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TIPS

For Making Election Data Pay Off

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for election management. This series provides tips and suggests best practices to help you run efficient and effective elections.

Use the data collected throughout each election cycle to identify voter trends, improve election day operations, and make your day-to-day internal operations more effective.

① Put the Data to Work

You can use the right data to improve internal operations and support annual budget needs.

Here are data that will help:

- Past voter turnout, early voting, and absentee balloting numbers help budget and plan for future elections.

- Use logic and accuracy (L & A) testing to determine the time it takes a voter to cast a ballot using the jurisdiction's equipment can help determine the number of voting stations needed in each polling place to keep wait times manageable.

- To improve existing voter outreach and education efforts, identify the issues at the polls—locations opening late, poll workers failing to report, and voters going to the wrong polling place or having identification problems.

- Data on provisional ballots—where they were issued, how many were rejected, and why—can suggest changes to reduce provisional balloting in the future.

- The unit cost of various components of each type of election—for example, the cost of processing each type of ballot—is essential when budgeting.

- The number of labor hours dedicated to performing particular tasks can identify the need to automate certain functions.

- Statistics from the telephone software also can help identify the need, for example, for a dedicated call center on election day.

- The number of hits each link on your Web site receives identifies popular information or questions common among voters.

- Census data can identify areas in greater need of minority-language assistance and voter outreach efforts.

- On your Web site, display historical election data in a graphic format that voters, media, and legislators will find helpful.

- Publish an analysis of each election that demonstrates the issues—such as long lines or insufficient numbers of poll workers—using graphics. These data and graphics can reinforce your needs for the next election cycle.

REMEMBER

Data you collect from one election can help you learn and plan for the next one.

Tip 1 *continued*

■ Distribute periodic reports internally, to other government departments, to the media, to legislators, and to the public. Such reports get the word out about your office's operations.

Quick Click

Post-election report example:
http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-101223.pdf

2 Identify the Data You Need

Encourage your staff to find ways to manage and plan voting operations based on hard data.

Examples of useful data:

■ Voter registration statistics.
- Number of inactive and active voters by precinct.
- Registration applications processed by category and location.
- Registration applications declined and why.
- Confirmation mailings sent and returned.
- Election day registrations by precinct.
- Election day registrations by election.

Quick Clicks

Example historical data:
http://www.jocoelection.org/archives/general.htm

http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/results/2013/index.htm

http://www.jocoelection.org/archives/mail.htm

Example demographic data:
http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Elections/Resources/Files/pdfs/stats/PrecinctVoterCountMarch.rtf

http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-101225.pdf

http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-109705.pdf

Provisional ballot analysis example:
http://recorder.maricopa.gov/voteroutreach/pdf/English/1-2013%20General%202012%20Provisionals.pdf

■ Election statistics.
- Number of early voters in person.
- Number of early voters by mail.
- Candidates by race and district.
- Ballot styles.
- Languages provided.

■ Polling place and poll worker statistics.
- Number of poll workers assigned.
- Number of training sessions for different categories of poll worker.

- Number of polling places compared with actual voters processed.
- Number polling places assigned per rover.

■ Post-election analysis.
- Number of replacement ballots issued and why.
- Number of military and overseas ballots issued.
- Number of military and overseas ballots returned.
- Number of military and overseas ballots counted.
- Number of military and overseas ballots not counted and the reasons why.
- Numbers of blank ballots, overvotes, and undervotes cast by race.
- Numbers of blank ballots, overvotes, and undervotes cast by precinct.
- Average wait time for polling place voters by precinct.
- Average wait time for early voting in person by location.

■ Internal data.
- Number of voters per staff full-time equivalent.
- Staffing costs for full time, part time, and overtime.
- Cost per vote per type of election.
- Cost per training session.
- Cost per poll worker.
- Number of Web page views by time and date.

REMEMBER

Comparing similar elections over time makes budgets easier to prepare and, if necessary, substantiate.

Quick Read

On election data, why it is important, and how to use it:

Evaluating Elections, A Handbook of Methods and Standards, by R. Michael Alvarez, Lonna Rae Atkeson, and Thad E. Hall.

3 Collect the Data From Reliable Sources

Know where to find and how to use good data.

Examples of elections data sources and their uses:

- In requests for proposals (RFPs) from software and other vendors, include details about your data collection needs.

- To help you project future population growth and voting needs in each precinct, your local planning and building department can provide subdivision plans and building permits.

- To compare your office with similar offices (in terms of staffing levels, polling places, and so on), seek out data from other jurisdictions in your state and comparable jurisdictions nationwide.

REMEMBER ⊕

Work with your software vendors to automate the collection of data that are requested on a regular basis.

- E-poll books in polling places can count voters during certain times.

- Help desk tracking software can capture the number and types of calls received by location.

- Online poll worker training software captures the number of users and their successful completion of various exercises in the training program.

- The telephone software system can identify a need for a dedicated help center on election day.

- The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), the U.S. Census Bureau, colleges and universities, and privately funded think tanks collect valuable data on various scales.

- Internal data quantifying the services your office provides can account for staff needs and assist in the budgeting process.

- Contractors, including university researchers or interns, and part-time staff can manually collect data such as: exit polls, poll worker checklists and feedback, and manual logs on ballot duplication.

Quick Clicks

State elections data examples:
http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections/Research/electResultsMain/HistoricalElectionComparisons.aspx

http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/results

http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,4670,7-127-1633_8722---,00.html

http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/statewide-elections/2004-general/

4 Analyze the Data Carefully

Look at your data. Use the results to improve performance.

Collecting these numbers can improve your overall efficiency and effectiveness:

- First, understand the type of data your voter registration software collects, and work with your vendor to develop reporting tools to retrieve these data.

- Routinely review the numbers, by precinct, that are stored in your voter registration and vote tabulation software. Understand what the numbers tell you about your process. Encourage your staff to analyze these numbers for accuracy and transparency.

- Review your absentee voting statistics by precinct to project the number of remaining voters likely to vote on election day at each polling place.

- To help evaluate your staff and training procedures or predict the need for additional employees, examine internal data such as: the number of transactions completed per employee, the number of errors per employee, and the average data entry time per action.

- To identify locations to target with voter education/outreach efforts, compare the population of each precinct with the number of registered voters in each precinct.

Tip 4 *continued* ■ Voter history by precinct should equal the total votes cast by precinct, plus any ballots by precinct that were not eligible.

REMEMBER ⊕

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can visually pinpoint areas in need of election resources.

Quick Clicks

Voting trend data examples:
http://www.ocvote.com/datacentral/

https://www.ocvote.com/data/voting-trends/

http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/results/2013/index.htm

http://vote.minneapolismn.gov,www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-101226.pdf

http://recorder.maricopa.gov/wpubs_flag.aspx