Democracy Project Update – April 2017

PCEA – Three Years Later

January 2017 marked the third anniversary of the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration’s (PCEA) unanimous final report. The report’s recommendations focused on: modernizing voter registration; expanding early voting access and access to voting; reducing lines and improving polling place management; and modernizing voting technology.

The Bipartisan Policy Center’s (BPC) efforts to move the recommendations forward have resulted in an increased number of states employing online voter registration and data sharing efforts. Our recent work in those areas is highlighted below.

Many issues remain with respect to the coming voting technology crisis, the usability of schools as polling places, the expansion of early voting, and United States Postal Service (USPS) implementation of PCEA recommendations. The Democracy Project’s knowledgeable team of bipartisan experts are available to help state and local policymakers and election administrators with policy creation, development, and guidance around implementation.

Data Sharing Programs Improve Accuracy of Voter Registration Lists

News reports about inaccuracies in statewide voter registration lists often surface in competitive election cycles. It’s a fact that deceased persons and persons who have moved to a new state do remain on virtually all state lists. The PCEA recommended cross-state data sharing to address accuracy of the voting rolls and also improve Election Day efficiency. BPC continues to be part of the solution by highlighting best practices for data sharing systems for state election officials and administrators.

In December 2016, BPC convened meetings with key stakeholders to discuss the status of—and encourage participation in—two well-organized and highly effective data sharing programs: the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) and the Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck (IVRC). More than 35 officials participated in the meetings held in Colorado and Arizona.

ERIC, launched in 2009 and funded initially by The Pew Charitable trusts, is an
independent, non-profit organization run by its member states (with 20 states and the District of Columbia currently participating). Pew and IBM worked for three years to create a sophisticated data-matching system to ensure the highest level of security and to address privacy concerns. Every 60 days member states submit their voter registration lists for active and inactive voters, as well as records from the Department of Motor Vehicles; states have the option of providing additional data from other state agencies. ERIC obtains additional national data such as the USPS National Change of Address and the Social Security Administration Master Death Index. The states are provided with an anonymization application so that all sensitive, private data protected by state law is anonymized before ever leaving the state.

States receive two types of reports at least once each year for Eligible but Unregistered voters and List Maintenance. Member states are required to reach out to Eligible but Unregistered voters within 90 days of receiving a report. The List Maintenance report identifies Cross-state Movers, In-state Movers, In-state Duplicates, and Deceased voters—and ERIC recommends that these reports be issued monthly.

There is an initial baseline $25,000 fee to join ERIC with additional costs based on the yearly budget which is divided up based on the number of registered voters and number of participating states. States also incur mailing costs associated with the required mailings. A June 2016 Government Accountability Office report concluded that investment in ERIC saves states money and “leads to more accurate voter registration lists [by] identifying registrants who elections administrators should remove for various reasons, such as having moved to another state or died.”

IVRC’s Crosscheck, launched in 2005, is a state-to-state matching program that compares a state’s voter registration list to voter registration lists from other participating states to identify duplicate registrations. IVRC was created as a bipartisan response to the Carter-Baker Commission which called on states to increase interoperability between the states to decrease duplicate voter registrations. Each member state is required to submit encrypted data to the Kansas Secretary of State’s office for cross-checking once a year in January. Member states provide a range of data including first and last name, date of birth, and some provide the last four digits of a social security number. The data is then returned to member states after the Crosscheck procedures. The original data is securely destroyed upon completion of the Crosscheck process.

Within 10 years, there were 28 member states comparing over 110 million voter records to identify duplicate registrations across state lines. The Crosscheck system identified five million potential duplicate registrations between the participating states. There is no cost to participate in the program.
BPC continues to reach out to non-participating jurisdictions to encourage their participation in ERIC and/or Crosscheck. Some states participate in both programs. BPC will issue a detailed report about data sharing in 2017.

Data Show that Polling Place Lines Were Shorter in 2016

Anecdotal reports about long lines at polling places on Election Day 2012 led then-President Obama to create the PCEA. In January 2014, the PCEA recommended reducing Election Day lines by collecting data, developing online tools to guide resource allocation, helping local officials to identify and mitigate and address the factors known to cause long lines, and setting a new 30-minute goal for maximum wait times.

Since the PCEA issued its report, BPC’s work to advance the PCEA recommendations has led to a focus on improving the election system. To address polling place line length issues, BPC formed a partnership with Professor Charles Stewart III, director of the CalTech/MIT Voting Technology Project, to develop a nationwide line data collection effort to execute on Election Day 2016. As a result, a total of 178 jurisdictions spanning 17 states have provided, or will soon provide, line length data from Election Day 2016.

Participating jurisdictions range in size from very small (600 registered voters) to some of the largest in the country (1.65 million), representing a total of 30,553,428 registered voters. Voters in these jurisdictions collectively cast 21,196,892 votes, or roughly 15% of all votes cast in the election.

Since the November 2016 election, BPC and CalTech/MIT have processed and returned data from a total of 82 participating jurisdictions. The data includes insights into the voting process of more than 2.2 million voters from 2,215 precincts in jurisdictions spread across eight states. The average wait time per county was 8.48 minutes (taking each precinct as 1, not adjusted for population size). The average wait times spanned from 1.1 minutes to 23.4 minutes—well under the PCEA-recommended 30-minute maximum wait time.
BPC's Democracy Project will continue to incorporate and analyze additional data as it is reported. The participating jurisdictions will then be able to use their data to improve polling place management in upcoming elections. In the meantime, BPC is actively encouraging additional jurisdictions to participate in the line data collection program during the 2018 midterm election cycle. BPC will issue a full report on the 2016 data collection effort.

Learn More
- Calculating Wait Times Infographic
- BPC, Election Administrators Partner to Collect First-Ever National Data on Voting Lines
- Election Day Line Data Collection Program

“Delivering” Democracy with electionmail.org

_BPC and Democracy Works Partner with U.S. Postal Service to “Deliver” Democracy_

During 2016, more than 600,000 United States Postal Service (USPS) employees delivered more than **276 million pieces of election mail** and **2.3 billion pieces of political mail**. Tens of millions of American voters received their ballot from USPS, both domestically and abroad, and the number grows with each federal election cycle. The PCEA in 2014 recommended that voters be offered expanded opportunities to vote and highlighted areas to improve the vote by mail—or absentee—voting process. BPC
outlined detailed, actionable recommendations for voters, election administrators, legislators, and the USPS in a 2016 report “The New Reality of Voting By Mail in 2016.” Democracy Works and BPC launched ElectionMail.org in early 2016 to create a centralized repository of election mail issues. This joint effort was made possible through a generous Democracy Fund Network Grant. The goals of the project were: to provide state and local election administrators information about election mail issues as they developed in real time to enable those officials to gather actionable data, and to collect never-before-gathered data to paint a comprehensive picture of the scope of election mail problems during the 2016 election cycle.

An ElectionMail.org website was created to collect information. The success of the website reporting program was such that, in September 2016, the USPS elected to integrate ElectionMail.org reporting directly into the USPS internal Sharepoint ticket tracking system. This decision resulted in faster response times for tickets and more consistent resolution tracking—and also demonstrated the USPS commitment to the ElectionMail.org project.

During the 2016 election cycle, 124 local and state election officials reported a total of 153 issues from 21 states through ElectionMail.org. Delivery delays were the most common issue representing 39% of all submissions in 2016. Lost mail (21%), undeliverable or returned mail (14%), and misdirected mail (14%) were the other large categories. Some delivery delays were not actual delays on the part of USPS, but instead represented misunderstanding of the delivery standards by local election officials.

Other statistics of interest about the reports submitted via the website:

- 50% dealt with election mail going to the voter
- 39% addressed problems with mail being returned to the election office
- 11% involved mail traveling both directions
- 85% related to domestic election mail (rather than Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ballot issues)
- 84% dealt with the delivery of ballots
- 60% dealt with the November 2016 general election

In the good news category, only 7% of the issues reported were thought to affect more than 1,000 voters—and those were “non-critical” issues that, if unresolved, would not impact election results significantly.

This project led to an unprecedented partnership with the USPS to work directly with state election officials to track delivery of election mail. Under the leadership of the
Postmaster General and Deputy Postmaster General, ElectionMail.org was embraced and promulgated within the USPS itself. We were invited to address the 500+ regional managers at the National Postal Forum in Nashville, and were the first non-postal entity allowed to deliver one of the weekly operational webinars broadcast to nearly 1,000 USPS managers.

A forthcoming paper, “Election Mail: A Delivering Democracy Update” will provide more detailed information about the data collected in 2016. That paper will be posted on the BPC website after its release.

Learn More:
• BPC Report, The New Realities of Voting by Mail

PCEA Receives Public Service Award
Not Resting on Its Laurels, BPC continues to Engage Key Stakeholders to Catalogue Best Practices

The PCEA recently received the Election Verification Network’s Public Service Award for the impact that its work and its report The American Voting Experience had on focusing attention on the “impending crisis” in voting systems and technology. The PCEA report launched many efforts such as the National Conference of State Legislature’s (NCSL) working groups on policy and technology and reports published by the Brennan Center and the Wharton School. Perhaps more significant for the longer term, the report highlighted some critical issues for the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to remedy in its current process to set voting systems standards. In addition to the challenge of modernizing the states’ technology and voting systems, there is an additional need to identify revenue streams to replace aging equipment. The NCSL is compiling information about various state funding strategies to serve as a resource of best practices for other states to use.

In recent months, BPC’s Democracy Project team has convened a number of in-person and individual group meetings with key election officials and administrators and technology experts engaged in the elections field to learn more about how states are addressing these issues. BPC is compiling a list of best practices from across the country with an eye to serving as a resource/clearinghouse going forward.

Democracy Project team experts John Fortier, Tammy Patrick, and Don Palmer participate regularly in meetings related, but not limited to: the Election Assistance Commission’s advisory boards, the National Association of Secretaries of State, the National Association of State Election Directors, the United States Postal Service, the
Election Verification Network, and local election official state associations—as presenters as well as meeting participants.

**Events**

Videos from Recent Past Events

*Spring Cleaning: Voter List Maintenance Best Practices, Tools and Success Stories-Webcast*
March 21, 2017

*Analyzing the 2016 Election*
November 15, 2016

*Are We Ready to Run Our Elections?*
October 27, 2017

**Recent Testimony**

*Testimony by Donald Palmer to the Election Assistance Commission*
Presented on Thursday, December 15, 2016

John Fortier directs the Democracy Project at BPC. Read more about John and his team, and subscribe to receive updates.