Report on the Compensation, Recruitment and Training of Election Officials

Wisconsin State Elections Board

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BACKGROUND

Poll workers are an integral part of the election process in Wisconsin. Throughout this report, the term poll worker is used as an alternative to the term election inspector, which is used in the state statutes. At the polling place the one poll worker who has gone through the training and has been certified is called a chief inspector. They are the individuals who make the process work at the most fundamental level of election administration. The State Legislature recognizes this and required, in the 2003 Wisconsin Act 98, that the State Elections Board prepare the following report on the recruitment, training, certification and compensation of poll workers throughout the state.

A variety of methods were used in gathering the information for the report including conducting a survey of county and municipal clerks and interviewing election agencies in other states. The statistics provided give an in-depth view of the status of poll workers across the state, while the qualitative data provides ideas for the future. A draft of this report was posted on the Website of the State Elections Board in order to solicit feedback from the public and clerks. The comments which were received have been incorporated into the final report.

A sentiment which repeatedly occurred in the survey was the appreciation that clerks have for their poll workers. These are individuals who sit through an often long day and do their job with a high level of dedication and many come back and serve their community every year for many years. It is the Board's hope that this report will lead to an improved understanding of the role and importance of poll workers in Wisconsin, to see where there is room for improvement and gain some new ideas on improving the process for the future.

RELEVANT STATE STATUTES

Wisconsin Election Administration Plan

In 2002, the State Elections Board adopted the Wisconsin State Plan which outlined the future plan for the state in terms of its elections administration, pursuant to S. 5.05(10), Wis. Stats. The plan was required for Wisconsin to be compliant with the Help America Vote Act and receive federal funds associated with the act. The plan included information on the new Statewide Voter Registration System as well as the Board's strategy for training of election officials.

Compensation

The State does not currently set a required wage for poll workers or Chief Inspectors, rather it is set by each local municipality. S. 7.03, Wis. Stats., states that a poll worker must be paid a "reasonable daily compensation" for their work on election day and for any training they are required to attend. The Wisconsin Towns Association has issued an opinion that municipalities should pay poll workers at least minimum wage. There is a provision in S. 7.03, Wis. Stats., that a poll worker can waive any compensation and volunteer their time. This is done with a written document submitted to the clerk.

Training

The State Elections Board is responsible for conducting regular administrative meetings and conferences for election officials, which according to S. 5.05(7), Wis. Stats., "shall be designed to explain the election laws and the forms and rules of the board, to promote uniform procedures and to assure that clerks and other officials are made aware of the integrity and importance of the vote of each citizen." The municipal clerks also have a responsibility to train the poll workers in their municipality, per S. 7.15(1)(e), Wis. Stats., and assist the State Elections Board in any training it does, per S. 7.15(11), Wis. Stats.

In 2001 S. 7.31, Wis. Stats., was created, which requires that each polling place have a "certified chief inspector." This chief inspector is required to attend an initial training from the State Elections Board and attend subsequent trainings to maintain their certification. The State Elections Board set a policy which detailed that the required subsequent trainings would be six hours. There are no other statutes which require poll worker training.

Recruiting

Each municipal clerk is responsible for staffing the polling place of their municipality. In December of even-numbered years, the governing body for a municipality selects poll workers to serve for a two-year term. The major political parties in a municipality are supposed to submit names, to the local municipal clerk, of people in their party who would like to serve as a poll worker. Then the clerk and the municipality's governing body confirm appointment of poll workers from the provided lists. The majority of the municipal clerks however, do not receive a list from the major political parties. In this case, the poll workers who are chosen are unaffiliated with a party. This process is detailed in S. 7.30, Wis. Stats.

High School Poll Workers

S. 7.30(2)(am), Wis. Stats., provides the opportunity for 16-17 year olds to work as poll workers. There are a few stipulations before a high school students is allowed to work. First a clerk must obtain authorization from the principal of the student's high school and the parents of the students and the student must have a 3.0 grade point average.

Poll Workers Working in Shifts

If a municipality would like to allow its poll workers to work in shifts, it must pass an ordinance per S. 7.30(1), Wis. Stats.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The majority of the statistics in this report were gathered through a survey conducted of municipal and county clerks during April 2005. A copy of the survey is attached in the appendices. Overall there was a 72 percent response rate from the municipal clerks with 1,346 municipalities completing the survey. The survey of the county clerks had a 69 percent response rate with 50 county clerks returning the surveys. Below is more detailed information about the respondents of the survey. Additionally, of the largest 50 municipalities, ranked by their population, all except two, the City of Sheboygan and the City of Muskego, responded to the survey. Please see the appendix for a county by county participation rate.

Respondents to the County Clerks' Survey

Ashland	Crawford	Manitowoc	Rusk
Brown	Dane	Marathon	Shawano
Burnett	Dodge	Marquette	Sheboygan
Calumet	Florence	Outagamie	Taylor
Chippewa	Fond du Lac	Ozaukee	Walworth
Clark	Green Lake	Pepin	Waukesha
Columbia	Jefferson	Racine	Waupaca

Respondents' Years of Work Experience

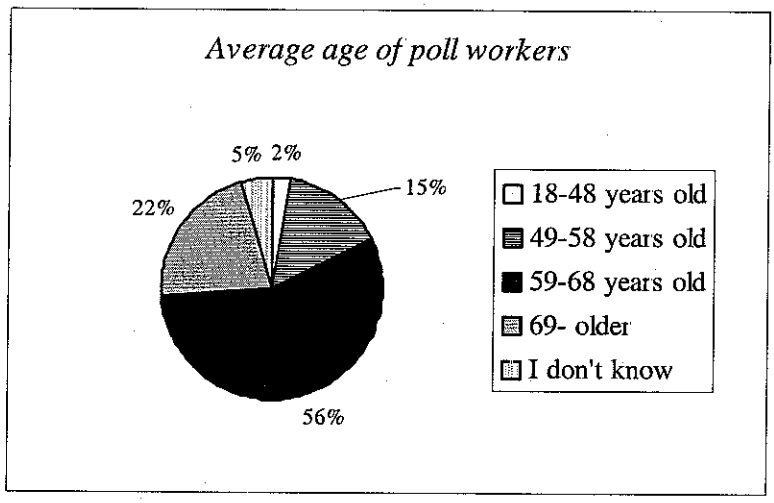
County Clerks		
Less than 1 year	8	16%
1-3 years	7	14%
4-7 years	13	26%
8-11 years	9	18%
12 or more	13	26%
Didn't Respond	2	0.30%

Municipal Clerks		
Less than 1 year	75	6%
1-3 years	237	18%
4-7 years	313	23%
8-11 years	201	15%
12 or more	517	38%
Don't Know	4	0.30%

Types of Municipalities that Responded			
	# of Respondents	Total # of municipalities in this category	% of total municipalities in this category that responded
Towns	848	1265	67%
Villages	328	386	85%
Cities	171	190	90%

OVERVIEW OF POLL WORKERS

To no surprise, the information revealed that the State's poll workers are mostly comprised of older individuals. Wisconsin is not unusual. Across the nation, the average age of poll workers is 72 years old. Due to the rural nature of most of Wisconsin, it is also not surprising that many polling places only utilize three to five poll workers for each election.



Average Number of Poll Workers

Towns	
Fall Gubernatorial	4.6
Fall Presidential	5.5
Spring/Other	4.3

Villages	
Fall Gubernatorial	4.7
Fall Presidential	5.6
Spring/Other	4.4

Cities	
Fall Gubernatorial	7.0
Fall Presidential	8.0
Spring/Other	6.5

Average number of poll workers working at a polling place

	3 Poll Workers	5 Poll Workers	7 Poll Workers	9 Poll Workers	11 Poll Workers	*More than 11	Did not answer	*Average number of workers for those who answered more than 11
Fall Gubernatorial	571	504	174	38	22	34	3	19
Fall Presidential	391	495	271	66	54	67	4	20
Spring/Other	638	510	137	20	14	25	2	18

POLL WORKER COMPENSATION

The survey revealed that while there is a large range of wages paid across the state, most municipalities pay above minimum wage to their poll workers. One interesting statistic is the number of municipalities that do not pay their poll workers to attend a training session, 21 percent of respondents. Please see appendix for a detailed look at the training wages. Although it could be argued that many poll workers work on election day because they feel it is their civic duty and do not work because of the wage they will be earning, several clerks commented on the importance of paying a decent wage in order to attract and keep quality poll workers. When the average wages of each county for 2002 and 2004 are compared, almost all of the average wages have increased over the past two years. Please see the appendix for a chart depicting the 2002 versus 2004 wages separated by county.

All of the wages on the following graphs were calculated so that they are a per hour wage. When a municipality reported a daily wage that was paid, this was divided by 12 to achieve the per hour rate. Of the 275 municipalities that reported a daily wage, 80 percent of these municipalities were towns and villages, which have the option of opening the polls at a later time and therefore poll workers presumably would have shorter hours to work. For a detailed review of the average and ranges of wages per county, please see the appendix.

Average Election Day Wages

Poll Workers		
	Range	
	Low	High
Per Hour Range:	$2.33	$14.00
Average:	$7.05	

Chief Inspectors		
	Range	
	Low	High
Per Hour Range:	$2.50	$16.67
Average:	$7.31	

Training Wages

Per Hour range	$5.00-$12.00
Per Hour Average	$7.29
*Per session range	$2.00-$70.00
*Per session average	$31.31

* Based on a half day session

POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT

In contrast to the State Elections Board's assumption that many municipalities had trouble recruiting poll workers, the data revealed that only 25 percent of clerks stated that they had this problem. When that 25 percent are viewed in more detail there does not appear to be any shared characteristics of these municipalities, such as they are predominantly towns or urban areas. When the data is broken down by county, there does appear to be some counties where more municipalities have this problem than others. See appendix for a more detailed look at the statistics on recruiting.

The majority of clerks rely on the conventional methods of recruiting workers such as getting lists from the local parties or simply talking with and asking individuals in their municipalities to participate. Of the clerks who have tried two of the more unconventional methods such as using high school poll workers or working with local community groups, their experiences appear to vary, with the high school poll workers appearing to be the more effective approach. The clerks also had a variety of solutions to the issue of recruiting, with some of them being more feasible than others.

Trouble Recruiting Poll Workers
By Type of Municipality

	Towns	Villages	Cities
	Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Yes	187	98	52
No	661	230	119
Percentage Stating Yes	23%	29%	30%

Main ways that recruiting is done *(Respondents were asked to mark all methods that they use)*	
	Number of Respondents
Word of mouth	1079
Other poll workers recommend individuals	885
Political parties	252
Other- specified below	239
Advertising	182
Civic groups or volunteer organizations	38
Sign-up Sheet at the polling place or town hall	53
Clerk makes phone calls to possible workers	33
Newsletter	31
People just volunteer	25
Recommendations from the town board	19
Posting Notices in the town hall	7
Announcement made at board/council meetings	6
Working with the local high schools and high school teachers	5
Article in the local newspaper	4
Web Site	3
Sending a letter out to the community	3
Begging and Pleading	2

The Main Obstacles to Recruiting Poll Workers	
	Number of Respondents
Community Members work full time and cannot take a day off	310
Community Members are just not interested	231
Required to work too many hours on election day	91
Not enough compensation	67
Other- specified below	63
Intimidated about making a mistake, too much training, many community members are too old or too young, snow birds, too much paper work	