

# **2018 Report: Best Practices for the Administration of Illinois Elections**

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## **Executive Summary**

In recent years, the integrity and security of election processes and procedures have become a focal point for voters and advocacy groups alike. To ensure transparency, trust, and accountability in the Illinois elections process, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform (ICPR) and the League of Women Voters of Illinois (LWVIL) have partnered to assess the processes and procedures of election administration across the state. The result of our partnership is a set of recommendations tailored to the needs of Illinois' unique network of election administration. These recommendations include targeted reforms to ensure Illinois has best practices in place, and is a leader on this issue in future elections.

The passage of key election reforms in the past five years, including Election Day Registration and Automatic Voter Registration, has strengthened the integrity of election processes in Illinois. However, these laws create new challenges for election administrators, and have exposed additional issues in our election system that need to be addressed. A key lesson from the passage and ongoing implementation of these laws is that the resources and needs of Illinois' 109 election jurisdictions are diverse and vary significantly.

With this in mind, election administrators may find that some recommendations in this report may not apply to their jurisdictions, or require customization to yield benefits for their constituents. ICPR and LWVIL encourage election administrators to consider all of these recommendations, and use their discretion in implementing those which utilize their resources most efficiently.

More than ever, Illinois voters need to continue to have faith in their election procedures and results. This can be achieved by highlighting excellent election administration procedures in some areas of the state, identifying overall trends in the way Illinois currently prepares for Election Day, and addressing which issues, if any, need to be addressed.

The recommendations in this report can bring renewed public interest and support for the important work of election administrators across the state and foster a collaborative effort between key stakeholders, including election administrators, state policymakers, and advocacy organizations. With the wide range of constituencies across Illinois' 109 election jurisdictions, a coalition including all of these groups is required to continually support and strengthen Illinois' elections.

## **Methodology**

ICPR and LWVIL’s findings in this report are organized into two main sections. Section I summarizes best practices in key areas of election administration. Section II outlines practical steps needed for funding and implementing major initiatives.

In order to produce these findings, our organizations constructed a survey for election administrators, that included questions on their operations procedures, needs, and challenges. This survey was sent to all 109 election jurisdictions in Illinois, and received responses from 50 administrators representing diverse jurisdictions across the state.

Additionally, we gathered important information on best practices through a review of previous research and existing procedures in other states. The federal Election Assistance Commission provides a robust supply of research and recommendations for election administration, which was used in this report. Additional research by Pew Charitable Trusts, the Brennan Center for Justice, Verified Voting, and the American Bar Association were also invaluable in putting together this analysis. We have compiled this data with the input and support of Illinois election administrators, taking into consideration successful procedures already in place across the state, and potential areas for improvement.

Findings presented in Section I are separated into “Best Practices” and “Recommendations.” They are categorized by their importance to fundamental election operations, and the difficulty in implementing them. “Best Practices” represent procedures and programs that are not absolutely crucial to effective administration, or would require significant resources to implement effectively. While still important to establishing robust election administration, they should be treated as long-term goals, as opposed to short-term priorities. “Recommendations” are more immediate practices that should be adopted, since they require less strategic planning and funding. These findings are more fundamental to election administration and often include documentation and transparency practices.

Financial, technological, and bureaucratic challenges often limit the extent to which best practices can be implemented on a larger scale. The recommendations found in Section II account for this, and offer strategies for implementing reforms that will yield the greatest benefit for the highest number of jurisdictions, while using the fewest additional resources. This section also incorporates the role of the state government in supporting the practices election administrators choose for their jurisdictions.

Note: “Best Practices” marked with a ° are currently either required by state statute or are common practice in some form among election administrators, although implementation of individual practices will vary depending on the jurisdiction.

# **Section I:**

## **Findings on Best Practices**

# **Top Recommendations for the Administration of Illinois Elections**

## **Legislative Reforms**

1. Allow election administrators to establish vote centers for their jurisdictions by submitting a formal plan for board approval. This plan should detail vote center locations and hours, including considerations of marginalized communities\*
2. Require election administrators to submit assessments of their voting equipment to the State Board of Elections for publication every two years \*
3. Allow the State Board of Elections to require the submission of procedural documentation for primary areas of election administration, including poll worker recruitment plans, poll worker training programs, and outreach strategies to marginalized communities. This documentation process would centralize key election information while retaining the benefits of a decentralized system that can serve Illinois' diverse voting groups.\*
4. Prioritize paper-only ballots, on-demand ballot printers, and electronic pollbooks (as necessary), when considering new funding for election equipment
5. Increase poll worker pay and allow poll workers to volunteer, if they desire to do so

## **Election Administrator Initiatives**

6. Use a wide array of poll worker recruitment and management strategies for a year-round recruitment management system
7. Give poll workers hands-on training with all poll equipment, and provide specialized or targeted training to different groups of poll workers based on their assigned tasks
8. Create a "Best Practices Checklist" for assessing poll workers' Election Day performance
9. Speak with voting rights groups about marginalized communities that may have issues at the polls, and prepare a formal plan for outreach to these communities
10. Encourage collaboration between the State Board of Elections, election administrators, and audit experts to identify the best type of risk-limiting audits for Illinois elections

*\*Represents a current ICPR and LWVIL legislative priority for the 2018 ILGA Session*

# Voting Equipment

## Best Practices

- Ensure that all voting machines produce a reliable VVPAT (per 10 ILCS 5/24C) through a well-documented auditing process every election cycle<sup>o</sup>
- Continue requiring that all machines must be certified by the State Board of Elections, using federal technical recommendations for voting machine standards (10 ILCS 5/24-3)<sup>o</sup>
- Employ regular maintenance and audits, documented chain of custody at all times, and storage in a secure, hospitable location for all voting machines, unless needed for maintenance, testing, or polling<sup>o</sup>
- Use electronic pollbooks to decrease wait times and ensure accuracy, where there is sufficient voter population and reliable infrastructure<sup>o</sup>
- Operate elections solely with paper ballots to avoid disruptions to polling and accommodate increased turnout. Paper balloting allows for greater ability to scale election operations to handle high turnout through the setup of additional voting booths in a polling place. Paper-only balloting is also more resilient to physical tampering, compared to electronic voting, because of the reduced effect breaking a single machine can have on the number of voters a polling location using paper ballot can accommodate.
- Make in-precinct ballot printers available to all precincts to meet demand and accommodate the numerous ballot styles in each jurisdiction on Election Day
- Collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions to enter into shared service agreements for voting equipment maintenance

## Recommendations

- Require the State Board of Elections to publish the number, age, and condition of voting machines in each jurisdiction after every two-year election cycle to measure the need for new equipment. This data would supplement the information the State Board of Elections currently collects from each jurisdiction and should include a short narrative assessment from the office of the election administrator describing the jurisdiction's overall need for new voting equipment.

- Prioritize paper-only ballots, on-demand ballot printers, and electronic pollbooks (as necessary), when considering spending on new equipment
- Plan for long-term maintenance when selecting new voting machines
- Make ease of use, along with security, a priority when vetting new systems because training for poll workers is an easily overlooked cost during voting machine procurement



# Poll Worker Recruitment

35% of election administrators listed poll worker recruitment as their top challenge in managing elections. Of those who did not list recruitment as their top challenge, the vast majority cited similar issues with finding enough people to work 13+ hour days on Election Day. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) provides many valuable resources for election administrators by offering effective strategies for poll worker recruitment. The practices listed below are highlights from the EAC's *Election Worker Successful Practices*<sup>1</sup> guide for election administrators, along with some other successful programs used across the country. Because jurisdictions vary significantly in the make-up of their populations, these strategies represent a wide array of tools for election administrators to tailor to the unique needs of their constituents.

## Best Practices

- Make specific appeals to college and high-school students, leveraging campus events, campus partners, teachers/professors, and campus communication methods, to recruit tech-savvy and enthusiastic young volunteers
- Appeal to established business, charitable, and civic organizations to engage and recruit members that may be willing to serve as election workers
- Create an “Adopt-A-Polling Place” program that allows local businesses and community organizations to provide poll workers for a particular precinct; Orange County, CA and Milwaukee, WI have similar, successful versions of these programs
- Increase poll worker pay and allow poll workers to volunteer, if they desire to do so
- Make post-election marketing efforts to thank the poll workers for their service both directly (via mail or email) and indirectly (via ads, flyers, or other public announcements)

## Recommendations

- Post as much information as possible on the jurisdiction web page, placing important recruitment information on the home page
- Collaborate with other local government offices to recruit office workers and advertise in their offices and on their web pages

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/Election\\_Worker\\_Successful\\_Practices.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/Election_Worker_Successful_Practices.pdf)

- Provide ample training and office staff support throughout the poll worker experience
- Have a follow-up plan for when potential poll workers make contact
- Track recruiting efforts each year to strategize for future years
- Develop a “marketing strategy” that includes the reasons election workers volunteer, such as civic duty, community service, social interaction, school credit, family tradition, and earning extra money
- Combine the strategies listed above for a year-round recruitment management system

# **Poll Worker Training**

Similar to recruitment efforts, jurisdictions vary significantly in the types of training, the scale of the training, and the resources (financial and staff) available for training. Therefore, the following lists are meant to provide a toolbox for administrators to customize for their specific jurisdictions. Many recommendations come from the EAC report linked in the previous section.

## **Best Practices / Recommendations**

- Offer multiple training methods each tailored towards the different adult learning styles: reading, listening, and watching
- Provide specialized/targeted training for different groups of people and different tasks
- Create a “Best Practices Checklist” for assessing poll workers’ Election Day performance
- Track different training methods to assess the effectiveness of new methods and optimize trainings based on these results
- Include experienced poll workers in training as group leaders
- Survey election workers to assess the effectiveness of various training methods
- Use supervisor reports and previous election error reports to evaluate training and monitor worker performance
- Develop polling place opening and closing flow charts and one-page reminder sheets on each part of the voting process
- Create checklists and flow charts to address special situations and scenarios
- Use bullets or lists instead of paragraphs wherever possible in training manuals

## **Recommendations**

- As much as possible, provide copies of training resources for workers to review at home, including online and physical handbooks, training guides, and Election Day checklists
- Make training sessions as hands-on as possible, allowing workers to view and participate in common Election Day situations
- Highlight changes in election equipment and laws from previous years to all election workers in biennial training sessions
- Test the usability of all training and polling place materials before training is scheduled

## **Marginalized Communities**

In their survey responses, many election administrators indicated they did not view accommodations for marginalized communities as a major issue for their offices. While many administrators are not reminded of their needs regularly, these groups should be represented in every administrators' overall election plan. Therefore, this section offers key strategies and concerns that may not arise on a regular basis for some administrators. For the sake of this report, "marginalized communities" refers to groups that have greater difficulty voting due to circumstances not accounted for by the standard voting process. These groups could include non-native English speakers, new voters, voters with disabilities, voters with a lower socioeconomic status, or voters in pre-trial detention.

### **Best Practices**

- Create a system to track the utilization of accessibility measures and give special focus to the specific needs of those communities
- Work with advocacy groups, community organizations, and jail administrators to advertise and communicate voting eligibility and the relevant accommodations available
- Work with jail administrators to get lists of eligible voters in order to target outreach to potential voters, for voters in pre-trial detention
- Reach out to advocacy or community groups and offer to collaborate to enhance accessibility. Allow the groups to submit an action plan and provide feedback that ensures the plan is feasible for the jurisdiction's resources.
- Establish verification procedures to ensure polling places are prepared to respond to likely requests for accommodations on Election Day, and adjust training and resources if any issues are discovered

### **Recommendations**

- Create a list of marginalized communities in a jurisdiction that are most likely to need special accommodations
- Prepare a formal plan that addresses each community, including outreach to ensure those communities are aware of the resources available

- Train all poll workers to handle requests for specific accommodations, as well as how to communicate sensitively with those requesting the accommodations
- Track the use of accommodation requests to ensure accessibility plans are tailored to the jurisdiction's changing populations
- Speak with a voting rights groups about communities that may have been overlooked and listen to feedback on the needs of those groups

# Polling Places and Early Voting

## Best Practices

- Document compliance with 10 ILCS 5/19A-25 regarding communication of early voting information<sup>o</sup>
- Publish guides for voters with key dates, times, and locations online<sup>o</sup>
- Post early voting information in prominent places on the jurisdiction's web page<sup>o</sup>
- Establish consistent polling locations and times - beneficial to fostering greater voter participation and satisfaction with election administration
- Identify central, easily accessible early voting locations within each community
- Document outreach strategies and regularly evaluate individual methods
- Track common questions/confusion about early voting and adapt outreach to address these issues in the future

## Recommendations

- Allow jurisdictions to establish vote centers as universal voting sites on Election Day. In order to switch polling to vote centers on Election Day, election administrators should be required to submit a plan for approval by their board of election commissioners, or board of county commissioners. These plans should include location and hours of vote centers, as well as written considerations for certain communities that could be disproportionately affected by the implementation of vote centers, including the elderly, people living with disabilities and/or language barriers, people of color, and students.
- Create a robust communication strategy outlining early voting locations and times, including a variety of outreach strategies, including mailings, online postings, public service announcements (PSAs) news releases, and announcements to local schools, businesses, and community organizations
- Create a formal marketing strategy that includes a variety of outreach methods
- Encourage other local government offices to share early voting information on their web pages and in their offices
- Collect feedback from voters through surveys or public forums to assess the need for outreach about early voting

# **Auditing and Internal Controls**

## **Best Practices**

- Establish internal controls to measure the efficacy of election administration procedures and to identify any areas for improvement in current processes. These controls include:
  - Testing and certification for poll workers<sup>o</sup>
  - Formal procedures for recruiting poll workers and communicating early voting
  - Regular equipment testing to ensure machines are functional before use in polling<sup>o</sup>
  - Strategic auditing during polling to verify proper procedures are being practiced, including for accessibility requests
  - Documented chain of custody and security verification for all voting equipment<sup>o</sup>
  - Forensic auditing of voting equipment
- Replace the current audit of 5% random sample of precincts with a risk-limiting audit, which provide a more efficient auditing procedure in most elections and give greater confidence in election results. Risk-limiting audits decide the number of ballots needed to sample based on the number of voters and the initial margins of victory to decide the size of the audit. Typically, risk-limiting audits require smaller samples than the current requirement. They also provide greater statistical confidence that election results are correct. The EAC tested risk-limiting audits in California with great success. Colorado has also implemented risk-limiting audits successfully.

## **Recommendations**

- Allow the Illinois State Board of Elections to collect and publish documentation of internal controls from each election jurisdiction, requiring substantial submissions in the following areas:
  - Poll worker training
  - Accommodations for marginalized communities
  - Voter outreach for early voting
  - Post-election results auditing

- Voting equipment testing

Currently, Illinois' decentralized elections system removes many of the formal connections between local election administrators and the state election authority that many states have. While Illinois' system benefits the diverse needs of Illinois' jurisdictions, increased data collection by the State Board of Elections would provide Illinois with one of the benefits of a more centralized system without requiring changes to the existing election administration structure.

- The State Board of Elections, election administrators, and audit experts should collaborate to identify the best type of risk-limiting audit for Illinois elections
- Election administrators should create formal documentation for key functions of their offices and publish them for public viewing, where appropriate
- Put Illinois in line with the majority of states and give the State Board of Elections greater authority to conduct audits and oversights to ensure election administrators and their appointed election workers are following state statute



# **Section II:**

## **Implementation and Budgeting for Best Practices**

## **Implementation and Budgeting for Best Practices**

The practical considerations involved with implementing any major initiative, including those described above, require significant strategic planning. The vast majority of survey respondents indicated that producing adequate funding and staffing to execute existing office functions remains a challenge. As such, this section offers guidance on creating a strategic plan for funding and executing new election administration initiatives. Individual administrators should tailor this plan to their resources and their existing relationships with state, county, and municipal government offices.

### **Step 1: Defining a strategic goal**

Election administrators may establish a clear definition of success for any new election initiative before reaching out to other government offices for support. These definitions should outline acceptable costs and minimum outcomes for the project. Survey respondents reported more success in securing support for their plans when they contextualized their strategic goals in terms of existing state requirements. For example, a county clerk looking to increase their budget to include a new electronic pollbooks would frame their strategic goal in terms of ensuring compliance with new state requirements for Election Day Registration.

### **Step 2: Constructing an implementation plan**

Election administrators can use their strategic goals to build an overall implementation plan that details the resources necessary to practically implement an election initiative. In addition to funding, this plan should address staffing and other resource challenges, including facility availability and community relationships. Having a strategic plan allows for a comprehensive analysis of funding needs, as well as quick and effective implementation once the necessary resources are fulfilled.

### **Step 3: Coordinating with county officials to secure additional county funds**

Most elections offices in Illinois do not have the available staffing and funding to implement new initiatives without additional support from their county boards (and municipal governments, in the case of municipal election administration). Coordinating with county officials to secure funding through additional budget line-items or investments from the county's capital funds are a common first step in pursuing new funds for election initiatives. The strategic goals and

implementation plan can be supplemented with testimony from advocacy groups that support the initiative. For example, many voting rights groups would support a jurisdiction's adoption of Election Day Registration in every polling place, making them potential allies in securing funds from county officials.

#### **Step 4: Collaborating with other groups to lobby for state discretion and/or funding**

If the county is unable or unwilling to fund the new initiative, election administrators should consider working with their counterparts in other jurisdictions to lobby state government for additional funds. Additionally, state and local voter advocacy groups, including ICPR and LWVIL, represent potential collaborators in advocating for authority and funding for projects that encourage civic engagement and more secure and accessible elections. Many election administrators reported their ability to implement cost-saving measures by optimizing their offices' operations to their jurisdictions. These steps often require changes to state requirements, which would allow administrators to save enough resources to re-implement in their new election initiative.

## Appendix 1: Election Administrator Survey

### **Overview**

1. If your jurisdiction was to receive additional state funds for election administration, what would your funding priorities be? (e.g. voting equipment, poll worker training, poll worker compensation, etc.)
2. What is the biggest overall challenge to election administration in your jurisdiction?

### **Poll Worker Management**

3. How does your jurisdiction decide the necessary number of election workers to recruit above the statutory requirement for Election Day?
4. If your poll worker training is not conducted by the State Board of Elections, please describe the training and certification process your jurisdiction provides.
5. What, if any, outreach does your jurisdiction utilize to recruit poll workers? (Please make note of specific programs that target private sector employees, students, or minority populations.)
6. How would splitting poll worker hours in to half-day shifts on Election Day affect related aspects of election administration in your jurisdiction (e.g. poll worker recruitment and election security)?

### **Election Operations**

7. The Illinois Election Code sets specific requirements for the number and hours of operation of polling locations for early voting and on Election Day. What would be the optimal hours and dates of early voting for your jurisdiction if these statutory requirements did not exist? Please provide a brief rationale with your answer.
8. How do you communicate early voting locations and hours of operation to your constituents?
9. Please describe any challenges to the implementation of Election Day Registration in your jurisdiction, including confusion among your constituents about the law.
10. Were there any comments or complaints in your jurisdiction regarding the operations of voting machines in the most recent General Election?

## **Voter Accommodations**

11. What process does your jurisdiction take to facilitate voting for individuals in pre-trial detention?
12. What accommodations (including, but not limited to signage in common non-English languages, language options on voting machines, bilingual election judges) are available to voters requiring language assistance for the following reasons:
  - a. Blind/Impaired Vision
  - b. Non-native English Speakers

## **Oversight Procedures**

13. Please describe absentee ballot validation procedures for ballots received by your office.
14. Please describe the process of the required post-election audit of 5% of precincts in your jurisdiction, including how the public can acquire the results of that audit. (Audit requirement found in 10 ILCS 5/24B-15 and 5/24C-15)
15. Please provide a written description of any audits your jurisdiction conducts on other aspects of election administration (e.g. poll worker training, voter registration procedures, etc.)