



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
JOCELYN BENSON, SECRETARY OF STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
LANSING

**2023 NASS IDEAS AWARD SUBMISSION**

**NASS Committee Subject Area:** Elections

**Title:** Democracy MVP: Recruiting Quality Election Workers and Combatting Misinformation

**Description:** Started by Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson during the height of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the Democracy MVP program has since recruited more than 80,000 volunteers to serve as election workers. The high-quality volunteers are of all ages, willing to train and serve before or on Election Day or get called that morning as emergency backups. All are pre-trained on election basics, screened to prevent the placement of bad actors seeking to interfere in election administration, and invited to share accurate election information and their own experiences to combat misinformation and galvanize public confidence in election security.

**Contact & Project Lead:** Sarah Reinhardt, Director of Special Projects  
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Phone: (517) 285-0043

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### History

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson launched the Democracy MVP program in May 2020 to respond to the critical need for election workers to administer elections during the Covid-19 pandemic. As many veteran election workers declined to serve due to health concerns, the statewide recruitment effort aimed to prevent staffing shortages ahead of two statewide elections. It also sought to engage a new generation of workers in election administration to strengthen Michigan elections for years to come. The importance of this cannot be understated, and is reflected in the program's slogan, coined by Secretary Benson: "Democracy is a team sport and election workers are the MVPs."

In its first year the program successfully recruited over 40,000 prospective election workers and exceeded staffing needs statewide. Among those recruited were more than a thousand who served as part of an "A-Team" of volunteers ready to answer the call on Election Day morning and serve any jurisdiction where unexpected staffing shortages might occur. Further, when an onslaught of misinformation attacked the then completed presidential election, MVPs were tapped to share their experiences to combat false claims and doubts about election integrity. (See examples in Supporting Materials.)

Following this success in 2020, the Michigan Department of State (MDOS), which is led by Secretary Benson, worked to develop the program further. The department surveyed thousands of Democracy MVP recruits and consulted local election clerks for their evaluations and recommendations. Based on their feedback, MDOS bolstered the program for the 2022 statewide elections and, despite the waning pandemic, built the list of recruits to more than 80,000.

Additional improvements for the second iteration of the Democracy MVP program included:

- A streamlined sign-up form that made volunteering simpler for prospective workers
- A portal for clerks to see which volunteers were fluent in additional languages, had project management experience, and/or were technologically savvy
- Targeted recruitment of people with project management and technology experience carried out in part through partnerships with Power to the Polls and LinkedIn
- Inclusion of videos for volunteers that provided basic information about elections and election law
- A screening system to deter and filter out bad actors
- Provision of an election worker code of conduct for clerks to administer to their workers to ensure they were willing and able to carry out their responsibilities with integrity

### Significance

The significance of the Democracy MVP program cannot be overstated. Designed to meet a critical need in 2020, MDOS built it into a multi-faceted, multi-purpose tool that strengthens Michigan elections, preempts and counters misinformation, and enhances the working relationships MDOS has with the more than 1,600 clerks who administer elections in Michigan.

#### Strengthening elections

The average age of election workers across the country is 72. This threatened elections in 2020, because seniors were more susceptible to serious cases of COVID-19, and as election workers age out of service we face a significant challenge staffing elections in the future. But the Democracy MVP program addresses both issues, as MDOS is now consistently recruiting younger volunteers who comprise a new generation of election workers. In fact, MDOS has synchronized Democracy MVP to work in tandem with its high school and college voter education programs, and in doing is recruiting thousands of students to serve as election workers.

Further, many of the volunteers first recruited in 2020 returned to service in 2022 and will likely continue to serve in years to come. Additionally, these younger volunteers more frequently possess the technology skills that election clerks told MDOS they increasingly need staff to have to operate the state's electronic pollbooks and other systems.

### Combatting misinformation

In addition to carrying out their duties with integrity, election workers can also play a critical role in their communities and networks as purveyors of accurate information about election administration. They all receive initial training from MDOS and direct training from the jurisdictions they serve, and then witness the many protections built into Michigan's elections to ensure they are secure and accurate.

MDOS found many MVPs were already providing information and combatting misinformation in their communities after the 2020 election and so endeavored to amplify their voices statewide. By surveying thousands of recruits our office gained personal testimonials to the integrity of Michigan elections that we packaged into a variety of formats and shared statewide. The voices of election workers carried a gravitas and honesty that the purveyors of misinformation lacked, enabling the truth to cut through the rhetoric and reach voters. MDOS now considers the Democracy MVP program a critical component of our efforts to combat misinformation by both providing and sharing first-hand experiences with election administration.

### Enhancing relationships with local officials

With 1,520 townships and cities administering elections, and 83 counties assisting with staffing recruitment and more, Michigan likely has the most decentralized election system in the nation. MDOS provides support and oversight for all jurisdictions, and it is critical that we build and maintain strong relationships with clerks across the state.

The Democracy MVP program enhances every one of those relationships by providing a valuable, no-strings-attached service to local jurisdictions. Further, we mold the program to meet specific clerk needs by meeting regularly with a focus group of clerks statewide. This brought about the specific recruitment of volunteers who are multilingual, tech savvy, or have project management experience. And after we delivered on the requests made by clerks, their trust in and appreciation of our office grew (see emails included in Supporting Materials), which brings about both tangible and intangible benefits to election administration.

### **Impact**

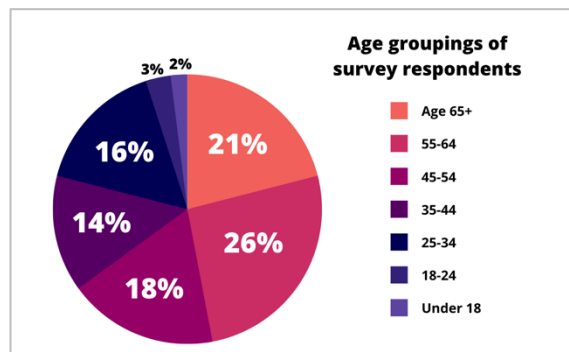
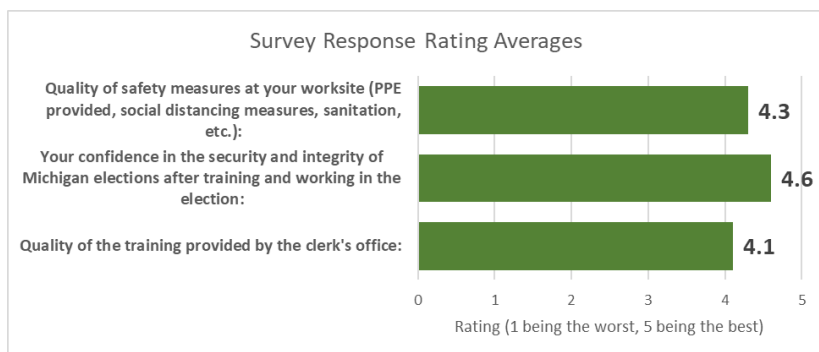
The impacts of the Democracy MVP program are numerous and tremendous. They include:

- Over 80,000 total volunteers recruited, including residents from all of Michigan's 83 counties. This exceeded the statewide need and assured sufficient staffing for all jurisdictions.
- Recruited more than 1,000 "A-Team" election workers to be on stand-by in all of Michigan's 83 counties on election days should unforeseen absences or incidents occur.
- Enabled election officials to focus more time and resources completing other critical elements of election administration.
- Recruited a significant number of younger election workers, with approximately 21% of recruits below the age of 35 (see graph in Supporting Materials).
- Prompted and strengthened partnerships with more than 100 organizations, including local, state and national businesses, religious institutions, sports teams and non-profit organizations to inform and encourage eligible residents to sign up to serve as election workers.
- Provided election clerks on-demand access to an automated list of MVPs in their county. The list shows if MVPs have experience, are multilingual, are tech savvy, have project management experience, and their party affiliation (to assist clerks to meet the balance of party affiliations required by state law).
- Generated scores of election-worker testimonials used in materials that preempted and countered misinformation statewide.

## Supporting Materials

### MVP Survey Responses

In 2021 and 2022, MVP sign-ups who had been hired as election workers were surveyed on their experiences. The following results indicate increased belief in the strength and security of Michigan's elections. Respondent's experiences were shared as part of the Department of State's campaign against elections misinformation.



**Michigan Department of State** @MichSoS · Feb 8, 2021  
Sign up as a poll worker for a future election and you can see democracy up close. [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP).

"I learned voter fraud is next to impossible. Many checks and balances are in place to prevent errors. We're not done until the numbers balance."

*Karl, 2020 Absent Voter Counting Board  
Village of Farwell*



**Michigan Department of State** @MichSoS · Mar 12, 2021  
Serving as an election worker gives you an up-close look at democracy. Tens of thousands of Michigan citizens stepped forward in 2020. To learn more and sign up, visit [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP).

#MISecureElections

"I learned that casting your ballot, either absentee or in person, is very safe with systems in place to ensure every legally cast vote is counted."

*Melissa, 2020 Election Inspector  
City of East Grand Rapids Polling Site*



**Michigan Department of State** @MichSoS · Sep 15, 2021  
Election workers are the Most Valuable Players of our democracy, ensuring free and fair elections for all. Sign up to help in future elections at [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP)

"I learned how many safeguards are in place to protect election integrity and one vote/person."

*Erin, 2020 Election Inspector  
Ann Arbor Polling Site*



**Michigan Department of State** @MichSoS · Dec 13, 2021  
Thousands of election workers support the security and integrity of elections in Michigan. Sign up as a Democracy MVP and you can be a part of this dedicated team in your community. [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP)

"I learned how the poll inspector team works together to ensure the election process is secure."

*Frank, 2020 Election Inspector  
Larkin Township Polling Site*



An [MVP partner toolkit](#) was designed to help community partners easily spread the word about the need for more election workers in Michigan. Below are excerpts of several shared graphics from community partners.

**Michigan Townships** @Mltownships · Oct 25

Elections are a team sport & clerks & election workers are the MVPs! Join your township elections team today at [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP). Hired workers will be paid for their time, & fully trained by local or county clerks to run elections in accordance with Michigan election law.



michigan.gov  
Democracy MVP  
Get trained, get paid and help your community by serving as an election inspector (i.e. a poll worker). Local election clerks across the state are...

**Baraga County Chamber of Commerce** @BaragaChamber · Oct 17

Sign up to serve as an election worker - Local clerks across Michigan are actively seeking PAID volunteers to help run polling places and assist voters. Those who are interested may sign up by completing the election worker interest form at [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP).



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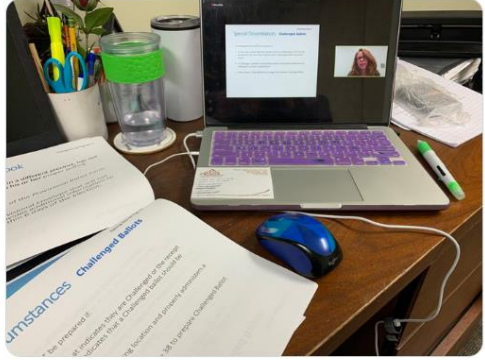
**MCCA** @MIColleges · Oct 11

Michigan has a critical need for more paid election workers for November. Learn more about elections and help your country, state and community! Sign up today at [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP).



**Bernadette Skodack** @bsk014 · Oct 22, 2020

Participating in the Washtenaw Co election Inspector training  
#DemocracyMVP #Vote @DemocracyMVP



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**SER Metro-Detroit** @sermetro · Oct 23, 2020

Quite a few SER Metro Youth Services participants attended training this week for the Election Pollworker Positions. What an opportunity to get involved on election day, get paid & continue the awesome civic engagement our student leaders are known for.

[Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP)



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**Grand Valley State** @GVSU · Oct 4

Make a difference, and make some cash 🙌

Lakers, help solve Michigan's critical need for election workers! This fall, get paid to help run smooth, secure and accessible elections.

Learn more and sign up: [Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP](https://Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP)



ALT Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP

**From:** Kalla Langston <[clerk@cityofbuchanan.com](mailto:clerk@cityofbuchanan.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 7, 2022 2:13 PM  
**To:** Reinhardt, Sarah (MDOS) <[ReinhardtS@michigan.gov](mailto:ReinhardtS@michigan.gov)>  
**Subject:** RE: MDOS Election Worker Recruitment Program Update

**CAUTION: This is an External email. Please send suspicious emails to [abuse@michigan.gov](mailto:abuse@michigan.gov)**

You are my favorite person, I have recruited 6 workers from Democracy MVP for my August election! So thank you for working so hard to get this going!

***Kalla Langston***

**City Clerk**  
City of Buchanan, Michigan  
302 North Redbud Trail  
Buchanan, MI 49107

(269) 695-3844 Extension 17  
(269) 695-4330 Fax



**From:** Victoria Mitchell <[vmitchell@berkleymich.net](mailto:vmitchell@berkleymich.net)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 10, 2022 11:44 AM  
**To:** Reinhardt, Sarah (MDOS)  
**Subject:** Thank you!

**CAUTION: This is an External email. Please send suspicious emails to [abuse@michigan.gov](mailto:abuse@michigan.gov)**

Hi Sarah,

Thank you so much for the MVP program! This has been an invaluable resource and I'm very grateful for the program and all the work done to maintain and promote this! We connected with some wonderful workers for Tuesday!

Is this program offered during odd years?

Thank you again so much! Having support as a local clerk is priceless and appreciated!

--  
Victoria Mitchell, MiPMC  
City Clerk  
City of Berkley  
3338 Coolidge Highway  
Berkley, MI 48072  
[vmitchell@Berkleymich.net](mailto:vmitchell@Berkleymich.net)  
248-658-3319

(she, her, hers)  
see [www.mypronouns.org](http://www.mypronouns.org) to learn more