THE NCSL-MACARTHUR ELECTION CONNECTIONS PROJECT: NEVADA

A team of Nevada legislators, legislative staff, state election officials and local election officials convened in Las Vegas on July 22, 2014, to discuss elections-related technology. Topics included the use of technology to assist voters and administrators; financial resources for voting equipment; certification for voting equipment; and ensuring that elections are inclusive, safe and reliable. From this event, Nevada will be well-positioned to continue to excel in the field of elections administration.

A Profile of Elections in Nevada

- Registered Voters: 1,434,946[1]
- 57 percent turnout in the November 2012 General Election[2]
- Election jurisdictions: 17 counties
- Equipment used: Direct-Recording Electronic (DRE) machines and high-speed central count optical scanners for counting mail ballots
- Nevada has received a total of $23,144,727 in federal (HAVA) funds for elections

The Morning: A Presentation by State, County and Municipal Election Officials

Clark County Registrar of Voters Joe Gloria presented the technology used in his jurisdiction, including challenges that he is currently facing and future innovations in elections technology. Participants then had the opportunity to attend demonstrations showing how Clark County processes early, absentee and Election Day Voters; handles voter registration and poll worker training; and inventories voting equipment. The morning concluded with a tour of the mobile early voting unit, warehouse and overview of the process for tabulating votes on election night.

- Voter turnout during the early voting period has increased steadily, from 44 percent in 2000 to 63 percent in 2012. Clark County aims to make voting convenient for voters and therefore has early voting sites in malls, grocery stores and in a mobile trailer that can create a "pop-up" voting site in an empty parking lot.
- Laptops at early voting sites are connected in real-time to the statewide voter registration database.
- There is ample security at the county elections facility with many areas requiring at least two points of information for access (a badge and a key code, for example) and there are cameras in sensitive areas. Computers in the tabulation room also require biometric information (a fingerprint scan).
- Much of Clark County's software is outdated or no longer supported by vendors.
- Out of Clark County's 274 polling places, 194 are in schools. If schools were no longer available to use, vote centers, which or allow voters to vote at any site in the county, may help address this. Legislation to enable vote centers was vetoed by the governor in 2013. A new legislative effort would be necessary to introduce voter centers in Nevada.
- Clark County mails 775,000 sample ballots to registered voters at a significant cost. Allowing voters to receive sample ballots via email or view information online instead of sending paper sample ballots may save money.
- Carson City is using electronic poll books to reduce wait times, ensure that voters get the correct ballot, email voter participation to parties, and make the post-election reconciliation process more efficient.

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[1] All registered voters, courtesy of Nevada Secretary of State's Office, July 1, 2014

[2] Percentage of voting eligible population, courtesy of The Pew Charitable Trusts' Elections Performance Index

The Afternoon: A Conversation About Technology and Efficient Elections

Participants identified issues that Nevada may face in the next several years and discussed what issues legislators and local officials view as priorities. Merle King, executive director of the Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, moderated.

The Voting System Marketplace
- Jurisdictions are looking for solutions that are more cost-effective and also convenient for voters. Some options that are beginning to be discussed—and implemented in some cases—are all-mail elections and Internet-assisted voting.
- Accessibility for people with disabilities is becoming an important aspect of elections. With an aging population and veterans returning from war with traumatic brain injuries, cognitive disabilities are more prevalent. Current standards for voting systems often deal with audio and visual disabilities, but not others.
- Current laws on testing and certification need to be considered when designing a strategy for purchasing new voting systems. Things to consider include how much to depend on federal certification, and whether or not the current laws on certification give Nevada the flexibility to purchase state-of-the-art systems in the future. It's also important to think about the desired goals of certification.
- Voting machines in Nevada do not need to be replaced immediately. As long as vendors continue to make parts for existing machines, local officials can continue to repair and maintain them. Buying a whole fleet of new machines would be costly.
- Even if the machines do not need to be replaced, outdated software and operating systems will soon need to be upgraded. Any available funding will most likely go to this rather than newer innovations.

Funding
- An injection of federal money for voting systems is unlikely.
- There may be room in the state budget for a smaller investment, $2 million for e-poll books for example, but not $20 million for all new voting machines. A wholesale replacement of machines would require designating an ongoing revenue stream in the budget.

Other takeaways
- One of the advantages of e-poll books is that they eliminate human error. Ballots can be assigned automatically to ensure that voters are able to cast their ballot for the correct races.
- Integration between the DMV system and the voter registration system is a challenge for election officials.
- Election officials can look to other industries and the military for models of successful secure Internet-based systems.
- Public confidence and trust in the system is important.
- New technology needs to be inclusive of all voters, including low-income voters who may not be familiar with computers.

Resources

- NCSL's webpage on the Elections Technology Project (which includes links to other state reports)
- NCSL's webpage on Electronic Poll Books (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL's webpage on Electronic Transmission of Ballots (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL's webpage on Absentee and Early Voting (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL's webpage on Maintaining Accurate Voter Registration Rolls
- The U.S. Election Assistance Commission's website on Testing and Certification
- NCSL offers technical assistance, testimony and other in-person help as needed
- NCSL can provide research on any topics useful to Nevada as policymaking proceeds

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