



Distinguished Voter Education
and Communications Initiatives



Summary – Opening Doors, Winning Hearts & Minds

Prince William County’s “sold out” Open House allowed hundreds of voters to get a firsthand view of the Office of Elections, demonstrated transparency and the effectiveness of voting processes, and garnered significant media attention across the region.

In August of 2024, the PWC Office of Elections opened its doors to the public for two full days to demonstrate five major election areas – voter registration, mail voting, election equipment, election officer training, and results reporting. Guests of the Open House toured through the Office of Elections to hear lectures, participate in hands-on activities, and ask open questions of elections’ staff.

Nearly 300 reservation slots “sold out” in just a few days and the event had a large waiting list. Many requested the event be repeated and it will continue in 2025.

Individuals who attended included election officers, election skeptics, and voters with curiosity. They all came away with increased confidence in the voting system and a deeper understanding of how elections work.

Not only were participants impressed by the many layers of security in elections, but the act of demonstrating such transparency has value with the broader public.



Director of Elections Eric Olsen shows attendees how the Office of Elections reports results on election night.



Attendees learn how election officers are trained and staff before each election.

Creativity and Innovation

Holding an Open House creates a few profound effects:

- Allowing people in a generally secure space reduces the concerns of “skeptics” as they can see, touch, and understand things directly.
- Answering questions from participants provided non-scripted insights for participants who get to experience demonstrations of staff knowledge and expertise.
- Skepticism of processes based on the fear of “the other” is reduced when you directly meet and interact with staff.

Aside from providing public accessibility, the Open House program doesn’t ask staff to do anything other than demonstrate their excellent work.

It simply provides an opportunity to explain that work to voters, election officers, and decision makers. Attendees participated directly by helping election staff report election results and assign election officers in mock exercises.

No limitations were placed on attendee participation other than making a reservation.

In addition to voters, the Virginia Commissioner of Elections, local elected officials, and the PWC County Manager attended the event. Finding out more about the election process was very beneficial for them.



Nearly 300 voters signed up for the Open House in just a few days and the waiting list exceeded 50 people.



Attendees included several elected leaders and decision makers.

Cost Effectiveness

The program did not cost anything beyond the PWC Office of Elections' baseline budget, drawing on the existing employees, resources, equipment, and office space.

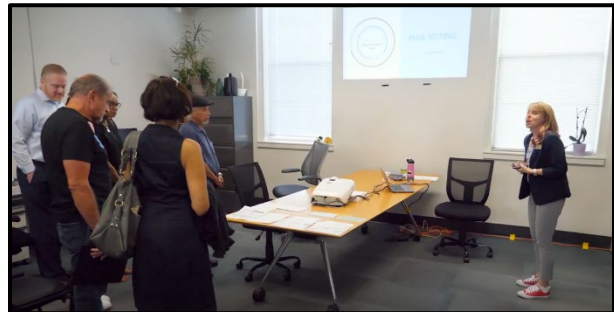
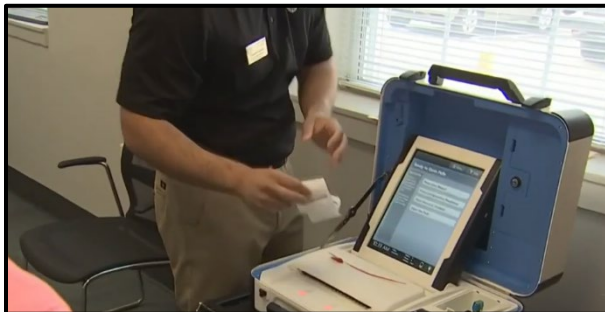
Regarding total time investment, here is a quick breakdown of the Open House:

- The Event Coordinator (1) took about 6-7 days to promote and coordinate the event.
- Presenters (5) needed 1 day of preparation and 2 days of presentation.
- Tour guides (8) worked for 1 day each to help manage tours.

In sum, that totals roughly 30 days of staff time (or the equivalent of one employee for 6 weeks), but that time investment could be scaled based on public demand, the number of Open House days, etc. With materials now prepared, future events will be even more cost/time effective.

Overall, the investment was well worth it as news broadcasts and articles covering the event will reach tens of thousands of voters in our region. Additionally, participants will share their experience with many others.

While election offices cannot compete with the social media of individuals with millions of followers, they can connect directly with their own community and provide a personalized educational experience that social media cannot.



Existing staff, election equipment, and A/V resources were used to complete the Open House, so no resource other than staff time was needed to complete the event.

Can It Be Replicated

The Open House program can easily be customized and replicated in any county and focus on the subject matter of that locality. For our staff, election equipment, mail voting, and results reporting were areas of particular concern, so those received more time and attention in this Open House.



Presentation skills and good relationships with local media would be the only specialized resources a locality would need to replicate this program.

The Open House dovetails with overall voter education programs and transparency efforts by the PWC Office of Elections including:

- The “How it Works” document series that explains how a variety of election processes work with easy-to-understand graphics.
- The Election Security document series provides data and details on all the security steps taken to ensure election security and accuracy.
- Online transparency initiatives such as posting officer-signed results tapes, training manuals, and Electoral Board meeting content online.

All Open House participants received a custom sticker and a packet of materials with both the document series noted above. We also encouraged participants to email the staff with any questions.

While this program could be done by any office, individuals comfortable with public presentations and handling questions is an important qualification for those in the Presenter role.

PRINCE WILLIAM Office of Elections

Election Security Series

Voter Registration
Maintaining registration data is an important component of election security. The registration process provides safe and accurate information to voters to maintain their registration.

Equipment Security
Election equipment used by the Office of Elections staff must meet certain criteria established by the Virginia Department of Elections and the Electoral Board.

Quick Stats

- 99.2% State compliance standards met in 2023.
- 74.5% Future "stadium" standards already met.
- 2,605 to 2,603 The results of a 2023 primary recount conducted with Stafford County under court supervision that perfectly matched Election Day totals.

Did You Know?
Virginia uses a Risk Limiting Audit, a type of post-election audit that utilizes statistical methods and a manual review of paper ballots to confirm that the electronic voting systems accurately reported the correct outcome of an election.

Last Updated: October 2023

Open House Planning Checklist

- Block off Office/Event Space**
 - Set dates for Open House to block off time for staff and reserve space
 - Plan out the flow of guests through the event space
 - Think about A/V needs, equipment requirements, etc.
 - Determine the number of guests possible per group
- Plan and Develop Presentation**
 - Decide on subject matter focus
 - Assign staff to develop the curriculum for each content area
 - Develop interactive exercises and presentations for engagement
 - Test presentation length to determine tour schedule
 - Finalize a tour schedule
- Assign Tour Guides**
 - Develop rules for security
 - Assign tour guides to manage/lead groups
- Invite Guests**
 - Use a web-based scheduling platform to manage invites/reservations
 - Invite local officials, media, VIPs, and election officers to spread the word
 - Promote the event through media channels (local news, social media, etc.)
 - Have guests sign up for a time slot and email instructions to them
- Finalize Tour Plans**
 - Plan out any documents or giveaway items tour participants will receive
 - Do a final run through of the presentations and give feedback
- Host Open House**
 - Demonstrate for attendees the great work your office does

Open House Schedule: Friday 8/16

TIME	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
9:00	Intro			
9:05	Equip			
9:10				
9:15	VR	Intro		
9:20		Equip		
9:25	Mail			
9:30	Results	VR		
9:35				
9:40	EO	Mail		
9:45		Results	Intro	
9:50			Equip	
9:55		EO		
10:00			VR	Intro
10:05				Equip
10:10			Mail	
10:15			Results	VR
10:20				
10:25			EO	Mail
10:30	Intro			Results
10:35	Equip			
10:40				EO

number of guests by overlapping groups while still allowing for presenters to have breaks.

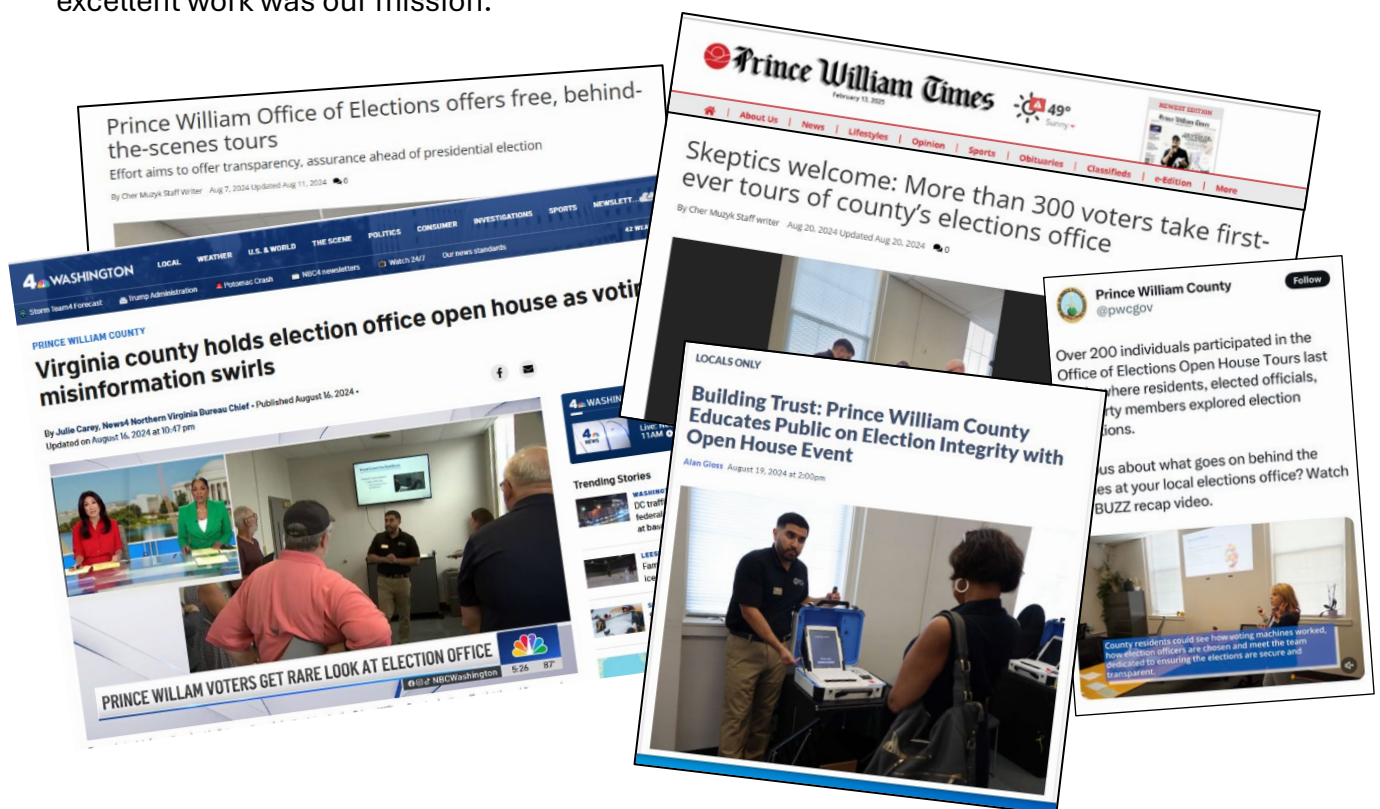
Meets Category Requirements

The Open House was a voter education and communications program to educate the public. Participants had no restrictions other than signing up for a time slot. The subject matter dovetails with other voter education products built by the PWC Office Of Elections and the educational component represented a new strategic direction.

In 2022-2023, our Office and Board were getting many demands from election skeptics that were pulling attention and time from critical Office objectives. While the Board and Office heard and answered these concerns, it was clear spending excessive hours devoted to a small group of individuals (1) had little public benefit and (2) would not convince them of their own inaccurate assumptions and conclusions.

This was a strategic decision to shift away from the unreasonable concerns of the few towards the education of a broader audience of voters.

The idea for the Open House was launched with this in mind. The focus was clear – convincing extreme partisans at either end of the spectrum was not a cost-effective use of time. Focusing on a message to educate voters and generate public attention to our excellent work was our mission.



Outcomes for Voters/Election Officials

On the second day of the Open House, one attendee noted to our staff that her husband (an election skeptic) had attended the event the previous day. She noted he came home from the event feeling totally different and had no idea all the protocols and measures in place to ensure election accuracy. He was changed.

This was the premise of the Open House – if people learned and participated in all the steps that go into making elections accurate and fair in their community, it is almost impossible to be skeptical afterwards.

This program educates the public, improves the safety of our staff and election officers, and builds trust in our great democratic institutions.

Other election offices should replicate because Tweets and news stories will come and go, but seeing and experiencing the process firsthand can be transformative for voters.



"I'm very confident... the elections are very secure."



"Yes, you do have doubts... but after seeing this process... it's really calmed some of those doubts down."



"...a lot of the things you hear are just not accurate. So, the only way you can counteract that is to have good information."



"They have a lot of safeguards, a lot of double checks, triple checks."

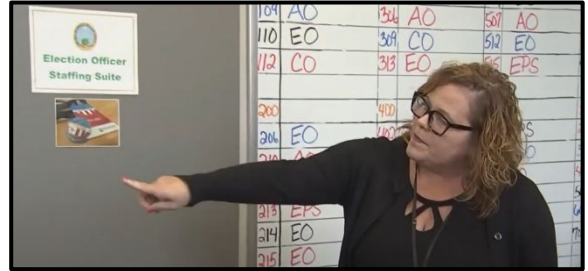
More Information

More information and media coverage of this event can be found at the following links.

Resources

PWC Office of Elections Open House Weg Page:
<https://www.pwcvotes.org/open-house>

PWC Communications Office overview video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRoars5Lgdg>



Media Coverage

NBC4 Washington 2.5-minute primetime news story:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIFfe_3Ntyk

Prince William Times Coverage of Event
https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/skeptics-welcome-more-than-300-voters-take-first-ever-tours-of-county-s-elections-office/article_0efeed3c-5eab-11ef-bc6a-776b444422f7.html

Potomac Local Coverage of Event
<https://www.potomaclocal.com/2024/08/19/building-trust-prince-william-county-educates-public-on-election-integrity-with-open-house-event/>

Prince William Times Announcement of Upcoming Open House
https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/prince-william-office-of-elections-offers-free-behind-the-scenes-tours/article_8f77fc12-54b3-11ef-82a9-87cf1ea2faf2.html

ADDENDUM



PWC ELECTIONS OPEN HOUSE



PRINCE WILLIAM
Office of Elections

OVERVIEW

- Dates:** August 16 & 17, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
- Length:** Tours start every 20 minutes and take approximately 45 minutes. With 18 tours each day there will be approximately 300 visitors in total.
- Objective:** Provide a learning opportunity for the public, elected officials, party members, and election officers to learn more about the process.
- Focus:** Demonstrating the process, backup planning, and many layers of security that go into all the tasks we perform for an election. (Example: Preparing the scanners – cover L&A testing, paper ballots and digital images of all scanned ballots as backups, give group a test set to count, run test deck, explain what we do, etc.)
- Materials:** Tour guests will receive a packet of documents including our election security and “How It Works” series documents they can take at the end of the tour.

TOUR SIGN UPS

The public will be able to sign up online starting the week of July 29.

- A web page detailing the Open House and what visitors can expect will be added.
- There will be an online signup where each visitor will sign up for slots.
- We’ll leave a few time slots open for breaks and for any VIPs we may have.
- We’ll do Twitter promotion and drum up some local media coverage to help us get voters to sign up for the process.

TOUR PROCESS

Each tour group will receive an introduction with the rules of the tour in the office lobby. They will get an overview of what they will learn and any rules we need to note. They will get a folder to hold documents/primers from each station.

Each group will have a tour leader that guides the group to the next stop and makes sure we don’t lose anybody. We will have security on site as backup for any unruly visitors or those trying to violate the security of our office.

At each location, the tour will stop to learn about that topic, and we’ll add some hands-on participation at some locations to keep it engaging.

TOUR GUIDE

TOPIC	LOCATION	TIME	PRESENTER	AV
Introduction	Front Lobby	5 minutes		-
<i>Basics on elections, communications, and what to expect on the tour. Give out folders.</i>				
Equipment Prep	Conference Room	10 minutes		TV
<i>How we complete L&A testing, hand count a sample set, run test deck/print, explain security features of our equipment.</i>				
Voter Reg.	Voter Reg. Area	7-8 minutes		-
<i>Review many list maintenance steps we take each year in coordination with the state to clean the voter rolls.</i>				
Mail Voting	Commons	7-8 minutes		Proj.
<i>Review the steps taken that make the mail voting process secure including how intake and CAP work, our 3-check system, etc. Show examples with envelopes.</i>				
Results Reporting	Director's Office	7-8 minutes		TV
<i>Review how results are reported by the officers and our staff on Election Night and how they are verified during canvass, online results tapes for public.</i>				
EO Staffing/Training	EO Suite	7-8 minutes		WB
<i>Explaining how we recruit and staff polling places, partisan representation improvements, overview of training and certification classes officers must complete.</i>				