



# 4 TIPS

## For Managing Alternative Voting Methods

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for election management. This series provides tips and suggests best practices to help you run efficient and effective elections.


Nationwide voting has slowly moved from one Election Day toward an election period of several days or weeks that can involve a variety of methods for voting. Maintaining the accuracy, security and integrity of elections -- despite having to manage these multiple methods of voting -- is still expected by the public.



### 1 Understand the Types of Voting Methods

Although each state works to make its process more voter-friendly, the different types of voting methods that are available can be confusing. To assist your voters it's important to understand the types of voting allowed in your area.

- Voting by mail – know how the vote by mail process can be used based on your state law. Some states are “all vote by mail” with all ballots sent and returned via the U.S. Postal Service. Many jurisdictions using “all vote by mail” also provide in-person voting locations for voters who opt not to use the “vote by mail” system.
- Combined voting methods – determine if there are different vote by mail and polling place voting processes for Election Day. Know if your state requires the vote by mail (absentee) voter to provide one of several authorized reasons before an “absentee by mail” ballot can be issued. Determine if your state allows any voter to request to permanently receive his or her ballot by mail. Also, determine if your jurisdiction provides satellite in-person voting during specified periods of time prior to Election Day.

**REMEMBER** 

Determine if your jurisdiction provides drop off boxes allowing the voter to bypass the U.S. Mail to return his or her voted ballot.



Tip 1 continued

**REMEMBER** 

In some absentee by mail jurisdictions a voter's request for an "absentee by mail" ballot must be notarized. Also, many jurisdictions allow voters with a specified reason to request a "permanent" absentee ballot.

- Early voting and polling place voting – note if your state allows any voter to request a ballot by mail, can vote by mail, or can vote in-person at a designated early voting location. These voters can choose which method they want to use.
- Vote Centers – some jurisdictions may offer several locations where voters from various groupings of precincts or jurisdiction-wide can go to cast their ballots in-person for specified number of days leading up to (and, perhaps, including) Election Day. The Vote Center method replaces precinct-specific polling places on Election Day. Vote Centers may operate prior to and through Election Day.

**REMEMBER** 

It's important to routinely communicate, to the public, the types of voting options, hours of operation and deadlines for requesting and receiving a ballot by mail. Be sure this information is on printed materials sent to voters and on your website.

**Quick Clicks**

- <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>
- <http://countyclerk.lakecountyiil.gov/ElectionInfo/Voter-Services/Pages/Voting-Options.aspx>
- [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/05/putting\\_the\\_new\\_in\\_new\\_england.php](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/05/putting_the_new_in_new_england.php)
- [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/06/iowa\\_study\\_finds\\_no\\_postmark\\_o.php](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/06/iowa_study_finds_no_postmark_o.php)
- <http://www.co.weld.co.us/Departments/ClerkRecorder/ElectionInformation/VoteCenters.html>
- [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/06/indiana\\_still\\_weighing\\_impact.php](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/06/indiana_still_weighing_impact.php)

- Use your voter registration mailings as an opportunity to communicate details on the upcoming elections– including the voting methods that are available to the voter, the locations, hours of operation and deadlines for voting. Send these mailings prior to every election cycle.

**REMEMBER** 

Inform your voters about voter registration deadlines and the need to update their registration if they change their address and/or party affiliation.

- Review all the written information you send to voters. Find ways to make this information easy to understand and the forms simple to complete.
- Review the errors that voters have made in the past in registering to vote or in mailing a ballot, and find ways to correct and/or simplify the form to eliminate or reduce similar errors.

**2 Understand Your Voter**

Remember that the lifestyle of voters has changed over the years. Having one Election Day in which a voter has a specific polling place and must vote within a specified period of time has created obstacles for many busy voters.

- Actively promote election-related activities using a variety of public relations tools.

**REMEMBER** 

Something as simple as placing a large red X by the signature line is a good visual reminder for the voter to complete this task. Also: review your return mail ballot envelope to ensure that the voter will easily understand the requirements.

Tip 2 continued

- Be sure your voters understand their options for returning their mail ballot **on** Election Day. In many jurisdictions state law requires that the mail ballot be returned **ONLY** to the election office **prior** to the close of the polls on Election Day. Other jurisdictions allow a mail ballot to be returned to the polling place on Election Day. This ballot may be counted or the voter may be required to complete a provisional ballot.

### REMEMBER



Voters will return and vote in every election if voting is a good experience. Welcome voters as they enter the voting area. Explain the voting process and review any specific requirements they need in order to vote. Let them know the approximate wait time. A simple “thank you for voting” as the voter exits the voting location sends a positive, personal message to each voter.

### Quick Clicks

[http://www.eac.gov/voter\\_resources/contact\\_your\\_state.aspx](http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx)

## 3

### More Efficiency in Administering an Election

In many jurisdictions, election officials are now conducting three elections at the same time: In-person early voting for a certain number of days or weeks, no excuse voting by mail, and operating polling places on Election Day.

- Using electronic voting equipment that stores all ballot styles in each machine can be an important tool for processing your voters.
  - Using ballot-on-demand technology can provide more options and allow your voters from any precinct to vote in one location.
  - If you are able to implement “all mail ballot” voting you will eliminate poll worker and polling places issues.
  - The length of the ballot has an impact on the time a voter needs to mark the ballot. Take additional steps to inform your voters of the extra time needed and encourage the voter to come to the polls prepared to vote on each ballot question.
- Consider conducting a test election internally within your office. This is an opportunity to test new procedures, including the voting system set up and closing procedures.

### REMEMBER



Changes in voting equipment will have an impact on your internal operations including certain storage needs and security considerations, polling place requirements, and changes to poll worker training.

- Review voting statistics from similar elections in the past (local, state and federal). Examine the number of locations that were used for in-person early voting, the number of early voting days offered, the peak hours of voting (at various locations), and the number of election staff and poll workers that were required.

### REMEMBER



Collecting statistics in every election can help you plan the allocation of limited staff and resources for future elections.

### REMEMBER



Post copies of the ballot questions for voters to see as they enter the polling place, or consider handing out copies of the lengthy questions so that voters can review prior to voting.

**4**

**Using Technology to Manage Various Voting Methods**

Election officials are embracing technology as a means of providing better service to voters and for increasing efficiency within their offices. Changes in voting processes are reinforcing the need for new technology tools.

- Some jurisdictions outsource the assembly and mailing of their outgoing ballots. These jurisdictions simply upload the data to the vendor for printing and mailing.
- Many jurisdictions have implemented a mail ballot tracking system to ensure that all their ballots have been delivered to the Post Office.

**REMEMBER**

Be sure to build a partnership with your local Post Office. Provide a calendar of deadlines for their use and encourage them to make the handling of returned mail ballots a priority

- For small to medium sized jurisdictions, the addition of a mail stuffing machine and an automatic envelope opener can improve internal efficiency.
- Some jurisdictions have developed a centralized computerized “election management system” containing all the information pertaining to internal operations in one system.

**REMEMBER**

An election management system allows you to instantly retrieve information regarding early voting by precinct, the number of poll workers/voting machines by polling place, serial numbers of all equipment delivered to each location, and the numbers of ballots issued and returned by mail.

- Jurisdictions are beginning to implement electronic poll books to replace the paper roster of voters in each polling place. This reduces the paper and staffing that are required to prepare rosters for each polling place.
- Some jurisdictions provide live connections from polling places which enable poll workers to view all registered voters and then direct voters to the correct polling place.
- Many jurisdictions now provide an online tracking system giving voters the opportunity to go online to confirm their mail ballot has been received by the election office.

**Quick Clicks**

- <http://www.arapahoevotes.com/>
- <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-pollbooks.aspx>
- <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/absenteeballotstatus/search.aspx>
- <https://info.kingcounty.gov/elections/BallotTracker.aspx>

