

1. Executive Summary

Executive Summary - Key Points:

During the Presidential Primary Election in March, Los Angeles County introduced a new voting system that served nearly 1 million voters at more than 970 vote centers throughout the County.

Post-election surveys and voter exit polls indicate that most voters (70%) had a positive experience, while 20% reported a negative experience. Overall 15% percent of voters reported waiting more than 2 hours to vote. RR/CC acknowledges that not all voters were properly supported on Election Day, resulting in long waits and great frustration for many voters.

At the request of the Board of Supervisors, the RR/CC, with a team of experts, examined the issues and analyzed the causes behind those failures, which relate primarily to technology, training and capacity issues.

As a result, RR/CC already has started to improve training and procedures and to refine its systems to ensure a better experience for ALL voters in future elections.

Los Angeles County introduced new Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) in the March 2020 Presidential Primary Election. Voters reported that their experience with the BMDs was positive. The BMDs are new and, as with anything new, it will take some time for voters to become accustomed to using them, including features that ensure ballot security and voter privacy.

RR/CC looked carefully into the root causes of the issues experienced by voters. Here are some key findings:

- Vote Centers were open for 10 days before Election Day. 27% of voters cast ballots in the first 10 days; 73% on Election Day. RR/CC also received and processed 1,141,594 Vote by Mail (VBM) ballots.
- Longer wait times primarily resulted from technical issues with the electronic pollbooks (PollPads) that are used to check-in voters as they arrive at the Vote Centers. Even though ample network bandwidth was available, the PollPads had issues synchronizing data with the voter database and the voter search function was too limited for the size of the County's electorate. This resulted in delays as voters checked in. Also, some Vote Centers had fewer PollPads than needed to handle voter turnout on Election Day.
- While there was a perception among voters and the media that BMDs were not operable and contributed to wait times, generally this was not the case. Based on the data, BMD availability did not contribute to wait times, but some BMDs were unavailable for two reasons:
 1. While not intended, Election Workers did not make all BMDs available at the Vote Centers. Some BMDs were not turned on in larger Vote Centers because they were not identified as necessary to meet voter needs during the election. Had all BMDs been needed, Election Workers would have powered them on.
 2. There was a known issue with a printer gear that affected more BMDs than originally identified, causing 1,297 to be taken out of service because of paper jams. This affected 5.6% of the BMDs in the field.
- Network bandwidth between the PollPads and the voter database was sufficient and was not a constraint on Election Day.

- While RR/CC recruited the overall number of Election Workers needed, delays in Vote Center selection and late assignment of Election Workers caused some Vote Centers to be overstaffed and some to be understaffed because either too many Election Workers were assigned to a Vote Center or the Election Workers did not report as scheduled or at all. In most cases, multilingual Election Workers were stationed where needed, but the under/overstaffing issue applied to them as well. The need to have Vote Center Leads work 11 consecutive days proved to create difficulties for Vote Center Lead attendance and also caused difficulties filling those critical roles.
- Election Worker training started while many elements were still changing – procedures being finalized and new legislation being passed (Senate Bill 207) – which caused differences between training conducted earlier vs. later in the cycle. This represented a lot of change – new technology and new/changing procedures – for Election Workers to absorb.
- There were challenges and constraints in gaining access to and setting up Vote Centers, with some closing early or opening late, and some not opening at all on some days.
- The Help Desks where Election Workers and voters call to get help did not have adequate staff needed to respond to incoming call volume promptly. Technical issues with the telephone system also led to excessive wait times.

The RR/CC is committed to addressing each issue below in preparation for the November 2020 General Election.

Voter Wait Times

- Continue to put more resources toward encouraging voters to vote before Election Day at a Vote Center of their choice. With a broader distribution of voters across the voting period, fewer bottlenecks are likely to develop and issues can be immediately identified and addressed.
- Work with the Secretary of State and KnowiNK, the vendor for PollPad, to reduce the PollPad synchronization time to rapidly receive and process updates from the KnowiNK ePulse voter database server and ensure the availability of PollPads to check in voters through KnowiNK's ongoing improvement and certification of the PollPad and ePulse products.
- Improve the search function to quickly match voters based on multiple criteria, and make it easier for voters to obtain and bring with them a scannable Voter ID from the Sample Ballot or access it on a mobile device using the Voter Registration Lookup Tool.
- Ensure that all Vote Centers have at least 5 PollPads and an appropriate number of BMDs for adequate capacity.
- Implement procedures to ensure all deployed PollPads are powered on, updated and ready for use in Vote Centers.
- Track wait times at Vote Centers and communicate wait times to voters in real time through an app that will better assist voters in selecting a Vote Center.

Ballot Marking Devices

- Continue work to replace the printer assemblies on all BMDs affected by the faulty printer gear.
- Train Election Workers to turn on all BMDs daily during the voting period.

Vote Center Locations

- Encourage voters to use the Online Vote Center Locator Tool.
- RR/CC also will implement a more effective management tool to maintain and manage a database that tracks identification, recruitment and updates, and Vote Center profiles on a real-time basis.

Vote Center Staffing

- Assign Field Support Technicians to specific Vote Centers rather than through a dispatch-only model to ensure that Election Workers receive technical support quickly to assist with any equipment issues.
- Assess and improve the process of assigning multilingual staff to ensure that staff who speak the languages of the community are available in Vote Centers.
- Complete implementation of the database to support Election Worker and Vote Center management (PollChief), to provide visibility into election worker assignments and ensure more consistent staffing across Vote Centers.
- Streamline the Vote Center Lead Program to ensure better Lead coverage across Vote Centers, including potentially breaking up the 11 consecutive days of service.
- Start Election Center Worker recruitment earlier.

Election Worker Training

- Generally, Election Workers assigned high grades to the quality of their training and received high marks from voters, but there is more to do.
- RR/CC will carefully examine the feedback from Election Workers and Leads gathered through the Election Worker Survey and Vote Center Leads Survey, feedback from voters, and other input.
- RR/CC will adapt the Election Worker training program to account for areas where deeper training is needed or where additional topics should be covered. Options include additional computer-based training (CBT) and/or extending in-person training.
- The Department will improve training on how best to communicate important instructions to voters, including how to cast their ballot in the BMD.

Voter and Election Worker Help Desk¹

- RR/CC Help Desks for voters and Election Workers were inadequate, particularly on Election Day. The Department will engage an experienced outside firm to assess and document requirements for scaling Help Desk operations, infrastructure and telephone systems.
- Outsource IT Help Desk operations to an experienced telecommunications company that provides help desk/support services.
- Migrate all Help Desks onto a single incident management system, ensuring the ability to escalate and provide issue visibility across all groups.
- Ensure adequate numbers of staff and agent IDs for all Help Desk lines.

Vote by Mail Ballots

- Procedural and systems failures resulting in 17,000 voters receiving their Vote by Mail ballots later than scheduled trace to limitations in the County's Election Management System (EMS) and insufficient staff capacity.
- Incorporation of the Special Congressional District 25 contest following an extended candidate filing period required creation of ad hoc scripts and reports from the EMS that over taxed system and staffing resources to address the other election contests.
- The Department is working with the EMS vendor on modifications to better adapt to similar conditions in future elections.

Measure FD

- The issue involving three cities and Measure FD related to boundary changes that had not been updated in the Department's system.
- The error, in part, related to insufficient quality checks, a flaw in the process of regularly requiring updates to election boundaries and failure to validate those boundaries with the districts that placed measures on the ballot.
- The Department has put in place measures to address frequency and verification of jurisdictional boundaries and to ensure accuracy and currency of Geographic Information Systems data.

Ballot Boxes

- Voters in Los Angeles County are accustomed to a centralized ballot box at their polling place.
- While the integrated ballot box on the new Ballot Marking Devices allows voters to cast their ballot with greater accessibility and privacy, the new feature caused voters confusion. Over time, this will improve as voters become more familiar with the system.

¹ RR/CC will work with the County's Chief Executive Officer to secure funding to accomplish this item. Because of the financial effects of addressing the COVID-19 health emergency the RR/CC may be unsuccessful in obtaining the necessary funding to accomplish these desired changes.

- The Department is modifying messaging in the user interface to make the process for casting ballots easier to understand.

Voter Feedback

- RR/CC will continue to utilize voter surveys to improve the volume and quality of feedback. Responses from the post-election surveys in March found 70% of respondents had a positive overall voting experience; 20% had a negative experience.
- A Loyola Marymount University exit poll found somewhat similar numbers: 87% of respondents said they had a positive overall voting experience at the Vote Centers, while 13% reported a fair or poor experience.

Conclusion

These results – and the findings derived from the Board’s motion – will assist the Department in continuing to improve the voter experience for Los Angeles County voters.

RR/CC is engaged with the Secretary of State and a broad range of community stakeholders to prepare for the November 2020 Presidential General Election considering the effects of COVID-19 on the voting experience.

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