Quick Start

MANAGEMENT GUIDE

POLLING PLACES AND VOTE CENTERS

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The Quick Start Management Guide for Polling Places and Vote Centers is part of a series of brochures designed to highlight and summarize the information contained in the chapters of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Election Management Guidelines (EMG). The goal of the EMG is to provide a collection of election management guidelines, consolidated into one document, to assist State and local election officials effectively manage and administer elections. These guidelines are solely designed to serve as a source of information for election officials and not as requirements by which they must abide. The EAC expects the EMG to be completed in 2008. However, due to the urgent need for election management resources, EMG chapters and Quick Starts are released as they are completed.

The content of the EMG and the Quick Start Management Guides has been developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation and ensuring the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

INTRODUCTION

- Historically, a polling place has been a building used for voting purposes on Election Day. For voters, it is the place that they frequent a few times each year. For election officials, polling places require so much more. Locating them, inspecting them, notifying voters of their location, ensuring that the locations are accessible and convenient and that there are enough parking spaces, etc…indeed polling place management is a full time, year-round job in every election office.

- Early voting locations and vote centers have added a new level of management to the processing of voters. The use of technology for checking in voters and issuance of ballots has introduced the ability to manage larger numbers of voters in large centralized locations. Each of these voting options must be authorized by State law and managed by local election officials.

LOCATING, INSPECTING, AND DETERMINING POLLING PLACE AND VOTE CENTER SITES

- Collect information about available locations by contacting area city halls and county building/planning departments. Work to obtain access to existing GIS data base information to determine location, building capacity, parking availability and building contact information.

- Contact area city planning departments to review future use and zoning maps to determine where and what type of future growth is expected within the next election cycle. Periodically review new occupancy permits to assist with population density projections. *Example: It is important to know when and where large apartment complexes are scheduled to be constructed as it may require additional polling places to efficiently serve the voters.*

- Develop checklists and tool kits to facilitate the inspection of all possible locations and ensure compliance with the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Partner with your county building/planning department staff to assist your office with inspection responsibilities.
  TIP: *Develop a working data base of all available locations within your jurisdiction in order to easily manage last minute polling place cancellations.*

- Reach out to your disabled community organizations and ask for their assistance in finding and securing accessible polling locations.

- Develop a written contract for the use of each building on Election Day. Be sure to provide the building manager a copy of the county's insurance policy information, and ask for a copy of theirs. Develop and distribute a uniform fee structure for use of the building. TIP: *Some jurisdictions are provided the use of public buildings at no cost.*

- Vote center and early voting locations are polling places where any voter in the jurisdiction can vote, and should be located close to major traffic arteries for easy access. Consider using places that have large parking areas and that people frequent on a regular basis, i.e. libraries, recreational centers, malls, municipal/county buildings. Remember that these locations must also meet all applicable ADA requirements.

- Conduct a public hearing to gain input and approval of the vote center/early voting locations. Be sure to invite members of the major political parties.

- Consider merging the data collected on all possible locations with your county's GIS computer system. By merging voter registration and "expected to vote" numbers by precinct with the GIS data, you are able to visually locate buildings that are within close proximity to precincts/voters and with sufficient capacity to serve the number of voters expected on Election Day. *Example: Two or more precincts could be served by one polling place, depending upon the size of the building, its location, and available parking, etc.*

POLLING PLACE SUPPLIES – PREPARATION AND DISTRIBUTION

- Partner with other county departments to support the delivery and pickup of voting equipment and supplies.

- When using delivery companies for equipment/supply distribution, be sure to include details about specific delivery requirements within your contract document. Examples include equipment packing needs and delivery deadlines. TIP: *Consider awarding your contract to a company that has its own ability to develop a delivery routing plan based on information provided by your office.*

- Develop asset control procedures for all equipment and supplies. Utilize bar code technology to track distribution and return of equipment.

- Place laminated reminder cards throughout the poll worker supply kits to call attention to important tasks and/or responsibilities. TIP: *Consider color coding important supplies that must be returned on Election Night.*

- Develop easy to follow checklists for use in opening and closing voting equipment. Train poll workers to operate in teams of two when opening and closing the equipment. One person should read the instructions and the other perform the task.

- Encourage poll workers to balance the number of voters checked in to number of voted ballots cast periodically throughout the day.

STAFFING, TRAINING, AND ELECTION DAY SUPPORT

- Develop a working knowledge of your telephone system and its capacity level. Utilize phone banks to distribute calls on Election Day, and make sure to have procedures and policies in place to protect the privacy of confidential information.

- Provide a separate phone number that is dedicated to polling place opening/closing calls from poll workers. A different phone number should handle all regular calls from the general public.

- Partner with area community college instructors to assist with development of a poll worker training course. Provide incentives to poll workers who complete the course. Ideas include: additional compensation and/or issue certificates of completion and lapel pins. Consider developing an on-line training refresher course for poll workers to review procedures prior to Election Day. For more ideas regarding the recruitment and training of poll workers, please, refer to the following EAC publications: 1) Successful Practices for Poll Worker Recruitment, Training, and Retention, 2) A Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Worker, and 3) Compendium of State Poll Worker Requirements; these publications are all available on the EAC's Web site at www.eac.gov.

- Remember to incorporate training on customer service and problem solving techniques in your poll worker training program.

- Assign field coordinators to regions containing 8-12 polling places on Election Day. The coordinators should receive additional training/certification. They should be trained to respond to trouble shooting calls in their region, and also to periodically visit their assigned polling places to assure that all locations are set up correctly and processing voters according to established procedures. TIP: *Develop a polling place supply/ procedure checklist and request that the field coordinator and supervising poll worker at each location sign off and return the checklist for auditing purposes.*

- Utilize your early voting poll workers as Election Day supervising poll workers in your largest polling places or as regional field coordinators. They bring their knowledge and experience from working longer periods of time at the vote center/early voting locations.

FACILITY MANAGEMENT

- Consider coordinating the polling place setup process on Monday evening, prior to Election morning. By completing some of the setup process the night before, poll workers are relieved of some of the anxiety that they experience on Election morning. TIP: *Request that poll workers call in and confirm the completion of their polling place setup the night before. This assures the Election Office that some of the procedures have been completed prior to Election morning.*

- Develop a polling place layout design for each polling place. Train poll workers to use the approved layout when setting up their location on Election Day.

- Conduct a mock election utilizing the maximum number of check-in computers at all early voting and/or voter center locations. Utilize your poll workers to staff the locations and as "mock voters". Monitor the computer server for capacity issues; determine how many voters can be processed within a certain period of time; and evaluate other line control and crowd management issues. Debrief the results of your mock election to determine the need for additional space, staff, and check-in computers. Determine how you can implement a "Plan B" to divert voters to a different area for processing when the line extends beyond a defined point. TIP: *Provide a 3x5 card to the voter who is 100 feet back in the line. Place the time on the card and ask the voter to provide it to the computer check-in clerk who will also note the time. Collect these cards to evaluate customer wait time.*

- Develop tracking procedures to collect statistics on the flow of traffic in and out of each polling place. Use these statistics to develop future staffing needs to manage peak voter periods.

- Send out a reminder card containing voter information prior to the beginning of early voting. Encourage voters to bring the card with them in order to gain access to the "fast check-in line".
  Tip: *Include the ballot style number and a bar code on the card.*

- Provide a listing of vote center/early voting locations to area law enforcement agencies and request their assistance with traffic control issues on peak voting days.

- Develop a "Plan B" for Election Day in the event that long lines form. Consult with other jurisdictions and your State Election Director to develop uniform state procedures for handling this issue.

VOTER EDUCATION

- Implement a visible public relations campaign to inform voters of the various voting opportunities available to them. TIP: *Incorporate information about early voting/vote center locations and hours of operations on all mailing pieces distributed by your office.*

- Recognize that voters are creatures of habit and do your best to keep the early voting/vote center locations and hours of operation consistent.

- Post informational signs at vote center/early voting locations to inform voters of how long their expected "wait time" will be at certain points in the line. Also provide information on alternative vote center/ early voting locations in the event that voters choose to leave and return at another time or place.

- Inform voters of when the peak voting times are and encourage them to avoid that day and/or time of day.

- Post a "polling place lookup and review your sample ballot" feature on your jurisdiction Web site. Publicize your Web site address on all mailing pieces distributed by your office.