

EAC Clearinghouse Award Submission

Category: Contingency Planning: Exemplary Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Efforts Wake County Board of Elections

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In August of 2024, while preparing for the 2024 General Election, our office participated in a CISA tabletop exercise. Through this exercise, we realized the importance of having a contingency plan to ensure that every voter could still cast their ballot in the event of a disruption or emergency at a polling place on Election Day. Given Wake County's size and number of precincts, our biggest challenge was determining where to start. Key concerns included:

- What if a polling place suddenly became unusable?
- Where could we transfer voters if a polling place had to close?
- How could we assist voters if they went to the wrong polling place?

To answer these questions, we created an Emergency Action Plan that allowed us to respond quickly if a polling place needed to close unexpectedly on Election Day.

Our first priority was to structure our polling place information in a way that was both efficient and easily accessible. We sought a solution that could be easily shared across the office while also allowing us to manage a large volume of information in an organized way. After evaluating our options, we determined that Excel was the best tool for maintaining organization and accessibility.

We began by examining a map of Wake County's precincts to identify adjacent precincts. After identifying all adjacent precincts, we created expansion groups in excel for staff to easily analyze each precinct's alternative options. As the structure of the Excel spreadsheet took shape, we recognized the need to consider additional factors when selecting the most suitable alternative polling places. These factors included the enclosure size, the availability of parking, number of registered voters, and the distance from the affected polling place.

I	1 2		А	В	с	D		
		1	Precinct	t Polling Place	Address	Voting Enclosure		
		2	01-01	Brooks Avenue Church Of Christ	700 Brooks Ave, Raleigh, NC 27607	Fails-Watson Hall		
	Γ·	3						
	·	4		Precinct	Polling Place	Address		
	·	5		01-02	Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Of Raleigh	3313 Wade Ave, Raleigh, NC 27607		
	·	6		01-03	St Johns Baptist Church	1615 Oberlin Rd #A, Raleigh, NC 27608		
	·	7		01-06	Oberlin Regional Library	1930 Clark Ave, Raleigh, NC 27605		
	·	8		01-23	Pullen Community Center	408 Ashe Ave, Raleigh, NC 27606		
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Enclosure Size	Parking	ADA Spaces		
2,242 sqft	30	10		
Voting Enclosure	Enclosure Size	Parking Spaces	Distance	Directions
Founders Hall	2,204 sqft	62	1.2 Miles	https://www.mapquest.com/di
Fellowship Hall	1,247 sqft	26	1.4 Miles	https://www.mapquest.com/di
Room 114	1,450 sqft	50	2 Miles	https://www.mapquest.com/di
Room 112A & 112B	2,997 sqft	22	2.1 Miles	https://www.mapquest.com/di

Figure 1 : Example of the alternative precinct data.



Initially, we prioritized proximity as the primary factor in determining alternative locations. However, we realized that some of the closest facility options were too small or lacked sufficient parking. Despite these challenges, we successfully identified over 150 alternative voting locations within two miles of the original polling place. After staff evaluated all factors for each alternative location, the most viable alternative location in each expansion group was highlighted for quick reference.



Figure 2: Graph showing the count of alternative precincts that are within certain distances of the original polling place.

To further enhance our emergency preparedness and provide support to precinct officials, our office created a second tool in Excel that we called the Ballot Style Comparison Tool. This tool allowed us to quickly select and compare two ballot styles or precincts, identifying the differences in the contests included on each ballot.

To develop the Ballot Style Comparison Tool, we first needed to organize the data. We did this by extracting a list of ballot styles and their corresponding precincts. Once these ballot style-precinct combinations were isolated, we generated a second dataset that paired each ballot style with the races included on that ballot. Using the Excel FILTER function, we were able to automatically populate the relevant information for each ballot style. To maintain data integrity all of the data was copied before finally incorporating pivot tables filtered by precincts and ballot styles, enabling faster and more efficient data filtering.



P	PRECINCT	⇒† BALLOT S	STYLE 🔽 M	uni 🔽 Ward	i -	Cong	SupCt	✓ Jud	NCSen	▼ NCHse ▼	cco	M 🔻 SCH 💌			
01-01		B0001	RA	AL R-D		02	N/A*	10D	15	049	4	5			
01-02		B0002	RA	AL R-D		02	N/A*	10D	16	049	4	5			
01-03		B0003		AL R-E		02	N/A*	10D	15	049	4	6			
01-04		B0004	RA	AL R-E		02	N/A*	10C	15	049	N/A*	* <mark>6</mark>			
01-05		B0005	RA	AL R-E		02	N/A*	10D	15	034	5	6			
BALLOT STYL		E		¥Ξ	\sum	PRECINCT				%≡	\mathbb{X}	To select multiple	e entries		
	B0029	B0030	B0031	B0032 ^	^	01-01	01-0	1-02	01-03	01-04	^	click the check marks (§≡), they will turn yellow when			
	B0033	33 B0034 B0		B0036			01-05	01-0)6	01-07	01-07A		multiple select is	on (📧). To	
B0037 B0041		B0038	B0039	B0040				01-09	01-1	LO	01-11	01-12	:	icon with the red	X (🙀). If
		B0042	B0043	B0044				01-13	1-13 01-14 01-15 01-16	multiple entry select () is					
	B0045	B0046	B0047	B0048		01-17	01-1	18	01-19	01-20	activ	active, option wil	on will be		
	B0049	B0050	B0051	B0052		01-21	01-2	22	01-23	01-25		removed from list.			

Figure 3: Example of the final data and the related pivot tables used by staff in the event of an emergency.

EAC Clearinghouse Award Criteria

Innovation

 This approach is innovative because it combines proactive emergency preparedness, data-driven decisionmaking, and strategic contingency planning to ensure uninterrupted voter access on Election Day. By leveraging Excel's capabilities, we structured polling place alternatives based on adjacency, accessibility, and capacity, enabling quick responses to disruptions. The Ballot Style Comparison Tool streamlined ballot verification and improved efficiency. This scalable, technology-driven solution enhances election resilience and serves as a model for other jurisdictions to modernize emergency preparedness without requiring complex software.

Cost-effectiveness

• Both of these tools are very cost effective. The ballot style comparison tool and the Emergency Action Plan were both made in Excel. The main cost for both of these projects is in the amount of time it takes to make the Excel spreadsheets.

Replicability

- The Emergency Action Plan is easily replicable by others. The two main barriers to completion are deciding what information should be quickly available and the time that it can takes to create the excel spreadsheets.
- The Ballot Styles Comparison Tool is less easily replicable and requires more than basic Excel skills. However, these skills can be readily acquired through LinkedIn Learning courses.



Sustainability

- Our Emergency Action Plan is easily sustainable. The emergency action plan can be easily maintained by 1-2 staff members ensuring that all information is kept up to date.
- While a new ballot style comparison tool will be required for each election, we will already have a known process that will produce the intended information.

Improves Outcomes for Voters and Election Officials

- The ballot style comparison tool greatly improved the outcome for voters and precinct officials. Throughout Election Day, particularly towards the end of voting hours, out-of-precinct voters would arrive at the incorrect voting place. By using this tool, office staff was able to quickly direct officials to which ballot style should be given to an out-of-precinct voter, if they chose to vote provisionally.
- We are confident the Emergency Action Plan would greatly improve outcomes for voters and officials as well. With the Emergency Action Plan, we would be able to quickly instruct officials where they should send voters and provide the officials with turn-by-turn directions as soon as they notify office staff that an emergency has occurred at a voting location.

Conclusion

Developing an Emergency Action Plan and a Ballot Styles Comparison Tool from the beginning was a challenging task. One of the biggest challenges that we faced was how we would ensure that all of our tools would work together if an emergency took place. To ensure that our office would be prepared we: 1) Met to determine what the main priorities were in the event of an emergency. 2) Walked through the steps of what would happen if there was an emergency at a polling place in group discussion; 3) Held office wide demonstrations on how to use the Emergency Action Plan and the Ballot Styles Comparison Tool. 4) Determined teams responsible for action items after the emergency takesplace.