**United States Election Assistance Commission**

**Election Data Summit**

**How Good Data Can Help Elections Run Better**

Held at

American University

School of Public Affairs

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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

The following is the verbatim transcript of day 2 of the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Election Data Summit “How Good Data Can Help Elections Run Better” held on Thursday, August 13, 2015. The summit convened at 8:32 a.m., and adjourned at 12:26 p.m. EDT.

**ELECTION DATA SUMMIT**

CHAIRWOMAN MCCORMICK:

Welcome back to day 2 of the 2015 EAC Data Summit. I think we had a very good day yesterday and we’re going to have a great day again today. This morning I’d like to welcome Doug Chapin to start our day off. He is the Program Director -- Director of the Election Academy at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. And he’s going to get us started by kind of looking outside our world and how we can collect and use data. So, welcome Doug Chapin. We look forward to hearing your presentation.

MR. CHAPIN:

Thank you very much. Good morning everyone. My name is Doug and I’m an election geek.

[Cheering]

MR. CHAPIN:

Wait a minute, I know it’s early, but usually at the election geek anonymous meetings we say, “Hi Doug,” so let’s try that again. Good morning, my name is Doug and I’m an election geek.

MULTIPLE RESPONSES:

Hi Doug.

MR. CHAPIN:

Hi everybody, what a nice audience. Thank you for coming today. First of all, I do want to thank the Election Assistance Commission, the Commissioners, and all the staff, not only for inviting me but for hosting this Data Summit. There are few things that get me more excited in the world of elections than good data and using it properly. And so, it’s a great opportunity to be here. And as I often say, and many of you have probably heard me say, other than family and friends, my favorite people in the world to be with are election officials. So it really is a pleasure to be with you here early on a Thursday morning. And if you’re out there in Webcast land, especially if you’re out there on the west coast, thank you for getting up early to be with us here today.

What I want to talk about today, as we kick off day 2 of the Election Summit, is going beyond the importance of data and the importance of analysis and thinking a little more deeply about how we can use what we want to do with data to structure how we collect and analyze it. And so, I want to start with a phrase which is very popular with a local football team and that is this, “Know your why.” Why are we collecting data? Why are we collecting election data in the field of elections, and what does that tell us about what we can do with it? I think we collect data for three reasons. Data tells stories. Data give us the ability to flesh out what we see with our eyes and understand more. Data reveals truths. Data helps us go beyond what’s right in front of us, to see the forest and not just the tree that’s about to fall on us. But third, and I think most importantly, data needs language. Not just the language of stories and explanation, but also its own language, its own syntax, its own structure, which allows us to constrain it in such a way that we can tell the stories and reveal the truths that we want to tell and reveal. And to illustrate how that can work when it’s done well, I want to reference another field, which like the field of elections, is passionately of interest to millions of Americans, but inexplicably and even shamefully, seems to be ignored by the rest. And, of course, I’m talking about major league baseball. Now, I want to talk about major league baseball partly because, after family, friends, and election officials and data, baseball is really one of my favorite things. But I also want to talk about it today because I think baseball, and major league baseball in particular, has done a tremendous job in recent years in going beyond the way they’ve always done it to think ahead and, if possible in a game that’s over 150 years old, truly revolutionize the way in which they collect and use data. And to illustrate that, I want to talk about a couple of scenarios in a talk that I like to call, “A Tale of Two Pitches.” The first pitch involves this man – Max Scherzer of the Washington Nationals. On June 20th of this year, Max Scherzer was one out away from what’s known as a perfect game. And for those of you who are not baseball fans, a perfect game is when a pitcher faces the minimum 27 batters and retires every single one of them, allowing none of them to reach first base. It’s extraordinarily rare; maybe two dozen times at most in 150 plus years of major league baseball. That day, Scherzer was one out away, and the 27th batter was a man named José Tábata from the Pittsburgh Pirates. Tábata strode to the plate and very quickly Scherzer, like he had with just about everybody else that day, got to two strikes on Tábata. The entire crowd, me included, are on their feet roaring at the prospect of seeing something extraordinary and rare. Scherzer winds up, throws Tábata a hard breaking ball, known in the business as a slider, and this happens – the ball hits Tábata on his elbow, Tábata is awarded first base, the perfect game is gone. Now, it’s not a truly sad story because Scherzer retired the next batter, which meant he got a no-hitter, which is still very special, but not quite as extraordinary and rare as a perfect game. And after the game there was tremendous controversy about whether Tábata had done enough to get out of the way of the pitch. Not surprisingly, that discussion was colored in large part by the color of your favorite team’s uniform. If you were a Pirate’s fan, you shrugged and said, “Hey, it’s part of the game. Scherzer should have thrown him a strike.” If you were a Nat’s fan, or a neutral looking for something really rare, you thought that maybe Tábata had done a little bit less than he could have to get out of the way and maybe he shouldn’t have been awarded first base. And in the old world, and by the old world, I mean maybe, you know, seven years ago, before the iPhone 3, or whatever, the old days as my kids call it, all we would have had was that kind of talk radio debate back and forth. But we don’t anymore because of this. This is called PITCHf/x. It was developed by a company called Sportvision. And that picture up in the upper right hand corner is of three cameras which are in every major league baseball stadium across the country. And those three cameras capture about two dozen pieces of data for every single pitch thrown in a major league baseball game – speed, break, where it was released, where it ended up, position at the plate, and what have you. And that’s resulted in a huge database of pitches for collection and analysis. And if you look at that data, something striking jumps out at you about the Scherzer hit, by PITCH. In the history of PITCHf/x’s use, they recorded more than 5,000,000 pitches. Of those, 283 were like Scherzer’s, thrown by a right-handed pitcher to a right-handed batter with a hard break to one square inch just off the plate. How many of those hit a batter? One -- the one that hit José Tábata.

UNKNOWN:

Are you a Nat’s fan or a Pirate’s fan?

MR. CHAPIN:

I’m a Nat’s fan, you bet. Now, while this doesn’t conclusively determine whether or not José Tábata is the massive world class spoilsport that many of us think that he is, it certainly informs the discussion in a way that it never had before. In other words, major league baseball’s effort to collect and categorize and make available for analysis, pitch-by-pitch data, not just who threw it, but how fast it went, its location, what have you, tells us more about an event than we would have seen otherwise. Data tells stories.

Now, my next point involves an old joke that’s told about baseball umpires and in it three umpires are discussing their craft. And one of them says, “I call them as I see them.” And the other one pushes his glasses up to his nose and says, “No, no, I call them as they are.” The oldest one kind of harrumphs, spits his tobacco, and says, “Boys, they ain’t nothing until we call them.” And in baseball, for the longest time, the umpire’s word was the last word. If he called it a strike, it was a strike. If he said you were out, it was out. In the new world of PITCHf/x, that isn’t necessarily the case anymore. And, in fact, PITCHf/x can help us reveal truths about the way in which major league umpires call a baseball game. And so, to that, I want to talk about another scenario involving this young man, Bryce Harper of the Washington Nationals. Harper is only 22 years old and already in his 4th year in the major leagues. And this year he is having truly a year for the ages, hitting at a clip that rivals the great Ted Williams at his age. And a big reason for his success, in addition to his speed and power, and awesome hair if he takes off the helmet, is his command of the strike zone. This year, more than ever before, Harper has learned to identify what pitch is a strike, what pitch is a ball, what pitch to hit, and what pitch to let go by. And that power became very important on the night of July 31st of this year, in New York, when my Washington Nationals were playing their then second place rivals, the New York Mets. It’s the bottom of the 11th inning and a tie game. Harper came up and on a 2-2 pitch he was thrown this pitch circled in red. Now, if you look at this diagram, that black box is the strike zone. Harper, as a left-handed hitter, is standing to the right of the box. That pitch circled in red is high enough to be a strike, but is somewhere between six to eight inches outside the plate. Now, that is a rulebook ball, but is known in the business often as a lefty strike, and it is often called by umpires. Harper got that pitch, thought it was a ball, began to relax, the home plate umpire called it strike three. He was out. Immediately Harper and the umpire had a very frank and open exchange of views, after which young Mr. Harper was asked to leave the field. Now here’s something interesting about that pitch and that strike. Using PITCHf/x data, some enterprising analysts out there, not just motivated by the Harper call, but by others, looked at lefty strike data. These are all the major league umpires, about 100 of them, in the game. And what this analyst did is use that PITCHf/x data and figure out what percentage of lefty strikes those pitches off the plate that are still called strikes, were called by various umpires. And you’ll see, by the boxes I’ve circled, that the range is from about 4%, one in 25, to 30%, or almost one in three. What’s fascinating though is that when you take that data and overlay it against other characteristics, you find out that by and large the folks to the left hand side of the spectrum tend to be younger umpires, who presumably are looking at the PITCHf/x data and calibrating their strike zones accordingly. The ones who do not, tend to be umpires who are more experienced. Remember “they ain’t nothing until I call them.” Unfortunately for Bryce, the umpire that night was Jerry Meals, who is one of the more experienced umpires in the game. Data reveals truths. All right. You can take a single pitch, again, colored by your own fandom, or you can look at the data and start to identify how different umpires are calling different pitches. And so, it allow us to, instead of going from the forest, instead of going from the tree back to the forest, it enables us to go from the forest down to the tree and figure out where this individual umpire fits in the overall scheme of things.

How does this relate to elections? I think it relates to elections in a couple of different ways. Number one, the 3,000 plus election officials we have in this Country are in some ways like our umpires. Each one of them comes to the game, the field, the work, with a different point of view, a different approach, different biases, strengths and weaknesses. But unlike baseball, where we have this, PITCHf/x, we have tools that look more like this, the Election Assistance Commission’s EAVS tool. Now, this is light years better than what we used to have, which was nothing. Right? And it’s certainly better than paper and pencil. But unlike major league baseball, whose PITCHf/x gives us observational data, which allows us to record what happened, not necessarily what we see, we’re asking states and localities to report their own numbers. And unfortunately, that means we often end up with data that looks like this. These are three pages from the 2014 Report that involve 18 jurisdiction’s sort of lengthier explanations of, “How many applications did you receive?” Put this back into the baseball context, this is a little bit like an umpire saying, “Well, yeah, maybe it was a strike, but you know, where I’m from, if I have a steak the night before, my eyes are a little bit better, and I don’t like Harper because he’s young and he needs to get a haircut or what have you.” But you end up with this very sort of imprecise look at data. I think what we need in the field, and what I hope we will begin to talk about today and continue to work on going forward, is a system that finds a way to capture the same kind of real-time observational data, whether we’re using technology or the line length monitors that my colleague Charles Stewart, everybody drink, talks about, or the other innovative things that you all are doing. We need to make that routinized, rather than something that just the high performers are doing. We need to find a way to put real time constant scrutiny on the process, so that we can do maybe not 5,000,000 pitch level analysis, but we can still do very detailed fine-grained analysis of, not only what’s going wrong, because that’s what everybody always wants to talk about, but also what’s going right, so that the rest of us can copy it.

So, I hope you’ll forgive, and I hope you appreciated, the walk through the world of baseball and what it might mean for elections, but, again, as we think today, and going forward, about data, remember, data tells stories, data reveals truths. But without a language, without an approach, without a commitment to real time constant collection and analysis of data, all data can tell us is this [picture on screen].

I’m looking forward to working with all of you and with people at every level of experience, including entry level election officials, to adopt that constant, passionate commitment to data. I look forward to working with all of you. If you’ve got questions, suggestions, or anything else about the way you would like the work to go forward, please don’t hesitate to contact me at [dchapin@umn.edu](mailto:dchapin@umn.edu). Thank you for getting up early with me this morning. Thank you for indulging my love of baseball. And, play ball. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN MCCORMICK:

Thank you so much Doug. We’re looking forward to playing ball. We’ve got about 10 minutes before 9:00 so we’ll take a break until 9:00 and our first panel will start then. Thanks.

[Recess from 8:48 a.m. until 8:57 a.m.]

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CHAIRWOMAN MCCORMICK:

We’re ready to get started on our panel for today. Today we’re going to be looking at strategic planning for administering the 2016 and 2018 EAVS, so this should be very interesting. We touched on the EAVS a number of times yesterday. Moderating the panels today will be Merle King from the Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, and thank you so much Merle, as always, and take it away.

DR. KING:

Thank you Commissioner McCormick and welcome everybody to the first of two panels this morning that will address issues related to the EAVS survey. The first panel this morning will look at the challenges of collecting data, and then, the last panel of the day will conclude by looking at strategies and opportunities for implementing the data in the EAVS survey.

What I’d like to do this morning is make a few introductory comments, and then, we’ll get right to our panel and at the conclusion we’ll have an opportunity for some Q&A as we’ve done. And additionally, maybe to take comments from the audience on challenges that, perhaps, were not illuminated by the panel, but may be relevant to this discussion.

I want to begin by talking about some things that we heard yesterday and kind of use those topics as a bridge into today’s discussion about these challenges. The first one that struck me yesterday was the constant reference to data and the importance of data in the process. And for those of us who work in the space of information, information systems, there is a fairly sharp distinction between data and information. Data is kind of raw representation of fact or phenomena. Information has a different kind of value. Information informs decision making and informs policy development. And, so I think a part of what we’re talking about today is the transition from collecting the data to making the data -- transforming the data into useful information, and subsequently then into knowledge, knowledge which blends the experience of the election officials and policy makers with that information. So that was one thread that I heard yesterday. A second thread has to do with the difference between what’s interesting and what’s impactful. And often as academics sit around and talk about data and problems and opportunities, you’ll hear the word *interesting*, that’s *interesting*. And election officials rarely talk about what’s interesting. Interesting is usually a metaphor for something bad that’s happened. What we talk about is *impactful*. How can we collect and transform this data into information that impacts elections, improves elections? And then, finally, is this notion between pushing and pulling data through systems. And if you think about the difference between a siphon and a pump, a siphon pulls through a system, it pulls through channels. And once you initiate the siphon, it powers itself through gravity. And when we’re talking about information moving through systems, if you can create an environment that pulls the data through, that is, the end-user is incentivized to use that data in strategic and tactical ways, then, those systems become kind of self-powering systems. On the other hand, push systems, where we have to constantly apply an impeller force to push the data through the systems, those systems are fragile in the sense that as soon as that force stops, the data stops. And so, what struck me yesterday as we talked about these issues, is how much of what we’re doing involves compliance and kind of pushing data through the system, as opposed to creating incentives and methods to pull the data through the system.

So, Section 241 of the Help America Vote Act, HAVA, charges the Election Assistance Commission with the responsibility of conducting periodic studies of election administration issues, and that is what we do with the EAVS survey. It is conducted every two years, and the purpose of this survey is to look at challenges, not so much to reflect on how we could have done better, but more, how we can do better as we begin to organize the 2014, I’m sorry, 2016 and 2018 events. So, the goal of our round table this morning will be to talk about the challenges that state and local election officials, as well as researchers that are engaged in the actual collection of the data, what are the challenges of executing this requirement of HAVA? One of the things that also strikes me, if you work in a research environment, and I think Eric Fischer really teed this up yesterday when he talked about his background in biological sciences, research is kind of research and there are rules that apply across the board, whether you’re collecting quantitative data, qualitative data. And a common challenge to all research projects is ensuring that there is accurate and appropriate data collection techniques. What makes the EAVS survey so challenging is that the protocols, which need to be uniform, the protocols, the actual methods and techniques for collecting the data, storing that data in the system, those protocols have to be uniformly applied across the spectrum of all researchers. Well, if you think about it, the researchers are the actual individuals that are collecting and inputting this data into the system. So, we have some kind of integral issues within our protocol structure, of the EAVS environment, that creates challenges for this uniform and accurate, and as Doug said this morning, kind of the routinized approach to collecting this data. So, the researchers that are assigned this responsibility, some, I call them researchers, they are election officials, we’re a very diverse group. We’ve diverse geographically, we’re diverse by the laws of our jurisdictions, we’re diverse by our employment arrangements. I don’t know, off the top of my head, the number of part-time election officials in the U.S., but I’m sure it far exceeds the number of full-time professionals. So, we have a variety of issues that we’ll be talking about, on this panel, and what I’d like to ask each panel member to do is to give a 5-minute, or less, if you’re so inclined, introduction of the challenges that you see from your perspective as a local, state election official or a practitioner in some regard. And then, once we’ve gone through the panel, we’re going to come back and reflect on some of the things that we heard in the opening comments, but also reflect on some of the things that we’ve heard yesterday, and, then we’ll open it up to questions from the audience.

So, with that, I’d like to introduce the panel and start on my far right with Shirley Black-Oliver. Shirley is the Voter Registrar of Clarendon County, South Carolina. Best run county in South Carolina.

MS. BLACK-OLIVER:

Thank you.

DR. KING:

Next to Shirley is Veronica Degraffrenreid, and I like to show off that I can pronounce her last name. Veronica is the Election Preparation and Support Manager of Elections for the State of North Carolina. Best run state in the south.

Keith Ingram is the State Election Director of Texas. Texas is just in a class by itself, so there’s no comparison.

Next to me is Kevin Kennedy, Director and General Counsel for the Government Accountability Board of Wisconsin.

On my left is Baretta Mosley, Circuit Clerk of Lafayette, do you pronounce it, la-FAY-et or LA-fa-YET?

MS. MOSLEY:

You say la-FAY-et.

DR. KING:

La-fey-et. That’s how we say it in Georgia too. Lafayette, Mississippi.

Next to Baretta is Ron Szoc, the EAVS Project Manager for the EAC, a contractor.

And then, Abby Moore, who is a research analyst with FVAP.

And so, we’re going to go in this order. And there’s timers in front of you, if it helps. And we’ll begin with Shirley.

MS. BLACK-OLIVER:

Good morning. Once again, I am Shirley Black-Oliver from Clarendon County Voter Registration and Elections. I am also the past, immediate past president of the South Carolina Association of Registration and Election Officials. It is my pleasure to be here today.

On the local level we face many issues. As you know, locally the information is obtained and then transmitted to the state level to complete the EAVS survey. Locally it starts with the poll managers. In the State of South Carolina, the poll managers pay is extremely low, therefore, it is very hard for us to get younger poll managers. However, the State of South Carolina does have the 16 to 17 year old program that we use to help the poll managers at the precinct. In obtaining the information to complete the forms letting us know whether an individual voted a provisional ballot, failsafe ballot, or several other issues, including photo ID. If the information is not complete on those forms, it is hard for us to gather the information that we need to give to the State. So, having the 16 to 17 year olds is a plus for the State of South Carolina. Also, with the surveys, not only do we have to obtain the information for the surveys for the EAVS survey, we also are bombarded with surveys from other individuals. For instance, the Associated Press and other local interested groups. You all don’t understand the impact that causes us in obtaining this information when a lot of the information is duplicate information that can be received from, if they would just visit the EAC site and obtain some of the information that they are looking for. So, having to deal with so many surveys, having to deal with the low pay salary for poll managers, and not being able to obtain younger poll managers, it causes an impact on obtaining the information expediently so that we can get it to the State office. And that’s one of the issues, some of the issues that we’re faced with locally. The State of South Carolina, however, is good, as far as putting information in our system. We input that information into the system, where they will be able to abstract it from there and be able to use it for the survey. So, that’s a good plus for South Carolina. But locally, poll managers, and the poll managers pay is one of the problems that we face that causes a big stress in obtaining the information correctly and timely.

DR. KING:

Thank you Shirley. Veronica?

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

Good morning. Again, Veronica Degraffrenreid, the Elections Manager with the State of North Carolina. And I started with the State Board of Elections in 2008, and so, my first EAVS survey was in 2009. And after going through that survey I almost quit. It was a very, very difficult process and procedure and there were a lot of challenges. And what I realized is that we didn’t, although North Carolina has a homegrown elections management system, we refer to it as SEIMS, or the State Elections Information Management System, and what I realize is that that system needed to, basically, cull more data in order to breed more uniformity. And so, as I was going through, and I was tasked with completing the survey, it was difficult, number one, to get the data that we needed from our IT Department. And so, I realized that I needed to work, one of my tasks was going to be to work very closely with our IT Department to tell them what it was that we needed. And so, that if SEIMS needed to be modified, it was our job, as the business unit, to let them know what type of data we needed and how that data needed to be sliced and diced. Some of the information that we needed for the survey had to come from our County Boards of Elections. So, in North Carolina, we’re top down, we have the State Elections Information Management System. All 100 counties in North Carolina, all of their data goes into that application, and then, we pull data from that application, but it didn’t do enough in order to give us the ability to really respond to those questions. So, what I found, in having our County Boards of Elections respond, manually, outside of SEIMS, was that the data didn’t add up sometimes. And so, that was frustrating. And so, you’re sitting there, you know, really for hours and hours and hours, and, you know, thank God for pivot tables, in trying to get everything to somehow add up. And that’s not a comfortable feeling when this data has to be shared nationwide and people are using that data from year to year, you want to make sure that if you are sharing that data, it is reliable. And so, I’ve worked very hard over the past several years to kind of automate what we do in North Carolina, in terms of responding to the EAVS survey. So, that was one of our initial challenges. Now, there are a lot of questions, that’s the other, there are a lot of questions in EAVS. And we slice and dice, you know, different segments of data in many different ways. And we’re not quite there yet, some of the things, you know, we’ve decided that, okay, we can’t respond to that, that’s too much in the minutiae, because in changing SEIMS in our State, there’s an opportunity cost. I mean, this is responding to data, and that’s important, but there are other things that are involved in elections administration, as well, that we want to ensure that our voters, what the impact is. So, there’s a balancing act between what can we do to improve our system to, I guess, encourage better data collection, versus what can we do to improve our system to help us more effectively manage elections in North Carolina. And so, there’s a balancing act challenge, as well. But, despite that, and I know this is about the challenges, but I just want to, I think we’re going to touch on this in the segment, despite all of that, we don’t mind in our State, I don’t mind, responding to the EAVS survey, despite its challenges, because what I find, you know, almost on a weekly basis, sometimes daily basis, when we get closer to elections, is that everybody wants data. And our public has become more sophisticated, they know that the data is out there. And it’s great when they’re asking about, “Oh, well can you give us information about the 2010 and compare that to the 2012 or 2014?” And all we have to do is say, “Go here.” You know, that data is available. So, we’re not having to continuously, you know, reinvent the wheel and provide data that has already been, and then, you can slice and dice and, you know, get the information that you need from the data. Thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you Veronica. Keith?

MR. INGRAM:

Keith Ingram. I’ve been the State Election Director in Texas for three years, seven months, eight days, not that I’m counting, and that means that I’ve gone through two of the EAVS surveys, after the 2012 election and after 2014, and they were both painful processes. My assistant, who runs point on the process, quit after the first one, and the one that just did it said that if she’s here in 2016, it will have been a failure on her part. So, there are challenges involved. We’ve got the opportunity when we talk about the challenges, to talk about what I like to talk about, which is Texas. Texas is large. It’s large and diverse. And the first and most fundamental challenge, that we have in collecting the EAVS data, is that people are involved. We’ve got 254 counties in Texas. We’ve got 101, 108, something like that, that have Election Administrators that’s appointed by a County Election Commission, and they do both the voter registration and election management for those counties. So, there’s one person that we have to interact with in those counties. In the other 150 or so counties, we’ve got, usually the situation is a County Clerk, that’s elected, that runs the election, and then, there’s a Tax Assessor/Collector, that’s elected, that does the voter registration. And they like to point fingers at one another about whose responsibility it is for which part of the EAVS survey. We also have in some counties, some of the smaller counties, we’ve got a Sheriff, who is the Tax Assessor/Collector, who is the Voter Registration Manager, who is the Election Manager. So, you know, we’ve got a variety of situations, we’ve got everything from Harris County with 2,000,000 voters, to Loving County with about 85, and all of the magnificent variation between. And so, that means that each of these county election officials has available to them a different set of resources, a different set of cultural variables, and even different language. We’ve got, we’ve got some places where county election precincts are county election precincts, and we’ve got a lot of places where county election precincts are, just about, only known as boxes. So, if you talk county election precinct, they don’t really understand what you’re saying, and they have to go through their translation filter. So we’ve got people. The second challenge is, of course, technology, and Veronica was just talking about that. If the system that we have in place doesn’t collect the data, or make it easy to collect the data, then, we have to do what Professor McDonald was talking about and the county election officials have to either reconstruct the data after the fact, or they have to keep a second set of books. In Texas, that’s complicated because we’ve got an election management system, a voter registration database that’s statewide, that is used by 215 counties. There are, however, 39 counties who have their own VR system and election management system, that interfaces with ours on a batch process overnight, but basically, they are on their own. The problem is that the 215 counties that we have that operate online with our election system represent about 4,000,000 voters in Texas. The offline counties, the 39 that are offline, represent about 10,000,000 of our voters. So, we have very little control over what their systems collect. So, the third challenge is the EAVS survey, itself. It is lengthy, it’s sliced and diced in pretty fine categories, and it uses terminology that is not common to all of our jurisdictions. So, there is what I like to think of as the perfect storm, the confluence of all three of these challenges. And the confluence of all three of these challenges occurs in the UOCAVA data. We have a system where the categories that the EAVS survey puts out are very finely described and may not be understood by the local election officials, which is the second variable, and then, we’ve got a system that doesn’t capture those categories. So, here we’ve got data that is purely *ad hoc* and after the fact and completely unreliable. So, you’ve got a number in a box that looks like data, but if you put any confidence in that number at all, you’re missing the boat. But it doesn’t have to be the confluence, the perfect storm, it can be a situation where, voter registration, it’s easy, right? We’ve got all the categories in the system, we’ve got people who know how to use those categories, and the categories are, generally, well understood. So, if a voter registration comes in code 17, that’s a county registrar voter registration application. That’s easy. If it comes from DPS, it’s whatever the code number is for DPS. If it comes from a health agency, it’s got that code number. But you still depend upon people who are entering that data to put in the right code. So, even if, as we are planning to do, even if we add categories to our election management system so that people can enter the data, we are still going to depend on data, on people to put that data in under the right code. And that’s always going to be the most fundamental and basic challenge.

DR. KING:

Thank you Keith. Kevin?

MR. KENNEDY:

Good morning everybody. I’m Kevin Kennedy. I have a few pictures to illustrate some things and to distract you from what I’m saying as we talk. Unlike Keith, I have been keeping track of my time. Next Monday marks 32 years as Wisconsin’s chief election official. And if you do the math, yes, I started at the age of seven. One of the things I’ve learned over that period of time talking to local election officials, talking to my co-workers, is if you’re going to be successful as an election official, you need to know your numbers. And you need to know them in the biblical sense, as intimately as you possibly can. As Doug Chapin said, data tells stories. And I can think of hundreds, if not thousands, of stories that come up because people knew their numbers or they didn’t know their numbers. And in Wisconsin, probably the challenges for this election system are really all about the numbers. This begins with the number of local election officials we partner with to collect data, 1,853 towns, villages, and cities, along with 72 county clerks. There are 66 questions on the EAVS survey, including FVAP related questions, with 7,333 total sub-questions. Since we are NVRA exempt, we don’t have to address all of those questions, one of the benefits of Election Day registration. I’m going to skip a couple slides to get to -- we choose to collect our data at the recording unit level, which is the smallest meaningful unit of election data for voters, poll workers, ballots, results, interactions at the polling place, incidents at the polling place. In 2014, we had 3,589 recording units. That translates to 2,630,737 data points for the EAVS. This presents four sets of challenges for us. One, which I’m going to finish with, is buy-in from our local partners, why we collect this data. Two, as you can guess from these numbers, is just the collection of that data. Three, to make this data relevant, reconciliation. And four, reporting it out to the people who want it. After five rounds of data collection at the national level, and maybe I’ve got that number wrong, we’ve made significant strides under collection, reconciliation, and reporting. In 2008, as far as collection goes, we received a $2,000,000 grant from the EAC. We used those funds to establish an electronic data collection portal, get away from the paper collection. We had been collecting data in Wisconsin on registered voters, particularly because of our Election Day registration, since the ‘70’s. We also used that money to bribe, I’m sorry, to induce our local election officials to learn how to use that portal. After an initial series of $100 payments per reporting unit to provide an incentive to get local election officials off the paper forms and the data inputted directly into our Wisconsin Election Data Collection System, or WEDCS, this reduced our data entry. It provides on-line prompts and definitions, people can hover right over the question, they can find those definitions, and it has standardized our data collection. When you have that many numbers to draw on, that’s very important. From a reconciliation standpoint, just collecting data from local election officials is not enough. To ensure we’re collecting and reporting quality data we implemented an intensive reconciliation effort utilizing common data points from our statewide voter registration system, from voter participation, voter registration, UOCAVA numbers, and absentee voting, to match that up against our WEDCS data. We also draw on our State canvas reports, the official results, as part of that reconciliation. And that is very important to us to make sure we’re getting these. We use these checkpoints to follow-up directly with those local election officials. You know, we can check to see where there are differences, we’ve built in certain formulas on that, so we know who we have to call to follow-up. It’s not just “is there a number there,” but do those numbers make sense across those three different data points. When it comes to reporting data, in order to prepare our reports for the U.S. EAC, and for the website, which is where we direct a lot of people, we need to develop and refine our data queries to pull the most complete data into those reporting templates. Each reporting cycle we review and revise these queries. It used to take us two months to take the ever-changing questions that came in on EAVS and its predecessor, we’re down to two weeks, but we have to refine that each time. Probably the most important thing, though, is not, as I said, the collection, the reconciliation, or the reporting, it’s getting the buy-in. And if I’m looking at challenges, when we were preparing for this, among our staff, what we really did is try to figure out what was the biggest challenge -- and it’s getting the buy-in from local election officials. It’s a continuing challenge to explain why we collect data and why it’s important. I think the key is to convince local election officials that the data is actually being used to improve how elections are administered. And, frankly, our staff said, “Are we really doing that?” And it’s forcing us to re-examine that. I’ve heard a lot of discussion about this today. In many cases we do do this. We point this out when we’re developing fiscal estimates. We use our WEDCS data to refine, and thwart, sometimes, legislative initiatives that come from the 132 election experts in the legislature. We’ve also drawn on this data to develop some very comprehensive reports on the impact of eliminating Election Day registration. When they find out it costs $5,000,000, they rethink that. The cost of using saved data to verify citizenship, we’re able to pull our data to develop these reports, which you can find on our website. One of the elements we’re really hoping to do to develop and ensure buy-in, as well as improve collection and data quality, is to tie data collection to the daily processes of registration, issuing ballots, UOCAVA voting, and other aspects including poll worker recruitment and retention. If they’re thinking about that as they’re doing the Acts, and the data is part of that implementation, I think we have -- probably the best place where we’ve had to get buy-in is we, in addition to the EAVS data, we collect election cost data for every election in the State. And we developed this during the recalls, and it was very important because people wanted to know what does it cost to run an election in Wisconsin. And it turned out, it gave the locals tools to go back to their council members and say you’ve got to change the budget, we did not plan for these two extra statewide recall elections. We started this in 2011. We got a lot of pushback, at first, because people saw that as “oh, you’re just trying to show how costly this is, and you’re going to try and thwart the recall efforts.” The answer was “no,” it gave a lot of information for people to use, and we continue to use it. As I mentioned, it shows up in those reports. So, if I would emphasize one thing, it’s, look very hard at why we’re collecting this data and develop reasons and examples and stories to tell about why you’re collecting it, so that you can get that buy-in. And when I’ve got as many local partners as I do, it’s very important, because sometimes I have to have a one-on-one with each of them to tell them that story and convince them. Thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you Kevin. Baretta? Baretta is going to use the timer. Kevin, did you? I don’t think Kevin had one down there.

MR. KENNEDY:

I ignored it.

MS. MOSLEY:

Good morning. I am Baretta Mosley from the great State of Mississippi. I live in Oxford, Lafayette County, where the Ole Miss Rebels reside. Got it right. Since I’ve never had the opportunity to observe elections in other states, I can only speak for the State of Mississippi where the Circuit Clerk is the go to person for elections. We have more than 19 clerks retiring this year, two have already retired. And the Circuit Clerk is not just a Registrar; that is just one of the many duties that we have to do. I am the Circuit Court Clerk, and Registrar does not define what I do for elections. I register people to vote, I send out voter registration cards, I provide ID for people who do not have ID for voting purposes, I do absentee voting. As a matter of fact, that’s what I was doing all day Monday from 6:00 in the morning ‘til about 6:00 p.m. in order to be here this week. We’re in an election cycle now. My staff is a staff of six people; that includes me. And I work with five Election Commissioners, which are elected by supervisor districts. We use the same statewide election system in all 82 counties to run our registrations and our elections. We use the same election equipment in all 82 counties, except for four. And that equipment that we use is ES&S. Now, when you talk about data collection and Circuit Court, I have to just kind of cringe, because I’m known as the person who hate elections, along with the other 82 clerks and the 19 that are retiring, because of elections because it takes a big chunk out of what we do. And, we are a State Court. That means that we handle felony cases, civil cases, we have a drug court, and we have county court. And we have to divide all this time with elections. So, when you have that kind of burden hoisted on your shoulders and elections is part of it, and election has developed into a big hole, a big black hole that gets bigger and bigger, and on the heels of that black hole, you have a survey from this person, that person. But, because we are on the same election system with the state, they have assisted us in a lot of these surveys. And our little cheat sheet looks something like this. When we get surveys from, this is our EAVS survey, and if you’re not familiar with the election system, this looks like Japanese to you. And our new clerks, which we will have more than 20 taking office on the first of January, and our Presidential Primary Super Tuesday is in March, we’ve got to get those clerks trained between January and March how to hold elections. Not only how to hold elections, we’ve got to do this all in the midst of holding Court. And on my docket, I have, at the present, three capital murders, one simple murder, three hundred and something drug, burglary, rapes, and a capital rapist that included bestiality that I cannot find attorneys to represent these people for. And saying all of that, I just wanted to emphasize that if we are a little slow in getting this information to you…

[LAUGHTER]

…please be patient with us, because we will eventually get it. Because this is, I know it is important data and we want to cooperate, but that’s just like a little speck of, you know, in the universe. But, we will eventually get to it. And with our, with us being a University town, we have an explosion of students, probably in the next couple of weeks, and they’re all going to register to vote because they will vote for the president, and never vote again in our county. Thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you Baretta. Ron?

MR. SZOC:

Good morning. My name is Ron Szoc. I’m with ICF International. We are the data collection contractor for EAC, and I’d like to personally apologize to everyone here for being responsible for such turnover at the State election offices because of the EAVS. As you know, it’s close to 800 items, it’s quite a mound of information and I really do feel your pain. One of the things I’d like to do here is to clear up what I thought was a misconception that I kept hearing yesterday. And that is the impression, if I didn’t know anything, and just based on comments yesterday, it sounds like the way EAVS data collection works is kind of like a slingshot dragster. You know, bam, out goes the data collection tool, we get the data back, then three months later, there’s a report. But it’s more nuanced than that. There’s actually, in the data collection tool, there are approximately 127 rules that are applied, dynamically, as data are entered that check for various inconsistencies. When we get the data from the state with the data template, then we run further checks against, at each jurisdictional level, and as well as at the State level, using about 240 additional rules, including rules for the FVAP questions that were added this year. So, there’s a lot of error checking going on and it would be a mistake to assume that because there are, I hate air quotes, but there I am, because there are errors, or what look like errors, that there is no error checking. And that’s not quite the case. So, in terms of, I start to think, okay, what’s the best way to approach this, and I thought -- oh, and the other thing about EAVS is that occurs in a very short timescale. You know, the data are due to us, according to the nominal schedule, by February 1st of the year after every election. We have two weeks to turn it around, do our additional validation checks. We generate a log, we send it to the State, State has two weeks to make any corrections. And corrections are, in a sense, not required, I mean, we can’t beat them up because they refuse to change a number that doesn’t make sense. You know, the States will come back with whatever their response is. And that has to have -- so everything is done and the database allegedly is frozen by March 2nd. In reality, things kind of dribble past that, because, you know, States, they have other things to do, they’re not all about EAVS. They have, you know, court cases to take of, and things like that. So, we’re flexible, and we try to work with the States so that ultimately we get the data in time to generate that report in June. So, I started to think, okay, so, I like to think of error as like this active character that looks something like a Smurf, but not quite that color blue, and Mr. Error is always looking for ways to creep in and gum things up. So, what are the possible sources of error that we have in the EAVS? Well, I think that there is, let’s see how many do I have? I have like three. Okay, so there’s three sources of errors. One is an error of omission. So, you know, you look at the data and at jurisdiction and it’s not there, and you think, well, it should be there. But why isn’t it there? Well, it could be, as we heard that sometimes the election management systems don’t maintain that data. It’s not entered, it’s not part of what develops. So, the data, literally, is not available. Or, someone at a jurisdictional level, for those States that do a sort of a bottom up approach to the EAVS, some clerk didn’t know where to find the data, and so, there you have a blank for a particular jurisdiction, but you might have the total number for the State. Then there are errors of commission, like errors, just flat out data entry errors. Like one error that we came across was one of the States said that they had 1.4 million election machines, which seemed a little bit excessive. It certainly got the usage of machines, well, it turns out they had closer to 700. And that was just a pure data error, and it was easy to catch. And then, there are what I call errors of sense, as in “that makes no sense.” But how do you know that? You know that because of some outside information. You know that because, for example, in the example that was cited the other day, yesterday, was that a State had the same number of participating voters as the number of registered voters, which, clearly is impossible. But why is that? Because it’s something that we know from actual election behavior. But, at an individual jurisdictional level, like the one from Maine that has 12 people, or nine depending on the family that’s moving in and out, maybe 100% participation is a valid number. So what should the rule be? So, you know, how do we take care of this? Well, one is common definitions, but that’s not quite it because you can have common definitions, but you need to make sure that people understand the meaning of those definitions. And that’s been a perpetual problem, as we’ve heard from yesterday’s panels and I’m sure we’ll hear more of it today. We heard that, in Texas, that was part of the problem. EAVS uses language that people in Texas do not use, and vice versa. Secondly, maybe more training at the jurisdictional level, although, with all the stuff that election officials do, I don’t know if that’s realistic or possible. It’s also a financial burden and it’s not like your buckets are overflowing with cash, you know, unless you’re doing something funny, in which case, welcome to Washington. And then, there’s possibly unsolvable problems. What do you do, what do I do as the data collection contractor when we go back to a State saying, you know, you really need to look at this number because, you know, this should really be less than or equal to that, but it’s not, it’s twice that. And what if the State comes back with, well that’s the number. What do we do? I’m open for suggestions. What we do when a State says, we’ve given you all of the data that we are legally bound to give you and that’s it? What do we do when people are dealing with live registration, or election management systems that do not have an archive capability so that they can tell you today the number of registered voters, but they can’t tell you, well, but on February 12th this is the number of registered voters that we had. Well, you can’t, for those systems. So, how do we handle that? And then, how do we handle those instances where we go back to a State saying, these are some of the issues that we found at these jurisdictions, these are the rules that have failed, etc., etc., and we hear crickets, you know. So, that’s kind of, from my position as a data collector, and again, I apologize for the turnover, so, thanks.

DR. KING:

Thank you Ron. Abby?

MS. MOORE:

Hi, my name is Abby Moore. I work with the Defense Manpower Data Center, DMDC, and we support the Federal Voting Assistance Program, or FVAP, in their administration and analysis of their post-election voting surveys. So, we have a little bit of a different perspective. We’re more end-users of the data, so we -- what DMDC/FVAP does is we take that collected data from the EAVS survey, we do an extensive, more data checks, more analysis of it, and we apply more edits, more imputation, to create these national level UOCAVA estimates. So, our biggest challenge is, similar to what some people have said yesterday and today, is understanding data quality and what influences data quality. So, when are data more likely to be accurate? When are they less likely to be accurate? What influences that? Does it have to do with who’s filling out the survey? Does it have to do with whether or not the State has a statewide tracking system of UOCAVA voters, UOCAVA ballots? Does it have to do with the questions themselves? So, maybe some questions just have better data quality than others, or what’s going on. So, to get a little bit into the weeds, what we do with the data, as I mentioned, is when we get the data from the EAVS survey for Section B, so we are solely focused on Section B, that UOCAVA section, we go through it, thoroughly. We do some more data validation checks that Ron mentioned, we flag any data that look inconsistent, that look a little weird, that just don’t look very plausible. But we actually apply data edits to those. So, we are changing numbers to make them make more sense, make them more plausible. We’re not just doing it randomly, we have a system in place to do that, so it’s not me just making up a number at my computer, but there is a system in place. And, so for us, understanding those inconsistencies would be really beneficial. So, is it actually an inconsistency, or is something that can actually happen in real life? If so, what’s the story behind it? What’s the context? If it is a true error, why is that happening? Does it have to do with the question? Could we make that question better, so we’re all kind of speaking the same language? And then, the second major thing that we do with the data is we look for any missing values. And we actually apply an imputation technique to impute for missing data, so that data spot is no longer missing, we have a value for it. So, understanding why the data are missing would also be very beneficial. So, as Ron mentioned, is it missing because it’s supposed to be a zero? Is it missing because the State doesn’t collect it, doesn’t track it? Is it missing because that specific jurisdiction doesn’t collect it or track it? So, just understanding all of that would help us in our analysis, interpretation, data editing, and then, hopefully, it would have a kind of kick back effect where we can possibly improve survey design. So, you know, I don’t want to say it’s going to ever become an enjoyable process to complete the EAVS, but, maybe just slightly less frustrating, if we can improve that survey design.

DR. KING:

Well, thank you. It’s rare in a round table where you see an opportunity to actually make a difference, and I want to tell Baretta, half of the people in this room are lawyers, and half of those are underemployed, so, if you brought some business cards, you should be able to get somebody to go back to Lafayette, Mississippi, and represent…

MS. MOSLEY:

See me after the meeting.

(laughter)

DR. KING:

Well, thank you all, thank you all for this really broad perspective on the issues that we’re facing, both at the jurisdictional level, and then, at the data collection and aggregation and subsequent policy level.

I have some questions that I’d like to now put back to the panel, and some of these may be directed at individuals, but for the most part, anybody should be able to jump in and answer the question. So, one of the things that I heard, particularly from the locals, but also from the States, is the importance of training as a part of an election officials core competency. And most of us in the room are familiar with how that’s done. It’s usually done in some combination of an annual State meeting, some continuing education, could be done with on-line or other methods of training. But I’d like to start back with Shirley and Baretta, kind of get the local perspective, and then, get the State perspective, on how are we addressing training for compliance with the EAVS survey, or in general, with the importance of data collection, to address some of the issues that Abby and Ron pointed out, which is, that often the data is incomplete, the data has semantical issues with it. So, if we could start with the locals, talk about what training you may focus on, or perhaps, what training could be improved at the local level, and then, we’ll look at the State. Start with Shirley, and then Baretta.

MS. BLACK-OLIVER:

Okay, with the State of South Carolina, we do have continuing ed training. Our staff members can obtain classes through the South Carolina Election Commission. Also, as far as the Poll Managers are concerned, Poll Managers are trained prior to each election. It’s not so much as the training portion of it, it’s like I stated earlier, we have elderly Poll Managers and Clerks that believe in, this is the way it’s always been done, and they’re not apt to changes. Therefore, like I stated earlier, we do have the 16 and 17 year old poll assistant program and those poll assistants do help with the process. So, we’re seeing less envelopes coming in now with insufficient information, so we’re able to extract that information and pass it on to the State. Classes are offered throughout the year for the staff. So, we have consistent training in the State of South Carolina.

DR. KING:

Okay, thank you. Baretta?

MS. MOSLEY:

We will be training our newly elected Clerks a week in December and, of course, the Secretary of State’s office will be having a segment on just elections – how to conduct elections, what your responsibilities are, how to meet the HAVA requirements. We will also have more training in January during our winter conference. And we have, probably, a day dedicated just to, for the Secretary of State’s office to present, because elections have grown to be such a big part of the Clerk’s responsibilities. And not only that, the Secretary of State’s office also, throughout the year, has training on the SEMS which is our statewide election system, advanced, basic training for you and your staff, and it goes on to the GEMS server, which is also part of the election process. It’s a stand-alone server; it does not talk to the statewide server; it cannot be hooked up to the internet. And that is also part of the Clerk’s responsibility. We build our database with it. And there’s also training there. And new Clerks, Clerks within our Districts have mentors, seasoned Clerks. I’ve been with the Clerk’s Office for almost 28 years, and more than likely, if I get a newly elected Clerk in my District, I will probably be her mentor, so I will be the go to person for her, and I will assist her in whatever she needs, whether it’s election or Court.

DR. KING:

Okay, so, in both of your cases, is EAVS related or data collection and reporting of data, is it culled out in the training, in any way? Or is it kind of just one more issue…

MS. MOSLEY:

It’s just one more issue, because election results, the data that we input into SEMS, we have so many interested people. In every election, I have people waiting in the wings, wanting the people who voted on last Tuesday. We had an election on last Tuesday, when I arrived in my office Wednesday morning, there were two candidates wanting to know who voted in what primary. We’re good, but we’re not that good. We have to process the poll books first. So, yes, it’s just one of the many things that they touch on.

DR. KING:

Okay. Let’s start with Veronica, and look at the State’s perspective on training. There’s a pretty common maxim that, people do what you inspect, rather than what you expect. And so, often, what we look at, when we see a performance anomaly we’ll go back and look at the training materials, and see if there’s a gap between what we are measuring in our training, and then, what the actual performance is. So, if we could get the State perspective on the training related to data collection.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

Right, I guess, you know, the best way of describing our training, and it’s evolving right now, is that, I have young children and, you know, there’s a lot of testing, and I don’t like teaching for a test and I think I feel the same way about EAVS. We don’t train for EAVS; we train for elections. And EAVS is very broad. I mean, it encompasses anything from voter registration to voting methods to voting systems, and so, our training involves preparing our County Boards of Elections and election officials who administer the voting sites on how to run elections. And if we address that, then the data will come, the data will come. So, for us, that’s how we train. Now, when I started the training, we do statewide conferences, that’s why I wasn’t here yesterday, because we had our big one, and so, we have the conferences, we have procedural manuals. And those were the two big ways that we would train. The problem with the conference is that it’s not timely and that, you know, elections happen, and then, people forget what they’ve done and they forget the training. And then, the documents are sometimes not comprehensive enough, and many times they are just out of date because elections are not static and they are constantly changing. And we have, when it comes to our election management, we have help files. And what we find with help files is that most people don’t read them. They don’t go to the help files even though they’re there. They want to call you up and just ask the question. So, what we’re doing now is trying to focus more on, certainly, providing help files, but providing help files that are more modern, and so, e-learning is a big component of how we’re going to be training, in order to administer elections. And also, some documentation, but trying to make it simple checklists instead of comprehensive procedural manuals, so they know exactly what they need to do without having to read a lot of prose. And the other big thing that we do, and it has been very helpful, is that when you are in the process of running an election and, you know, there are key events or key things that happen within the season, what we do, we send them targeted communication. We send them targeted communication. Right now, we are preparing for our municipal elections, so the targeted communication that they’ll get from my staff will be how to proof their ballots. You know, making sure that their election set-up is correct. So, that way, they don’t have to go and find, you know, and figure out oh, okay, where do I go to do this? We’re telling them, “You know this is coming up. These are the steps. This is what you need to do.” So, that’s how we address training. If they do that correctly, then the data for EAVS will come, will come out of that.

DR. KING:

Okay. Thank you. Keith?

MR. INGRAM:

We have a similar set of possibilities for communicating the information that’s necessary. We have a county election seminar, it’s three days at the end of this month. All of you all are welcome if you want to come. And we’re actually extending it a fourth day because we’re rolling out a new voter registration system, statewide, and so, that fourth day is going to be dedicated to training on that. And like Veronica said, we don’t do the training for the purpose of collecting the EAVS data; we do the training so that people are familiar with the categories and have a common language to speak with. We use targeted webcasts every month, with mini manuals associated with them, related to our voter registration database. We have advisories, target specific, calendar specific, that we put out. And we’re trying our best not to overwhelm with words, as Veronica said, if it’s too much prose, it doesn’t get read, it becomes Charlie Brown, wah, wah, wah, and nobody reads it. So, of course, the main thing is, we have the mini manuals, they’re available for people to look at, they don’t look at them, so they call our hotline. We have an election official’s hotline and we’ve got trained professionals who interface with folks on a regular basis. And then, there’s something else that happens, organically. The Texas Association of Counties has a list serve where the counties talk to each other and cross-pollinate. There are regional county election official meetings across the State, where they get together on a monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual basis and talk to each other and cross-pollinate. And whenever something like the EAVS survey comes, the list serve traffic, with regard to that topic, picks up and often, you know, when a question is appearing that people have conflicting questions or answers about, somebody on the list serve will call us, get an answer in an e-mail, and then, it will go back to the list serve. We don’t participate in the list serve, so we have to wait for them to have something bubble up that can’t be resolved before they talk to us. But that’s another way that things get trained on.

DR. KING:

Thank you. Kevin?

MR. KENNEDY:

Well, we really try to pick and choose our training opportunities. I agree, you can’t train just for EAVS; you train for election administration. But one of the things, because we have so many local election officials we have to reach out to, we have really developed a series of webinars. So, we do actually have a webinar for completing post-election statistics, whether it’s cost information, or whether it’s EAVS, or the other data that we collect. And that’s really been one of our best tools. But, we also recognize we have to be face-to-face. Fortunately our County Clerks meet three times a year and we’re always there. Although, one time last year I think they were sick of us and said, “We’re not inviting you.” But usually, we’ve got, you know, a few hours on their three-day agenda. Next week our Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association meets. We want to make sure we’re present at those meetings, at their District meetings. But the reality is that at the County Clerk meetings out of 72 County Clerks, maybe 50 are there. I’ve got one County Clerk who never shows up, but he’s got my personal cell phone, so he calls me. And, with 1,853 Municipal Clerks, you know, even with the annual conference, their regional conferences, we’re lucky if we face-to-face 300 or 400 of those 1,853. So, we really stress the webinars, and we, you know, we have set up a communication system for our Clerks so that we have priorities on this, and we try to remind them of the importance that Election Day is not the end of the election process. And, as I said at the beginning, one of the things we’re really looking at, now, is how do you build in collecting the data as you’re doing the process. As you’re issuing the absentee ballot, are you doing the recording in the voter registration system so you don’t have to go back and look at this after Election Day? It’s those kind of things that you build in that I think the other State Directors are talking about.

DR. KING:

Thank you. And I think for the election officials, in the room, and joining us on the web, there’s a keen awareness of the kind of chronological unfolding of an election, and that election officials have a tendency to focus on that portion of the election that’s immediate. And, so when you do training for election officials, candidate qualifying is usually the first thing you talk about, and it’s often the most important, because that’s what the election official interfaces with, those candidates when they come into the office. And as you move downstream chronologically, and you get past tabulation, get past the candidates, get past any kind of reconciliation, to these very tail end operations of data collection, there’s a lot of fatigue that sets in, and so, what I heard here is there’s first, an awareness of that and trying to fold the EAVS data collection into the larger context of the election. But also, looking at just in time solutions to deliver that training, when it’s most appropriate.

I’d like to move now to this end of the table and ask a couple of questions about the actual technology and the methods that are used to collect the data. And one of the challenges, Ron, that we have in voting systems particularly, but election systems in general, is the notion of user acceptance testing, testing for usability, testing for accessibility, with the system. And I know that there is a discussion that we may be moving to a web based data collection technique, but talk, if you could, about the importance of user acceptance training and this particular tool, where the need to create incentives and inducements and ease of use on the part of the end user directly impacts the quality of data that gets into the system.

MR. SZOC:

Sure. I think, I’d like to put things in a brief historical context. We first got the contract for the 2010 iteration of EAVS, and prior to that, I believe the way the data were collected were via Microsoft Word forms that had to be, you know, filled out. You had to fill out each field, and then, there was a document for each jurisdiction, or something like that, I’m not quite sure. So, what we did seemed like a vast improvement. And I think one of the things that we’ve noticed over the past three iterations of the EAVS, is how much more sophisticated the individual jurisdictions and States have become with regard to EAVS. And so, what happened I think is that the original sort of technological framework that we did for data entry, which, it’s basically an Excel based template that has a lot of, thousands of lines of VBA code behind it, that implement the rules and guide the user interface. I think now we’re at the point where, you know, in 2010, we just sort of pushed it out there, and part of the -- and the same in 2012 and 2014. We’re at the point now though, especially when we start working on alternatives to this, I think we’ve outstripped the Microsoft Excel technology, and we need to move to something that’s in a sense, grander, and at the same time, simpler. And I think we do definitely need to involve the States in that process. It can’t be where EAC and ICF, or whoever the contractor is in 2016, get together in a room and say, “Oh yeah, it should work like this,” and away we go. I think it can’t be that solipsistic. It has to be, we have to engage the States, not necessarily every State, or maybe every State, or at least a representative from every State, and go through, like a typical software development lifecycle, you know, usability testing, especially with web, because, now when you also get into notions of access and ADA and things like that. But, involve the States in the actual construction, go through, you know, rapid application development or some other method like that, that engages the ultimate user, and then, gets them to buy into the final product. And I think that becomes a, sort of a necessary condition going forward. It’s kind of like, in 2004, I think, Kim, are you, Kim Brace, yeah, Kim, the grandfather of all election data, you could learn a lot from Kim if you talk to him, he’s there. But Kim was part of that 2004 and 2006, and he participated in every EAVS, including the 2010 EAVS, and I think, you know, the 2004 was like baby steps, it was the first ever EAVS that Kim did pretty much all on his own, with EAC. And then, we sort of became a teenager, and now we’re kind of, but we never got clothes that fit. So now we’re at the point where we’re kind of an adult, we need to put on our big boy pants and get the web, or whatever technology is appropriate, I don’t think it’s Excel, I don’t think it’s, you know, any Microsoft product. And nothing against Microsoft. It’s not based on Office, it has to be based on, you know, software technology that’s current and relevant and usable and deployable in 8,200 jurisdictions. And that’s where, you earlier talked about buy-in at the local level, and I think that’s really important. Designing a system like this will be a real, real, a really difficult challenge because it has to, in one system it has to accommodate, you know, top down States, where all the data exists at the top layer, bottom up States, where the data currently exists at the bottom level, and, but the State still needs to control access and scheduling and things like that. This would be a really powerful tool, as well as part of that tool being common data definitions and getting buy-in on that. Getting agreement, it’s okay if you use your own vocabulary, but with the EAVS, maybe we can agree on a common terminology that everyone accepts. You could still maintain your own local vocabulary sheets, but, you know, for EAVS, we all have agreed on this.

DR. KING:

Let me see if there’s any reflections on this side of the table on that issue.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

I’d like to speak to that. One of the things that we found helpful in our State is that, you know, people want data, they want, they think they want reports, but they don’t really know what they want until they see it. And so, to that effect, what would be nice, at the State level, is that if you want data, let us just give you the data and then you slice and dice in the method, and so if you give us, tell us what fields, right, if you give all the States and say we want these simplified fields. We want, you know, a date field for this, we want the reasons for this, and so, that way we all give you, you give us the format, we give you the data. And then, you take that data, and then, you can slice and dice that data in the way that you feel that’s effective for you. That would be helpful. If we go to something web-based, at the State level that would be okay as long as we’re just uploading or importing data, and not, we can’t do, you know, we have 100 in North Carolina, Texas 200 plus, we can’t do that, you know, jurisdiction by jurisdiction. That would be unreasonable, because we don’t send that out to our localities. So, that’s what I would add to that. Fine, let’s do that, but let’s import data, tell us the common data elements, and then we can provide that.

DR. KING:

Okay. Any other comments on that? Veronica makes an excellent point. It really came up in the discussion yesterday about the common data format, and the challenges at the State and local level of re-engineering, literally, if you go across the country, thousands of home-grown legacy systems from which this data is derived. And it’s an aspirational goal, but logistically, it’s complicated by a variety of factors. One is vendor compliance, in the space, if it’s not a home-grown system. So, I think that the idea of looking over the horizon using some formal methods for designing the system, but specifically bringing the end-user in as a key component of the design requirements, I think, is critical.

I want to now go to the questions that are in the EAVS survey, and in just a moment, Abby, I’m going to start with you, but then, I want to ask the panel about what questions seem to be most problematic within the survey. But one of the things that strikes me about the data that we often collect on elections is our tendency to jump into the middle of the process, and to begin collecting data, really, without clear charter, intent and plan for utilization. And normally, in the design of an audit you have first an identification of some risk aspects of your system, you have vectors at which that risk enters your system, and then you design an audit to collect the data that’s appropriate to mitigating that risk, and then you collect the data. And then, most importantly, you feed that data back into some process that informs change in the system and improvement in conformance. And so, often in elections we’re just, we’re just collecting data. Sometimes we’re hoping for serendipitous opportunities to use it, but I think when you get down to the local level there’s often a profound disconnect between what they’re collecting, and why they’re collecting and, more importantly, what’s our target use for this. So Abby, you mentioned something that caught my attention, and I’m paraphrasing, but it was, “How do you make a question better?” And I thought, well that’s really intriguing. Obviously it’s, there’s some subjectivity to that, but if you could talk about that as a segue into, then a question to the panel which is, “What are the bad questions, if you will, in the survey?”

MS. MOORE:

Yeah, yeah, so, I don’t want to call it, maybe, a bad question, but I think there are definitely some questions we can improve on the EAVS survey. So again, my perspective is a little bit biased because I’m focused on Section B, UOCAVA section, but, you know, talking to the election officials to understand what they track in their systems, versus what we ask on the survey, and where the disconnect is, and is there a way to ask the question in a different way, so we’re actually asking for data that you already collect. So, we’re not trying to make you do some kind of separate data system to just get something just because we ask it on the survey. And also, asking the question in a way so it’s clear what we want, and you are giving us the data point that we are asking for, so we’re all kind of speaking the same language.

DR. KING:

So, you see it primarily as a semantical issue? That you’re, in fact, talking about the same thing, but using different descriptors?

MS. MOORE:

I think it’s both, yeah, semantics and also asking, maybe we’re asking questions that it’s impossible for a State or election official to collect that specific data point. So, if we’re drilling down to too granular of a detail asking for how many UOCAVA ballots did you reject from military voters in 2014? Is that too granular, because of the way that the system is built to track it.

DR. KING:

So, in your process, do you have a method in which you validate those questions with your user community? Is there a formal process that you engage in to validate those questions?

MS. MOORE:

What we do, what we did with 2014 is, as I said, we went through the data pretty extensively to flag anything that seemed a little bit weird or inconsistent or that was blank. And it involved using some of the data checks that Ron mentioned – so, looking to see where subparts just didn’t add up to a total, or one subpart was a lot larger than the total was, so what’s going on there? But it also involved looking at other data sources, so going back to 2010 or 2012 data and seeing, well, in 2012, they said they sent our 1,000 UOCAVA ballots. So, why now in 2014 is the number 100,000? So, those kind of validation checks are the ones that we do. And then, going back to the States to kind of see what’s going on.

DR. KING:

Okay, thank you. So, to the remainder of the panel, are there questions in the EAVS survey that are particularly problematic for your jurisdiction? I see Veronica smiling, so let’s start with her.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

It would be Section B of UOCAVA, I mean, there are a lot of questions there. And I’m not sure, I know that the FVAP used to send out their own survey, and then that was morphed into the EAC, so I’m not sure if this particular style of question is still there in the EAC survey as it used to be in the FVAP, and it’s the distinction, you know, between domestic military versus overseas military. I mean, we don’t track, you know, our requests that way. They’re either military or they’re, you know, overseas citizens. And so, the only way that we could ever be able to do that is that we needed to go in and look at the address, you know, that was used. That was not a data element that was being captured. And then, I guess the other, you know, challenge is perspective. It is so State-specific. In our State, we allow military and overseas citizens to register to vote up until the day before Election Day. And so, some of the questions are kind of, you know, it would appear that, you know, other States don’t do that. And so, timing and perspective also weigh in on how we can adequately respond to some of the questions. So, there’s just difficulty sometimes understanding what the question is, and then trying to make sure that we’re not over, making that more nuanced just because North Carolina law is a little bit different than Texas law or South Carolina law.

DR. KING:

Okay. Keith?

MR. INGRAM:

That’s what I was going to say. The UOCAVA questions are the most difficult and it’s primarily because we don’t capture that data on the front end. And so, it has to be reconstructed on the back end. The other area where we have consistent difficulty is provisional ballots and reporting on those. Again, because we don’t collect the information on the front end and have to reconstruct it afterward. And the problem with reconstructing what happens with the provisional ballot is that it’s, it’s collected at the polling place, usually by the County Clerk doing the election, it’s sent to the Voter Registrar for processing, and then, back to the County Clerk for a final decision by the Early Voting Ballot Board. So you know, several people have had a hand in this, and answering the question is difficult when the information is not collected by the system and whose data is final and whose data gets reported becomes problematic in Texas.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

The provisional one, interestingly, is one that has become very easy for North Carolina, because we took that data and we made sure that we, that’s one that we made the change. What I found initially in 2009, we were getting the reason for the rejection of whether or not a provisional would be counted versus not counted, and I saw a lot of “other,” right? A majority, like, what does that mean? And so, knowing that people are going to be looking at that data, we don’t want to be faced with the “other” and so, we knew that we needed to improve data collection. And so, number one, we eliminated the “other” field and made them either, really, there are only a limited number of reasons why someone’s provisional should be counted, not counted, or partially counted. And if we needed to expand, you know, what was available in our system, that’s what we did, because otherwise, you know, we thought, okay, if you’re using “other” then you don’t have enough options. But if you’re using “other” because you should not be really rejecting that ballot, that goes to more the training issue, so we’ve addressed it both ways.

DR. KING:

Kevin?

MR. KENNEDY:

Let me see, 66 questions, 733 sub questions, where do I start? I actually think that when you talk about the FVAP questions, they’re the most challenging. In Wisconsin, we have to train around that. We only have 10,000 UOCAVA voters out of 2.5 million in 2014, people voting, or three million in a presidential year. So, my two -- I had a slide that I didn’t show about who are the people who we had to nag the most, and they had no UOCAVA voters. So, all those questions didn’t apply when we were doing that. But they are the most challenging because we’re trying to get information on how to improve the process and it’s difficult to explain why it’s important to serve those people and to answer those questions. And provisional voting, because it’s just, it’s so different across the Country, and in Wisconsin with Election Day registration, you know, I’m in double digits for provisional ballots. That’s going to change next year because we’ll have an option for voter ID and I’m going to see those provisional numbers go up, so we have to train around that for our data collection. That’ll be one of the challenges. But sometimes it’s the nature of what we’re trying to measure, and you have to look at those and anticipate that, I think is where we go with that. And we’ve always known that the UOCAVA is, requires special handholding, but again, knowing the number is small, out of 1,853 jurisdictions, we can say, you know, 1,500 of you don’t have to worry about this.

DR. KING:

All right. In just a moment I’d like to open up questions and comments from the audience, but I wanted to follow-up, really, with the three State election officials, for just a brief comment on, reflecting on something Keith said, which is, “It’s onerous for us because it’s all back end and no front end.” So, it kind of begs the question, well, just fix the front end. So, what are the complexities and the challenges with attempting to transform the front end processes to collect that data within your jurisdictions? Just to give our audience a sense of why that’s not trivial, although it may appear to be an obvious solution.

MR. INGRAM:

Well, the answer is, it is the answer, right? I mean, that’s the way to fix it. The problem is that, like Veronica said, there’s an opportunity cost involved. Right now we’re in the process of transitioning from our legacy voter registration data base that was in-house, that we maintained and developed and added to, to a vendor supplied system. And that process is going well, but it’s not going to be finished before January. Phase 2 is going to be rolled out in January. So we just, we can’t do it right now. Physically, the constraints, resource constraints on the part of the vendor are all geared toward getting counties functional in the new system. And so, it just physically can’t be done. Next year, at some point, we’ll be able to and so then we’ve got to, we’ve got to pick which bits of low hanging fruit do we want to include. And then, we have to make sure that the counties know that this functionality is in the system and needs to be used. And all of that is a process that we’re going to have to undertake. So we’re going to have to sort of pick our battles for 2016, and then, try to make it more robust in 2018. It’s something that we aspire to do, but currently it’s just not possible.

DR. KING:

Okay. And quickly, Veronica and Kevin, any comments on that?

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

Yes, again, it’s just the balance between people resources with training versus technology, and in both respects just striving for uniformity. And that just takes time.

MR. KENNEDY:

We made a big stride on that, back in 2010, when we built the data portal, got rid of the paper, and so everybody is using that. As I said, we had to induce them to get it, and that makes a big difference, the more we can automate the entry, eliminate the duplicate data entry. We, too, are revising our statewide voter registration system in-house and we’ll be rolling that out at the end of the year and we’re trying to incorporate the data collection, validation processes in this. I think e-poll books is a great way to do this, to the extent that you can, you know, I keep telling my Legislature, we’re no longer on the cutting edge when it comes to e-poll books, half the States are already doing this. And the more that you can take advantage of technology, you know, you can’t rely on Excel spreadsheets for this, you know, we use CRM for a lot of our, and SharePoint, for a lot of our data, just because it is so immense. But, it seems to me, you want to get people thinking in terms of, that on-line registration also feeds into that. So, by trying to leverage all of those opportunities, I think, to bring as much technology to bear is going to make the whole data collection process much better. And it’s an evolving process, as you heard from the other State directors.

DR. KING:

And I think what I hear, the common theme here, is that when you have an opportunity to change out a system in effect you have to unfreeze every system in your portfolio, because they’re all interconnected in some way. And so, for each State, the change out to a new VR system or a new candidate qualifying system or a new election reporting system, ENR, all of those create opportunities to come back and revisit the data collection, if that process is factored into the requirements determination. And it seems like tracking that from a national level would be some of the low hanging fruit.

Now, what I would like to do is get questions from the audience on the issue related to data collection, specifically, in EAVS. And if we have the microphones, I have a question over here, Dr. Hall. And please remember to introduce yourself before your question or comment.

DR. HALL:

Sure, my name is Thad Hall. Having worked on the passage of the Help America Vote Act from 2001, and following these laws for a long time, I have a question for the three straight elections people which is very simple. In 1993, Congress passes the National Voter Registration Act, and in 2002, they passed HAVA. NVRA has requirements for data collection and reporting related to voter registration, HAVA has requirements related to States, specifically, playing a key role in serving the Federal military in overseas voting population, UOCAVA voters, so, can you explain why, after 13 years of HAVA and 22 years of NVRA that data reporting and collecting on these issues is so difficult, given the fact that these are Federal requirements? Because it just doesn’t seem, I’m just asking, because it just seems kind of odd.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

Well, umm, here’s the thing. North Carolina is a military State, so if anyone would say that we would not want to do everything that we can to provide our military with the opportunity to vote, they would just be wrong, because we absolutely do. And so, the question is not that we’re not complying, you know, as required by NVRA, HAVA, or UOCAVA, we are. It’s just a matter of, again, how do you slice and dice that level of compliance. To give you an example why data collection and compliance, you know, are really two separate things. A lot of the questions in reference to, on the EAVS, is, how the request, how the FPCA or the FWAB is received. On the compliance level, we receive it, we send them a ballot. Right? That’s the compliance. And it’s counted. But the data collection, well, did it come by e-mail? Did it come by fax? You know, or was it mailed? And so, it’s that level of minutiae, that’s the difficulty. Again, whether it was an FPCA or was it an FWAB or was it a State request form? Those are some of the things, the fields, that we, specifically, added to our system to be able to collect that data, but to the extent that we’re now collecting that data, again, has nothing to do with the fact that, regardless of the method of the request coming in or the ballot going out, has nothing to do with the fact that we’re ensuring that our voters in North Carolina, military and overseas voters, have the opportunity to vote and cast a ballot that will be counted.

DR. HALL:

On the NVRA side, you should be collecting all those data and should have been collecting it for some time.

MS. DEGRAFFRENREID:

NVRA would be different. If we were talking about just simply voter registration, so, the sources of voter registration, absolutely, we collect that, collect that, as well. So, NVRA, we’ve been collecting that since 1993 and 1994. That particular, you know, Tab A, is a little bit easier for us to do. But even with that one sometimes, they’re not, I guess, the difficulty is that sometimes the, being able to collect the data, they’re in different buckets. Right? So, sometimes you have to cull and put things together. Another example for us would be, if someone submits a voter registration application, to the extent that it’s processed, it goes into our statewide list of registered voters, but if it’s rejected or if it’s incomplete, for some reason, it goes into another bucket. But the EAVS survey, they want all sources of registration activity. So, that would include those that are processed and those that are, for whatever reason, valid reasons, they’re not processed. So, we have to add those together. So, again, it’s not that we’re not collecting the data, not complying, it’s just a little bit more difficult to get that information and to ensure that it’s accurate and that everything adds up. That’s the difficulty.

MR. KENNEDY:

Let me just say too, we talk about getting buy-in for reporting, particularly from the locals, and probably the least persuasive reason for buy-in is, “it’s the law.” That doesn’t go very far. You have to give them more of a reason. And, as you can see, “it’s the law” hasn’t been an issue, or driving force for people to comply on this. But, on the other hand, more attention, such as this data summit, probably does it. And I think the lawsuits over NVRA, thankfully Wisconsin has been exempt from the NVRA, so it’s an area that I use that data to say “we don’t have to do this, your life is so much easier than it is in Texas or North Carolina on this.” This is what you have to do and this is why we put an emphasis on the rest of the data, I think.

MR. INGRAM:

Yeah, and like Veronica said, you know, I have to disagree, fundamentally, with the premise of your question because compliance is one thing, reporting is another. The NVRA has reporting requirements that, compliance is a matter of reporting, obviously, we report that data, and that data is the easiest part of the EAVS survey to report, because we already have it. Compliance with the Help America Vote Act, and specifically, with the MOVE Act, is a different beast. We serve the voters, but that doesn’t mean that we’re gearing our service towards the voters to make sure that we can put all the numbers in the boxes for a report that comes later. We’re working toward that fact, but that’s a different thing.

DR. KING:

We have a question up here.

MR. SEBES:

John Sebes of OSET Foundation here. I wanted to really, really, really thank Veronica, in particular, for, when asked about the future, tell us the data and we’ll upload it. That’s fantastic. So, we’ve got an app for that, we’re working on that, right now, actually. But particularly, also thanks to Merle for harking that back to common data format discussions. So, I wanted to say, that because of the announcement Matt made yesterday about a change in the way standards activity is working at NIST, I think, really, the top priority is exactly starting to work on the common data format. So, we’re starting to form a study group on that, right now. And States that already have some automation for production in the State of Wisconsin, I think, would be one of them, and other States that have data systems that could get involved in this, we’d really like some participation, so we make sure the standard actually meets, not just EAVS needs, but the data that you all actually collect. So, not so much a question, but, let’s see, question? How does that sound?

DR. KING:

Thank you. We are at the end of our time, so the first thing I would like to do is thank the Panel. Thank you for your preparation. Thank you for your participation. And thank you for your insights and what you’ve brought and shared to this discussion. I hear, in this Panel, an awareness of the problems, and that’s always the first step for addressing it. And with that, I will adjourn this panel and we’ll reconvene in 15 minutes.

[Recess from 10:28 a.m. until 10:46 a.m.]

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MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Before we get started I’ve been asked by our amazing conference logistics folks, Deanna Smith and Shirley Hines -- and I want to give a special shout-out to Deanna Smith, and this is my moment to do so, because Deanna Smith is the one who found American University, as our venue. And it was not an easy thing in the middle of August to find a venue. She checked with over 20 places, and what a stroke of genius to find American University and the School of Presidential Studies. Also, a huge thank you and shout-out to Shirley and to Henry Botchway, who worked from dawn ‘til dusk on all the behind the scenes media stuff and the travel. That said, cabs, if you are interested in needing a cab, please, please see Shirley Hines out at the front desk. She’s taking a list of folks who want one, and this will work just as it did yesterday and they will get that all coordinated. Thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you, thank you Karen. And welcome back for those of you here in the audience and those of you joining us on the web.

The second part of our round table discussion this morning will deal with strategies to evolve and to make better utilization of the EAVS data that’s collected from all 50 jurisdictions and assimilated into a biannual report. In our first session this morning, what we heard was some awareness of the common challenges that are faced at the local and the State level with, conforming and complying with the EAVS instrument, but also, a recognition of the need for change; that we can’t keep doing what we’ve been doing and expect different results. And so, the discussion, in the last part of our session this morning, will deal with strategies and suggestions for moving forward. And I suspect that some of these suggestions will be very detailed. They may deal with specific kinds of data to collect, within the EAVS survey, or perhaps data to exclude from it, methods for collecting. But, hopefully what we’ll finish with today is some vision, perhaps a shared vision, of how this system could be transformed to do what it was intended to do, which is to improve elections across our country.

So, we have a large panel today, and I’ve been given explicit instructions that we’re going to be finished out on time, and we want to make sure we reserve some time at the end for comments by Commissioner McCormick. So, with that, I’d like to go right to the panel and ask them, as we’ve done with the others, to open with a no more than five minute remark that shares your vision of how we can better operationalize this data, better collect this data, and how we can move the system forward. And, I’ll begin with Kim Brace, and we’ll work down the line.

MR. BRACE:

Thank you Merle. I wanted to take this opportunity to welcome you all to American University even though this is the end of the conference. I graduated from AU, so I went to school here. I tend to remember it back in the 1960’s, when we were being tear gassed out here on Ward Circle, so I had my gas mask the last time I was in this building. I also wanted you to know that this was the building that Dick Smolka had his offices up on the second floor. So there’s a lot of connections to election administration here.

I want to talk a little bit about the need to connect different sets of data together and use that to check accuracy. It’s one of the things that I’m worried that is not being done in EAVS, and so, I want to give you some examples and things that can be done. But, we try to bounce data off of all sorts of different sources and that’s where you can start seeing where there are problems with the data. We do a number of different things. We bounce precinct shape files against a voter file, because when you do that you can see that, every time we’ve done that 10%-12% of the voters are actually sitting in the wrong precinct. And that’s happened for every single time, in every jurisdiction that we’ve done that work in. It’s because there’s cul-de-sacs there, and cul-de-sac is a single record in a street file, and it gets missed. You remember Maine Avenue, but you don’t remember all the little cul-de-sacs, so they get missed when they make changes. Other ways of bouncing things against each other, in my county, I was the County Registrar for Prince William County, and when, during that short time I was there, I was only there for five months because they were doing transition, but we tried to look at comparing data against each other. I just did a study of 2014, for the county, where we looked at what was the drop-off rate or the residual vote rate, what Charles calls it, but the difference between the number of people that turned out and the number of people, number of votes cast for each of the offices. And what we ended up finding is that the paper ballot absentees were five to 11 times higher drop-off than the DREs. Now, we’re a county that is changing from DREs to paper ballots and this causes me immense concerns, so I’ve been working with the County Board to look towards educational efforts to get voters to understand how to mark their ballot, because, clearly, they’re not doing it, and they haven’t done it in the past, and everybody’s going to have paper ballots now in this county. But we’re bouncing things against each other to see where there are patterns, and then, see how we can try to effectuate changing of behavior or working towards improving the elections process, in our instance.

For the EAVS, and for the EAC, I would suggest, and I have ever since I gave birth to the process, as Ron said, since I started in 2004 with the EAVS, we need to keypunch the data that is already available on the State’s website, before the election, with number of registered voters, if the State has that at the county level. But, certainly the election results. I’m not interested that, you know, Barack Obama won so many votes. What I’m concerned about is getting all the candidates and getting their results in, so that I could see how many total votes were cast for President or Governor or whatever, and I can compare it with what, then, gets reported on the EAVS. I can run a comparison on that side to see if there’s some problems with any kind of data coming to us from the States. So, you need to collect more data even outside. You don’t need to add a question to EAVS for this, this is data that’s already on the State’s website. We just need to have that available for the purposes of crosschecking. We need to look at the difference between those number of people that were voting and votes cast. In Colorado, we’ve collected data for 40 years. Colorado traditionally had not put vote history into their system until six months after the election, because all those precinct registries were coming to the State to be keypunched. Well, by six months, people have died, people have moved, and so, they were constantly getting 104% of the turnout being cast for the highest office. We understood that once we finally figured out what they were doing, but clearly, just talking to them and figuring out why is your data not crosschecking against each other, is one important key. Don’t rely on just a signature that the data has been checked. That to me is a feel-good excuse for a CYA prophylactic that I don’t think is necessarily needed. We need to have better efforts at trying to get the data correct.

So, while I started off this by welcoming you and talking about gas masks, I also have noted that in sitting here for two days that these seats have shrunk an awful lot since I was last in this room. So, it’s that pregnancy of the election survey, I guess, that’s still with me, or something along that line. So with that…

DR KING:

Thank you Kim. Next is Nikki Charlson from the State of Maryland.

MS. CHARLSON:

Thank you. I wanted to first thank the EAC for inviting me and the prior panel, because in listening to their pain, it makes me put my pain with the EAVS survey into perspective. So, I would like to share with all of you how we do it, because I do think it’s a, it’s a, we’ve struggled, but I think we’ve now reached a point where it’s as painless as it’s ever going to be. First of all, Maryland has a couple of advantages. We have the same voting system statewide, we have electronic poll books statewide, and we have a top-down voter registration system that has an absentee provisional and a poll worker module. So, those are all statewide systems that the counties access. And, we only have 24 counties, so Kevin, I’m really sorry. So, by us doing it, we do the EAVS survey, there’s only a handful of questions that we have to ask the local election officials for. But otherwise, everything is data that we have access to at the State level. And the advantage of that is, obviously, there’s consistency in the data. We write the scripts, we started this process of writing queries for each question back in 2006 and 2008, and so, now they’re pretty solid. We rarely have anomalies in those scripts, because we’ve flushed them out over the years. When the EAC issues a new survey, we look at it and make sure that our queries line up, and then, when the, after the election, then we take our data snapshot. We just run the queries. Of course, the disadvantage is if we’ve got something wrong, we’ve got it wrong for the entire State. But it does prevent a county from reading one question one way, and running, thinking this is how they’re going to pull it out of the system, versus another county running it a different way. We’re either all right or we’re all wrong. And I felt the benefit of our process, this last time around, because I didn’t get the FVAP questions into our queries, and so, that part of the survey was a big struggle, because we hadn’t done our homework before, looked at the queries, tweaked them, and had them all ready to go. And so, that was proof, for me, that our process worked and that I needed to make sure that we kept doing it each election.

Because we have a pretty effective way of collecting data, it frees us up to spend time looking at the data, itself. And I’d like to echo what Veronica said on the prior panel, the importance of having your EAVS team include IT people and policy people. I can’t, I wouldn’t know how to run a script, wouldn’t, no idea. But, they, like I don’t know how to do their job, they don’t know how to do my job. So, they run the script, and then I sit there, and we look at the data and say, “Does this look right?” Looking for omissions, some of the categories that the prior panel was talking about, these numbers don’t add up, this just doesn’t make sense. So, we have that benefit because our data collection process, we’ve been able to make that be as painless as possible.

In terms of what we use the data for, obviously, we turn it into the EAC and we’re very happy when that’s over, and that’s when the election really ends, it’s not when the last ballot is counted. We look for anomalies in the data that can help us, either target some training or look at how we can improve the experience for voters. So, for example, in looking at provisional data one year, there was one county whose rates for partially accepted provisional ballots was just so high, just really out of whack as a percentage. So, we don’t just grab the raw data, we then convert it to percentages, because that’s where you’re going to find the anomalies among counties of different sizes. And when we looked into it, it turned out that the county didn’t deploy all their ballot styles to their early voting center. So, voters were getting a ballot for that county, but it wasn’t always theirs. And so, we partially county provisional ballots and that explained why the partially accepted percentage was so much higher than every other county. And so, clearly, there was a good training opportunity coming out of that. In terms of the voter experience, we’ve been looking at the rejection rate for absentee ballots, those that were rejected for no signature. And we just said, well, let’s make the X on the signature line bigger and heavier in weight. And after we’ve made that simple, simple change, our rejection rate for no signatures on absentee ballots has decreased and stayed low. It didn’t cost us anything, it was just sitting down and looking at what can we do to make sure people are signing the oath. And it was just making that X a bigger font and a bigger weight.

I’d also like to echo what Kim just talked about, is, take those numbers and compare them to other sources. What we do is when we take the voter registration data, say for absentee ballots, one of the numbers we report is accepted absentee ballots. Then we take the reports from the voting system, the number of ballots counted in an absentee canvas, and compare them. And they ought to match. I mean, there are, as election officials, we know there always are good reasons why they don’t, but we can most of the time explain those. Oh we had a couple extra provisionals we threw in there, you subtract those, and now your numbers match. So then, you can have confidence in your accepted absentee ballot numbers because you’ve reconciled it against an independent source. And then, we take it one step further because our local election officials have to do minutes from all of their canvases, and we make sure that that number in the canvas matches all those other, in the other documents. And in doing this, there was one election where we identified one election office that was off by 300. They had counted 300 more ballots than they technically had in their possession. Well, it turns out they just forgot to -- one day’s of mail never got received into the voter registration system. But if you hadn’t looked at that, you would think that more people voted a ballot than they got, which I’m sure we all know people that would look at that and come to a very different conclusion, than just somebody forgot a mail tray. And we caught that before we turned in our EAVS survey, before we posted turnout numbers. So, otherwise, those 300 people would, it would look funny. And so, those are just examples of how we’ve used the EAVS data in one way, and scrubbed it against another, or massaged it a bit to find problems, and then, use them either to enhance training or to improve the process for the voter.

DR. KING:

Thank you Nikki. Sean Greene from the Pew Charitable Trust.

MR. GREENE:

Good morning. I’m Sean Greene. I’m a Project Director with the Pew Charitable Trust Election Initiatives Team. Thanks to the EAC for hosting this summit and inviting me to speak on this great panel.

I’m going to sort of frame my remarks around three general points, some of which have been touched on, and some I think are a little new. One is about, it’s really about how to use the data. So, one is about sharing data, one is about visualizing that data, and then, one is about re-visiting that data, after the fact.

So, when it comes to sharing data, I just want to echo what Veronica said on the previous panel. There are a couple of States, and Maryland is one of them, that actually take their AVS data and put it on their State website, well before the EAC publishes it. They put up the Excel file they submit. I think California does this, as well. It is great to be able to point people to that data set, researchers, the public, the media. You don’t even have to point them to the EAC data set, which is the whole huge National data set, you can just point them to your State website and say, “Here’s the data you’re asking for.” I think it’s a great practice. Additionally, there are States that put up data well beyond the AVS. Kevin Kennedy was talking about the data they put up in Wisconsin. They just put up the Excel files of all the data that he was talking about they collect; a lot of the process data that’s related to the AVS and some of their cost data, which is great. You can just go, download it and use it yourself. North Carolina, as well, puts up, has an ftp site where you can download tons of data. It’s really, I think, a great practice.

But then, secondly, what I want to talk about is visualizing that data. So that data, when you download it, it’s great for researchers, great for some folks in the public, but for telling the stories that you want to tell, there’s sort of great and simple ways to visualize the data. I don’t want to steal Neal’s thunder, but Neal’s already mentioned this, Neal Kelley from California. They have, Orange County, they have a great election data central website, with all sorts of election data, they visualize in really clear, simple, straightforward ways. And they talk about the voter registration process. You can see day-by-day registration, and you can see, as the deadline approaches, you can see that graph go up. It’s a really great way to show how your office is dealing with data. And we heard also from Amber in Denver, yesterday. Some of the data that she was showing, they have that right up on their website. They have a great infographic, which I think does a great job of telling the story of how policy, how you can show how policy changes have an impact on the work that you do. She was able to show, after they did voter modernization, the impact it had on things like provisional ballots, looking back to 2010 and comparing that, graphically, to 2014. I think it’s a great approach to doing it. The EAC does it as well on their, when they release they have several infographics they put up on their website, which is really a great, simple way to share stories about why these data are important and what they mean.

And the last thing I want to discuss is sort of revisiting or reviewing the data. And this, I want to talk a bit about a project that we’re involved in now which has the exciting title of State Data Projects, we haven’t come up with a better name for it yet. But we are partnering with a couple States, Virginia and Utah, to talk to the State election officials, local election officials, and including, per our discussion yesterday, people from all sized counties, small, medium and large. Having convenings, and talking about what data do you want to collect? What data do you collect, and what do you think this data means, and what would be important for you to share? And what best practices could you share and glean from sharing this data? And one of the things that we’ve done during this process, which I found really sort of eye-opening, is, we’ve gone, opened up the AVS data set with the States and locals, and we’ve actually worked with academics in these States, as well, and looked at it all together, and just sort of gone over it, for an hour or so. If the data looked different from different counties, why? Do you have different data definitions? What’s going on there? And then, having the further discussion of, can we agree on how we talk about these data? And then, thinking about how they would be useful to State and local election officials. We found it -- it’s been a really great process. Edgardo is not here today, we’ve been working really closely with him on this project. It’s really exciting, and we hope we get to work with more States on this type of work in the future. Thanks.

DR. KING:

Thank you Sean. Ron Hammons, State Election Director, Arkansas.

MR. HAMMONS:

Good morning. I’m Ron Hammons. I’m the Director of Elections for the State of Arkansas, and like any good southerner, I guess, I’ve got to start out with a good tale for you guys, as you spin a yarn of sorts. But two of the points I want to bring to the table that we faced over the years, I’ve been in the election business for 17 years now, so much like Kevin Kennedy, I started when I was seven. And we sorted that process out, to where I’ve kind of grown with this program. I’ve seen, I’ve worked before HAVA, I’ve worked through HAVA, and I’ve worked in the post-HAVA years, as we come to fruition here. And I’m on to HAVA 2.0, it seems, as we’ve started an integration into a new voting system in the state of Arkansas. One of the things we’ve looked at, as I’ve been at the low end of the totem pole in collecting this data, it seems, for years, as different roles throughout our office. I’ve seen this thing from birth, to where it stands, as we stand now. One of the problems we’ve encompassed over the years is one -- is the collection of the data. Dealing with Clerks or individuals in our counties, making two sets of people work together. One being the County Board of Elections Commissioners, who get certain points of data, and our County Clerks, who get the other. And as Keith had pointed out just a little bit earlier, the problem is with people a lot of times. It’s trying to get them, get A to talk to B and develop a C program. And one of the things that we’ve looked at is changing that dynamic in the State of Arkansas. We’ve looked at, how do we make it more efficient and more accurate? And that’s the two key pieces that I find as we go forward, is efficiency and accuracy. That’s the point of any data collection is, how do we do it simply and how do we do it accurately, to the point of precision? One of the things that we’ve looked at, as we’ve gone forward, is integrating a new voting system in the State of Arkansas, replacing what we purchased under HAVA. We’re starting with four new pilot counties this year. One of the programs we’ve done with this pilot program is do a fully integrated voting system, which, I think is probably one of the next phases as you see voting systems move forward, with the EAC, in States, as we go forward. And what I say by full integration in voting system, we are from top to bottom talking to each other for the first time. The petri dish of voting systems and vendors that we’ve had for years has not talked to each other. Voting tabulation did not talk to voter registration, and vice versa. And we worked with our vendor to start building that connection. Our vendor, of course, is ES&S. And they have our voting tabulation, as well as our voter registration system, statewide. We are integrating our new system along with, not only just our voter registration system, but the voting system, and integrating poll books, and pieces of technology, as we move forward to develop a better system, one, for our poll workers who are out working the polls themselves for data collection points, to bring that data back into our voter registration system with our Clerks in a simpler format. Now, as we -- as several of the counties talked about, as the elderly poll workers, and the things that we face as we go forward through this process, we found that we have to keep it simple for them. And some of the new systems that are out there have created better products. I’m hoping the VVSG, as it moves forward, creates some of that technology to where it becomes simpler to use. And I think the vendors have taken that. But through our efficiency, one of the things we’ve worked with is my staff, I’ve got a phenomenal staff, I can’t say good enough things about them, and the guys and gals who work in our voter registration department, although they number three, now, one has been with me a long time and has been very instrumental in making this process happen. And we try to take our data collection points from our County Clerks, specifically, in our voter registration system, who is the Registrar and who is in charge of that information. We’re trying to build it, and we’ve worked with the vendor going into these systems to build the questions, if we have it in advance, and one of the best things, you know, we find is we get the information in July, although that’s rather close when it comes down to getting the information in there, so we can pull the data points out, out of our voter registration system. The second part of that, as we go back to, is adding the people. I’m dealing with County Clerk’s offices, who are running a multitude of other jobs and duties that they’re elected to do, as well as the election side of things. And so, they’re having to coordinate two or three people staffs, not 10 or 20 or 30, in some locations that some have, but two to three, and they’re out for this reason or that reason, whatever, holidays, and trying to get that data put in correctly. So, that is the biggest piece that we come to with efficiency and accuracy is the training of those individuals. And that’s the next phase as we build those pieces, to work with them not only with our vendor, but with the counties themselves to open those doors so the communication lines simplify the one line versus multiple lines. Thank you very much.

DR. KING:

Thank you Ron. Neal Kelley, Registrar of Orange County, California.

MR. KELLEY:

Thank you Merle. So, I’m, unlike the State folks that are here, the local user on the front lines trying to collect that data, although, I know the State, in some cases, where it’s top-down system. So, I don’t want to be redundant in what’s been said in the previous panel and what’s been said already in the entire Summit, and that is that, yes, the EAC survey, in some respects, is difficult to interact with and to input data into. But the positive thing is the EAC is working on this issue. I mean, that’s pretty apparent from what we’re doing here today. So, I wanted to focus on, really, two things. And this is maybe a little bit of visioning, so bear with me. Merle, you asked, one of the questions was, what could we do with the data, what are other things that we could look at. So, I want to talk about additional data that could be collected, I think, that would be helpful with the EAVS survey, as well as the role of government, in general, in understanding the data. And Sean kind of teed that up for me, with telling stories, so I appreciate that.

The first is, I think, if we could collect data on traffic patterns. And this may sound a little out there, but bear with me. So, as we’re talking about vote centers in Colorado and New Mexico and other States that have moved forward with vote centers, California is now talking about that, as well, and California, as you know, is the most populous State in the Country, and we have tremendous traffic issues and tremendous traffic problems. So, if there was some way to incorporate traffic pattern data into the EAVS survey, when people vote, when they’re issued ballots, and matching up that data, and that would help us, as election administrators, in allocating resources, and when that traffic is moving in the community.

The other thing is wait times in polling places. This has certainly been a hot topic over the last year or two, and I think we’re going to see in ’16 a number of apps that will be coming out that allow voters to check-in when they get in line and to check-out when they’re done voting. If we could collect that data and to be able to use that on the National level, to be able to change the way we’re doing things in our operations, I think that would be very helpful.

I touched a little bit on this, yesterday, in how and when voters prepare for an election. If there was some way that a sociological study could be done and you could capture that data to say, when is a voter aware that the election is going to take place? When is the voter – right, and when is the voter aware that the ballot is going to be hitting their house? And when they’re aware of where their polling place is. That would be fantastic data to incorporate into what we’re using.

And then, finally, trends and technology. And I know that the Commissioners are very -- seem very focused on technology, and moving that forward. But what is out there, and what kind of data could we collect from a technology standpoint to help us better understand our business and to move things forward?

So, then the next part of this, I have five points I wanted to make in the role of improving the ability for the public to understand the data. So, in the last panel, I was out there and I was kind of flipping through the PDF of the ’14 data, and it’s very rich. There’s a lot of information in there, but how could we make more sense of that, perhaps, for the public? And the first is ease of access. And to be able to easily access the data and, I hate to use the word manipulate, that’s not the right term, but to be able to take the data and look at it in different ways that’s available now. The next is interactive applicable data. And that kind of goes along with ease of access. Quick example for you – so, in Orange County, we have 34 cities, two of our largest cities, the city of Anaheim and the city of Huntington Beach are very similar in size, very similar in population, but different in demographics. And you can take the data and compare the two, and find very interesting patterns in how people are voting, and what are they using to vote, when are they turning out, and it’s very different even though the turnout between both cities is almost identical, but how they do that is very different. Imagine if I could, compare Orange County, California, with Orange County, Florida, and see what’s happening across the Country. What are the things that I could learn from Orange County, Florida? The third is to tell stories. And again, I thought Sean did a great job of talking about that. I think the -- I found this, when we’re able to sort of tell the story of registration, as an example, and to take the data we have, and to display it graphically, for people to understand it, easily digest it, and tell the story of their community and how they’re registering and how they’re voting, we have a connection with those voters and the people that are using that data. And it builds trust, it builds trust between government and the users of the data. When, where, and how the data is displayed, right, so there’s other things that we could do, and this is a really out there idea, but, so imagine in southern California, we have electronic traffic signs that are on the freeways, and if it said, “24% of your community has voted. How about you?” Right? And you could get the data out there in front of the people, not just the wonks that are using the data, but the general public, and that may move people to vote and to cast ballots. And then finally, and I know that the Commissioners are doing a great job of this and you’re headed on the right path and I am thankful for that, and that is, establishing an on-line presence. And to be able to do it in a robust way so that you can use the data on a daily basis, and not just kind of put it on the shelf and move forward to the next election.

So, just, really quickly I wanted to thank the EAC for inviting me and for doing this. I think it’s been fabulous, so, thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you Neal. Jennifer Morrell, Arapahoe County. Best run County in Colorado.

MS. MORRELL:

We hope so. So, something that I heard yesterday, and again, today, I wanted to address, first of all, is that this idea that when a local election official is responsible to enter the information for the EAVS survey, that sometimes that can be problematic. I’ve been in two States, now, where that’s done right at the top, it’s taken straight out of the State voter registration database, and most of the time the local election officials don’t even touch that data or have a chance to look at that. And I would say that that also is problematic and something that we need to think about. I think there’s an opportunity for a better State-County partnership, where that’s being done. It’s great when that data is collected and formatted for the survey by the State, but I want you to give me some ownership and accountability for that. I want you to give, as a State, you know, Director of Elections, or anybody else where they’re pulling that data for EAVS at the State level, give the local election officials the opportunity to review that, and make sure what you’re reporting matches our numbers. I can attest that the last two surveys, that has not been the case. And there’s an added benefit to that, actually. When you identify discrepancies between what the local election official is showing as their numbers, and what’s being recorded in the State VR system, it really is a good opportunity to say, “What’s happening here?” Is this a training issue, is it a usability issue? Because that data isn’t being input the way it was meant to be. The other thing is, we need to make this meaningful to me as an election administrator. And I talked yesterday about benchmarks. How can I use EAVS as a measurement tool for improving what I do? And I need to be able to compare it with other counties, in my State, who are high performers, compare it with counties, in other States, as Neal just mentioned, who might also be high performers. And just to give you an example, in the 2014 report, Colorado’s returned undelivered ballots, they had a rate of 5.1% where the average was 2.1%. So, that’s going to jump out to me as a State that does all mail ballots. That’s a lot of resources there, both in time and money, that I need to figure out what’s happening. So, I need an easy way to be able to drill down and look at my specific county rate, how does that compare with other counties in my State, how does that compare to counties who use the same mail facility? You know, is it an issue, at the USPS, versus how I’m managing that voter registration database? How does it compare to industry standards for bulk mailing? Maybe there’s not a problem at all, maybe it just reflects the transience of my population. But unless I can drill down and really look at that and have some benchmark to compare, I don’t know if it’s a problem or not.

Again, just to repeat, we’ve heard about benchmarks and being able to look broader, one thing that I’ve thought about a lot is kind of a cluster analysis, not just looking at other counties or jurisdictions that have similar numbers of registered voters, but maybe clustered by the voting method that they use or the type of voting system, voting equipment. In Colorado, we have some counties that are using automated signature verification versus a manual signature verification process, you know, with judges who are doing that solely. Maybe we cluster based on how we’re doing, what our voting method is, and then, be able to compare and contrast some of those numbers.

And then, as Sean mentioned, the definitions are critical. And I think that’s something we could iron out fairly easily. These robust discussions about, what does a data field mean, how are we going to use it? We just had this great conversation, in Colorado, about confirmation cards and came to a realization that there might be several confirmation mail pieces that we’re defining as a confirmation card. And how does that translate when we’re sending that data in to EAVS? And so, an opportunity to just kind of pull back, look at how we identify that, and how we’re reporting that.

DR. KING:

Thank you Jennifer. Gary Poser from Minnesota.

MR. POSER:

Hi, Gary Poser. I’m the Director of Elections for the State of Minnesota. I’ve been there for, this is my 9th year, and I did 17 years in the counties prior to that. So, all of that experience helps me to understand how we’re pulling our EAVS data together, as well as how our registration system works.

So, Minnesota is very fortunate, similar to Maryland, where we are a top-down State. We’ve built our own statewide registration system, which includes an absentee module, we’ve built our own election night reporting system to get all of our vote counts with the candidates and all of our vote counts. So, we’re very fortunate to have all of that information at the State level. We are, similar to Wisconsin, we are not an NVRA State, so, the first few times we were reporting EAVS, we had lots of holes in our voter registration data, we just didn’t capture any of that data, we had no need to. We did get an EAC grant where we used part of that to, actually, do a gap analysis, looking at our system, how we could capture that data better, and how we could record that on a transactional basis so that now we do, we are able to have all of that data and report all of the NVRA numbers, even though we aren’t an NVRA State. I think one of the things we also do is make sure that we try and eliminate any of the times where a county could make a mistake in recording their voter registration. So, if they are doing an on-line registration, the data we’ve queued up for them automatically puts that on-line source onto the voter record. They can’t change that if it’s coming electronically from driver’s licenses. All of those things are built in, so that they can’t make as many mistakes as they are entering some of that data. I’ll say that, for the most part, our counties do not give us any extra input on completing the EAVS survey. We’ve tried to have all of that data ourselves. We’ve recently even made the change when, you know, we need the number of poll workers, or the number of booths that they had, we’ve added that to the results statistics that they’re required to give us at every precinct when they sign those results on election night, so those numbers are part of their official results. The county puts those numbers with their other stats into our database, on election night, so that we have all of that data available to us when it comes time to do the EAVS. We have pre-canvas reports, so before the county certifies their final results and statistics, we have some pre-reports for them to run, looking for those percentages of where they might have some outliers, trying to get them to correct that data prior to officially certifying their numbers. So again, we’ll have better data, as well. I think one of our outcomes of our 2008 U.S. Senate race, of course, it was difficult to get through that, but one of the things it did get us was a lot of buy-in from our county partners, that, yes, they want to do things uniformly, they don’t want to be that outlier that gets called before the Judicial Panel and have to explain why they did something differently from all of the other counties. And so, if we start to point out to them that they are doing something differently from other counties, they’re very willing to try and get back in line with everybody else. And that’s part of the part where I wanted to get a little bit into is, even though we’re collecting all of this data, at the State level, for the EAVS, because we’re collecting that on a transactional basis, we’re not waiting until the end of the election to evaluate that data and get it ready and look for the outliers and some of those issues at that point. We’re trying to run those reports throughout the election cycle to see if a certain county is doing something differently from somebody else. Does somebody have a lot of rejected absentee ballots, more than they should, compared to how all of the other counties are doing? Are they choosing a rejection reason that should be very miniscule, but one county seems to have a lot of those, are they somehow, you know, not changing the default for the rejection reason? Are they taking the very first one on the list instead of actually going down it and choosing the right one? So, we’re running those types of things, you know, on a weekly basis, during the election cycle, during that absentee period. We’re looking at those rejection rates, seeing if our rejection rate seems as it should be. And if it’s not, we want to take some action during the election cycle, to not only get them to fix the data, if they’ve chose a wrong rejection reason, but if they’re rejecting ballots that they shouldn’t be, you know, we want to get them into line during the cycle, so that not only are the voters are served better as well, but we, also, then will end up with our better data at the end, as well. So with that, I think I’ll just kind of say that luckily for us, you know, our counties are mostly blissfully ignorant of the EAVS data and us collecting that for them and providing that along.

DR. KING:

Thank you Gary. Michael Winn from Travis County, Texas.

MR. WINN:

I’ll keep my comments relatively short, but first of all, I’d like to thank the EAC for conducting this Data Summit. It’s been an eye-opening experience for me, and I am just blown away about all the information that we take away from this. And, of course, Merle, for moderating this panel.

I am from Austin, Texas, 650,000 registered voters. In the previous panel, you heard from State Director Keith Ingram that Texas, it is in a class all by itself. You know, he talked about having 101 EAs, he talked about having 153 jurisdictions, where there is a County Clerk and a Tax Assessor/Collector. And then, if you drill down, there were 39 jurisdictions, who are not on the statewide voter registration system. I am one of those jurisdictions, a large jurisdiction. And so, what I have found is that I rarely see the information, because I am a jurisdiction where I have to rely on my voter registration department. And it’s good and it’s bad. What I’ve realized and found out from this Summit is that we still have the same problem. We still have the same problem of sharing information, collecting data, training, and communicating. And so, for me, I think, and what I have tried to do since I’ve been in the County Clerk’s office, is try to figure out, instead of throwing stones, how do we correct the problem? And I think that what we have to do is be pro-active. And one of the things that we do, we keep a second set of books. We collect a lot of information, because one, sometimes we get into law suits. Two, we’ll see the EAVS data, we’ll see the FVAP data, and we need to be able to record that information, and share it with our partner, our partner being our Tax Assessor/Collector. And so, what I have determined as challenges for us, to kind of look at, is one, sharing information, training, making sure that when you train individuals, you kind of build a depth chart. When you have individuals who work with you, in a county such as ours, sometimes they’re temporary employees, and you assign that task to one person, but what you need to do is create a depth chart to where if that person leaves, someone else knows what you’re doing. Now, me, as a Director, I get the high level information, but I’ve got to be able to disseminate it down. And so, I think, what we have to do is concentrate on how we best do that. And then, finally, we have to be able to communicate. We have to be able to communicate with our partners, our partners being the people who are stakeholders in the process with us. And so, what I’ve learned, and what I’m going to take back from this is that I’m going to try to figure out how can I have meetings with my Tax Assessor/Collector and someone from that office and make sure that they get the same information that I get, and then, they get my set of books, in case they get asked a question. Because, if they get the EAVS data, and we have to do a crosscheck, the information is consistent and it’s something that we know we can rely on. I like what Mr. McDonald said, earlier, when talking about making sure that information is disseminated down to the local jurisdictions. I worry about those jurisdictions, in the State of Texas, where they don’t have the resources or the depth to be able to do that kind of work and collect that kind of information. So, that’s a challenge. And we just need to be able to overcome that. We’ve been working with OSET Foundation on election night reporting. They have a great module, and there is a tremendous amount of data that you can get from your voting system. And we just have to be able to parlay that to benefit us, to make sure that the information that we get out is accurate and everyone has access to it. And so, those are the three things that I see as a challenge for the local election administrator, and one who rarely gets to see the data. And I just kind of want to throw a shout out to Keith, again, because when he talked about not being on the list serve, Keith, be happy that you’re not on the list serve, because you don’t want to know about somebody’s dog or horse or something else. But we just have to be able to effectively communicate that information to all of the counties. Thank you.

DR. KING:

Thank you Michael. And Karen Lynn-Dyson from the EAC.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

My remarks are very brief because I’m pretty much here to listen. And that’s what I’ve been doing, intently, the last couple of days. It is a daunting, but yet, really exhilarating, task to figure out how to connect all of these dots. I think that, you know, all kinds of silly expressions like, you know, “we’re the Feds and we’re here to help,” “first, do no harm,” all those kinds of things really do come into play, and I think we really do take very seriously. I think that, obviously, at 30,000 feet, we are as Thad kind of pushed a little bit this morning on, in terms of what we are authorized to report, there is that at the very highest level. But I think that the most gratifying work that we do comes from the middle name, assistance. And we really are here to help States and their localities do good work, to basically administer elections better, more efficiently, and more effectively. So, how do we, the Federal government, that have this unique opportunity and this unique perspective on collecting all of these numbers, help the little place in Maine see the value in having to do that and having to report that. We’re in a really unique moment in history, and it’s different even from when I came to the EAC, almost 11 years ago, 11 years ago next week. We didn’t talk about or think about data, big data, in the manner in which we do now. Kim and I started in ’04 on this, sitting in his office, looking at all of these spreadsheets and looking at all these numbers. And I was brand new to elections, and came from a very different background in economics and workforce issues. We’re a long way from even, you know, ’04, in terms of how we collect data, how we use data, how we think about data, and that’s my challenge as I work with the Commissioners and I work with senior management at EAC. In the next couple of iterations, how do we show States, how do we show localities, the real value, the true helpfulness of collecting this information. And that’s one of the real beauties of what I do, as a one-man operation, pretty much. The research, the policy, the program work is connecting the research that we do through EAVS and the educational work that we do, the Election Management Program that we run, the Quick Start program that we run. So, I’m here to listen, I’m here to really think, and I’m here to act through educational work, through educational programs and resources that we provide. So, lots to think about. Lots to digest. I’m always, always anxious to hear from stakeholders, and that, for me, is election officials, it’s locals, I love when I hear from locals, it’s gratifying when I talk to students, and they’re trying to look at these data. And sometimes you wonder, “gee, are there young people out here even thinking about these things,” and they are, they’re still very interested, they’re passionate about it. And, I’m here, I’m here to hear what you have to say, and this is an iterative process. It’s funny that Kim and I are on bookends of this panel, because I look down there and I think, holy schmoley, where we were, and then I think about where we are now.

DR. KING:

Thank you Karen. And thank you, all the panel, for your thoughts on these topics. I want to come back and ask for some reflections on something I heard Jennifer say. And yesterday I heard several people mention the importance of benchmarking, that the EAVS data and other data permits jurisdictions to benchmark. But Jennifer is the first person that I can recall saying, for this purpose – benchmarking to improve performance, benchmarking to validate best practices. And I think, all of us, when we talk about benchmarking we kind of implied that, but I think it’s important that we really do think about, how is this data operationalized, in a way that justifies the infrastructure we are creating to collect it, the training we do to collect it. So, I’d like to come back with that question, really, to the whole panel, and maybe not everybody wants to jump in on the question, but can you give examples of how the EAVS data has been transformative, within, either State or local or in a research vein, that can serve as an illustration for how we move past collecting good data to using good data to improve elections?

MR. KELLEY:

Can I?

DR. KING:

Jump in Neal.

MR. KELLEY:

So, this is a very specific example, and that is, and it’s not just the EAVS data, but it’s also data collected within California, and that is the absentee rejection rates at individual counties. We, you know, I thought we had a very low absentee rejection rate, and then, I was comparing it to some other counties in California, and I thought we can do a much better job at this. And so, quick example of that is, when there is a signature issue, are we reaching out to the voter to try and rectify or cure that problem? Not all counties are doing that. And I’m speaking about California, right now. And so, when we started doing that we were able to contact the voter, and in many cases, cure the problem, and our absentee rejection rates improved. So, now our biggest challenge with absentee rejection rates are when the voter doesn’t sign it. And we’ve cured that by mailing them another envelope, rather than having to get them to come all the way down to our office. That’s very specific information about how we’re using the data to improve the operation.

DR. KING:

Okay.

MS. CHARLSON:

I guess I had a couple of examples. Absentee provisional are just a really easy place to start. The data gets broken down very simply, and you can look at each rejection reason and say what could we do better? That’s an easy place to start. The harder places are, you know, how do we balance our turnout among early voting centers, what makes an early voting center a better performer than others? Those are the really hard questions, but the easy rejection reason data and return rate data really is an easy place to start, at either the State level or the county level, and just pick off a couple at a time and see what impact you have.

MR. WINN:

In Travis County, what we were able to do with that information, we use that information to bolster our argument for vote centers. Prior to going to vote centers, we had precinct voting. And so, we had a lot of provisional ballots, we had a lot of voters who were, you know, at 5 o’clock rushing trying to get to the polls, and so, we use that information to build up our case for vote centers, and we’ve been using vote centers for the last four years and our provisional rate has just, just dropped. And so, it’s very useful in that regard.

MR. POSER:

It’s probably not really an EAVS data element, but you know, when you have election night reporting and all of your counties are reporting in, I mean, I think it is an interesting thing to see what time are these results coming in, and how come some similar counties have such different times when they’re first reporting and are they struggling with their absentee, accepting or rejecting, and putting that in, or are they doing different processes so that they’re able to more quickly report those types of numbers. So, I think you can find some issues what times were what counties might be struggling and say, you know, what are you doing differently here, what can we see to resolve some of those types of issues just with other types of data.

DR. KING:

Any other?

MR. HAMMONS:

I kind of take a different perspective than a lot of the county officials who are in the weeds with dealing, seeing the relative data and going, okay, this is what we need to do here, how do we efficiently do this? From my perspective I see it a little bit differently. And I see it as though, as areas for training. And the biggest piece to that is developing, as we move forward, is, where does the training need to take place? The consistency of training across the Board for all county officials, for my local election officials, for State officials, or even with the different agencies in the State of Arkansas that deal with elections, we have two, primarily ourselves and the State Board of Election Commissioners, which are two separate entities, and so that we work together and build a training program that the information is consistent across the Board. And without those measurables you’re not able to see the points that need to be discussed, that need to be brought up, and pull out the white elephant in the room, basically, and grab it by the horns, and go “this is what we got to fix.” And if we don’t do that, you know, it’s good to be able to see it on a local level and talk to people on an individual level, in a certain county, but it’s also, one of the, Jennifer had several good nuggets, today, I guess for saving, she used the word called “accountability” which is something I use with my staff quite a bit. And that’s something we’re trying to work into, we’re working with our counties, at this point, is the accountability of not only to the voters, but to themselves, their staff, and the State, so that we are able to train through this data, so that they know how to do their job properly, so that the edge that we walk so finely is not being sharpened to cut our own throats with.

DR. KING:

Good point. Sean.

MR. GREENE:

Just to add onto that a bit, I mean, for our work in the Elections Performance Index and the State data projects, I mean, the AVS simply is a great place to start, to see where you sit relative to other people in your State and other States. Without that data, we don’t know that. And then, it really can tell the better story of, oh, how are we doing, how are we doing over time, and how am I doing relative to my neighbor, and what are some best practices we can learn from that? So, without the AVS data, we just don’t have that big picture and I think it’s really important.

DR. KING:

All right. I want to come back and touch on something that has really kind of been a unifying theme throughout the discussion today and yesterday, and it’s the challenge of identifying the stakeholders in this process. And each time I think I’ve got my list completed, it grows. And, of course, identifying the stakeholders is only the first step, then identifying what are the interest of those stakeholders, and then to operationalize it, what are the roles of the stakeholders in this process? And we have really a good cross section here, and I think in terms of the prior panel, where we talked about using a more inclusive approach for designing any subsequent change to the EAVS instrument, it may be informative to talk about this issue of roles and responsibilities, both, in the execution of EAVS, but maybe more importantly, in the go forward strategy, in designing the next iteration of EAVS. And, in part, why I think this is so important is something that Neal said, is that the information needs of election officials are, some of it is constant, some of it we need to know, turnout, those kinds of things, but there are other issues that are more effervescent, that become relevant at that point in time, but then, may pass out of relevance. And one thing, for many of us, right now, that we would like to know, is, what is the age of your voting system, the ability to look at that data from a collected level. So, I’d like to kind of start, and if you have something, chip it in, if you don’t, we’ll just keep moving, but give me a sense, Kim, starting with you, as a researcher, and keep it short, what do you see as your role and responsibility in the EAVS process and any future iteration of it?

MR. BRACE:

Okay, well, as the birther of EAVS, I guess, as I’ve been called, I mean, the thing that is important, from my standpoint, is the recognition that, I mean, we have 10,072 jurisdictions in this Country that run elections, a variety of things, townships, counties, cities, that sort of thing, but there’s 10,000 different entities, that all of them do it differently. They may have 50 State laws that kind of govern them, but they’re still operating differently. But, jurisdictions out there are one of the keys, I think, for the EAVS, and one of the things that I’ve always wanted to see done is to be able to take the tables that are in the EAVS report, at the very end, I mean, we designed those back in 2004. The goal was to ferret out information and use percentages so that you could see what, what is happening. But I want to see that out, not at the State level, but at county-by-county, and be able to duplicate those tables. They become a great resource both for being able to crosscheck the data and get it out to the States when they feed it back. Let’s get it back to them because they can see there’s 105% at some point in time, for some jurisdiction. But being able to make use of that information, to feed in, and clearly to help get better data, that’s where my goal is.

DR. KING:

So, a more enhanced role for local jurisdictions...

MR. BRACE:

Yes.

DR. KING:

…in both engagement and utilization?

MR. BRACE:

But I think when you also look at EAVS, you really have, you have to split apart, where’s the data coming from? I mean, clearly, the voter registration system, particularly run statewide, is a great resource. We ought to key in on that and be able to pull that and work with States, as one of the people said this morning, you know, let us know what the data items you want, and we’ll pull them out. That’s what we should be doing. We should be playing with it, as opposed to trying to key it back in again, or whatever. Give us the data format, give us the data that we can then suck it in and make use of it.

DR. KING:

Okay. Nikki, in your comments earlier this morning, you talked about the efforts that you’ve made in Maryland, and one of the things that struck me is what a legacy that will be within the State of Maryland for subsequent members of your staff or whoever may hold the position in the future. And so, as you think about the roles and responsibilities, from the State perspective, I wonder if you could also add in a perspective on the importance of preserving that legacy and infrastructure so that when you leave this position the ability to execute doesn’t leave with you.

MS. CHARLSON:

So, it’s really important, and actually, I just, we have a new technical person who joined our team. And so, for her, she needs to learn how to do it. And while the scripts are there, we’ve never had a document that ties the script to a specific question number and what row in the column. So, that’s what we’ve been doing over the last, well, I won’t say, because it’s taken longer than it should have, but we’re trying to develop this master spreadsheet of here’s the script, here’s the document, here’s what row or sum of rows, so that it’s both preserving my end of it, as well as the IT end of it. And I’m really hoping that that document means that somebody else can start to develop a, “Gosh, that just looks weird, I need to dig more into it.” Because that takes, that takes election people time to be able to recognize an anomaly, and then, go ahead and investigate it. So, I think, that’s something that we’re already working on, just to make sure that that is institutionalized in our office.

DR. KING:

Great. Sean, as a researcher and a user of the aggregated data, what are your thoughts?

MR. GREENE:

I mean, so, I think for us as we’ve done our work on the Elections Performance Index with Charles Stewart at MIT the past couple of years, I think one of the things that we’ve learned is that the Index is really important, but there’s a lot it doesn’t capture. And so, this is what has sort of inspired us to do these State data projects. And one of the goals of these State data projects is actually to work with States and local officials to create tools that they want to use. And by that I mean, some people have talked about this already, there are a lot of States and some counties that are already sitting on a lot of other data. So, for us, it’s getting to what are those important pieces of data and how can we share those and why are those important to you? So, I think for us, that’s sort of what we’ve learned over the years with the Performance Index, not just that it doesn’t capture everything, but as we’ve heard today, there are a lot of challenges to that data, and there are data in there that are as important that aren’t captured in their survey. So, that’s really sort of what we’re looking to do in the future.

DR. KING:

Okay, thank you Sean. Rob?

MR. HAMMONS:

Kind of go back to the original question you brought to me, was kind of what is our role as we go forward, and everybody’s perspective is just a little bit different, from Sean’s to Kim’s to each one of us, and we both, all play major parts in the creation, collection, and transparency of this data to the citizens of the United States, as well as, you know, our citizens within our States and jurisdictions. The role for me is, from our perspective, is the efficiency role. I need to be able to provide the tools and the education that my local officials need on their level. They’ve got to be -- for them to be successful, for this project to be successful as we move forward, is I’ve got to be able to provide them with a proper tooling and education to collect that. And without those pieces, it falls apart. You’ve got to have a firm foundation for that. So, my role at the State is basically, I’m the consiglieri, I’m the guy in between, right? So, I’m in between the vendor, the EAC, the Federal Government, the DOJ, I’m that buffer between them and the county most of the time. So, my role as we take it on, because I’m the guy who transmits that data to them and becomes officially accountable for it as it goes over, because I’m the one they call back and go, “Hey Rob, two and two is not six.” And so, in those situations, my job and our role at the State from our perspective is the efficiency aspect of it. I’ve got to give them what they need to do the job correct, so that it is successful. Otherwise, we never will find success.

DR. KING:

Okay, thank you. Neal?

MR. KELLEY:

I’m going to go beyond the role of just the county officials, and say that, with my colleague Michael Winn, here, who’s also in leadership in associations, that they play a really vital role in this process as we start moving forward, particularly at the State level because, and many times they won’t admit this to you, but there’s a lot of county officials that will listen to the group of the association much more than they would their State, no offense to the State guys, or even the Federal Government. And so, that’s a really rich opportunity to get people involved in a different way.

DR. KING:

Okay, thank you. Jennifer?

MS. MORRELL:

I think my role is to help researchers and policy makers really understand how those input elements are used, paint a clear picture of the process, short of having you all come in and run an election with us for six months. I have an obligation, probably, to, whether it’s something as simple as flow charting the process or being a little more descriptive about those input elements, and then, to provide feedback. For instance, and again, both States that I’ve worked in now, Utah and Colorado, when you are putting in a new voter registration for military and overseas voters, you have three check boxes – military, overseas, and UOCAVA. Which one do I check and why? And what’s the judgment behind that? Those are things that I don’t know that we’ve communicated back and forth and described in depth so that they understand how we’re using it and why.

DR. KING:

Thank you. Gary?

MR. POSER:

I think the part that I’ll mention is, you know, making changes to the questions, especially, for us, as a top-down State, and if we’re trying to collect all of that data, I think, you know, as a stakeholder I have an interest in getting those questions as soon as possible, so that we can start programming towards collecting the data that’s going to be required. And, you know, when you think about it, you know, for the voter registration part, you’re starting right after November of 2016 collecting the voter registration data for the 2018 Survey. And so, you know, we’re really at the point here, even if we want to make a change to 2018, for voter registration we need to know that, now, so we have time to program it, we have time to train the counties if we’ve changed something in our system. So, you know, the absentee part has a little bit longer, a little more lead time, but for voter registration if there needs to be some type of a data element that we’re not currently collecting, we need to know about that well ahead of time.

DR. KING:

Let me follow up, really, to your point, Gary, because when you talk with non-election officials they’re often surprised at the length of time that election officials request to make changes. And so, in this, in the context, and I’d like more than just Gary’s input in this, on the context of just the EAVS data, what kind of heads up does a jurisdiction, at the State level and at the county level, need to evaluate transforming their data collection process, their training materials, their education effort, their communication effort, how much advanced time do we need?

MR. POSER:

Right, well, I guess I’ll say for the voter registration system, as I mentioned, making those changes, you know, 2016 is going to be a Presidential year, so, and our primary is in August, so our absentees start, for the August primary, they start at the end of June. We’re very hesitant to make any changes to our voter registration system once we’ve started the absentee process through November. And then, in November, you know, the next week after November we should be starting to collect new data for 2018, because we’re now in the next election cycle. We need to have all of our program changes made before June of 2016. And so, you know, that’s the type of lead time I think we’re talking about for voter registration, just as an example.

DR. KING:

Is it consistent here with the rest of the panel that, kind of a need for a two year window?

MS. CHARLSON:

I guess, definitely for voter registration. I think for some of the others there’s more flexibility, but I know that in our office the vendor and our staff sit down and plan out, say, their say their 2016 release schedule, in 2015. And so, there’s a lot of priorities to get in there, so it’s possible to, even one year before, just to make sure that it’s in place for when you have to start collecting the data right after the prior election. Because if there’s not time to get it in the release schedule, then it’s not going to happen.

MR. HAMMONS:

That’s kind of like us. We have, we do two updates to our VR system a year, upgrades, firmware, software, whatever. And those are done on the January and July cycle. So anything that I’ve got to get in for July implementation, I have to have in no later than January 1. So, I’m working on, and that’s just the installation of the software itself. That doesn’t include the training and the mechanism that I have to do, or six months’ worth of training, because a lot of times we deal with, the individuals for training, it’s a revolving door. I’m dealing with deputy clerks coming in and out of the offices, you know, and the person we train, now, may be fired next week. And then, I have to start the training cycle all over again. So that’s one of the biggest things we face, is, are we training the same people, do we have the same people in place? And so, the more time I have on those, from the State perspective, is better.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Merle, could I ask a question?

DR. KING:

Yes Karen.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Similarly, I think some of you know, in addition to our exploration of the web based possibility, we’re also looking at, certainly not adding any questions, but I’m very curious about the elimination of certain questions. I think those of you who are very involved with the EAVS know a couple of the questions are pretty stale at this point. I’ve heard, interestingly enough, that it’s not at all easy to eliminate questions either, never mind add questions. But that what would possibly happen is that you would continue, because it’s programmed into your system, to ask the questions and you just wouldn’t necessarily report them. So, I’d like to ask that question. And I’ll just ask, for example, if, hypothetically, if the EAC decided that it were not to ask any questions about machines, what would that do to your life as the completer of the EAVS Survey?

MR BRACE:

Merle, if I could, for a second, I think, I mean, it’s not only illuminating, but I think it’s still adding. There are some subject areas that are not, necessarily, that we need to program through the VR system, yes, we need more time for doing that, but, you know, how many jurisdictions are doing vote centers? Just be able to categorize the jurisdictions with, how many have vote centers, and how many vote centers are they doing? That’s a small data item there that, is things they’re looking at, that people are doing right now, that I think would help on that side. So, there are some parameters and some options there for small types of questions that deal with things that are going on today.

MR. POSER:

And, I guess I’ll echo that. I mean some of, you know, some additional things wouldn’t take much for us to be able to report as well. And I think as far as the equipment goes, yeah, we’re going to keep collecting that data anyway, and in fact I think, you know, we’re still going to put a map out on our website that shows where the spread is of what type of equipment, and so, we’re probably going to use that ourselves anyway, so we’ll want to keep collecting that. So, I’m not so sure that we would ever stop collecting something that we’re currently collecting.

MR. BRACE:

But I will say that on the equipment issue, I mean, we’re going through, as you know, we’ve collected it since 1980, there’s a lot of change going on right now. There’s a lot of jurisdictions that are making changes. We haven’t seen a lot of changes in the last two, four years, but it’s all hitting right now. And so, to drop that for 2016, I think would be terrible in order to have that longevity.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Let me clarify if I might. On that particular question, were we to eliminate it, and that’s a hypothetical, were we to eliminate it, it would only be because we do collect that information through the EAC’s Voting Systems and Certification Program. That is a very robust program. It, you know, I mean, they are down to the granular level of knowing about those voting machines. So, that would be the only reason why we would consider that.

MR. BRACE:

But that is only for jurisdictions that have been certified by the EAC. There’s still a lot of jurisdictions out there that don’t have EAC certified equipment.

DR. KING:

Okay. Michael?

MR. WINN:

I think for us, you know, I’m going to get asked that question by the State, I’m going to get asked that question by my auditor, so, we have to collect the data anyway, and I just can’t see not doing so. And then also, when you go back and look at historic reports and you’re communicating with others who don’t have that information and being able to go to the site and be able to recite, “well, this is what’s happening in this part of the country,” I think is very beneficial.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Good to know.

DR. KING:

Gary?

MR. POSER:

I already have.

DR. KING:

I was going to say, roles and responsibilities, how do you see the EAC’s role going forward? And perhaps, because there are other shareholders that are not represented on this panel, if you can maybe reflect on those stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities in the go forward?

MR. POSER:

Okay, so I already mentioned kind of about the question, I think, you know, I’m not sure how we’re going to go further from there. You were talking to, sorry.

DR. KING:

Karen. Sorry Gary.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

Excuse me sir, could you repeat the question? Roles and responsibilities of the EAC overall or my particular…

DR. KING:

With, just focus on the EAVS in your office.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

I think that, you know, it does kind of go back to first, you know, do no harm. I mean, I want to create a really good baseline of information of data and I think that maintaining an instrument that is -- whose information can be compared from year-to-year, I think that my goal, my role, is to help show the value, to collect the most complete data possible. I’ll tell you a little nugget related, you know, being with the Federal Government, I suppose State folks have to do all this all the time too, there are unbelievable numbers of forms and information that’s asked for on a yearly basis by OPM, by OMB, by Congress, by, you know, it’s kind of never ending in terms of accountability. And one of the questions that we, as staff managers, have to answer every year is, relates to benchmarking, relates to, you know, you have a series of goals, you have a series of objectives around your particular programs and your projects, and what is the benchmark you’ve reached in a given year, around completeness? And I suppose being somewhat grade conscious and somewhat competitive, in those early years, you know, you’d say, well, you know, how has the Election Day Survey, now the Election Administration and Voting Survey, how has it managed to complete its level of completeness on the varying questions? So, of course, in the early years we were doing well, and oh, the next year we were doing even better, and I look back at some of those numbers and I’m thinking, yeah, well, it was the dark ages and we were getting better. But, but compared to where we are now, I mean, for me to say that we are, you know, having, you know, 99% completeness, in terms of the, all the questions that we ask, that’s a real achievable goal at this point in time. And it really wasn’t very achievable, even as late as, you know, 2010.

DR. KING:

Karen, does the EAC have a formal or an informal method of collecting input from its user community on this specific project, an advisory panel or an advisory group?

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

It’s good that -- I mean, that’s one of the many, you know, to the point again, about as the Federal Government, the enormous amount of rules and procedures we have to go through. For those of you who don’t know, the EAVS, the Election Administration and Voting Survey is a part, and must be a part, of the Paperwork Reduction Act. And so, in terms of input that we receive on that instrument, it is a rigorous 120-day public comment process which must be gone through. And I did ask one of our staff members, who serves as the intermediary between the Paperwork Reduction Act folks, very elaborate infrastructure, the OIRA infrastructure that oversees this, I said, even if we were to eliminate some questions, would we have to go through that process? Because that particular instrument that we’re using, now, does have clearance through 2017. Were we to change that instrument, even to eliminate questions, would require us to go back through the system, maybe not in a full blown 120-day comment period, but we would have to look at that again. So, this is something that I think, understandably, the Government does not take lightly, because they see the 8,000 jurisdictions, the 10,000 jurisdictions, the 55 States, as being human subjects, who are subjected to the completion of this survey and there are burden hours. How long does it take you and you and you and you to collect these data and report them to the Federal Government? So, for us, you know, you’re talking about lead time, Nikki’s talking about her two years, there’s a lead time for the EAC to change this instrument, and it’s a considerable lead time. It’s a good year, because once we go through that 120 days then we kind of sit and the clock just ticks while we wait for the Feds to tell us whether or not we can administer the instrument.

DR. KING:

Okay, very good.

MS. MORRELL:

Can I add something to that? So, as a user of that, and as a small to medium jurisdiction, when that instrument is provided, and I have to kill a tree to be able to really visualize it, it would be helpful to include in that some instructions for me. How do I use that? What should I be looking for? What are some of the bigger counties looking at and drilling down to, and how have they interpreted that? Little bit of instruction on what I can do with this, I think would be a tremendous help for small and medium jurisdictions.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

That’s a great commercial, if I might Merle, for one of the things, I was a little bit busy the last 60 days or so, 45 days, trying to put this together, but one of the things that I’m very focused on is doing a, now, I’m a huge Ted Talk fan, but doing YouTube video, and probably even a series of YouTube videos. I can’t tell you, even in a given week, how many times I’m asked, how do I find the data on the website? How do I read the data? How do I read these columns? And I’m asked that question by Ph.D.’s, I’m asked that by John Q. Public. So, in a similar fashion, I want to show you, not only how to use those tables and to create pivot tables and do all that, but why it is, you know, this tremendous mining of resources. And I think one of the best ways is to do some videos that are widely available on EAC’s website. And a start to that is this year’s data visualization that we’ve done and, you know, you’ve seen, and they’re out on the table out front. But I really want to, you know, make that bigger and richer and deeper.

DR. KING:

You know, I think to Jennifer’s point that, when I opened the Panel this morning I talked about the difference between push and pull strategies of moving information through systems. And I’ve heard several people say that the purpose of this data is to tell stories. It’s to animate. It’s to illuminate. And maybe what we need to focus on is not developing more data collectors, but more story tellers. And let that become the incentive for pulling more data through the system so that we can move from anecdote, which, unfortunately, is often the basis for policy changes, we have an anecdote that’s powerful, it tells a narrative, but moving to using data to reinforce those policy decisions and to create that story that transforms our election systems and our election processes into better performing systems.

I have an eye on the clock, and what I’d like to do right now is to open up to the audience for questions or comments and, again, I’m going to make sure that we wind up in time to get everybody out of here.

So, we have one over here. I’d like to go on the record saying that I have not mentioned Charles Stewart’s name yet, until this moment, and it’s only in the context of recognizing him as a questioner. That means I don’t have to buy drinks.

DR. STEWART:

Do I need to have a microphone to talk?

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

We have to get your question on the record, Dr. Stewart.

DR. STEWART:

So actually, so, not to pound on the machine question, but it did almost give me a heart attack, over here, but the issue about the machines did raise something I said in passing yesterday. I was just curious, both from the perspective of the Commission and local and State officials, about alternative ways of gathering some of the data. And it just strikes me as an observer that there is this kind of very short period of time in which the Survey needs to go out, to be populated and brought back, and QCed and all of that. And the machine data strikes me as the best example, as you mentioned, the EAC already has that information, to a large degree, and could be easily, that’s the sort of thing that could pre-populated, and then double checked, and maybe, just kind of tweaked on the edge. There might be some other things, like, say the number of precincts, there might be some things that could be pre-populated and I’m just wondering the degree to which the Commission has thought about pre-population for some of these rather than just kind of sending this out as entirely as the survey. And then, to the jurisdictions that have to complete it, would it be helpful to be able to kind of answer chunks of the survey at different times, or is the work flow now set up such that, although it’s a bit of a pain, now you’re kind of set up, you just do a big push for a month or so, and so, while if you were to, so I’m just kind of wondering whether it would be worthwhile to pursue other, just, timings of getting the data together to make life easier, and maybe actually to produce data that might actually be a bit more reflective of what happened during the election? So.

MS. LYNN-DYSON:

I’d like to hear the Panel on the NVRA because that is something that we have pre-population. That is pre-population of knowing what I know outside, you know, being inside the Beltway and outside from really having to do this, that the NVRA data is collected in advance, and I don’t know to what extent you all have thought about and could possibly populate those cells and answer those questions.

MR. HAMMONS:

I guess I’ll jump in first. It’s nice to, and to the point of Professor Stewart, it is, it’s, military has probably one of the best expressions I’ve seen for this – embrace the suck. And just get in the middle of it and get in there. It’s going to be hard, it’s going to get done, but, we live in a two-year, I live in a two-year cycle. I mean, once I finish with the general election next year in 2016, I’m preparing for ’18. So, you better get your data as soon as you can from me, because my focus has already shifted. And by the time I get to Election Day, I’m already shifted to ’18, because by the time I’ve gotten to Election Day I want to be able to sleep at night at that point in time, because the work’s done. And that’s kind of the rule that we play by. And so, the longer we draw that out or longer we pull the system apart to go, this data, this town, this town, whatever, it’s, you know, it sucks, it’s right at Christmas, it’s there, it’s what it is, people want to leave. We just finished a full election cycle, everybody’s worn out, they’re tired. But the work doesn’t end on Election Day as everybody in this room knows. We know that, and it never stops. It’s not a continuous process, there’s not a quiet time, there’s not a time when we can lay down and go sleep with the dog and hang out. It’s a continuous process, we’re always building a better program. And it’s better to get it knocked out in one fell swoop, to me. It’s kind of like your homework as a child, get it knocked out and then you can go play. And for us the play cycle is two years later when I get to go back to another election.

MR. KELLEY:

Can I add to what Rob said, and to Dr. Stewart’s specific question on the work flow? So, we peeled apart the Survey several years ago and developed queries in our system to be able to handle it right after the canvas. So, as soon as that’s done, we run the queries and we can start collecting the data. So, I cringe inside a little bit of the thought of kind of doing this throughout the process, right? Because a lot of the data in there requires that the canvas is complete, so, anyway...

MR. POSER:

If I could, just as, just as at an Election Day registration State, so even though we’re not an NVRA State, we still are answering those questions and so our Election Day registrations on Election Day are still included in that election cycle and our counties are still entering those after the election, so we wouldn’t be able to report those that quickly.

MS. MORRELL:

Just to address the pre-population question, I think it’s a great idea, but I would reiterate what I said earlier and give local officials the opportunity to have a check and review period, so that if there is a discrepancy we have an opportunity to figure out why and learn from that.

DR. KING:

One more, or two more, first Nikki, and then Kim.

MS. CHARLSON:

So, I guess I’m with Rob. We just sit down, we do it all. The questions that could be answered before are ones that we don’t really do much analysis with. The number of precincts, they are what they are, it doesn’t really matter, so the amount of time it takes to do those questions is nominal and once the voting system questions are in -- I just, we just cut and paste from year to year. So, it could be done but it doesn’t really save us, it doesn’t save us much time.

MR. BRACE:

I guess the other possibility is not necessarily pre-populating, but setting up, in essence, a spreadsheet that shows some history, so that you’ve got, not only, you know what is going to come for 2016, you’re going to key that in, but let’s look at the numbers that you had reported for ’14 and ’12 and ’10, so that we can say, okay, it makes sense that this guy has 200,000 more, or it doesn’t make sense, because we can see some trend line there.

DR. KING:

All right. Any other questions? Everybody’s exhausted.

MR. HAMMONS:

I’m just glad to know that Gallup actually just contacted us and we seem to be the best panel in this process. So, the poll is out and we’ve won.

UNKNOWN:

I don’t have a question, but I just wanted to say that I found a pair of sunglasses, we’re wrapping up, I found a pair of sunglasses. So if somebody’s missing a pair of sunglasses.

DR. KING:

Taking my queue from Roki, I think it’s time we do start winding this up. First thing, I’d like everybody to really reflect on the scope and the depth of the discussion over the past two days, about how a community can come together on this critical issue of the data that describes, in many cases, what we are, what we do, and the difference that we make. And I hope, like me, you’ve benefitted from hearing from viewpoints that, usually, I don’t have access to. I don’t work with all the folks that are represented on these panels, on a regular basis. And so, hearing the issues from the vendor’s perspective, from the researcher’s perspective, from the EAC’s perspective, from the State’s, from the local’s. The solution is embedded in all of those viewpoints. I also want to thank the EAC, really, not so much for this round table, *per se*, because this round table and the ones that preceded it are kind of outcomes of what I would like to thank them for, and it’s a recognition of a need to change how the agency works with its constituencies, and the importance of the agency listening to the stakeholders, understanding the stakeholders issues, and finding ways to implement those perspectives into solutions that do what we’re all about, which is improving elections across the country. So, I thank the Panel for your participation today and your preparation and your travel. I thank American University for its hosting of this and with that, I’d like to turn over the microphone to Commissioner McCormick.

CHAIRWOMAN MCCORMICK:

So, thank you very much. I’ve invited my other Commissioners up here. We can’t tell you how gratified we are that you came, and all of the participants. What an amazing two days, and we’ve got a lot to think about, a lot to chew on, a lot to learn, and how to serve you better. So, I’m just going to pass the mic over to my other Commissioners and see what they have to say.

COMMISSIONER MASTERSON:

I echo the thanks, and thank you, all of you, and Merle, again, for being willing, and what I can assure you is that we’ve listened, that we’ve learned, and now we go back and take this information and use it to make things better. And so that’s our task now is to take and synthesize the information, so that the data collection is easier and so that the back end process is worthwhile to you, and I’ll just share with you one of my takeaways from this, which is, this conversation over the last two days sounds eerily familiar to the conversation I’ve listened to for the last six, seven years, around voting systems, and why we have requirements, and what we ask the systems to do, and why do you ask, you know, performance-based versus functional. And so, what we have to go back and evaluate the survey, and say, are we getting data that helps election officials run better elections? That’s the focus. Just like we ask, are we putting forth requirements that helps voting systems serve election officials to run better elections? So, that’s the focus. That’s kind of my takeaway as we go back and look through this information. So, thank you all.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

I want to thank you all for coming here today, the audience, and from what I understand, there were 21 States represented by 42 individuals, and the information that we’ve gathered here today will be useful. You know, starting off with the first Panel was a little difficult, but, you know, we proved to be the best Panel anyway, and this is why I’m holding the mic last. Always something. But, in all seriousness, it has been a really, really great two days, and I want to thank Karen again for putting this on with her team, and, so this is why we’re always on the same page, which has always been great here. And I want to thank Merle for all his help, and am looking forward to going down to Atlanta pretty soon. And, you know, there’s not anything else I can really say, but it’s been a great two days, and I’m looking forward to, actually, looking at some more of this stuff.

COMMISSIONER MASTERSON:

The only I’ll add is, Rob, actually your boss was on my Panel, so I would suggest to you that our Panel was the best.

[Laughter]

CHAIRWOMAN MCCORMICK:

All the Panels were great and I just wanted to thank you all for your participation. I want to thank our staff. We’ve been on a lot of travel lately. We’ve put a lot of burden on them. Alice Miller, thank you so much for all the work that you and your staff have done. Karen Lynn-Dyson, for putting this together. This was something that we’ve been wanting to do for quite a long time, from the day we walked in, and we have now shown how important it is that this conversation get started and continue. We want to thank Deanna Smith, Shirley Hines, Henry Botchway, Sheila Banks, a special thanks to Megan Dylan for her tweeting, throughout, we appreciate that, Mohammed Maeruf, Bryan Whitener, Bert Benavides and all of you for participating. We also want to especially thank American University, The School of Public Affairs, here, and The Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies. They’ve been such gracious hosts to allow us to use their facility. And thank you so much and let’s continue working on this. There’s a lot to be done. So, thanks so much and we appreciate your attendance.

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[The EAC Election data Summit, How Good Data Can Help Elections Run Better, adjourned at 12:26 p.m., EDT.]