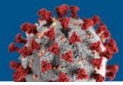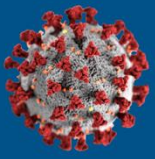# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2020 PRIMARY DURING COVID-19

This document is one in a series created as part of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. These documents provide guidance for state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials on how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of the COVID-19 epidemic.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2020 PRIMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic forced election officials across the country to quickly make plans for safely conducting an election. Some states' election calendars required they be the initial test cases of elections in this new environment, while others had the benefit of time to plan and learn from earlier elections whether due to their election date or the ability to postpone their primary election.

Many states will utilize expanded mail-in voting or absentee ballots resulting in a substantially higher percentage of mail voting than in previous elections. Many of these votes will be cast by first-time mail or absentee voters. Traditionally, shifting to primarily or almost total vote by mail involves an extended planning and transition period. However, many states are attempting to greatly expand access to mail or absentee ballots before November due to the pandemic. Some jurisdictions tested expanded mail options for their primaries or were forced to adjust due to an increase in volume, learning valuable lessons and identifying stress points ahead of an expected surge in turnout above primary levels in November due to the presidential election. Other jurisdictions adjusted their in-person voting procedures to serve their voters while maintaining safety for election workers and voters and coping with a shortage of poll workers. Many jurisdictions dealt with a shift in both their mail and in-person procedures.

The evolving nature of the COVID outbreak creates difficulty in predicting mail or absentee voting participation, as many voters still hope to vote in-person or will be ineligible to vote absentee under their state's laws. Officials will be required to make constant adjustments and plan for heavy mail and absentee participation while simultaneously anticipating high in-person turnout due to the presidential election. Additionally, some jurisdictions expect increased provisional balloting to address issues that may arise in mail or absentee voting.

The unprecedented nature of the 2020 general election presents several communication challenges that could increase the consequences of misinformation and disinformation. Many states and local jurisdictions need to educate voters on new rules and processes related to absentee or mail voting. Some jurisdictions will consolidate in-person voting locations and must communicate changes to voters. Further, election officials will have to educate voters on when to expect election results as tabulation may be slower with increased mail voting. It is essential that election officials work with the press and public to clearly communicate updates as early and often as possible.

Many election officials are currently planning for an election without the experience of conducting a large turnout primary during the COVID outbreak, while others are assessing what shifts they may need to make before November based on their primary experience.

This document includes common themes and feedback from election officials, in their own words, outlining their observations, lessons learned, and best practices based on their experience of adjusting to conducting a large turnout election after the outbreak of COVID-19 required stay at home orders across the United States. This guidance document is based on

their recommendations, and is intended as a non-binding resource for election officials. This document does not include feedback from states that saw no shift in their processes due to already conducting their elections by mail and is not exhaustive of all experiences in the 2020 primary election calendar. It includes information shared with the EAC through webinars, interviews, and a public hearing on lessons learned from the 2020 primaries. While officials saw a surge of ballots cast by mail or absentee, it is notable that election officials spent considerable time highlighting to the EAC the unique challenges they faced in conducting in-person voting and the extensive planning that they are undertaking to ensure safe and accessible in-person voting for November.

Officials also highlighted the complications that COVID-19 has added to their budgets, as some jurisdictions spent the majority of their Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding on their primary elections. Highlighting the ongoing concern that COVID has presented, and the need for additional funding, Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate testified to the EAC, "We have COVID right now. We may be facing COVID still in the next elections. As most of my peers here will attest to, we have elections all the time. We talk about the big ones. But we have elections for school boards and various cities, et cetera." The experiences of jurisdictions around the country outlined in these resources could serve as lessons learned for all election officials as they plan for this unprecedented election and beyond.

PREPARING FOR IN-PERSON VOTING DURING COVID-19: RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- ❏ If your state law requires an excuse to vote absentee, evaluate state law to determine whether there is flexibility (e.g., to allow all voters to request an absentee ballot under a declared state of emergency).
- ❏ Remember that some voters will want to vote in-person and you must accommodate them. When evaluating your potential turnout for November, do not assume that all communities will be comfortable or able to use absentee or mail voting equally.
- ❏ Make clear plans to deal with voters that have COVID-19 and want or need to vote in person. Consider appointments or specialized poll workers to serve COVID positive voters.
- ❏ Work with USPS early. If voters who request absentee ballots do not receive them in a timely manner, they will only be able to vote in person.
- ❏ Leverage existing tools and data sources to determine the best places to locate and ways to design in-person locations.
  - ❏ University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy Voting Location Siting Tool
  - ❏ Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project's COVID-19 Polling Place Queue Length Model
- ❏ Review Importance of Accurate Voter Data When Expanding Absentee or Mail Ballot Voting to plan for increased mail or absentee voting and to anticipate how to prevent issues that could lead to stressing in-person voting locations.

To best allocate resources for voting locations, election officials should model the turnout by location and day. Evaluating historical data and assumptions about November can provide a starting point but will not be highly predictive of how voters will choose to vote during the pandemic. Extra allowance should be made in models for the volatility. While many election officials and experts expect high levels of mail or absentee voting, election officials must also prepare for a high turnout of in-person voters.

Sherry Poland, Director of Elections of Hamilton County, Ohio, testified about this uncertainty to the EAC stating, "We have no history to go back to of conducting an election during a pandemic. So, it's almost like you have to plan for close to, you know, your 80 percent turnout absentee by mail and also for an 80 percent turnout for in person on Election Day. So you have to secure the resources for worst case scenario."

The laws within each state, ongoing litigation, and the communities that are served by each in-person voting location will impact the expected turnout with the effects of COVID-19 changing expectations at different rates across localities.

Election officials should evaluate whether their state law currently allows all voters to vote by mail or absentee, or whether an excuse is required and whether concerns related to COVID have been added as an excuse. Officials are advised to be mindful of any ongoing litigation. While changes to election procedures have typically been limited in the lead up to Election Day, 2020 has featured rapid changes to procedures in some cases only hours before the opening of polls in the primary, indicating that localities must plan for all possibilities despite current regulations.

The 2020 primary has shown that, even in states with increased mail or absentee voting options, participation in in-person voting is likely to remain high in some localities. When considering volume increases, consider factors that may increase in-person demand, including state laws and voters' preferences, perceptions, and accessibility needs for voters with disabilities. Election officials must factor these in when evaluating where to place voting locations and how many voters these locations should expect to serve on Election Day.

Election officials use modeling to allocate resources and staff for election operations. The constantly evolving nature of COVID-19 has made this modeling more difficult. Where on the calendar states held elections impacted their voter's perceptions and demand for services such as mail in ballots, and consequently the state's election officials experience managing the changes. State laws that limit the use of absentee ballots will have more significant impacts on in-person voting, particularly if there are limited voting locations and a smaller election workforce.

The number of votes cast by mail in 2020 will likely eclipse all records. Issues voters face with requesting, receiving, or returning ballots may result in an increase of in-person voters presenting at a voting location after requesting an absentee ballot. In the absence of a program to address these voters, such as live connected e-pollbooks allowing voters to cast a regular ballot, these issues could potentially create an uptick in the number of provisional ballots cast in some jurisdictions. Election officials should review Importance of Accurate Voter Data When Expanding Absentee or Mail Ballot Voting to plan for increased mail or absentee voting and to manage the risk these issues can create.

Planning for Voters with COVID

Jurisdictions around the country faced the difficult question of serving voters who are attempting to vote in person after testing positive for COVID-19. Louisiana Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin addressed the issue of turning away voters who present COVID symptoms during early voting stating, "I've got a challenge of dealing with courthouses who are doing temperature checks on people who are entering their buildings. I've got to inform them on early voting days you cannot reject someone because they have a temperature. If they present themselves to vote you have to let them vote."

James City County, Virginia, faced the question of how to respond when a voter called on Election Day asking for their voting location and informing the office that they had tested positive

for COVID. Dianna Moorman, Director of Elections, highlighted to the EAC that, even with appropriate use of personal protective equipment, offices must develop a plan for how to protect workers and the voter stating "it changes your mindset once you realize that the voter does, in fact, have the virus versus whether we treat everybody as a potential of having it." One potential solution Director Moorman highlighted is the use of specialized poll workers stating, "[w]e did actually enlist volunteers from the Medical Reserve Corps, we had quite a few of those who are, actually most of them were, retired doctors to work at the polls, as well. So they would have helped in the event of that happening."

Kentucky's primary included voting by appointment, a system that could allow offices to respond to the challenge of a voter with COVID. Through calling and setting an appointment time, a voter with COVID can be offered more personalized service and ensure that voters are not congregating in line with a voter known to have COVID.

POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

The loss of experienced poll workers can have ripple effects through the electoral process. As Sherry Poland, Director of Elections of Hamilton County, Ohio, testified to the EAC, "we learned from those states that did hold in-person voting during this pandemic that it's all about the poll workers." Whether it is the loss of experience in election operations or a loss of workers at a level that necessitates closing or consolidating voting locations, recruiting, training, and retaining poll workers has been a major thread of 2020 primary elections.

❏ Prepare to have fewer experienced workers. Conduct early outreach to past election workers to evaluate how many will be available to work in November. Having a sense of the scale of the problem will inform your recruitment efforts.
❏ Prepare for last minute cancelations. Election officials should anticipate a sudden and last minute drop in the number of available election workers and work to anticipate the need for additional staff.
❏ Consider offering hazard pay to poll workers if your budget allows.
❏ States should work with their governor or other applicable state agencies to make sure that unemployed workers who serve as election workers do not lose their unemployment benefits.
❏ Recruit from nontraditional groups, especially those currently impacted heavily by COVID-19 including hospitality workers, teachers, or workforces that could potentially obtain continuing education credits for training such as lawyers, accountants, or realtors.
❏ Streamline the application process to make it easy for poll workers to sign up.
❏ Expand opportunities for non-partisan volunteer groups and businesses to "adopt-a-precinct."
❏ Prepare to adjust training for poll workers to include options that meet social distancing guidelines through the use of new locations, PPE, or virtual training.
❏ Review the EAC Election Worker Successful Practices manual for further information on recruiting, training, and retaining election workers.

Preparing for Fewer Repeat Poll Workers

The typical age of a poll worker falls squarely within the most at-risk populations for COVID-19[1]. Due to the continuing outbreak, many experienced poll workers have not served in primaries and may not participate in November. This results in a loss of important election administration experience and creates an increased need for poll worker training. The reduction in repeat poll workers may become measurable early in the planning process. However, some election officials have reported last minute cancellations or no-shows on Election Day. Election officials will have to anticipate a last-minute drop in the number of available poll workers and work to anticipate the need for additional staff.

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[1] Data collected as part of the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) indicated that more than two-thirds of poll workers were over the age of 61 in 2018. Further information is available at https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/2018_EAVS_Report.pdf.

To help address these last minute shortages, some states have waived requirements that election workers reside in the local jurisdiction in which they serve. Many state offices have also created backup teams of workers who can be deployed throughout a state in the event that voting locations find themselves short staffed on Election Day. In some places, these teams have been comprised of off-duty members of the State National Guard.

Here are some examples from election officials:

Jared Dearing, Executive Director of the Kentucky Board of Elections spoke to this issue telling the EAC that "Kentucky is facing a crisis in the retention and recruitment of poll workers. Of the 16,000 poll workers necessary to operate Kentucky polling locations, over 9,000 are older than the age of 65. And over 5,000 are older than the age of 70." Further, he said, "It was reported to me by several county clerks that less than 10 percent of their poll workers were willing to work on Election Day. This will become exacerbated in November as turnout is expected to be record highs and experienced poll workers will be desperately needed."

Lynn Bailey, Director of the Board of Elections in Richmond County, Georgia faced similar challenges, testifying to the EAC, "Poll workers canceling out left and right here left some locations with very, very few experienced poll workers."

Thomas Lund, a municipal clerk in Madison, Wisconsin faced this issue stating, "[w]e've lost between one third and 40% of our [poll] workforce. Just, people who can't take the health risks. They will be back after COVID."

Dianna Moorman, Director of Elections in James City County, Virginia noted a large drop in the final hours saying "[w]e did have a 10 percent attrition rate from our election officers that did not show up within 24 hours of elections of the actual Election Day."

Recruiting New Poll Workers

Election officials facing a large deficit in experienced poll workers are turning to proven methods of recruitment as well as using innovative programs to meet their poll worker needs through partnerships with other officials and the public. Some examples from around the country include:

Officials in both Orange County, Florida, and Washoe County, Nevada, allow for the "adoption" of a voting location. The program has been used since 1998 in Orange County to ensure a full staffing of voting locations as community groups or businesses commit to working a voting location together on behalf of their business or organization. This program is available beginning in the 2020 elections in Washoe. Other counties are currently considering these options, including James City County, Virginia, as an option to increase the workforce.

Delaware recommends streamlining the recruitment of state employees to fill poll worker gaps in 2020. Previously, Delaware state employees would indicate an interest in serving as a poll worker and then be contacted to complete an application form which would then be sent to the appropriate county. In 2020, the Department of Elections created an application that could be completed online and immediately sent to their county, removing a step within their previous recruitment system. State Election Commission Anthony Albence credits the streamlined system with increased response rates stating "If we're asking for their help we should make it easier for them. It yields a lot more results."

States including California and Florida also encourage government employees to serve as poll workers or are making that request for 2020. Seminole County, Florida, has worked to directly recruit from within the government to prevent a potential shortage of poll workers in 2020. Supervisor of Elections Chris Anderson reported, "another measure that our office has adopted to cope with a COVID-19 election cycle is to reach out to local government partners--the other constitutional offices in the county--to borrow personnel to help the office staff and serve as election workers." The office sent flyers to the offices of the Sheriff, Clerk, Tax Collector, and Property Appraiser for distribution to their employees in the hopes of recruiting new poll workers for November. Other intergovernmental recruitment techniques included recruiting off-duty members of the National Guard to serve as poll workers in Nebraska, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, and to distribute hand sanitizer in Iowa.

Barbara Goeckner, Deputy Clerk of Cambridge, Wisconsin, utilized National Guard staff during the last minute confusion of what she described as an "ever changing" election. Due to last a minute court decision she explained "at approximately at 8 p.m. the night before the election it was decided by the courts the election would go forward at 7 a.m. the next morning." The decision resulted in a rapidly approaching absentee deadline as "[v]oters who didn't hear that late decision went to bed thinking that they had another week to get their ballots returned to the clerks," when in reality it was due the next day. Utilizing the National Guard as temporary phone bankers, the elections office made calls to all absentee voters at their known phone numbers to inform them of the deadline that day.

The Virginia Department of Elections worked with both the Governor and the State Department of Education to send letters to all state employees, college presidents, and school superintendents, as well as their National Guard, to encourage those workers to serve as election workers. This one method of outreach yielded over 1,500 applications. Virginia also worked with the state's Medical Reserve Corps, a nationwide program founded after 9/11, to have those volunteers help clean voting locations and maintain social distancing so that election workers could focus on administering the election.

Consider offering hazard pay or working with your government partners to allow government employees to receive pay for serving as poll workers if they are currently required to volunteer unpaid. Clark County, Nevada has utilized county workers as the team leaders at voting locations since 1994 but was unable to pay these workers. Due to the COVID pandemic these crucial workers will now be eligible for pay and comp time for agreeing to serve in 2020.

Additionally the county will be increasing all worker's pay by $50 due to COVID in an effort to recruit an adequate number of workers.

Officials can also look to other potential populations to recruit members of currently underworked professions. Madison, Wisconsin has recruited bartenders, a workforce that the Clerk licenses, to serve as poll workers for the past five years. The use of bartenders as poll workers helps to diversify their poll worker population and supplies voting locations with workers that are familiar with reviewing state identification as a part of their regular job. Richmond County, Georgia recruited medical and cyber professionals from the nearby Georgia University Medical Center and Georgia Cyber Center.

Student and educator populations have also been heavily recruited to bridge the gap of necessary poll workers[2]. James City County, Virginia utilized 16 and 17 year olds as "pages" for the primary election, allowing them to receive service credit for working at a voting location under the supervision of the Chief Election Officer. Richmond County, Georgia has an ongoing partnership with the Georgia Board of Education to recruit student and teacher poll workers. Richmond County specifically recruited high school juniors in the hopes of retaining them as poll workers in their senior year this November.

Hamilton County, Ohio took a multilayered approach. They have expanded their "Partners in Democracy" program to recruit poll workers from local government agencies and local businesses, and have received a commitment from a local Fortune 500 company to give employees the day off to serve as poll workers in November. They are establishing a new program entitled "Devoted to Service" to recruit members of nonprofits to serve together. Simultaneously they are running a "Youth at the Booth Challenge" to provide a pizza party to the local high school that recruits the most student poll workers.

Similarly, Paul Pate, Secretary of State of Iowa, outlined a robust recruitment program in Iowa including groups interested in voting, the National Guard, teachers and high schools, and city and county employees. Secretary Pate stressed the importance of early recruitment stating, "the sooner we have those poll workers identified, the sooner our county jurisdictions will know how many polling sites they can staff. If you don't have the people, you can't staff those sites."

Training New Poll Workers

Initial reports of malfunctioning machines or voting issues are often later found to be the result of poll workers not understanding a process. Poll worker training will take on an elevated importance in 2020 due to the recruitment of more inexperienced poll workers. Social distancing guidelines may require the development of virtual training programs.

Seminole County, Florida is one of many counties tailoring their training to the populations they serve. The county is offering training in-person in large spaces to allow for social distancing and

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[2] For more information, please visit EAC Election Worker Successful Practices.

the use of PPE as well as online training through utilizing an online meeting platform. Supervisor of Elections Chris Anderson stated "in-person training is for newer election workers. Online training is for more experienced workers who are already familiarized with the equipment. To be eligible for Zoom training, workers have to have served in two of the most recent elections."

Other states including Colorado, Indiana, and Texas are offering online training for poll workers. Chicago, Illinois is currently researching interactive online training to verify that the workers have engaged with the training. These programs will help to ensure that more poll workers, including those appointed right before and/or on Election Day, will receive proper training.

PREPARING FOR IN-PERSON VOTING DURING COVID-19: VOTING LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

❏ Anticipate losing voting locations due to the pandemic or due to insufficient poll worker staffing levels to maintain operations.
❏ Identify locations that accommodate social distancing, including innovate large scale locations such as sports facilities.
❏ If possible, utilize government facilities for new voting locations to limit the number of voting locations that cancel close to the voting period.
❏ Consider expanding curbside or "drive-thru" voting options to maintain social distancing and offer access to voters with disabilities.
❏ Review guidance from manufacturers on how to clean and sanitize equipment due to COVID-19.
❏ Work with other officials, including state governments and emergency managers, to access PPE.
❏ Consider distributing supplies used to vote such as pencils or pens as one time use supplies.
❏ Leverage existing tools and data sources to determine the best places to locate and ways to design in-person locations.
    ❏ Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project's COVID-19 Polling Place Queue Length Model
    ❏ University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy Voting Location Siting Tool
❏ Review GCC and SCC working group documents on:
    ❏ Innovative Practices and New Solutions
    ❏ Finding Voting Locations and Poll Workers
    ❏ Considerations for Modifying the Scale of In-Person Voting
    ❏ Health and Safety at the Polling Place
    ❏ Safeguarding Staff and Work Environment from COVID-19

Traditional in-person voting presents obstacles to following social distancing guidelines. In-person voting has historically involved physical interaction for voters through the check-in process, poll workers offering assistance to voters, or simply standing in line. Officials across the country have shifted the layout and design of their in-person locations to accommodate social distancing including spacing out voting booths and establishing a one-way flow through the voting location. Some have had to consolidate voting locations due to a limited number of poll workers and locations available in the primary. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the GCC have collaborated on guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 at voting locations. Election officials should refer to the latest Considerations for Election Polling Locations and Voters for the latest information on safely configuring and operating in-person voting locations.

Physical Distancing and Polling Place Consolidation

While voting locations and polling place design typically vary, some election officials are moving to voting locations that allow for poll workers and voters to maintain a safe physical distance. The lack of available poll workers may lead to polling place consolidations or the creation of vote centers. In addition, many jurisdictions leverage nursing homes, senior care, and other healthcare facilities that are no longer available to them given concerns around COVID, or use government or private facilities that are now requiring temperature checks or other health screenings. Further, voting locations are subject to the same capacity restrictions imposed on many other locations, which means that election officials not only need to accommodate more space between people, they need to plan for few people permitted in the entire facility. Officials across the country have utilized alternative government facilities, innovative design concepts, and unique voting locations to conduct their primaries.

Louisiana had to move 10% of voting locations due to their normal proximity to at-risk populations in nursing homes and healthcare facilities. Similarly, multiple jurisdictions in Wisconsin had to consolidate polling locations. Madison Municipal Clerk Thomas Kund stated, "Madison was down about one third in terms of polling places. We usually have 90 and dropped to 65 this spring because of COVID. Some places said 'we can't have you here.' We're now trying to maintain and hopefully increase the number."

Joe Gloria, Registrar of Voters in Clark County, Nevada, has traditionally placed voting locations in shopping malls and grocery stores. While these locations are easily accessible, they are also privately owned. After the outbreak of COVID, Gloria was concerned about the possibility of last minute cancellations for voting locations and worked to place vote centers in government facilities. This move will ensure that the 125 voting locations will be available on Election Day.

Officials across the country used the primary election to implement social distancing and capacity restrictions. Many polling locations featured markings or decals on the floor to maintain social distancing and the distribution of PPE to voters. The Governor of New Mexico issued an [executive order](#) limiting polling locations to serving four voters or 20% of a facilities capacity at one time and mandating social distancing to "minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19 through in-person voting." Locations across the country also obtained or made plexiglass or plastic partitions to further separate poll workers and voters while maintaining visibility for all parties.

Some jurisdictions have leveraged voting super centers. For example, Jefferson County, Kentucky had one voting location for their primary election. The voting location was established at the Kentucky Exposition Center, a large convention center location that provided the necessary space to allow distancing while voters were in lines and while voting. Voters and election officials reported no wait times and an easy and safe process to cast their vote.

Following reports of long lines in areas of Atlanta, the Atlanta Hawks offered State Farm Arena to serve as a voting location in November with arena staff trained to serve as poll workers. Following that announcement, the Detroit Pistons [offered](#) their training facilities and

headquarters as a voting center and the Milwaukee Bucks offered the Fiserv Forum a potential voting location. While all localities do not have access to a location the size of the Expo Center or an NBA Arena, localities should consider large venues that may not have normally served as voting locations but are otherwise vacant due to the pandemic, including sporting and business venues.

This innovative use of space and staffing may create opportunities to vote while social distancing, but will also require officials to address the unique nature of conducting an election in a large scale facility. Officials should plan in advance to anticipate questions that may arise such as whether voters must be in their precinct specific line at the close of voting hours or if being within the larger building or within a larger line within the location is sufficient or how to handle parking issues that may arise for voters. Officials should also consider physical safety requirements for voters, equipment, and supplies and anticipate any additional staffing that may be required to serve voters in large facilities.

If state law allows, officials can also provide the option of curbside or "drive-thru" voting. Election officials in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Virginia highlighted their use of curbside voting to the EAC. Officials in Kentucky worked to make this option available at locations that could provide that capability, with Secretary of State Michael Adams stating, "[t]o us it was pretty obvious that we had to come up with a way to ensure public safety, of course, but also ensure that Mother Nature didn't disenfranchise anybody."

Managing the Flow of Voters when Choosing New Locations

The necessary consolidation of polling locations that occurs when there are inadequate poll workers can lead to the use of voting locations that are new to voters and the election officials conducting the election. When choosing a new location, election officials should consider the flow of voters both inside and outside of the building, utilizing resources as needed to ensure voters can safely access the building. Officials should review Finding Voting Locations and Poll Workers and the University of Southern California Center for Inclusive Democracy Voting Location Siting Tool for further guidance on locating new voting locations. For further information on managing the flow of voters, officials should consult the Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project's COVID-19 Polling Place Queue Length Model.

In addition to necessary considerations to ensure voters with disabilities have access to voting locations, election officials should consider a layered approach to minimize traffic and ensure the orderly flow of voters into a limited parking area. One such approach was in Kentucky which included both free shuttle service to the voting location and the use of National Guard to direct traffic for those who drove to the location. A dramatic increase in turnout may exacerbate the need for creative solutions in November.

Providing Opportunities for Voters with Disabilities

Mail voting options do not meet the accessibility needs of all voters with disabilities who often rely upon accessible voting machines or curbside procedures at voting locations to vote a secret ballot. Election officials in jurisdictions that are expanding absentee or mail-in voting must ensure that in-person voting options accommodate the needs of voters with disabilities.

Lynn Bailey, Executive Director of the Board of Elections of Richmond County, Georgia emphasized the importance of ensuring the right to vote for voters with disabilities telling the EAC, "Anyone with a disability should be able to come in with relative ease to cast their ballot in an environment that's safe and welcoming. We also try to foster that by involving members of our disability community as poll workers. And that has really helped to provide mentors, particularly during early voting, to show voters the way, if you will."

Cambridge, Wisconsin Deputy Clerk Barbara Goeckner highlighted clear face shields during an EAC hearing as an option to assist hearing impaired voters that can normally rely upon reading poll workers lips at voting locations. James City County, Virginia is developing a tabletop display for voters with hearing impairment to provide step-by-step instruction to ensure they can vote and communicate with poll workers.

Some states are working to expand the use of electronic ballot delivery and marking tools to allow blind or visually impaired voters to vote an absentee ballot at home. For more information on electronic ballot delivery and marking, please see Electronic Ballot Delivery and Marking.

Personal Protective Equipment, Disinfecting Polling Locations, and Voting Supplies

COVID-19 has also created new responsibilities for election officials and poll workers, including acquiring personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., gloves and N-95 masks) and other protective equipment (e.g., other masks or face coverings), disinfecting voting locations, and distributing or disinfecting supplies used to vote.

Some states are providing protective equipment to localities. In states without a centralized distribution, officials should work with others in their states, including emergency managers, to obtain equipment directly. For example, the Wisconsin Election Commission worked with the Wisconsin State Emergency Operations Center to request cleaning supplies, PPE, and additional staff. The Center was then able to work with the National Guard to obtain and distribute the supplies. States may use CARES Act funding to obtain these supplies.

Kentucky utilized the National Guard to clean and disinfect voting locations. Chicago, Illinois prioritized the use of protective equipment when designing their voting locations. Following their primary, Chicago Election Board spokesman, Jim Allen told the EAC moving forward "[w]e will have stationary plexiglass shields--like you see in convenience stores--at the table where people are exchanging information. We will offer not only masks, but see-through face shields to poll workers, something they wear like with a headband."

Green County, Missouri has recruited additional poll workers sanitize voting booths, pens, styluses, and other materials between voters. Shane Schoeller, Green County Clerk told the EAC, "You want to minimize the risk to everyone that's there but we're going to have to have more people there rather than less in order to serve the voter well. So, for example we're going to have at minimum, one person who will be assigned to clean hard surfaces."

Consider distributing tools used to vote, such as pencils or pens, to voters as a one-time use supply to minimize the need for disinfecting during voting. One county that utilized this plan was Scott County, Iowa. Poll workers distributed pencils to use to complete their ballot and to take home, allowing the county to minimize the equipment that requires sanitization between voters. Roxanna Moritz, Scott County Auditor and Commissioner of Elections compared it to the typical "I Voted" sticker stating, "We went ahead and bought pencils for everyone. So it's going to be our 'I Voted' sticker. Take it with you please. Use it and take it with you and we'll be watching to make sure no one leaves them behind."

Localities that conducted primary elections during the COVID outbreak have spent significant portions of their budget and CARES Act funding on supplying protective equipment to voters and poll workers and acquiring equipment for voting locations. Localities must now evaluate how much of their purchased supplies are reusable, such as a plexiglass shield, and how much PPE must be replaced or purchased anew. Jared Dearing, Director of the Kentucky Board of Elections, noted the difficulty of stretching COVID response budgets, telling the EAC, "some of the things that we purchased for this primary election we can reuse. We can re-purpose. But a lot of the things were one-off costs."

PREPARING FOR INCREASED MAIL OR ABSENTEE BALLOTS

❏ Work closely with your state and regional USPS contacts.
❏ Prepare in advance:
  ❏ Clean up data to ensure the format works for your vendors
  ❏ Work with the United States Postal Service to design envelopes to ensure ballots can be mailed
  ❏ Establish a chain of custody for counties to track ballots.
  ❏ Evaluate staff needs to process additional ballots.
❏ Follow USPS best practices
  ❏ Use Intelligent Mail Barcodes
  ❏ Use green USPS 191 tags
  ❏ Work with a mail piece design analyst
❏ Discuss anticipated increases in mail or absentee voting with your vendors as early as possible.
❏ Identify a safe and secure location to store additional mail or absentee ballots.
❏ Work with officials in your state to provide flexibility in the timeline for processing ballots.
❏ Review GCC/SCC documents on preparing for increased mail or absentee ballots including:
  ❏ Managing an Increase in Outbound Mail Ballots
  ❏ Inbound Ballot Process
  ❏ The Importance of Accurate Vote Data When Expanding Absentee or Mail Ballot Voting
  ❏ Election Education and Outreach for Increased Absentee or Mail Voting

The 2020 primaries saw a dramatic shift in the use of mail and absentee ballots. In Kentucky, absentee ballots usually represent less than 2% of votes in Kentucky. The 2020 primary saw record turnout of an estimated 1.1 million voters with an estimated 75% casting their ballot absentee. Similarly, 1.75 million mail ballots were requested in New York, 11 times more than usual. The Michigan presidential primary saw a 97% increase in absentee ballot requests over their previous level from 2016. It is clear that jurisdictions will see record rates of mail and absentee voting in 2020.

Pennsylvania was poised to offer a larger number of absentee ballots in 2020 but saw a dramatic rise for their primary election. More than 1.8 million voters requested mail ballots, almost 17 times the number that requested to vote absentee in the previous presidential primary. Pennsylvania was able to handle the processing needs of this influx due to the availability of an online ballot application tool and a hotline they had established to assist voters that run into issues requesting their ballot. Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar told the EAC, "we were very thankful for the extra funds from the

federal government to allow them to increase their staff and increase their equipment and increase every way, shape and form the ability for them to increase that extra volume."

Many election officials will rely more heavily on ballot printing and mail processing vendors. However, some jurisdictions will be able to handle the increase of mail and absentee ballots on their own by processing the outgoing and incoming ballot packages with their staff. States that conduct all or most elections by mail typically begin working with vendors months in advance of Election Day. Vendors are purchasing new machines to increase capacity to meet the demands of the 2020 election, but have warned that they may not be able to obtain additional equipment in time to meet the needs of jurisdictions if they delay in placing orders for ballots.

Expanding Partnerships for Increased Mail or Absentee Ballots

A dramatic increase in mail or absentee ballots can lead to numerous challenges related to processing ballots, and further amplifies the need for a positive working relationship with the postal service and vendors. Increased use of mail and absentee ballots in the primary and lessons learned from states that conduct all elections by mail have helped to identify some of these potential issues before November.

Delaware Commissioner of Elections Anthony Albence credits working with the Postal Service representatives early in the process for success in rapidly increasing their mail ballot usage in 2020. Delaware's rescheduled primary fell on the Tuesday after the Fourth of July mail holiday. Due to an established relationship, Albence was able to work closely with the postal service and regional election mail liaisons to develop a plan for delivery, recommending that officials "Lay that groundwork early. Don't reach out just a day or week before the election. Develop a plan with them early. How are you going to plan with them to get mail if there's a chokepoint?" He also recommends utilizing all tools that the Postal Service makes available for election officials, including the election mail kit that is distributed to jurisdictions and collaborating on design. "Over the years one of the pieces we learned is it is absolutely essential to utilize through the USPS the election mail design service."

James City County, Virginia utilized a close working relationship with their Postmaster to ensure that every ballot legally cast was delivered on-time for processing. Speaking of their relationship, Elections Director Dianne Moorman told the EAC, "On election day, she (the Postmaster) actually got in her car and drove up to the processing center up in Richmond and delivered the ballots that were still in the processing center that would have otherwise missed the deadline on Election Day. She brought back over 200 of those ballots for us to process."

Barbara Goeckner, Clerk/Treasurer/Administrator of Cambridge, Wisconsin highlighted the importance of working with the Postal Service to prioritize applications during the application period and ballot return as Election Day approaches. She stressed the importance of including an intelligent mail barcode (IMB) on envelopes to track ballots in the mailing process. She also testified on her office's use of USPS 191 tags. She explained for any officials unfamiliar with the

tag, "It's a lime green tag that the post office will provide you to attach it to your ballots. It's to denote to the post office that these are ballots and they should be paid close attention to."

Election officials in jurisdictions across the country faced reports of undelivered ballots. Officials in Chicago, Illinois attempted to thwart potential issues through the use of intelligent mail barcodes. Even with thorough planning, election officials should anticipate that unforeseen mailing issues may occur or that voters unfamiliar with voting by mail or absentee may not recognize their ballot packet in the mail. Officials should establish crisis plans for communicating voting options to voters and ensure that voting locations have the necessary provisional ballots to handle an influx of voters who report not receiving their ballots.

ESTABLISHING STAFF LEVELS AND PROCESSING OF MAIL OR ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Additionally, election officials have to address where and how to safely store an increased number of mail ballots. Officials should work to identify secure locations now to allow for adequate planning on set up and security for operations.

Richmond County, Georgia saw an increase of mailed ballots from about 1,000 in previous elections to 30,000 in the primary. Board of Elections Executive Director Lynn Bailey stated, "With the influx of paper ballots, one of our biggest challenges was finding secure storage space for all the paper. We were fortunate in some ways, I guess, that our building was closed for weeks for about seven weeks prior to the election. We were able to commandeer various conference rooms around the building and even set up tables working in the hall. We tripled our staff. And attempted to keep everyone safe and distanced from each other."

James City County, Virginia, also ran into similar space issues. Elections Director Dianne Moorman told the EAC, "We also had the rearranging of the office space. We didn't realize at the time that we were going to have to shift the entire operation of what my office and my building did here in a very compromised space to make those ballots available and for us to be able to process by mail the huge increase that we had. So having to rearrange an entire building to make sure that that is able to accommodate what our new needs are is going to be a huge thing also going into November."

Processing Timelines

Ballot preparation and tabulation of the number of ballots expected in November will require an increase in staff and could require legal changes to allow for timely reporting of results. While some states with extensive vote by mail or absentee voting rates begin processing their ballots weeks before Election Day, some that have traditionally low absentee voting rates do not begin processing until Election Day or sometimes later. Election officials are setting the expectation that there will be an increase in unprocessed ballots on Election Day. Results posted on Election Day are unofficial and are not official until the certification of the election. The public and media should expect that the results will change over time as those ballots get processed.

This is a normal part of the election process. Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate has attempted to make this point clear to the press, telling the EAC, "we're spending a lot of time trying to explain to them that our goal is to give you accurate election results. It's not a race to get out the election results the fastest." Officials should work to provide flexibility in the timing of their ballot processing to ease these burdens.

Louisiana has worked to ease the pressures of Election Day. Through collaboration with legislators, the elections office will be permitted to allow election staff to begin preparing ballots for processing two days before Election Day. They also have altered their procedures to allow for processing of ballots to begin earlier on Election Day. Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin stressed the importance of timely processing stating, "We're going to have to start tabulation early on Election Day--much earlier than they're used to...because the expectation is there."

Officials in Delaware also advocated for additional time to process ballots before Election Day and were granted a 30 day period to process ballots. Officials are hopeful that the advance preparation of ballots will allow for a quick turnaround for certification and recommend that other jurisdictions work to allow advanced processing. Anthony Albence, Commissioner of Elections, stated "You don't want to be in the situation to be rushing."

Pennsylvania was previously one of four states that required election officials to wait until the close of polls on Election Day to begin processing absentee ballots. A recent change of the law will allow them to begin processing their ballots the morning of Election Day, providing crucial hours to begin counting a large portion of their votes cast.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE VOTING PROCESS

❏ Utilize the #TrustedInfo2020 initiative to ensure voters are receiving information directly from election officials
❏ Consider all communication channels available to communicate with voters about their options, including earned media, social media (including free options such as Facebook Live or Youtube videos), and information in sample ballot mailings.
❏ Collaborate with officials at every level within your state to reinforce accurate and up to date information.
❏ Use simple, clear, and plain language about the evolving changes to the election and the options voters have to cast their vote. Include information on expectations for voting in person, including how social distancing may impact waiting times and line length throughout the day.
❏ If state law allows, mail absentee ballot applications as opposed to informational mailings on how to apply. This will allow voters who lack access to printers to apply more easily for an absentee ballot.
❏ Meet voters where they are and partner with businesses, such as grocery stores or local newspapers, to distribute absentee application forms.
❏ Utilize temporary workers to conduct outreach to transient populations to potentially decrease the number of absentee ballots that are returned.
❏ Review GCC/SCC guidance on Election Education and Outreach for Increased Absentee or Mail Voting

Election Officials as Trusted Sources

In November 2019, the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) launched the year-long #TrustedInfo2020 initiative to promote election officials as the trusted sources of election information. By driving voters directly to election officials' websites and social media pages, voters will get accurate and up-to-date election information and minimize the impact of election misinformation and disinformation. Beyond participation from NASS members, 40 of whom serve as their state's Chief Election Official, national level partners of this effort include: the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED), U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Bipartisan cooperation can allow officials to ensure all voters receive the information they need and to inspire confidence in the electoral process. For example, in Kentucky, the Secretary of State, Governor, and Board of Elections worked together in a bipartisan manner to ensure voters had the information they needed to vote and saw members of both parties working together to address the challenges of conducting an election in a pandemic. Secretary of State Michael Adams highlighted these efforts when discussing CARES Act funding with the EAC stating, "It's important for me to work with a governor of the other political party, to reach an

agreement well in advance of our election and provide clarity to our voters." He further stated, "I'll tell you what I think is the biggest threat to our elections [] today. It's not foreign, it's domestic...It's us if we don't put partisanship aside and brinksmanship aside and come up with a solution."

Information about COVID-19 continues to evolve on a daily basis. Additionally, litigation on the 2020 election operations is ongoing in some states and may result in rapid and sometimes confusing updates to voters. The last minute cancellation of poll workers may cause last minute changes to polling place availability. Jurisdictions may face one or all of these obstacles. Election officials must recognize the opportunity for disinformation campaigns and the spread of misinformation that the evolving landscape of 2020 provides. Officials should communicate early and often in simple, clear, and plain language about the evolving changes to the election to help ensure voters, especially those who are unfamiliar with voting by mail or absentee, are less likely to fall for disinformation campaigns intended to confuse them or discourage them from voting.

Election officials must ensure their voters are aware of their available options for voting. Many election officials will need to educate their voters on new or expanded options due to COVID. Voters who are new to a specific process, such as absentee voting, need to be educated on the process including how to request and return a ballot. Additionally, voters need to be educated on the safeguards in place for each voting option so they will have confidence in the integrity of the election. Find more information in [Election Education and Outreach for Increased Absentee or Mail Voting](#).

Lynn Bailey, Director of the Board of Elections in Richmond County, Georgia highlighted the importance of informing voters stating, "As far as messaging goes on voting options, you know, I really can't say strongly enough I think that's one of the most important things we can do. Voters need to know what to expect. They need to plan. They need to assess what particularly under these circumstances what's going to work best for them." Her office is planning a multi layered approach to ensure voters receive the information they need on voting options. She testified that, "we'll continue to push our messaging through social media, through press releases and getting the word out by having good, frank, honest discussions with civic groups and other interested parties on their voting options."

Connecticut Secretary of State Denise Merrill has found voters to be on alert in 2020. "People are already sort of on edge, I think, and this is just making them frantic about their right to vote." She has utilized CARES Act funding to begin a public information campaign ahead of the November election stating, "One of the big things we're going to do is mount a big public information campaign because I think people are so confused about what the rules are. Has anything changed, can I get an absentee ballot, should I get an absentee ballot, are the polling places going to be safe? So I think we're going to have to spend a significant amount of resource on trying to reach people with the answers to these questions."

The Florida Division of Elections is also utilizing a portion of their CARES Act funding to communicate directly with voters to share accurate and timely information that voters need to know about their options for voting. Secretary of State Laurel Lee said, "One of the most important things that we did was make sure that the most up to date, current, accurate information was being shared so that the precautions that were being recommended, like social distancing, were implemented at the precinct level." This information will include informing voters of safety precautions in place at their voting location so they are comfortable voting if they choose to vote in person.

Use technology or creative campaigns to reach voters. After shifting to a vote by mail primary, the Nevada Secretary of State's office launched a campaign and website with FAQs to promote "Mail it in Nevada." As a part of that campaign, their office held a Facebook Live Q&A event to walk voters through the process of casting and returning their ballot.

Address common questions publicly to allow voters to obtain the information they need without making duplicate requests of elections staff. Due to two delays to their primary election, Delaware Commissioner of Elections Anthony Albence noted that many officials in the state were receiving duplicate questions. Albence worked with the Governor and Attorney General's offices to create and post a FAQ page responding to these common questions. He noted the questions continue to evolve and are constantly added to as voters post questions. "There's no bad questions. Every question is an important question to someone."

Distributing Absentee Ballot Applications

Officials in Ohio attempted to educate all registered voters by mailing a postcard to their home outlining the absentee application process. They discovered that it was not the most efficient way to increase absentee applications, as many voters lacked the technology to obtain an application without assistance from the election office. Sherry Poland, Elections Director for Hamilton County testified to the EAC, "In hindsight, that was a mistake. An application should have been mailed to all of those voters. As mentioned earlier by one of my colleagues, many voters, they might have access to the Internet but they don't have access to a printer." In order to better reach voters, her office pivoted to provide the application forms where voters were. "For example, we partnered with Kroger and asked them to put an absentee application in their grocery stores. That was the one place during late March and early April that people were still going, to the grocery store," Poland testified. They also partnered with local newspapers to print absentee applications in the paper, allowing voters to simply cut out the application for completion.

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate noted the success of mailing forms directly to Iowa voters. He testified, "One significant step we took was mailing absentee ballot request forms to all active registered voters. The challenges of businesses and libraries and public buildings being closed, if you don't have a computer then or a printer at home, you were going to have a hard time getting access to absentee ballot request forms. So we had to take significant steps to make sure Iowans could vote safely and securely."

Pennsylvania undertook a large campaign to educate voters about their options and to encourage vote by mail. Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar told the EAC, "we also embarked on a very comprehensive voter education campaign. So we basically ended up tripling, or maybe even more, the voter education campaign we had been planning before COVID just to educate voters about the options." This campaign included mailing postcards to all primary households and placing bilingual TV, radio, and digital ads, which Secretary Boockvar credits with increasing the number of voters who applied to vote by mail.

Reaching Student Populations

Localities with large transient or student populations may face unique hurdles in providing voting options while attempting to extend their limited budgets in 2020. With universities closing and shifting to online courses, many students may be registered at an address where they are no longer permitted to be physically present but plan to return. Dianna Moorman, Senior Director of Elections for James City County, Virginia, took a proactive approach to minimize the costly issue of ballots being returned to their office. She told the EAC, "[w]e actually took the time and called every single voter that was listed as a student and had their dorm address or had a different mailing address regardless of whether they were students or not. But we actually called them to see if they were, in fact, still at their dorm, if they were still at their apartments or if they were back home. We were able to capture about 80 percent of those." Through targeted outreach, officials can save resources that would otherwise be spent on ballots that are returned as undeliverable.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE MEDIA

❏ Work with the press to share information about election changes.
❏ If your office does not have dedicated communications staff, designate one staff member to coordinate with officials throughout your state and the press.
❏ Create a FAQ page in clear and basic terms for your website that includes commonly asked questions for the use of voters and the media.
❏ Compile a press kit for your websites' newsroom page. If needed, coordinate and share materials between offices throughout your state, such as sample press releases and news advisories to populate your press kit.
❏ Invite the press to a "show and tell" demonstration of how your office is adjusting to COVID or how your office will work through Election Day.
❏ Partner with community organizations to communicate directly with voters on changes.
❏ Consider hiring a public relations firm to assist in outreach.
❏ Utilize election officials and their websites as trusted sources of information.

Due to COVID-19, election officials have worked to adapt their voting procedures both for the primary and general elections. As with any elections-related change, the opportunity for voter confusion is high, presenting opportunities for disinformation and/or misinformation. Election officials can get ahead of these dangers by viewing press as partners in election outreach, focusing on voter education and outreach, and being the trusted sources of information within their communities.

Communicating with the Press

Many election administration changes have resulted from COVID-19, including consolidated voting locations, increasing voting by mail and extending early voting opportunities. Each of these changes has the opportunity to confuse voters and cause reports questioning the reasoning for the changes. By working with the press and building relationships ahead of announcing these changes, election officials can combat misleading coverage before it has the chance to reach the public and maintain voter confidence.

Ohio's primary election was delayed by six weeks due to COVID. To ensure the public was informed, Secretary of State Frank LaRose and the Secretary's office worked closely with the media to keep the public up to date leading up to the election. In partnership with local officials, the office sent out a press advisory announcing a "show and tell" demonstration of new voting equipment and how they were sanitizing equipment for their primary election. Grant Shaffer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, reported that after conducting one follow-up outreach to the outlets, the response by the press was overwhelmingly positive. He stated that while they may not have seen a similar reaction to a demonstration in the past, "People are really focused in a way on administration that they haven't been before." Moving beyond their demonstration, their proactive outreach to the press led to relationships that created multiple earned media interview opportunities leading up to the primary. Shaffer described their communications plan as "very scalable depending on what your resources are."

Beyond conducting media interviews and briefings, election officials should also consider compiling a press kit and housing it on their websites' newsroom page. Examples of states proactively compiling COVID information for the media and officials within their state include North Carolina and Wisconsin. If a local office does not have dedicated communications staff to conduct outreach or compile a press kit, they should work with officials at the state level or in larger localities in the state to obtain sample materials including press releases and fact sheets. It is also helpful to designate one staff member as the point of contact for press outreach and coordination on media work when an office does not have a dedicated communications staff or utilize officials from within the government that can aid in public relations for the elections.

Voter Education and Outreach

States should also communicate directly with voters to increase awareness of current election procedures and options through voter education and outreach campaigns and utilizing their

existing websites and social media channels. If you have funding available, consider hiring a public relations firm to help reach voters. Officials should also work with community groups to distribute information directly to voters.

Both Connecticut and Florida have utilized CARES Act funding to communicate directly with voters to share information ahead of the November election. These public information campaigns are intended to ensure voters know their options for voting and to help them understand the safety measures for their safety. Florida Secretary of State Laurel Lee told the EAC, "I know the local elections officials are very interested--as are we in the Department of State--in ensuring that voters have all of the accurate information they need about how to exercise the option that's right for them."

Clark County, Nevada, Registrar of Voters Joe Gloria described working with a dedicated staff member of the Public Information Office to work with the press and to speak with community organizations. Gloria stated that in addition to including information in sample ballots and displaying it prominently on their website, the work with the PIO has allowed them to "be successful in getting the word out" about the upcoming election and changes that COVID has required.

Similarly, the Ohio Secretary of State's office worked with community partners to quickly communicate changes to their election to voters. Through establishing sample letters, graphics, and other materials that could be sent directly to voters, the Secretary of State's office was able to utilize the reach of over 150 community organizations across the state including unions, business organizations, interest groups, libraries, and voting rights organizations. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Grant Shaffer reported "There was and is a very high willingness to be sources of good election information."

Election offices should provide clear information about any changes to the election procedures on easily accessible websites to ensure voters can find the information they need. Delaware Commissioner of Elections Anthony Albence stressed the importance of coming from the mindset of an average voter and not assuming knowledge of election administration. "Put yourself in that mindset of someone who knows nothing about the process. Things that may seem logical to you may not be logical to them. It may be totally foreign to them." The state's FAQ page has been utilized as a reference for both voter inquiry and press outreach.

States that have created pages for voters to find the most up to date information on how COVID is impacting their elections include Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Oklahoma. States that have not yet created a page for COVID updates should create a page dedicated to providing updates for voters and ensure it is easily identifiable from their homepage and accessible for voters with disabilities.