

2000 Issue Forum Final Report

Political Leadership and Citizen Participation

The primary focus of this forum group was to seek understanding about how to improve voter education and accessibility. They explored issues related to voter education in the public and private school system, ballot technology, efforts by political parties and local elected officials to reach young voters, and the efforts of community groups (e.g., League of Women Voters) to educate the general public about the voting process.

Key findings:

- There is no systematic effort by the local or state office of elections to educate students and the general public about the electoral process. This includes a lack of a defined education plan (e.g., one using widespread mock elections) and a clearly established financial budget.
- Ballot technology is outdated, inefficient, and needs to be improved.
- Although Sunshine State Standards are established for teaching civic-related curricula in the public schools, the extent of instruction provided to students varies considerably by teacher and school. Nationwide studies show that a significant percentage of students lack basic knowledge of the democratic and elections process.
- Although voter registration has increased over the years, actual voter turnout has continued to decrease substantially.
- Although information about candidates and issues is available through the Internet, members of the general public either are not interested in or lack the ability to access this information. In addition, local media coverage of local issues and candidates is very limited and oftentimes selective.

Action plan—Improve Ballot Technology and Voter Education Now:

The group will provide a report of its findings calling on the local Supervisor of Elections, City Council, the Duval County School Board, and other local leaders to take action including;

- updating the technology of ballot machinery;
- providing detailed and timely information regarding candidates and issues;
- improving the mechanics of the registration and voting process; and
- providing young adults in Northeast Florida with a more systematic and comprehensive approach to civic education and greater opportunities to be involved in the elections process.

Group members will also meet with city council members and other civic-minded organizations to advocate for the following actions:

- Holding town meetings to dialogue with youth about voting and their role as citizens; and
- Working with the local office of Junior Achievement of Florida's First Coast to develop a voter-education curriculum to educate students about the democratic process and citizen representation.

Community Leaders and Resource Experts

Issue forum groups met with both community leaders and resource experts who provided valuable information for group discussions. We wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the Forward process.

Political Leadership and Citizen Participation

Bill Babcock, Social Studies Teacher, Bolles School
Bruce Barcelo, Barcelo & Company
Lori Bayler, Student, UNF
Bill Brinton, Attorney, Allen, Brinton & McCarthy
Jeff Broome, Student, FCCJ
Dick Carlberg, Assistant Supervisor of Elections, Duval County
Reggie Chever, HR Specialist, Federal Reserve
Pete Cummings, Republican Party member
Gigi David, Vice Principal, San Jose Episcopal School
Ivonne Diaz, League of Women Voters
Mark Foss, Chair, Greater Arlington/Beaches CPAC

Paul Griego, Sales Mgr., Election Systems Software
Suzanne Jenkins, City Councilwomen, District 4
Lisa King, Democratic Party member
John Krizka, Sales Rep., Sequoia Pacific
Mike McCormick, News Director, Channel 12
Ivory Orr, Student, UNF
Jenifer Rivera, Senior, Fletcher High School
Clay Roberts, Director, Florida Division of Elections
Allen Rushing, Supervisor, Social Studies Dept., Duval County Schools
John Seibert, Social Studies Teacher, Bishop Kenny High School

Issue-Forum Participants

Forum groups met biweekly for four months. They received information from knowledgeable resource people and additional written materials provided by Forward staff. Congratulations on your efforts and future civic involvement and advocacy.

Carla Marlier, Chair
Brian Smith, Vice Chair
Ed Hearle (JCCI Advisor)
Ellyne Bottary
Lisa Buggs
David Conte

Michelle Cook
Matt Corrigan
Dan Davis
Audrey Gibson
Clemente Inclan
Suzanne Jenkins

Jill Johnson
Randy Roberts
Hollie Smith
Tricia Wilhelm