Automating Elections Administration:

The Benefits of Investing in Emerging Technologies

Over the last few election cycles, we have witnessed increased scrutiny and pressure placed on Elections Administrators and Secretaries of State as to the fairness and accuracy of the elections that they oversee and certify. Increasingly, Elections officials are turning to relatively new automations to assist them in maintaining their voter records and handling the multitude of administrative tasks involved in ensuring their ability to effectively manage the elections process. This white paper will illustrate how secure workflow automations are increasing efficiency, accuracy, accessibility, and auditability of elections administration.

Efficiency

In the past most voter registrations were maintained in paper files. Besides having to maintain the paper file, the system was burdensome since the file was not immediately accessible and could easily be misplaced or misfiled. Digitizing voter records provides immediate access and greatly reduces the chance of losing the record.

Additionally, voter registration consumes an elections office's staff resources and only increases pressure due to the time constraint for adding and updating registrations to the statewide voter registration databases as the registration deadline nears before each election. Data entry consumes much of the time involved in adding new registrations or updating existing records. Automations assist election's staff by scanning and uploading the data into the local database and once verified for accuracy, submitting the voter registrations to the statewide database reducing data entry errors and duplicate data entry into multiple databases.

Another task that consumes election office staff is responding to public records requests. Staff spends countless hours copying and then redacting sensitive information when responding to a records request. Automations help collect, redact, and prepare the documents so that the response is handled timely and exactly as requested.

Accuracy

Maintaining the accuracy of voter records locally and in the Secretary of State voter database creates an enormous workload for elections staff. Studies have shown error rate rates of between 1-4% due to manual data entry errors. Considering the critical nature of maintaining election records both locally and at the state level, it is incumbent on election administrators to provide various means of efficiently ensuring that the data they maintain and submit is accurate. Scanning, optical character recognition, and automations that can transfer the data from the document to the database reduce data entry errors and

make it easier to verify that the information has been captured accurately whether the document is a voter registration or required candidate reporting forms.

🔑 Accessibility

Access to voting is critical to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to cast their ballot. The need for efficient ballot-by-mail is key which creates an additional burden on elections offices in managing ballot-by-mail initiatives. The latest Census report indicates that in 2020, 43% of voters cast ballots by mail, and another 26% voted in person before Election Day. By comparison, in 2016, only 21% mailed in their ballots and 19% voted in person prior to Election Day. A larger share of voters aged 65 and over voted nontraditionally (77.7%) than those in younger age groups (69.7% or less).[1]

This increase is indicative of the acceptance of ballot-by-mail ensuring access to voting especially in the elderly and disabled populations. Automations have made it easier to process ballot-by-mail requests, track returns and match signatures to verify the authenticity of the voter, maintaining the integrity of the process.

Additionally, it is imperative that changes in voter status be processed timely. If voter record changes (name, address, etc.) are not processed timely, voters may be turned away or be forced to submit provisional ballots increasing the workload on elections staff to validate the identity and authenticity of the voter. Automations provide the ability to make changes to voter records and upload the revisions to the necessary state and local databases for polling books and post-election verification needs.

🔍 Auditability

Given recent questions about the reliability and integrity of elections over the past few cycles, many jurisdictions are requiring post-election audits to ensure the process was fairly and professionally managed in accordance with existing election laws. Election procedural (process) audits ensure that election officials comply with regulations or internal policies and identify and resolve discrepancies in an effort to promote voter confidence in the election administration process. Producing requested documents and information timely and on-demand creates an enormous workload on elections staff.

Offices that have digitized records are able to save an enormous amount of time gathering, verifying, and providing the documents, records, etc., required by the auditing body. Being able to locate and organize the requested materials ensure that the audit is conducted efficiently and with a high degree of confidence in the results. These post-election performance audits when accomplished timely with data-driven results provide the officials responsible for the audit and the electorate with much higher confidence in the integrity of the process and that their votes were recorded as intended.

💬 In Their Own Words

Elections Administrators who had made the investment in elections administration software have reflected on the effect that implementing elections administration automations have had on their ability to manage their office.

Jodi Duck, Elections Administrator, Howard County Texas:

> *The advances of scanning software and data storage have greatly streamlined our office in the past 2 years. Not only in the effort to "go green" but to also have a searchable avenue to collect data quickly. With the ever-growing need to answer public information requests, quickly and effectively, our dms3 elections suite automations with the Audit/PIA-FOIA module allows us to collect the scanned data with a few keystrokes instead of sorting through boxes of physically stored documents. The ease of redacting necessary information and emailing documents reduces our workload from days to hours."*

Trudy Hancock, Elections Administrator, Brazos County Texas:

> *Automation in the field of elections has become paramount as our world has evolved into a "results as quick as possible" world. Not just election results but results of productivity for everything that we do. The automation that products, like VistaSG's elections suite provides, help to facilitate a quick response, clean data and satisfaction of a job well-done. These automations and workflows help to cut down the time it takes to process documents, helps reduce mistakes and makes time for all the tasks required in the current field of an election's official. Without automation and streamlined processes this job would be unmanageable."*

These Elections Administrators and many more just like them have experienced improved administration with tasks that took days now take hours or that took hours are completed in minutes freeing both them and their staff to perform more value-added tasks assisting their respective constituents and stakeholders.

👍 The Benefits

As we can see, investing in elections administration technologies is providing benefits with respect to the efficient operation of elections offices and maintaining the credibility of our elections. While the perceived cost of the technology has many jurisdictions questioning its value, users of the technologies have gotten a valuable return on their investment….**TIME** …to better manage their elections and serve anyone that needs their assistance. Clearly, automations are making a significant impact on elections administration.

In closing, The Brennan Center For Justice has performed many assessments of the current state of Elections Administration and has stated that "Many local BOEs lack the staff capacity, funding, and infrastructure to meet the increasing demands of election administration. These shortages limit voting opportunities and leave local BOEs vulnerable to technical failures that make it harder for voters to cast a ballot and have their vote counted."[2] Investing in emerging technologies that offer solutions for elections offices like Vista Solution Group provides, is just one way to improve elections administration and ensure voter confidence in the integrity of the elections process.

[1] Sherer, Zachary, U.S. Census Bureau Report, Majority of Voters Used Non-Traditional Methods to Cast Ballots in 2020, April 29, 2021
[2] Brennan Center for Justice, Memorandum in Support of Legislative Package to Improve Election Administration in New York State, May 6, 2022