

U. S. Election Assistance Commission
Public Meeting
Voter Information Websites
September 21, 2006

University of Missouri-St. Louis
Millennium Center
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Director of Elections
Kansas City Board of Election Commissioners

Chairman DeGregorio, Director Wilkey, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today with this distinguished panel of experts to discuss use of our public access portal in the election process. My testimony intends to convey how we created our site, how it is used and what future challenges we may face as technology continues to advance.

The Kansas City Election Board website was created as an extension of our voter outreach program. Our intent was to reach an expanding population of the community who obtain information through the internet. Our goal was, and continues to be, to provide election related information, especially timely, accurate information voters need for Election Day.

The site was designed to be an educational tool for those interested in a variety of election topics. We provide an explanation of how the Electoral College functions, the difference between partisan and non-partisan elections, how to run for elective office, how ballot language is developed, and how to use voting equipment, among other things. Last year we began to post our newsletters and topic specific pamphlets on the web. Both have high rates of downloads, so the data clearly meets a need of some users.

In addition, instructional material informs users on what is required to register, how to change a voting name or address, how to get voting rights restored and how to use voting equipment, along with other useful tools. Election specific data, such as absentee ballot applications, sample ballots and locations of polls is uploaded prior to each election.

The content of the site was developed on the basis of questions most frequently asked by voters. It was our belief at the time that widespread use of the site would reduce voter calls. We have learned there is no measurable statistic to confirm this claim. However tracking reports indicate over 50,000 users accessed the voter search feature prior to the 2004 Presidential Election. We believe this to be an indication that the system does have a positive impact on our call volume.

'Voter search' enables users to confirm their registration status when the last name and date of birth fields are populated. Address confirmation, a voter ID number and a ward and precinct assignment are then returned to the voter. An option to query the system for voting districts and for a list of their elected representatives, is another component of the search. Prior to each election, the user can request a poll location and receive directions to the building.

Missouri Statutes define what personal data can be returned to voters during a search. The data is also available for public consumption in other formats: on our in-office public viewing system and, for a fee, through our public service request system. The website database is hosted by an off-site server in a remote location, so the possibility of access to live data does not exist. The database also is not part of the statewide system, so there is no risk of compromising the security of other voter records.

Questions most frequently raised about the site are: How is the system being used and is it being used as intended? In the inaugural year of 2002, a total of 37,362 sessions were logged. A session is defined as a visit to the site by one user that lasts more than three minutes. Contrast that with a total of 158,768¹ sessions in 2004 and we can clearly conclude that internet users are aware of and access our site.

As expected, trends indicate that the highest number of sessions occur during Primary and General Election periods. An unexpected outcome was the increasing volume associated with April School Elections and the relative steady sessions that occur throughout the year during 'off' election years (see Attachment).

Tracking data suggests users have become more sophisticated in searches over time. In 2002, election results were accessed more than any other page. 2003 users became interested in voting districts, voter searches and voter registration data (e.g. name change, address change, cancellations, restoration of rights). Web users main interests in 2004 were 'precinct finder' and voter registration requirements prior to the Primary and General Elections. Thus far in 2006, users are searching for specific information about elections, such as sample ballots, poll logs, voting district data, qualifications for office and campaign finance information.

We have learned that voter searches do not mirror user downloads. And, we note differences in the types of data downloaded in off years, mid-years and a Presidential Election year. In 2004, 22.62% of users downloaded sample ballots, 12.01% obtained web registration applications², 11.42% printed absentee ballot applications and 9% received registration update forms.

¹ Urchin Tracking System used for all tracking reports.

² No longer available in web format.

The top three downloads in 2005 were web voter registration forms (11.57%), our newsletters (7.43%), and sample ballots (6.87%). To date in 2006, downloads were requested for web applications (7.39%), Democratic sample ballots for the August Primary (5.50%) and sample ballots for the April School Board elections (4.28%). Growing interest in newsletters and informational pamphlets indicate users value current election information and may signal a need to generate both more frequently.

I believe an unintended benefit of establishing the site was the ability to reach a broad segment of the disabled community. I frankly did not realize the extent to which disabled voters rely on our site until recently. We inadvertently posted sample ballots for the August Primary in HTML, rather than PDF *and* HTML. Within hours after posting, I received five complaints from disabled voters. The error was easily and quickly remedied. This experience was a wake up call to me to begin to develop creative methods to utilize this cost effective method of communicating with this group of our voters.

Other segments of our communities may not be as technically astute or have immediate access to computers, but this is not a major barrier to dissemination of information. While the data indicate usage of our website is a growing trend, we recognize the need to provide information in multiple formats to support those who prefer more traditional methods. This includes mail, newspapers, radio, television, newsletters, conferences, libraries, kiosks and other outlets. We must continue to think of our websites as *one* outreach mechanism, not *the* outreach outlet.

Through partnerships with businesses, labor, churches, non-profit advocacy organizations and other groups, we can continue to expand our reach into the community and protect the voting rights of voters who have not crossed the digital divide.

As we move to the future, some of the challenges we will face include:

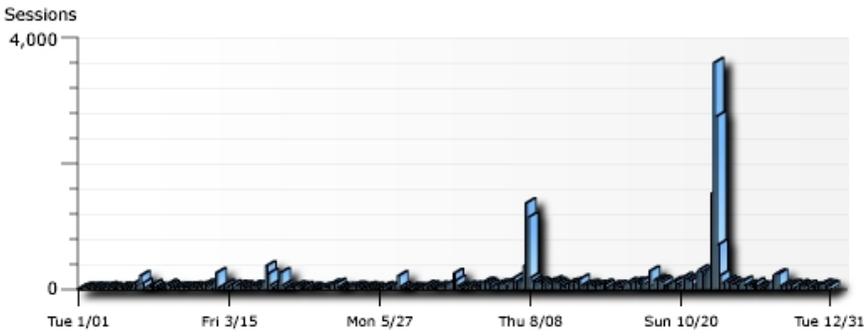
- Constant monitoring to ensure accuracy of the site
- Ensuring data is regularly updated
- Determining what additional information should be included on the site
- Recognizing most users access the site prior to major elections, identifying what is needed for maximum exposure to information during those periods
- Minimizing risks of exposure as statewide interstate and intrastate portals are established
- Securing funding to keep pace with ever changing technological advances

I look forward to the Publius study that will address these issues.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to share my views on this critical subject.

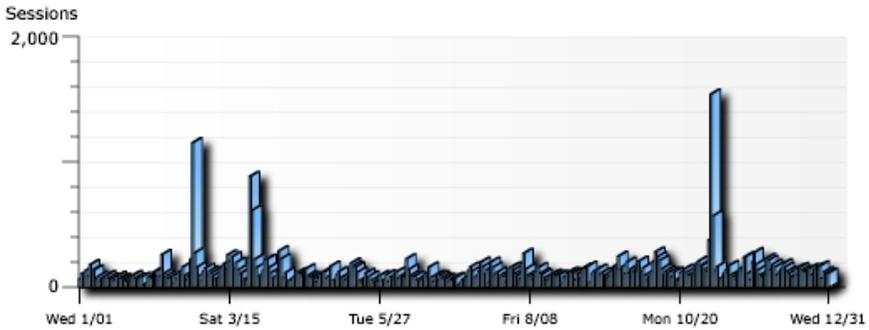
Attachment
KCEB Sessions Graph

Report: Sessions Graph
Date Range: 01/01/2002 - 12/31/2002

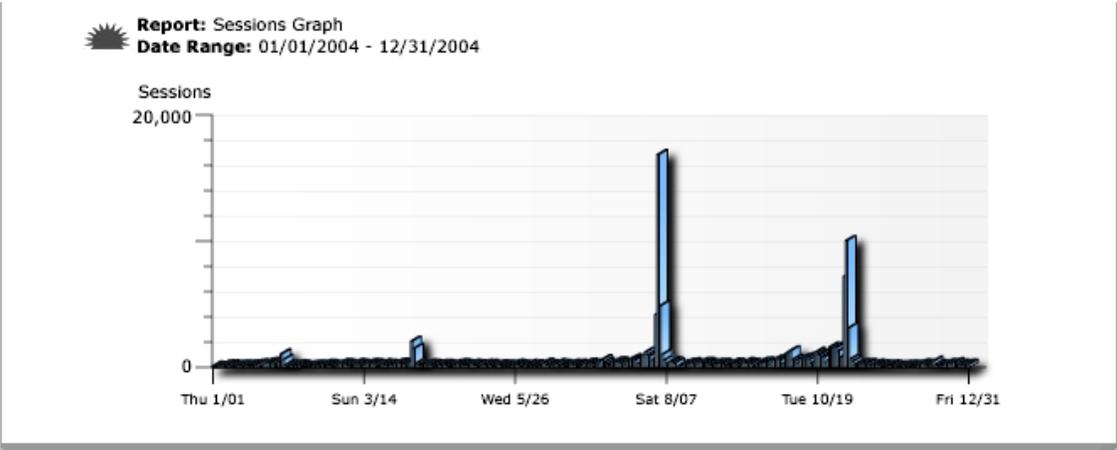


2002 Elections: April citywide school election; August Primary; November General

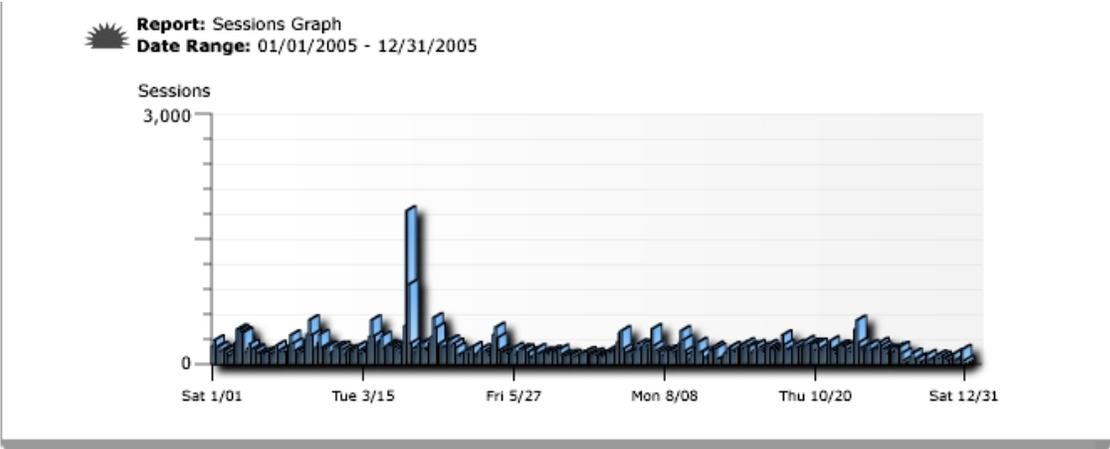
Report: Sessions Graph
Date Range: 01/01/2003 - 12/31/2003



2003 Elections: Feb Municipal Primary; Mar Municipal General; Aug Citywide; Nov Citywide

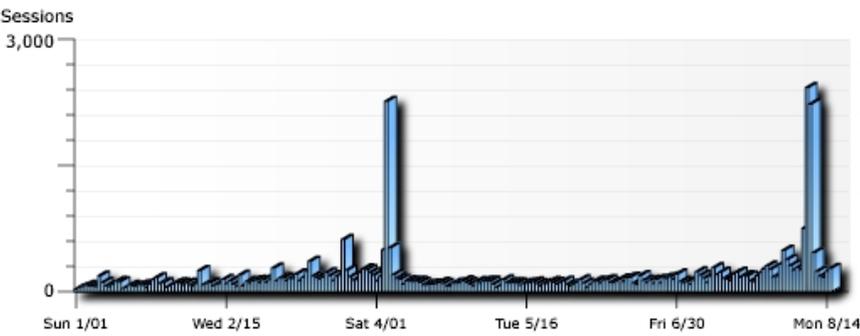


2004 Elections: Feb Special; April School and Special Citywide; Aug Primary; Nov General



2005 Elections: Feb Special; April School and Citywide Special; Aug Special

 **Report:** Sessions Graph
Date Range: 01/01/2006 - 08/15/2006



2006 Elections: April Suburban Schools; August Primary