats would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals whose insight and experience contributed greatly to this report:

Maria Acevedo, Benedicta Akinyemi, Seymour Amlen, Linda Anderson, Nyja Attenborough, Marianne Barcellona, Lillian Brahms, Lucky Brannon, Marion Bunn, Wayne Burnette, Dorothy Buzawa, Cornelia Carlyle, Leta Carlyle, Sandra Carter, Rick Churchill, Crystal Clemons, William Cochran, Lillian Coello, Barbara Cohen, Maxwell Cohen, Denise Conyers, Kathryn Corbett, Jerry Cordova, Gay Danna, Maria Figueroa, Noga Garrison, Pilar Gomez, Sheila Greenberg, Susan Gwertzman, Carol Handwerker, Edgar Holder, Norma Hooper, Valerie Horst, Barbara Hunter, Annie Isaac, Carmen Ithier, Minnie Kelly, Murray Koenigsberg, Sharon Koonce, Joe Lawrence, Peter Lerch, Gail Lerner, Jan Levy, Dorothy Lewis, Myrna Long-Reid, Sharon Mack, Sheila Mitchell, Miriam Navarro, Cynthia Ortiz, Mary Pasley, Bernice Pedroso, Katalin Pota, Helen Rogers, Beverly Scheiner, Frances Schoen, John Seaman, Eleanor Seepes, Teisha Silva, Maxine Spence, Genovia Stanfield, Cheryl Steward, Maria Valdes, Olga Vargas, Ronald Walton, Hiry West, Carolyn Whitley, Elizabeth Wilbur, and everyone who attended the forum at Goddard-Riverside on October 25th, 2012

Introduction

New York City voters and poll workers alike have raised significant concerns about how the Board of Elections handled the Presidential Election this past November 2012. While we recognize that Hurricane Sandy did significantly hamper the final days of preparation, there can be no disagreement that there is significant room for improvement.

The items included in this report represent the changes that the District Leaders of the Community Free Democrats believe the Board of Elections should employ to address some of the problems seen on Election Day.

These recommendations were gathered from our experiences at the polls, from a forum we held with 70 dedicated and veteran poll workers, and from Upper West Side voters who shared their concerns with us directly.

We presented these ideas at a hearing of the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations, chaired by Council Member Gale Brewer of District 6 on the Upper West Side, and attended by officials of the City and State Board of Elections.

This report was compiled in December 2012.

Shift Time & Compensation

Shift Length - The 16+ hour shift is simply too long. Splitting days into two shifts is a sensible solution, though we recognize that this is financially and logistically difficult to implement. If this isn't a possibility then other significant reforms are needed.

Compensation – The compensation for the 16+ hour shift is insufficient. Serious consideration should be made to increasing poll worker wages. Moreover, additional compensation should be awarded to those poll workers who have mastered advanced training.

Timeliness - Poll workers should be paid in a more timely fashion, no later than a month after the applicable Election Day.

Training

More Training - It has been nearly universally demanded, from poll workers and voters alike, that more training be provided. We recognize that limited financial capacity makes overhauling the system difficult. However, we must find a system that better prepares our poll workers for busy elections.

Specialized Training - The BOE should consider the implementation of sub-specialist tracks within the standard Inspector training. While Inspectors should be provided with enough training to work the table or the scanner (so that they can back-up their fellow workers), there should be two tracks for these two very different tasks.

Training Content - A common criticism we have heard of the current training is that a significant amount of time is spent addressing procedures for uncommon occurrences so that the poll workers know how to respond. This track method of training would provide the opportunity to focus more on the common occurrences for everyone, and specific issues for the right workers.

More Rigorous Testing - The single biggest cause of long lines at the Presidential Election was poll workers who could not quickly locate voters in the registration books. Poll workers that cannot reliably and quickly complete this task should be screened out from these positions.

Disabled Voter Access Training - Working with the New York State Protection and Advocacy for Voter Access program, specific training needs to be provided to the appropriate poll-workers to ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the electoral process

Training, Cont.

Street Finder - The Street Finder training is inadequate as poll workers routinely have the common even/odd problems. Information clerks that are tasked with using these finders need to be properly trained and tested to make sure they can use them. Electronic Street Finders should be provided at poll sites to help workers find buildings quickly. The paper-copy should only be provided as a backup.

Coordinator & Monitor Responsibilities

Coordinators – These workers need to be significantly more involved in pre-election day setup. They should be required to visit their site as early as possible the day before the election to ensure proper setup and to ensure that all required materials have been delivered. Coordinators also need to call their potential workers 4-5 days ahead of time to make a final confirmation of who will actually be working, and be given a contact number at the BOE to report their final count, so that standby needs can be anticipated.

AD Monitor – These teams have been given too many sites to visit on a given day. The forms that they are expected to fill out are too long for their current number of assigned sites. Consider either eliminating the current system where Monitor teams overlap, thus allowing each team to have a smaller area, or increase the number of AD Monitors that are deployed. Monitors shouldn't be responsible for more than 10 to 20 sites.

Election Day

ED Table – All effort must be made to reduce the amount of paper work and verbal instructions that workers are currently required to process while checking voters in.

Line Management – A much more rigorous effort needs to be made at all poll sites to properly plan for line management on Election Day. Coordinators, door clerks, District Leaders, and permanent BOE staff must all be on the same page for how a site's line is going to be managed long before Election Day begins.

Site Setup – A complete re-evaluation of many Upper West Side poll sites must be completed prior to the next election. Considerable problems occurred on Election Day because the Board of Elections dictated the site setups, rather than consulting the coordinators and District Leaders who had been working those sites for years. Sometimes these plans put equipment too far from available power outlets. Often, these dictated floor plans left no sensible place for vital signage, such as ED numbers, to be posted above the ED registration desks.

Elderly/Disabled – We must also have a site specific plan for how poll workers are going to accommodate the elderly and disabled. There must be a plan for moving these voters to the front of the line. Additionally, specialized seating areas or other accommodations must be allocated to make sure these voters are treated appropriately.

Pens – Multiple Upper West Side poll sites ran out of pens during Election Day and workers had to scramble to find replacements. A better system of ensuring that pens stay in privacy booths should be created.

Election Day, Cont.

Voter Book – All tables' voter books should be at a minimum broken into two parts (A-L and M-Z). Moreover, the printing method for these books should contain tabs that extend past the binding to make quick lookup possible.

Scanner Technical Response – Scanner repair waiting time needs to be addressed. Many sites did not get a technician for hours after the request was placed.

End of Night Close Out - The process of closing a poll site at the end of the night is overly complex. It is unreasonable to expect workers who have just finished a 16-hour day to be able to properly complete this process. The method for closeout needs to be simplified at all steps.

Document Design & Printing

Ballot Font Size - The font size on ballots must be increased. Not only do we have to accommodate those with low-vision, but the lighting standards of poll sites vary considerably, with some locations being quite dark and requiring high contrast.

Dark Ink - Print all documents with the darkest ink available. At sites with low-light conditions poll workers have a hard time reading some documents.

Easy Tear Ballots - The printed ballots are difficult to remove without tearing, significantly slowing down the voting process. A different, easier to use ballot bundle is required. Additionally, consider not having the ballots attached to each other.

Large Ovals - The ovals that voters fill in are too small. Attempt to maximize the space allocated to these bubbles, and if possible, provide voters with instructions on how to fill them out. Consider having these instructions affixed to the table-top of the privacy booth.

Large Sample Ballots - Create very large sample ballots and instructions that can be hung on walls in several places for people that are waiting in line. Make sure they are also placed near the privacy booths.

Document Design Mismatch - The Return of Canvass report pages for the last primary were not white, pink and yellow as indicated in training, but rather, were white, yellow and deep yellow, which caused confusion at the poll site. Additionally, the Police Return Envelope had a different look from the one presented in training.

Coordinating with Community Leaders

Poll Worker Computer System – The creation of a cloud-based poll worker assignment system would improve the efficiency and consistency of Election Day setup. This system should be available to poll workers so they can view their assignments and manage their contact information and be available to District Leaders so that they can see their workers and assign them to the appropriate locations.

Poll Site Selection – The selection of appropriate poll sites should be made in closer consultation with District Leaders, local elected officials, and community leaders.

Upper West Side Site Specific

PS 75 (735 West End Ave - 13 EDs – 2 EDs without voters)

This poll site may have been the most chaotic on the entire Upper West Side and required some voters to stand in line in excess of two hours. A complete overhaul of this site must be performed. In our estimation, the cafeteria can accommodate a maximum of six EDs. And on busy turn-out days those six EDs would still be crowded. We must move five of these 13 EDs to new locations in the area.

PS 9 (100 W 84 – 12 EDs – 1 ED without voters)

In our estimation, the cafeteria can accommodate a maximum of six or seven EDs. We must move the rest to new locations in the area. Additionally, we should be using classroom space or the auditorium to help make line management more feasible.