

## Expand Your Bilingual Poll Worker Pool: Recruit LPR Poll Workers

Many counties across California are benefitting from lawful permanent resident (more commonly known as “green card holders”) poll workers. LPR poll workers provide a greater availability of election volunteers and language assistance for voters who are limited English proficient.

### Why is language assistance important at polling places?

Over 2.6 million eligible voters in California are not yet fully proficient in English, including 47% of eligible voters who are naturalized. Without language assistance, these citizens face challenges in asserting their right to vote and casting an informed ballot.

Based on a 2015-2016 survey, 32% of Asian American voters in Los Angeles County used language assistance to cast their ballots. Of those voters, 46% of Chinese voters and 50% of Korean voters used language assistance.

### What are the benefits to LPRs working as poll workers?

(1) LPR poll workers are able to assist people with language barriers, as many of them are **bilingual**.

- In November 2016, **Los Angeles County** staffed 344 LPR poll workers. 262 of them (76%) were bilingual, providing crucial language assistance to a county that covers 10 different languages on Election Day.
- In **Santa Clara County**, 174 out of 194 LPR poll workers in November 2016 were bilingual (90%). 76% of the bilingual LPR poll workers were bilingual in one of the four Section 203 languages (132 of 174).
- 4 out of 5 LPR poll workers in **Santa Barbara County** were bilingual in November 2016 (80%).
- **Orange County** had 114 LPR poll workers in November 2016. 92 of them were bilingual (81%). The top 4 languages spoken by their LPR poll workers were the four languages the County is required to provide on Election Day under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act.
- In November 2016, 77% of **San Francisco County**'s LPR poll workers were bilingual in one of their required languages: Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese (100 out of 130).
- All 23 of **Riverside County**'s LPR poll workers were bilingual in November 2016.
- 92% of the LPR poll workers in **Sacramento County** in November 2016 were bilingual (11 out of 12).
- 68 out of 119 of LPR poll workers in **San Diego County** in November 2016 were bilingual (57%).
- In June 2016, in counties including Orange, Santa Clara, Sonoma and San Benito, 100% of the LPR poll workers staffed were bilingual. 80% of the LPR poll workers in Sacramento County were bilingual in June 2016.

(2) Bilingual LPR poll workers can help **fulfill state and federal language assistance requirements** for counties. During November 2016 poll monitoring, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA found that 16% of the bilingual poll workers assigned for targeted precincts in the federal law languages were missing<sup>1</sup>. In addition, 62% of the bilingual poll workers assigned for targeted precincts in the state law languages were missing<sup>2</sup>. Even with recruitment efforts, county elections officials still struggle to find bilingual poll workers to serve on Election Day.

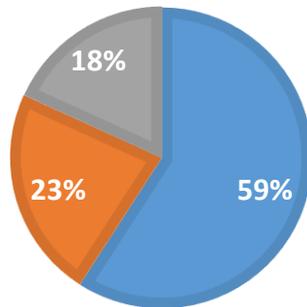
<sup>1</sup> The counties observed were Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside, Tulare, Kern, and Kings. Some precincts require more than one language under Section 203.

<sup>2</sup> Along with Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus, twenty-one counties were observed for this statistic. Some precincts require more than one language under Election Code 12303. For more information, visit “Voices of Democracy: The State of Language Access in California’s November 2016 Elections”: <https://www.advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/Voices-of-Democracy-CA-Language-Access-CA-Nov16-Elections-Report.pdf>

- In November 2016, Santa Cruz County had 2 bilingual LPR poll workers. Both of them were placed at targeted precincts for their state law language requirement.
- 82% of the bilingual LPR poll workers in Riverside County were placed at a targeted precinct for language requirements in November 2016 (18 out of 22).

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY: BILINGUAL LPR POLL WORKERS (NOVEMBER 2016)**

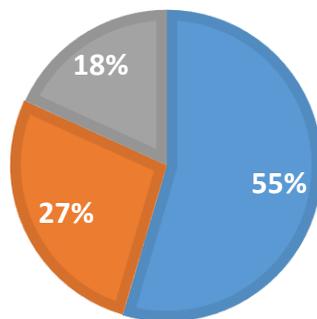
- Placed at a Section 203 Target Precinct
- Placed at a EC 12303 Target Precinct
- Not Placed at a Target Precinct



- 82% of the bilingual LPR poll workers in Sacramento County were placed at a targeted precinct for language requirements in November 2016 (9 out of 11).

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY: BILINGUAL LPR POLL WORKERS (NOVEMBER 2016)**

- Placed at a Section 203 Target Precinct
- Placed at a EC 12303 Target Precinct
- Not Placed at a Target Precinct



**(3)** LPR's, including high school students, now have a new way to **get involved in their community**. This civic opportunity provides LPR's – who are future voters – with a unique glimpse into the democratic process. For many LPR's, working as a poll worker is their first time experiencing the electoral process up close.

**What extra resources are required to recruit LPR poll workers?**

Counties need not launch a completely new recruitment campaign just for LPR poll workers. Many elections offices across the state have implemented the new legislation by simply updating their materials and applications to include LPR eligibility. Orange County's election office added messaging geared towards LPRs at all of their poll worker recruitment events. Counties, including Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Clara, have modified all of their fliers, newspaper ads, social media posts, online applications and FAQs to include the LPR community.

## 10 Tips to Recruiting LPR Poll Workers

Many county election offices have had success recruiting LPR poll workers. Below are tips compiled from interviews with election office staffers from some of these offices.

### (1) Develop relationships with the community:

- Connect with local community groups and organizations to spread the word to their members that LPRs can participate as poll workers. Many counties have shared that this was the most effective way to get the word out.
- Ask influential local leaders to share information about LPR poll worker eligibility with their community.
- Start an “adopt-a-poll” program. The Sacramento County ROV encourages community groups to be a poll site on election day. In return, the community group receives a facility stipend. ROV staffers were able to form new relationships with organizations through this program.

### (2) Update and translate all outreach material and use neutral language:

- If the county’s current poll worker application does not include LPR eligibility, update it, both on paper and online.
  - Example: “I certify that I am a (please check one): registered voter in California OR legal permanent resident of the United States (green card holder)”
  - Example: “I am a registered voter in the State of California, or I am a non-citizen, legal resident of the United States”
- Update all outreach and training materials to include LPRs. As soon as the LPR poll worker legislation passed, Los Angeles County election office made changes to every relevant file (e.g. brochures, presentations, handouts).
- In order to be more inviting to LPR listeners, use words like “non-voters” or “non-citizens” when giving poll worker presentations at events, schools or community-based organizations. The Sacramento County ROV staff uses neutral language in all poll worker recruitment material to ensure that non-citizens are not dissuaded by the wording. In their high school ads, the requirements state “a resident of the state of California,” rather than “citizen or lawful permanent resident.”
- Translate poll worker outreach material (e.g. flyers, applications, etc.) into all relevant languages, in both online and paper formats.

### (3) Get advice from language experts:

- Maintain a year-round language advisory committee that provides input on community outreach plans, translations and bilingual poll worker recruitment and placement. Include members from all the language communities covered in the county.
- Hire a language coordinator for each language for which the county is covered. The San Diego County election office has a Language Services Department, a group of bilingual outreach coordinators, each responsible for one of the county’s languages. Throughout the year, they attend neighborhood activities, participate in events and host workshops to educate and recruit community members.

### (4) Invite county staff:

- Advertise among the entire county staff to apply to be poll workers. In Santa Barbara County, half of their LPR poll workers in June 2016 was recruited through their County Employee Poll Worker Program. Staff send out a countywide email to all departments to invite their staff to be poll workers. Many of the respondents were bilingual and/or LPR.

**(5) Target students:**

- Add LPR student recruitment as part of the county's high school poll worker program.
  - If able, hire someone who specializes in youth outreach. San Francisco Department of Elections has a high school student poll worker coordinator who regularly visits local high schools, providing voter education and conducting poll worker recruitment. Santa Clara County has a similar outreach coordinator dedicated to high school and college student recruitment.
  - The San Francisco Department of Elections hosts a High School Voter Education Ambassador Program as a way for the election office staff to collaborate with high schools to promote civic participation among students. During the two weeks in April and September, participating high school students, or "ambassadors," learn how to register voters, recruit their peers to serve as poll workers, and implement their own ideas on how to get their classmates civically engaged. Establish a version of the student ambassador program in your own county.
  - Stay in touch with school administration, professors and teachers in your county. Shasta County ROV staffer found a LPR poll worker by contacting the ESL class at a local college.

**(6) Attend naturalization classes and ceremonies:**

- Many counties already attend naturalization ceremonies, where they recruit recently naturalized citizens to serve at the polls. This is also an opportune place to recruit LPR friends and families attending the ceremonies. Los Angeles County election office sets up a table at naturalization ceremonies to not only connect with new citizens but also the attendees.
- Naturalization classes provide an opportunity to reach many non-citizens at once. These are residents getting ready to be future voters. Many still do not know they can already civically participate by working at the polls.

**(7) Ask current poll workers:**

- Ask current poll workers to invite their family and friends to apply. In June 2016, 4 out of the 5 LPR poll workers in Sacramento were referred to them by a poll inspector.

**(8) Use social and ethnic media:**

- Post on social media to reach a wide and varied audience. It is a free and time-efficient way to get the word out. This could also be a creative way to engage a younger audience.
- Ethnic media is crucial in getting bilingual residents interested in serving at the polls. The Orange County election office publishes ads (both paper and electronic) in ethnic newspapers, community boards and bulletins. Ask community members which new sources they trust and frequent.

**(9) Start a mailing list:**

- Send a letter that includes voter and poll worker information to households with registered voters. San Francisco Department of Elections uses this method to reach non-voter and non-citizen family members. In September 2015, San Diego County's election official sent 33,000 mailings to registered voters, inviting them to serve at the polls. The letter specifically states: "As you may know, legal permanent residents are also now eligible to apply to serve as poll workers... You may have friends or family who are interested in applying for this opportunity to serve; please help us get the word out." Both counties were successful in recruiting LPR poll workers using this method.

**(10) Recruit year-round:**

- Treat poll worker recruitment as a way to maintain a pool of future poll workers. Dedicate time each month to prepare for future elections, avoiding last-minute recruitment. Orange County election office constantly recruits, regardless of how far the next election is. As a result, they have had pool of LPR poll workers since the LPR poll worker legislation passed in 2013.

*Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA would like to extend special thanks to all of the county registrar of voters and their staff members who made themselves available for this project. In particular, we would like to thank the ROV staff in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, and the City and County of San Francisco.*

## LPR Poll Workers Speak About Their Experiences

### **Alma F., Santa Barbara County**

*Alma first heard about serving at the polls in 2014 when she saw an ad at her local coffee shop. She had always wanted to serve her community, so she called her county elections office to ask if she could participate as a non-citizen. November 2016 was Alma's third election as a LPR poll worker.*

“ Because I am a Spanish speaker, I was able to assist the Spanish-speaking voters on Election Day. I got to explain to them the whole process when they walked in -- everything, step by step, on how to cast their vote. It was a great feeling that I could help, and I just loved the whole experience. Now, I can't wait to become a U.S. citizen so I can vote myself! I love my town, my city and this state. It's such a big part of my life living here, so I liked that I got to participate for my community. I want to recommend that everyone work as a poll worker at one point, whether they are a citizen or not. You get to see this interesting process that also determines our future! With everything happening [in 2016], it's important we are all involved.

### **Maha S., Orange County**

*Maha learned about the poll worker opportunity through her county's student poll worker program. When she was told that LPR high school students can also work at the polls, she signed up for the June 2016 primary election. She was able to help older voters who spoke Hindi.*

“ During my day of volunteering at the voting polls, I learned so much more than I had thought. I learned [how] to handle difficult situations and [how] to guide and instruct others. It also built up my confidence. I wasn't afraid to talk to other adults, especially in a different language. Most of all, I got the chance to experience an election up close as a teenager. I now know [what] the process is, and, in the future, will be prepared for when I will have to vote.

### **Linping Z., San Francisco County**

*Linping was a trilingual college student when she first worked at the polls in 2014. She was always curious about how America runs elections and skimmed through a voter information handbook from a friend who recently became a naturalized citizen. She read that LPRs could work as poll workers. She felt that her presence at the poll site made a difference.*

“ I'm originally from China. Over there, even when you're a citizen, you don't have the privilege to choose your leaders. It's a very far away concept that a citizen can make decisions on certain issues. It was a whole new world for me to see this type of political system when I was a poll worker. I saw the passion in the voters who walked in to make these changes and decisions. I can't vote yet, but it was amazing for me to be a part of it in some way. I got to help this one Japanese-speaking voter with my language skill during the last election. He didn't speak much English. I think just me being there made him feel more comfortable, knowing that he could understand everything.

### **Armando S., Sacramento County**

*Armando is an election supervisor at the Sacramento County elections office. He worked at the polls for the first time in 2015 when he was a lawful permanent resident and assisted Spanish-speaking voters. He is now a U.S. citizen and looks forward to casting his own ballot.*

“ It was meaningful for me to be [at a polling location] because, at that time, I was in the process of becoming a citizen. I saw it like a 'training' for when I would be able to vote, which would be the 2016 elections. Being there for the first time was truly eye-opening. It helped me [see] more value to the hard work that counties put in, in order to have a successful election. I want to highly encourage the LPR community to participate and get involved in any way they can. It's easy to not care when you can't participate in the process. But when you're there and see it for yourself, you really do start to care about what's happening.