



Elmwood Voting Initiative: Reimagining Incarcerated Voter Access

A partnership that brought an in-person voting experience inside a correctional facility, ensuring eligible incarcerated individuals could register, vote, and cast their ballots with the same access and dignity as any other voter.



Overview

In 2025, the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters' Office partnered with the county's Diversion and Reentry Services Department as well as the Elmwood Correctional Facility to bring the vote center and election office experience inside the facility for eligible incarcerated individuals.

Previously, voting was limited to mailed ballots, and only if a voter had updated their registration in advance. We changed that. Three times per election cycle, a cross-trained team deployed on site with e-pollbooks, same day voter registration capability, ballot-on-demand printers, accessible ballot marking devices, and secure ballot containers.

Eligible voters could register on the spot, receive immediate assistance, print their ballot, complete it, and personally cast it. Across three visits, we served about 50 voters.

We also created new printed materials to directly help and inform this group of voters. These included a detailed flyer about the offices on the ballot and a colorful poster supporting them in reclaiming their right to vote.

With this process in place, eligible incarcerated individuals experienced voting with the same access, professionalism, and respect as any other voter.

Creativity and Innovation

This program asked a simple but powerful question: if a voter is eligible, why should their experience be diminished because of where they are housed? Most correctional voting efforts stop at mailing a ballot. We brought a vote center experience instead.

Our team deployed e-pollbooks for voter lookup, same day voter registration tools, ballot-on-demand printers, and accessible ballot marking devices. Voters could resolve complex registration issues on site, receive immediate answers, and participate directly in the process.

This model is not yet common in most jurisdictions. As more states adopt same-day voter registration, ensuring that eligible incarcerated voters can access those services becomes a matter of equity and justice.

We did not lower the standard of service. We raised access to meet it.



Cost Effectiveness

The program required no new infrastructure and minimal direct cost. We redeployed existing equipment and trained staff. The primary investment was staff time and equipment transport.

Across three visits per election cycle, about 50 eligible voters received full-service assistance that may otherwise have been inaccessible.

By providing in-person support, staff reduced registration errors, prevented incomplete ballots, and ensured accurate processing. Real-time problem solving improves both voter confidence and administrative efficiency.

The return on investment is measured not only in dollars, but in equal access. With limited incremental expense, the program strengthens compliance, improves accuracy, and affirms that lawful participation is worth operational effort.

Can be Replicated by Other Offices

While eligibility laws differ by state, the principle is universal: if a voter is eligible, access should not depend on geography or custody status.

The model is adaptable. Offices can form cross-functional teams and partner directly with correctional facility staff to deploy registration tools, same day voter registration where permitted, ballot printing, and accessible voting equipment inside secure facilities.

As more states adopt same-day voter registration, replicating this approach becomes increasingly important to ensure that eligible incarcerated voters are not excluded from modern election systems.

Security and equity are not opposing values. This program demonstrates they can coexist.



**Meets
Category
Requirements**

This initiative represents a new practice in election administration by redefining how voting operations can function within a correctional facility.

Instead of limiting incarcerated individuals to mailed ballots, the program integrated same day voter registration, ballot issuance, and accessible voting assistance into a secure setting.

The effort required cross-division coordination, operational adaptation, and careful planning with facility staff. It applied standard vote center tools in a context where they had not previously been deployed in Santa Clara County.

By delivering the election office experience inside a correctional facility, the program advances innovation grounded in equity, professionalism, and justice.

**Improves
Outcomes for
Voters and
Election
Officials**

For eligible incarcerated voters, this program changes the experience from remote and uncertain to direct and participatory. Individuals who may not have known they were eligible could register on site. Complex questions were resolved in real time. Ballots were printed and completed by the voter using the same equipment used throughout the county.

Imagine being incarcerated but still eligible to vote. With so many rights restricted, the ability to fully participate in democracy carries profound weight. This program ensures that participation is not symbolic or second-class, but equal in process and respect.

We are glad to have already helped about 50 incarcerated voters in the most recent election cycle and look forward to helping many more in the future.



Elmwood Voting Initiative

REFUSE TO BE SILENCED
DEMAND YOUR JUSTICE

The answer is to elect the people who you want to see in office, who can represent you and your vision for the justice system.

The County of Santa Clara supports you in reclaiming your right to vote!

Let us help you get there.

County of Santa Clara
Registrar of Voters
sccvote.org/vra
866 430-VOTE (8683)

Registrar of Voters
1555 Berger Drive, Building 2
San Jose, CA 95112

408-299-VOTE (8683)
registrar@rov.sccgov.org
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YOUR VOTE BUILDS THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN

Here's how your vote shapes what happens at home, in your community, and across the country.



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Serves as the county's main governing body. Approves budgets, passes county ordinances, oversees land use, and manages county services such as health and social programs.



ASSESSOR

Determines the taxable value of property within the county. This valuation helps fund schools, public safety, and local government services.



DISTRICT ATTORNEY

The District Attorney (DA) is the main lawyer for the government in a county or district. They decide whether to file charges, take cases to trial or offer plea deals. The DA reviews complaints against individuals, including police officers and decides whether charges should be filed.



SHERIFF

Your Sheriff is the top law enforcement officer for the county. County sheriffs are elected by voters. Sheriffs supervise the conditions of county jails, direct a staff of deputies, and act as the local police in some communities.



CITY COUNCIL

City Council members make decisions about how a city is run. They create local laws, set budgets, and decide on things like public safety, parks, and road repairs, including how to spend tax dollars. They represent the people in their city and work to improve the community.



JUDGES

Judges have enormous authority over our lives by interpreting the law, deciding what evidence is heard in a case, and deciding how long to sentence someone convicted of a crime.



SCHOOL BOARD

School board members hire/fire the local superintendent (who sets overall district policies, including disciplinary rules), set the budget, approve contracts for teachers, and decide where to open or close schools.



SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Independent local agencies that provide specific services such as water, fire protection, libraries, parks, or public transportation.

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