INNOVATIVE PRACTICES AND NEW SOLUTIONS

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

OVERVIEW

Innovative practices and new solutions have been implemented through the 2020 primary election season in response to COVID-19. They offer illustrations of operations that are possible, either as principal solutions or as backup options for the 2020 general election. The primary election season has also provided examples of how significant uncertainty can impact election operations, especially when conditions change rapidly.

As the title of this document indicates, many of the practices highlighted here are innovative or experimental. These solutions may not have the complete stress testing election officials would prefer. However, new ideas and inspiration triggered by examples of solutions such as those used by other election officials around the country in response to this unprecedented pandemic may be necessary.

Resilient Election Day operations should include contingencies for voting locations being unable to open as a result of last-minute facility cancelations, poll worker or staff shortages, and other potential problems related to the pandemic. Some modifications election officials have employed include:

- ❑ Consolidating the number of locations into larger "super centers" that can serve the same projected number of in-person voters, but with fewer poll workers and locations.
- ❑ Creating a ticketing or reservation system so voters do not have to stand in line while waiting to vote.
- ❑ Deploying drive-through voting and ballot drop-off locations.
- ❑ Using a "teller" window to separate the voter and poll worker.

Although this document provides many examples, election officials are continuing to develop new and groundbreaking ideas. Wisconsin and Nebraska, for example, recently implemented innovative practices during in-person voting amid COVID-19. Elections in other countries, such as South Korea, may also be instructive, to the extent consistent with applicable U.S. federal,

state, and local laws.[1] Additionally, election officials may find it useful to seek information from industries that have addressed challenges related to implementing and enforcing social distancing, such as grocery stores or banks.

HOW CAN YOU USE "SUPER CENTERS" (LARGE VOTING LOCATIONS)?

Standing up very large voting locations, or "super centers," centralizes resources, expertise and facilitates in compliance with social distancing. Football fields, stadiums, fairgrounds, drive-in movie theaters, malls (especially if they are vacant), large warehouses, parking lots, and parking garages are all examples of potential non-traditional locations to leverage as super centers. You can find additional information on voting locations, as well as recommendations for voter and stakeholder engagement, in *Finding Voting Locations and Poll Workers* and other Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Subsector Coordinating Council guidance documents on the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections webpage and the Election Assistance Commission COVID-19 response webpages.

Non-traditional super center locations offer some logistical challenges to consider:

- ❑ Longer travel distances to these locations for some voters.
- ❑ Accessibility challenges.
- ❑ Power needs for voting equipment and other technology.
- ❑ Internet connectivity for electronic pollbooks.
- ❑ Heating or air conditioning, depending on the external conditions.
- ❑ Tenting to maintain acceptable shelter and climate.
- ❑ Availability of close, adequate parking.
- ❑ Proper allocation and transportation of necessary supplies to each location.
- ❑ Physical security.

[1] See, e.g., International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): Managing Elections under the COVID-19 Pandemic; The Republic of Korea's Crucial Test https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/managing-elections-during-pandemic-republic-korea-crucial-test.pdf; and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES): Elections Held and Mitigating Measures Taken During COVID-19 https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/elections_held_and_mitigating_measures_taken_during_covid-19.pdf.

HOW CAN YOU INSTITUTE A TICKETING OR RESERVATION PROCESS?

To facilitate social distancing, it may be beneficial to reengineer the voter check-in process. Some examples of innovative voter check-in systems are described below. Remember to develop a plan for voter education and stakeholder outreach related to any new initiatives.

LOW-TECH TICKETING

Officials can use a low-tech (e.g., paper) line management system similar to those used at deli counters or some motor vehicle licensing agencies. This can be operationalized with sequentially numbered raffle tickets and a white board to announce the next number, or range of numbers, to enter the polling location.

- ❏ Such a system can be valuable when lines are expected to be long. The "next ticket" range can be posted both inside and outside the polling place. For example, the location lead worker can post information every 15 minutes about the next range of ticket holders that will be allowed into the polling place.
    - ❏ At 10:00 a.m., the site lead announces "From 10:15 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., numbers 24,700 through 24,725 will be allowed to enter the polling place."
    - ❏ This process could inform voters in the parking lot when their time to access the polling place to vote is approaching. Voters waiting in parking lots or in a vehicle line can introduce additional traffic management issues.

TECH-BASED TICKETING

Use a technology-based check-in system similar to some restaurant host stations.

- ❏ A voter arriving at the polling place provides their phone number to a poll worker who enters the data into a queuing tool with texting capabilities that is staffed and managed by a poll worker. The voter then receives a notification, through text message, when it is time to check in. The voter can remain in their car or away from others until it is their turn.
    - ❏ It is possible that buzzer/paging units may be handed out in lieu of using a texting tool; however, that will create additional cleaning, procurement and device control requirements.

- ❏ You may also consider the use of an automated ticketing application that allows people to reserve their position in line at home in real time and track their progress in the line before they reach the polling place. Similar to the option described above, the voter receives a text message when it is their turn to check in.
    - ❏ This solution eliminates the need for voters to be physically present to begin the check-in process.
    - ❏ However, a voter may sign up and then not arrive in time for their turn, leading to predictability challenges.

Deploying such a system would require implementation of accommodations for individuals without access to the Internet and/or a mobile phone, or who otherwise face challenges using such tools.

RESERVATION SYSTEM

There may be ways to accept advanced reservations to vote from voters, or certain voters, especially during early voting times. This is similar to the process restaurants use to reserve a table for later in the evening or even a few days out. It also allows you to modify the number of reservations available at any given location and at any given time. Such a system:

- ❏ Allows voters to schedule a time to vote in-person at a given location.
- ❏ May provide enough data on voter preferences or demand for specific locations to allow resources to be shifted to meet the demand.
- ❏ Might help election officials provide safe voting opportunities to specific voters affected by this crisis, such as those at higher risk of severe disease.
    - ❏ Retail and commercial service providers have tailored operations to specific users. For example, some grocery stores open an hour early for high risk individuals and/or emergency workers. However, elections are legally and fundamentally different from other critical functions. Such a targeted opportunity should not be undertaken absent significantly vetted legal authorities.

Introducing new technology and hosting it on a website introduces many risks, especially if there is a shortened timeline to implement and test the technology. Review established guidelines for new technology and implement rigorous product testing.

HOW CAN YOU USE DRIVE-THROUGH VOTING?

You can create outdoor vote centers or drop-off locations that allow voters to vote or cast their ballots from their cars. Sites might include large parking lots (e.g., malls, stadiums, colleges, high schools, convention centers, etc.), parking structures, drive-in movie theaters, etc. Some officials in Wisconsin implemented drive-through voting locations during the state's April 7, 2020, primary election. Voters remained in their cars, while poll workers wore gloves and face coverings, and in some locations additional protective gear. Videos and written guidance on how to properly put on and take off PPE are provided on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. Considerations for using such a system include:

- ❏ Voters can check in from the safety of their cars without co-mingling with other voters.
    - ❏ Additional technology conducive to constant physical movement, such as tablets, may be necessary to verify a voter's eligibility in the voter registration database (VRDB).
- ❏ For jurisdictions that use a ballot marking device, election officials could mount the voting machines in such a way that voters can either interface with them through their car window (like a drive-up ATM machine) or by stepping out of their vehicles momentarily.
- ❏ For jurisdictions that use a hand-marked paper ballot:
    - ❏ The poll workers can use ballot-on-demand technology or preprinted ballots retrieved and brought to the voters' cars by poll workers after check-in.
    - ❏ The voter receives a ballot, pen and clipboard.
        - ❏ Under one option, there are multiple stations, each one with a poll worker, the ballots, and a ballot box or tabulator. The poll workers check in the voters, give them the ballots, and then step away while the voters mark their ballots in their cars. Next the poll workers bring over the ballot box/scanner or put the ballot in a secrecy folder and then put it in the scanner or box.
        - ❏ Alternatively, after checking in and receiving their ballot materials from a poll worker, voters park, vote, and then drive to the exit where the ballot box/scanner station is located to deposit their ballot and return their supplies.
- ❏ Please note, using voter centers where any voter can vote at any location means all ballot styles should be available at all locations.
- ❏ Supplies should be disinfected before being reused.

You may have the opportunity to use vacant restaurant buildings with a drive-through. Voters can check in by announcing themselves where they typically order food, and when they arrive at the pickup window, an election worker presents the pollbook and a ballot. Voters can vote in their cars and deposit their ballots in a scanner or ballot box at the exit.

MIXING VOTING MODELS BY NECESSITY

During the 2020 primaries, election officials have left or considered leaving their *vote anywhere* early voting locations open through Election Day as a fail-safe measure to accommodate voters whose precinct polling places were unable to open. This solution allows every voter to have a place to vote on Election Day and can be used to manage late changes that arise on or just before Election Day. Considerations for such a measure include:

- ❏ Keeping early voting locations open on Election Day may exacerbate potential staffing issues because poll workers, who often have precinct assignments on Election Day, may need to be reassigned to stay at the early voting locations.
- ❏ Using universal use locations on Election Day, when voters are typically only allowed to vote at their precinct, may create voter confusion. Voters in neighboring precincts where polling places are still open may believe they can vote at universal sites.
- ❏ Mixing voting models can create some data integrity concerns if the universal vote locations are not strictly limited to voters whose precinct voting locations are not open unless pollbooks update in real-time. Many precinct-based voting operations rely on paper pollbooks or electronic pollbooks that are not networked. Early voting sites are typically networked to accommodate the voter's choice in where to vote. Running the two models simultaneously, without strict controls on who can vote where, could potentially allow individuals to vote in both locations if there is no real-time connectivity between all locations.
    - ❏ If employing a mixed model, it is important to carefully consider the technical and integrity implications and available risk mitigations, as well as to communicate the rules clearly to the voters, campaigns, and other stakeholders.

WHAT OPERATIONAL RISK CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD YOU ADDRESS?

- ❑ Adding new technology to an operation, particularly with a short timeline, can create risks. As risk managers, election officials may decide to accept or mitigate those risks in light of other pressures. Considerations for reducing operational risk include:
  - ❑ Keep it simple. Poll workers and voters may find it easier to interact with lower-tech systems.
  - ❑ Test all new technologies for functionality, security, and volume under typical Election Day pressure.

WHAT CYBER AND PHYSICAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD YOU ADDRESS?

Any new technology may have vulnerabilities. It is important for election officials to know the risks and make a knowledgeable decision whether to accept and work to mitigate the risks. It is important to conduct penetration testing on new technology and vulnerability scanning on information distribution methods such as public facing websites.

SECURITY RESOURCES

- ❑ Sign up for CISA services, such as vulnerability scans (aka CyHy), remote penetration testing (RPT), phishing campaign assessments, etc. All CISA services can be located in the CISA Election Infrastructure Security Resource Guide. All services can be requested at Central@cisa.dhs.gov.
- ❑ To gain situational awareness of the threats to the election infrastructure, become an Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center Member by visiting https://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac/.

OTHER RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- ❑ **CDC Situation Summary webpage**—This page provides updated information and guidance on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.

- ❑ **CDC Coronavirus index webpage**—This page provides links to all CDC resources on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- ❑ **CDC List of State and Territorial Health Department Websites**—This page provides links to all websites of state and territory health departments, which the CDC recommends consulting for state-specific information on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- ❑ **CDC Recommended Precautions for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Election Polling Locations, including Cleaning and Disinfection**—This guidance provides recommendations on the routine cleaning and disinfection of polling location areas and associated electronic equipment. It suggests actions poll workers can take to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by limiting the survival of the virus in the environment. According to the CDC, this guidance will be updated if additional information becomes available.
    - ❑ There is a section on recommendations for processing mail-in ballots. The CDC states that workers handling mail-in ballots should practice hand hygiene frequently. No additional precautions are recommended for storage of ballots.
- ❑ **CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020**—This interim guidance for businesses may be relevant to election offices. It seeks to help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)

- ❑ **CISA Coronavirus webpage**—This page provides information on CISA's efforts with federal partners concerning coronavirus and COVID-19 and links to other federal resources.
- ❑ **CISA Insights: Risk Management for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**—This brief provides recommendations on how to address physical supply chain and cyber security issues that may arise from the spread of the novel coronavirus. This resource is helpful for election officials to prepare for possible impacts of the novel coronavirus.

U.S. Postal Service (USPS)

- ❑ **USPS Statement on Coronavirus**—This statement from the U.S. Postal Service released March 4, 2020 may be helpful to voters who participate by mail, including military and overseas voters.

Election Assistance Commission (EAC)

- ❑ **EAC Disaster Preparedness and Recovery webpage**—This page features presentations from election administrators about how they conducted elections in the face of a variety of natural disasters. Their examples of preparedness and recovery could be helpful for election officials as they address the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- ❑ **EAC Contingency Plans webpage**—In preparation for the 2016 elections, the EAC collected continuity of operations plans and resources from election officials at the state and local levels. This includes state-specific examples for H1N1 flu preparedness.
- ❑ **EAC Election Management Guidelines Chapter 11: Contingency Planning and Change Management**—This 2009 resource was created to assist state and local election officials in effectively managing and administering elections. Each chapter explores a different aspect of election administration and provides examples and recommendations.