

Fact Sheet on Lawful Permanent Residents As Poll Workers

County election offices are now able to recruit lawful permanent residents (more commonly known as “green card holders”) as poll workers. Previously, only registered voters could be poll workers in California (with a limited exception for high school students). Beginning this year, LPR high school students are also able to work as poll workers due to the passage of AB 554 by the California legislature.

What do poll workers do?

Poll workers are the individuals who check in voters, show voters the voting equipment, and ensure that ballots are properly inserted into the ballot box. In communities with large numbers of limited English speaking voters, bilingual poll workers are essential in ensuring that voters are adequately assisted on election day.

Who trains poll workers?

Poll workers are trained by the county and have a supervisor on site to assist them. Poll workers receive a stipend for attending a training and for working on election day.

Don't most voters speak English?

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.

Aren't there enough bilingual poll workers?

Every election entails a massive effort to recruit poll workers, including bilingual poll workers. Under federal and state law, counties are required to provide language assistance at poll sites when language minorities reach threshold numbers. All but two counties in California are required to provide some language assistance. The need for bilingual poll workers continues to grow as the state becomes more diverse.

What are the benefits to LPRs working as poll workers?

(1) Now that counties can recruit LPRs, counties have a greater availability of election volunteers who are able to assist persons with language barriers, as many of them are bilingual.

(2) LPRs, including high school students, now have a new way to get involved in their community. This civic opportunity provides LPRs – who are future voters – with a unique glimpse into the democratic process.

What can community groups do now that LPRs can serve as poll workers?

(1) Community groups can add poll worker recruitment into their existing outreach work. For example, groups conducting naturalization work can inform those interested in citizenship that they can already work as poll workers.

(2) While counties have been informed that they are now able to recruit LPRs, counties may not have taken steps to recruit LPRs. Community groups can provide counties with suggestions on where to go to recruit LPRs interested in being poll workers.

(3) Counties may not have made changes to their poll worker application. If your county has not updated the application to include LPR eligibility, ask your election official to change it so that LPRs are aware of this poll worker opportunity.

(4) Community groups can post a flyer in their public space and distribute a flyer to their community networks and to ethnic media letting people know that LPRs now have the opportunity to be poll workers. See our sample flyer.

Lawful Permanent Resident (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 will be 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 this year, 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. ”