

Local Initiatives Designed to Improve the Voting Experience

Concepts for Local Elected Officials and Election Officials

FAIR ELECTIONS
LEGAL NETWORK

www.fairelectionsnetwork.com/local-election-initiatives/

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Executive Outline

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights and legal support organization that works to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies and improve overall election administration through administrative, legal, and legislative reform as well as provide legal and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations.

This toolkit on local initiatives implemented by local elections officials and elected officials highlights innovative approaches to solving some of the biggest problems in election administration, as well as promoting a more voter friendly environment. Our goal is to provide examples of unique and effective election practices that can be implemented by localities across the country to expand and modernize voter registration and voting, save money, make elections more efficient, and eliminate common problems in state election administration. While this toolkit provides a wide range of examples it is not exhaustive by any means, as there is a breadth of great work being done by local elections and elected officials to ease the voting process.

Furthermore, in light of the historically low voter turnout in the 2014 midterm elections, it is the duty of elections and elected officials to find ways to make voting as easy and accessible as possible.¹ Local officials are uniquely positioned to have a direct impact on their communities, as so much of election law is state and locally-based. Measures taken by local officials can not only significantly reduce barriers for voters, but may also contribute to higher voter turnout in future elections.

For those interested in reaching out to FELN, our resources go beyond the scope of this toolkit. FELN can assist local officials with planning and implementation of best practices in election administration. Contact FELN at info@fairelectionsnetwork.com to get involved and start having an impact on elections in your city or county.

Voter Registration

A. Local Voter Registration Initiatives and the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)

- Six states are exempt from the NVRA primarily because these six states had Election Day registration in place when the NVRA was enacted. Municipalities in these states can nevertheless encourage public assistance agencies – like the Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Health and Human Services, or Department for Employment Services – to help distribute voter registration forms and information.

B. Local Promotion of Online Voter Registration

- In 20 states that have implemented online voter registration, local elected officials can **facilitate the online registration process by mandating that dedicated computers are available at public offices and libraries** for the purpose of being utilized for online voter registration.

C. Facilitating New Residents' Registration

- Elections offices can **partner with title companies and realtor associations** to offer new homeowners voter registration forms to register or update their registration information.
- Pass city ordinances **mandating landlords to provide voter registration forms and information to new tenants** upon move-in. This is particularly helpful in cities with highly transient populations.

D. Registration During Commercial Transactions

- **Credit unions and banks can offer voter registration information and forms** at their physical locations as well as on their websites, since many people regularly interact with banks.

E. Use of Deputy Registrar Programs

- Employ **student deputy registrar programs** to register people to vote.
- **Streamline the training program for deputy registrars**, such that it is seamless and easy for people to attend the trainings. Ways to do this include making the training available on weeknights and weekends, and post a training video and completion form on the city/county elections website.
- **Recruit bilingual and multilingual deputy registrars** from community centers, cultural organizations, and schools, to assist registering voters who have limited English-language proficiency.

F. Preregistration and Voter Registration in Schools

- **Institute voter registration programs for students when they turn 18** in high school. In states that allow preregistration, coordinate with school boards and specific school administrators and teachers to register 16- and 17-year-olds in high schools.

Poll Worker Recruitment and Training

A. Poll Worker Recruitment

- Implement **student poll worker programs**. Officials can recruit from colleges, and in states that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to be poll workers, recruit from high schools. Elections offices can do this by establishing relationships with high school principals and teachers so they know about the program and can help spread the word to students. Targeting bilingual students to participate in poll worker programs helps build a group of poll workers skilled in various languages.
- Utilize **city employee poll worker programs**, which allow city employees to serve as poll workers on Election Day by using paid leave to do so. These types of programs are effective because city employees are generally already familiar with the elections process and they can serve as a reserve pool of poll workers in case of a shortage.
- Establish partnerships with **local community organizations and businesses to create "Adopt-A-Precinct" programs**, which allow these organizations and businesses to recruit their employees to serve as poll workers together at a particular precinct. This both addresses the city's need for poll workers and fosters good relationships with businesses and organizations. Cities can also specifically recruit employees with language skills to provide help to limited English proficiency voters.

B. Poll Worker Training

- Local elections offices can provide **additional training** online targeted to handling voting machines, as voting machines prove to be particularly tricky to operate.
- Elections officials creating training materials should **include hypotheticals, diagrams, and photos** to better help poll workers understand how to set up polling locations and potential problems that may arise on Election Day.
- One easy way to ensure that poll workers are not overwhelmed with information is to **divide responsibilities** for individuals. This ensures that each poll worker is only responsible for certain tasks and has less specific details to remember about a wide array of responsibilities poll workers usually perform.

Voter Education

A. Community Outreach

- Elections officials can **schedule visits to organizations and schools** that request specifics on registering and voting.
- Establish a program through which city officials can **recruit volunteers to serve as ambassadors in their communities** and can help elections officials disseminate voting information.

B. Using Social Media

- Municipalities can establish social media policies and use online platforms like **Twitter and Facebook** to diversify their outreach to voters.
- Other media platforms municipalities can use include Sunlight Foundation's **Open States website and the Voter's Edge tool and mobile app**.

C. Language Access

- Municipalities can reach more voters by exceeding state and federal language access requirements, and **providing translations on elections websites and translated materials** in top languages spoken in the area.
- Alternatively, the city can direct voters to trusted third-party organizations that provide translated voting information on their websites.

D. Providing Additional Information About the Process

- One especially effective way to reach high school students to inform them about the electoral process, aside from directly providing information to them, is through their parents. The city or school can **reach out to parents or guardians and provide them with basic registration and voting information** to encourage their students to participate in the electoral process.
- Election officials should also consider **offering voter guides using plain language explanations** of each of the positions and issues voters will see on their ballots.

Administrative Practices

A. Setting Convenient Voting Hours

- At least a few states give municipalities some flexibility on setting Election Day hours. Municipalities in these states should consider **providing extended hours, including later evening hours**, to increase convenience for voters.

B. Availability of Early Vote Locations

- Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia allow some form of early voting. In these states, the law varies in regard to where early voting locations should be set. In states with flexibility on early vote locations, municipalities should **make early vote locations available at convenient locations** like shopping malls, grocery stores, colleges, libraries, and community centers,
- If funds allow, municipalities should also consider offering **portable early vote sites**.

C. Aligning Municipal and Federal Elections

- Election officials can promote greater turnout for municipal elections and ease the administrative burden of holding elections by **scheduling municipal elections at the same time as state and federal elections**.

D. Accessible Elections Websites

- Municipalities should consider designing **their elections websites such that they are easy to navigate and accessible for all voters**.

Introduction

For elections at every level, states control the lion's share of decision-making power. Besides a few major federal laws that provide some standards and protections that constitute the foundation of elections – including the Voting Rights Act (VRA), the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), also known as the Motor Voter Act, and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) – states possess a great deal of discretion in election administration.

The VRA, passed in 1965 in response to systematic state disenfranchisement of minority voters, implemented a change to voting practices in America and was designed to enforce the voting rights guaranteed to all Americans under the 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution. The VRA enfranchised minorities at the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and contains numerous provisions regulating the administration of elections throughout the country.²

In 1993, the NVRA was signed into law primarily to provide more opportunities for eligible voters to register to vote. The NVRA's most significant contributions include a standardized national voter registration form and a requirement for states to register applicants who used the federal form. It also requires states to provide the opportunity for every American to register to vote for federal elections when they apply for a driver's license or renew a driver's license, at all offices that provide public assistance and provide state-funded programs primarily serving persons with disabilities, and by mail using forms developed by the states or the federal registration form developed by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC).³

HAVA, signed into law in 2002, was enacted by Congress to address improvements to voting systems and voter access that were identified following the 2000 election. HAVA made sweeping reforms in several important areas of election administration and also established the EAC, which has since assisted states in implementing HAVA requirements, developed best practices, distributed HAVA funds to states to support election administration, and collected data following elections. The EAC also broadly oversees the election administration process across the country by maintaining voting system guidelines and operating the federal government's first voting system certification program.⁴

Beyond these few federal laws, states have a great deal of control over setting the rules for registering and voting and ultimately administering elections. In recent years, laws passed in many state legislatures throughout the country have made it more difficult for Americans to cast ballots. State legislators and elections officials around the country have taken steps to limit third-party voter registration efforts, enacted strict voter identification laws and proof of citizenship requirements, shortened early voting days and hours, and improperly purged voter rolls, thus limiting voters' access to the ballot.

While states across the country are passing laws that make it harder to vote for many Americans, some states have made strides toward improving access to the ballot and the voting process. In states like Colorado, Illinois, and Massachusetts, state lawmakers and election officials have recently expanded access to the ballot box by enacting reforms such as extending early voting hours, same day registration, mailing ballots to all registered voters, and allowing for the preregistration of 16- and 17-year-olds.

In light of the trend toward greater restrictions on voting in many states and voters' frustrations with antiquated voting processes, in March 2013, President Obama signed an executive order to create the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA).⁵ The Commission culminated six months of research and interviews with election officials into a report, which included recommendations for running smoother, more efficient elections. Among other things, the PCEA recommended better funding local election officials to help them administer elections, expanding opportunities for early voting, and implementing more effective voter registration practices, including online voter registration.

Given the many restrictive voting policies in place nationwide, it has become increasingly important for local elected officials to take affirmative steps to expand the franchise of voting. Innovative local-level legislative and administrative action may prove particularly useful, given that local election officials have a good deal of discretion within existing national and state frameworks to improve voters' experiences at the polls and improve overall turnout. Localities can also play a role in shaping the conduct of elections, voter registration, and voter participation. As a result, there is value in exploring local options to counteract restrictive voting laws and increase access and convenience at the polls.

Home Rule and Local Initiatives

The level of discretion granted to localities in elections – and otherwise – to enact ordinances or administrative rulings varies from state to state. Local authority in lawmaking and administrative action typically turns on the home rule statute or constitutional provision in each state.

Home rule is a term used loosely to convey the level of autonomy local governments have.⁶ Generally speaking, states can be broadly categorized as either strong or weak home rule states. Municipal home rule jurisprudence consists mostly of setting the boundaries between areas of local affairs and government within the legislative purview of towns, cities, counties, and those areas of statewide concern and thus assigned to the legislature. This toolkit broadly categorizes states by those that provide for municipal home rule in their constitutions, states that provide for municipal home rule by statute, and states that do not authorize municipal home rule, along with how the home rule provision is applied to varying municipalities.⁷ *See Appendix.*

In discussing the various steps municipalities can take to improve the voting experience in their areas, it is important to determine the extent of the particular state's home rule provisions. The home rule provisions provide guidelines for the action particular municipalities can take in the realm of election administration. Moreover, it is a framework for what municipalities can do generally to improve residents' everyday interactions with local government. Localities seeking to reform and improve their electoral process should first confirm they have the authority to do so under a home rule charter in their state. Generally, limitations under home rule charters apply to local ordinances covering state jurisdictions, but usually do not apply to local administrative actions. We will explore both approaches.

Ways Local Governments Can Improve the Electoral Experience

Depending on the home rule provision, local governments have the ability to impact the efficiency of the voting process at different stages. It should also be noted that while state statutes sometimes preempt localities, state law does not limit how localities implement voter education and various administrative practices. Local officials can generally take action in one of three ways: 1) passing ordinances, 2) expanding voting options through administrative actions, and 3) providing concrete help to voters through rigorous voter education practices by local governmental institutions and interactions with its citizens. This toolkit will outline some best practices local governments can implement, as well as examples from localities that are already leading innovators in the following areas:

- voter registration,
- poll worker recruitment and training,
- voter education, and
- other administrative practices.

Voter Registration

Voter registration is the first and most critical step to getting Americans engaged in the electoral process. Since only 11 states and the District of Columbia have implemented same day registration,⁸ voter registration is the first point of access to the ballot that must be addressed, and it must be faced well in advance of Election Day in most states. Even in states with same day registration, voter registration before Election Day must be a priority in order to maximize voter participation while at the same time decreasing wait times at the polls.

Voter registration promotion, outreach, and education are especially important for first-time voters, who have not yet been exposed to the electoral process. Key demographics include high school and college students, as

well as naturalized citizens. Many cities and counties have established programs whereby high school seniors are provided voter registration forms and voting information in their government classes. Many other cities and counties also provide voter registration forms and registration assistance to new citizens at their naturalization ceremonies.⁹

Not only should first-time voter registration be a priority, elected officials should also consider the impact of the process on those who have to reregister after moving. States require voters to reregister not only when relocating to different states, but also when moving within the state and even within the same city or county in some instances. According to studies conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2012, the population of the United States is considered highly mobile.¹⁰ In fact, between 2012 and 2013, 25.9 million Americans over the age of one moved (constituting about 11.7% of the population over the age of one), and of these, about 75% were 18 and older.¹¹ As a result, voter registration and reregistration should reflect the highly transient lifestyles of voting-age Americans.

Registration must be widely accessible and easy to complete for all voters. Paper forms should be made easily available and, in order to maximize registrations, they should be easy to return to the proper election officials. Online voter registration has recently become a viable alternative that is showing significant results in improving access and accuracy, while reducing costs.

Local Voter Registration Initiatives and the NVRA

One tremendous effort toward making voter registration easier and more widely accessible was the implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), also known as the Motor Voter Act. Americans' engagement with governmental entities (like a department of motor vehicles or social service agency) is an effective place to incorporate voter registration. The Motor Voter Act was deliberately enacted in recognition of this idea that the more convenient and routine it is to register to vote, the easier it is to do and the more likely it is that people will actually participate in the process.

States exempt from the NVRA can nevertheless help facilitate voter registration through public assistance agencies. Six states are exempt from the NVRA primarily because these states had Election Day registration in place when the NVRA was enacted, but municipalities in these states can still encourage public assistance agencies to help in the voter registration process.¹² One such example of this is Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. Wisconsin is one such state that is exempt from the NVRA. In 2014, Milwaukee County passed a resolution to develop a voter registration program to register voters at places where they apply for, renew, or update information for social services from the county.¹³

Voter registration forms and voting information can be made available at various city and county agency offices that people regularly visit, including departments for employment services or health and human services. If residents of the city are able to easily access voter registration information in places they frequent, it means they do not have to seek out this information on their own. By making voter registration forms available at local agency offices, voters can also obtain help in completing their forms if they have any questions; the agency employees can be trained or educated on the voter registration process to help individuals if they require such assistance.

Local Promotion of Online Voter Registration

One way to streamline the voter registration process and make it less costly and more sustainable is through the adoption of online voter registration. Depending on the particular state, if online voter registration is available, local elected officials can help facilitate this process and make it accessible for voters across the

Adding online voter registration will engage many voters in a way they are familiar and comfortable.

state. For example, local elected officials can mandate that dedicated computers are available at public offices and libraries for the purposes of being utilized for online voter registration. Unlike other types of election reforms, online registration has actually been embraced by people all along the ideological

spectrum. Not only does it have widespread support from elected officials, but voters have readily adopted online registration since they are already accustomed to completing many important tasks online in their daily lives, including banking and interacting with state agencies like the DMV. Adding online voter registration to the list of available online services will help to engage many voters in a way they are familiar and comfortable. Online voter registration is also highly cost-effective. In Arizona, the first state to implement online voter registration, an EZ Voter online registration form costs just \$.03 to process, compared to the \$.83 it costs to process a paper registration application.¹⁴

Facilitating New Residents' Registration

Apart from implementing online voter registration, there are other ways to make voter registration easier and more accessible for voters. In Tennessee, the Wilson County Election Commission has taken steps to make voter registration easier for new homeowners in the county. The Wilson County Election Commission, along with Wilson County title companies and the Eastern Middle Tennessee Association of Realtors, have partnered to make voter registration maintenance a part of every real estate closing.¹⁵ This is especially important where, in places like Tennessee, voter registration is by county, and voters who move even within a county are required to update their voter registration address.

The city council in East Lansing, Michigan made great strides in promoting the distribution of voter registration forms and updating voter registration information. The city passed an ordinance mandating landlords to provide new tenants with voter registration forms and a one-pager on student voting FAQs.¹⁶ East Lansing has a high population of students, many of whom are registering to vote for the first time and move frequently – sometimes as often as every academic year, or even more frequently. With a large student population from Michigan State University present in the city, the one-pager on student voting is a especially pragmatic aspect of the landlord requirement in the city.¹⁷ Students not only move to East Lansing from all over Michigan and potentially all over the country, but they are also a particularly transient population from year to year while in school. Immediately providing a primer on the voter registration requirements and the voter registration form upon moving into new apartments saves time and eliminates confusion. Because the city provides a uniform one-page FAQ sheet for landlords to distribute, it lends accuracy and legitimacy to the information provided to tenants.

As a result of East Lansing’s high population of students, the city clerk’s website includes a direct link to Michigan State’s YouVote – a nonpartisan committee that disseminates voting information to students on Michigan State’s campus – of which the city clerk’s office is a participating member. The YouVote committee is unique among campus civic engagement initiatives because it brings together a variety of stakeholders to participate in the discussion about fostering student participation in the electoral process, including campus administrators, students, and city clerks’ offices. The city clerk’s partnership with YouVote makes it easier for students new to East Lansing to find resources that are geared specifically toward them and engage in activities that promote awareness of the election and the issues, in addition to registering their classmates to vote.¹⁸

The city council in Takoma Park, Maryland also passed an ordinance in 2013 requiring landlords to provide all new tenants with a voter registration form along with information on online voter registration and how to obtain additional registration forms.¹⁹ Landlords are further required by the ordinance to provide their tenants with information about the municipal elections process.²⁰ City Councilmember Tim Male described the city’s population as highly transient and suggested that this ordinance helps ease the transition for new residents.²¹

These types of practices are valuable not only in cities with high student populations, but in cities of various populations and sizes. As reflected earlier in the Census Bureau report on mobility and movers in America, transience is common across age groups and can be attributed to a variety of reasons, not just for attending college elsewhere.²²

Registration in Commercial Transactions

In early 2014, Utah credit unions participated in a 30-day trial period of offering voter registration forms at branch locations of credit unions across the state. During this month-long period, links were provided at the

statewide credit unions' website.²³ These practices continued after the trial period. In the days leading up to the 2014 general election, the statewide credit unions website continued to provide links to Utah's online voter registration portal along with other pertinent voting information.²⁴

People visit their local banks, in person or online, on a regular basis. Being able to register to vote while simultaneously doing something as routine as checking an account balance can mean saved time not only for election officials, but also voters themselves, who would otherwise have to seek out voter registration forms and information on their own in their otherwise busy schedules. While this is not a specific measure for local elected officials to take, they can certainly encourage this type of voter registration effort, or highlight it as a model for how local businesses can foster civic engagement.

Use of Deputy Registrar Programs

Besides making voter registration forms widely accessible, municipalities can take other steps to ensure potential voters have the information they need to register to vote or update their registration information. Cook County, Illinois has provided a student deputy registrar program since 1991. The County trains students to register people to vote so long as the students are at least 18 years old and are sponsored by a civic organization or agency such as their school. Cook County also provides assistance to colleges looking to organize voter registration efforts. The County promotes these efforts by providing deputy registrar trainings for those looking to conduct a voter registration drive. It establishes comprehensive programs, creates registration materials, and provides a web link that takes voters directly to voter registration forms and important election information.²⁵

Wisconsin state law also provides for a deputy registrar program. Qualified voters who serve as deputy registrars in Wisconsin are called special registration deputies.²⁶ These special registration deputies can apply to any municipal clerk or board of election commissioners to be appointed to the position for the purpose of registering voters within the municipality.²⁷ In Madison, Wisconsin, special registration deputies can complete their training by watching the training video posted online at the city clerk's website and completing the certification form by email or fax.²⁸ Another example can be found in Texas. In Tarrant County, Texas, though the in-person trainings are typically offered during business hours, once a week, the County offers an in-person training in the evening. The County also offers the training online for those who cannot attend in person.²⁹

In states like Wisconsin, where there are provisions in place for deputy registrars to register voters, municipalities can use various methods to recruit and train the registrars. For example, in cities with a high population of eligible voters that are non-English language speakers, the city can recruit language-proficient deputy registrars from places like local community centers, cultural organizations, high schools, and colleges. Another key factor in recruiting volunteer registrars is making the trainings as accessible and easy-to-attend as

possible. In many places, deputy registrars are required to attend trainings in person, often during business hours. Work and child care obligations present obstacles for those who may otherwise be interested in participating in registrar trainings. Municipalities should consider other ways to provide deputy registrar trainings, including online training videos and providing in-person trainings on weekend or evening hours.

The same innovative practices that apply to training deputy registrars can apply to trainings for third-party voter registration organizations.³⁰ Some states that allow third parties to conduct voter registration drives have explicit training requirements for these organizations. In Virginia, the state offers online trainings for third party voter registration drives.³¹ In states where such online trainings are not available statewide, counties or cities can provide an online option themselves.

Preregistration and Voter Registration in Schools

The board of education can also provide voter registration information and guidance to high schools. Some states already mandate this through their board of education’s policies.³² In other places, local officials can facilitate this process by encouraging school boards and school administrators to help students get registered to vote. Getting students preregistered (in states that allow it) or registered as soon as they turn 18 can go a long way toward keeping them engaged in the voting process throughout their lives. Colleges, including community colleges, can also provide voter registration materials and information upon enrollment, with tuition statements, or at freshman orientation. Another crucial aspect of preregistration which should be considered is the fact that some students may not go beyond high school. For these students, it becomes more difficult to later locate them to get them on the voter rolls if they are not preregistered or registered to vote in high school. Some states have conducted studies to show that Americans who are engaged in the electoral process at an earlier age, have a greater likelihood of participating in the process when they can vote. For example, in Florida in 2008, young voters who preregistered to vote turned out at a rate 4.7% higher than their peers who registered after turning 18.³³

Getting students preregistered (in states that allow it) or registered as soon as they turn 18 can keep them engaged in the voting process throughout their lives.

Poll Worker Recruitment and Training

Poll Worker Recruitment

One of the most critical components of running smooth and efficient elections is having a sufficient number of well-trained poll workers, including younger poll workers who are familiar with computer systems and those

who are proficient in common languages in the area. Bilingual individuals are able to provide quick and effective assistance to limited English proficiency voters who visit polling places.

In its January 2014 report, *The American Voting Experience*, the PCEA underscored that the right to vote and the quality of a voter's experience hinge on the effectiveness of polling place management. Countless ballots are rejected or never cast because of poll worker errors, flawed procedures, or a failure to communicate accurate information to voters. For this reason, the Commission lamented "the absence of a dependable, well-trained [. . .] corps of poll workers" and noted that poll worker recruitment is "a persistent challenge" for local administrators. Acknowledging that maintaining "a sufficient number of capable poll workers with the free time to work on Election Day" is "one of the most difficult challenges election officials face," the PCEA ultimately recommended diversifying the pool of recruits, in part by seeking out high school and college students and cooperating with schools to encourage this kind of civic participation.³⁴ Though the report framed the issue in terms of the need to plug gaps in recruitment, it also noted that many poll workers are retired senior citizens; according to one survey, more than half are older than 60.³⁵ These workers may be less familiar or comfortable with today's election technology which can pose additional problems at the polls. The report further recommended recruiting bilingual poll workers, particularly in jurisdictions with polling places that have a significant number of voters who do not speak English, to better address "barriers to access faced by limited English proficiency voters."³⁶ This is particularly needed in jurisdictions that have a large number of language minority voters but are not covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act and the other language minority assistance provisions.

One easy measure localities can implement to streamline the recruitment procedure for poll workers is to include the poll worker sign-up form on the county or city elections website. Maricopa County, Arizona is one such jurisdiction. People looking to sign up as poll workers can complete the sign-up form and automatically submit it online.³⁷ This method is easier, faster, and simpler than emailing, faxing, or mailing the form to sign up as a poll worker. Further, it requires no additional steps once someone is on the county recorder's website.

Student Poll Worker Programs

Poll worker requirements vary from state to state, and thus, localities looking to implement innovative poll worker programs should first discern the requirements for their state to inform how they can go about recruiting poll workers. Some states require poll workers to be at least 18 years of age. In other states that allow 16- and 17-year-old poll workers, like Illinois, the participants must be a part of a school program established by election officials in order to work as poll workers.³⁸ In still other places, like Maryland, 17-year-olds may participate as election judges independent of a school program.³⁹ Some localities also have unique programs within their states, such as Fairfax County, Virginia, which allows election "pages" through a program with local high schools. Other localities in Virginia have struggled to implement a similar program.⁴⁰

Student poll worker programs recruiting from both high schools and colleges can provide a broader pool of potential staff. A shortage of poll workers can mean longer wait times at the polls on Election Day. These types of student poll worker programs are mutually beneficial, in that they serve as valuable educational

Recruiting students will not only bring down the average age, but it will also bring fresh perspective to the process.

opportunities for students who participate in the program. Furthermore, students will likely have a better understanding of new voting technology and possess greater knowledge of the issues that affect fellow students on Election Day, including identification requirements and proof of residency

requirements. Currently, the average age of poll workers nationwide is 72.⁴¹ Recruiting students will not only bring down the average age, but it will also bring fresh perspective to the process. Furthermore, one of most notable benefits of the student poll worker programs is the gap they fill in terms of language assistance for voters. Many students from minority language communities are bilingual and can serve as a conduit between election officials and limited English proficient voters.

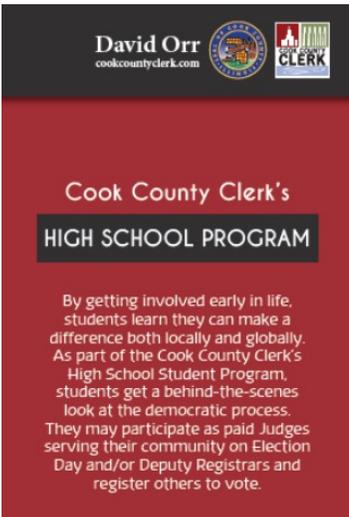
Minnesota state law explicitly permits the use of student election judges, referring to them as trainees, but does not require municipalities to implement student programs. The state statutes simply limit the responsibilities of student judges in a handful of ways. Beyond that, the state law does not include further requirements for student judges.⁴² Minneapolis, Minnesota has created a comprehensive Student Election Judge (SEJ) Trainee Program.⁴³ Students who are at least 18 years old may serve as regular Election Judges. Students under the age of 18 may serve in the SEJ program if they meet the following requirements: 1) are at least 16 years of age; 2) can read, write, and speak English; 3) are in good academic standing; and 4) have the consent of both their parents or guardians and the school. The city has implemented a program in which an SEJ Coordinator works directly with the city's high schools (and teachers) to go into the classroom to recruit and work as a liaison with the Election Judge Coordinator on schedules and assignments. In 2013, its presentations in schools to included more classroom presentations regarding why voting is important. The city has further expanded its outreach beyond public high schools and into private and charter schools.⁴⁴

In the 2013 general election, 162 students participated in the SEJ Program in Minneapolis. More than 35 of these SEJs provided language assistance to voters at the polls in languages including Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. Additionally, students from nine different schools participated in the SEJ program in 2013.⁴⁵

The SEJ program has been in place in Minneapolis since the 1990s. Beginning in 2014, the SEJs joined in traditional training classes with other election judges. This effort allows the students participating in the program to feel as much like a regular election judge as possible. Trainings have also been moved around the city to include high schools in each of the four quadrants of the city, to ensure that they are accessible for all. Also beginning in 2014, the city clerk's office started using SEJs for primary elections. Thirty-four students participated as SEJs in the primary election that took place in the spring 2014 primary election.⁴⁶

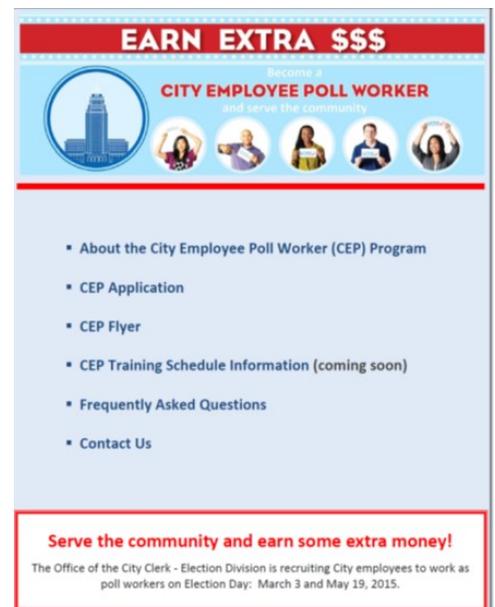
To ensure the success of the Minneapolis SEJ program, the city clerk’s office regularly communicates with the high schools, particularly the social studies teachers, to promote the program. A representative from the clerk’s office also visits the schools to talk about the SEJ program. Anissa Hollingshead, Management Analyst for the City Clerk’s office, noted that “[b]y and large, the feedback [on the program] has been fantastic.” She went on to say that a number of the SEJs go on to participate as regular election judges after they turn 18.⁴⁷

Cook County, Illinois also has a student election judge program in place. The County partners with more than 80 high schools across suburban Cook County to recruit high school juniors and seniors to serve as election judges in their communities. The County successfully recruits and trains around 1,500 student election judges each year. Not only is this beneficial for the County, but it also serves as a catalyst for lifelong electoral participation for the students. Of those participating in the program, 93% of students reported being more likely to vote in the future, while 90% reported that they would be willing to serve again in the future. Cook County also works with colleges in the area to recruit both election judges and equipment managers – those who are responsible for setting up and maintaining the election equipment. The County recruits both students who are registered within Cook County as well as those who are not, along with bilingual students.⁴⁸



City Employee Poll Worker Programs

Over the past decade, the City of Los Angeles has experienced a significant decline in the number of Community Volunteer Poll Workers to staff and operate the 1,600 polling places located throughout the city on Election Day. Recognizing this problem and need for effective poll workers who understand evolving election laws, procedures, and voting systems, the city implemented a City Employee Poll Worker (CEP) Program to fulfill some of the most fundamental elements of elections: that every polling place will open on time and that every voter will have an opportunity to vote. The CEP Program is important to effective polling place operations for several reasons: 1) CEPs have a higher degree of accountability (to the City of Los Angeles) than other volunteer poll workers may have, 2) they are trained to identify and address difficult issues, and 3) they serve as a reserve pool of poll workers to fill last-minute vacancies.⁴⁹ Similarly, Orange County, California has also implemented a City Employee Poll Worker Program. On its website, the County specifically encourages bilingual county employees, including those who speak Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese, to participate in the program.⁵⁰



Jurisdictions oftentimes have difficulty recruiting poll workers for Election Day. Local officials can help address this problem by allowing state or municipal employees the opportunity to volunteer as poll workers and use paid leave to do so. For example, in Maryland, the state law permits state employees to serve as election judges during work hours and allows the employee to use one hour of administrative leave for each hour of service as an election judge up to eight hours for each day of service.⁵¹

Community-Based Partnerships

Election officials can also foster civic engagement through their partnerships with community organizations or local businesses. Orange County, Florida pioneered the “Adopt-A-Precinct” program in 1998 – a public-private partnership in the electoral process. This government-run program allows the Supervisor of Elections

Orange County, Florida pioneered the “Adopt-A-Precinct” program in 1998 – a public-private partnership in the electoral process.

to establish alliances with businesses, community service organizations, and other agencies to help recruit poll workers. Participating organizations or businesses must provide a coordinator and at least nine volunteers who are registered to vote in Orange County to serve as poll workers at their organization’s adopted precinct. The Coordinator assists with everything from the application process, to training and testing, and helping coordinate poll worker schedules on Election Day.⁵²

Orange County’s Adopt-A-Precinct program provides community organizations and businesses the opportunity to be part of the election, helps raise funds for worthy causes by paying the participating business instead of individual workers, and allows each participating business to adopt a specific precinct for the election cycle by providing the personnel to staff that particular precinct. The county elections office also displays a sign outside the corresponding polling place with the participating organization’s name, highlighting its contribution to the community.⁵³

At the time Orange County introduced the “Adopt-A-Precinct” program, it was new to Florida. In the 2000 election, 25 businesses participated in the program by adopting 31 precincts on Election Day; in 2004, 60 organizations adopted a total of 69 precincts; and by the 2010 election, 80 organizations adopted 89 precincts. As a result of the program’s success in its first few years, the Florida legislature passed legislation in 2002 requiring all County Supervisors of Elections to develop similar partnerships.⁵⁴

Another example of partnerships that city clerks can build with local organizations can be found in Southeast Michigan. In Dearborn, Michigan, the effort to recruit bilingual poll workers was initiated by a community organization: Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). ACCESS serves a particularly important role in Dearborn because of its large population of Arab Americans.⁵⁵

During the 2010 election, ACCESS recruited the help of about ten University of Michigan law students to serve as poll watchers to observe and report on problems at polling places in the area. Throughout a few precincts in the Southeast Michigan area, the poll watchers all reported back to ACCESS with some of the same issues: the lack of bilingual poll workers resulted in confusion for many limited English proficiency voters, which ultimately also led to longer lines.⁵⁶

Upon learning of these findings, ACCESS, through the leadership of Rachid Elabed, the organization's Advocacy and Civic Engagement Specialist, recruited young people 16 years of age and older, from high schools and colleges to serve as poll workers. Elabed successfully signed up about 15 students to serve as poll workers for the 2012 election. He worked with the Dearborn City Clerk to bring in these poll workers and ensure that they received training. The poll workers Elabed recruited were mostly young and bilingual in English and Arabic. They were able to navigate new voting technology at the polling place in addition to assisting the many Arabic-speaking voters in Dearborn. As a result of ACCESS's successful outreach, the Dearborn City Clerk asked Elabed to continue recruiting poll workers. In 2014, the number of poll workers ACCESS recruited more than doubled to over thirty. ACCESS's effort in poll worker recruitment has gone beyond Dearborn to a neighboring town of Dearborn Heights, where the Arab Americans population has grown rapidly in the last few years. 2014 was the first time ACCESS helped to recruit bilingual poll workers in Dearborn Heights, and the group successfully brought in eight new poll workers.⁵⁷

Poll Worker Training

Also crucial to effective poll worker programs is a need to properly train poll workers. Well-trained and well-informed poll workers ensure a smoother Election Day process, as they are able to more effectively assist voters. Municipalities can make their training more effective by incorporating it into the poll worker recruitment programs (like Minnesota's Student Election Judge Program) conducted by the city.

Poll worker training is a crucial, and often overlooked, aspect of the voting experience. While HAVA included many needed election reforms, it also created new challenges in the polling place. The expansion of electronic voting machines, use of provisional ballots, and creation of a different identification standards for many first-time voters have all contributed to an increasingly complicated Election Day. On top of this, many state legislatures have been passing controversial election laws, which frequently end up being litigated in the court

system. These changes, as well as the uncertainty that results from ongoing court battles, add to the challenges and potential for confusion for voters and poll workers alike.

As a result of these layers of changes in elections laws, Election Day issues arise because of poll worker errors. In many states on Election Day 2012, for example, poll workers insisted that voters show a driver's license even though this was not the law in the state. The PCEA heard testimony of one such instance in Philadelphia from the November 2012 general election.

The reality is that most instances like this occur because of confusion and inadequate poll worker training. Historically, much of the discussion about poll worker training has been centered around increasing the amount of training poll workers must receive. However, serving as a poll worker is unique and requires a unique form of training. Unlike a typical job, poll workers – particularly new poll workers – do not get to develop their skills over an extended period of time. In places without in-person early voting, Election Day is the first time poll workers are put to the test. They are placed at their polling location with the expectation that they can adequately serve voters, regardless of the assistance needed or the unique problems which may present themselves. The lack of opportunity for on-the-job training, combined with a constant influx of new employees, forces jurisdictions to provide materials which take the guesswork out of poll worker responsibilities. There are certainly some minimum standards that must be established and met so poll workers are prepared for any and all situations which may arise. This would ensure voters are not burdened with long lines or inappropriately given provisional ballots.

To address some of the difficult and unique issues that poll workers face on Election Day, municipalities have developed innovative training practices to help poll workers best prepare for Election Day. These practices go above and beyond the standard trainings that are typically required by state or city laws.

Training on Voting Machines

One persistent issue is the complexity of voting machines. Poll workers who are more familiar and experienced with voting machines will be better-equipped to handle potential problems that arise on Election Day. Recognizing this obstacle, the City of San Francisco acted to offer, as a supplement to poll worker training classes, a Voting Machine Practice Lab. The Practice Lab provides an opportunity for poll workers to practice set-up, voting functions, and closing the polls on the voting machines at their own pace before they show up to work on Election Day.⁵⁸

Use of Hypotheticals, Diagrams, and Photos

Prior to Election Day, it is also difficult to provide poll workers ample opportunities to learn the proper procedures. Thus, local election officials throughout the country have worked to maximize poll worker trainings to provide materials that mirror real elections by including hypotheticals. The EAC makes this recommendation in a report it released in 2007.⁵⁹

Some municipalities have found it useful to provide diagrams, pictures, and checklists for poll workers on Election Day.

Some municipalities have found it useful to provide diagrams, pictures, and checklists for poll workers on Election Day.⁶⁰ Polling place room layout is important to smooth procedures on Election Day. If the check-in table, voting machines, and provisional ballot tables are all in their proper locations, voters will more quickly be able to enter and exit the polling location. Further, providing pictures to poll workers of what proper set-up looks like helps them more accurately place items in the room on Election Day. Finally, a checklist of each of the tasks poll workers must complete on Election Day serves as an easy and simple reminder to hang proper signage, complete a payroll sheet, or collect voter cards.

Specialization of Responsibilities

To ease the burden on poll workers and more adequately train them in advance of Election Day, some election officials have considered assigning specific tasks to individual poll workers and creating separate positions for separate responsibilities. This specialization will limit the necessary training to their Election Day responsibilities. For example, Hillsborough County, Florida posts detailed job descriptions for five different poll worker positions (clerk, assistant clerk, inspector, deputy, and machine clerk) on their website.⁶¹ Providing specific and detailed jobs for various poll workers allows poll workers to focus on a specific subset of responsibilities on Election Day, and thus ensures that poll workers do not have to endure additional unnecessary training.

Another step municipalities can take to simplify poll worker training is to provide them with training in chronological order mirroring their duties on Election Day. For example, many local elections offices will provide lengthy poll worker training manuals that are organized by areas of responsibility. Alternatively, places like Cuyahoga County, Ohio, provide trainings and poll worker materials that list the poll worker's Election Day tasks in chronological order.⁶² This helps poll workers acclimate to how things will actually run when they show up to the polling place, and helps them think about their responsibilities in the order they need to be accomplished.

Johnson County, Kansas Poll Worker Manual

Staging of Voting Machines

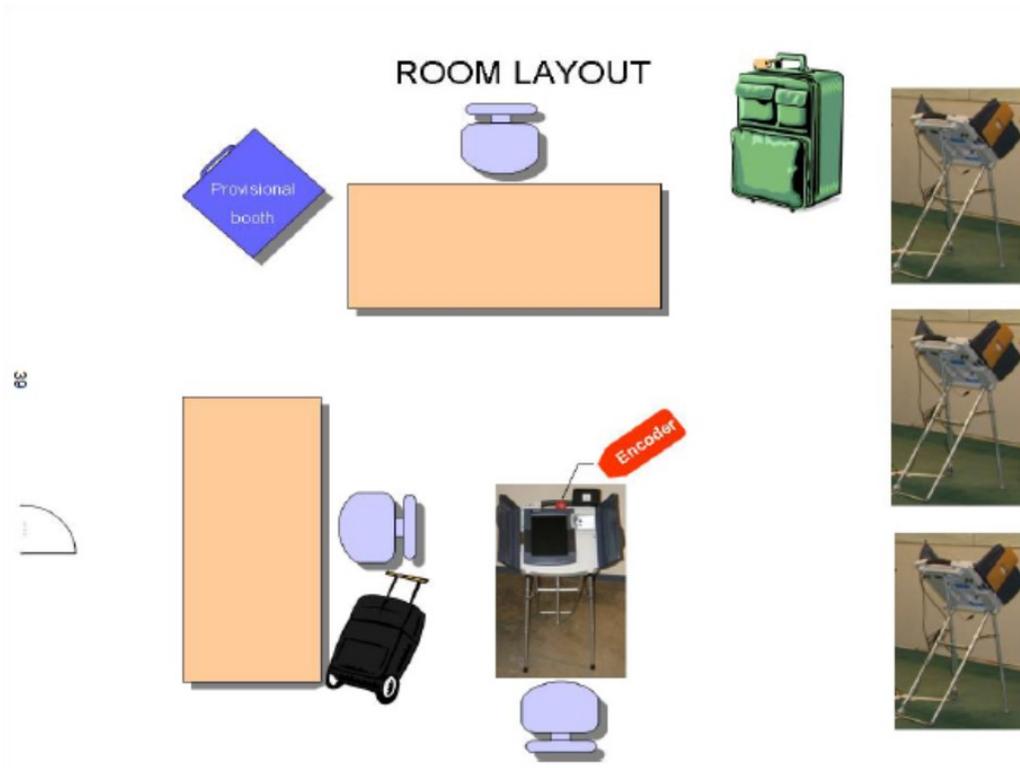
WRONG!!! You can see how the voters are voting!



RIGHT!!! Voters' backs are to the wall.
Voters are voting in private.



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Voter Education

To increase the number of voters able to cast their ballots, localities should implement robust voter education programs to provide voters the information they need regarding registration, election dates and times, polling place locations, and ID requirements. A crucial aspect to turning out voters is filling information gaps, and part of that requires strategic efforts from election offices to get this valuable information to voters.

Voter education is one area in which counties and municipalities have broad discretion to implement creative solutions to fill an information void for voters. Towns, cities, and counties should be proactively engaging voters in the process however they can.

Community Outreach

Most county clerks' offices provide information on their websites relating to voting and registering to vote. Many offices also mail voters postcards or voting guides that advise voters of election dates, times, and how to find their polling locations.⁶³ While these are effective methods of distributing voting information, there are other innovative methods that municipalities can employ to reinforce voting information to residents. For example, in Pima County, Arizona, the County Recorder's office visits organizations and schools that request them to come and talk about voting topics.⁶⁴ Though this goes beyond the typical scope of posting information on the county website or distributing pamphlets, it is not a practice that is unique to Pima County. Counties and cities nationwide employ this strategy because it requires no extra effort on the part of voters to seek out information regarding registration or voting.

Another effective way to disseminate voting information is through a program like Minneapolis' Ambassador Program. Beginning in the 2013 municipal election, the Volunteer Ambassador Program began recruiting volunteers to raise awareness about upcoming elections and engage more individuals so a greater number of people will turn out to vote. The premise behind the program is that individuals will be more likely to participate in an election if the information is received from friends, family, neighbors, and locally-based organizations than from strangers or outside organizations.⁶⁵ The city clerk's office worked with the city's Neighborhood Community Relations Department to conduct cultural outreach through different cultural media and outlets to recruit ambassadors.⁶⁶ In the inaugural year of the program, 60 individuals signed up to be ambassadors, 30 participated in the training class, and 10 to 15 were involved in the community on a regular basis. Though the city did not achieve the level of participation it had hoped to, Anissa Hollingshead with the city clerk's office, noted "[b]eing an ambassador is as much about the informal activities as it is about the formal process."⁶⁷

Using Social Media

One easy and cost efficient way to reach a broader audience is through the use of social media. County and city election officials can use Twitter and Facebook to publicize voting information. With the rapidly-changing Internet landscape, many localities now have explicit social media policies. One such example is the City of Seattle, Washington. The City permits its various departments to use social media to reach broader audiences. Seattle’s social media policy outlines the parameters of social media use to disseminate information to the public, and notes that “[w]herever possible, content posted to City of Seattle social media sites will also be available on the City’s main website.”⁶⁸

Other online and media platforms can be utilized to get voters the information they need to cast a ballot or become knowledgeable about the issues that affect them. This includes directing voters to various organizations that have helpful online or mobile resources, like Sunlight Foundation’s Open States website and mobile app or the Voter’s Edge tool and mobile app, which was developed by MapLight. The Open States app is a helpful resource for voters to find out more information about their state lawmakers, what their positions are on various issues, and how they have previously voted.⁶⁹ The Voter’s Edge tool, developed by Sunlight and the League of Women voters, similarly allows voters to enter their home address to ascertain who their local legislators are, and what races and issues will appear on their ballots.⁷⁰

Language Access

Another way election officials can reach more voters about Election Day information is by going beyond federal or state requirements for language access, and providing translations on city and county election websites with voter education materials translated into the top languages spoken in the area. In California, the voter registration form is provided online in ten languages, including English.⁷¹ Los Angeles County goes one step further and includes multilingual election services in English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.⁷²

Election officials can reach more voters by exceeding federal or state requirements for language access, and providing translations on city and county election websites with voter education materials translated into their area’s top spoken languages

Elsewhere, in Ramsey County, Minnesota (where St. Paul is located), the County provides a pre-taped program on voting information on its website. The County has gone one step further by providing taped versions of this information translated into Spanish, Hmong, and Somali to reflect the high concentrations of these populations in the community. The County’s website includes written materials and instructions on how to register and vote in Hmong and offers voter registration applications in Hmong, Spanish, Somali, Russian, and Vietnamese.⁷³

Making voting information accessible in other languages may even be as simple as creating a partnership between the city or county clerk's office and local advocacy groups. In East Lansing, Michigan, the election information portion of the city clerk's website links directly to Asian & Pacific Islander American Vote (APIA Vote) – Michigan, to provide multilingual voting information for Michigan voters. APIA Vote provides information in Bangladeshi, Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Spanish.⁷⁴

Another way to increase access for voters with language needs is to make elections websites translatable into different languages. For example, Fairfax County, Virginia offers a website translation service powered by Google Translate. With this tool, the website can be translated into over 75 different languages.⁷⁵ Other cities and counties can similarly offer website translation services to ensure a broad pool of voters are covered and can easily obtain election information from their websites, not just those who speak languages covered by the VRA's Section 203 language access requirements.

Fairfax County Language Translation



The screenshot shows the Fairfax County Virginia website with a navigation bar and a search bar. Below the navigation bar, there is a section titled "Web Site Language Translation" with a "Note" and a "Select Language" dropdown menu. The note states: "The Fairfax County Web site is being translated through 'machine translation' powered by Google Translate. By using the translation service, you are asking for pages on this site to be converted into a language other than English. As with any machine translation, the conversion is not context-sensitive and may not fully convert text into its intended meaning. Fairfax County Government cannot guarantee the accuracy of the converted text nor are we liable for any resulting issues. Graphics with text, PDF files and special applications on this site cannot be translated." The dropdown menu is currently set to "Select Language".

Providing Additional Information About the Process

Voter education goes beyond simply providing information on voting. If done effectively, it can bring in portions of the population that are often forgotten and open the world of civic engagement to individuals who may have never participated in the process otherwise.

One especially helpful way to conduct outreach to students, in particular high school students, is through their parents. Home may be the first place high school students are exposed to the idea of voting. Election officials and high schools should work together to provide parents with tools to prepare their children to register and vote for the first time. Schools can send home voting information with students to provide to their parents, and

parents in turn can reinforce the importance of civic engagement to their children. Local election officials can also create targeted materials for parents to share with their children to help them understand the importance of voting. Schools are also utilizing more online communications to interact with parents, so sending emails or posting messages on parental portals allows districts to directly reach parents.

Not only is it important to ensure that voters know the details of how, when, and where to register and vote, it is also important to make sure that they understand what they are voting on, and how their vote will be counted. Local election officials should also make information easily accessible regarding the positions and issues that will appear on the ballot. To give voters a sense of the bigger picture, it would be helpful to include information in plain English on the duties of each of the positions that are up for election on the ballot. For example, voters will have heard of the Attorney General, but may not know the position's responsibilities. Moreover, in places where there are unique voting systems in place, like a top two primary, local election officials should make an effort to educate voters on how those voting systems work and what the implications are for the outcome.

Administrative Practices

Counties and cities can generally improve the election process for voters through various administrative actions. Rather than enacting ordinances to implement certain measures, election officials and elected officials can implement innovative administrative practices to simplify the voting process.

Setting Convenient Voting Hours

Most states have established hours for polling places in their statutes. However, in some places, like Kansas, states have predetermined voting hours, but county election officials can modify the default hours as needed or desired. Kansas county election officials may set different hours if the county publicly announces the different hours and the polls are open for at least 12 continuous hours. The officials must follow the rules and regulations set forth by the secretary of state specifying the time and manner of setting and announcing any change of hours.⁷⁶ Similarly, in Vermont, the state statutes specify only that polls may open no earlier than 5 a.m. and no later than 10 a.m. and shall close at 7 p.m.⁷⁷ In states with permissive voting hours, municipal election officials should set voting hours that reflect voters' busy lives, and allow for extended and non-business hours to allow voters to cast ballots at the times that are most convenient for them, particularly in highly populated areas.

Availability of Early Vote Locations

Another helpful administrative action is the expansive availability of early voting locations. Though state statutes specify whether or not early voting is permissible, counties often have discretion in determining where early voting sites are to be located. For example, in Nevada, the state statute explicitly grants authority to county clerks to set criteria by rules or regulations on early voting locations. The clerks are then also required to announce both permanent and temporary early voting locations.⁷⁸ In places like Clark County, Nevada (where Las Vegas is located), early voting is conducted in many high traffic areas like shopping malls, supermarkets, colleges, libraries, and community centers. Setting up early vote locations in places where voters frequent makes it easy for voters to cast early ballots in the course of their daily routines and also eliminates the need to make additional trips to separate locations to vote. Additionally, these sites are all equipped for and large enough to accommodate touch-screen machines.⁷⁹

Setting up early vote locations in places where voters frequent makes it easy for voters to cast early ballots in the course of their daily routines.

Similarly, in Illinois, the state statute allows for permanent and temporary polling places for early voting purposes.⁸⁰ Local election officials have the authority to establish temporary branch polling places for early voting in locations of their choosing and may also set the hours for early in person voting at these locations.⁸¹ In states like Illinois where local election officials have flexibility to establish additional or discretionary early vote locations, the local officials should seek to place these early voting sites in convenient, easily accessible locations to minimize the burden on voters. Municipalities in states with flexibility in choosing early voting locations should also consider locating early voting sites on college campuses. College campuses tend to be big hubs for eligible voters and placing early vote locations on these campuses would target a demographic of the population that may not have easy access to other early vote locations or the regular polling place on Election Day.

In 2006, Clark County implemented a pilot program using mobile early voting sites.⁸² Mobile sites for early voting continue to be used in Clark County, with mobile sites being used as recently as the 2012 general election.⁸³ The mobile sites were designed to support areas of the county where no facilities were available to support the robust early voting program offered in the county.⁸⁴ The use of mobile voting trailers allowed Clark County to reach segments of the county population that would not have otherwise been able to utilize the early voting program.⁸⁵

Recently, in Hidalgo County, Texas, county commissioners approved a number of early voting locations for voting during the 2014 general election, including two new mobile early voting locations. One of the mobile

locations stopped at every high school in the Edinburg, McAllen, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo, and IDEA school districts. The mobile early vote location targeted students as well as teachers, staff, and administrators.⁸⁶

Other places have similarly maximized the use of mobile early voting locations to target large groups of voters all at once. In Johnson County, Iowa, the auditor's office set up mobile early voting locations at high school football games on Friday nights during the 2014 midterm election cycle. Johnson County first made mobile early voting available in 2013 at a high school basketball game. The positive response the auditor's office received, along with the ease of using a mobile early voting site, led the auditor's office to use the same approach at football games during the 2014 midterm election. Johnson County is not the only place in Iowa that has employed this method of reaching out to voters where they congregate; Marshall County, Iowa, utilized mobile voting at high school sporting events in the 2012 election and in doing so, served as the inspiration for Johnson County.⁸⁷

Municipal and Federal Elections

One way to promote voter turnout for municipal elections is by scheduling municipal elections such that they align with state and federal elections. When Florida began to allow municipalities to move their March municipal elections to November roughly 10-15 years ago, the City of Pompano Beach, Florida decided to make the switch to take advantage of the higher turnout that usually comes along with state and federal elections. Many other cities have made similar changes as their state laws have begun to allow it. Pompano Beach City Commissioner Barry Dockswell noted that this shift enhances voter convenience because as a result, voters will not be asked to make separate, additional visits to the polls to vote on city issues.⁸⁸

Though many of the changes that result from administering local elections on the same day as national elections are positive, there are setbacks that may discourage some local election officials from making this change. One such concern is that incorporating local elections into national election days will result in local issues being overshadowed by high-profile national issues and races.⁸⁹ In states where there is no standard requirement regarding dates for municipal elections, local officials should nevertheless look into scheduling municipal elections in conjunction with state and federal elections. Doing so will reduce the number of visits voters have to make to the polling place, and increase turnout for and participation in municipal elections. Voters will be more likely to vote down-ballot on local races if they are already voting in a federal election than they may otherwise be to show up to vote only for local races. Not only is this approach convenient for voters, but it also reduces the administrative and budgetary burdens on election officials, who then must oversee fewer election days.

Accessible Elections Websites

City and county officials have also noted the importance of maintaining an accessible and easy-to-read website in the process of disseminating voting information to their constituents. Minneapolis, Minnesota, recently revamped its website, to include general information about elections and details regarding specific city programs, like its Student Election Judge program and its Volunteer Ambassador Program. The city has already noted that the changes in the website have made a huge difference, and have made it a better tool to disseminate information.⁹⁰

Conclusion

While some states have expanded access to registration and voting for their citizens, there are yet many state legislatures that continue to consider and pass legislation restricting registration and voting. Municipalities have the ability to counter this effort by enacting ordinances and adopting policies that make voting easier for Americans. Common-sense election practices can not only expand the franchise for all eligible voters, but they can also help simplify the work of election officials, save scarce resources in overextended local budgets and, in the process, bolster Americans' confidence in the electoral process.

For further questions or guidance on where to find additional resources on administering elections for local elections officials and local elected officials, contact FELN at info@fairelectionsnetwork.com.

Appendix

STATES THAT PROVIDE FOR HOME RULE IN STATE CONSTITUTION	
State	Application
Alaska	First class cities and boroughs
Arizona	Cities of 3,500 or more
California	Cities (and San Francisco city-county)
Colorado	Any municipality
Connecticut	Any city, town, or borough
Hawaii	All political subdivisions
Illinois	All cities over 25,000; municipalities optional
Iowa	Any municipality
Kansas	All cities
Louisiana	Any municipality
Maine	Any municipality
Maryland	Cities and towns
Massachusetts	Cities and towns
Michigan	Each city and village
Minnesota	Any city and village
Missouri	Any city over 5,000
Montana	Municipalities
Nebraska	Any city over 5,000
Nevada	Any city or town
New Mexico	Municipalities
New York	Cities, town, and villages
North Dakota	All cities
Ohio	Any municipality
Oklahoma	Any city of 2,000 or more; charter subject to Governor's approval
Oregon	Every city and town
Pennsylvania	Optional forms for all local governments
Rhode Island	Every city and town
South Carolina	Municipalities
South Dakota	Any municipality
Tennessee	Any municipality
Texas	Cities over 5,000
Utah	Any incorporated city or town
Washington	Any city over 10,000
West Virginia	Municipalities over 2,000
Wisconsin	Cities and villages
Wyoming	Municipalities

STATES THAT PROVIDE FOR MUNICIPAL HOME RULE THROUGH LEGISLATIVE STATUTE	
Arkansas	Any municipality
Delaware	Any municipality
Florida	Any municipality
Georgia	Any municipality
Kentucky	Cities only
New Hampshire	Cities and towns
New Jersey	Optional charter system for municipalities
North Carolina	Any municipality
STATES THAT DO NOT PROVIDE FOR MUNICIPAL HOME RULE	
Alabama	
Idaho	
Indiana	
Mississippi	
Virginia	
Vermont	

Endnotes

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