

## State reviewing ACORN voter forms

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The State Board of Elections is investigating suspicious voter registration forms submitted by an organization whose problems have drawn national attention.

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, known as ACORN, conducted a voter drive that registered nearly 28,000 people in North Carolina. But some of the forms it filed had information that may have been copied from phone books, local election officials said.

Durham County's elections office turned over about 120 suspect forms to the state for investigation about three weeks ago, and Wake County's elections office sent in about 30 suspicious forms last week.

Gary Bartlett, the state board's executive director, said ACORN has cooperated with the investigation into the questionable Durham forms.

The office received information about the Wake forms Friday, Bartlett said, but no other local elections official has alerted the state office to ACORN-related problems. The head of elections in Mecklenburg said that county did not have problems with ACORN forms.

Work on the Durham case isn't finished, Bartlett said, but the problem does not appear to be widespread and seems to stem from "one greedy person" trying to fill out enough forms to get paid.

He said he expected the board's investigator to refer the Durham case to the local district attorney for prosecution.

ACORN is a community organizing group that runs issue campaigns and was active a few years ago in ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage. It pays workers to register voters.

In North Carolina, the group had about 40 people a day working to register voters in Durham and Charlotte, said Pat McCoy, the group's state director. While the organization no longer requires workers to meet registration quotas, McCoy said, it does require them to show evidence of steady work.

McCoy said he had not heard about problems with Wake forms.

ACORN must return to the local elections boards the forms its workers submit, even the questionable ones. ACORN separates forms with potential problems from the rest and notifies election officials about them, McCoy said.

Problems with the group's voter registration efforts are making national news. A local elections board in Missouri reported several hundred problem applications. Nevada authorities raided ACORN headquarters in Las Vegas in an investigation of fake registration forms.

After McCoy and officials from ACORN's national office met with Mike Ashe, the Durham elections director, ACORN retrained staff and developed a system to trace problems.

"A lot of ACORN people just filled out the same name multiple times," so they would be paid, Ashe said, and "one or two were getting information from the phone book."

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