

Travis County Clerk Elections Study Group
Break-out Group Responses - May 6, 2009

Question 1

A. Generally, what is your impression regarding the way elections are conducted in Travis County?

Did your view change after you received the introductory information at the first meeting or after the tour?

Listing of positive and negative impressions follows.

Positive Impressions

- After tour, greater confidence in levels of security and experience of staff
- System good at avoiding human error
- Speed of results
- Transparency of operations (Travis County)
- Complexity of process, magnitude of details
- Good customer service
- Great/tight procedures used by County
- Very good (from an election judge)
- Impressed; great to see behind the scenes
- Very dedicated staff
- Responsive
- Ethical, helpful staff
- Tour helped clarify process first-hand
- Process is good, no change necessary
- Amazed that elections come off without major problems
- Organized professional staff
- Very well run, professional comparatively
- Amazing level of complexities
- Perception of operations was good and got better (particularly considering number of regulations and jurisdictions involved)
- Good public information
- Good Early Voting locations
- Good materials, information, personnel
- Effective use of laptops
- Looking to improve
- Procedures/training manuals

Question 1A (cont.)

Negative Impressions

- Gap in public confidence/understanding
- Perception that votes are not counted accurately
- Perception that some are out to cheat system
- Validity questioned
- Hacker vulnerability
- Need for back-up
- Lack of paper trail leads to voter confidence problem
- General fears about e-voting
- Can't see central tabulator on Election Night
- No real way to do recount other than by running ballot images
- Don't know if ballot image reflects actual vote count
- Security
- Buzzwords and jargon
- Defense and depth - robustness what happens
- Too many elections
- Lack of confidence/understanding/history
- Perceived need to get count by 10 p.m. deadline (pressure to provide results to media)
- Readability of screen
- Technology to help judges (size of type, etc)
- Usability
- Difficulty with joint primaries (sharing JBC)
- Need to recruit more pct judges (aging workers)
- Failures for some elections
- Voter confusion with technology
- Complicated polling place set up and break down for election workers

B. Please list at least three positive aspects and three negative aspects concerning the conduct of elections in Travis County. (Those with numbers were ranked 1,2,3)

Ranked Positive Aspects

- Great customer service for entities
- Tight Procedures
- Diversity of volunteers and staff

- Well organized
- Clear Instructions
- Effective follow-up

- Early Voting very efficient and significantly reduces pressure on EDay
- Increased confidence in physical security
- Transparent process
- Create web tour to help public understand process
- Accessibility for persons with disabilities

- Strong security efforts
- System good at avoiding unintentional human error
- Speed of counting and reporting
- Thorough training of workers
- Transparency of operations

Ranked Negative Aspects

- Observers can't see computer screens/results coming in on election night
- Not enough public awareness of how elections are run in Travis County
- No real way to do a recount

- Relationship with State Legislature
- Complexity
- Too many elections

- Perception gap; reality vs. lack of understanding
- No corresponding paper or other physical proof of ballot
- Media needs for outcomes can affect process

- Lack of paper trail
- EV workers often slow
- Wasted paper
- Lack of large paper ballots makes it easy to buy and sell votes
- No such thing as transparent microchip

Question 2

A. Considering your findings in Question 1, along with the concerns you believe are important to Travis County voters, compile a list of issues that you think this study group needs to cover regarding the voting system used in Travis County.

List of Issues Study Group needs to cover

ACCESSIBILITY

- Accessibility
- Usability of equipment and accessible for all
- Ballot format issues
- Ease of voting and registration

ACCURACY

- Accuracy

AUDITS/ RECOUNTS

- Independent verification of election results
- Verification/auditability with transparency and intent
- Ability to do a recount
- New system - can see how a recount could catch error
- Accuracy/recounts - paper/visual
- 2 copies of tallies
- Voter verifiable paper trail system
- Complexities of hand recounts

ELECTRONIC VOTING - GENERAL

- With paper system, a few people could cheat with it.
With an electronic system, everyone would need to collude to cheat.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Wise use of taxpayer's dollars
- Economically feasible
- Reduction of costs

GENERAL

- Clear set of rules
- Do No Harm

INTENT OF VOTER

- Intent
- Ballot verification

Question 2A (cont.)

POLLING PLACES

- Facilities Usability

POLLWORKERS

- Reinforcement of safety steps to an election judge
- Early voting administration

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

- How to quantify and Increase public confidence in election results
- Improve confidence in system (some voters perceive system to be hackable)

PUBLIC INFORMATION & EDUCATION

- Voter Communication and Education
- Accessibility. Public education with permanent staff to address issues
- Are there procedural problems that depress voter turnout
- Options to change perception (citizen academy)
- Less voting polls

SECURITY

- Understanding security technology
- Achieving national standards for election systems
- eSlate ports now sealed
- Seems more secure

SPEED OF RESULTS

- Efficiency
- Are we sacrificing anything to get 10 p.m. results

TIMELINE FOR ACQUIRING NEW SYSTEM

- When would new equipment/system be purchased

TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency of the system
- Evidence of redundancy to ensure security of ballots & voting process
- How does an auditable system mitigate the perception/reality?
- Advantages /disadvantages of paper ballots or records

VOTER REGISTRATION

- Voter registration and legislative changes

Question 2

B. Rank the items on your list in terms of importance on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important.

Group 1

1. Verification/auditability with transparency and intent
2. Usability of equipment and access for all
3. Understanding security technology
4. Voter communication and education
5. Wise use of taxpayer money

Group 2

1. Verification/auditability
2. Usability of equipment and accessible for all
3. Understanding security technology
4. Voter Communication and Education
5. Wise use of taxpayer's dollars
6. Address low turnout rates

Group 3

1. Do No Harm (Accuracy, accessibility, timeliness)
2. Address voter distrust. Improve comprehensive confidence in system (some voters perceive system to be hack able) options to change perception (citizen academy) How does an auditable system mitigate the perception/reality?
3. Timing/technology change. When would new equipment/system be purchased
4. Accessibility. Public education with permanent staff to address issues
5. Voter verifiable paper trail system

Group 4

1. Accuracy, accessibility, ballot verification
2. Efficiency, clear set of rules, transparency of the system
3. Ballot format issues, audit ability
4. Economically feasible

Group 5

1. Increase public confidence; measure and quantify.
 - a. How to quantify and Increase public confidence in election results
 - b. Are there fundamental risks with electronic voting?
 - c. Advantages and disadvantages of paper ballots or records.
 - d. Complexities of hand recounts
2. Independent verification of election results.
3. Reduction of costs. Are we sacrificing anything to get 10 p.m. results?
4. Are there procedural problems that depress voter turnout?
5. Achieving national standards for election systems

Most Contentious or controversial issues discussed by the groups

- Cost/benefits of recounts
- Finite resources/economy of scale
- Voter education issues
- Perception/public confidence/verifiability
- Skepticism of electronic voting
- Fear/mistrust predate electronic voting
- Should voter education focus on personal experience or systemic/infrastructure?
- Proactive outreach
- Separate out precinct/entity boundaries from voting systems
- Independent experts to test security technology issues
- Does voter education work?
- Ballot verification (by machine or voter)
- Common language - use of terms
- What does voter education mean? Values based (civic duty), cognitive (how to), trust (believes system works)
- Language barriers
- Proprietary vs. open source software
- Voter understanding, perception, expectations
- Voter verification is a continuum, not mutually exclusive
- Administrative<-----> mechanical

Individual comments

Is VVPT still relevant?

The introduction on our first meeting gave us a lot of information as to how complex the system of running elections.

The tour was of all the different steps that the election system has in place to secure the ballots and to trust that your ballots were counted

Money for educating the public including schools and senior citizens

List of Concerns of Past Study Groups

- One system for all voters regardless of disabilities or first language
- System that efficiently provides ability to offer ballot by-mail, early voting, and election day services
- System that provides accurate counts
 - Ability to determine the intent of the voter
- System that provides clear, easy method for voters to cast ballot
- System that has an accurate tabulation method
- System that provides the ability to test the accuracy of methods used in the administration of the election
- System that is auditable
- System that provides timely results
- System that allows for security and chain of custody procedures during key times of the By-Mail, Early Voting, and Election Day processes:
 - Ballot preparation
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) prior to delivery
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) during delivery
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) while in use by voters
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) at polling location after polls close
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) during delivery to Central location
 - Voted and Non-voted Ballots (equipment) at Central Count
- System that gives poll watchers, observers, and members of the public the opportunity to view what is being done during high risk points in the process
- System that provides the ability to administer each election in a consistent manner
- System that contains efficiencies that allow the best use of taxpayer money