

# COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

## Instilling Voter Confidence in Election Infrastructure



Today, rapidly changing technology and cyber threats – not to mention the constant chatter on social media – have impacted voter confidence to an unprecedented extent. It will take courageous action to address these pitfalls.

As an election official, the more you can strengthen your relationship with the community, the more you will gain increased confidence from voters. The very foundation of voter confidence is the certainty that their state and local officials can be trusted to conduct well-run, independent, and objective elections. You and your staff have direct control over many aspects of how voters perceive your election infrastructure and the electoral process as a whole.

The purpose of this white paper is to put the spotlight on three specific areas where proactive, courageous leadership can make a real impact on instilling voters with confidence. This is a challenging environment, but with leadership from the top, jurisdictions can further develop competency and expertise in:

1. Building credibility with the public
2. Demonstrating transparency and auditability
3. Communicating for trust and impact.

By definition, election officials manage the election process – from creating ballots to tabulating and certifying the results. And in this era of rapidly changing expectations, most election officials are wearing a “second hat” as IT directors. A successful and problem-free election includes all of the traditional tasks, plus compliance with a laundry list of federal and state standards and a ballooning array of technical challenges and risk management issues.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> TrustTheVote Project, 2017. *Exploring the Critical Nature of Election Infrastructure*. Retrieved from <https://trustthevote.org/2017/04/06/kudos-to-eac-on-election-infrastructure-as-critical/>.

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## 1 BUILDING CREDIBILITY WITH THE PUBLIC

Some two decades into the information revolution, technology and its practitioners continue to exert a powerful mystique for many members of the public. By placing renewed emphasis on voter education and outreach and communicating in plain, down-to-earth language, you can go a long way toward demystifying the modern electoral process for your voters.

With the right technology partner for your voting system, communication and education are made easier by features built into the process. With the latest generation of voting machines, voters can easily navigate ballots and verify that their choices are being captured as intended. A modern system gives voters a unique code to obtain their ballot, and screens that allow them to validate their ballot before casting it. These are all features that assure voters that the system is credible and trustworthy. With a process that is transparent and moves at their own pace, voters gain confidence that the electoral process is unfolding as it should.

The confidence runs both ways. The right voting system vendor is a technology partner for you. Select a vendor who will work with you proactively to manage risks and technical issues in an agile and timely fashion. This enables you to place your focus on voter education and outreach, poll worker training, and other activities that help elections run smoothly on a repeatable basis – building credibility and good will with your voters.

## 2 DEMONSTRATING TRANSPARENCY AND AUDITABILITY

In the age of social media and sensationalistic media reports, how can you convey the message that your election was timely, accurate, and above-board? Demonstrate the transparency that comes with use of a modern voting system.

For example, some voters may believe that the machines are networked to each other or to the voter registration system, that they connect to the internet or to wi-fi, or that elections can be hacked or have been hacked in the past.<sup>2</sup> In reality, none of these statements is true.

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<sup>2</sup> Brennan Center for Justice, 2016. *Voting System Security and Reliability Risks*. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/fact-sheet-voting-system-security-and-reliability-risks>.

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The electoral process is far more transparent than most people realize. You can educate the media and voters about how the chain of custody works for the election infrastructure. Demonstrate the built-in safeguards of your system and show how your voting system has no connection with the voter registration system, is not networked, and is air-gapped from the internet. Welcome the public and media to observe the ballot counting and adjudication process.<sup>3</sup>

A modern voting system also enables you to make detailed information available to the public that proves the accuracy of how votes are recorded and tabulated, such as:

- Federal and state certifications for your system
- Functional test results that verify election hardware – from voting machines to scanners to the tabulation system – works and performs its functions as expected
- Public logic and accuracy testing and test results that verify that the voting data was recorded correctly for every candidate and race for each election
- Election results by precinct
- Audit reports that show Election Night totals match results of later random, independent audits, and account for any variances
- Public access to vote capture data, as applicable with your state laws
- Reports that document vital election practices.

As the word gets out about how modern election infrastructure really works, you will facilitate the growth of confidence that your elections are being conducted competently.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Election Updates, 2017. *Thoughts on voter confidence and election reform*. Retrieved from <https://electionupdates.caltech.edu/2017/09/12/thoughts-on-voter-confidence-and-election-reform/>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2016. *Election Administration and Voting Survey*. Retrieved from [https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/2016\\_EAVS\\_Comprehensive\\_Report.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/2016_EAVS_Comprehensive_Report.pdf).

## 3 COMMUNICATING FOR TRUST AND IMPACT

In today's fast-moving world of non-traditional communications, low-quality or misleading messages can circulate quickly, fueling voter fears. As an election official, it's up to you to put a process in place to address legitimate voter concerns with reliable and timely information.

The strongest way to combat misleading information is to conduct an efficient, convenient election on modern, secure voting equipment. Voters who like and understand the process walk away feeling satisfied that their vote was cast according to their wishes and will be counted accurately. In a climate of trust, confusion or rumors don't get much traction.<sup>5</sup>

Build trust and impact voter attitudes by treating communications as an essential part of voter service. When you implement a modern voting system, proactively offer training and education via local civic groups and push out tips and updates on your social media. Educate and welcome local media outlets and reporters. Additionally, voters should find that your website is the most accurate, up-to-date source about upcoming elections, what's on the ballot, and where and how to vote. Have a process in place so that when social media starts buzzing, you can keep voter confidence high by responding clearly, quickly, and accurately through your official channels.

Similarly, when voters call the office or talk to a poll worker, they should be able to connect with people trained to answer questions about polling places, devices, and election situations such as absentee voting or accessibility. A recent study by the Harvard Business Review found that individuals who receive a quick, courteous response to their questions are more likely to believe an organization is "on their side" – even if their issue could not be resolved.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gallup News, 2016. *Americans' Confidence in Voting, Elections*. Retrieved from <http://news.gallup.com/poll/196976/update-americans-confidence-voting-election.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Harvard Business Review, 2018. *How Customer Service Can Turn Angry Customers into Loyal Ones*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-customer-service-can-turn-angry-customers-into-loyal-ones>.

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## CONCLUSION

Protecting the electoral infrastructure takes courageous and far-sighted leadership. So does enhancing voter confidence. All over the country, election officials are peeling back the layers of prior practices and old expectations to address voter concerns by building credibility, demonstrating transparency and auditability, and communicating for trust and impact.

While the challenges are formidable, the initiative is in your hands. You can build excellence in your organization by investing in training your people, improving your procedures, communicating with local media and partnering with the right technology vendor. By taking these steps, state and local election officials can instill voters with confidence in the election infrastructure and in the electoral process as a whole.



- Focus on voter education and outreach.
- Demonstrate the transparency in your modern voting system.
- Build enriching training experiences for pollworkers.
- Reinforce chain of custody security protocols.
- Use your channels of communications to promote public education.
- Select a technology vendor that will be a proactive partner.

### About Hart InterCivic

Austin-based Hart InterCivic is a full-service election solutions innovator, partnering with state and local governments to deliver secure, accurate and reliable elections. Working side-by-side with election professionals for more than 100 years, Hart is committed to helping advance democracy one election at a time. Hart's mission fuels its passionate customer focus and a continuous drive for technological innovation. The company's new Verity Voting system makes voting more straightforward, equitable and accessible – and makes managing elections more transparent, more efficient and easier. Only Hart offers a completely new, certified voting system with both electronic and paper options.

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