

# THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO BUILDING A YOUTH POLL WORKER PROJECT

A REPORT BY EVAN MALBROUGH

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# PARTNERSHIPS



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## The Andrew Goodman Foundation

The Andrew Goodman Foundation's mission is to make young voices and votes a powerful force in democracy by training the next generation of leaders, engaging young voters, and challenging restrictive voter suppression laws.

The Foundation's Andrew Goodman Puffin Democracy Fellows undertake high-impact projects on a local and regional level that address civic issues like voter suppression to advance political and social equity among young people in the United States.



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## Democracy Works

Democracy Works helps Americans vote no matter what, by providing the tools, information, and support needed to confidently participate in elections. Their vision is straightforward: Make voting a simple, seamless experience for all Americans so that no one misses an election.



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We especially thank the Puffin Foundation for their generous support of The Andrew Goodman Foundation and The Andrew Goodman Puffin Democracy Fellowship.





## LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

There are three pillars of American democracy: voters, elected officials, and poll workers. While the third pillar is often taken for granted, our democracy simply cannot function without it. Free and fair elections can only be achieved with equitably staffed and resourced polling sites. Without them, communities who are already disproportionately affected by voting restrictions — like students, People of Color, people with disabilities, and the elderly — face drastically increased limits to voting access and civic participation.

Over the past 20 years, counties across the country have faced persistent and growing poll worker shortages. In fact, according to the 2018 Election Assistance Commission Report, more than two-thirds of jurisdictions reported that it was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to sufficiently staff their polling locations in 2018. As voters, we see these issues manifest through excessively long lines to cast our ballots, lack of polling sites in underserved communities, and voters being unjustly turned away from the voting booth. For our democracy to be sustainable, we must continuously recruit and train poll workers who are representative of their communities. That includes young people. Young poll workers not only have the power to make polling locations more representative and equitable for other young voters, but also to advance new polling technology.



Covid-19 served to severely exacerbate the shortage, bringing it to the forefront of American consciousness. Prior to 2020, the majority of poll workers were senior citizens or retirees, the demographic who faced the greatest health threat from Covid-19. In an effort to mitigate that enormous personal risk, many of these public servants opted out of working the polls, ultimately leading to the largest poll worker shortage our democracy has seen. This unprecedented shortage made national news and mobilized organizations nationwide to recruit and train lower-risk individuals, including young people and students, to serve as poll workers. Thanks to the ceaseless efforts of local organizers — especially Black, People of Color, and Indigenous organizers — jurisdictions across the nation were able to support in-person voting and expand voting options during a global pandemic. The 2020 election would not have been free or fair without the hundreds of thousands of Americans who answered the call to secure in-person voting.

To ensure that democratic participation is never again so acutely threatened, we must continue to apply the lessons we learned during the 2020 election cycle and strengthen our election system year after year by recruiting and training new poll workers. If we simply strive to return to the pre-pandemic status quo, we will only deepen the structural problems that have existed within our elections infrastructure since it was conceived.

It has never been more urgent that we create entry points for all eligible individuals, especially young people, to serve as poll workers in every election, from local to federal. **For students looking to do their part, I wholeheartedly believe launching a poll worker project on your campus is the most effective strategy for recruiting and training young poll workers and making our democracy more equitable and efficient.** I started the Georgia Youth Poll Worker Project as a student at Georgia State University and an Andrew Goodman Ambassador. I had no experience leading a nonprofit and minimal experience serving as a poll worker, yet in just four months' time, I had successfully recruited over 1,000 young people in Metro Atlanta to be trained and work the polls in the 2020 election.

In sharing the lessons I learned along the way, I hope to activate students to start, run, and grow a poll worker project in their communities. Designed in collaboration with a brilliant team of interns, The Andrew Goodman Foundation, Democracy Works, and with support from the Puffin Foundation, the best practices detailed in this guide will help move America closer toward finally realizing a free, fair, and accessible democracy for us all.

In solidarity,  
Evan Malbrough  
Founder, Georgia Youth Poll Worker Project  
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## PART I: BUILDING A YOUTH POLL WORKER PROJECT

### 1

## STARTING A YOUTH POLL WORKER PROJECT

Youth poll worker projects are youth-led initiatives that aim to recruit other young people to staff polling places. Student poll worker projects implement this same model on campuses and take civic engagement at institutions of higher education to the next level.

### Building a Youth Poll Worker Project on Your Campus

Campuses are home to thousands of students, many of whom are eligible voters. These potential student voters are a key voting block and require opportunity, access, and education to encourage them to turn out to vote. While establishing an on-campus polling site is the most accessible and effective way to encourage student participation, the process takes time. Having students staff their off-campus local polling sites in collaboration with their local election official (LEO) can be just as effective in increasing turnout and sustainability.

### How can I make an argument for establishing a student poll worker project on campus?

This initiative will create opportunities for:

- New jobs for students and community members as paid poll workers
- Media opportunities for your campus community
- An increased culture of civic engagement and voter accessibility on your campus
- Institutionalization of poll worker programming ahead of the next federal election

## How do I introduce a student poll worker project on my campus?

- Determine who you can tap to be leaders and supporters of this initiative.
- Request to meet with your LEO to discuss student poll worker recruitment.
- Develop a proposal for an on-campus polling site to share during that meeting. If your initial proposal can't move forward, offer to help staff the nearest polling site and ask your LEO to host a poll worker training session on your campus.
- Recruit students!
- Ensure students are trained by your LEO.
- Staff the polls on election day!

## How can I best structure meetings about the student poll worker project?

- **Set your goals and discuss expectations:** Gather folks on campus to discuss your goals for poll worker recruitment on campus. In this initial meeting, it may be helpful to cover:
  - *Garnering staff or faculty support:* What staff or faculty member can dedicate time to support your recruitment efforts? This could be your Andrew Goodman Campus Champion or TurboVote implementer, an individual from your Student Life Center, or someone else on campus.
  - *Establishing campus buy-in:* As your campus supports your work, all students who work as poll workers should be eligible for excused absences from class on election day.
  - *Asking for advice from your local election official:* If you have an established relationship with your LEO, be sure to ask them to share background information your team should be aware of as you approach this work.
- **Understand the landscape:** Following this initial meeting, your supporting staff or faculty leaders should set aside some time to better understand the landscape for poll worker recruitment in your community to prepare for an upcoming meeting with your LEO.
- **Meet with the local election official:** Arrange a meeting with your local election official to discuss your plans! During this conversation, make sure to answer the following questions:
  - How many poll workers is your LEO seeking to recruit?
  - Are poll workers compensated? If so, how much compensation will they receive?
  - What is the anticipated time commitment for poll workers?
  - When are the LEO's scheduled poll worker training sessions?
  - Is the LEO open and available to train interested students on campus?



- **Plan your recruitment strategy:** Following the meeting with your LEO, you should work with your supporting staff or faculty leader to build a recruitment plan. Be careful to keep in mind:
  - *Incentivizing student participation:* What options are available to incentivize participation among your student body? You may be able to offer a class or volunteer credit, free t-shirts, food, or other giveaways!
  - *Reaching diverse students:* Ideally, your student poll workers will be representative of your campus community. Be intentional in reaching out to diverse student audiences, particularly students who come from communities that are underrepresented in the electorate and poll worker community.
  - *Training students:* Focus on recruiting students for the training session with your LEO.
  - *Setting recruitment goals:* Your recruitment goals should be based on your meeting with your LEO. If the LEO is facing a shortage of 10 poll workers, a recruitment goal of 50 is much too high!
- **Host a poll worker training:** In September or early October, host a training event for students on campus if possible. The training will be built in partnership with the LEO.
- **Plan for election day and student recognition:** Take some time to reflect on the poll worker training and discuss the next steps on campus. Work to answer the following questions:
  - Did students seem interested and engaged during the training?
  - How should we follow up to ensure these students apply to serve as poll workers?
  - What support does the campus need to provide student poll workers on election day?
  - How can we recognize students for their work?
- **Reflect post-election and celebrate:** Gather everyone together for a one-hour group discussion where folks can reflect on their experiences, learnings, and achievements. This is the perfect time to begin discussing your strategy for the next election, too!

## Tips to Obtaining an On-Campus Polling Place

If you are interested in setting up a polling place on your campus, these tips are for you! On-campus sites give student voters increased access to the ballot and underpin future GOTV initiatives.

- **Start early:** Polling places are finalized by election boards months in advance of any election. It is important that you start advocating for an on-campus polling site as early as possible to increase your likelihood of success. Starting early will also give you the time you need to recruit and train students to work at your on-campus site.

# TIPS TO OBTAINING AN ON-CAMPUS POLLING PLACE

1

START EARLY



2

DEVELOP A PROPOSAL



3

STAFF THE SITE



4

LEARN THE LAW



5

PUBLICIZE, PUBLICIZE, PUBLICIZE



- **Develop a proposal:** Create a brief proposal that demonstrates the importance of having a student-run polling place on-campus. Be sure to know which jurisdiction your campus sits in and propose a location for the site. When looking to reserve an on-campus space, be sure to keep the following criteria in mind:
  - For security purposes, the room must have a lock.
  - The location must have a secure internet connection.
  - There must be enough space to support multiple election machines for up to 14 hours.
- **Staff the site:** Ensure you have enough students to staff the location. You'll likely be aiming for 8-10 students who are available to attend trainings, meetings, and work the full election. You'll also need to work with university staff to get exemptions for students working during early voting and on election day.
- **Learn the law:** Poll workers serve as the frontline against voter suppression. Pay close attention during all pieces of training to become well-versed in the voting rules and procedures in your community. Everyone gets a ballot if they *may* be eligible. Fight hard to make sure every student and community member is able to exercise their right to vote. If they cannot vote on the machine, they can cast a provisional ballot. And if not, call your LEO to find a way.
- **Publicize, publicize, publicize:** A polling place needs workers, but it also needs voters. Work with student organizations and local groups to make sure your community knows your location is available to them. Flyers, social media, and campus-wide emails are great tactics to reach more voters.





## 2

# INSTITUTIONALIZING POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

There are three keys to success for any campus poll worker project: student participation, training from an election official, and support from your campus administration. Without buy-in from your campus administration, the viability and the impact of your work are at risk. Receiving and maintaining this institutional buy-in allows you to create an effective and sustainable student poll worker project.

## Strategies for Achieving Institutional Buy-In

- **Meetings:** In attending open-forum meetings, you may find the opportunity to present your project and ask for formal institutional support. It's also a great idea to request an individual meeting with your campus administration to pitch your poll worker project.
- **Written communication:** A one-pager is an effective way to open the conversation and communicate the core of what you're working toward. Your one-pager should include an overview of your initiative's goals; key dates and deadlines; an action plan; specific budgetary, personnel, or resource needs; and projected impact. If you have a relationship with your administrator, share the one-pager with them directly. Otherwise, ask a supporting staff or faculty leader to make the introduction and share the one-pager.
- **Email:** To keep your supporters updated on your work, be sure to communicate via email. These emails should include thanks, status updates, and requests for support in overcoming challenges as you face them.



## Planning Essentials

- **Connect with Government Affairs:** In building a campus poll worker project and developing a relationship with your local elections office, you are directly interfacing with our government. Prioritize communicating with your campus Government Affairs office to gain support and guidance. This also helps establish your credibility as you seek to build rapport with the LEO.
- **Find a dedicated space on campus:** Depending on the nature of your work, you may need a dedicated space on campus for both storage and voter engagement activities. If you have or are seeking to establish an on-campus polling site, you'll need a large enough space to store voting machines and other election materials. In that case, the space should be secure and accessible, have a reliable internet connection, and meet any other requirements laid out by your LEO.
- **Advertise through official institutional channels:** With your institution's support, you may be able to leverage official institutional channels of communication to connect with your entire campus community. You may want to draft language for email and social media communications so that your institution can easily uplift your work and amplify your call for recruiting student poll workers.
- **Gain support for excused absences:** In order for students to feel comfortable working the polls during elections, they need support from the administration in excusing absences from any missed classes while carrying out their civic duty. In order to mitigate the academic impact of missing classes, work with professors and deans as soon as possible to secure their support in providing excused absences, recorded lectures or presentations, or rescheduled tests.
- **Build a coalition:** From student clubs to the Student Government Association, build coalitions with established groups on campus to gain momentum and engagement around your work. Oftentimes, these groups have budgets that they may be able to use to support your work. Plus, they can be immensely instrumental in student poll worker recruitment!

With your institution, LEO, and campus community by your side, you are best positioned to identify, recruit, and train students to serve as poll workers. By institutionalizing a student poll worker project, you not only build a stronger culture of civic engagement on your campus, but also strengthen American democracy at large.





### 3

## THE NEED FOR MULTILINGUAL POLL WORKERS

It is essential that your poll workers meet the needs of your community. That's why multilingual poll workers must be present in every election. This allows every voter to be confident in the accessibility of their polling location and their ability to participate in our democracy.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that there are approximately 350 languages spoken in the United States. Other than English, the five most commonly spoken languages are Spanish, Cantonese, French, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Poll workers who are fluent in their community's most commonly spoken languages provide vital assistance at the polls, ensuring that your electorate is heard.

Historically, poll workers have been overwhelmingly white and elderly. While their service is invaluable, it must be said that representation matters. As we seek to close the poll worker shortage gap, we must prioritize recruiting poll workers who are reflective of their community. Assistance and translation are both necessary. Multilingual poll workers provide a sense of security and reassurance to voters who may feel wary when going to the polls. In knowing that their voice is valued in their community, these voters recognize their importance in the electorate and can be confident in their vote. Inclusion strengthens the democratic ideals on which this nation was built.

Recruiting multilingual poll workers is a necessity for a successful poll worker project. Young, multilingual poll workers create an entry point for their communities to participate in our elections. They have the power to help non-voters and occasional voters become life-long voters who participate in every election.





## 4

# LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA

The momentum and success of any grassroots effort, including recruiting poll workers, greatly relies on strong and consistent social media engagement and performance. At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, organizers needed to respond quickly by strengthening their social media presence to ensure that their outreach continued during a period of remote activity and social distancing. The pandemic ultimately taught us that digital organizing and a robust social media strategy are crucial aspects of any campaign, regardless of our ability to return to in-person interaction. To build or improve your own social media outreach to potential poll workers, consider the following guidelines.

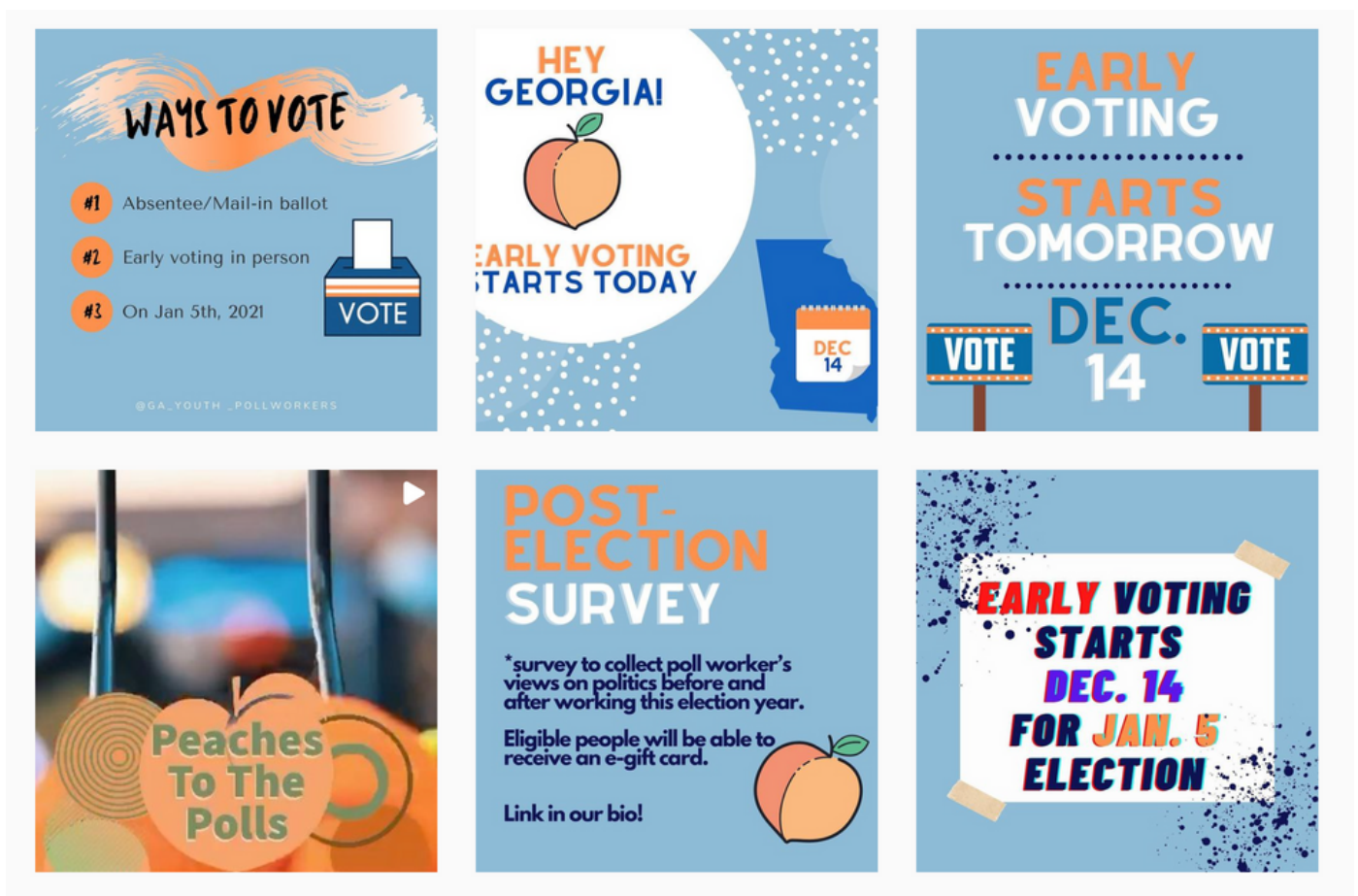
## Social Media Outreach Guidelines

- **Define your target audience:** It is integral that your audience is established so your posts are relevant to them and optimized for high engagement.
- **Include the “why” in your posts:** Teach your audience why they should care about your work. Infographics are one popular way to do this!
- **Create interactive story posts:** Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter include stories feature that can help engage your audience. Interactive tools offered on these platforms include gifs, polls, countdowns, and more!
- **Keep a content calendar:** Plan and organize your posts in advance by creating a calendar that outlines your point person for each day, the message of the post, the image that will accompany the post, and the platforms where the post should be published. Your content calendar also helps you track key dates or upcoming events to feature.





- **Use visually appealing graphics:** Your graphics should be aesthetically pleasing, legible and accessible to people with disabilities, and aligned with your brand. Use free websites like Canva or Photopea to quickly create professional, beautiful graphics. You can even create templates to save time and keep your feed consistent!
- **Leverage giveaways:** Giveaways are a great way to increase engagement with your followers. But not so fast! Be sure to attach your giveaway to an action. For example, ask your followers to tag three friends in your post to be entered into the giveaway. This engages your current following and helps cultivate new followers.
- **Create a meaningful brand:** Your brand identity includes colors, font, imagery, messaging, voice, tone, and more. Your brand should be designed to appeal to your target audience. Consistent brand application advances your overall social media and programmatic goals.
- **Track and measure your impact:** Set goals for your follower count and engagement! By doing so, you can track whether your efforts are making an impact and make interventions to improve.



Images used with courtesy from @ga\_youth\_pollworkers on Instagram.





## PART II: SAMPLES AND TEMPLATES

### Youth Poll Worker Project Proposal Template

In order to start a youth poll worker project on your campus, you will need to garner the buy-in of your campus administration and local election official. One great way to do that is through developing and presenting a proposal! The following template is based on a proposal that was created by the Georgia Youth Poll Worker Project.

# THE PROPOSAL



## Point of Contact

[Name]

[Title], [Campus or Organization Name]

[Contact Information]



## Purpose

The **[Youth Poll Worker Project Name]** seeks to recruit and train students to serve as poll workers, which will simultaneously address our nationwide poll worker shortage and increase representation at our polling sites. We are seeking to recruit **[Number]** students who will ultimately serve as poll workers at the **[Polling Site Name]**. Students will complete the following trainings:

- Registrar Training
- Official Paperwork Training
- Poll Worker Training
- Election Technician Training
- Provisional Ballot Training
- Absentee Manager/Counter Training
- Line Monitor Training
- Early Voting Training



## Payment

Our jurisdiction hires poll worker instructors who are on the county payroll. Outside of training required by the jurisdiction, we will provide the supplemental, required training.

These trainings will involve hands-on lessons on Election Paperwork, Ballot Marking Devices, Poll Pads, Election Net, Easy Vote, Scanners, and Troubleshooting Broken Machines. Students will be evaluated on each topic both on paper and through hands-on activities.





## Schedule

### **[Month]:** Curriculum Building and Logistics

This period will be dedicated to creating the week-to-week curriculum and lectures for the poll worker program in **[Semester]**. Along with the curriculum, tests will be administered per topic as a way to gauge performance standards and track progress.

### **[Month]:** Training

**[Number]** students will engage in comprehensive poll worker training. Students will attend training **[Frequency]**.

### **[Month]:** Poll Working

Students who complete the training will work **[Number]** days at a polling location in **[County]** on **[Date]**. Each student will be evaluated on their performance working the polling location.

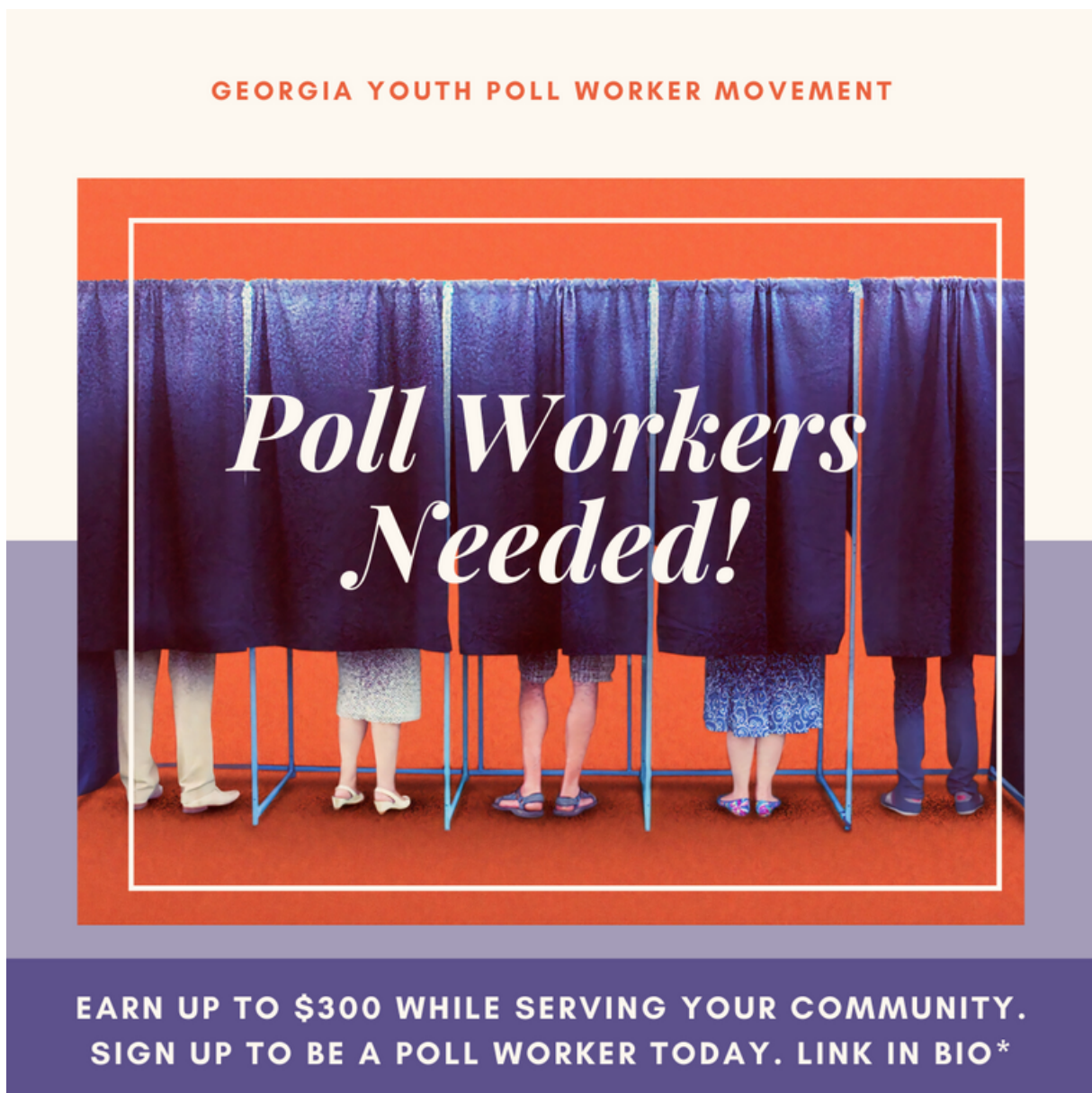
### **[Month]:** Evaluation

All stakeholders will gather together to discuss their experience, evaluate our success, and identify points of improvement for future elections. The evaluation will be collected into a report to be shared broadly. After evaluation, the next steps will be planned on continuing and expanding the training. Results and studies will be released by the **[Youth Poll Worker Project Name]** in partnership with **[Partner Name]**.

## 2

# GRAPHIC SAMPLE

In order to build a strong brand and presence on social media for your youth poll worker project, it is important to create graphics that are engaging and informative, visually appealing and accessible, and easily shareable. The following graphic sample promoted the Georgia Youth Poll Worker Project on Instagram and LinkedIn.



# 3

## EMAIL TEMPLATES

In order to build meaningful relationships with external organizations, it is key to maintain consistency and professionalism in communications. The following email samples fostered partnerships with other nonprofits, counties, and academic institutions.

### Election Office Email

Hello [Office Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is [Name] and I'm the [Title] of [Campus Name's] [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]. My team has been working to recruit youth poll workers to work in your jurisdiction. I have attached an Excel sheet with their names, addresses, and other contact information. These students have indicated that they would like to work this upcoming [Election Period]. We would love to work with you to get these students hired.

Thank you so much and hope to hear from you soon,

[Name]  
[Title], [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]  
[Campus Name]





## Organization Partnership Email

**Hello [Organization Name],**

I hope this message finds you well. My name is **[Name]** and I'm the **[Title]** of **[Campus Name's] [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]**. This initiative not only encourages college students to vote, but also to get more deeply involved in our elections by serving as poll workers. We are looking to recruit as many poll workers as possible for the upcoming **[Election Name]**.

We would love to partner with you and open this opportunity to your community members. I'd love to set up a time to talk through what our partnership could look like in terms of logistics and impact. Please let me know what times work best for you, and I'll follow up with a meeting invitation.

Best,  
**[Name]**  
**[Title], [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]**



# Student Recruitment Email

Hello [Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is [Name] and I'm the [Title] of [Campus Name's] [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]. I'm reaching out to invite you to join our [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]. We are looking to train [Number] students to serve as paid poll workers in our upcoming [Election Name]. Wages range from [Value] to [Value]. Shifts are from [Hour-Hour] from [Day-Day].

Serving as a poll worker doesn't just provide you with an opportunity you can add to your resume. In this work, you'll help make sure that everyone has the option to cast their ballot in person. Last year, our democracy had serious nationwide poll worker shortages. This caused polling location closures, confusion, and obstacles to voting. [Campus Name] seeks to provide students with an opportunity to earn income and to make a difference in our community.

If you are interested in being a poll worker, please sign up at this link [Embed Sign-Up Link] by [Deadline]. If you have any questions, please let me know.

[Name]  
[Title], [Youth Poll Worker Project Name]  
[Campus Name]

P.S. Want to see the latest from us? Follow us on [Social Media Platform] at [Handle].





## PART III: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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