

U. S. Election Assistance Commission Public Meeting
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EAC Offices – 1225 New York Avenue, Suite 1100, Washington, DC

*“THE ROLE OF THE
UNITED STATES ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
AS A CLEARINGHOUSE”*

Tony J. Sirvello III, Executive Director
International Association of
Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers
(IACREOT)

The business of election administration in the United States is as varied and diverse as its fifty member states. The individuals responsible for such administration are called by many names – Supervisor, Administrator, County Clerk, County Auditor, Secretary, Chairman, Commissioner, etc., and the laws that each of these individuals enforce verify the axiom of “what works here may not work there”, i.e. elections conducted entirely by mail. When a federal law is passed that brings about continuity among the states in the administration of federal elections, i.e. the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002, there is produced some common ground among the states in areas of election administration, i.e. the requirement in Section 303 of HAVA relating to a statewide voter registration list, and yet there remains flexibility among the states as to the methodology used to implement such a system. This is where the Election Assistance Commission, in its capacity as a clearinghouse can provide invaluable assistance to the states and local jurisdictions as an information house.

As a predecessor to the clearinghouse function of the Election Assistance Commission, the Office of Election Administration of the Federal Election Commission, for many years performed just such a function. The heart and soul of that operation are of course currently staff members of the Election Assistance Commission. As a member of the OEA’s Advisory Panel for seven years, I was privileged to participate in and make use of many of its resources, i.e. the Voting System Standards Program, Election Case Law, Computerizing Election Management, Ballot Access Procedures, Absentee Balloting Issues and Options, Contested Elections and Recounts, and Recent Innovations in Election Administration. These publications provided background and “how-to” information for election officials throughout the United States and were instrumental in many cases for bringing a community of interest and knowledge among election officials.

As a precursor to this presentation, I solicited opinions from the many election officials in IACREOT and I received several excellent responses. One item that appeared on most of the responses was the suggestion that the EAC collect information on contracts and requests for proposals for new voting equipment, thereby creating a library of RFP and contracts for voting equipment procurement and publicizing the availability of same to election jurisdictions. This idea was at the top of the list provided by Conny McCormack, Registrar/Recorder of Los Angeles County, California, and Bill Cowles, Supervisor of Elections, Orange County, Florida. Speaking from personal experience, I requested and received completed and implemented RFPs from several jurisdictions in preparing the RFP for Harris County, Texas in 2000/2001, for the purchase of a new voting system and a new election management system.

In keeping within that same focus, other suggested that it would be helpful to gather information on the deployment and administration of the equipment after purchase, i.e. how many pieces of equipment are needed per registered voter and turnout history?; what type and how much training is recommended for the implementation of the new equipment?; what approach should be taken to reach out to the voting community? These suggestions were high on the list submitted by Sharon Turner Buie, Director of Elections, Kansas City, Missouri. Sharon also expressed an interest in a study on absentee balloting and early voting and how those systems have been abused to prey on elderly voters. Sharon, along with many others, asked for suggestions on the recruitment, training and retention of poll workers, a dilemma faced by most election jurisdictions in the country. Sharon wondered if perhaps an election workers pool, similar to the jury pool, could be created to stockpile available workers. Other suggestions included a national publication of instances where vote fraud has been prosecuted and a single source for researching case law on elections.

Cliff Borofsky, Elections Administrator, Bexar County, Texas offered several items he would like to see in a clearinghouse package. Cliff would like to see the EAC act as clearinghouse of information for the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Cliff suggests that there should be a move toward national standardization of voter ID requirements, with the EAC acting as a clearinghouse for such an initiative. The super site polling location is a growing initiative in the country and Cliff proposes that the EAC should be the clearinghouse for it. Along these same lines, Cliff endorses the idea of Super Tuesday being declared a national holiday, even suggesting that public transportation to and from a super poll site be free on Election Day.

Karen Hartenbower, County Clerk, Emporia, Kansas, would appreciate the EAC providing a webpage with links to all breaking election news, one that would alert election officials to “all that is news” in the election community.

There were many other suggestions relating to the role of the EAC as a clearinghouse of election information, but the ideas just enumerated best sum-up the most vocal responses among IACREOT’s election officials.

It is a daunting task you undertake because many times election information is only as relevant as the next piece of legislation passed in a state legislature. If I might add a final suggestion in light of that , a library of state election codes would be beneficial to those jurisdictions that might want to enact a piece of legislation in their respective states with the background of what it took to move that piece of legislation through the state of adoption.

In summation, the role of the EAC as a clearinghouse of information is one of extreme import. The EAC, now recognized as THE federal agency for election administration and implementation, would offer a base of knowledge – facts and suggestions – that election officials throughout the nation could look to for guidance and assistance.