



5 TIPS

for Managing Change in Elections

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.

Being able to manage change has become an essential skill set for election administrators. Changes in elections can come from many sources and can require administrators to be proactive and reactive. By embracing some basic principles of change management, election administrators can reduce its impact, improve an organization’s success and help ensure the long-term sustainability of the election operation.



1 Help Staff Embrace and Plan for Change

Major changes in an election office can include new election laws, changes in voting methods, voter registration software and voting systems. Success is based on establishing each employee’s ownership, acceptance and enthusiasm for change. **Your** ability to embrace change can foster a positive attitude.

- Stay informed on proposed reforms in federal and state election laws, and how these could affect your office. Educate staff on the areas of the operation mandated by federal and state law. Appoint a staff member to review and analyze proposed changes.
- Work with your state election office and your jurisdiction’s lobbyist to develop a written impact analysis for use in your office. Include staffing and budgetary impact (if any) to use when lobbying. Consider corresponding directly with your state and/or federal elected officials.
- Change, in any form, will have an impact on internal and external functions. Develop an implementation action plan that evaluates the use of technology, reviews the new procedures and processes needed, and reviews the new internal and external operations that are required.
- Schedule regular staff meetings with all employees. Use these meetings as an open forum for staff to voice opinions on any area of the operation. An organization-wide discussion will result in more ideas for overall improvement.



Tip 1 *continued*

- Use staff meetings as an educational tool for describing the responsibilities of each division and how just one change can cause a domino effect on deadlines and the entire operation.
- Conduct debriefing sessions with full and part-time staff, poll workers, voters, campaign staff and media, etc. Provide stakeholders with an opportunity to make suggestions for improvements. Their involvement is important for building consensus and for implementing a successful change management plan.

REMEMBER



It's important to create an environment that fosters and rewards flexibility, accepts new ideas, and the use of new technology to improve and streamline various functions.

- Provide sufficient training and time for staff to learn the new steps. Reassure staff you are committed to their success.
- Encourage staff to think "outside of the box" and make suggestions in any area of the office/election operation.
- Recognize that restructuring affects each employee in a different way. It's important that staff's concerns be addressed as change is implemented.

When developing your change management plan:

- Review the work flow diagrams to determine the impact of the change on various internal processes and procedures.
- Use Post-it Notes as a way to encourage staff to brainstorm ideas on what needs to be altered and how to go about implementing it.
- Encourage each employee to write an idea. A moderator places all notes on the wall and the team begins to organize the notes into categories.
- Each category leads to the development of a change management plan – what needs to be changed, why it needs to change, the impact of the change, how to implement the change and how to fund the change.
- Rank the priority of each need. This also becomes the first phase of managing the change.
- Use flow charts as a visual tool to discuss how each detail affects the next process. This exercise will emphasize that the timely completion of work assigned affects each step in preparation for the election.
- Establish teams that have a common interest in an area of change. Designate a team leader who will schedule meetings to discuss the change management plan. Continue to hold regular staff meetings on the status of implementing each change.

2 How To Handle Mandated Changes

Reforms in federal and state law can be unexpected and have a start date that affects the election calendar and office workflow. Here are some scenarios that illustrate how to respond to mandated changes.

Scenario 1

New legislation alters the requirements to register to vote. When developing a change management plan remember:

- The voter registration software must be updated to automate the procedures for processing of registration applications.
- Voters submitting registration applications who don't meet the new registration requirements must be notified and given an opportunity to provide the required documentation. Encourage staff to develop innovative solutions to simplify the impact on voters.
- The mandated change will require immediate outreach campaigns to notify voters, candidates and media.
- Websites and all communication methods must be updated to communicate the new requirements.
- Poll worker training manuals and training procedures will need to be updated to include the additional requirements for processing voters.
- New signage for polling places will be required to inform the voter of new check-in requirements.
- Software that manages the printing and set up of poll books and/or electronic poll books must be modified to prompt poll workers for certain changes in processing voters.
- The new voter registration requirements may increase the number of provisional ballots.

Scenario 2

Additional voting options result in the need for new procedures, staffing, facilities and communication. When developing your change management plan consider possible scenarios for the various new methods of voting:

- Early voting and/or vote centers require managing voting for a period of time longer than just Election Day. This change increases the number and placement of early voting locations, the hours of operation, the need to identify large facilities, and the need to recruit and train seasonal staff.
- The use of new technology for signature verification and tracking outgoing and incoming ballots require additional funding and training. The use of off-site ballot printing and mailing services can provide you with a centralized solution for this function.
- New technology may be required to process a larger number of voters for a longer period of time. A new group of seasonal and temporary employees with new skill sets is needed to staff early voting and vote centers.
- The local Post Office is a partner with your office. Develop a strong alliance. Provide a calendar of deadlines to reinforce its role in the election.
- Vote by mail has an impact on space, facility needs and staffing.

Quick Clicks

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/electionacademy/2014/05/change_is_never_easy_utahs_gra.php



Tip 2 continued

Scenario 3

Develop an action plan for court cases that challenge the eligibility of a candidate for office. Some deadlines in your election calendar may be affected:

- A delay in the initial preparation of an election will create a domino effect for making the ballot design final, proofing and printing of ballots (including the vendor’s ability to print and deliver ballots to all jurisdictions).
- A delay in ballot delivery will create a need for additional staff to distribute mail ballots and open early voting locations.
- The mandated deadline for mailing Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballots will require you to develop a solution for managing the change in ballot content.
- Conducting logic and accuracy testing of your voting systems must be completed in a shorter period of time.



Some tips for working with election staff on changes:

- Develop a succession plan for your internal operations. Any turnover in full-time employees results in a skill loss that must be immediately replaced. A serious illness or death of a staff member has a huge impact on an already understaffed department.
- Developing new leaders depends on three critical components: skills and knowledge, efficiency and effectiveness, and acceptance of leadership role.
- Cross training of staff and having checklists are necessary tools, especially during staff turnover during peak election periods.
- Evaluate the need to hire additional temporary employees.
- Maintain an open door policy and encourage staff to privately talk about the change at any time.
- A change in the location of polling places or polling place consolidation requires notifying voters who may be affected by the change and communicating the change to all candidates, poll watchers, media, etc.
- Reinforce to staff that changes caused by new mandatory federal and state election laws will have a direct impact on the change management plan that is developed and the elements included in it.

Tips for communicating the change externally:

- Attend area meetings and events to discuss and inform the public about the change.
- Develop a handout highlighting “how it was done in the past, what is occurring now, and what its impact will be.” Discuss the differences by using these three topics as talking points.
- Allow opportunities for a question and answer period after each presentation.
- Consider establishing a team of ambassadors to attend area and neighborhood functions.
- Issue periodic press releases informing the media about key milestones and assuring the public that the office has an action plan for managing any impact on the preparation of the election.
- Develop newsletters/ brochures to educate the public about the change.



3 Evolving Technology Affects Elections

Technology is a major force in administering elections, and election offices depend on technology to manage elections.

Many polling places with paper rosters and ballots have been updated to on demand printers, electronic voting equipment and computerized poll books.

Voter registration applications that once were completed and processed manually now may be entered online and processed with the application and voter signature stored electronically.

Here are a few examples where technology is altering elections and ideas for how you might manage those changes:

Quick Clicks

<http://www.govtech.com/local/Looming-Crisis-In-Voting-Tech.html>

REMEMBER



Technology requires a continual redesign of processes and procedures.

Voting Equipment

and election management software, in most instances, has a 10-year life cycle. In some cases, the voting system is no longer supported by the vendor and/or parts for the system are no longer available.

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 provided federal funding, for the first time, to state and local election offices to update voting equipment. State and local jurisdictions will need to fund the replacement of this equipment. Partner with the budget office to brainstorm solutions for funding this new equipment.

- Deployment of a new voting system requires a timeline that includes a Request for Proposal, seeking and reviewing responses, and selecting a vendor. Appoint an internal project manager to work with the vendor and manage the implementation timeline.
- Request assistance from the attorney in your jurisdiction to handle all contract negotiations and change orders, etc. Review the status of the project with your attorney prior to making payments to the vendor.
- Have staff, poll workers, IT specialists, budget officials and other stakeholders attend vendor demonstrations and conduct hands-on demonstrations or mock elections to educate poll workers and voters about the change. Full-time election staff must learn new skills and new staff will be required to be technology literate.
- Schedule community open forums to provide an overview of the equipment change, include a question-and-answer session and provide an opportunity for the audience to practice on the new equipment.

Quick Clicks

- <http://www.austinmonthly.com/AM/October-2014/Talk-Thinking-Outside-the-Box/>
- <http://www.cavo-us.org/news.html>
- <http://discovermagazine.com/2014/julyaug/1-lock-the-vote>

REMEMBER



- Develop a "train the trainer" program for poll worker training sessions. Use these trainers to staff poll worker practice locations prior to Election Day.
- Partner with area governmental agencies to use their IT staff to provide support to poll workers for opening and closing the polls using new voting equipment on Election Day.
- Any change in procedures and technology has a major impact on election staff's success. Staff are the key link with the public and play a major role in conducting an election.
- Keep it simple and use plain language when developing new instructions or checklists, i.e. new instructions for poll workers who may only work one day throughout the year.

REMEMBER



Your human resources department may be available to review materials and also provide trainers. Jurisdictions will need to devote additional resources to recruiting all levels of staff with appropriate skill sets, including an increasing need for poll workers who speak minority languages.

Tip 3 *continued*

Voter Registration (VR) Software

is now maintained in a statewide database and local jurisdictions are connected within this software system. Initially, statewide VR databases were designed to manage only voter registration.

Many statewide systems have now added modules that can process absentee mail ballots and early voting, and can track poll worker assignment and training.

- Any update to the software and/or new modules designed to automate election management processes require thorough testing prior to statewide implementation. The timing of these updates depends on the state's and local jurisdiction's timeline for elections.
- Some jurisdictions have developed their own software that uses a download from the state voter registration database, along with software that is designed to manage all internal election processes.
- Some large jurisdictions have initiated efforts to design and build their own voting system. Stay informed on the progress of these initiatives.

On Demand Ballot printers are being used in early voting locations to provide the ability to print a ballot for any voter jurisdiction-wide.

- On demand ballot printers can eliminate unexpected ballot shortages on Election Day.
- The use of on demand ballot printing technology has facilitated the ability to operate early voting/vote centers and to consolidate polling places.

Electronic Poll Books

– a new technology designed to replace paper voter rosters in polling places on Election Day, has been successfully implemented in numerous states and jurisdictions.

- These devices provide ease in voter lookup, enable poll workers to direct voters to correct polling places, and can help reduce the need for issuing provisional ballots.
- The use of this new technology in polling places provides poll workers with a simple way to process voters and, in many instances, may reduce lines as voters are processed in a more timely fashion.
- This new technology is being used to automate post-election auditing. Electronic poll books can now easily upload the voter history from each location and balance those numbers to the ballots cast in the vote tabulation software.

Internal Automation

is now being used throughout election offices to manage a variety of functions.

- Tracking outgoing and incoming mail ballots online is now available for voters.
- Using technology to input and track provisional ballots provides a streamlined process to prepare for the election canvass.
- Consider purchasing automated machines for stuffing ballots and for opening returned ballots.

Social Media is being used by election officials to reduce communication costs and provide a more voter-friendly environment.

- Election officials are using websites, Facebook and Twitter to educate the voter.
- Connecting print and broadcast media to social media enables mass distribution of information on critical issues on Election Day—such as last-minute polling place relocation and up-to-date information on voter turnout. Facebook and Twitter can communicate one message to a large segment of the population.
- Email, text messaging and cellphone apps can provide direct communication to voters. Text messaging can be used to reach all poll workers simultaneously on Election Day. Cellphone apps can provide voter and polling place lookup, maps and directions to polling places, and indicate the expected wait times at different voting locations.
- Online voter registration is provided in many states—further automating the registration process, reducing internal costs for processing voter registration applications, and allowing voters to input his or her data, eliminating the need to decipher handwritten registration applications.
- Many websites are providing UOCAVA information and links to assist this category of voters.

REMEMBER



For on demand ballot printing you will need to determine if the printers require specialized paper, toner or other replacement parts.

Quick Clicks

<http://electionguru.wordpress.com>
<http://electiondiary-briandnewby.blogspot.com/>

4 Budgets and Funding in a Changing Environment

Many election officials develop their budgets based on a four-year election cycle. Elections occur many times during that time period. Election officials must educate the budget department of the importance of comparing their budget to a similar election year. Presidential election year budgets should be compared to the previous Presidential election year.

- Develop a detailed long-range cost analysis and schedule a meeting with your budget analyst, at the local and/or state level. Provide details on the overall costs and the impact of the change and request his or her help with communicating the impact of budget cuts to other stakeholders and decision-makers.
- Recommend that your jurisdiction establish an election reserve fund for the sole purpose of technology replacement. Prepare a 10-year equipment replacement plan including all technology within your department. Request that the budget office include funding for the reserve fund in **every** annual budget. This reserve fund becomes a savings account for future equipment replacement, i.e. voting system.
- Educate budget staff that a mandated change may cause an immediate impact on your budget, i.e. supplies, mailings to voters, training costs, printing, temporary facility needs, additional staffing, etc. Request input from staff on ways to cut costs internally.
- Department-wide budget cuts require reductions/cost savings in internal operations. Communicate the areas where costs can be reduced – while at the same time reinforcing that many election costs are fixed. Because elections are mandated by federal and state law, ballots must be printed, polling places must be secured, poll workers must be recruited and trained, supplies must be distributed, and additional, temporary or seasonal staff are required to manage early voting and absentee by mail.
- Meet with the human resource department to review full-time staffing needs. Prepare documentation and statistical data documenting the increase in voters, the impact of new federal and state election laws, and a comparison of your office operations and staffing levels to similar departments.

REMEMBER 

Cost justification is difficult because elections occur periodically throughout the year. Use your budget presentation as an opportunity to educate elected officials and the community about what is involved with administrating elections.

5 Evaluating the Impact of Change

The business of elections can involve implementing changes, administering new functions and executing an election in a new way. Change can be stressful; it can affect staff in the office and can extend to poll workers. External stress can come from candidates, voters, the media and other stakeholders.

Communication and feedback are important components to alleviating stress and achieving overall success.

- Election administrators should use every opportunity to solicit feedback from stakeholders to develop new approaches, change workflow patterns, train election staff differently, make better use of technology and plan for future elections.
- Post-election debriefings and feedback from staff, voters, candidates, media, etc. can result in valuable changes and improvements to election management.
- Prepare for the unexpected by developing a set of “What If’s?” scenarios. Engage other departments in this process.
- Develop a hands-on approach by working side-by-side with staff as change progresses. Spend time actually doing their work, i.e. data entry, logic and accuracy testing, packing and unpacking of supplies, etc.
- Emphasize that internal processes will continue to change as new technology is developed. Reinforce to staff that the plan is in constant motion.
- Nurture the “team” mindset – include seasonal, temporary and poll workers as a part of that team. Continue to solicit input and suggestions from all members of your team.
- Stay engaged throughout the process.
- Change in administering elections is continuous. Election administrators should engage in ongoing planning and create an approach for accommodating the next set of changes that will occur in elections.

