Summary of the Spanish Language Community Outreach Group (COG) Meeting
February 24, 2011 10:15 am – 11:45 am
Mizell Senior Center
Palm Springs, California

Attendees:

Yvonna Cazares – Community Organizer
John Rodriguez – Community Organizer
Diane Hines – Parks and Rec. Commissioner
Oleg Millan – Election Officer
Mario Fuerte Perez – Volunteer at Hot Desert High School
Martha Fuerte – Volunteer at Hot Desert High School
Mary Jane Sanchez – Business Consultant

Registrar of Voters Staff
Laura Estrada – Elections Coordinator’s Assistant
Horacio Vargas – Election Technician II

Meeting Commenced at 10:30 a.m.

Ms. Laura Estrada introduced staff and explained the objective of the meeting.

Meeting Objective:

To explain to members the duties and responsibilities of the Spanish Language Program Coordinator. To also educate current and future voters about services offered by the Registrar of Voters’ (ROV) office. This includes opportunities for bilingual members to assist the Spanish speaking community in understanding the voting process.

Material Explained:

1. Monthly meetings are prescribed by the DOJ per the Voter Rights Act of 1965
2. Requirements to serve as an Election Officer
3. How attendees can help
4. Handouts: Sample Ballot paper and electronic ballot, bilingual recruitment poster

Introduction

Laura Estrada introduced herself and explained when and how she was hired related to the Memorandum of Agreement entered into with Department of Justice.

Ms. Estrada explained the meeting was being taped for the transcription of minutes for this meeting. She explained a copy of the minutes would be sent to all members via e-mail or regular mail.
Horacio Vargas offered those who may not have an e-mail address to also receive them by mail, and if they preferred they could get a copy of today’s video taping.

Ms. Estrada asked each attendee to state their name and share some background about themselves. After everyone introduced themselves, Ms. Estrada explained the agenda and pointed out that it was both in English and Spanish on the other side and they were welcome to follow it in their written language. Ms. Estrada shared from the agenda the purpose for holding the Community Outreach Group (COG) meetings throughout Riverside County on a weekly basis instead of monthly as stated in the MOA. Ms. Estrada stated that meetings are held at various cities in Riverside County in order to reach all the county with the same message within a short three month period. Ms. Estrada explained that by holding these meetings the goal is to have attendees become committee members. Ms Estrada then explained what being a committee member entailed, which she said, is to attend, invite others, disseminate information, and offer suggestions on improving outreach efforts.

Mr. Vargas shared how our county is offering the Spanish speaking population assistance at the polls in their language, but we may, in the future, be required to provide other languages as is done in Los Angeles County and San Francisco County, depending on the growth for those populations.

**Attendee Comments**

Mr. Oleg Millan stated that his experience has been that voters have asked why is it that Registrar of Voters only translates materials from the English to the Spanish language when the county of Riverside has voters who speak other languages.

Ms. Estrada explained the Registrar of Voters is mandated by the DOJ and Voters Right Act of 1965 section 203 to translate these materials depending on population size using Spanish surnames, as is taken from the Census Bureau documentation.

Mr. Millian expressed that it stands to reason that we have a large Spanish speaking population concentration in California.

Mario Fuerte Perez shared that to his knowledge California is the only state offering the ballot in both Spanish and English. All other states in the USA offer ballots in English only.

Ms. Estrada explained to Mr. Perez that she was not aware that other states did not publish the ballots in English and Spanish. It was further stated that she imagined there were other states that did offer the ballot in other languages.

Ms. Estrada continued with the meeting and shared the map of Riverside County, explaining it has been divided into 15 sections, and would like a committee member leader for the COG program from each section. At present there are 18 members, but that is not covering all sections. All sections have not been reached to date, but should have been reached by the middle of next month. Ms. Estrada also shared the special meeting that will take place March 31, 2011 to recognize all committee members who are the leaders of the COG Program covering all of Riverside County.

Mr. Vargas shared that since we are inviting all committee member leaders, it gives everyone a chance to meet each other from all parts of the county and interchange ideas.

Ms. Estrada asked at that point if anyone would like to be a committee member. Ms. Diane Hines said she would like to be committee member. Others just said they wanted to think about it.
Ms. Estrada shared two posters to the attendees, she explained that the posters will be given to everyone to take home, review them, and offer changes on language, presentation, translation, and so forth. The suggestions offered by each committee member will be voted on at the recognition meeting in March. Ms. Estrada passed out voter guide booklets in both English and in Spanish that attendees may also use for comparison of adequate translation. Ms. Estrada passed out a copy of the November 2, 2010 ballot, to be used also for comparison of adequate translation.

Mary Jane Sanchez shared that she had visited the community in the high desert region and shared that some candidates stated that when getting their name on the ballot they were not allowed to precisely state in English what their designation was. They were only given a choice and it might have not really conveyed the designation. Ms Estrada explained that this was correct being that the contents on the ballot in English had to be translated into Spanish. Ms. Sanchez felt this was a concern that might be good for the Registrar to address.

Ms. Hines added that she also noticed on the ballot that friends of hers did not have an accurate designation either. Ms. Hines offered that perhaps if the proper designation was stated for each candidate it might mean a vote difference on the ballot for them.

Mr. Vargas shared his experience in the desert as a Spanish Language Rover. He commented that many voters made their candidate selection solely on surname instead of making an informed decision.

Mr. Millan also shared his experience working for a candidate campaign and found many voters to be persuaded by surname only as well as what Mr. Vargas shared.

Yvonna Cazares shared that she was aware of the campaign efforts made in the region Mr. Millan worked and stated much was gained in the campaign efforts.

Ms. Sanchez suggested that not enough words were allowed on the translation for Spanish on the ballot to explain a measure, as it takes more words than it does to say the same in English. She further explained that they were only allowed 250 words in both English and Spanish. Due to translation you have to say more words Spanish to explain what you stated in English.

Ms. Estrada said this would be presented to the Registrar of consideration. Ms. Estrada then went on to explain the take home packet.

Ms. Sanchez was allowed about 10 minutes to present her work developing suggestions to improve the COG Program as a committee member leader. The presentation included: Guiding Principles, Public Hearing, Interdependencies, Best Practices for Creating Feedback and Suggestions, Recommended Components, Suggestions on Preparations for the November 8, 2011 General Election and the 2010 Presidential Election, Roles and Responsibilities, Proposed Timelines, and Steps. She has attended several COG meetings and the thoughts she had shared previously have now been put down in a more formal format. She stated that COG members must be ambassadors to teach others the same to do successful outreach, to formulate a motto, evaluate the needs of our Spanish speaking community and be always open to anticipate change, open a 24 hr. hotline for community suggestions…and much more.

Ms. Estrada thanked Ms. Sanchez for her presentation for her many suggestions. Ms. Estrada announced the next meeting, which will be held in Bermuda Dunes. Ms. Estrada thanked everyone for attending this meeting. She asked all to consider being a committee member and in short reminded everyone of the details of being able help with the COG Program. Members continued further discussion.
Mr. Millan lastly shared a suggestion about the hours worked at the polls that perhaps two groups might work so that it would not be so long a day working for both groups. Perhaps a morning group and an afternoon group would work out. Mr. Millan also stated that ballot counting should not have to be done four times at the end of election night.

Ms. Estrada shared that whoever would ask to work in two groups it is always allowed though seen seldom. As for counting ballots 4 times, it should only be done no more than twice and then taken to the collection center. This has been part of Election Officer’s training.

Ms. Sanchez suggested it might be written in the handbook as a reminder to only count ballots twice at the end of Election night.

Ms. Estrada explained that this suggestion will be considered and possibly added to the Handbook in future elections.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.