

State Office: Iowa Secretary of State Paul D. Pate

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Title of Program: Be the Expert: A Three-Pronged Approach to Positioning County Election Commissioners as Trusted Sources

Project lead: Michael Ross, Deputy Secretary and Chief of Staff

Description of the program: Local election officials play a critical role in maintaining the integrity and public trust of elections, particularly amid unprecedented turnover rates that have seen nearly 40% of officials nationwide and just over 30% of Iowa officials being new to their roles prior to the 2024 General Election. To address these challenges, Iowa's Secretary of State Paul Pate has implemented the "Be the Expert" program, a comprehensive initiative designed to support and train county election commissioners, ultimately helping to build public confidence in the electoral process. The efforts show promising results and boost trust in elections among Iowans. A 2024 Iowa Poll revealed that 91% of likely Iowa voters now have confidence in state elections, a significant increase from previous years.

Subject area of nomination: Elections



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local election officials are integral to safe, secure, and fair elections. As the frontlines to the elections process, their access to resources and their positions in the community is key to building trust in elections across the nation.

Ensuring local county officials have the necessary resources and training to administer smooth and accurate elections is particularly challenging today, while we are seeing increased turnover rates amongst local election officials. Prior to the 2024 General Election, nearly 40% of all election officials nationwide were new to their roles, with turnover rates at their highest in at least two decades. In Iowa, election offices faced similar challenges – a third of county election commissioners had never administered a presidential general election. This turnover rate has been relatively standard over the last few years.

Lack of firsthand experience and training can result in mistakes, which are usually avoidable. Mistakes further diminish public trust in elections, which is already at low levels. In Iowa, there are between 100 and 200 elections a year. Training and preparedness for county election commissioners and their staff must be a year-round effort.

As the state commissioner of elections, Secretary of State Paul Pate works closely with his staff and local election officials in all of Iowa's 99 counties on a layered program that goes beyond training and administrative procedures required by Iowa law. Our "Be the Expert" program encapsulates our efforts to support election officials and help present election leaders in a favorable light – as trusted sources and election experts. By positioning auditors as trusted sources of election information in their communities, we are ensuring the public can trust them and the elections they administer and that county commissioners and their teams are perceived as knowledgeable, trusted experts. Collectively, it builds on our efforts statewide to be trusted sources to make sure our office and election officials have a good reputation for administering safe and secure elections on behalf of Iowa voters.

Iowa's 99 county auditors play critical roles in administering safe and secure elections. As the county's commissioner of elections, auditors and their staff conduct county, city, school, state, and federal elections and maintain voter records.

This effort provides county auditors with tangible tools and actionable steps to not only administer secure elections, but engage with their community, from the public to other local county officials. This three-pronged approach integrates training and relationship building with cybersecurity support and communications resources.

"91% of Iowans have trust in Iowa elections, a significant increase from previous years."

-2024 Iowa Poll





We have seen Iowans' trust in elections build in the past few years. A 2024 Iowa Poll found that 91% of likely Iowa voters had confidence in Iowa elections and 74% in national elections. This is a significant increase from 2022 when only 65% of likely Iowa voters indicated they had confidence in U.S. elections, and 30% reported they were "doubtful 2022 results across the U.S. would be counted as voters intended."

HISTORY

Since Secretary Pate took office in 2015, the initiatives in our training program have evolved from the first iteration including attendance at county association conferences and an 800-page printed paper handbook, which pre-dated Secretary Pate's term. The handbook has been in its current format for more than 20 years, and has been maintained, updated, and expanded over the course of that time by several administrations. Today's program integrates an interactive online portal with resources, hands-on tabletop exercises, proactive and reactive press support, and intricate cybersecurity assistance.

TIMELINE

- Prior to 2015 Election Administrator Handbook (EAH) was distributed to all 99 county auditors.
- Prior to 2015 Began attending the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) annual conference to build relationships with other county officials, including county commissioners/board of supervisors who are key decision-makers. Our presence included a booth in the exhibit hall.
- 2018 Provided hands-on tabletop exercises for county election commissioners and their local election teams (including IT, emergency management administrators (EMAs), law enforcement and sheriffs, etc.) with support from the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).
- 2020 Instituted weekly virtual meetings for the six weeks leading up to a primary or general election and two weeks following for "just in time" training and information distribution.
- 2021 Created an electronic version of the election administrator handbook.
- 2021 Launched Bug Bounty partnership with counties and enhanced cybersecurity support provided by the state for local county election offices.
- 2022 Modernized the online version of the election administrator handbook to format for more intuitive searching and guided user experience.
- 2022 Implemented training sessions separated into six districts for smaller groups and tailored experiences, thus meeting local officials closer to their home counties.
- 2024 Launched Law Enforcement Guidebook for county law enforcement and auditors
- 2025 In the process of transitioning the election administrator online database to an interactive portal with new tools





The program continues to adapt as new needs arise and the landscape evolves. The next iteration of the online portal will include a program that allows election officials to submit a date of an upcoming local election, automatically updating a calendar with key dates and deadlines required by Iowa law. Our office will continue our cybersecurity presence among the counties as technology evolves, including a higher concentration on social engineering and how these tactics can assist bad actors in attacking our systems and demonstrating the impact of AI in elections community and infrastructure.

SIGNIFICANCE

In Iowa, we believe our elections are only as strong as our frontlines – from poll workers to county commissioners, these individuals play a critical role in strengthening our election processes and ensuring election integrity for Iowans in all 99 counties. Iowa's three-pronged approach to supporting county officials positions them as trusted sources and provides them with the necessary resources to "Be the Expert." The approach combines in-person visits for new county commissioners, updated Incident Response Plans (IRP), and more fully integrated cyber training with the rest of our training for effect and to help counties build on their images with their constituents and position themselves as trusted sources and election experts. In turn, these efforts loop back into our priorities of increasing trust in elections and positioning our office as a trusted source for Iowans.

Be the Expert: combines training, resources, cybersecurity assistance, and communication support to position county election officials as trusted sources and election experts.

Because of the increased turnover rate of local election officials, year-round training and opportunities for intra-county relationship building on election efforts are of the utmost importance. Relationships between county departments such as emergency managers, IT directors, law enforcement, and election offices are critical in administering smooth elections and handling any potential crises that may pop up around or during an election. Our office emphasized fostering opportunities to develop these relationships – both between county departments and between our office and specific county agencies – which has allowed for safer and smoother elections in all corners of the state.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Providing hands-on opportunities for local county officials has proven critical in providing counties with the necessary support to administer a clean, fair, and smooth election. 2024 national research showed that many local governments are struggling more than ever with limited budgets, small staffs, and high turnover rates. Unfortunately, this is reflected in county election offices across Iowa, and as such, there is not enough time or resources to dedicate to the detailed training necessary to run efficient elections.





Our office has staff dedicated to training opportunities, and over the last year, we have invested more time and resources than ever before in enhancing training opportunities for local election officials.

In-person and virtual training and tabletop exercises Our ongoing training sessions include:

- Weekly virtual meetings for the six weeks leading up to a primary, general or city-school election and four weeks following
- Attendance at annual ISAC and Iowa State Association of County Auditors annual conferences, including a full or half day of training sessions
- Annual district trainings where our office travels to each of the six auditor districts within the state and provides in-depth training and workshops
- Tabletop exercises with the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) in the six districts

Our office annually attends the CISA Tabletop the Vote tabletop exercise (TTX). To capture the most relevant scenarios, we provided in-person opportunities for our county election offices to participate in tailored TTX sessions. We not only personally invited each county auditor and their staff, but our team also distributed personal invitations to each county's election security partners – including county IT, EMAs, and law enforcement. These in-person, hands on exercises resulted in each county compiling and/or updating an Incident Response Plan (IRP).

Our office has made it a requirement that each county not only compile an IRP but also file it with our office annually. County auditors are also encouraged to share their IRPs with other county departments, ensuring each partner understands expectations and can prepare accordingly. This ensures offsite availability should a county need its IRP when it is not able to access its offices. This addition has been a critical component in working with each county to administer fair, smooth, and secure elections in all 99 counties.

Streamlined administration with user-friendly resources

Beyond providing the necessary training required by Iowa law, our staff is committed to providing adequate tools that support commissioners in their election administration and streamline their duties. This, in turn, supports commissioners as they position themselves as trusted sources and experts in their respective communities.

A key component of this was the transition of a printed, hard copy election administrator handbook into today's iteration. This interactive, searchable portal allows for more efficient administration and the ability to quickly understand and ensure they are accurately following election law and official Iowa Secretary of State guidance. Today's portal is constantly evolving and updated to include essential deadlines, key forms and documents, FAQs, and video





recordings of in-person and virtual training for any election staff unable to attend or who need to review specific portions.

Our team records most training sessions, whether virtual or in-person, for storage on the portal. Because all counties are not created equally – and many rural counties have limited staff and resources – it is particularly important to have video records of training sessions, ensuring that election offices with limited staff and resources who may not be able to attend sessions have all the information easily accessible. This also ensures that all 99 counties are provided the same information and receive answers to their questions. Consistency in knowledge and understanding of election law and administration is crucial to administering fair and accurate elections.

"91% of Iowans have trust in Iowa elections, a significant increase from previous years."

-2024 Iowa Poll

With at least 200 elections happening annually, the ability to tailor the product for a community's specific needs is instrumental in streamlining administration. The next iteration of the portal will feature a calendar option that allows county election staff to input a specific election date. The software will develop a calendar with specific dates and deadlines as required by Iowa law, saving auditors valuable time in manually formulating dates and deadlines. Further, this process ensures accuracy in administration efforts and saves our staff valuable time in answering questions and verifying dates and deadlines on behalf of counties.

Expanding training opportunities by providing opportunities for relationship-building Just as administering elections at the state level requires partnerships from other state, federal, and local agencies, local election officials rely on key partnerships to support a variety of facets. Intra-county relationships between election partners, such as county IT, EMAs, and law enforcement, are critical in maintaining secure elections. However, with county staff siloed off and often in separate buildings miles away, maintaining those relationships can be difficult.

The Iowa Secretary of State initiated relationships with county election partners beyond county auditors, including county IT teams, sheriffs, and emergency management administrators. Relationships between our office and county IT teams were strengthened through 2022's Bug Bounty partnership, which was established, in large part, to build on existing relationships with IT directors. Since implementing the Bug Bounty program, communications with county IT teams have dramatically improved, and we've created a Slack channel for information sharing between county IT teams and our office for election-related issues, fostering ongoing communications that allow us to better react to the needs of counties and election-related matters. Upon receiving notification of potential cyber incidents, we are better prepared to communicate not only with the county auditors but with their county IT departments.





We've also made sure that the IT Director for ISAC has a seat at our table during our quarterly security meetings with other state, federal, and local partners, and include them in our press conferences and other initiatives leading up to elections. Ensuring that IT directors have representation in these meetings help us develop our relationships with county IT departments and ultimately helps us predict and respond to election-related needs and incidents.

In 2024, our office emphasized building relationships with county law enforcement and emergency management administrators (EMA). Through direct communication with the Iowa EMA Association, our office has been able to share potential threats and other relevant information directly, which is pushed out to county EMAs via the association's communication methods. This strategy allows us to reach county EMAs with no existing relationship, by leveraging an already trusted voice in the space. Our team was invited to present at the annual conference, as well as the Iowa Homeland Security annual conference, for the first time in 2024, which has allowed us a more significant presence among county EMA officials and to build rapport.

We also increased outreach efforts with local law enforcement, updating officials on threats and other relevant information. Direct lines of communication allow us to reach local communities quickly and without gatekeepers. As a result of these efforts, our staff was invited to present to the Iowa State Sheriffs Deputies Association board early in 2024 on the laws relating to the election and related security measures, the importance of tabletop exercises and developing IRPs, expanding partnerships within the counties, and today's threat landscape, including new threats such as swatting, doxing, and bomb threats. These relationships ultimately allowed our staff to work directly with a county sheriff on education around swatting, and our team invited the sheriff to present to county auditors in person at one of their conferences, providing key information about the dangers of swatting and steps to take should an incident occur. Our office also saw immense benefit in hearing directly from law enforcement officials on their specific concerns and questions relating to elections, helping us better develop resources to support their efforts, including our Law Enforcement Guide.

The new Law Enforcement Guidebook combines input from local law enforcement and election officials to provide a one-stop shop for all the resources needed to ensure secure elections on election day.





Notably, our partnership resulted in the creation of a Law Enforcement Guidebook and its distribution to local law enforcement in all of Iowa's 99 counties. Upon receiving feedback from county auditors and law enforcement officers, our office decided to create a new resource that would educate and guide auditors on the role of law enforcement in elections and provide law enforcement officers with resources to be more informed about specific election laws. Working with the Iowa State Sheriffs Deputies Association, our team met directly with county sheriffs to gather feedback on what information would prove most valuable to law enforcement and how best to structure and present the information. Input was invaluable in providing a tool that would be widely used and easily accessible for law enforcement officers.

Further analysis of the input provided by local law enforcement allowed our office to identify some of the most anticipated reasons law enforcement could be called to a polling place or otherwise on election day, allowing us to emphasize providing detailed guidance around those specific instances and corresponding laws. This feedback also resulted in our offering the resource in both a hard copy and electronic version. The electronic version proved to be valuable so law enforcement could easily access the resource in patrol cars or on the go when needed.

CYBERSECURITY MEASURES

Election cybersecurity remains a race without a finish line. To that end, there is growing momentum in election offices around the country to institute Vulnerability Disclosure Programs and Bug Bounty programs to help election officials bolster their cyber maturity. The Iowa Secretary of State's Office became the first election office in the nation to launch a Bug Bounty program and the first agency in our state. We offer monetary rewards to security researchers who find vulnerabilities in websites and applications maintained by the Secretary of State's office.

A Bug Bounty program offers ethical security hackers recognition and compensation for reporting bugs, especially security exploits and vulnerabilities. These programs allow qualified developers to discover and resolve bugs before the general public is aware of them, preventing incidents of widespread abuse and data breaches.

Our statewide Bug Bounty program launched in 2022, before the November general election. It was a valuable addition to Iowa's Vulnerability Disclosure Program (VDP), launched in 2020. We were the second state election office in the country to launch a VDP.

Following the success of our statewide Bug Bounty program, the Iowa Secretary of State launched a separate but related Bug Bounty program in three counties, allowing us to improve our efforts to ensure that every county in Iowa has top-notch cybersecurity and that our elections are protected on every level. We shared information around vulnerabilities found in our three volunteer counties with all 99 county IT departments, allowing all counties to collectively respond and mitigate potential risks.





Iowa's county Bug Bounty Program found 18 vulnerabilities across three counties – before bad actors could manipulate them.

Our initial Bug Bounty program included a full ransom of \$25,000. To date, we have paid almost \$9,000 to ethical hackers who reported vulnerabilities to us. Through our county Bug Bounty program, we paid out a total of \$5,625 to ethical hackers who reported 18 vulnerabilities in county systems. The number of vulnerabilities was much lower than expected, which reinforced the understanding that educational outreach, training, and support on cybersecurity measures is working.

After around four years of working with Bugcrowd, our cost to them has been approximately \$175,000. Although that sum might seem like a lot at first glance, this is a fantastic return on investment. It is worth noting that there is much flexibility around cost, prize pool and transferring costs, and can be adjusted to best fit other state and county budgets and resources.

A malicious actor hacking into one of our websites could have caused significant damage to voter confidence that could not be quantified in monetary value. Additionally, ransomware bounties have cost government entities millions of dollars in recent years. Having an ethical hacker find the vulnerability and giving them a monetary reward is much more cost-effective in cybersecurity.

COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

While many county election offices lack the staff and resources to disseminate public communications efforts, public information campaigns are key in positioning election officials as trusted sources and election experts. Our staff has added key communications support for county election teams throughout the year, from dedicated toolkits to answering reactive media requests. Communications training has become a component of in-person and virtual training sessions, especially media and crisis communications training. County auditors are also encouraged to include crisis communications plans in their Incident Response Plans, which are developed at security tabletop exercises hosted in conjunction with CISA.

Proactive press release templates, reactive media support

In 2019, our office began developing press release templates that could be updated quickly and efficiently, allowing them to tailor the press releases to their communities and with their key messages. Initially, these press releases focused on election-specific events, such as the pretesting of election equipment and updates on post-election audits. In the following years, we've added press release templates focused on civic holidays such as Poll Worker Recruitment Day and National Voter Registration Month, as well as informational campaigns around our Iowa Businesses Against Trafficking program.





Detailed toolkits with holistic communications support

In 2023, we began developing comprehensive communications toolkits for election offices that include press release templates, best practices for working with the media, crisis communications planning, speech examples, posters, social media graphics and captions, social media best practices, and crisis holding statements that can be tailored to reflect specific incidents affecting counties around election day.

IMPACT

The ultimate goal of our "Be the Expert" program is to support auditors and help position them as trusted sources and election experts in their communities. Because local governments have limited budgets, staff, and resources, our office has prioritized using our resources to make these tasks more efficient and accessible to local election offices.

It's essential to provide local election offices with these resources as many election offices across the county experience higher turnover rates. As of January 2025, around one-third of Iowa's county auditors will be new to that role or have never before administered an election. This turnover rate has been typical for our state over the last few years.

We require county auditors and their staff to attend these trainings. Over the last year, more than 300 auditors and their staff attended our in-person district training events, which makes up about an estimated 75% of total county election staff statewide. Participation in training opportunities continues to increase year over year as new opportunities are added. One particular draw has been the addition of guest speakers to the training curriculum, such as speakers from the US Postal Service and de-escalation and swatting experts.

"The TTX session I attended with my local law enforcement, IT director, and EMA leaders was the first time we'd ever been in a room together. The session allowed us to collaborate better, and we feel more prepared than ever for the next election."

-A county auditor after attending the CISA IRP TTX

We have received positive feedback from county election officials on multiple occasions. Notably, after facilitating tabletop exercises with county election staff and their local partners (IT, EMA, law enforcement, etc.), one county election commissioner noted that it had been the first time they had ever been in the same room with each other, and the training opened lines of communication and allowed for better collaboration.

Further, staff has been able to decrease the time spent answering one-off questions from local election offices, instead dedicating time to training and proactively answering questions. Many hours have been saved in reactive support, and resources are now better spent actually





administering elections. Perhaps most notably, our staff has developed better relationships with county auditors and has seen increased lines of communication.

Regarding cyber support, our county Bug Bounty program found 18 moderate vulnerabilities in county systems, which was, thankfully, under expectations. By identifying these specific vulnerabilities, we have been able to update our training modules and educational outreach around cybersecurity, placing more focus on these vulnerabilities and mitigating similar risks in other counties.

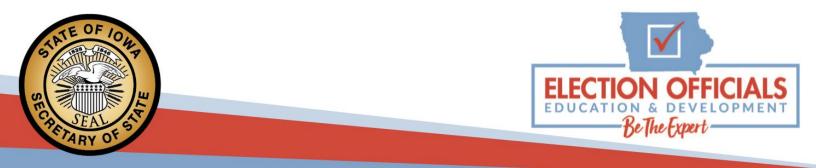
County election officials have also taken advantage of communications support, and we have seen key media placements in many local newspapers from county auditors who leverage press release templates. Now, more counties have a social media presence and share trusted information with their constituents. Our staff has also been able to support a number of county officials in reactive media requests, assisting them in drafting statements and responses to a number of press questions. This includes crisis communications support around election day – a few county auditors leveraged the holding statements provided by our team to keep the public apprised of situations that came up on election day. Proactive communications support, from press release templates to social media posts, has allowed county auditors to join our choir of trusted sources for election information seamlessly and helped us spread critical information to the public.

This program has reinforced to lowans the importance of turning to trusted sources and election experts for election-related information. Proactive communications support and training opportunities further position local election offices as THE election experts.

As members of NASS, we have all made efforts to position Secretaries of State and election commissioners as trusted sources and election experts. Our comprehensive training initiatives for local election officials have positioned county auditors as trusted sources, allowing them to "Be the Expert" in their communities.

These efforts have been instrumental in reshaping the narrative around elections within our state, helping reinforce our office as a trusted source, combatting misinformation, and further positioning our office and county election officials as trusted election experts.

We have seen trust in elections build over the last few years. Notably, in 2024, the Iowa Poll found that 91% of Iowans trusted Iowa elections and 75% trusted U.S. elections – an increase from 2022, when 65% of Iowans indicated they had trust in America's election process.



SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

District Auditor Training Presentation Slides

Welcome ELECTION & DEVELOPMENT BeThe Expert SOS Introductions • Purpose of district trainings Housekeeping ELECTION OFFICIALS Be The Expert T Voter R Step 1: Select the election for which the vote has requested an absentee ballot **District Training Agenda** 02/19/203 Step 2: Enter the Date that the ab Administration Cybersecurity Primary Election Administration Housekeeping Step 3:C ring list ALLof the re- General Election Communications Training Updates • Lunch! Step 4: Save the record ELECTION OFFICIALS Be The Expert ELECTION OFFICIALS Be The Expert \checkmark **Primary Election** Tips to Counter Misinformation UOCAVAs · Assisting overseas civilians • Do not amplify mis-, dis-, mal-information by repeating falsehoods. Postmark guarantee • Do not ignore and hope they will go away. · Irrelevant if using private delivery services • Proactively share the trusted facts. Repeat the truth, over and over May need to enter a post office and request a postmark • again. Voters will know who to turn to when they have questions. Postmarked Monday, June 3 and received by your office noon on • Monday, June 10 ELECTION OFFICIALS Be The Expert ELECTION OFFICIALS Be The Expert





Media Coverage of Auditors National Voter Registration

Hampton Chronicle Publication Date: 09/13/2023 Page Number: 006	A CONTRACTOR	Akron Hometowner Publication Date: 09/08/2023 Page Number: 006
Title: Franklin County Auditor Flint Encourages Iowans to Participate in N Author: Size : 25 Inches Sq. Hampton, IA. Circulation: 2895 Keywords: National Association of Secretaries of State – Paul Pate – S		Title: Pyrnouth County Auditor encourages Iowans to participate in National Voter Regis Author: Size : 28 Inches Sq. Akron.IA. Circulation: 1577 Keywords: National Association of Secretaries of State – Paul Pate – Secretary Of State – A
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Media Coverage of Auditors Post Election Audit

Clarksville Star Publication Date: 11/16/2023 Page Number: 001		Sun Courier Publication Date: 11/17/2023 Page Number: 002
uthor: ize : 22 Inches Sq Clarksville,	iostelection audit in Butler County to ensure integrity of IA Circulation: 1068 Paul Pate ~ Secretary Of State ~ VoterReadylowa.go	f t Title: Auditor Deters conducts post-election audit in Grundy Co. to ensure integrity of th Author: Size : 24 Inches Sq. Gladbrock,IA. Circulation: 783 Keywords: election integrity ~ Paul Pate ~ Secretary Of State ~ VoterReadyIowa.gov
Auditor's Office conducts post- election audit in Butler County to ensure integrity of the vote	AUDITOR FROM PAGE 1 "I'd like to thank the courty and/tors and the elec- tion/dirical and poll workers across the state for their hard work, this year," Secretary Pale said. "We conducted an- other fuir, genere election in	Auditor Deters conducts post-election audit in Grundy Co. to ensure integrity of the vote Grundy Contry Audior Bonda Contry Letrosonder. Grundy Contry Audior Bonda Detersonder.
ALLISON - Builer Cruns ty Additor Grane conducted successful post-election and of the November City-School election on No: 9, 2023. Bal- lots in the 2-4. (Clarksville precine twee hand-counted by interface the totals reported by interface the totals reported by the Scientary of State follow- ing Election Dy. The Mayon ing Election Dy. The Mayon ing Election Dy. The Mayon ing Election Dy. The Mayon interface and the Notion Science for Courty Science State. Build for Grane State follow- ing and the Notion Science State for Gaussian Science Science Science Science for Gaussian Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Science Scien	lowa, and these hand-count andis are one more way we ensure the integrity of the vote?" Every ballot tabulator in lowa undergoes a public your count test to constrain your count test to constrain your count test to constrain all 99 counties following each election. For the Chys-School Election, one randomy cho- sen precine tim each count- y is required to conduct a post-election addit to verify the machine count. For more information about election security in about election security in spost-field security and post-field security in about election security in about election security in post-field security in approximation about the voting process is smalible at Woterfleady-lowagov.	ed a successful post-elec. County Auditor Rhonda R. Deters. Thehand count ber City-School election no November 13, 2023. Ballots in Precinct 7 were hand-countid by election matched the totals report. The precinct vas ram. and it is especial each election. For the system, and it is especial each election. For the system, and it is especial each election. For the troot after use fact. The precinct vas ram. Tal like to thank the county is addition works arous the state for Mayor in Grundy Centter was audited. The results workers across the state for Mayor in Grundy Centter was audited. The results matched the proof of the the audit is proof of the e- lability of the election sys-

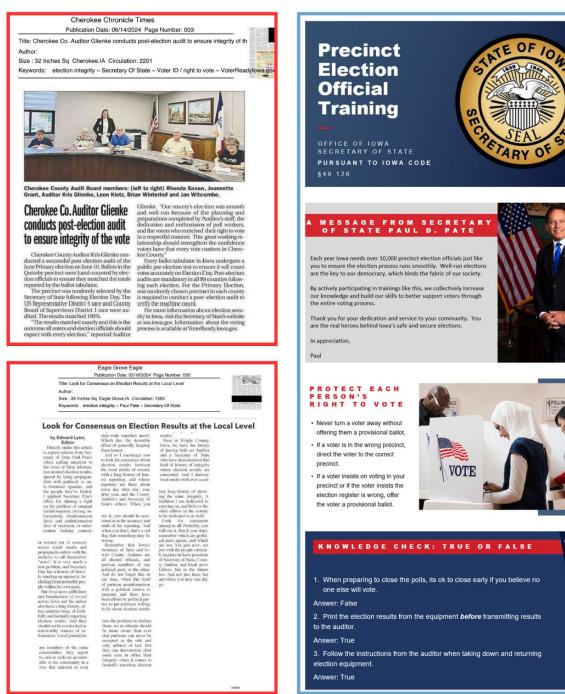




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PEO Training Slides

Media Coverage Auditors Trusted Information







Swatting Preparedness Handout from Auditor Trainings

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How to prepare for swatting

- 1. Ensure your elections office establishes a dialogue with a local police or sheriff representative who may be designated as the elections liaison
- 2. Provide the liaison with the names and home addresses of election officials and key or higher risk staff, specific locations of voting centers and counting facilities, and any other relevant election-related locations within your jurisdiction.
- 3. Ask law enforcement if it is possible to have a flag put into their computer-aided dispatch system to alert 911 staff and responding officers of the nature of those locations, with a specific note about concerns regarding swatting.
- 4 Provide police and 911 staff with 24-hour cell phone numbers for critical elections staff who can be reached in the event of possible false reports.
- 5. Encourage police to confer with federal authorities such as the FBI or DHS on current trends in swatting as well as ways to spot indicators of swatting.
- 6. Establish protocols for communication between elections staff to share information in the event that one or more jurisdictions experience a swatting call so that others can be alerted to be on the lookout for similar incidents.
- 7. Train your staff to remain calm in the event of such an episode and consult with your local police on an area-specific protocol to quickly and succinctly relay to responding officers that everyone is safe.
- 8. Maintain best protocols to ensure security plans remain confidential for the safety of the public.

What is swatting?

Swatting is a term used to describe criminal activity by an individual or group who knowingly provides false information to police suggesting that a threat exists at a particular location so that police respond with tactical units, or what is commonly known as a SWAT (special weapons and tactics) team. Knowingly calling 911 with a false report can result in a felony charge in Iowa

Who are potential targets of swatting?

Election officials, election offices, and polling locations could be potential targets of swatting-especially in the lead-up to an election. Swatting attacks that lead law enforcement to election offices or polling locations have the potential to disrupt the election process, including preventing individuals from voting and potentially decreasing confidence in the electoral process.

Common indicators of swatting

- 1. A swatter may block or spoof their phone number using an uninitialized cell phone displaying a 911-area code so the ANI/ALI may show all 9s or 0s instead of a phone number, or it may show a 661-area code Skype call, another frequent method swatters use
- The call comes in on a non-emergency line and shows as blocked, unavailable, or private. Some swatters spoof the phone number to match the address they are swatting if the victim has a landline phone
- The background noise does not match the scenario. In an incident where someone is shot or there are hostages, there is likely to be background noise
- 4. Most swatters are not in the same city, state, or country, so the caller is unfamiliar with local street, business, or city name pronunciations
- 5. Finally, almost all swatters say these three things: they are armed, they are suicidal, and they are going to kill any responders that come to the scene.

Protect yourself from swatting

- 1. Do not post any information that could allow someone to determine your location in any public place.
- Do not use geo-tagged photos on social media
- 3. Hide your I.P. address by using a proxy
- Review your online information, know its location, and remove any personal information.

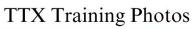


Your next steps: Please report any incidents or suspicious activity to local law enforcement.





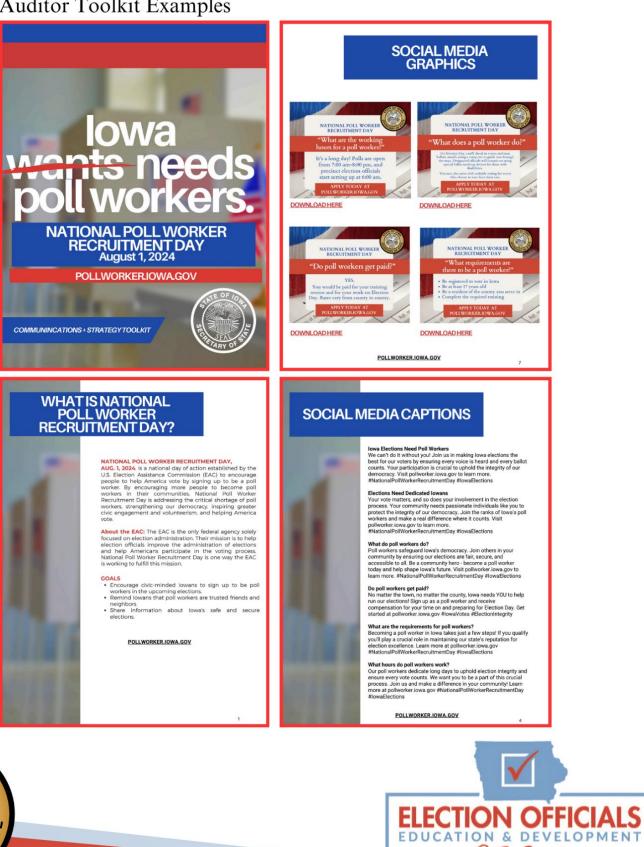








Be The Expert



Auditor Toolkit Examples

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Toolkit Press Release Sample for Auditors

BEST PRACTICES WORKING WITH THE MEDIA



- Update the highlighted sections in templates to reflect your specific office.
- There is a section to add a quote as well. This is an opportunity to be personal and specific about the importance of voter registration and participation.
- It is a best practice to copy and paste the press release into the body of the email.
- Keep emails to press short. You can include an introductory email before the press release to the reporter, or you can simply just send the press release with no additional commentary. Reporters (especially local reporters) get A LOT of these and it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. As a rule, all written outreach should be succinct and easy to read.
- If you have photos that are relevant to the topic, include those. If not, you can include photos of your team, a headshot, etc.
- If you are sending to more than one member of the media, it is important to either send separate emails or blind copy (BCC) the members of the media, so the emails are kept private.
- For additional resources, contact the Communications Director for the Iowa Secretary of State, Ashley Hunt at Ashley.Hunt@sos.lowa.gov.

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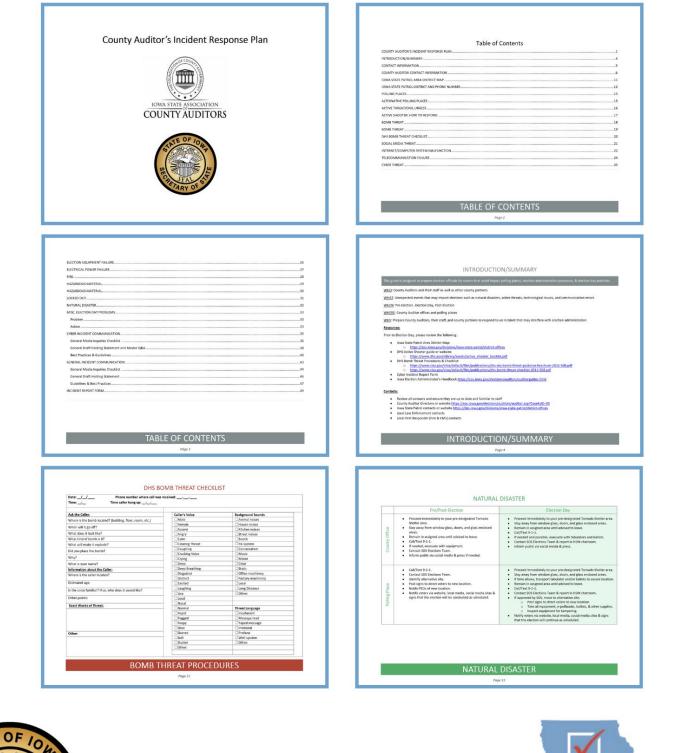




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ELECTION & DEVELOPMENT BeThe Expert

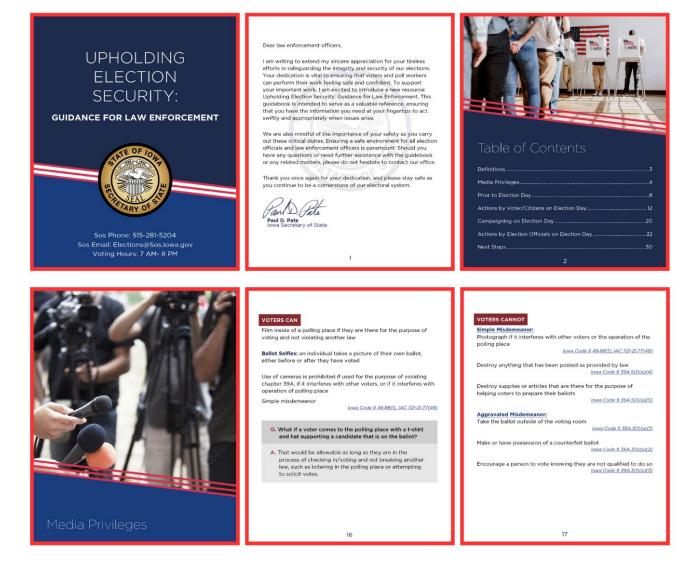
Incident Response Plan Auditor Training Template Examples



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2024 Law Enforcement Handbook







SUPPORTING LINKS

Sample Media coverage from press release templates

National Voter Registration Day

- Akron Homeowner <u>Plymouth County Auditor encourages Iowans to participate in</u> <u>National Voter Registration Month</u>
- Bayard News Gazette September Voter Registration Month
- Corning Adams Co Free Press <u>September is Voter Registration Month</u>
- Jefferson Herald <u>Greene County Auditor encourages Iowans to participate in National</u> <u>Voter Registration Month</u>
- Leon Journal Reporter <u>Secretary Pate and County Auditor Hoover Celebrate Iowa Poll</u> <u>Workers</u>
- Vinton Eagle <u>Benton County Auditor encourages Iowans to participate in National Voter</u> <u>Registration Month</u>
- Hampton Chronicle <u>Franklin County Auditor Flint Encourages Iowans to Participate in</u> <u>National Voter Registration Month</u>

Post-Election Audits

- <u>Allison Butler Co Star Journal</u>
- <u>Clarksville Star</u>
- <u>Cresco Time Plain Dealer</u>
- <u>Parkersburg Eclipse News Review</u>
- <u>Grundy County Register</u>
- <u>Greene Recorder</u>
- <u>Graettinger Times</u> <u>Gladbrook Sun Courier</u>

TrustedInfo OpEd

- Eagle Grove Eagle
- <u>Accompanying editorial by editor</u>
- <u>Sigourney News Review</u>

Poll Worker Recruitment

Hampton Chronicle - <u>Secretary Pate and Katy Flint, Franklin Co. Auditor, Celebrate Iowa</u>
 <u>Poll Workers</u>

Examples of communications toolkits

- Poll Worker Recruitment
- <u>General Election Communications</u>



