

Washington State VoteWA Project

Outstanding Innovations Competition

Washington State has long relied on our partnership with the 39 counties to conduct and certify elections. VoteWA is a collaboration between OSOS and the counties to create a centralized system for both voter registration and elections management, and contains integrated petitions management, candidate management, and a self-service public portal.

The Problem

In 2014, Washington State had a statewide voter registration and information system that had been developed with HAVA grants from 2003-04. These two separate platforms, the Voter Registration Database (VRDB) and Washington Election Information system (WEI), had been developed by Secretary of State's Office staff in partnership with Microsoft developers. Each system was enhanced and expanded over time to include election night results reporting, online voter registration, voter information applications, and county website functionality.

At the county level, there were 39 separate election management systems, provided by 3 different vendors, with individual maintenance and support contracts. The data in the state database was not consistent across all of the counties. The current county applications were not configurable and not well-integrated. They could not accommodate desired changes in election laws and evolving technical platforms (younger, mobile voters). These systems were also increasingly difficult to secure from cyber threats.

The Washington Office of the Secretary of State (OSOS), along with the 39 County Auditors in Washington, initiated the VoteWA project to implement a modern Elections Management System (EMS) for Washington.

But, how to tackle the task of receiving approval and buy-in from all 39 counties on the strategy to move forward together with one voice? The Secretary had a clear vision.

In 2014, the Secretary of State's Office convened a Tech Summit with county election officials to discuss the status of election management and voter registration systems in Washington. The summit began with a catalyzing question: *Knowing what you know today about voter registration, election management, and tabulation systems – factoring in all federal and state requirements, and public expectations for accessibility, integrity, and earlier, more meaningful results – would you build the election system we currently have?*

The answer was a resounding “no.”

The Solution

With the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections on the horizon, the County Auditors and the Washington Secretary of State were greatly concerned about keeping an outdated system stable and secure. State and local offices had developed and purchased voter registration and election management systems during the mid-2000's with Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds. The hardware and software platforms were still in use in 2014 and would be nearing end-of-support by 2020. While the current OSOS system met state architectural and security standards, many of the county systems were vendor-supported, with little visibility into those systems. The prospect of proposed legislation to enact same-day registration (SDR), automated registration (AVR), and 16-17 year-olds pre-registration was also looming.

Given the very real challenges facing the state, Secretary Wyman began laying the groundwork for this project in 2014. She solicited county stakeholder engagement and involvement with a dynamic, in-person Technology Summit. Summit attendees declared a future goal to create a standardized data model – which would result in the ability to exchange voter registration and election data between the state and its 39 counties.

From that point forward, the OSOS and county election officials collaborated to define business requirements for a statewide EMS that fully met or exceeded the 21st Century expectations of voters, election officials, and other Washington State stakeholders. The information gathered from the business requirements was the foundation for two Request for Information (RFI) initiatives that led to the Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFI/RFP also provided the foundation for the assumptions used

in the Decision Package to the Washington State Legislature which provided funding approval. During the selection period, the project team worked with stakeholders to rebrand the project under the name: VoteWA.

Still, the Secretary and the OSOS needed to ensure every county in Washington was committed to both the project's success and local system implementation in each county. The well-developed relationship between the OSOS and the County Auditors, combined with four years of productive, pre-project work, helped secure support from all 39 counties. They remain committed to the project's completion and to using VoteWA as their local EMS systems.

This was unprecedented. While a few states have engaged county election officials to develop and install statewide registration and election systems, developing a comprehensive system that replaced 39 separate election management systems, two statewide platforms (voter registration and voter information), and countless secondary IT systems, the VoteWA project was a true statewide partnership. The project pulled together 40 independently elected officials, along with nearly 100 election and IT professionals, to define, develop, and implement a state-of-the-art, interconnected, voter registration, election management, and ballot tracking system.

The first goal of the project was to establish the complete buy-in and commitment of all parties to the project to ensure their participation through its completion. Hence, the birth of the Executive Steering Committee.

The Executive Steering Committee

The Secretary of State created the Executive Steering Committee to bring the OSOS and the county elections community together regularly to discuss and make decisions about the VoteWA project. The members included four Secretary of State representatives and eight County Auditor representatives. The Assistant Secretary of State acted as the Executive Sponsor of the Committee and ensured the meetings cover relevant subjects.

Goals of VoteWA proclaimed by the Executive Steering Committee:

- Satisfy the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requirement that both the state and local (county) election officials have immediate access to the voter registration list.
- Satisfy the HAVA requirement that the state must direct the degree of access and control any one official or class of officials have over the list's data.
- Reduce overall maintenance cost to the Washington State elections community.
- Leverage remaining Federal HAVA funds to offset the cost of the development and implementation activities.
- Implement a centralized database.
- Implement a state-wide application governance model.
- Minimize duplicative data entry.
- Ensure a fully secure environment.
- Satisfy legislative/regulatory requirements for new bills approved in Washington.

The Result

VoteWA was effectively used as the statewide voter registration and election management system in the 2019 August Primary and General Elections. The system went live on June 6, 2019 – effectively uniting Washington counties under one centralized database and empowering modern legislative mandates (several house bills and senate bills could not be implemented prior to VoteWA).

In addition, the VoteWA solution will save the citizens of Washington money, increase confidence in election security, and enable a number of process efficiencies that will save the state and the counties time and effort. With this additional time, we can increase service to the public and focus on activities with a higher value proposition. Efficiencies include:

- Synchronization of data between the OSOS and 39 counties, leading to reduction in duplicate data entry
- Completely satisfy the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requirement that both the state and local (County) election officials have immediate access to the voter registration list

- Improved ability to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); comply with the Rehabilitation Act (Section 508); comply with other accessibility and language translations requirements
- Improved ability to implement strong intrusion protection mechanisms for voter data that comply with federal, NIST and applicable cyber security requirements, and Washington Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) security policies
- Increased ability to adapt to changes in laws or regulatory requirements
- Reduction in staff time to process reports and update data
- Increase accuracy and speed of the precinct mapping process
- Decrease time to configure online ballots
- Simplification of support model (one vendor); reduction in maintenance fees to state/county
- Decreased time to validate petition signatures
- Architecture will mitigate risk of system downtime
- Ability to implement outstanding legislative mandates:
 - 2SHB 1513
 - SHB 2528
 - EHB 2759
 - SHB 2887
 - ESSB 6002
 - SSB 6021
 - SB 6058
 - ESHB 2406
 - E2SHB 2595

VoteWA is an outstanding innovation. We have attached supporting documents for your consideration.

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