"Preparing for the 2016 Election Cycle in Battleground Jurisdictions: Best Practices and Lessons Learned"

EAC Roundtable Discussion

Wednesday, January 6, 2016
2:30 – 5:00 PM (EST)

Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City
1250 S. Hayes Street
The Diplomat Room
Arlington, VA 22202
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Participate
Live webcast at www.eac.gov
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Participants

- Merle King, Roundtable Moderator; Executive Director, Georgia's Center for Election Systems, Kennesaw State University
- Brian Corley, MPA, Supervisor of Elections, Pasco County Florida
- Honorable Pedro A. Cortés, Pennsylvania Secretary of State
- Luanne Cutler, Registrar of Voters, Washoe County, Nevada
- Matt Damschroder, Assistant Secretary of State, Ohio
- Robert Dezmelyk, Moderator, Town of Newton, New Hampshire
- Sandra Juno, Clerk, Brown County, Wisconsin
- Honorable Paul Pate, Iowa Secretary of State
- J. Kirk Showalter, General Registrar, City of Richmond, Virginia
- Honorable Wayne Williams, Colorado Secretary of State

Background

The 2016 election cycle has already begun. State and local jurisdictions are preparing for Presidential Primaries as well as the state primaries and general elections to follow. Researchers and media outlets have identified at least eight battleground states, whose election outcomes could determine the next President of the United States. These states, and the local jurisdictions within each of them, will be under intense pressure to execute error-free elections. The national, regional and local media scrutiny will be relentless. Some of these battleground states have experienced this level of scrutiny before – for others, this may be their first time in the national spotlight.

How do these election officials prepare for the upcoming elections, knowing that every error, every anomaly is magnified and speculated upon? How do they deal with the fundamental logistics of preparing for and executing an election while at the same time, monitoring media and election advocate's reports and speculations? What can other election jurisdictions learn and apply from the work of their colleagues in these battleground jurisdictions?

This roundtable will seek to explore how election officials in the fishbowl of the 2016 battleground states are preparing for the upcoming election cycle. It will identify concerns, risks, mitigation strategies and best practices for dealing with the special challenges of a presidential election cycle.

Here is a list of potential follow-up questions that may be asked:

Potential Discussion Questions

1. What electorate or electorate behavioral changes do you see in the 2016 cycle that was not present in the 2012 cycle? What has caused these changes and how is your office adapting to them?
2. One prevailing campaign strategy in battleground states is to recruit new voters rather than persuade existing voters to change allegiance. What activities do you see in your state that indicates this strategy may be in play and how does that impact your preparation for the upcoming election cycle?
3. In close elections, every anomaly can take on exaggerated importance. This can intensify interaction with media outlets as they attempt to cover election stories in real time. How does your status as a battleground state affect your media strategy? What advice can you give other jurisdictions regarding managing media relations in the potential intense spotlight of a close presidential election?
4. How has the use of social media changed your preparation for the upcoming election cycle? Does your jurisdiction have a strategy for managing its outgoing messages? For monitoring other sources of social media for impact on your election?
5. Audits and recounts are a common outcome of every election. Audits become especially important in close elections because of their ability to illuminate both correctness of process and therefore increase confidence in the outcome of the elections, but they can also help identify weak or ineffective procedures that need to be corrected in coming elections. How prepared is your jurisdiction to conduct planned and ad hoc audits in 2016? Are you preparing any differently than in the past?

6. Political parties, campaigns and activist groups are already recruiting lawyers to assist in monitoring election practices in battleground states. Does your jurisdiction do anything to assist these groups in better preparing these observers – so that they are familiar with your state's election laws, voting technology, and other jurisdiction-dependent factors? Are there ways that election officials can assist these groups so that all parties reach their desired goals without great disruption of the process?
7. The adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", is especially applicable to elections administration. What areas of preparation are you most concerned about in the upcoming elections? Do you plan to do anything differently, based up the last election cycle, changes in voting/election technologies, etc.? Should there be a need to make minor changes after the primary, how would you vet and implement these changes in time for the general election?
8. There has been a national discussion on the preparedness of aging voting systems in the U.S. How would you assess your jurisdiction's voting system? What has been done to identify and mitigate aging factors in your deployed systems?
9. The use of polls, and especially exit polls, to validate election outcomes is controversial. How do you anticipate managing the discrepancies between predictions and reality when it comes to polls and the election results?
10. Does your jurisdiction manage a call center for election officials/poll workers? For voters/advocates? If so, how does your preparation change, if at all, in a presidential election? How are call center employees selected and trained? How are calls escalated within the center?
11. Do you anticipate any special voter education initiatives for this cycle? Discuss any initiatives you have planned or under way and what the expected outcome of the initiative will be. What motivated the initiative?
12. The pressure to prepare and display timely unofficial results via an Election Night Reporting (ENR) system is intense. Helping the public and media understand that official results won't be available for days (or weeks) is a challenge. How does your jurisdiction manage that challenge?
13. If your state has been a battle ground state in the past, what are some of the lessons-learned that have been captured and can guide your state in preparing for the upcoming election cycle?
14. What advice do you have for your election administration colleagues as they prepare for the upcoming cycle? What are the three most important things they should focus on and why?