

ILLINOIS EMBRACES EDR

A Review of the Illinois Election Day Registration Pilot Program for the 2014 General Election



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Chicago Lawyers' Committee), Just Vote, the South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI) and others advocated for the introduction of Election Day Registration (EDR) in Illinois in 2013 and 2014. In mid-2014, the Legislature passed, and Governor Quinn signed, a bill introducing a EDR as a pilot program for the 2014 General Election. In order to assess the effectiveness of the pilot program and to make recommendations for any future adoption of permanent EDR, the Chicago Lawyers' Committee and SAAPRI conducted an exit survey with people who used EDR in Greater Chicago.

We learned two important lessons from the 2014 pilot program:

1. EDR is needed in Illinois to provide equal access to the polls. According to the Illinois State Board of Elections, 8,958 Illinoisans registered or updated their registration using EDR on November 4, 2014, representing some 0.25% of voters in the 2014 General Election. Even in this pilot year, we can see that EDR could matter in tight races: the Illinois Treasurer's race was decided by just over 9,000 votes, or 0.26% of all votes cast. A significant proportion of those using EDR used it to update their registration, and many of those people had tried to update their information prior to the registration deadline but, due to administrative errors by government agencies or confusion over the procedure to update their voter registration, were unable to do so.

2. EDR needs more resources than it was given during the pilot program in order to reach its full potential and provide fair access to the polls. The pilot program was highly popular, and election jurisdictions were not always able to keep up with demand. Increased resources will enfranchise those who wish to, or who must, use EDR.

We support the introduction of permanent, in-precinct, Election Day Registration for all Illinoisans so that every eligible citizen is able to cast her ballot and make her voice heard.

This brief report sets out the geographic distribution of those who used EDR in Chicago, Suburban Cook County, Lake County, and Will County, and the results of the 290 exit surveys that volunteers collected in the City of Chicago, Suburban Cook County, and Lake County on November 4, 2014.

“ I was very grateful [Election Day Registration] was available to me. If I was not able to vote today, I would feel as though my voice wasn't heard and doesn't count. ” – Janise Williams

INTRODUCTION

Illinois offered Election Day Registration (EDR) for the 2014 November general election as a pilot program. Governor Quinn supported the legislation as a way to allow more people to exercise their most basic democratic right. He noted at the signing ceremony for the bill that “Democracy is a God-given gift” and that “it’s important that we make sure that the voice of the people, everyday people, is heard.”¹

Volunteers with the Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (CLC) and the South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI) conducted exit interviews with 290 people across three election jurisdictions (the City of Chicago, Suburban Cook County, and Lake County) to find out whether eligible voters had trouble using EDR, how they heard about EDR, and why they needed to use EDR. The Exit Survey Results section summarizes the trends we

saw in the data, but the full set of results, broken down by election jurisdiction, is set out in Appendixes 1 and 2.

We tracked some demographic data so that we could know which members of the community were represented in our results. The median age of our respondents was 34 years old. Our respondents were 54% female and 46% male, and 59% were white, 30% black, 6% Latino, and 5% Asian American.

“ I moved from Addison to Schaumburg this past July. Hence, I was waiting for the old polling reminder to be sent or forwarded to us and none came. Since we didn’t receive anything, I finally called the elections office on Nov. 3. I would have been really upset if they said we wouldn’t be allowed to vote. That [Election] Day Registration and voting saved the day. ”

– Freda Marzan

EXIT SURVEY RESULTS

The exit survey was not designed to be conducted under test conditions (no specified random sampling, no requirement that every respondent answer every question, and it was only conducted in three election jurisdictions) or to indicate statistical significance, but the surveys do give us a helpful snapshot of the way that many people learned about EDR and why they wanted or needed to register and vote using EDR.

Dedicating Insufficient Resources To EDR Locations Resulted In Long Lines

Election authorities were largely not prepared for the thousands of people that wanted to utilize EDR in Greater Chicago. The City of Chicago only offered EDR at five sites throughout the city. By 11am the wait time at the EDR location at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, on the south side, was around one hour. By 5pm wait times at four of the five City of Chicago locations were 3-4 hours. In Welles Park on the north side of Chicago, the longest wait times ended up being around 7 hours, with the final votes not being cast until 3am the day after Election Day.

Cook County devoted more resources to the pilot program than the City of Chicago. It offered EDR at 17 sites across Suburban Cook County and one site in downtown Chicago. Wait times were less than an hour at all sites except Evanston and Calumet City, which had long lines towards the end of the day. Suburban Cook County has around 100,000 fewer people who are eligible to

vote than the City of Chicago yet it processed 3,604 people through EDR while Chicago only processed 2,897.²

Lake County also suffered from bad planning, with its five EDR sites only opening at 10am, causing Attorney General Lisa Madigan to seek and win a court order keeping the EDR sites open until 9pm. In the end, Lake County processed 526 Election Day registrants.³

Election Officials, Family And Friends, And The Media Promoted EDR

In Suburban Cook County and Lake County respondents were slightly less likely to have heard of EDR before Election Day (42% and 46% respectively) than respondents in Chicago (49% heard about EDR before Election Day). Respondents in Suburban Cook County and Lake County were also less likely to have heard about EDR from the news or media (20% and 18% respectively), while 39% of City of Chicago respondents heard about EDR through the news or media. When asked to explain their answer, respondents reported a variety of media sources including NPR/WBEZ, Chicago Tribune, Fox32, MSNBC, ABC News, PBS, Red Eye, Google, and Facebook.

“Election Day Registration is a great idea. My name was not on the list at a regular precinct because I had moved. I couldn't have voted today if Election Day Registration were not in place.”

– Anonymous South Asian female, Cook County

EXIT SURVEY RESULTS *Continued*

Overall, about a third of respondents heard about EDR from an election official (in most cases because they went to their polling place and found out that their registration had not been updated even though they thought they updated it, or their name had been removed from the voter roll, or they were listed as inactive, despite their having voted in recent elections).

Administrative Errors By Government Agencies Was A Major Reason For The Use Of EDR

Of the 179 people who answered the question “Why didn’t you register to vote before today?” a striking 54% said that they had moved and needed to update their address. Many of those who selected that answer added that they had thought they had updated their address or name at the DMV, or online, but it must not have been recorded. This suggests that the DMV and online voter registration system isn’t accurately recording when someone says they want to update their voter registration information, the

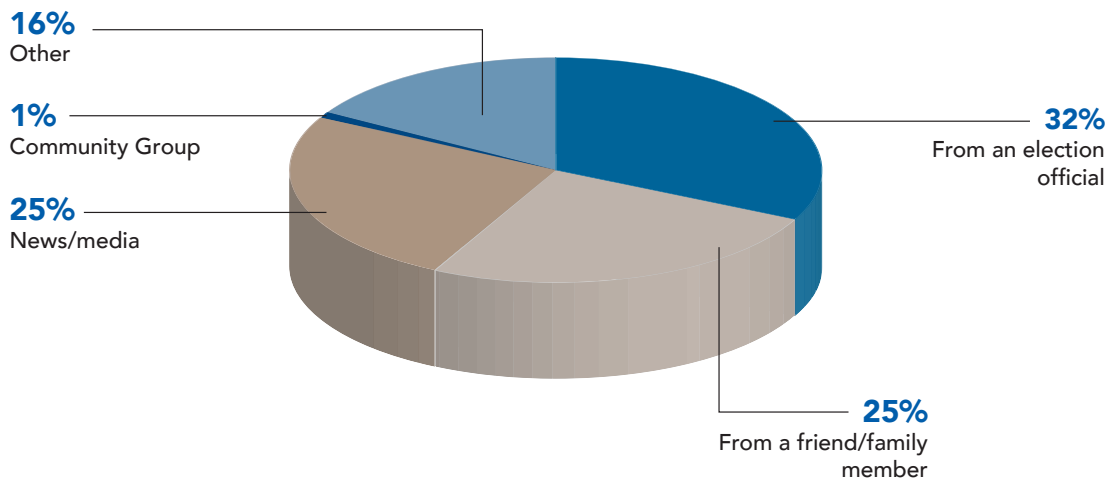
DMV isn’t offering voters the option to update their registration when they change their information on their driver’s license (despite the requirements of the NVRA) and/or the notification system for when someone has not successfully updated their information is lacking.

The other major categories of reasons for using EDR (in addition to new information like a changed name or address) were that voters had no time to register (8%) or did not know how to register (6%). The “other” category (27%) largely included people who believed they were registered but their names were not found on the voter roll at their polling place. Far from being the “procrastinators” that some election officials and media labeled them, most EDR registrants were people who attempted to register and were prevented from doing so by administrative problems or who had other troubles with the regular system. For all of these people, EDR ensured they were able to take part in democracy regardless of the pressures on their time in everyday life.

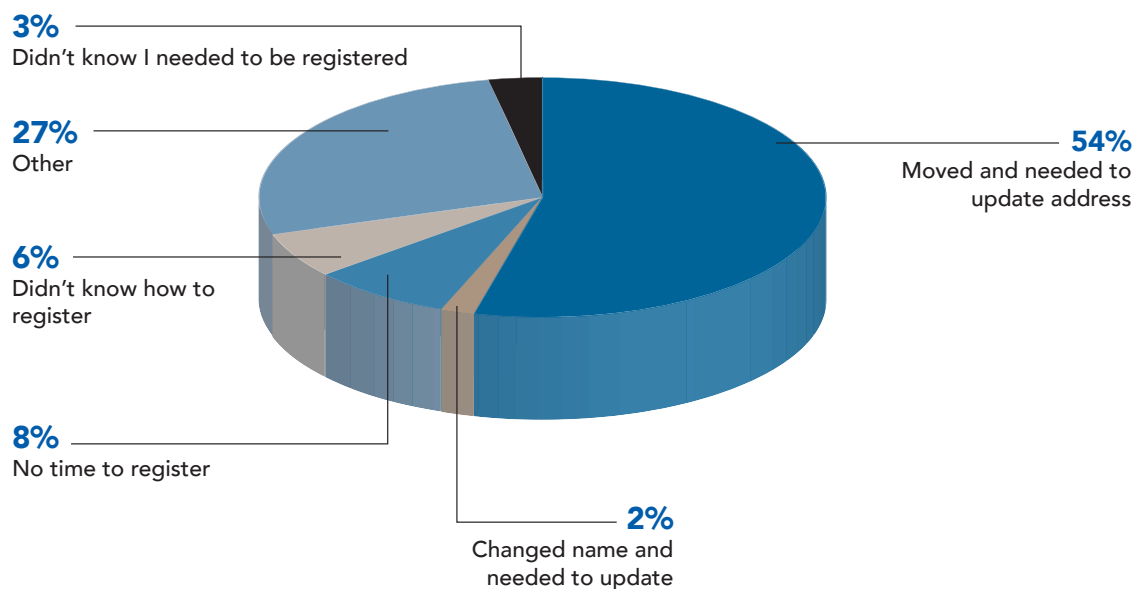
“ Between being a woman and the child of immigrants, a lot of people fought for my right to vote. It was important that I exercised that right. ” – Rishika Murthy

DATA ON THE USE OF EDR IN 2014 IN ILLINOIS FROM CHICAGO LAWYERS' COMMITTEE EXIT SURVEY

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT EDR?

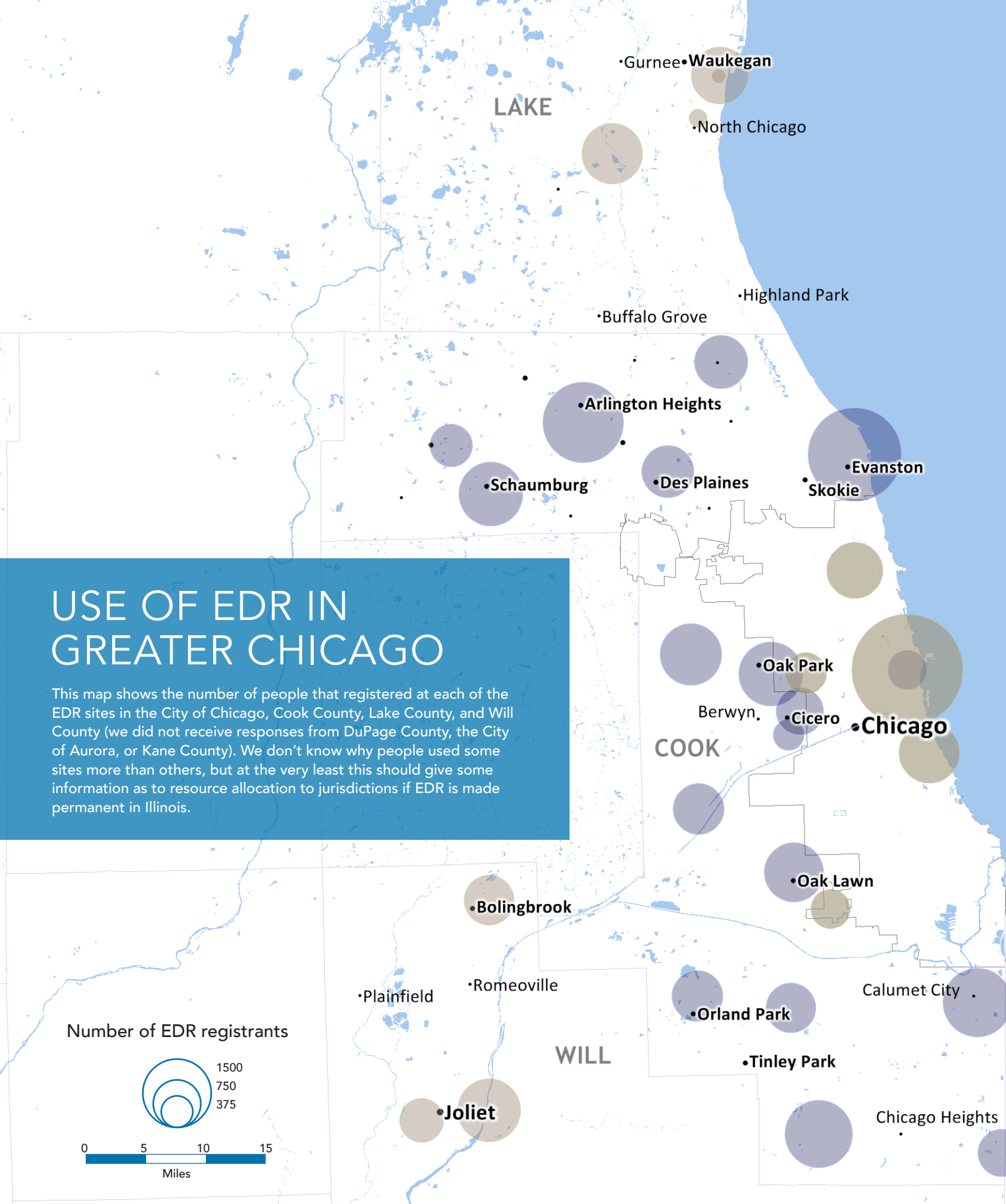


WHY DIDN'T YOU REGISTER BEFORE TODAY?



USE OF EDR IN GREATER CHICAGO

This map shows the number of people that registered at each of the EDR sites in the City of Chicago, Cook County, Lake County, and Will County (we did not receive responses from DuPage County, the City of Aurora, or Kane County). We don't know why people used some sites more than others, but at the very least this should give some information as to resource allocation to jurisdictions if EDR is made permanent in Illinois.



CONCLUSION

Greater Chicago used EDR at rates beyond the predictions of election jurisdictions. Across the state nearly 9,000 people (.25% of total turnout in the election) registered or updated their registration and voted at Election Day Registration sites.

We encourage Illinois legislators to support permanent, in-precinct Election Day Registration for all Illinoisans. It will enfranchise eligible Illinois voters affected by snafus at the DMV or with online voter registration. It will enfranchise eligible Illinois voters who are too busy (often people with multiple jobs, or child-care commitments, or studies) to get to a voter registration site in advance of Election Day, but rely on the two hour window that Illinois requires employers to give to their employees so they can vote. It will enfranchise new voters, often young people, recently naturalized citizens, and voters from historically disenfranchised communities, who may be unfamiliar with registration requirements. It

will enfranchise eligible Illinois voters who don't have a printer to print a voter registration form or a stamp to send it, and those who don't have a driver's license so can't use the online voter registration system. In short, it will enfranchise eligible Illinois citizens who want their voice to be heard in their democracy. And that can only be a good thing.

“ People have busy schedules. This is excellent for those of us who are busy or didn't know to register or correct the registration before. We should improve EDR in the future so that there is less wait time. ” – Timothy Adeniran

“ Election Day Registration was a very convenient option because I didn't have to re-register and vote on separate days, which would have been hard because of my work schedule. ” – Olivia Thiel

ENDNOTES

- ¹ John Byrne and Monique Garcia, "Quinn signs same-day voter registration bill" *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 2014, available at www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-quinn-voter-registration-law-20140701-story.html (last visited November 21, 2014).
- ² United States Census Bureau, "Voting Age Population by Citizenship and Race (CVAP) 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5 year estimates (County and Place data), available at http://www.census.gov/rdo/data/voting_age_population_by-citizenship_and_race_cvap.html (last visited November 21, 2014).
- ³ Mike Riopell, "Lake County polls open until 9 for same-day registration," *Daily Herald*, November 4, 2014, available at www.dailyherald.com/article/20141104/news/141109427 (last visited November 21, 2014).

“ I wouldn't have voted if there weren't this option. In the past, my registration was incorrect and I didn't have a chance to correct it — today I did. ” – Anonymous Asian American male, Cook County

APPENDIX 1:

Select Results for All Respondents in Greater Chicago

	Total	Percent of respondents
Total Respondents	287	N/A
DEMOGRAPHICS		
Female	155	54%
Male	132	46%
Black	83	30%
White	161	59%
Asian	14	5%
Latino	16	6%
WHEN DID YOU HEAR ABOUT EDR?		
Today	156	55%
Before Today	127	45%
HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT EDR?		
From an election official	85	32%
From a friend/family member	67	25%
News/media	67	25%
Community group	3	1%
Other	43	16%
WHY DIDN'T YOU REGISTER BEFORE TODAY?		
Didn't know I needed to be registered	8	3%
Moved and needed to update address	133	54%
Changed name and needed to update	4	2%
No time to register	20	8%
Didn't know how to register	14	6%
Other	67	27%

APPENDIX 2:

Select Results by Election Jurisdiction

	CHICAGO		COOK COUNTY		LAKE COUNTY	
	Total	Percent of respondents	Total	Percent of respondents	Total	Percent of respondents
Total Respondents	79	N/A	157	N/A	51	N/A
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Female	45	57%	83	53%	27	53%
Male	34	43%	74	47%	24	47%
Black	29	39%	39	26%	15	31%
White	38	51%	97	64%	26	53%
Asian	3	4%	7	5%	4	8%
Latino	4	5%	8	5%	4	8%
WHEN DID YOU HEAR ABOUT EDR?						
Today	40	51%	89	58%	27	54%
Before Today	39	49%	65	42%	23	46%
HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT EDR?						
From an election official	23	30%	44	31%	18	37%
From a friend/family member	12	16%	41	29%	14	29%
News/media	30	39%	28	20%	9	18%
Community group	0	0%	2	1%	1	2%
Other	11	14%	25	18%	7	14%
WHY DIDN'T YOU REGISTER BEFORE TODAY?						
Didn't know I needed to be registered	1	1%	4	3%	3	7%
Moved and needed to update address	44	59%	64	51%	25	56%
Changed name and needed to update	0	0%	3	2%	1	2%
No time to register	6	8%	8	6%	6	13%
Didn't know how to register	4	5%	9	7%	1	2%
Other	20	27%	38	30%	9	20%