

London Borough of Lambeth

Election Alarm Clock project

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the London Borough of Lambeth's Election Alarm Clock project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the London Borough of Lambeth.

Introduction

The Election Alarm Clock project was run by the London Borough of Lambeth's democratic services team, targeting young, transient people in the borough who are under-represented in the democratic process. The site was devised and run by Delib, a consultancy company specialising in 'e-democracy'.

Aim

The main aim of the project was to boost voter registration and turnout among younger demographic groups by using new technologies to address the problem of transience.

Funding

The project was awarded £14,511 over a six-month period from December 2005 to June 2006.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were:

- to increase awareness and understanding of local, national and European elections in the UK
- to increase voter registration

among young people, especially transient urban citizens living in rented accommodation in the London Borough of Lambeth

- to increase voter turnout in elections by providing a reminder service via text messaging (SMS) reminding people to sign up to the electoral register, sign up for a postal vote, and then, on election day, to vote

How successful was the project?

The Election Alarm Clock (EAC) is a website which lets users sign up for an email or SMS reminder about registering to vote and when to vote. To drive traffic to the site, 2,000 postcards were spread around Lambeth along with posters and press work, and a viral game linking back to the EAC was marketed around the internet. Users who registered at the EAC site would receive email and/or SMS messages reminding them to register to vote and about polling day itself. A total of 208 people registered for the reminders, comprising 8% of visitors to the site.

The site had two key pages: one discussed the rules for electoral registration, the other gave upcoming electoral registration and election dates. Versions of this page were viewed a total of 646 times (which includes repeat visits) during the life of the project (March to June 2006), with a peak number of visits in April. Whether or not the site increased registration is impossible to determine; the numbers on the register in Lambeth increased from 207,260 in March to 211,815 in May. Obviously this cannot be directly attributed to the EAC; the register does not have data to indicate whether the newly registered voters were in the project's target 18–35 age range.

However, information provided by users when they registered with the site shows that of 36 Lambeth registrants who gave this information, 72% (26) were in the 18–35 age group, which indicates a degree of success in reaching the target demographic, and 44% (16) were of ethnicities other than white British/Irish. Due to the localised nature of this project, it was not possible to measure the numbers of people who visited the site but who did not sign up for the alarm clock reminder because they were not based in Lambeth.

Registered users were emailed with a follow-up survey, and a selection of Lambeth council staff and youth council

members who were not registered were asked to use the site and answer questions about it to provide further information. Almost every person surveyed about the site, both users and non-users, felt that the site should have more information about candidates and manifestoes, and links to political sites, indicating a demand for online election-related information. For young people using the internet for a limited time in a cafe or library, a visit to an elections site has to be seen as worthwhile, reinforcing their desire for a one-stop election site. Youth council members were ambivalent about the site, saying that while they liked it they felt it was unlikely they would use it because they only checked their email occasionally, or didn't want the SMS messages.

Good practice

- Distribution of postcards in cafes and other venues was an effective way of advertising the site to the target audience.
- The site was clear and easy to use, and its purpose was immediately obvious.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- The aims of increasing registration and turnout were ambitious for a project of this nature.
- Due to the timing of local elections, an internet-based

service like this is not suitable for all areas, but at the same time is difficult to localise.

- Most users wanted more information about elections than the site provided.
- A longer lead-in time would have enabled more publicity and therefore increased usage of the site prior to the election.

Further information

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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