The Presidential Election, Pandemic and Polling

Union Public Library

Adults

|

Intergenerational

The Presidential Election, Pandemic and Polling

Dec 8, 2020

Free

Byline

Debbie Walter, Adult Services, Union (N.J.) Public Library

The 2020 presidential election brought into sharp focus the public's unease with the accuracy of polls. From underestimating sizable differences, to overstating levels of support, the role of public opinion polls in our democracy goes far beyond simply predicting the outcome of a race.

We invited Krista Jenkins, professor of political science and executive director of PublicMind at Fairleigh Dickinson University, to present a Zoom program. Jenkins discussed when the unease over polling accuracy is warranted, as well as the art and science of conducting and reporting on complicated polling data.

Advanced Planning

We wanted to encourage voting and approach the election from several perspectives. In October, we held two "how to vote" sessions. One was in Spanish and other was on the history of women's voting.

In the final days of the election, we saw that polls mattered more than ever. I wanted to bring in an expert talk about the 2016 presidential election compared to 2020.

I saw that Professor Krista Jenkins was speaking in the area to a group that paid to hear her. I called her and explained that we had no budget; she kindly volunteered her time. This took place about two months prior to the event.

Marketing

We marketed this program through local media, the library's social media pages and fliers.

We have relationships with state history groups and associations because we have been producing at least one history event a month. These groups helped get the word out to their members, and we reached out to history-minded newsletters and Facebook groups.

Budgeting

Professor Krista Jenkins agreed to do this program for us free of charge.

Day-of-event Activity

Everyone was sent the Zoom link in advance of the presentation and we opened the room for the one-hour program to begin.

Jenkins has been teaching virtually for a long time so she knew the technical ropes well. She shared a prepared Powerpoint but also spoke off the cuff and from notes. There was plenty of time for questions, and the audience participated.

Program Execution

This program was executed entirely through Zoom. The audience attendance was a bit disappointing, but we received a lot of good comments and participants asked great questions during the Q&A time.

Advice

If I could do this over, I might see if I could get the high schools involved but given COVID, I figured that they have enough on their plate. You might also ask local media to cover the presentation and not just promote it.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

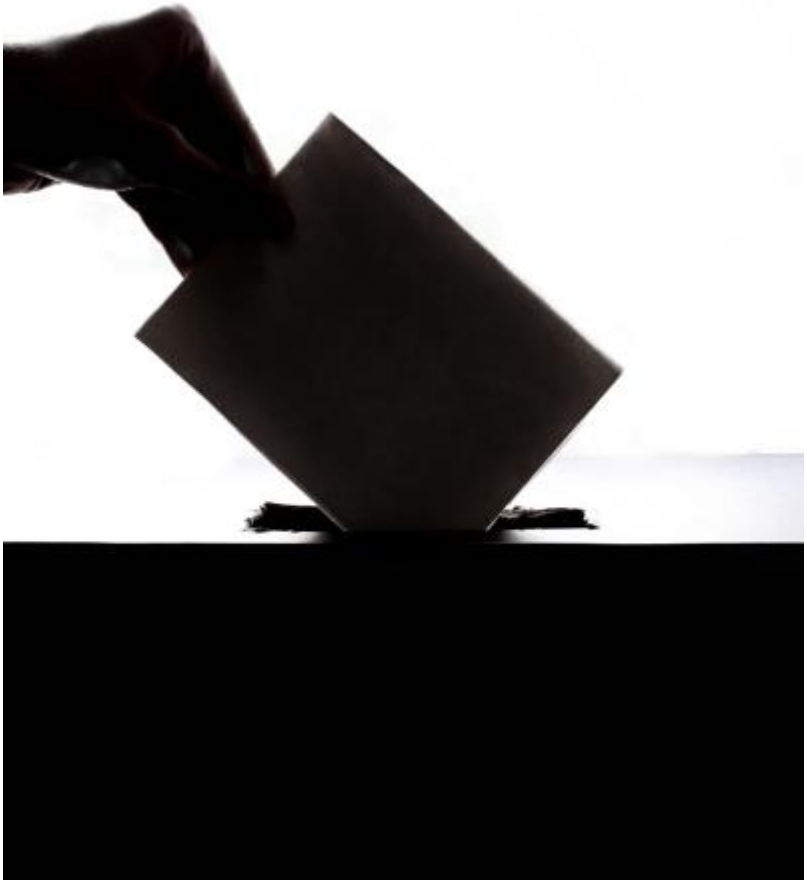
Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

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100 Years of Women's Voting Rights

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
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Audiences:

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Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational