

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

CourtFunds helps improve poll worker retention rates, while saving time and taxpayer dollars

Berks County, PA Controller implements CourtFunds to pay poll worker disbursements on the same day of service



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Berks County has a population of more than 420,000, of which approximately 260,000 are registered voters. The Office of Election Services is responsible for managing the 202 polling places in the county. One of the major responsibilities of the Office is to obtain and train as many as 1,200 poll workers for each election.

The responsibility of paying poll workers brought in by Election Services falls on Berks County Controller, Sandra Graffius. Her office ensures those workers get paid for their service in a timely fashion. "We work hard to get people to come and work the polls. That's a big commitment on their part, working from 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.," says Graffius. "We don't want to deter election workers from coming back."

In May 2021, Graffius decided to switch from paying poll workers with paper checks to providing electronic disbursements via debit cards. Doing so delivered Berks County considerable time, manpower and overall cost savings.

THE CHALLENGE

Ensuring fair and transparent elections is a major priority for any community. With more than 260,000 registered voters, endeavoring to meet the demand has been a big challenge

202

the number of
polling locations in
Berks County,
Pennsylvania

2,400

the average number of
poll workers paid annually
by Berks County for their
work on both primary
and fall elections

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for the Office of Election Services in Berks County. Doing so has required a small army of individuals to serve as poll workers, whom the department must go out and recruit.

Although the position is paid, it requires training in advance of election day and then approximately 15 hours of work the day voting occurs. Given the time and effort involved, it's not an easy task obtaining the number of people necessary to meet the demands of each election.

According to Oliver Arthur, former Internal Audit Manager with the Berks County Controller's office, Election Services is responsible for going out and finding people to act as poll workers. "Those people get paid a stipend for working on the polling day, plus payments for some training in advance."

The Controller's office manually processed paper check disbursements for all the poll workers that were due payment. This involved spending countless hours printing, compiling, and sorting checks into precincts to be handed out on election day, as well as mailing checks in the days following each election.

Additionally, there was the time-consuming process of reviewing bank statements to determine if checks had been cashed, investigating payments not received, reissuing checks, and escheatment processing.

Overall, the process was time consuming, labor intensive and costly for staff across multiple offices in Berks County – the Controller's Office, IT staff, Treasurer's Office, and Election Services.

“We work hard to get people to come and work the polls. That’s a big commitment on their part, working from 6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. We don’t want to deter election workers from coming back. **I believed CourtFunds would be beneficial when I first heard about it. I’m happy it has worked even better than originally anticipated. Working with Rapid Financial Solutions to be able to provide our poll workers payments on election day and with options they want, has been of great benefit to them and my office.** Receiving debit cards and saving the taxpayers check-producing costs encourages them to continue playing a vital role in county elections and our democracy.”

— Sandra Graffius, Controller, Berks County, PA

■ COURTFUNDS: THE PERFECT FIT FOR PAYING ELECTION WORKERS

The use of paper checks to address an array of disbursement scenarios had been one Berks County, and in particular the Controller's Office, had long dealt with. Given the fact the Controller's Office was responsible for supervising all of the fiscal affairs of the County and scrutinizing all bills and payments, Graffius felt it was important to look at existing processes within her office in order to reduce costs, create efficiencies, and better serve the people of Berks County.

She became aware of CourtFunds pre-paid debit cards when Rapid Financial Solutions approached the Berks County Clerk of Courts office regarding electronic juror disbursements.

Graffius decided the use of a pre-paid debit card made perfect sense for elections. "I saw several uses of the CourtFunds product within our office, but decided it would be a best fit for the poll worker payments," she said.

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“Election Services now provides us with an Excel spreadsheet that contains each poll worker’s information, including their name, address, phone number, the precinct where they are working, and the amount they are supposed to get paid. **We then take that file, assign the individual a debit card and perform necessary modifications allowing us to do the bulk upload to CourtFunds.**”

— Oliver Arthur, Internal Audit Manager, Berks County, PA Controller’s Office

■ QUICK AND EASY IMPLEMENTATION

Once the decision was made to make a change, implementation of CourtFunds began. Rapid Financial Solutions worked with Arthur and other staff to complete the implementation within four weeks.

According to Arthur, the process was straightforward and easy. It included modifying their existing spreadsheet to match the required fields for import to CourtFunds. Rapid also hosted Zoom trainings to walk Berks County through the process of assigning cards and showing them how to upload the Excel spreadsheet into CourtFunds. Thereafter, on the day of the election, the team at Rapid assisted them with the upload of the payments to the poll workers’ cards.

“Election Services now provides us with an Excel spreadsheet that contains each poll worker’s information, including their name, address, phone number, the precinct where they are working, and the amount they are supposed to get paid,” Arthur explains. “We then take that file, assign the individual a debit card and perform necessary modifications allowing us to do the bulk upload to CourtFunds.”

The cards are then distributed by a group of rovers utilized by Election Services to assist poll workers at each of the 200-plus polling locations throughout the County. This approach enables the Controller’s office to track who actually worked and is due payment, versus those who failed to show up and are not due a disbursement.

■ TRAINING POLL WORKERS FOR NEW PROCESSES

In addition to training staff on the implementation of CourtFunds, there has also been a need to train poll workers on the switch to pre-paid debit cards — they’ve been accustomed to receiving checks in the past.

John Ditizio, Debit Card Project Manager for the Berks County Controller’s Office, provides training to poll workers. Ditizio and Graffius perform approximately 40 poll worker trainings per election cycle.

Says Graffius, “John and I are conducting three trainings per day to demonstrate how to use the debit cards. It’s one of our biggest challenges, as poll workers have always received checks for doing this in the past. We now educate them on the reasons why the CourtFunds card is so beneficial. They love hearing how they’ll be paid on election day, how they can transfer or spend the funds multiple ways, and how much money we’ve saved the county with the cards.”

WORKERS PAID BEFORE POLLS CLOSE

"Today, the person gets paid the same day, as long as our office has them in our list ahead of election day. If not, then we are paying them the very next day," noted Arthur. "We even send out blank cards with the rovers that they can give to poll workers who signed up that day to work. The rover can fill out a spreadsheet with the person's information and turn it back into us that night, with the payment then loaded the next day."

Unearned payments are now eliminated as well. The rovers bring back the cards assigned to people who failed to show up to work the polling place on election day. The funds that had been pre-loaded on the card are now recaptured and returned to the County.

The decision to utilize CourtFunds and work with Rapid Financial Solutions has been a good one for Graffius' office and the constituents of Berks County whom she serves. "I believed CourtFunds would be beneficial when I first heard about it. I'm happy it has worked even better than originally anticipated," Graffius stated. "Working with Rapid Financial Solutions to be able to provide our poll workers payments on election day and with options they want, has been of great benefit to them and my office. We want them to be willing to work the polls in the future. Receiving debit cards and saving the taxpayers check-producing costs encourages them to continue playing a vital role in county elections and our democracy."

LEARN MORE ABOUT COURTFUNDS

From municipal and county, to state and federal courts, CourtFunds is the contactless way to disburse payments to everyone accurately and on time, no matter what part of the transaction they play a part in — jury payments, restitution, child support, bonds, witnesses, and more.

Learn more about how CourtFunds can help your state, county, or municipality solve its most complex pay disbursement challenges by scheduling a call with one of our payment technology experts.

Paying poll workers in Berks County: the four-step process

1

The Berks County Election Services office compiles a list of poll workers including names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and emails, if possible. This list is received the Thursday or Friday before an election.

The Controller's Office pre-assigns a card number to each poll worker on the list. The poll worker list is then sent to CourtFunds on the Friday before election day.

2

A second list of poll workers with pre-assigned card numbers is also sent to CourtFunds on Monday, the day before the election, to account for any new workers that may have signed up over the weekend.

3

On Wednesday, the day after an election, Berks County submits a list of substitute poll workers from election day that need to be paid.

4

Any CourtFunds cards assigned to "no-show" workers are returned to the Controller's Office and are defunded within a week.