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Portuguese American Citizenship Project under new model

By: Ric Oliveira

FALL RIVER - After losing more than 50 percent of its funding, the Portuguese American Citizenship Project is trying to revive itself after getting a boost from the Azorean government to continue the program which measures the voting trends of Portuguese Americans.

The 105,000 Euro grant (about \$140,000) - spread over three years - from the Azorean Government is being matched in the first year by a 35,000 Euro grant (about \$47,000) from the original funding source, the Luso American Development Foundation, to continue the research and statistical depth of the non-partisan program. Previously, the grant from FLAD was for \$200,000 per year.

Several new leaders along with founder James McGlinchey were in the region last week to meet with parishes and local leaders to try to convince them to stay onboard despite the fact that the national organization can no longer pick up the costs of the mailings.

From California to New Jersey to Connecticut to Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the group's leaders have tried to keep the 10-year-old program alive.

"Basically the main goal is to re-launch under a new model," said Elmano M. Costa, a professor at the California State University and the new head of the board. "We will now be operating with about 50 percent of the funding we used to have before. Where as in the model before - the grant from FLAD paid for everything - we will not be doing that again. We will do the data processing, each club and church will have to print and mail out their own (voting reminder) cards. We are seeing who is willing to continue in this project while also assuming some of the local costs."

The program works by targeting American citizens at church parishes, clubs and other organizations. Those identified as citizens are then mailed out reminder cards, which feature their voting precinct and the date of the upcoming election. Then, the voting rolls are analyzed and compared to the church or group rolls. This information is then compared to the general population and other elections, as well as other populations in other states. In the past, the studies have shown that as much as 78 percent of Portuguese American citizens of the United States vote in the elections, dispelling long held beliefs of a lack of participation.

Costa said that so far most groups feel the project is important enough to fund the election drives in their own communities.

"Surprisingly, to be honest, we set out wondering how many organizations would stay on, right now it looks like a lot of clubs are still in," he said.

Costa said that most in California and several in New Jersey and in Connecticut will remain in the program. He was unsure of the local participation, but he planned to meet with dozens of leaders to convince them to continue the counts.

According to McGlinchey, it may just continue.

"I feel very comfortable," said McGlinchey. "I think it is very important to keep this going. These gentlemen are serious players in all this stuff. California will go. Getting the East Coast to not have much slippage is vital. Our preliminary reaction indicates that there will be a lot of people staying in. People will dropout for sure, but we will keep it going."

The job of now breaking down the statistics and assuming McGlinchey's role will fall on the shoulders of Prof. António L. Borba, also of California State University. He will be retiring from the University in May and

then taking up the challenge of breaking down the figures along with some hired college student help.

"My focus is to try and do some of the work that Jim has done, contacting the communities, making sure they we get the data bases from the communities," he said. "We will gather the voter registration lists from the cities and the counties, make sure we work with those databases and coordinate them and prepare all the information that is needed to be able to send out the registration cards. We also want to support organizations that might want to do candidates night to provide them with all the information they need to do that."

The group said that most of the money is incurred in travel from cost to coast, as well as in the paid student staff. An inordinate amount of time goes into preparing the databases. Roughly 40 percent of the funds will also go to pay Borba's salary.

"Hopefully by September we will be ready to go," said Costa.

Anyone interested in getting their group involved can email Borba at aborba3@gmail.com

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