

# Mixed Greens

An assortment of fresh tossed ideas.

## 007 Reaching voters with diverse communications

Greeting graduates by Carlys. K. Allen

An education idea smorgasbord; something for everyone by Stuart Holmes

### Greeting graduates

Finding ways to achieve effective voter outreach to young adults is a challenge. We shamelessly hijacked the following idea from Jefferson County (who, I understand, borrowed the idea from Clark County).

For the past three years, we have distributed graduation cards with enclosed voter registration forms to all graduating high school students in our county, plus our Skagit Valley College/San Juan Center graduates. We customize the cards for each school and deliver them for inclusion in their graduation packets. Our auditor signs each card personally.

In mid-April we contact the schools to obtain the estimated number of graduates. The school folks are quite enthusiastic about the project and happy to assist our efforts. We deliver the cards to the schools by mid-May.

We code the enclosed voter registration forms with a small highlighter mark in the upper right corner so that we can track our results. We use it to mark each new registration of a graduate and whether they used the form we sent or registered another way.

We monitor our new registrations throughout the year and identify those who were recent graduates but registered online, came into the office, or mailed a form they obtained elsewhere. We also check each student listed in the local newspaper graduation announcements to see if any graduates have registered prior to receiving the card. Some teachers in the county incorporate voter registration as a requirement for their classes (as long as the student is old enough); we've found that about 1/4 to 1/3 are already registered.

We tend to get about 10-15% return from the enclosed forms, but there are about as many who register online or another way after graduation.

If this outreach idea is of interest to anyone in other counties, I am happy to chat with you about our experience.

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## **Election reminders on utility bills**

We contacted our local City Clerks to ask if they do outreach on their city utility bills. It was surprising that the cities actually were already doing a lot of voter outreach. All of the cities were completely open to the idea of partnering. We write a few different utility bill reminders because each city has different requirements. We also will be providing voter registration deadlines and election reminders in the cities' newsletter/magazine. A few of the cities even offered their digital reader boards for outreach.

## **Election reminders in school newsletters**

We contacted the school districts that publish a newsletter (October through June). We place a small reminder article in the newsletter during the General Election. We also contacted our local colleges and provide them with information that is sent to all college staff and students as well as displayed on TV monitors in the hub.

The hardest part about communicating with the school districts is that they take awhile to respond. They are often out of the office for extended periods of time. The most important thing is to be patient and don't forget to remind them.

## **Future plans; local realtors pass along address change info**

People who visit realtors' offices are usually changing their address. We want to take advantage of this fact so we are developing a package realtors can give to each home buyer. When we are finished, we will contact each realtor office in Benton County. We have been invited to present at our local realtors conference. When someone buys a home in Benton County, they will be reminded to update their voter registration.

## **Monitoring and goals**

We are compiling statistical data and will continue to do so. Following the primary, we will be able to compare turnout/registered voters to previous years. Our short-term goal is to develop partnerships with our local districts and community. We believe we will gain support while educating them about the election process. Our long-term goal is to increase the registered voter total by 20%.

## **New Video Voters' Guide**

We (and our voters) really loved the idea of a Video Voters' Guide but completely disagreed with the price tag. We knew we could put together our own Video Voters' Guide with existing resources. First we researched the limitations of our web site and then developed format requirements. The candidates recorded their own videos and we were available if any candidates needed assistance. Participation was optional and we received a good participation rate for our first year. We learned a lot the first year which means next year will be even better.

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If you have an experience to share with your colleagues, we want to hear from you; email or call Lindsay or Amanda.