

## **Ideas for green elections**

*Two counties discuss how they “greened” their early voting*

By [M. Mindy Moretti](#)

Back in April to celebrate Earth Day, electionlineWeekly attempted to write a story about how, if at all, counties and states were able to “green” their election administration. Unfortunately we didn’t get much response at the time, but since publishing a request for information, stories have begun trickling in about what local jurisdictions are doing. We’ll periodically publish news from counties as we get it. This week, two counties discuss how they made early voting a bit more green.

Since 2008, [Guilford County, N.C.](#) early voting coordinator Tim Tsujii has been working nonstop to green the early voting process.

“Our first green practice is our sample ballot recycling boxes that we place near the exit of every voting enclosure. Voters may pick up a sample ballot at the information table located at the entrance of the voting enclosure,” Tsujii explained. After they’ve cast their vote they can simply drop the sample ballots in the box as they are exiting the room so that they may be re-used by other voters. We even use the cardboard box that the sample ballots are delivered in from the print shop as the drop box.”

Another green practice that the county implemented was an e-newsletter and poll worker confirmation system. In years past the county would mail out quarterly newsletters to keep poll workers informed, but in 2008 the county moved to an e-newsletter with only a small handful of people still getting paper versions.

The poll worker confirmation system is a database module that the county created through Microsoft Access, allowing them to communicate with poll workers en masse instantaneously by email and generate queries that store information such as work availability, schedules, training, etc. The database contains contact information for both prospective and hired early voting workers.

“Microsoft Access allows us to create forms that we can send out including work availability questionnaire, training registration, and election confirmation sheets. After these forms are distributed, the poll workers can simply reply to the email and the information is entered into queries,” Tsujii explained. “Again, there are a handful of workers that receive their materials by mail but the system has decreased print and mailing costs.”

Saving money — in addition to going green — was also the focus in 2008 when [Hendricks County, Ind.](#) promoted early voting as a green alternative.

“We used a ‘Green Theme’ for the 2008 general election,” said Laura Herzog, election supervisor. “We offered ‘Walk-In’ voting on our MicroVote DRE voting panels.”

She estimated that the county saved in excess of \$34,000 in paper, postage and ink and eliminated a lot of waste.

“Once I began crunching numbers on savings in paper and postage, I realized how truly “Green” it actually was and not simply a catchy slogan,” Herzog said.

Herzog said the program was very well received and that as long as the law allows it, her office will never go back to in-person paper absentee ballots.

Moving forward, Herzog is already planning on how to take advantage and promote Indiana's new online voter registration as a green alternative.

"I can't take any credit for it; however, I can use the functionality in my "green campaign," Herzog said.

Cyrus Bhedwar, southeast regional manager for [ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability USA](#) said that several local governments have contacted his organization looking for suggestions and solutions to making elections more sustainable for the environment, but that he hasn't really been able to provide them with too many examples of jurisdictions "greening" their elections.

"The opportunities are out there," Bhedwar said. "And I'm sure that local governments are going green with their elections, it's just a matter of putting those who are doing it in touch with those who want to do it."

And on that note, electionlineWeekly will again make the request to send us information about any greening of elections local governments may be doing.

## II. Election News This Week

- As the stalemate over picking a new executive director for the New York City Board of Elections continues, apparently there is [not enough money to cover costs for holding the city's November general election after paying for primary operations in September](#). The assessment of the Board of Elections shortfall — pegged at approximately \$19 million less than what the agency's staff says will be necessary to conduct its appointed tasks through the coming fiscal year — was announced this week at the regular meeting of the commissioners. According to finance officer John Ward, the city budget passed last week leaves the Board \$9 million short of the "personnel services," or payroll budget, and an additional \$10 million short of the OTPS, or "other than personnel services" budget used to pay for the new voting machines at long last being introduced this year to bring New York into compliance with the Help America Vote Act, as well as to bring those voting machines to the polling places. Board of Elections staff told *City Hall News* that the current budget allocates enough money for either one drop-off and pick-up of voting machines, presumably for the primary elections, and then not to be able to pay to bring the machines back out for the general, or to leave the pricey new voting machines sitting in polling places from September through November. "The choice is right now, we can send the truckers out and once back, but the second time becomes a question," the Board's general counsel, Steven Richman, explained to the commissioners.
- [New Mexico has settled a lawsuit](#) filed by advocacy groups last year over compliance with a law that lets people register to vote at various state agencies, including the Motor Vehicle Division when they get a driver's license. Secretary of State Mary Herrera and Taxation and Revenue Secretary Dorothy Rodriguez, who signed the agreement last week, did not immediately return messages seeking comment Wednesday. The Taxation and Revenue Department oversees the MVD. The settlement requires MVD staffers to be designated as National Voter Registration Act coordinators, who will help ensure compliance with the law through education and training and by making sure offices have equipment needed for voter registrations. The MVD must update computer systems and websites and monitor compliance. The agreement also requires offices to post signs telling members of the public they can register to vote at that office. The agreement settles only the part of the lawsuit against the MVD and the Taxation and Revenue Department. Still to be settled are allegations the New Mexico Human Services Department did not follow the law's requirement to distribute voter registration cards along with applications for public assistance such as food stamps and Medicaid. That requirement is in an effort to reach low-income citizens who are less likely to own vehicles.
- The [Standards Board of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) has selected three of its members to serve as officers of the board through June 2011. The new chair is Jim Silrum, North

Dakota's deputy secretary of state. Brad King, co-director of the Indiana Election Division, is vice chair. Leslye Winslow, senior counsel to the Missouri Secretary of State, is secretary. The Executive Board, comprised of nine Standards Board members, selected the new officers. The Standards Board will meet on July 27, 2010, to learn about and provide feedback on recent EAC activities related to grants, research, and testing and certification, including the EAC Election Operations Assessment and congressionally-mandated work on UOCAVA ballot transmission. Also this week, [Board of Advisors of the EAC](#) elected three of its members to serve as officers of the board through June 2011. The officers are Jim Dickson of Washington, D.C., chair; Keith Cunningham of Ohio, vice chair; and Linda H. Lamone of Maryland, secretary.

- The [National Technical Assistance Center for Voting and Cognitive Access](#) is hosting a free conference call titled Poll Workers: Ideas for Inclusive Training. The subject is improving poll worker training to better serve the needs of voters with disabilities, including people with cognitive disabilities. The call is free; people only need to pre-register at [www.govoter.org](http://www.govoter.org). Links to the instructions are on the right side of the home page. The call will be Wednesday July 14th, at 8am Pacific time.
- **In Memoriam:** [Sandra Hersey Henderson](#), who was the deputy supervisor of elections for Duval County since September 2006, died at a local hospital Sunday night. She was 54 and had congestive heart failure. Henderson had worked for the city since July 1, 1999, when she served as Jerry Holland's executive assistant as the City Council representative for District 3. When Holland was elected elections supervisor, she moved with him to the elections office on April 15, 2005, and was named deputy supervisor a year later.

### III. Research and Report Summaries

*electionline provides brief summaries of recent research and reports in the field of election administration. Please e-mail links to research to [sgreene@pewtrusts.org](mailto:sgreene@pewtrusts.org).*

#### [A Citizen from Day One: A Proposal to Provide Voter Registration Services at Naturalization Ceremonies](#)

– Tova Andrea Wang, Demos, June 29, 2010: The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which is responsible for naturalizing new citizens, is encouraged to provide a means for these new citizens to register to vote immediately at naturalization ceremonies by distributing registration forms, providing assistance in completing them, and transmitting them to the proper election authority. USCIS could perform this role if, as the report recommends, they were designated a voter registration agency.

[The Canvass: States and Election Reform](#) – The National Conference of State Legislatures, July 2010: In this issue, vote-by-mail is examined as a potential cost-saving solution, an in-depth look at California's new "top two" system is provided, and the Indiana Supreme Court decision upholding the state's photo ID requirement is summarized.

### IV. Opinions

California: [Saturday voting](#)

Illinois: [Election reform](#); [Special elections](#)

Indiana: [Voter ID](#), [II](#), [III](#), [IV](#), [V](#), [VI](#), [VII](#); [Online voter registration](#)

Maine: [Instant-runoff voting](#)

Minnesota: [Voter ID](#)

New York: [Voting machines](#), [II](#); [Accessible voting](#)

South Carolina: [Early voting](#)

Tennessee: [Overseas voting](#)

West Virginia: [Polling places](#); [Special election](#)