

CHAPTER

TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

Voting has changed over the years. Whereas Americans once made their selections for office by voice vote, voters today use optical scan and direct recording electronic (DRE) voting systems to cast their votes. These options provide accessibility, security, and privacy for the voter.

The technology for administering elections outside the physical act of voting has changed as well. States have implemented statewide voter registration databases to manage their voter rolls. Many jurisdictions have incorporated new technologies—such as GIS, GPS, and social media—into their processes and procedures in order to administer elections more efficiently and to save costs.

Election law continues to evolve. For example, some jurisdictions are implementing online voter registration, a technology that allows voters to register and to make updates to their registrations online if they have a valid State identification. Those States changed their laws to allow digital or digitized signatures on voter registration forms. Technology to help Americans overseas to vote has moved forward after the enactment of the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act of 2009, which required changes to State laws concerning the transmission of ballots for Federal elections. Additionally, a few States have taken it a step further to allow uniformed and overseas citizens to submit completed absentee ballots via electronic mail and facsimile.

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 includes several references to technology. First, HAVA provides funding to States to replace punch card and lever voting machines.¹ HAVA requires the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to “...make grants to assist entities in carrying out research and development to improve the quality, reliability, accuracy, accessibility, affordability, and security of voting equipment, election systems, and voting technology.”² The Act requires all voting systems used in Federal elections to meet minimum requirements for verifying the selections made on the ballot, provide voters the opportunity to change any choices, and notify the voter about overvotes.³ Finally, HAVA mandates statewide voter registration databases.⁴

Advances in technology can yield great benefits to those who implement them correctly. Election officials are already using exciting new tools, many of which can be adapted to other jurisdictions with little or no changes to law. This chapter on Technology in Elections aims to make these advances accessible to election officials across the country by explaining innovative uses for technology in the elections office and the voting process. It also includes tips for how to manage cost, maintenance, and the replacement of technology.

The content of this chapter on Technology in Elections was developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation to ensure that the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

¹ 42 U.S.C. 15302

² 42 U.S.C. 15441

³ 42 U.S.C. 15481

⁴ 42 U.S.C. 15483

Jurisdictions are reminded to implement these voluntary practices only after reviewing State and local laws and regulations. Local election officials should contact their State election officials with questions about the legality of a specific policy or procedure in their State.

Technology in the Elections Office

New technology and innovative uses for existing technology have increased the efficiency of elections offices across the country. The basic tasks of election administration—voter registration, records and content management, chains of custody, and outreach—are all labor-intensive assignments that can be made simpler with technology in the elections office. This section will share good practices from across the country to illustrate potential solutions in all elections offices.

Voter Registration

Voter registration can potentially impact an election office's staff resources, and the time crunch for adding and updating registrations to the statewide voter registration database only tightens as the registration deadline nears before each election.

Much of the time involved in adding new registrations or updating existing records is consumed by data entry. Elections office staff must add the information from handwritten paper records into the statewide voter registration database so that the data can be compared for eligibility. To ease the burden of processing paper records, States and local jurisdictions are exploring automatic data transfer of registration files directly from other State databases—particularly the State's motor vehicle agency, which is consistently one of the largest sources of voter registration applications⁵ to the elections office.

Automatic data transfers can result in three major efficiencies: time, security, and accuracy. First, data transfers save time and can be more secure than using paper exclusively. Instead of waiting for paper records to be forwarded from the external offices that collect voter registration forms, the data can be sent electronically to the election office. Transfers can be accomplished in real-time or by batch transfer. Real-time transfers occur when the data file is sent immediately. The more common batch transfer occurs at a set time on a regular schedule. For instance, if the batch transfer occurs after the close of business, the registration data accumulate during the day into a 'suspense queue.' Then, in one transaction, all of the data in the 'suspense queue' is transferred to the elections office.

The second efficiency is in the need for reduced staff time for data entry. If the registration information is sent from the motor vehicle agency, the data are already entered into a usable, electronic form for inclusion in the statewide voter registration database. When the agencies electronically transferring the registration data can handle the initial data entry, elections office staff can focus on all of the other responsibilities that they have as the registration deadline and Election Day near.

The third efficiency of automatic data transfer is accuracy. The handwritten registration forms can be difficult for elections office staff, at times, to understand. Any data already delivered to the elections office in an electronic format may assist in improving the accuracy of the voter registration database and could reduce the number of elections office staff needed to manually reenter the data from handwritten forms.

⁵ Impact of the National Voter Registration Act on Federal Elections (various years) available at www.eac.gov.

The current trend in using technology to facilitate voter registration is through the Internet and online voter registration. As of the time of the writing of this chapter, four States (Arizona, Washington, Kansas, and Oregon) offer their citizens the opportunity to register to vote from their personal computers. Arizona first started offering online voter registration in 2003. By the 2008 election cycle, more than one-third of the total registrations received in the State were via the Internet. It represents the most popular way of registering to vote in that State.⁶

The online voter registration systems in the States that utilize such technology generally have the same requirements. The individual who is registering to vote must have a valid driver's license or non-driver's State-issued identification card in the State in which they are registering to vote. The digital signature provided by the registrant to the State is pulled into the statewide voter registration database from the State's motor vehicle agency and serves as the signature for matching purposes. In Arizona, the individual receives a confirmation number at the end of the registration process, which serves as proof that the transaction occurred.⁷ These online registration systems also allow already-registered voters the ability to update their addresses for voting.

INCLUDE IN A BOX:

A screenshot of the Arizona online registration public interface.

States and jurisdictions are already seeing cost savings due to reducing paper expenses and making the entire voter registration process more efficient. For example, Maricopa County, Arizona has noticed that while paper registrations cost at least \$0.83 to process, the average online registration costs about \$0.03.

The trend of States providing online voter registration is likely to continue. At least five States have mentioned publicly that they are working to implement the process and some of these States will offer online voter registration in time for the 2010 Federal election. However, other States interested in providing this option to voters might need to change State requirements for voter signatures on paper registration forms. State law must allow digital signatures in order for online voter registration systems to be feasible.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

Washington State's online voter registration

Individuals with Washington State driver's licenses or non-driver's State-issued identification cards can register to vote or change their addresses via a portal on the Washington Secretary of State's website.

On the "My Vote" portal, a registered voter can see upcoming elections, information about voter assistance offices, voter history, etc. The State maintains this database. The voter history and upcoming elections information is transferred from each county's voter database each night. If a voter changes his or her address at a motor vehicles agency office, the address is automatically changed in the statewide voter registration database as well. However, changes made to the voter record do not get transferred to the motor vehicles agency's database.

⁶ Impact of the National Voter Registration Act on Federal Elections 2007-2008, available at www.eac.gov.

⁷ http://www.azsos.gov/election/How_to_register.htm

After registering online, the registrant receives a confirmation screen explaining that he or she is not yet registered officially. It can take up to 14 days to verify eligibility for voter registration. The voter is directed to check the My Vote portal at that time to check on the progress.

Jurisdictions that cannot accept digital signatures for registration purposes can still use technology to improve their voter registration processes. All States offer voter registration information and forms online. However, except for the four States mentioned above, the voter must download the form and sign it before sending it back to the elections office for processing. The data still must be transcribed by an elections office staffer from the paper-based form into the statewide voter registration database. The State of Florida offers the downloadable registration form with a unique feature that benefits both election officials and the voters.

The State of Florida offers a fillable form online. That is, the individual inputs his or her information into the form electronically. The registration form must still be printed, signed, and returned to the elections office by the voter. However, the form completed online by the voter is encoded with a tracking number. Once the printed and signed form arrives at the elections office by mail, an elections office staff member can input the form's tracking number, which retrieves all of the electronic data input by the voter online. The elections office does not have to duplicate the data entry because all of the data that appear on the paper-based voter registration form match the electronic data. This technology allows Florida elections offices to cut down on data entry problems – including the time it takes to enter the data and any transcription mistakes that occur in the process.

Records Management

Federal and State laws set the requirements for records retention that election officials must follow. Some jurisdictions have commenced comprehensive programs to digitize all of their paper records and to link the files to specific voter files. In these programs, electronic scanners are used to capture and digitize voter signatures, paper correspondence and voter registration forms, which can then be linked to individual voter files for quick reference. This technology may be prohibitively expensive for many small jurisdictions.

The digitizing of paper records can help election officials to manage the piles of paper records they maintain for all of their voters. Fewer paper records require less warehouse space and digitized records can be saved on redundant memory as a backup in the event that the primary document is unavailable or destroyed.

Orleans Parish, Louisiana has been working since 2007 to digitize all of the paper records for which it has responsibility. The paper files are expensive to maintain and the filing systems in place currently are out of date. It can take considerable amounts of time for elections office staff to locate the correct paper file when it is needed. If the jurisdiction scans all incoming correspondence as it reaches the elections office, it will have a digital image of all records. These records can then be attached to individual voter files for quick reference as needed.

Digitizing the paper records is not a new concept, though. Election officials in Johnson County, Kansas have been digitizing all voter registration cards for years. Prior to scan technology, all of the paper-based voter cards needed to be alphabetized by hand. When trying to locate a specific voter card, elections office staff needed to hope that the card was filed properly the last

time it was used. In a jurisdiction with over 300,000 registered voters, some filing mistakes are inevitable. Once the voter cards were digitized and linked to specific voter files, all of the information was instantly accessible to all elections office staff as necessary. Additionally, the election official instituted new procedures to scan all new voter cards as they were received and to conduct data entry from the scanned image. The new procedures expedited the data entry process.

Content Management Systems (CMS)

Election officials manage employees and coordinate all activities in their elections offices. As with all government officials, any efficiencies that can be found in these management processes result in an improvement of services for all voters. The content management system, or CMS, helps the election official to manage all work flows in the elections office where inexpensive solutions can maximize staff effectiveness.

A CMS is a database that contains information on voter history, polling places, candidates, poll workers, provisional ballots, absentee ballots, early voting, etc. Jurisdictions vary on the amount of information that can be contained in the CMS. The system can be paper-based manual or computer-based software program designed to:

1. Allow elections office staff to contribute to and to share stored data;
2. Control the information each elections office staff member can view or edit;
3. Aid in easy storage and retrieval of data;
4. Reduce repetitive duplicate input;
5. Improve the ease of report writing; and,
6. Improve communication among office staff.

INCLUDE IN A BOX:

A screenshot of a software-based CMS. Need to find a jurisdiction willing to share the image.

A software-based CMS can be built in-house, purchased off the shelf, or contracted out to a vendor depending on the staff and monetary resources available in the jurisdiction. If a jurisdiction decides to contract out for a content management solution, most vendors offer a CMS built on a standard platform that is transferrable to other vendors if the election official switches vendors in the future.

Geographical Information System (GIS)

The GIS technology has been used for years by agencies like the U.S. Census Bureau to present information in a geographically-specific format. Election officials might have used the GIS technology in the past during the redistricting process. It can also be used to update the voter registration software street index and precinct information for different voters. There are other uses for GIS that election officials can leverage for increased efficiency in election administration.

For instance, the technology can be used to track from where voters are traveling to vote during early voting and/or in the case of vote centers on Election Day. This tracking capacity allows election officials to efficiently place early voting sites and vote centers in the jurisdiction. If voters are primarily using one centrally-located early voting site or vote center, the election official knows to spend the most resources on expanding that site over other sites. If the jurisdiction has a number of vote centers, it will be clear to the election official if there are regional disparities about where voters from across the jurisdiction are choosing to vote. Finally, the technology might help to consolidate polling places, if necessary.

Internet

There are many technological solutions available to election officials through the Internet. The Internet can be an inexpensive tool for election officials as they reach out to all voters, but especially when reaching out to younger voters who receive the majority of their information online. Internet efficiencies include the elections website, an eNewsletter, social media, audio podcasts, and web-based poll worker supplemental training.

The Internet is especially useful for voter outreach. Election officials might consider implementing an electronic newsletter as a method of disseminating election-related information. Additionally, appointing an elections office staff member the responsibility of coordinating social networking opportunities will put the elections office on the forefront of technology. However, when designing web-based information systems, election officials should keep in mind that many voters either do not have access to the web or are not skilled in using the web. Any information available via the web should also be available via other means. For additional information and suggestions see chapter 14 of the Election Management Guidelines, *Communicating with the Public*.

Technology in Voting

Jurisdictions are now increasingly using technology to improve the election administration during early and absentee voting and throughout Election Day. For example, election officials across the country use different types of technological solutions to aid in the labor intensive process of administering absentee voting by implementing absentee ballot tracking technology and ballot sorters. Similarly, the concerns about providing sufficient time for uniformed and overseas citizens to vote in elections has spurred technological advancements for UOCAVA voters, who are now allowed to receive election materials electronically and, in a growing number of States, are able to return voted materials electronically. To improve Election Day operations, election officials are using Geographical Information System (GIS), Global Positioning System (GPS), and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chip technologies. Finally, this section will discuss electronic poll books used in jurisdictions nationwide.

Technology in Absentee Ballots

Some States and individual jurisdictions have begun tracking absentee ballots electronically as they travel throughout the process. The barcode on the absentee ballot is scanned at various points during its life cycle, which creates a record of where the absentee ballot has been. For additional information and suggestions about absentee voting see chapter 7—Absentee Ballots—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

This tracking technology yields at least two benefits. First, the election official is able to provide a much more accurate picture for the voter who calls to inquire about the status of his or her absentee ballot. The election official using even the most basic absentee ballot tracking technology will likely know exactly when the ballot was mailed and returned to the elections office much more quickly than in the past. More advanced tracking solutions can include barcode scans throughout the U.S. Postal System, which allows the election official to know when the ballot was received by the voter and when it was mailed back as well. Absentee ballot tracking solutions can be built in-house or contracted out to a vendor.

Absentee ballot tracking also provides benefits for the voter. Most of the absentee ballot tracking solutions include an interface with the jurisdiction's public portal, which allows the voter to search for the status of his or her own absentee ballot. For example, in Virginia a voter can use the Virginia Election and Registration Information System (VERIS) to find answers to many questions including where is the polling place, which elections are on the ballot, what is the status of a provisional ballot, and what is the status of the absentee ballot.

Other technological solutions for absentee voting election administration can be found in the use of ballot sorting machines as well as signature match for election eligibility verification. While these solutions include high up-front costs, they might be most useful to jurisdictions with high rates of absentee voting by mail or are considering moving exclusively to vote by mail elections.

Spokane, Washington uses ballot sorters to group the 300-450 ballot styles per election for easier counting. Spokane, Washington has 260,000 registered voters. In 2002, about a quarter of the registered voters chose absentee voting by which to cast their ballots. Two years later, the percentage was up to about half of all voters and, today, all elections are conducted exclusively by mail.

The jurisdiction conducts in-house all of the sorting of returned ballots and signature verification. In Spokane, the ballot sorter takes a picture of each absentee ballot return envelope as it is processed through the machine to be grouped into its appropriate ballot style for counting. There are two purposes for this action. First, the returned ballot is recorded as returned by the voter or is flagged for further review if the voter had previously returned a ballot to the elections office. Second, the ballot groupings provide for expediting counting of the many ballot styles.

All vote by mail systems rely on a signature match to the voter's signature on file for identification purposes. In Spokane, the image of the signature on the return envelope is uploaded to a server and a team of elections office staff reviews the signatures for election eligibility. The initial reviewer can accept the signature as proof of identification for election eligibility or flag it for further inspection. The second review is done by a more experienced signature reviewer. If the second reviewer cannot make a determination or chooses to reject the ballot, a team looks at the original paper-based ballot to make a determination about the signature match and, thus, the ballot's eligibility. All signature reviewers are trained by the State police and many have been conducting signature matches for the jurisdiction for many cycles. The election official can review each of the reviewers' records for anomalies (such as inordinately high rejection or acceptance rates) to ensure that they are doing their jobs correctly.

If there is a problem with the signature match, the voter has until 14 days after the election to provide supporting documentation. Certification of the election occurs 21 days after Election Day.

Technology in UOCAVA Voting

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986 ensures the rights of absent Uniformed Services voters and overseas voters to register to vote and to cast absentee ballots for Federal offices. Recent updates to the act require jurisdictions to send ballots to UOCAVA voters at least 45 days before Election Day in order to afford the UOCAVA voter sufficient time to return his or her voted ballot.

States are going even further than providing a 45-day window for voting, though. Through the use of electronic transmission options and an overseas kiosk system used by a jurisdiction during the 2008 Presidential election, UOCAVA voters have seen a marked improvement in their ability to successfully cast a ballot from abroad and have it counted. For additional information and suggestions about absentee voting see chapter 8—Uniformed and Overseas Citizens—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) of the Department of Defense⁸ has Federal responsibility for UOCAVA voting. The agency has produced a number of step-by-step solutions to aid UOCAVA voters. When a voter first enters the FVAP website, he or she is asked which type of UOCAVA voter they are since State laws may differ slightly for military and citizen UOCAVA voters. Selecting the appropriate option leads the voter to several more options for completing a registration and ballot request form (also known as the Federal Post Card Application or FPCA), completing a back-up ballot (also called the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot or FWAB), and information about where to send election materials. The website provides State-specific instructions for completing these Federal forms.

Election officials can use some information included on the FPCA and FWAB to improve the voter experience for UOCAVA voters. Box “J” of the FPCA and FWAB are areas in which the voter can provide an e-mail address to the election official. Election officials can use these electronic addresses to establish an e-mail connection with UOCAVA voters. Some election officials attempt to contact UOCAVA voters from previous cycles in order to update their address at which they might receive election materials and so that the election official does not send a ballot to an incorrect address.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Election officials can use e-mail addresses to send out election information to UOCAVA voters such as the election calendar, sample ballots, and the voting materials.

States have implemented different ways to accomplish electronic transmission of voting materials. It has been common for years to provide election materials and even to receive them back from voters via fax transmission. In recent years, States have been more willing to accept e-mail transmission of unvoted and returned, voted materials. Arizona provides electronic transmission of election materials in an innovative way.

Arizona uses a secure, online system of uploads and downloads of voting materials and blank ballots to a government server to ensure the security and confidentiality of the ballot. The State elected not to receive voted materials via e-mails due to its own security concerns. For UOCAVA voters in Arizona, when they register to vote, they are provided with a username and password to log on to Arizona’s Secure Ballot Upload system. To participate in the secure ballot upload system each voter must first obtain the unique username and password. Arizona’s UOCAVA voters can request a ballot via mail, fax, e-mail, or secure ballot upload and download.

⁸ www.fvap.gov

The exciting innovation is in the options for returning the ballot. Once a ballot is completed, the UOCAVA voter may scan it and upload it to the secure upload system using his or her unique username and password. This action can be done up until the time that the polls close on Election Day, which gives the voter as much time as possible to cast a ballot.

INCLUDE IN AN INSET BOX:

A screenshot of the Operation BRAVO homepage

Caption: Visit the Operation BRAVO website to learn more about the 2008 Okaloosa Distance Balloting project and other pilot projects.

Election Day Operations

Election officials are responsible for all activities that occur on Election Day. The frenetic pace of Election Day can be a challenge, but technology exists to ease this burden on elections office staff while building needed chains of custody for review, if necessary. The elections office in Long Beach, California is at the forefront of using technology to improve Election Day operations with its use of RFID chips, GPS, and GIS to improve election administration.

Radio-frequency identification (RFID) chips

Election officials have long used checklists to track outgoing supplies on Election Day and the incoming supplies on Election Day after the polls close. However, especially when it comes to the after poll closing return of supplies, tracking equipment back from the polling place to the elections office (or other warehouse) can be a daunting task. Elections office staff and poll workers are exhausted after a long day, and mistakes can be made that would hold up the quick election night tallies on which the media relies. Moreover, strong chain of custody documentation can prove important particularly in the event of an election contest.

The elections office in Long Beach, CA uses RFID technology to replace equipment checklists. First, the elections office built a special tunnel with RFID readers through which all equipment boxes pass both during the outgoing and incoming processes. A unique RFID chip is placed into every equipment box. The RFID readers recognize the chip in the equipment boxes, which are pre-assigned to each precinct, and electronically record the outgoing and incoming times. This technology makes it easier for election officials to know which precincts have not yet returned their materials on election night and to address the problem.

Global Positioning System (GPS)

Many jurisdictions use either vendors or other governmental agencies to deploy the voting equipment prior to Election Day and to retrieve the voting systems from the polling places after Election Day. The security of the voting technology is of great concern, and election officials take significant steps to secure the equipment when it is in their warehouses. GPS technology allows them to maintain the chain of custody on the voting systems after they leave the warehouse.

GPS technology can be used to track drivers as they deliver equipment and supplies to the polling places or transport election results from the precincts to the central office. In Long Beach, CA, the truck drivers are required to wear the GPS tracking unit around their necks while they are transporting the voting equipment or election results. This tracking information allows the election official to document the time at which the voting technology left the central warehouse, when it arrived at the polls, and when it was returned to the central warehouse. Since drivers are given set directions to follow, the GPS technology alerts the elections office to any deviation in the path from one point to another. All of the chain of custody information can be recorded and maintained as part of any election audit material.

Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

A few jurisdictions on the cutting edge of technology track the opening and closing of the polls through GIS on Election Day. For example, in Long Beach, California, each precinct chief poll worker dials into a central call center after the polling place has opened on Election Day. He or she provides the central office with a unique code for the polling place and the data is entered into the GIS database. At the central elections office on Election Day, a large board of the entire jurisdiction lights up in green as the unique codes are entered. If the code is not entered into the system, the GIS system alerts the jurisdiction's election official to which polls are having difficulties and are not yet open on Election Day, which allows elections office staff to take remedial action to fix the problem as soon as possible.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

TIP: Some phone companies provide wireless telephone service to election offices for their polling places at reduced costs. Election officials should check with their local providers. This program can save an election official money on long-term phone contracts.

Electronic Poll Books

Many voters are accustomed to the large, paper-based voter rolls at the polls on Election Day. In some States, voters sign the voter rolls during check-in as part of the process. However, different variations of electronic poll books are becoming more common. According to the EAC's 2008 Election Administration and Voting Survey Report, electronic poll books are in use in some capacity in 25 States.

The electronic poll books in use across the country include some or all of the following: complete access to the statewide voter registration database, jurisdiction registration lists, ability to credit a voter for having casted a ballot, and identification card swipe capacity for easy sign-in.

Depending on the needs of the jurisdiction, electronic poll books can include the full statewide voter registration database or just the jurisdiction-specific information. While the statewide database would help poll workers to direct a voter in the wrong precinct to the correct precinct assuming he or she is registered in the State, accessing the entire voter registration database file will take more time than just searching the jurisdiction's list. Most poll books have the ability to search the jurisdiction's voter registration list first and only to search the statewide voter registration database if the voter is not registered in the local jurisdiction.

Some electronic poll books include peripherals with the capability to swipe a driver's license, State-issued non-driver's identification card or coded voter registration card to facilitate the check-in process. The swipe technology would ensure that the correct voter is marked as having signed-in and eliminate the common problem of crediting someone else with the same or similar name for voting by mistake.

Voting Systems

The EAC has responsibility for testing and certifying election systems at the Federal level. HAVA mandates that EAC accredit voting system test laboratories and certify voting equipment, marking the first time the Federal government has offered these services to the States. Participation by States in EAC's certification program is voluntary. The EAC's full accreditation and certification program became effective in January 2007.

The EAC published Voluntary Voting System Guidelines for testing and certifying voting systems and is in the process of issuing updated guidelines. A complete copy of the current guidelines, a list of certified voting systems, and additional information about the EAC's testing and certification program is available at www.eac.gov.

Jurisdictions should check with their States' requirements for new voting systems. Most States require Federal certification and/or State certification. State-level tests generally are designed to assure that the voting system complies with State laws and regulations. The State election office can provide local jurisdictions with a list of voting systems that are certified for use in the State.

In addition to Federal and State certification requirements, jurisdictions should conduct acceptance testing on newly acquired voting systems and components. An acceptance test is defined as a test that is performed on an individual unit of a voting system in order to verify that the unit is physically, electronically, mechanically, and functionally correct. Correct, in this sense, means that the unit is identical in every respect to the system certified for use in the jurisdiction, including software and firmware to the unit that was originally purchased.

Acceptance testing provides election officials with an assurance that the voting system is functioning correctly, that the voting system complies with the conditions of the product acquisition document, and that the voting system is correctly configured for use in an election. For a complete description of acceptance testing see chapter 4—Acceptance Testing—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

Finally, election officials may consider pursuing partnerships with local colleges and universities to conduct testing on their voting systems. Local computer experts can help to ensure that the acceptance testing proves that the jurisdiction is receiving everything for which it paid. For a complete description of building partnerships with colleges and universities see chapter 12—Building Community Partnerships—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

Cost and Replacement

All technology has a defined lifespan. The cost of new technology, software upgrades, maintenance, storage, and replacement necessitates constant planning on the part of the elections office. It can be especially important to discuss the long-term plans with the jurisdiction's budget authority, as voting systems will not last forever.

Some election officials have advocated for the creation of a Standard Technology Operation Procedure manual, or a STOP manual. The STOP manual documents every technological

aspect of the elections process for continuity. Some areas that the STOP manual might cover include:

- How does the office technology interact on the network?
- How are polling places set up?
- What is in the server?

The STOP manual includes the serial numbers and expected life spans of all pieces of technology in the jurisdiction. It can also include information about when and where the technology was purchased and for how much.

The STOP manual can also include the processes for using the technology. For example, the manual can contain flow charts documenting ballot layout, processing provisional ballots, vote by mail, poll worker training, etc. The purpose of the STOP manual is to document every technical aspect of the elections process to ensure the continuity of operations, which is important considering that there is high turnover in the staff of elections offices.

Conclusion

As noted in this chapter, advances in technology can yield benefits for both election officials and for voters. However, it is important to consider all voters in the jurisdiction.

When implementing new, cost-effective solutions, it is possible that not every voter will have access. For example, using the Internet for voter outreach or for online voter registration is a step toward accommodating technologically-advanced voters. However, for the voters without access to the Internet, these “advances” are invisible. Election officials are reminded to consider these less technologically-advanced voters any time the elections office seeks efficiencies through technology.

CHAPTER

ELECTIONS OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

The elections office is often the smallest agency in local government—until Election Day—when it can become the largest. The public might perceive that election officials “only work on one day of the year, on Election Day.” However, managing an elections office is a full-time job with some of the most complex responsibilities expected of a public servant. The most efficient elections offices produce the most successfully administered elections.

When not in “election mode,” an election office handles tasks similar to other governmental agencies. Those tasks include data entry, processing incoming and outgoing mail, responding to telephone and in-person requests for information, accounting/payroll duties, staff recruitment and training, etc. As Election Day nears and the workload increases, though, there is not always a corresponding increase in the amount of available resources to complete all of the work.

In many “elections offices,” the administration of elections is just one of the offices' many responsibilities and duties. Many election officials are also the clerk, recorder, auditor, and/or treasurer of their jurisdictions. These multi-function “elections” offices face additional burdens because they tend to exist in very small jurisdictions with few full-time staff members and tight budgets. These small jurisdictions still must meet all Federal, State and local requirements for conducting an election.

Federal and State laws and local policies govern how elections are conducted. A change in these laws may have a significant impact on the processes and resources available to manage an election. The timing of any change in a law can also create additional challenges in properly administering an election. For example, as discussed in the section on creating an election calendar, election officials begin planning for elections many months in advance. If laws change during that election calendar, it can be daunting to meet new mandates in time for the immovable deadline that Election Day represents.

The logistics of managing internal office processes, facilities and equipment management, staffing, budgeting, collecting of statistical data, and administering an election are unique in public administration. Moreover, the programmatic expectations and budget vary from year to year based on the number of elections in the jurisdiction and can be difficult to explain to budget authorities seeking to reduce costs. This chapter on *Elections Office Administration* aims to help elections officials to implement the most efficient processes for managing an elections office.

The content of this chapter on Elections Office Administration was developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation to ensure that the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

Jurisdictions are reminded to implement these voluntary practices only after reviewing State and local laws and regulations. Local election officials should contact their State election officials with questions about the legality of a specific policy or procedure in their State.

Managing Internal Processes

Election officials must deal with some of the same responsibilities as public servants in other government agencies. All government entities should operate under clear and detailed policies

and procedures to ensure the accuracy and uniformity of service. Similarly, there should be clearly written policies and procedures for each division of the elections office. Election officials also may be responsible for the procurement schedules and records retention for the elections office. Election officials also have the unique responsibility of preparing for an election. The following sections discuss some considerations for election officials as they complete these tasks in their elections offices.

Policies and Procedures

Election officials should strive to develop some type of “Quality Management System” (QMS) that includes written policies and procedures for all aspects of elections. These policies and procedures might include maintenance plans, testing, and validation to ensure that the entire office staff and the public understand responsibilities and expectations for various different situations. The QMS ensures that all tasks are completed in the same manner by each staff member. This uniformity in internal processes is important so that every voter has the same experience when dealing with the elections office.

The *Election Management Guidelines* and *Quick Start Management Guides* include suggestions for policies and procedures for many different aspects of election administration. These topic areas include absentee voting, polling place operations, poll worker recruitment, training and assignments, early voting and vote center operations; canvassing and certifying election results, conducting a recount, communication with the public, provisional ballots, etc. All *Election Management Guidelines* chapters and *Quick Start Management Guides* are available at www.eac.gov.

A complete QMS will include and benefit from work flow diagrams based on the written policies and procedures. These diagrams document the processes for all internal and external activities. Some election officials prefer to engage the staff in developing these diagrams and to allow staff members from one division to review proposed work flows for staff members of another division. This opportunity allows all staff members to understand how their work impacts the entire organization’s mission and provides a chance for staff to work together to achieve efficiencies in programmatic responsibilities.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Election officials can look for duplication of work processes and encourage staff to look for and identify ways that they can do their work more efficiently.

One of the key reasons to create detailed policies and procedures is for succession planning. In many jurisdictions, election officials are elected by the public and the field, as a whole, experiences a high turnover in staff. It is unnecessary for an elections office to encounter a loss of all institutional memory when an experienced staff member leaves the employment of the elections office. Election officials can ensure that there are clear job descriptions and chains of command in place to weather any temporary loss in personnel. Cross training staff, the benefits of which will be discussed in the “Staffing” section of this chapter, in multiple areas of election administration helps to mitigate the harm that the departure of an experienced staff member might cause.

Procurement and Retention Schedules

As with all other public administrators, election officials must acquire, maintain, replace, and dispose of various different pieces of technology and paper or electronic records. Federal,⁹ State, and local laws govern the procurement, retention, and disposal processes with which the elections office must comply. Election officials might consider including the procurement and retention schedules into their policies and procedures so that all elections office staff understand the process and any responsibility they have to complete the tasks.

Election officials are often responsible for the acquisition and replacement of technology used in the elections office and for voting. No piece of technology lasts forever. Computers and voting systems constitute very large budget outlays for which the elections office must prepare in advance.

The Standard Technology Operation Procedure (STOP) manual, discussed in more detail in the *Technology in Elections* chapter, outlines how to plan for an election office's technological needs and capacity for the future. The purpose of the STOP manual is to document each technological aspect of the elections administration process for continuity.

Election officials also might review Federal and State records retention laws for election-related materials. If the jurisdiction does not have a written records retention schedule, the election official might consider establishing one for the elections office.

The retention schedule can include a few different pieces of information including each record series, type of record (i.e. inactive, permanent or archival), storage location, and date to be destroyed, if applicable. The election materials to be kept include all ballots and electronic media used during an election.

Disposal of Records

Election materials can require a lot of space in a warehouse. Since election officials likely have to store all of their voting systems, records, and equipment in one place, the proper disposal of election materials can be as important as the requirement to store them. For example, after an election, officials are likely to need space to store those materials used most recently.

Appropriate disposal of records at the completion of their retention schedules can free up much needed warehouse space for the more recently used election materials. Disposal of records can be handled in-house, by another government agency in the jurisdiction, or by a third-party.

Documenting disposal is important. The chain of custody of a ballot ends with the disposal of the ballot after it has reached the end of the records retention schedule. Just as election officials have security procedures during the printing, storing, distribution, retrieval, and archiving ballots, election officials will benefit from a record of disposal clearly noting that the election material was destroyed pursuant to the records retention schedule. Whether the elections office staff is responsible for the disposal of materials or if it is being done by another entity, there should be a record of the disposal as having taken place.

There are different options for destroying records per the records retention schedule. The elections office in Johnson County, Kansas uses a third-party shredding company, which conducts all of the shredding at the elections office so that the ballots do not need to be transported off-site and outside the control of elections office staff. The elections office in Dallas, Texas stores all archived election materials at a county warehouse. When the election materials near the end of the retention schedule, county officials notify the elections office staff about the impending end of the retention schedule. The elections office generally sends a staff member to observe the destruction. The elections office in Los Angeles, California incinerates the election

⁹ 42 U.S.C. § 1974

materials. The one thing all of the jurisdictions have in common, though, is that they are certain to document the disposal of election materials.

Election officials agree that consistency is the key to the disposal of records. Unless there is a need to retain records for longer than the time specified in the retention schedule, the disposal of records should not be delayed beyond the date required by the retention schedule. Selectively adhering to the retention schedule might give rise to the appearance of impropriety. For example, questions may arise including why ballots were retained from one election longer than the ballots from a different election?

Notwithstanding Federal and State laws on records retention for election materials, election officials should keep financial records relating to election administration for longer periods, if possible, to aid in documenting maintenance of effort (MOE) and for audit purposes.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Election officials should follow the records retention exactly (unless there is an ongoing legal dispute) and dispose of the documents and electronic media as outlined in law or in the jurisdiction's policies and procedures document.

Preparing for an Election

Election officials retain all of the responsibilities of effectively managing a government agency on top of the unique task of coordinating a jurisdiction-wide event with many moving parts— Election Day. While many government agencies can plan activities year on year, elections offices are tied more to a four-year cycle of planning while still being prepared to administer an expected, special election with little notice.

The responsibilities and needs of the elections office vary from year to year based on several factors, many of which are outside the control of election officials. For example, an elections office may administer three elections one year and only one election the following year. Special elections might occur with little warning and time for preparation. To handle this varying schedule of elections, most elections offices use an election calendar.

The Election Calendar

Each election has a beginning project date and an end date. These dates represent the beginning of the election cycle through the certification of results. The election calendar is similar to any project management timeline and will help election officials to keep track of important tasks. Some examples of events and tasks that might appear in an elections calendar include the securing of polling places, proofing and printing ballots, mailing out absentee ballots, opening early voting locations, hiring and training poll workers, preparation and distribution of supplies, conducting the canvass of votes and certifying the election. Certainly, elections offices should include many other detailed tasks and events to their election calendars as warranted.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

Screenshot of Colorado's 2009 Election Calendar

<http://www.elections.colorado.gov/Content/Documents/Election%20Calendar/2009%20Election%20Calendar.pdf>

Caption: This 2009 Election Calendar released by the Colorado Secretary of State's office includes both start and end dates for all tasks. The calendar includes a citation to State code to justify the tasks on the calendar.

Many election calendars include citations to State code next to each task that appears in the calendar. The purpose for citing to State code is to justify the reason for performing an activity at a given time, such as the first and last days on which vote-by-mail or absentee ballots can be received in the elections office.

Many election tasks cannot be started until a preceding task is complete. The contingent tasks might be clearly noted in the election calendar. For example, the absentee ballots cannot be mailed to voters until the ballot design, printing, and delivery of the unvoted absentee ballots occurs. Election officials might consider assigning a key staff member to monitor the progress of calendar events to ensure that critical tasks do not fall behind schedule and affect the elections office's ability to complete contingent tasks.

The internal office election calendar can include notations of specific staff member responsibilities. Election officials might consider assigning both primary and secondary responsibilities to staffers. In the event that the staff member with primary responsibility cannot complete the given task, a second staff member can ensure that key milestones are met. This redundancy helps to ensure that all events on the calendar are completed in a timely manner.

Project Management

Election officials use different processes to track staff's completion of deliverables. For example, some elections offices automate staff responsibilities. When an employee comes into the elections office in the morning, the project management software that the office uses provides a list of tasks past due, due, and due in the near future. This list helps to keep staff on time with meeting key deliverables. The critical events are highlighted and the calendar can be printed out for each individual's tasks, supervisor's tasks, and manager's responsibilities. If tasks are not signed off on time, supervisors are notified until—eventually—the chief election official is notified.

Election project management becomes more intense during the weeks approaching the start of early voting and Election Day. Full-time staff members are often working long hours in order to accomplish required tasks. Many jurisdictions use statistical data on a daily basis to monitor workflow, to review the number of absentee and early voters, and to respond to staff and voter needs. Key milestones may translate into a need for additional part-time employees. These employees are used to perform data entry, answer the phones, manage incoming and outgoing absentee ballots, etc.

Finally, all election preparation should include contingencies in the event of a natural disaster or other disruption to election activities. Election officials can consider responses to conceivable scenarios that might occur during the election in order to be prepared well ahead of time. Conceivable challenges include a shortage of ballots at the polls, polling places that are inaccessible on Election Day, poll workers who fail to arrive on time, power failures, road closures, and, sudden changes in weather conditions. For a complete description of contingency planning, see chapter 11—Contingency Planning and Change Management—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

Staffing

Elections offices are established in different ways dependent on State law. In some jurisdictions, elections offices have two bipartisan directors and a full-time nonpartisan staff. Other elections offices have a full-time nonpartisan staff that is subject to an appointed or elected electoral board. In any configuration, election officials will need to hire, train, manage, and retain a motivated staff in order to successfully administer elections.

Recruiting Staff

Working in elections administration means working a lot of hours, many of which can occur outside the normal government operating hours. Election officials point out four realities of working in an elections office about which potential hires might be made aware:

- (1) No vacations from October-December
- (2) Lots of standing
- (3) Moving equipment
- (4) Long hours and overtime

Job descriptions can note these sometimes unexpected tasks so that potential employees have an accurate picture of what working at an elections office entails.

Managing Staff

The first step to managing a motivated staff is to have a common goal. Together with the staff, an election official might consider developing a Mission Statement, staff competencies, and a list of core values for employees. Some examples include:

- Establishment of initiatives that “[s]eek better ways to provide services to encourage all eligible residents to exercise their right to vote. Conduct elections in a fair, accurate and efficient manner. Maintain a continuous professional level of service to the public. Develop new techniques to improve outreach services that acknowledge the diversity of Alameda County.” Source, Alameda County, California Registrar of Voters, Mission Statement
- “Serving the public by administering the election process and promoting voter participation.” Source: Johnson County, Kansas Election Office, Mission Statement
- Examples of staff competencies: Integrity, Honesty, and Impartiality; Teamwork and Cooperation; Reliability and Commitment; Attention to Detail and Responsibility; Flexibility; Stress Tolerance and Stamina; Change and Create; Communications and Public Relations; Election Management.
- Examples of core values: Open Communication, Honest Feedback, Challenging the Process, Commitment to Team Work, Delegation, Customer Focus, and Recognition.

Second, each full-time position on the elections office staff can have an individual functional statement. Some election officials discuss the functional statement that both the supervisor and employee sign. A functional statement is similar to a job description; however, it provides a

detailed listing of specific job duties required for the position. The functional statement may give an overview of the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and responsibilities expected for an employee to be successful. The knowledge section can include an understanding of various State and Federal election laws, local laws and policies, data entry software, and professional practices. The skills and abilities section might include the capacities to work well with others and to provide superior customer service to the voting public. The duties section would relate to the specific requirements of the job such as inputting registration information, answering phones, maintaining the voting systems, etc.

An example functional statement for the position of “election assistant” used in Sacramento, California appears on the following pages.

DRAFT



COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO VOTER REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

FUNCTIONAL STATEMENT

(Rev. 1/2005)

Section: Voter Services --Absentee

Position Title: Election Assistant

Employee currently employed in this position: Vacant

Under the direction of: Election Supervisor--Absentee

Position Overview: Specialized assistance with all aspects of absentee voting.

Knowledge of:

- Office practices and procedures
- Basis provisions of the California Election Code, NVRA, California and other Federal laws, codes and regulations that govern the elections process, the registration of voters, absentee voting, and/or relating to voter registration, and the administration of elections
- Data entry equipment and applications used in voter registration and elections
- Elementary mathematics
- Election Calendars
- Completing nomination papers
- Research of voting records
- Campaign disclosure
- Computer skills: Excel and Word or other computer programs to create letters and forms
- DFM software and systems to process absentee voters, enter and maintain voter records, scan affidavits and other related documents, and verify signatures on nomination documents.

Ability to:

- Read, understand, explain and apply basic provisions of various California codes and regulations relating to the administration of elections, and registration of voters
- File documents rapidly and accurately
- Review and compare documents for completeness and accuracy
- Work well with others
- Communicate effectively orally and in writing
- Speak English at a level for effective job performance
- Disassemble, inspect, repair and reassemble voting equipment
- Operate office equipment such as scanner, personal computer, microfiche readers, copier fax, inserter, folder, paper cutter, letter opener, laser printers, scanners and optical disk retrieval/storage systems

Duties:

1. Process Absentee applications, from the mail or at the front counter.
2. Prepare ballot packages for mailing.
3. Verify signatures on return absentee envelopes and process ballots for counting.
4. Sort incoming mail for processing.
5. Set up ballot room
6. Process 60-day, Military, Overseas, Permanent, Mail Ballot, New Citizens, and New Resident voters.
7. Answer phone inquires from internal and external customers
8. Assist in the Absentee Canvass including the accounting of used ballots, the destruction of unused ballots, and packing election material for storage and destruction,
9. Process affidavits of registration, cancel and correct voter records as required by the election code.
10. Correspond with voters to obtain information regarding voter registration and the absentee process.
11. Assist in the design and development of new processes and update procedures when laws change or changes in technology occur.
12. Assist with initiative, referendum, recall and nomination petitions.
13. Assist in the supervision of election night activities.
14. Train and supervise temporary employees. Monitor and check timesheets for accuracy and completeness.
15. Supervise a night shift when workload requires.
16. Proof election related materials and all correspondence
17. Maintain an accurate inventory and order sufficient quantities of forms, affidavits, envelopes and other items and equipment as needed.
18. Maintain historical election data.
19. Keep accurate records to ensure the timely destruction of election related materials
20. Process the various reports generated during the absentee and election process.
21. Coordinate and participate in voter outreach activities as needed.
22. Know the requirements for processing a Fail-Safe voter.
23. Assist with the canvass including Provisional Ballots and processing the yes/no votes from the Roster Book
24. Help in other sections when required.
25. Be able to work well with others and independently.
26. Other duties as assigned

Signed: _____

Employee's Signature

Date

Signed: _____

Supervisor's Signature

Date

Finally, because of limited staff resources, the best way to maximize the output of the staff in the elections office is to encourage staff to learn all of the different aspects of managing an election. The election official might develop an office organizational chart to distribute to all employees, which outlines the chain of command in the office. This chart helps employees to see which employee has responsibility for different areas of administering elections and where their help might be most appreciated.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

Include, high resolution example of an elections office organizational chart

Election officials point out that there are usually limited opportunities for the promotion of full-time employees in the elections office, which is especially the case in smaller elections offices. However, election officials can provide ongoing training opportunities and cross training of all staff members so that each employee becomes familiar with the process for providing voting access to the public. Employees can be empowered to think outside of the box in order to develop solutions to challenges caused by the limited resources elections offices receive.

Part-time Employees

As Election Day approaches, the local elections office often becomes the largest governmental department in the jurisdiction. There will be part-time employees and many poll workers to recruit, train, and manage.

Some election officials use “temp” agencies to fill part-time job slots. These part-time employees generally perform data entry tasks associated with voter registration, process absentee ballots, and answer the voter information hotline as Election Days nears. The benefits of using a “temp” agency to hire part-time staff include reduced training costs, especially if the same temp employees are repeatedly assigned to the elections office.

There is another potential pool of part-time employees that election officials may want to consider. If the elections office can implement a flexible work schedule—for example, not requiring a full eight hours of work on a given day—they may be able to hire stay-at-home parents. These potential employees enjoy the ability to work for a few hours during the day while still being able to drop-off and pick-up children at school. Election officials noted that the timing of elections often in the Fall near the beginning of the holiday season usually means that potential employees are looking to make some extra money and are very willing to work at the elections office.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Stay at home mothers and fathers could come to work after the children are in school and leave early to pick their children up after school.

Facilities and Equipment Management

Election officials are generally responsible for the facilities that house their operations. Depending on the jurisdiction, that responsibility might include the central (and perhaps satellite) elections office, a warehouse for voting equipment, and numerous polling places on Election Day. At these facilities, the elections office may be responsible for contracting for janitorial services, providing for security of buildings, employees and equipment, managing utilities, and the planning for continuity of operations.

Election officials might consider developing diagrams, which detail the location of all equipment and material in each facility under their control. Additional documentation can be prepared to show the security protocols are in place to protect voting systems and ballots (voted and unvoted) and any other equipment. In the case of election technology, election officials can indicate which areas of the buildings they manage are climate-controlled, thus, suitable for the storage of some voting systems.

Election officials can also create additional diagrams that outline the different potential uses of a single room within a facility. These diagrams might include the rooms in various staging configurations involved in managing an election. For example, areas used to conduct poll worker training sessions might double as rooms used during the preparation of absentee ballots, staging of election equipment, or canvassing of an election. The diagram can show the most efficient set-up for the room in each configuration so that staff understands how to organize the area.

Elections office staff might review the diagrams after each election cycle to make modifications, as needed. It is helpful to diagram the following facilities and to update them to achieve the most efficient configurations:

- Early voting locations – setup of equipment, laptops, check-in areas, voter staging areas, secure voting area, entrance and exit, location of all signs, etc.
- Poll worker supply check out and election night check-in areas.
- Staging area for recounts, canvassing, research or provisional ballots, etc., including the work flow diagram for each task.
- Outgoing and incoming mail ballot processing areas.
- Each polling place within the jurisdiction – create a diagram for each location indicating where to set up the voter check-in tables and voting equipment.

Election officials can track equipment and supplies to maintain chain of custody in many ways. First, election officials can use paper based checklists. These checklists are used when materials are moved from the elections office or warehouse to a polling place, for instance. Another common way of maintaining equipment is through barcode scanning. Similar to using paper-based checklists, each piece of equipment has a barcode that is scanned as it leaves the elections office or warehouse and when it is returned. There are even newer, technology-based systems to maintain the chain of custody and tracking over equipment and supplies. For a complete description of these new technologies, including using GPS and RFID chips, see chapter XXX—Technology in Elections—of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

Collection of Statistical Data and Budgeting

Many election officials view their budgets as based on a four-year election cycle. The four-year cycle is used because elections for almost all offices happen at least once (regularly) in that period. While most governmental agency budgets are compared year-to-year, election officials stress the importance of comparing similar election years. For example, the budget for a

Presidential election year should be compared to the previous Presidential election year. Election officials can use statistical data about voter turnout and elections office performance in the preparation for budgeting.

Statistical Data

Statistics can be important for planning, budgeting, and reporting requirements. They provide the ability for election offices to quantify the quality of service provided, evaluate internal accountability, and clarify long term goals and objectives. Computer systems and software provide an easy way to collect statistics.

Data from past election cycles provide a good first step in developing pre-election plans for future elections. If they have flexibility in this area, election officials can use past turnout from similar elections to make projections for ballot orders, number of poll workers, number of polling places, number of voting machines, voter registration, early voting and Election Day voters, etc. However, some States require jurisdictions to print a certain number of ballots or to have a certain number of poll workers regardless of past turnout or type of election. For example, the State of Texas has a formula for determining how many early voting sites can be open for early voting. Election officials can check with the State elections office to determine what, if any, requirements might pertain to their jurisdictions.

Still, election officials may be expected to provide estimated costs to the jurisdiction's budget authority before receiving their appropriations. Election officials can use statistics to determine costs. Such statistics include the cost per vote cast, cost per polling place, cost per absentee/mail ballot voter, cost for poll worker recruitment and other training costs.

Budgeting

There are many factors that affect the preparation of a budget. These factors include the amount of control an election official has over his or her budget, the funding sources, and legislation.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Consider publishing the performance measures in budget requests, media packets and annual reports.

Some election officials receive their elections office's budget as an appropriation from the jurisdiction's budget authority. The money comes from the general fund or some activity outside the control of the elections office. However, some elections offices are designed to fund the activities they administer. For example, in California, elections officials are also the clerk and recorder for the jurisdiction. In the past, the fees generated by the recorder functions of the office provided sufficient funding to absorb the costs of special elections and new election administration mandates passed by the California legislature or Congress.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

Screenshot of one page of the Election Center's Cost of Elections checklist.

Another funding source for elections offices is through usage fees. The elections office in Dallas, Texas, for example, provides smaller jurisdictions with election administration services. The fees include voting system rentals, mail ballot readers, and various computer programming. The jurisdiction can also charge the public for voter lists and other requests for information. The Dallas County price list from 2008 appears below.

Dallas County Elections Department 2008 Price Listing

(Converting to an accessible format)

Finally, election officials might consider making contingency funding plans for their budgets. Jurisdictions differ about how to budget for potential special elections or recounts. Some elections offices include a contingency in their budget requests, but other jurisdictions have unexpected events covered by a separate fund or the jurisdiction's general fund. In Sacramento, California, the county budget authority reserves money in a county-wide contingency fund that the elections office can use in the event of a special election or recount.

Conclusion

Many elections offices conduct jurisdiction-wide events with limited resources. Election officials and their staffs have many responsibilities that are unique to public administration. However, by relying on good management of policies and procedures, forward-thinking planning through election calendars, smart hiring and cross training of staff, and innovative use of statistics and budgeting, election officials can provide successfully administered elections to their constituents.

CHAPTER

ACCESSIBILITY

Election officials work everyday to make elections more accessible to the public. More than ever before, newly accessible voting machines have facilitated independent voting for voters with disabilities for the first time in their lives. An added focus on making polling places accessible serves to help people with disabilities to vote in person on Election Day. There are many accessibility initiatives an election official may consider to continue the trend toward fully accessible elections for all voters.

One in 5 people in the United States has a disability. “Disability” is defined by the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment.¹⁰

Some people are quick to imagine persons with visible disabilities—those who use wheelchairs, for example—when they hear the word “disability.” However, most disabilities are not visible. Different disability types include hearing, speech, vision, dexterity, mobility, and cognitive impairments. Over half of all people who have a physical disability are hard of hearing. All of these disability types can manifest in forms from mild to severe in voters with disabilities.

Election officials, who interact with the public, should be perceptive and try to anticipate the needs of people who may require assistance. In election administration, officials can focus on training their elections office staff and poll workers, who are the public face of election administration, to provide improved accessibility to voters with disabilities.

“Accessibility” is a term that refers to the removal of barriers that make it difficult or impossible for some people with disabilities to use something. It can refer to the built environment (e.g., the polling place) or to technology (e.g., the voting systems.) By providing accessibility in election administration, election officials ensure that people with disabilities can participate independently in the electoral process. Accessibility supports democracy, civil rights and the guiding principal of non-discrimination.

Federal laws like the ADA and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) cover accessibility issues such as the physical polling place, the voting activity, and the voting systems. State laws may also be helpful. For example, some State laws govern information technology accessibility ensuring that the websites of elections agencies are accessible for all regardless of disability.

Accessibility covers all aspects of running an elections office—registering to vote, accessing a web site, recruiting and training of poll workers, entering a polling place, and casting a secret ballot. Accessibility needs are far-reaching, and have been addressed by the EAC in several other chapters in the *Election Management Guidelines (EMG)*.¹¹

An election official who considers accessibility initiatives will increase the ability of all voters to participate fully and independently during each step of the voting process. This chapter on Accessibility provides many examples of ways to improve accessibility and to incorporate good practices into all aspects of election administration. Examples discussed in the following pages from various jurisdictions across the country show that an election official does not need to start from scratch to develop successful accessibility initiatives in their local elections offices. The

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C. § 12102

¹¹ The other chapters include *Ballot Building, Polling Place and Vote Center Management, Absentee Voting and Vote by Mail, and Communicating with the Public*. Additionally, there are Quick Start Management Guides on *Poll Workers* and *Serving Voters in Long-Term Care Facilities*.

strategies used in the examples have already been implemented by election officials to successfully address accessibility, so an election official can simply tailor them for his or her community, per State and local laws and regulations.

The content of this chapter on Accessibility was developed in collaboration with Federal agencies and disability organizations, as well as State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation to ensure that the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

Jurisdictions are reminded to implement these voluntary practices only after reviewing State and local laws and regulations. Local election officials should contact their State election officials with questions about the legality of a specific policy or procedure in their State.

Managing an Accessible Elections Office

Every component of election administration can incorporate accessibility from the materials election officials make available to the public to the training those officials provide to their staffs.

This section will focus on the areas of election administration that occur outside the physical polling place. These programmatic aspects include training, accountability, outreach, and information and communications technology. Physical polling place accessibility is addressed in the section below entitled “Providing an Accessible Voting Experience.”

Staff and Poll Worker Training

Among the first steps an election official can take to evaluate accessibility accommodations in his or her jurisdiction is to review all of the training material for full and part-time staff and poll workers. The staff and poll workers are the public face of the elections office and a staff well-trained on accessibility will improve the voting process for all voters.

Training modules about interacting with voters with disabilities can be added to poll worker training programs. This training can benefit all voters. For the basics in building a good system for managing poll workers, election officials can review the EAC’s *Successful Practices for Poll Worker Recruitment, Training, and Retention* available at www.eac.gov.

Voters with disabilities may not be aware of available accommodations. Because of this, poll workers and elections office staff can be trained to look for disabilities and to offer to help. For example, a voter may report difficulty seeing where to sign at the check-in table. A poll worker trained to identify voters who are visually impaired might offer a magnifying glass for the signature sheet. Such an offer could also serve as an opportunity to explain information about voting systems with screen magnification options.

Poll workers do not always understand when and how they can do to provide accommodations for voters with disabilities. Election officials should clearly outline the assistance poll workers can provide to voters with disabilities who are in the process of voting. Good communications skills ensure that all voters can understand staff and poll workers sufficiently well.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: It is best for poll workers to face people when talking to them as opposed to speaking while looking down at the poll book.

There are some basic tenets of disability etiquette that may help an election official, staff member, or poll worker to interact with voters with disabilities more effectively. The basics include:

1. Not making assumptions,
2. Asking before helping,
3. Being sensitive about physical contact.

It is better, for example, to offer an arm when leading someone who is blind to a voting station, rather than grabbing the voter's arm and pulling the voter. Service animals, such as guide dogs, are allowed in the polling place. It can be emphasized during training sessions that it is not appropriate to pet these service animals while they are working. Disability etiquette publications with more information can be viewed freely on the Internet and make wonderful inserts in a poll worker training package.

Election officials do not have to create training modules from scratch or by themselves. First, disability organizations may welcome an invitation to help to present a component of poll worker training on sensitivity to disability issues. Second, many of the for-profit online poll worker training programs include sections about addressing accessibility issues in the polls. Finally, there are many free, governmental resources available online that election officials can adapt to their jurisdictions.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

Examples of disability etiquette guides include:

Tips on interacting with People with Disabilities from United Spinal:

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

Tips on interacting with People with Disabilities from Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association:

http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/disability_etiquette.pdf

Examples of training videos:

Oregon's Assisting Voters with Disabilities Training Video

http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/HAVA/avwd_captions.wmv

North Carolina's State Board of Elections Accessibility Videos

<http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/content.aspx?id=57>

Accountability

Jurisdictions might consider implementing a procedure for receiving and responding to inquiries and complaints from the public about accessibility. Election officials may not always proactively make accessibility accommodations in all of the areas in which they can improve the voting experience for many voters. However, those voters who may have encountered an unexpected obstacle are often willing to share these experiences in the hope that a solution is in place for the next time.

If staff levels allow, election offices can benefit from one staffer assuming responsibility for all disability issues that arise during election administration in the jurisdiction. This staffer could be responsible for receiving and responding to inquiries and complaints and ensuring that voters with disabilities have all of the information they need to register to vote and use the accessibility features of voting systems.

Disability Outreach

There are many types of outreach that election officials can leverage to improve the accessibility programs they implement. First, it is important for election officials to review all printed material available to the public and make sure to offer it in alternative formats, such as large print, audio, and in a variety of languages. For example, some jurisdictions provide large print sample ballots at the polls for voters with vision impairments. If a document can be made available electronically on a website, it will allow voters to familiarize themselves with the process before they go to the polling place.

State and local jurisdictions might consider partnering with disability groups to pool resources and develop accessibility solutions. From poll worker accessibility training to checklists for inspecting polling places for accessibility, there are many resources already available in the field. Most of these solutions can be tailored to fit the needs of just about any jurisdiction. For more information about partnerships that election officials might pursue, refer to the *Building Community Partnerships* chapter of the *Election Management Guidelines*.

Outreach to Voters

Election officials might consider developing an outreach plan to raise awareness among voters with disabilities about accessible polling places and accessible elections programs in the jurisdiction, if any.

The outreach might address the following issues:

- Do voters with disabilities know how to...
 - Register to vote;
 - Use the accessible voting system?
- Do voters with disabilities know about various available accommodations such as...
 - Information in large print on paper;
 - The documents and other information viewable in advance on an elections website?
- Do voters with disabilities know to whom to complain if they have a problem?

Outreach to Government

Election officials have many governmental resources at their disposal. For example, many States have a Governor's Commission on Disability that advises the State government on disability issues. Election officials can check to see what state-specific documentation and advice might be available to them from this governmental entity.

Moreover, many counties have local Commissions on People with Disabilities. These organizations may help local election officials reach those individuals in the community who might need information on the various accessibility accommodations.

Election officials might consider establishing an Accessibility Advisory Board within the jurisdiction if none exists or creating a committee that focuses on election administration. Election officials can schedule regular meetings to solicit input and to gather suggestions and ideas about how to make the voting process and polling places more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

The elections office in Alexandria, VA works closely with the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities. The disability community helped to perform usability tests on the available voting technology when the jurisdiction purchased new equipment. With the backing of the Commission on Persons with Disabilities, the elections office was able to recommend the voting system that the city government ultimately purchased. Election officials noted that partnering together with the disability community from the outset and not as an afterthought works best.

Outreach to Nonprofits

The local disability community is another potential partner for election officials looking to promote the awareness of accessibility accommodations. Disability organizations may be able to provide assistance or advice about marketing strategies, usability testing, material reviews, or training.

Disability organizations may also be able to provide assistance in circulating voter registration information and voting materials to voters. They are also an excellent resource for recruiting poll workers with disabilities and may have an easier time reaching these individuals than the staff in an elections office.

Disability organizations may also be able to help evaluate voting systems as part of the State or local procurement process. If there is no governmental commission advising agencies about disability issues, election officials can reach out directly to the disability community to participate in the selection of the equipment. After purchasing equipment and before each election, the disability community may be able to help election officials with design of the ballot and the testing of the audio ballot.

Staff or volunteers at disability organizations may also be able to review draft documents from an accessibility perspective. These materials might include marketing materials, emergency evacuation procedures, voting instructions (including for audio ballots) and/or public service announcements.

Finally, disability organizations may welcome an invitation to review or to help present a component of poll worker training on sensitivity to disability issues.

Information and Communications Technology

Technology related to elections administration includes telephones, websites, voting systems, and electronic documents (such as an online voter registration application.)

Accessibility guidelines and standards help to assist individuals as they design or purchase technologies to ensure that people with disabilities can use them. For example, the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines apply to voting systems.

To make websites more accessible, elections office website designers may use the Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards issued by the U.S. Access Board and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) developed by the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative. Web designers sometimes use web accessibility tools to make their jobs easier.

Web accessibility evaluation tools are software programs or online services that help determine if a website meets accessibility standards and guidelines. While Web accessibility evaluation tools can significantly reduce the time and effort needed to evaluate Web sites, no tool can automatically determine the accessibility of a web site. Some of these tools can be used in combination to address specific aspects of the evaluation process. A limited number of free tools can be found online.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: A list of Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools can be found at the website of the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative:

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/RC/tools/>

When posting information to a website, election officials can provide accessible materials in a word processor-formatted document or in HTML. Documents in these formats are more easily read by voters with impaired vision who use a text-to-audio screen reader.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Consider using alt-tags for graphics, such as illustrations.

Providing an Accessible Voting Experience

The other area of election administration in which election officials can provide accessible accommodations is during the voting experience. Physical access to the polling location, voting technology, check-in procedures, and even the smallest lines can present challenges for some voters with disabilities and people who are elderly. States and localities have come up with myriad solutions to provide accessibility of the built environment, programmatic accommodations for voters at the polls, and innovative methods in which to facilitate the various types of voting (in-person, by mail, and early voting.) This section summarizes those solutions and includes information on voting in long-term care facilities.

Accessibility of the Built Environment (Polling Place)

In order to vote in-person, the voter must be able to access the polling place. States and local jurisdictions have made improvements in the accessibility of the polling place.¹² Accessibility considerations should start with the path from public transportation or the parking lot to the building entrance, through the building to the voting area, and back to the parking lot or drop-off area.

The Disability Rights section of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice has issued the ADA Checklist for Polling Places.¹³ The checklist is the most comprehensive document for election officials seeking temporary solutions for Election Day. These solutions consider the fact that election officials only control these sites on Election Day and cannot always make major changes to the building. Issues discussed in the checklist include parking areas, passenger drop-off areas, sidewalks and walkways, building entrances, hallways and corridors, and the voting area.

INCLUDE A PAGE FROM THE ADA CHECKLIST (IF ALLOWED)

ALTERNATIVELY

INCLUDE THE TEXT BELOW AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE TEMPORARY, INEXPENSIVE SOLUTIONS COVERED IN THE ADA CHECKLIST:

Parking Problem One:

Parking is available, but no accessible parking is provided or there are not enough accessible parking or van-accessible spaces.

Suggestion: Find a relatively level parking area near the accessible entrance and then designate the area for accessible parking spaces and adjacent access aisles. Use three parking spaces to make two accessible parking spaces with an access aisle. Traffic cones or other temporary elements may be used to mark the spaces and access aisles. Provide a sign designating each accessible parking space and make sure the access aisle of each space is connected to the accessible route to the accessible entrance.

At some polling places, voters with disabilities may not be able to enter the front door of the building. Election officials should consider all of the potential entrances a voter might use. Wayfinding signage will help all voters to find the accessible entrances and to navigate any hallways to the polling place. Examples and camera-ready images are available in the EAC's *Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections* report.

INCLUDE IMAGE IN A BOX:

¹² Government Accountability Office. **Voters With Disabilities: More Polling Places Had No Potential Impediments Than in 2000, but Challenges Remain.** June 10, 2009. GAO-09-685. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09685.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2010).

¹³ <http://www.ada.gov/votingprt.pdf>

B Wayfinding posters



Caption: The exact specifications for printing accompany these images in the EAC's Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections report.

Programmatic Accommodations

In addition to the accessibility of the built environment, programmatic accommodations can make the voting experience easier for voters with disabilities. Election officials can seek inexpensive, tangible solutions, such as providing a chair for individuals who have difficulty standing in a line at the polling place. Similarly, a chair can be placed near the accessible voting system. Poll workers can post voting instructions in large print and other languages for voters with limited vision. Intangible accommodations might mean providing assistance at a voting station, if requested.

Acoustics

Loud environments can increase the stress level for everyone, but it is especially stressful to voters who are hard of hearing. Individuals who depend on hearing an audible ballot may need the accessible voting system placed in a quiet area. One polling place creatively addressed this need by placing the voting system on an accessible stage that was isolated by curtains.

Election officials might consider using inexpensive, portable assistive listening devices (approximately \$120-\$180). These devices may help voters as well as poll workers with hearing loss to understand speech in noisy situations.

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Simple solutions can reduce echo and audio reflection, such as cloth table covers, framing and draperies, rugs on the floor, etc.

Accessibility of Voting Systems

All voting systems have some accessibility features to enhance usability. HAVA requires accessible voting systems for voters with disabilities in all polling places: “The voting system shall...be accessible for individuals with disabilities, including nonvisual accessibility for the blind and visually impaired, in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters....”¹⁴ The EAC publishes Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines, which help voting systems manufacturers to understand how to design voting systems to meet HAVA’s requirements.

The following sections discuss accommodations for the physical act of casting a ballot at a polling place, voting by mail, early voting, and voting in long-term care facilities.

Polling Place Voting

Poll workers can describe accessible voting systems in a manner that encourages voters to use them. They might refer to the machines as the “accessible voting systems” and offer a demonstration or assistance, if requested by the voter.

People with disabilities use a variety of assistive technologies to address vision, hearing, mobility, dexterity, memory, reading and other functional limitations. These individuals are allowed to bring necessary assistive technology (e.g., hearing aids, neckloops, mobility aids, switches, and magnifiers) and are encouraged to use that assistive technology in addition to the accessible voting system.

Poll Workers

Election officials might consider recruiting individuals with disabilities to fill the job of poll worker. For some voters, the presence of a poll worker with a disability can make the voting experience more comfortable and might increase the likelihood that voters will be receptive to offers of assistance. Disability organizations are great places to look for potential poll workers with disabilities.

Election officials might consider the following practices to improve conditions for poll workers with disabilities:

- Split Shifts – Some poll workers with disabilities would benefit from having this option in which poll workers do not have to be at the polls for an entire day, but for more manageable hourly shifts.

¹⁴ 42 U.S.C. 15481(a)(3)(A)

- Environmental Sensitivities – Some poll workers may be sensitive to substances, such as perfumes and air fresheners.
- Simple adaptive technologies – Poll workers may have problems with dexterity or be visually impaired. These individuals would benefit from soft grip tools and magnifying strips at the polls.

To improve the accessibility of future elections, officials might ask poll workers to complete a questionnaire to determine additional needs at the polling place. The responses to the questionnaire may provide ideas and solutions for addressing accessibility needs on Election Day.

See the EAC's *Successful Practices for Poll Worker Recruitment, Training, and Retention* for more information about poll workers, available at <http://www.eac.gov>

Voting by Mail

In the past, voting by mail meant that a voter completed a paper ballot and mailed it back to the local election official via the United States Postal Service. For many voters with disabilities, the physical act of marking the paper ballot made it impossible to independently vote by mail. These individuals had to compromise their privacy to vote by mail.

Some States are experimenting with new vote by mail technology. The State of Oregon offers an alternative format ballot for voters with disabilities. This type of ballot allows voters with disabilities to complete the ballot on their home computer or on an accessible computer station at the local elections office. After the ballot is complete, the voter can print the ballot and mail it to the local elections office or return it to one of many designated drop sites.¹⁵

Early Voting

Election officials can make early voting sites accessible for voters with disabilities. Some jurisdictions have a lot of flexibility in designating an early voting site. If possible, election officials with this flexibility can designate sites already determined to be convenient and accessible for voters with disabilities. For example, election officials in Houston, Texas sometimes use shopping malls as large, accessible early voting sites.

Officials in Bexar County, TX work with a private company to provide American Sign Language videos for deaf voters at early voting sites. All of the explanations about the voting process and the voting systems are converted into videos for deaf voters use at the early voting site. If specific questions are not covered in the videos and additional assistance is necessary, the video monitors at the early voting sites can be equipped with real-time webcams. When a deaf voter requests assistance, election officials can provide one-on-one assistance via these real-time webcams at a cost of \$3.00 per minute.

Voting in Long-Term Care Facilities and Mobile Polling

The number of older Americans is growing at an unprecedented rate commensurate with the need for long-term care. Between 2000 and 2050, the population of individuals age 65 and older will increase by 147% according to the U.S. Census Bureau. An estimated 44 percent of

¹⁵ <http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/HAVA/accessibility.shtml>

older adults will enter a long-term care facility before they die and 23 percent of these individuals will spend at least one year there.

Election officials can develop and implement policies and practices that facilitate registration and voting processes for residents of nursing homes, assisted living facilities and long-term care facilities,¹⁶ especially persons with cognitive and other brain impairments.

One such practice, known as mobile polling, utilizes election officials to bring ballots to convenient and accessible locations, such as long-term care facilities, while skilled, non-partisan election workers provide assistance when needed, and—where permitted—to register voters.

Mobile polling teams should be comprised of a minimum of two staff members (of opposite party affiliations, if required); they must also successfully complete training prior to providing services. The training should be similar to some of the aspects of poll worker training and the training described in the EAC's Quick Start Guide on *Serving Voters in Long-Term Care Facilities*. For example, in addition to the elements listed in the long-term care training, it should include, but not be limited to, information on:

- How to complete a voter registration application, absentee ballot application, and other forms required by State law.
 - Information on voter identification requirements, if applicable. *Note: The training should include how to assist residents with acquiring and/or locating acceptable identification for voting purposes.*
 - Details on where to pick up ballots and supplies; managing supplies on-site, including security of voted ballots; and delivery and return of all supplies and voted ballots.
 - Training on how to use voting equipment, if applicable.
-

INCLUDE IN A TIP BOX:

Tip: Election officials can ask their contacts at the long-term care facility to share the calendar with all staff members and visibly display it in general areas and/or distribute it to each resident.

INCLUDE EXAMPLE IN A BOX:

During the 2008 general election, the Vermont Secretary of State's Office joined with the University of Pennsylvania and the American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging to develop a mobile polling pilot program. The program was well-received and highly successful. Information on the Vermont Mobile Polling project can be found on the American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging's Web site at <http://new.abanet.org/aging/Pages/voting.aspx>.

Helpful Accessibility Resources

- American Association of People with Disabilities
<http://www.aapd.com>
- American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging Voting and Cognitive Impairments

¹⁶ See the EAC's Quick Start Guide on *Serving Voters in Long-Term Care Facilities* for detailed suggestions.

<http://new.abanet.org/aging/Pages/voting.aspx>

- Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs)
<http://www.votingaccess.org/>
- The Election Center
<http://www.electioncenter.org>
- National Federation for the Blind (Nonvisual Election Technology)
http://www.nfb.org/nfb/HAVA_intro.asp
- National Institute of Standards and Technology
<http://vote.nist.gov>
- United States Access Board
<http://www.access-board.gov>
- Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>