



Operational Tabletop Exercise Guide

For Facilitators

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Operational Tabletop Exercise Overview

About a TTX

A Tabletop Exercise (TTX) is an activity designed to simulate real-life situations in order to test the responses of a particular organization or team in an informal, low-risk environment. TTXs are used to clarify roles and responsibilities and to identify additional mitigation and preparedness needs. The exercise should result in **action plans** for continued improvement of existing plans. The scenarios for this TTX are taken from actual situations encountered by election officials. Knowing there is a likelihood that these events may occur again, election officials must exercise how they would respond to and deal with these situations.

Purpose

An underpin to election administration is planning. The purpose of this TTX is to allow participants to respond to simulated, real-life situations and evaluate whether the plans in place within their office or organization are sufficient for mitigating the issue. Each separate session of the exercise will present a new scenario for groups to respond to.

Ultimately, each exercise session will:

- Require participants to point to standard procedures or other written protocols they have in place that would help mitigate the issue.
- Require participants to point to crisis communications plans they may have to help address the error and quell public mistrust.
- Allow participants to learn about existing resources that may be used to build or enhance their own:
 - Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs),
 - Crisis Communications Plans;
 - Incident Response Plans,
 - Continuity of Operation Plans (COOPs), and
 - Training Programs.

Participant Experience

Participants in this TTX will be grouped into teams. Each team will have a facilitator who will guide the exercise. The exercise is broken into sessions. In each session, participants will encounter a new situation. At times, participants will be instructed to work individually to respond to questions or provide information about their own experience. Typically, this is followed up by group discussion on the individual responses. Each exercise session provides

Operational Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide

participants with an opportunity to discuss and respond to the different scenarios collaboratively as a team. Sessions will vary in length as guided by the facilitator or the exercise lead.

Each session of the exercise contains three separate components:

- Assessment, Investigation and Response - *provides participants the opportunity to detail what they feel may have occurred, what they would do to determine the root cause and the steps taken to properly respond to each situation.*
- Operational Procedures and Protocols - *participants will be encouraged to look at the plans and procedures already in place to determine points of improvement to ensure resilience and preparedness.*
- Communications Strategy - *participants will be challenged to respond using crisis communication strategies, such as identifying who the stakeholders are and developing holding statements, talking points and press releases.*

Each participant will act in their real-life role. The responses proposed by an individual may be shaped by their perspective and involvement if such a situation occurs in real life. There are no improper responses. Participants are encouraged to be open and engage in the various discussions.

The situation details presented in each session may not always resemble the real-world situation participants are used to. Participants are encouraged to own the situation as they work through the various questions and activities.

Participant Takeaway

Connected to the purpose outlined above, participants will take away a renewed desire to ensure documented plans, procedures and processes are in place to effectively manage the challenges they will face. The sharing of ideas and reflection on those conversations that take place during the exercise will urge examination and evaluation of the current state of the individual's organization.

About this Guide

This freely available guide provides *suggested* methods for responding to the various fictional scenarios presented. These materials are for training purposes only and should be adapted to meet the election preparation needs, policies and laws of the participants' jurisdiction. These methods are part of an exercise and not intended to be incorporated into any plans or accepted as policy. Participants should carefully evaluate each suggestion, and election officials must thoroughly consider and vet every potential remediation or response method before incorporating it into their plans.

Setting the Stage

Below is an example of a non-election related situation. Review the situation details below and then review the sample response to the questions in each of the three sections.

Situation Details

Date

Thanksgiving Day (after the noon turkey dinner)

Setting Details

Fresh snow has fallen on the ground and the trails in the state park are lightly covered in a 2” blanket of snow. It is snowing a bit and the wind has picked up a little. The temperature is about 36 degrees Fahrenheit.

Situation Details

The Thanksgiving meal has ended and you are stuffed. It is 1:30 p.m. You can hardly move but convince yourself that you need to get out and exercise. Same goes for Buddy, your lazy three-year-old Golden Retriever. You know the sun will set around 4:30 p.m. so you better get going. The rest of the family is napping so you leave a note and head out.

The trails in the nearby state park weave through a thick forest of coniferous and deciduous trees: primarily a combination of cedar, oak and douglas fir. Animal traffic is heavy as evidenced by the abundance of small and large animal tracks. The state park is only a short 15-minute drive away. You doubt anyone else will be around at the park, so Buddy is going off leash. You also leave your phone behind in the car. You enter a trail that is a three-mile loop.

While normally pretty good off the leash, Buddy is all energy and does not stay close. Luckily, the fresh blanket of snow helps you keep track of the rambunctious fellow so you are not worried. You are about halfway and realize that you cannot hear the pouncing footsteps and huffing and puffing any more. You also realize that the trail has less snow than it did earlier and it's more difficult to tell where Buddy would have gone.

You are getting a little worried after repeated calls and begin to lightly jog yelling “Buddy” frantically now. You stop – stabbed with the pain of a side ache after eating the better half of a turkey.

You continue to walk and call his name knowing that he will come back to you. But he doesn't. You finally reach the car just before dark.

Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. What actions do you take once you get to the car?

Call for help using the cell phone you left behind. Contact the park ranger to see if they can help in any way. Also, contact your family in case they want to come and help look for Buddy, perhaps with his favorite treats.

2. Who else is impacted by this issue (aside from you and Buddy)?

Your family, the park ranger and other animals

3. Knowing time is not on your side, list other actions you can immediately take.

- Honk the horn on the car hoping Buddy hears it and comes to you
- Call friends that may come help with the search
- Drive on the service roads in the park and yell “Buddy” and “Treat” out the window
- Using a map, determine where the search should be focused when others arrive
- Hike the trail again with a flashlight (if you have one) and look again
- Put a message on a local “lost pet” Facebook page

Operational Procedures and Protocol

1. List what you could have done to prevent losing track of Buddy or help you possibly find him quicker.

- Kept the leash on Buddy
- Took your phone so you could have called for help earlier
- Trained Buddy to stay closer
- Purchased a GPS-tracking device for Buddy’s collar
- Obtained a map of the park and surrounding areas
- Familiarize yourself with animal tracks so you can better recognize Buddy’s
- Kept Buddy at home
- Put a bell or other sound device on Buddy’s collar so you can hear where he is at all times
- Ensured that Buddy is wearing a collar with identification tags so if he is found someone can contact you or your family
- Microchipped Buddy

2. What resources exist to help you in preparing for situations like this?

- Visit <https://www.americanhumane.org/> or <https://www.petsforpatriots.org/> for tips on what to do
- A state park trail map which sometimes will include emergency contacts for the park service

Communications Strategy

1. **What stakeholders or partners should you contact?**

- Contact your family and friends for assistance
- Contact law enforcement or park rangers to ask for assistance
- Post a message on social media asking for assistance
- Email local veterinarians and animal shelters to be on the lookout

2. **If Buddy isn't immediately found, what information do you have readily available that would help in finding him?**

A picture and description of Buddy that could be sent to nearby animal shelters and/or published to social media

Session 1: Staffing Shortages

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

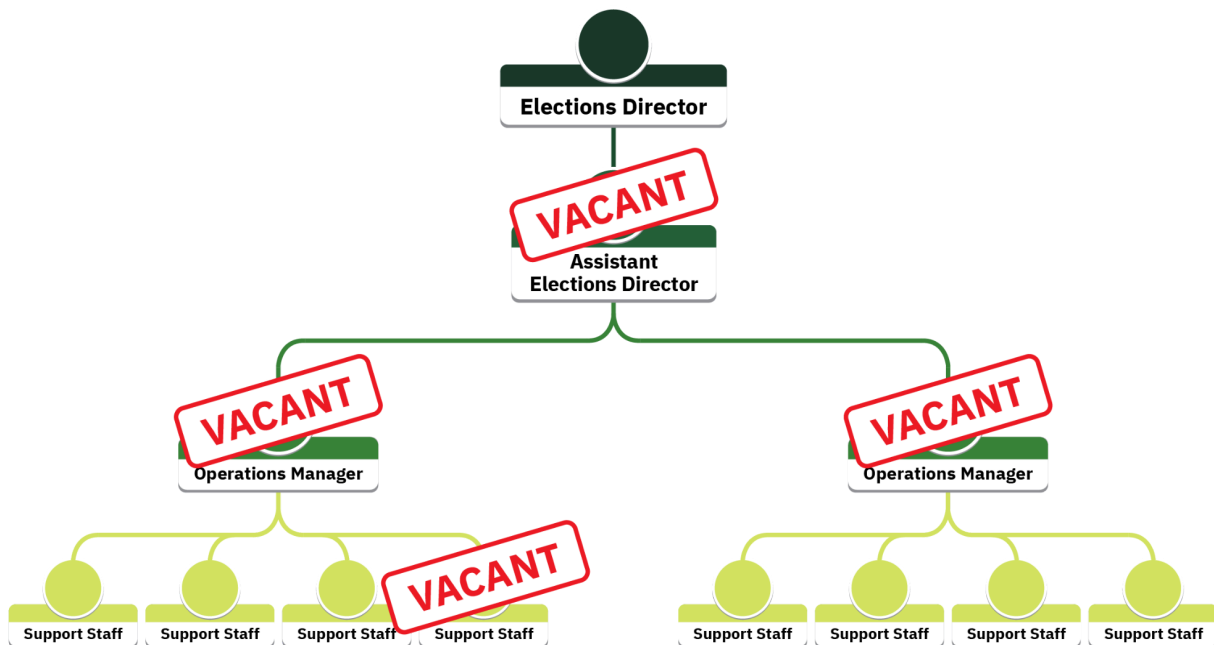
43 days before Election Day (EDay-43)

Jurisdiction Details

The election office is staffed by 12 individuals consisting of a director, an assistant director, two operations managers and eight support staff.

Scenario Detail

Morale has fallen in the election office. The pressure of the upcoming election has begun to weigh on staff, many of whom are new to their roles. This has resulted in arguments and conflict within the office. Further, one staff member frequently initiates discussions about politics in the office, making others uncomfortable. In the past 10 days, four employees have left the office: the two managers (the longest-tenured staff), the assistant director and a staff member. To complicate matters, the managers who left were responsible for recruiting and training temporary staff, some of whom only worked because of the relationship they had with the managers. Of the 30 temporary staff usually hired for a general election, only 10 have agreed to help.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. List the potential consequences of staff departures on operations.

Facilitator Notes

Possible consequences may include:

- Failing to meet critical deadlines
- Loss of knowledge to perform certain tasks
- Decrease in office morale
- Increased pressure on existing staff
- Appearance of mismanagement or problems within the workplace

2. List the possible reasons for staff turnover below. Place an “X” by the reasons that might be preventable.

Facilitator Notes

Possible reasons may include:

- Poor management (X)
- Salary too low (X)
- Hostile work environment (X)
- Job-related stress or fatigue (X)
- Staff do not feel safe (X)
- Other job opportunity

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. For the reasons above marked with an “X”, what are some preventative measures?”

Facilitator Notes

Possible improvements may include:

- Poor management (X) - Management training, consultant to help with management
- Salary too low (X) - Increase pay
- Hostile work environment (X) - Determine the source of issue working with HR - If an individual is a problem, address the issue with the employee, place the employee on a performance improvement plan and/or terminate
- Job-related stress or fatigue (X) - Offer mental health programs or additional time off - ensure staff are sharing responsibilities as evenly as possible
- Staff do not feel safe (X) - Work with jurisdiction leadership and law enforcement to train staff on precautions they can take, assess and improve workplace security, increase budget to implement protective measures

2. At least one staff member commented that they left because of poor management and the lack of control management had over the employees. How can the director or senior leadership improve those areas?

Facilitator Notes

Possible improvements may include:

- Setting clear written expectations for staff
- Meeting regularly with staff and set an agenda for any meeting
- Taking an in-person or online management class or providing mentorship
- Performing assessments
- Asking for employee input to improve and enhance processes when possible
- Holding a staff retreat
- Encouraging cross-training
- Providing for time off to allow staff to decompress

- 3. Another staff member mentioned leaving because they did not feel as if safety was made a priority. What are some of the measures already taken (in your office) to ensure staff safety is made a priority?**

Facilitator Notes

Possible improvements may include:

- Installing security cameras to monitor the exterior and interior of the office
- Training staff on personal social media hygiene to prevent doxxing
- Ensuring adequate lighting in the parking lot/garage
- Advocating for a buddy system when leaving the office
- Providing hotel accommodations to staff if safety is threatened
- Working with law enforcement and private security to provide security services
- Inviting law enforcement partners (e.g. the county sheriff) to visit and discuss security with staff.

- 4. Note the timing of the staff departures above in the “Situation Details.” Does this change things? How would staff leaving a week before Election Day impact your operations?**

Facilitator Notes

Timing does play a factor since there are typically more responsibilities to carry out and less time to perform tasks. Staff departures right before an election would ultimately decrease office morale, result in mistakes and put more pressure on existing staff.

5. List actions leaders (supervisors and managers) should take to strengthen office morale in a stressful environment.

Facilitator Notes

Possible actions include:

- Listening to staff - show that you are listening and make sure your team knows you're there to help however you can
- Creating a safe, supportive work culture - work with your team to create a positive work environment
- Empowering top performers to make decisions - empower standout employees to own certain tasks or projects, displaying their leadership skills and creative problem solving
- Recognizing achievements - Increase employee recognition, celebrate your employees' achievements and ensure they are communicated throughout the organization
- Building more flexibility into the work environment when possible
- Planning engaging and optional activities - some people enjoy the social and team-building aspects of work and get recharged by the opportunity to get to know their colleagues better

6. What resources do you need to make these actions possible? Which stakeholders can assist?

Facilitator Notes

Possible resources include:

- Dedicating time to focus on your staff
- Working with HR to assist with employee development programs and recognition
- Discussions with decision-makers about flexible work schedules, which may allow staff to balance personal and work time more effectively
- Working with those who allocate the budget to obtain funds to employ adequate staff around crucial times

- 7. Think about your current cross-training process in the office. Do staff members have exposure to tasks performed in other departments within the office? Are they trained to perform certain tasks? Are procedures for necessary tasks documented and up to date?**

*Individually, using the rating scale below, evaluate the strength of cross-training within your office with one being **no cross training takes place** and 10 being **all staff are trained in all areas - staff members can be fully interchangeable**.*

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

- 8. Based on the rating you gave, what improvements or changes can you make?**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss the rating they gave and to discuss how cross-training happens in their office. Some improvements or changes may be:

- Developing standard operating procedures to document functions performed by employees
- Providing purposeful and planned training to cross-train staff
- Fostering a team mentality and encourage staff to “share the load”

- 9. As a group, outline four to six cross-training best practices that participants, from experience, know work well.**

Facilitator Note

Encourage the group to share and record best practices. Ask participants who employ those best practices to share their experiences. Best practices may include:

- Exploring existing cross-training programs instead of starting from scratch - what will work best for your team: instructor-led, self-directed, on-the-job or a hybrid method of training?
- Asking staff about any prior cross-training - they may have great examples to help your team
- Developing a training manual to document roles, responsibilities and procedures
- Identifying redundancies to help streamline tasks
- Considering skills, talents, goals and interests when matching staff members with cross-training opportunities
- Establishing SMART goals and objectives

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- Regularly rotating cross-trained staff to ensure they retain their knowledge and abilities

Benefits may include:

- Better equipped to handle challenges
- More dynamic team
- Increased engagement with more variety in projects and tasks
- Preparation for future management roles

Communications Strategy

1. Staff turnover can lower the morale of the office. What can be communicated to the staff that remains?

Facilitator Notes

Communicate to staff the following:

- They are valued and you are committed to their success
- You are listening and want to hear their concerns
- Adjustments will be made as needed to produce a positive work environment
- There is still a mission - remind of the objectives ahead and desire to meet these as a team
- Remind them of the significance of their work

2. What are some approaches you can take to stabilize the environment?

Facilitator Notes

Some of the ideas already discussed may apply to this response as well.

3. The press contacted the director to ask about the staff turnover. List three to five talking points that would frame a response.

Facilitator Notes

Participants should list talking points borrowing from their own experiences. For example, staff departures may mean that voters would experience delays in receiving ballots or longer wait times when calling the office. The talking points should reassure the public that the office will be responsive and that information can always be obtained online.

Example talking points include:

1. Rest assured that our office will endeavor to continue to provide quality customer service to those who interact with our office.
2. We have built redundancy into our operations allowing staff to jump into other duties as needed.
3. Being an election official is very stressful. We are continuing to review our internal operations to best meet the needs of our staff and ensure a safe, positive workplace for our team of election professionals.

Session 2: Cybersecurity Event

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

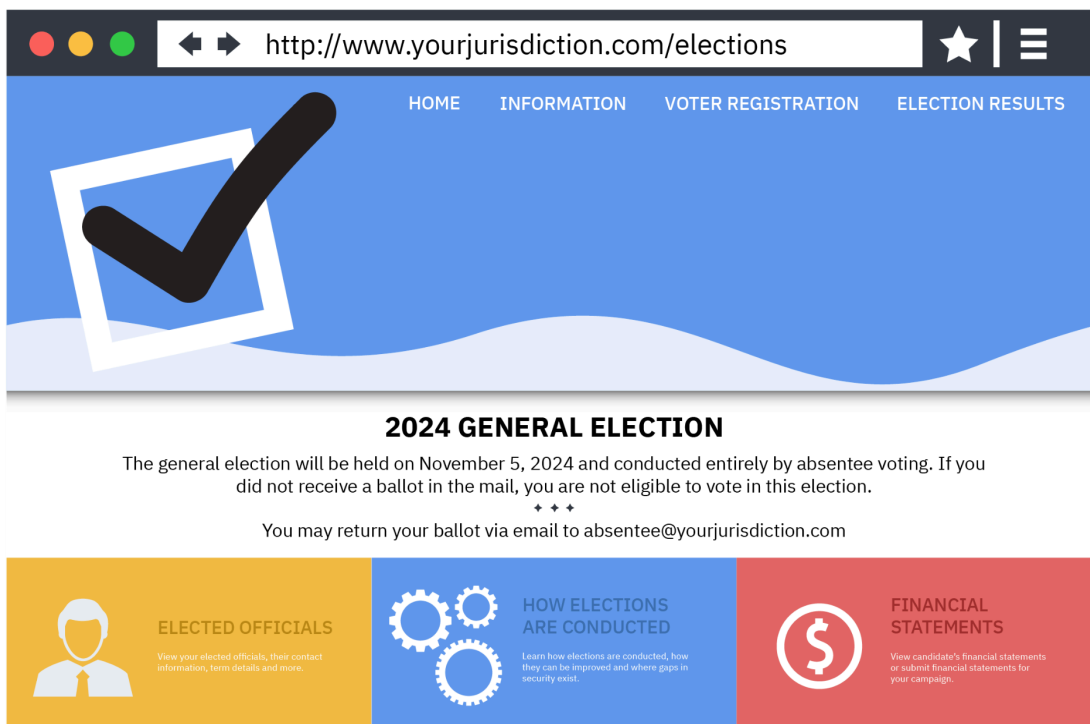
28 days before Election Day (EDay-28)

Jurisdiction Details

Since 2018, the election office has invested a lot of time and effort in improving its cyber and physical security. Assessments, upgrades to physical infrastructure, a new surveillance system, an upgraded voting system, employee cybersecurity training, more secure email and a segmented network were among the improvements.

Scenario Detail

The election division’s website is a part of the main jurisdictional domain. The election staff do not have direct administrative control of the site. Voters report that there is incorrect information currently displayed on the website. Staff review the website and cannot determine where the incorrect information is posted. The issue is reported to IT who determines that the domain being reported with incorrect information is named similarly to, but different from, the official site (also known as website spoofing).



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Individually, answer the questions below.

1a. Does your jurisdiction have a detailed plan for handling cybersecurity events?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1b. If yes to 1a, where is the plan located?

Facilitator Notes

The idea is that the plans are written down, distributed and readily available (printed in the event a network failure prevents you from accessing your plan). These plans should also be distributed to authorized stakeholders and exercised to ensure the plan can be executed as intended.

1c. If yes to 1a, are staff familiar with and trained on the plan?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1d. If yes to 1a, is the plan, including contact information, printed?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1e. If no to 1a, what do you need to create a plan? Check all that apply:

- Time
- A template
- Money
- Someone to do it
- Other: _____

2. What would be your immediate response if this issue happened to you?

Facilitator Notes

Individual activity - ask participants to record how they would respond.

Responses include:

- Execute your incident response plan
- Contact IT
- Inform the chief election official (SOS)

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- Contact a cyber insurance company
- Contact law enforcement
- Meet with staff and other stakeholders to discuss operational continuity
- Determine the scope of the issue and communicate with the press/public as needed

3. Someone from the general public brought this issue to your attention. How else could the website issue have been detected and/or prevented?

Facilitator Notes

Possible responses include:

- Assigning employees to periodically check critical systems, such as ballot tracking systems, websites, election result reporting applications, UOCAVA ballot marking systems, etc., to ensure they are operating correctly - this could be assigned to temporary staff
- Using/purchasing a service that will periodically check for website response (Uptrends, Uptime Robot, etc.) or pursuing more costly options that also offer application performance monitoring (APM) capabilities, such as Dynatrace or AppDynamics
- Purchasing similar domain names
- Utilizing Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC)
- Using a widget on the website for the public to report issues via email and assign staff to monitor incoming emails
- Using a .gov domain

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. How does having an incident response plan in place help with response to these situations? List out benefits of having an incident response plan.

Facilitator Notes

The plan will:

- Provide contact information for who needs to be contacted first
- Identify backup resources that should be utilized
- Provide communication templates to help frame a response

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- Provide guidelines for preventing the issue from spreading or affecting other systems
- Identify the stakeholders and how/when to engage them
- Include an after-action review step to minimize the chances of a recurrence of the issue leading to the incident

2. Individually, answer the questions below.

What has your jurisdiction done to prevent website spoofing? List actions you have taken to reduce the vulnerability.

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to share the various tools or preventions that they have in place, including technical information that they may have available. The key is for participants to have an understanding even if they were not directly involved in the technical aspects of the mitigations put in place. One example of a preventative step is to purchase other domains that may be similar to their own, use a .gov domain and to have Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC) in place.

3. Who do you rely on for IT support? How often do you meet with them? What is your plan to review your present infrastructure, systems, etc., to ensure they are secure?

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to address and discuss the questions.

4. List the strategies your office uses to build solid cyber hygiene within the office to help prevent cybersecurity events from occurring.

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to address and discuss the questions.

Possible strategies include:

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- Providing cyber hygiene education to staff
- Performing phishing testing
- Placing signs and posters in the office to promote cyber hygiene

5. *As a group, discuss the responses to the questions above.*

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to discuss the responses to the questions above.

Communications Strategy

In the section below, we will practice using a holding statement and talking points.

A **holding statement** is used to acknowledge an issue, inform your audience that you are working on it, and indicate that you will release more information as soon as you can. Sometimes you may wait to issue a holding statement until the media or the public start calling with questions. At other times, you may need to issue a holding statement to make everyone aware of a crisis before you are ready to release specific details.

A **talking point** is used to shape the script and helps create the narrative you are attempting to convey. Think of it as a short script which can be used by you and others when a response is provided. It may have more details than a holding statement.

1. **Assume that the press is aware of this issue and that the office is still investigating it.**

Draft a holding statement below that can be provided to the press and that staff can use when providing information to the public.

Facilitator Notes

Example holding statement:

“Today we discovered an issue with a website providing incorrect election information to the public. Our office is actively engaged with our partners to correct this issue. Please visit our website at _____ for correct, up-to-date election information. We are dedicated to providing you with accurate information to allow you to engage in the voting process.”

2. The “fake website” issue is now known to the press. They are asking for a comment on camera. Describe your approach to addressing this situation.

2a. Who will give the interview?

(circle one)

IT | Elections | Both | Other: _____

2b. List out four to six talking points.

Facilitator Notes

Example talking points:

- We are actively combatting incorrect information by those who wish to confuse the voting process.
- We are engaged with our partners to correct this issue.
- Voters should always rely on the accurate, up-to-date election information available 24/7 on our website _____.
- Always reach out to your election office if you are not sure about something you read online. We are [your jurisdiction’s] best resource for trusted election information.
- Our community’s election infrastructure is secure.
- [State] election officials have dedicated significant resources to make sure our election infrastructure is safe.
- Please let us know if you have any questions.

2c. Will you draft a press release in this situation?

(circle one)

Yes | No

2d. Why or why not?

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to address and discuss the questions.

Session 3: Ballot Proofing Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

21 days before Election Day (EDay-21)

Jurisdiction Details

The jurisdiction has struggled with producing ballots that contain errors. Each election, about a third of all ballots cast are mail ballots. For the past two years, ballots have gone out to voters with some sort of mistake.

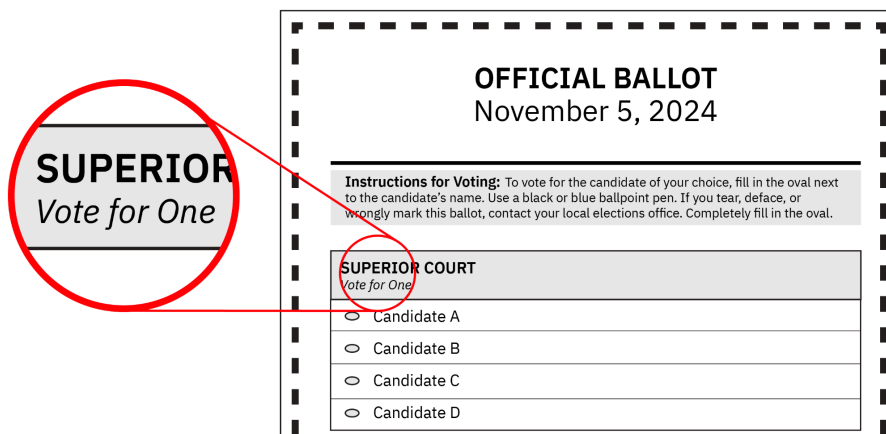
Here is a summary of the errors:

- A ballot printing error made it impossible to scan the ballots automatically. This required manually duplicating and rescanning 14,000 ballots. Another printer was acquired for future elections.
- Similar issue: Ballots were printed with the wrong ID code, preventing machines from reading them. The problem involved about 21,000 mail ballots, of which about one-third scanned properly.

The jurisdiction has approximately 150,000 registered voters and 10 staff.

Scenario Details

Once again, after the ballots were printed, the election office was informed of an error. For one of the superior court races, the “vote for” text should have read “vote for two.” However, it read “vote for one.” All ballots, including the ballots printed for Election Day, will need to be reprinted. Key community leaders are calling for immediate staff reform.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. What are possible explanations for the error?

Facilitator Notes

Possible explanations include:

- The office does not utilize a checklist when proofing to check for issues.
- The office did have a list, organized by election year, of offices that must appear on the ballot - or if there was a list, staff did not refer to it or it was incorrect.
- The office did not have the proper external partners review the office information for accuracy.
- The “vote for” text was not proofread at all.

2. What steps can you take to correct this situation?

Facilitator Notes

Possible steps include:

- Stopping further errant ballots from being sent out or produced
- Referring to your plans, including your crisis communications plan
- Contacting your legal counsel
- Meeting with your team to discuss communications with the public
- Carefully separating ballots that were already returned that contained the error
- Issuing a holding statement and/or issuing a press release
- Contacting the candidates affected to inform them of the error and the next steps the office is taking to resolve the issue
- Reproofing the entire ballot
- Verifying with all entities that the ballots are correct
- Providing instructions to voters on the proper actions to take
- Using your website and social media to present information to the public

- Issuing corrected ballots

3. What if there is not enough time to issue replacement ballot packets before Election Day? What alternatives could be offered to voters? What creative approaches could you take (if your state law allows for it) to securely deliver ballots?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think through the steps that would need to be taken if the error was noticed too late to issue replacement ballots. Possible steps include:

- Advising voters to vote in person and request a replacement ballot before Election Day
- Printing necessary quantities for provisional ballots to be issued to Election Day voters
- Communicating with voters, the media, and stakeholders to get the correct information to voters
- Advising stakeholders of the steps the office is taking to ensure accuracy in the process
- Establishing a temporary branch office to increase voter options for ballot pickup

As a follow-up, ask the team to discuss what creative approaches might be taken (if your state law allows for it) to securely deliver ballots.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. What protocols and procedures should the office have in place to prevent this issue?

Facilitator Notes

Possible explanations include:

- The director or a supervisor should have organized the ballot proofing process and created a checklist to ensure the ballot was thoroughly proofed.
- The ballot should have been shared with the proper entities (candidates, municipalities, issues groups, political parties, etc.) for sign-off and approval.

2. Individually, answer the questions below.

2a. Does your office have an incident response plan for these situations?

(circle one)

Yes | No | In Progress

2b. Think about your current ballot proofing practices. How would you rate your current procedures on a scale of one to 10 with one being *very poor* and 10 being *perfect*.

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

2c. Is your process for proofing documented? Where is it located? Are staff trained to proof?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their own practices relevant to ballot proofing. A checklist must be used to ensure all necessary ballot proofing steps are taken.

2d. Is the process outlined in checklist form?

Facilitator Notes

See above. Ask participants to describe their checklists.

2e. Does your proofing process involve using external partners?

(circle one)

Yes | No

2f. If yes, who are they?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their own processes and all external partners involved in the proofing process, including:

- The entity responsible for receiving the petition filing,

- Any entity placing an issue on the ballot,
- Political parties,
- Other election officials, or
- Candidates on the ballot.

For those who answered no, ask participants what kept them from doing this in the past and if they would they consider it in the future.

3. As a group, discuss the responses above.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to share their responses and provide details behind their response. Encourage participants to share best practices.

Communications Strategy

1. Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		
How do you contact them?		
Do you have their contact information readily available? Where is it located?		

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to discuss their responses.

2. Which stakeholders can help with communicating with the voters?

Facilitator Notes

Stakeholders who can help with communication include:

- The media/press
- Voter advocacy groups
- Other government offices
- Secretary of State
- Local political parties

Communication channels and tools include:

- Radio and TV ads
- Website and social media
- Other government offices' websites
- Ballot tracking text messages (be cautious that this may be interpreted as spam or mis-/dis-/mal-information)
- Automated emails, phone calls or text messages

Session 4: Election Results Reporting Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

7 days after Election Day (EDay +7)

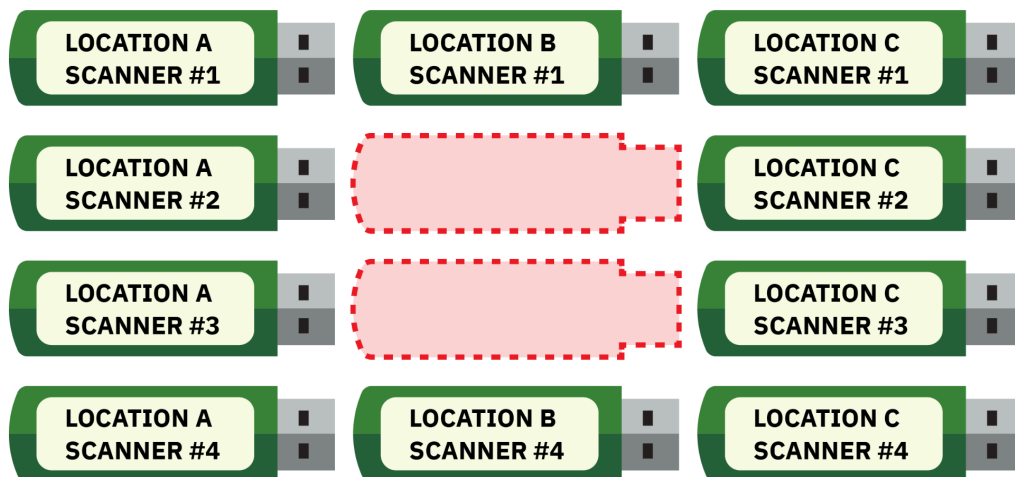
Jurisdiction Details

The jurisdiction’s primary voting method uses pre-printed paper ballots that are hand-marked and ballot scanners. Each election, several hundred precinct scanners are utilized. After polls close on Election Day, the USB drives used to capture the tabulated results in each scanner are removed and transported to the election office for accumulation. If a USB drive is left behind, the election office has the option to retrieve it or scan the hand-marked paper ballots returned on Election Night. Once all the drives are returned and all the ballots are scanned and tabulated, the unofficial election results are finalized and published.

Scenario Detail

Several USB drives from a particular polling location were not imported into the election management system (EMS) on election night. According to the unofficial results released after the polls closed, one candidate was far ahead in a contested council race.

During the reconciliation process, which occurred in the days after Election Day, the missing votes were detected. After importing the results from the USB drives, the outcome of the council race changed.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. List the steps you would take upon learning of this issue.

Facilitator Notes

Possible steps include:

- Contacting and informing key stakeholders, including all impacted candidates
- Carefully re-examining all results to ensure ballots cast were properly tabulated and reported
- Reminding stakeholders of the nature of unofficial results
- Reassuring the public that safeguards were in place to identify these issues
- Determining the root cause and building talking points

2. Upon learning of this issue, what other proactive measures should you take?

Facilitator Notes

Possible measures include:

- Reviewing all election results to ensure complete tabulation and reporting is performed
- Reaching out to the media and walking them through the steps your office takes to reconcile after each election - use this as a tool to educate the public about all of the procedural steps the office takes to ensure a transparent and accurate election

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. ***As a group***, list all the actions officials could have taken to prevent this issue from occurring. Include examples of how technology or other systems might have helped detect that some of the USB drives were not imported and, therefore, not all results were reported properly.

Facilitator Notes

Possible responses may include:

- Using a checklist and labeled organizers to ensure all USB drives are returned and processed
- Having two teams validate that the checklist is accurately completed
- Assigning team members to review the turnout percentage for each reporting unit (precinct, ballot style, etc.) to identify any possible outliers that require further investigation
- Comparing the results to the results tapes from the precinct tabulation equipment, if available
- Utilizing a software program to identify anomalies based on election turnout in previous similar elections
- Reviewing all final unofficial results thoroughly before releasing final unofficial results at the end of the night
- Ensuring all staff involved are properly trained on the procedures
- Conducting a training exercise with all staff involved in operations on election night to determine if the process needs to be refined or changed

2. What are some likely reasons the steps listed above were not taken?

Facilitator Notes

Possible responses include:

- Lack of training
- Inexperienced staff
- Other issues that may have prevented normal procedures from being followed

- 3. In the situation above, the staff turnover between elections was 50%. Three of the four individuals who helped to manage operations, which included results tabulation, were new to their role and unfamiliar with past practices. The manager in the department was brand new.**

Knowing this situation existed, what could upper management have done to ensure the continuity of operations for this critical area of election administration?

Facilitator Notes

Possible responses include:

- Improving election night check-in process
- Improving poll worker training
- Enhancing storage and organization practices
- Ensuring that staff training took place
- Setting aside time before Election Day to simulate election night so everyone can practice their role

- 4. What resources, best practice documents or training for ballot management and election night reporting does your jurisdiction have? When were they last updated? Does your office cross-train other staff to fill in as needed?**

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to share their own practices and identify if the practices are up to date. Encourage all participants to share.

Communications Strategy

When answering the questions below, think about: Who would your office contact in this situation? Who would reach out? How would you communicate with them?

- 1. How do you respond to this situation if the press IS already aware of the situation? How do you respond to this situation if the press IS NOT already aware of the situation?**

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to share their own practices and identify if the practices are up to date. Encourage all participants to share.

- 2. Individually, draft a press release.**

Facilitator Notes

Each participant should create their own press release. Reassure the team that they should **NOT** be afraid of being wrong but should be open to learning from this experience. Some may say that is not their job: respond accordingly by encouraging preparedness and the value of cross-training.

- 2a. Share your draft press release with other participants. Create one press release incorporating what the group determines to be the best elements of each draft.**

Facilitator Notes

Participants may be wary to share so emphasize again that this is a judgment-free zone and that any critique should be positive and intended to help one another learn. This is also an exercise where participants will draw upon what they feel is best. There will be an opportunity for individuals to complete a press release using a template that will make the process easier. One learning objective is that it is difficult to write a press release under pressure.

- 3. Generally, the public may view negative events as a reason not to trust the election process. What prebunking, or fact-driven communication, could have been done to prevent distrust in this situation?**

Facilitator Notes

- Ensuring the public and the media understand why the election results are unofficial on election night
- Educating the public on the practices that occur post-election to verify the accuracy of the results

Session 5: Reconciliation Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

13 days after Election Day (EDay+13)

Jurisdiction Details

There were approximately 200,000 ballots cast in the election. Voting consists of early in-person voting before Election Day, mail voting and in-person voting on Election Day. Approximately 40% of all ballots are cast before Election Day. About half of those are mail ballots. In-person ballots are cast using a ballot marking device and a ballot scanner. Hand-marked paper ballots are primarily used in mail and provisional voting.

Situation Details

During the period after Election Day, staff worked long hours processing ballots received after Election Day, importing data from the electronic pollbooks and performing other reconciliation activities.

Staff reviews the number of ballots counted from an EMS report and the number of voters credited with voting. Comparing the EMS report to the voter credit report from the electronic pollbook system, an issue is detected. For some reason, there are **more Election Day ballots counted than Election Day voters credited for voting**. The problem exists in several precincts.

In addition, staff also realize that **more mail voters received credit for returning a ballot that was counted than there are mail ballots scanned**. Also, some of the damaged mail ballots were never replicated to ensure the ballot would scan properly.

It is uncertain if any race or issue outcomes will change.

EMS Report		Voter Credit Report	
Ballots Cast		Check-Ins	
Precinct 101	- 62	Precinct 101	- 51
Precinct 102	- 58	Precinct 102	- 58
Precinct 103	- 75	Precinct 103	- 75
Precinct 104	- 43	Precinct 104	- 43
Precinct 105	- 83	Precinct 105	- 59
All Precincts	- 321	All Precincts	- 286



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. List possible explanations for having more Election Day ballots than Election Day voters.

Facilitator Notes

- Some of the voter credit failed to import from the electronic pollbooks or the paper pollbooks. A cause may be that an electronic pollbook did not sync.
- Results on the USB drive were imported more than once.
- A provisional ballot was scanned.
- Ballot jams in the ballot scanner caused a ballot to scan more than once.
- A voter or voters were provided with a federal- or state-only version of the ballot.
- The election media loaded on the voting equipment was not properly cleared from testing mode.
- The voter was not listed and was not checked into the pollbook.

2. List possible explanations for having more mail ballot voters than mail ballots counted.

Facilitator Notes

The following would mean that there are more mail ballot voters than mail ballots scanned:

- A batch of ballots was not scanned.
- A voter received credit for voting but did not return a ballot. This could be the result of an entry error.
- An individual ballot within a batch was not scanned.
- A ballot affidavit envelope was received but the envelope did not contain a ballot.
- The voted ballots were not extracted from the envelope.

3. How do you respond to this situation once the investigation reveals what happened?

Number the proposed responses below in chronological order. Skip over and do not number responses that you would not take.

- _____ Issue a statement to the press
- _____ Discipline staff
- _____ Make organizational leadership aware of the issue
- _____ Meet with staff to discuss the problem and decide on how to resolve the issue
- _____ Call other election officials for help
- _____ Determine which mail batches are off
- _____ Hand count all Election Day ballots
- _____ Take a leave of absence
- _____ Refer to the documented plan
- _____ Determine and document the extent of the issue
- _____ Review all other ballot types to ensure everything is reconciled properly
- _____ Correct issue and release results
- _____ Contact the state's chief election official
- _____ Contact the candidates and other key stakeholders

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to discuss the order chosen. Encourage participants to share their thoughts on how the responses should be ordered.

Proposed responses may include:

1. Make organizational leadership aware of the issue.
2. Refer to the documented plan.
3. Meet with staff to discuss the problem and decide on how to resolve the issue.
4. Contact the state's chief election official.
5. Contact the candidates and other key stakeholders.
6. Issue a statement to the press.
7. Call other election officials for help.
8. Determine which mail batches are off.
9. Review all other ballot types to ensure everything is reconciled properly.
10. Determine and document the extent of the issue.
11. Correct issue and release results.

4. What action steps are missing above?

Facilitator Notes

Allow the group to discuss any missing action items.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. Individually, answer the questions below.

1a. What controls do you have in place to identify or prevent reconciliation issues?

Ballots cast in-person

Facilitator Notes

Possible controls include:

- Reconciliation worksheets that are easy for poll workers to complete.
- Place for poll workers to describe problems or issues that might lead to an imbalance.
- Someone assigned to verify reconciliation logs or worksheets are completely filled out.
- Place to record the name of the person responsible for completing the worksheet in case there are follow up questions.
- Daily reconciliation for early voting.
- Informal checks throughout the day comparing the number of voters checked in with public counters on BMDs, scanners, etc.
- Strong material control and chain of custody practices

Ballots cast by mail

Facilitator Notes

Possible controls include:

- Batch control sheet that accompanies every batch of returned ballots that includes a place to record the name of who processed ballots in case there are questions or problems.
- Accounting each time ballots move from one process to another, e.g. validation to envelope opening and any accounting issues are rectified before ballots are moved to the next stage of processing.
- Process is supervised to ensure accounting takes place before the batch of ballots moves to the next stage of processing.

1b. Does the office have written reconciliation procedures in place?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. Do you have a designated person in charge of reconciliation?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1d. Who reviews the accounting and chain of custody forms used in an election? Who reviews them while an election is underway (during early voting, mail ballot processing, and at election day polling locations)? Who reviews logs and forms after the election to validate?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their current practices.

1f. When do you begin the reconciliation process?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their current practices. The best practice is at the beginning of each election, when ballots or supplies to print ballots are ordered, or earlier.

- 2. As a group, discuss your responses above and list four to six best practices you follow when it comes to reconciliation.**

Facilitator Notes

Based on a review of their individual practices, encourage participants to come up with a series of best practices. A helpful resource to guide election officials is the Ballot Management Audit Guide currently found on the TEG website.

- 3. List out the steps involved in the reconciliation process until the day the results must be finalized/made official/certified. Condense the steps down to 10 or fewer.**

Facilitator Notes

This may be challenging for some. However, encourage participants to start from day one to identify the various steps each office takes to account for and reconcile ballots cast/voted to voters.

Communications Strategy

- 1. What are some strategies for prebunking, or fact-driven communication, that could be used to help the press and the public understand the reconciliation process and what might be discovered?**

Facilitator Notes

Possible strategies may include:

- Provide the press and the public with a video or a short synopsis of the practices that go into accounting for each ballot, the reconciliation practices that occur at the office, and the chain of custody procedures that are adhered to.
- Allow for individuals and members of the media to take a tour of your operations.
- Use social media fact/myth posts to highlight the steps taken by the office every election to secure each person's vote.
- Ask respected stakeholders to attest to the security and accounting measures the office has in place. Stakeholders may be elected officials, community leaders, etc. that have a significant following on social media, for example.
- Inform the public of the various auditing controls that are used by the office, such as the use of an independent review of the final numbers as part of the post-election audit or canvassing process.
- Host a candidate/canvass board education event that includes a detailed discussion of the reconciliation processes.

- 2. When an issue is detected, describe the communication plan (who you would contact, when, how, etc.).**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage the team to diagram or outline the communication plan they would take. Ask participants to justify their responses.

3. Using the template below, complete the sections using the blank lines provided to draft a press release. Use the examples provided as a guide.

Press Release Template
Contact Information
[First Name] [Last Name]
[Title]
[Email][Phone]
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Press Release Title

Month XX, YYYY

[Begin with a quick concise (usually 100 words or fewer) introduction to explain what occurred and what immediate action has been taken to address the issue]

Example statement below

[JURISDICTION NAME], [STATE ABBREVIATION] – On [DAY OF WEEK], [MONTH] [DAY], [YEAR] at approximately XX:XX [AM/PM], the [ELECTION OFFICE] received reports that [ISSUE THAT OCCURRED]. [What immediate action has been taken to protect the integrity of the election, ensure voting access and/or safety of the public?].

[Include a brief statement of who your office is working with, how voters can seek additional assistance, and provide any additional information:]

Example statement below

The [ELECTION OFFICE] is working with [EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION(S)] to address the matter and is taking precautions to ensure [the safety of the public/the integrity of the election and voting process/voting access/etc.]. Voters seeking additional assistance may call [GENERAL OFFICE NUMBER]. [Is there any additional information you would like to provide to voters?]

[Prepare a quote:] by [ELECTION OFFICIAL NAME], [ELECTION OFFICIAL TITLE]:

Example quote below

“My office is dedicated to providing election services for the citizens of [JURISDICTION] to ensure equal access to the election process, protect the integrity of votes and maintain a transparent, accurate and fair process. We look forward to [What outcome are you looking forward to?].”

For additional information, visit [WEBSITE] or call [MEDIA CONTACT PHONE NUMBER].

END the press release with boilerplate language and media contact information in accordance with your jurisdiction’s policy:

###

About [ELECTION OFFICE]: The [ELECTION OFFICE] is responsible for conducting elections in [JURISDICTION] with [NUMBER] registered voters. As a local election office, the [ELECTION OFFICE] manages the processing of vote-by-mail ballots, recruitment and training of election workers, in-person voting operations and certification of elections.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage the team to utilize the examples in the template to create a press release. Feel free to split the press release into sections and assign each section to a smaller group of individuals.

Session 6: Poll Worker Shortages

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

43 days before Election Day (EDay-43)

Jurisdiction Details

The election office employs 450 poll workers to staff 55 voting locations on Election Day. The office typically trains about 65 of the poll workers to serve as supervisors of the locations. The jurisdiction is primarily rural and is geographically large, with it taking over an hour to get from one end to the other.

Scenario Detail

Poll worker recruitment is a struggle for this jurisdiction. Of the 65 supervisors normally recruited and trained to serve at locations, only 20 have said they would work again. Over half of the other previous poll workers have declined. The reason most give is they don't want to deal with the political environment and possible hostilities. Some have commented that the training program does not equip them to serve on Election Day and leaves them overwhelmed.

Office staff and staff leadership are concerned about getting enough folks to serve.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Individually, answer the questions below.

1a. List four to six reasons existing poll workers decide not to return (based on your experience):

Facilitator Notes

Possible reasons include:

- Inadequate training,
- Problems with others,
- Too long of a day,
- Not enough pay,
- Too stressful/current political climate,
- Ready to retire/served a long time,
- Technology too much/scared of equipment, or
- Frustration with the election office.

1b. Has your jurisdiction experienced a decline in experienced poll workers returning in subsequent elections?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. If yes, what do you plan to do to retain poll workers? If no, what have you done to retain poll workers?

Facilitator Notes

Possible programs/events that may aid retention include:

- Article thanking poll workers,
- Personalized letters/phone calls,

- Newsletters to keep poll workers feeling a part of the process,
- Appreciation breakfast,
- Award banquet/Recognition, or
- Partner with community organizations to recognize poll workers in creative ways.

2. As a group, share the individual responses above. Use the responses from the discussion to list best practices for recruitment and retention.

Recruitment

Retention

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to share recruitment and retention best practices. Encourage the team to list best practices that are practical for all jurisdictions regardless of size.

3. Consider the reasons poll workers may not return as poll workers. List strategies for preventing this from occurring.

Facilitator Notes

Many of the strategies may already be covered above. Allow participants to share what works well for them individually and list those.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. List some methods or tactics that could be used to strengthen a poll worker training program.

Facilitator Notes

Possible methods or tactics include:

- Evaluate your training program using both internal evaluation and allowing poll workers to provide feedback.

- Provide both online and in-person training options.
- Consider how adults learn and include a variety of learning styles into the course content.
- Be hands on.
- Show appreciation at the training.
- Provide numerous times for training and make it as convenient as possible.
- While not always popular, use creative pop quizzes to see if poll workers are learning from the content.

2. What are some topics that need to be covered in poll worker training “today” that may not have been covered in years past?

Facilitator Notes

Possible topics include:

- De-escalation,
- Reporting suspicious activity, or
- Educating voters on steps taken to secure the process.

3. What resources have you found helpful in conducting poll worker training (e.g., EAC guides, etc.)?

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to share tools that they have found useful.

- [U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence](#) resources
 - [Leading a Successful Poll Worker Program Course](#)
 - [Standards of Conduct for Election Workers](#)
 - [Digital Poll Worker Application Toolkit](#)
 - [Outreach Letter to Community Organizations](#)
- Humphrey School Poll Worker Training
 - [“But we went over that in Training”](#)
 - [“Buy-in, Build on, and Brainstorm”](#)
- [EAC Poll Worker Resources](#)

4. What other operational problems affect poll worker retention? What can be done to avoid the problem (e.g., failure to timely pay poll workers)?

Facilitator Notes

Other problems may include:

- Scheduling issues - not scheduling poll workers to an ideal training session or to an ideal location.
- Communication issues - poll workers may feel like their thoughts or comments are ignored or they don't hear from the office.
- Failure to timely compensate poll workers.
- Lack of recognition provided on a basic level.

5. What is the backup plan if you simply cannot find enough poll workers?

Facilitator Notes

Possible backup plan options include:

- Utilize other government employees to help staff polling locations.
- Reduce the number of polling locations.
- Ensure to hire around 25-35% more staff than needed and compensate individuals to remain "on call."

6. Pretend you have an unlimited budget. What doors does that open for you? How does that affect your poll worker program overall?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to share ideas. As a follow-up, ask the group what steps they could take to help obtain more funding. What have they done?

Communications Strategy

1. How can the press/media help with recruitment and retention?

Facilitator Notes

The press can write an article highlighting the need for poll workers and create a recognition piece for a specific poll worker or group of poll workers. Individual members of the press can highlight the need for poll workers through their social media channels.

2. How do external organizations communicate with you when an individual is interested in becoming a poll worker? Who monitors the information received?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to share how this is done today and discuss best practices that may be employed (e.g., form on website to sign-up).

3. List stakeholders that your office would connect with to recruit poll workers.

Facilitator Notes

Stakeholders include:

- Schools and colleges,
- Civic organizations,
- Businesses,
- Community organizations,
- Other government agencies,
- News media - stories on need,
- Secretary of State, or
- Non-profit organizations like Power the Polls.

4. What methods of both direct and indirect forms of communication with poll workers can aid in retention?

Facilitator Notes

Participants may provide crossover responses to these questions. Encourage the team to think about the value of direct outreach via a phone call or letter. Another idea for direct communication with a poll worker would be to ask location supervisors to contact their poll workers to say thanks and to maintain regular communication. Discuss other ideas for both forms of communication.

5. If there is a shortage of poll workers and not enough time to fill positions, what will the office communicate to the public and/or media? A talking point is used to create the narrative you are attempting to convey.

List out four to six talking points.

Facilitator Notes

Talking points may include:

- Serving as a poll worker is a rare opportunity to be on the cutting edge of democracy.
- Poll workers are paid for their service but serving includes the added benefit of ensuring the accuracy, integrity, and transparency of the election process.
- Being a poll worker will allow you to serve your community through exceptional customer support and service to your neighbors and friends.
- It's a chance to take some time off of work and serve others.

Session 7: Mail Ballot Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

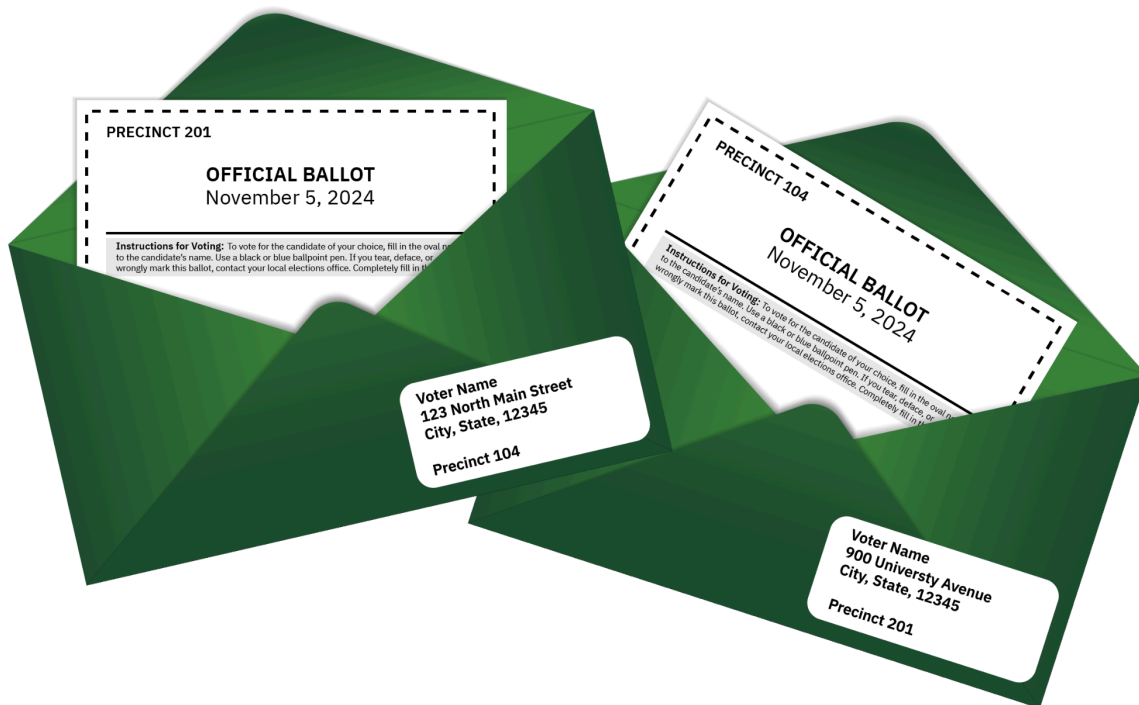
28 days before Election Day (EDay-28)

Jurisdiction Details

There are over 800,000 voters in the jurisdiction. With a turnout of 75% expected, over 200,000 ballots will likely be cast by mail. The office has its own ballot printer and mail equipment which inserts the ballot into the appropriate envelope. The equipment vendor is always onsite during the election. Two full-time staff are responsible for this department. Bipartisan staff work with the vendor representative to process the mail ballots.

Scenario Details

A large selection of ballots mailed to voters were not inserted into the corresponding voter's ballot envelopes. Therefore, incorrect ballots were delivered to more than 50,000 voters. The underlying problem occurred when the ballot inserting equipment was not set properly to verify the correct insertion.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Working in pairs, discuss and list the steps you would take to respond to this issue.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to list the steps they would take to respond to this issue. Possible steps include:

- Inform the chief elections official,
- Inform organizational leadership,
- Analyze the voter data file to prepare for a reprint and re-issuance,
- Engage vendors and other stakeholders who may be able to assist such as the USPS, etc.,
- Meet internally to discuss the problem and proposed solutions,
- Issue a holding statement for the press and the public using the office’s website, social media, ballot tracking tools, and email list serves,
- Once a solution is reached, determine which extra resources might be needed to help with the resolution,
- Communicate with the press and the public what the solution is and offer a variety of opportunities for voters to cast the correct ballot, or
- Plan on organizing the sorting process that may result in this issue.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

For the questions below, note that the issue resulted simply because a key setting was turned off which would allow the machine to verify the correct ballot was inserted into the appropriate envelope.

1. List ways this issue could have been prevented.

Facilitator Notes

Possible preventions include:

- Ensuring training on equipment is conducted thoroughly and that multiple employees are trained to handle critical operations,

- Creating a checklist to ensure all steps are followed, or
- Performing manual quality control on automated processes to ensure accuracy (e.g, verifying the inserting is accurate one out of every 25 or 50 pieces.

2. What should be done immediately to ensure the issue does not occur again?

Facilitator Notes

Employing the preventative steps would likely prevent this issue from recurring.

3. What other procedures should take place during the insertion process?

Facilitator Notes

Typically, automated equipment will have logs that can be reviewed to determine if the correct ballot is being inserted. This log could be cross-referenced with other reports or reviewed against the unsealed ballots themselves. Manual quality control guidelines must ultimately be in place to ensure accuracy independent of the automation.

4. *Individually*, answer the questions below.

4a. What if you could not issue replacement ballots quick enough? What other options are you able to provide to voters?

Facilitator Notes

A lot of the varying “options” depends on what state law or other applicable laws (e.g., charter governments) allows for the election’s office to offer voters. Some possible options are:

- Vote in-person before Election Day (if allowed),
- Utilize an accessible ballot marking system (if available),
- Vote the ballot provided; however, only the office and/or issues that the voter is eligible to vote on would be counted (after ballot replication is performed), or
- Determine if a vendor could help in the effort, though much would be involved in the setup of this process.

4b. Is this a situation that should be built into a continuity of operations plan (COOP)?

(circle one)

Yes | No | Unsure

4c. What would be a part of a plan? Would it outline purchasing extra supplies? How many? Contracting with a third party? Briefly describe what would be in the plan.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss what to include in such a plan. Encourage creativity.

4d. Assume that you cannot produce replacement ballots because the machine stopped working and you could not insert ballots into the envelope.

List four to six alternative options you have available. Place an X by the options that require pre-planned preparation.

Facilitator Notes

Alternate options include:

- Use temporary staff to manually insert ballots into envelopes,
- Contract with another election office or vendor to use equipment to print and insert ballots,
- Encourage voters to vote in person, or
- Encourage voters to print a ballot and any necessary affidavit (if permitted by law).

5. As a group, take time to discuss the individual responses to the questions above. Answer the questions below to help develop a continuity of operations plan.

5a. If the ballot inserter is not working, what would be your alternative method for inserting the ballots into the proper envelope?

5b. What resources are needed to execute alternatives noted above?

(check all that apply)

- Alternate Locations
- Communications
- Records (datasets such as voter lists, ballot styles, etc.)
- Personnel

- Equipment
- Continuity Procedures
- Related Documents

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss the alternatives and what resources are needed to execute those alternatives.

Communications Strategy

- 1. Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.**

		External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		
How do you contact them?		

Do you have their contact information readily available?		
Where is it located?		

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to complete and discuss the stakeholder chart above.

2. The alternative method of compiling ballot packets is taking longer. Most of the replacement ballots will take about two weeks to get to the voters.

2a. What do you communicate to the public?

Facilitator Notes
It is important to carefully set expectations. The public should be reassured that they have other opportunities to vote other than waiting on the replacement ballot. Inform voters that the ballots will still be counted even if the ballot is received after Election Day (if allowed by state law) but to encourage use of the drop boxes (if available).

2b. What methods do you use?

Facilitator Notes
Methods of communication include:

- Website site,
- Ballot tracking texts,
- Social media,
- Radio and TV,

- Newspapers,
- Email, phone, or text messages, or
- Other stakeholders.

2c. List out four to six talking points.

Facilitator Notes

- Today, our election office learned of an issue at our ballot printing and mailing facility.
- Some pieces of ballot inserting equipment were not set up properly to verify the correct ballot was inserted, and as a result some voters received incorrect ballots - or ballots for a different precinct.
- We are focused on identifying these voters and sending replacement ballots to all voters who received an incorrect ballot.
- Voters can track their replacement ballot at [www.yourcounty.gov/elections].
- If you received an incorrect ballot and are concerned you may not receive your replacement ballot in time to mark it and return it by mail, consider:
 - Voting in person on Election Day (if allowed),
 - Returning your replacement ballot using a drop box (if jurisdiction has drop boxes) rather than the mail, or
 - Requesting online ballot delivery (if available in your jurisdiction).
- Our office will continue to update the public as we work to resolve this issue.
- Visit your jurisdiction's website for more information or to contact your jurisdiction's election officials.

Session 8: Ballot Shortage

Participant Instructions

Carefully review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

General Election Day

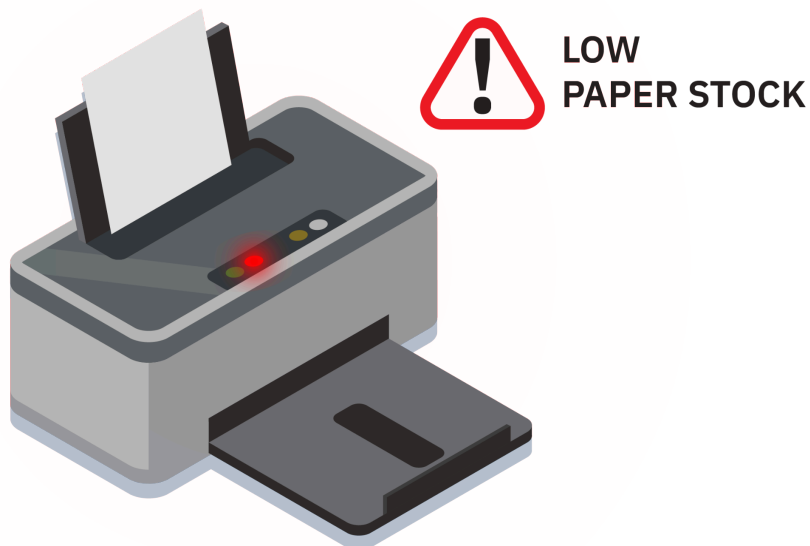
Jurisdiction Details

The jurisdiction has approximately 200,000 registered voters and is a healthy mix of small urban centers, municipalities and sparsely populated agricultural and rural communities. The elections office is run by a director, a deputy director, six full time staff and one part-time IT professional. The longest tenured employee has been there six months.

The voting system is a ballot marking device and ballot scanner combination with pre-printed ballots printed by an outside vendor. Electronic poll books are also used. The county has mail-in voting, but the vast majority of voters cast ballots in person on Election Day.

Situation Details

Poll workers quickly discover that the ballot marking devices were not adequately stocked with printer paper. To make matters worse, the backup paper inventory was the wrong weight and would not be scannable. Government leaders in the jurisdiction are furious at the director. Social media attention is focused on this issue with some saying this was intentional and motivated by malicious intent.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. What is your initial reaction to this situation? If an investigation was performed, what is likely to be the root cause of the shortage?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss their initial response and reaction. The possible root causes include:

- Paper supply was not ordered in enough time to sufficiently test,
- Paper supply was not tested,
- The wrong paper type was ordered (vendor specifications not followed),
- Paper type was changed from what was actually ordered, or
- Possible maintenance performed on the voting machines was not followed by acceptance testing to ensure proper functionality within the specifications for the manufacturer.
- New staff were not properly trained on election preparation
- Standard operating procedures and checklists were not available to staff

2. List some responses you would immediately take to help remediate the shortage.

Facilitator Notes

Immediate responses include:

- Issue a statement since the impact is the entire jurisdiction and not isolated to one or two locations,
- Deliver any reserve or backup supply of hand marked paper ballots,
- Request ballot printer to perform an emergency print job,
- Print ballots using office printers, or
- Encourage poll workers to use any ballot marking devices that are equipped with a printer to print blank ballots (if allowed and trained to do so).

3. On a scale of 1 - 10 with 1 being *insignificantly minor* and 10 being *extremely critical*, rate the severity of this issue.

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. *Individually*, answer the questions below.

1a. List the various ballot types your jurisdiction utilizes (i.e, provisional, by mail, UOCAVA, etc.). Place an X to each type that you know for certain is tested.

1b. Does part of the testing process involve testing ballots used on Election Day (either pre-printed ballots that are marked by the voter or blank stock used to produce the ballot)?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. Consider ballots that are produced by a vendor and directly mailed to the voters. Detail how those ballots are tested and regular quality assurance checks.

1d. Are the ballot ordering procedures written down?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1e. Do those procedures allow for enough time to test and possibly reprint ballots?

(circle one)

Yes | No | N/A

1f. Who handles this for the office?

1g. How many days does it take to perform proper testing on all ballots and voting equipment?

1h. Is the process well-documented?

(circle one)

Yes | No | N/A

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to respond to all the questions above. For 2a and 2b, encourage participants to go through by ballot type and determine how they are tested both for function and accuracy.

- 2. As a group, share and discuss the questions above. Share any best practices and record them below.**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to share responses and discuss and record best practices.

Communications Strategy

- 1. Given the rating you gave the situation above, describe your press/media strategy? Will you contact them? If so, when? How? Will you create a press release? Do you have talking points available?**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss how to involve the media/press in this situation.

2. Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
How do you contact them?		
Do you have their contact information readily available? Where is it located?		
What will you tell them?		

Facilitator Notes
Encourage participants to complete and discuss the stakeholder chart above.

Session 9: Electronic Pollbook Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided. For this exercise, the jurisdiction described below is your jurisdiction.

Situation Details

Time and Date

Election Day

Jurisdiction Details

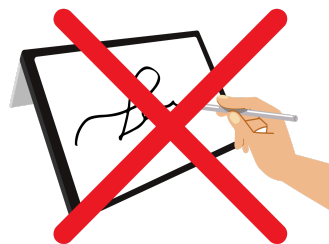
Prior to Election Day, the jurisdiction offers by-mail voting (upon request) and in-person voting. On Election Day, the jurisdiction has in-person voting at assigned polling locations. Voter check-in is performed on electronic pollbooks. Upon successful check-in, the voter is provided a ballot card with barcode information that contains the ballot style information. The primary voting system utilizes a ballot marking device used by voters to mark the ballot. Once the voter places their ballot card in the marking device, the correct ballot style for that voter appears. After marking the ballot, voters then place the marked ballot (or record of votes cast card) in a ballot scanner for tabulation.

Scenario Detail

In preparing to open polling locations for Election Day, poll workers discover that the electronic pollbook system used for voter check-ins is unavailable (e.g., voter data has not been updated to account for early voting or absentee/mail voting, system hardware is inoperable or online access to electronic check-in system is unavailable).

Upon initial discovery, the incident appears likely to prevent the use of the electronic check-in system for voters at the polling location for Election Day. The polling locations open in 30 minutes. The electronic pollbook issue affects all polling locations.

There are over 800,000 registered voters in the jurisdiction, over 800 precincts, and over 300 polling locations. There are approximately 3,000 poll workers.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

- 1. As a group, list all of the immediate response actions election officials should take to ensure voting begins on time. Feel free to make assumptions (i.e., that poll workers have access to a backup paper roster). Include the how, when, who, what and where corresponding to how the information will be shared with the appropriate parties.**

Facilitator Notes

Possible responses include:

- The office should use available means to communicate with poll workers on what steps to take. Available means may include sending a message through the EPBs, automated text message to cell phones, or message dispatch through staff assigned to visit polling locations.
- Poll workers should acknowledge that the instructions were received.
- Any communication should include basic instructions, but also reference documented instructions available to poll workers at the location (such as instructions for using the paper pollbook).
- Staff should be dispatched to larger locations to help with any setup arrangements to accommodate an alphabetical check-in process that may need to be used.
- Make sure poll workers understand when it is appropriate to issue a provisional ballot and re-iterate the proper procedures for provisional ballots.

- 2. Who would be designated as the responsible party for handling this situation? What approach is taken internally before a response to the situation is made? Who can make the final decision?**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage the group to discuss who is responsible for making a decision to change the check-in process. Allow discussion to focus on the plans that need to be in place, for example, to properly execute the check-in method shift.

3. How would you investigate to determine the overall scope of the issue? What troubleshooting steps would be followed?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage the group to discuss this question. Responses may include:

- Engage the vendors to determine what could be done to update the electronic poll books.
- Dispatch troubleshooters to determine any workarounds.
- Ensure a “dummy” unit is available that can be used for testing.

4. What is the immediate impact of this situation on the administration of the election? List out the possible consequences.

Consider the voter’s experience, the media coverage and reaction, concerns from key stakeholders etc.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss and outline the impacts.

5. What steps would you take to determine the root cause of the issue? Who would be involved? Who would lead the effort? How would root cause analysis work be communicated to internal and external stakeholders?

Facilitator Notes

Possible steps include:

- Contact the vendor and request that they assist in determining the root cause of the issue.
- Assign staff to work with the vendor to isolate the problem.
- Construct a report to outline the investigation and findings.

Once conclusions have been made, it is important to communicate the findings in a manner that is understandable to the public.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

In answering the questions below, note that the root cause of the issue was the electronic pollbooks could not be updated remotely to properly mark voters who have already voted. The file created to update the individual electronic poll books was too large to load. The jurisdiction started to learn of the concerns the evening before Election Day.

- 1. What operational procedures (written protocols, controls, and testing procedures) would assist you - the jurisdiction - to detect and/or prevent this type of situation from occurring? Do they already exist?**

Facilitator Notes

Thorough testing must be conducted prior to each election using a similar-sized dataset that is expected on Election Day. This testing must be well documented to ensure the process includes a significant sampling of the electronic poll books and other peripherals (cradle-points, wireless routers, etc.,) that are used on Election Day.

- 2. Consider the procedures that are in place - in your jurisdiction - that can offset the negative impact of this situation and maintain the continuity of operations.**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to consider the procedures currently in place.

- 3. What resources, best practice documents, or existing training can you use to develop or enhance your SOPs, COOP, communication plans etc. to handle situations like this?**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about the information that is available to them that can help with the proportion of these events.

Communications Strategy

In answering the questions below focused on communication, think about who would be contacted in this situation. By whom? How do you communicate with them?

1. Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction.

Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		
How do you contact them?		
Do you have their contact information readily available? Where is it located?		

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to complete and discuss the stakeholder chart above.

2. How do you respond to this situation if the press IS already aware of the situation?

Facilitator Notes

If the press is already aware of the situation, the office should use its crisis communications plan. The plan should have pre-scripted talking points that can be edited to be relevant to the situation. The press release template should also be changed and provided.

3. How do you respond to this situation if the press IS NOT already aware of this situation?

Facilitator Notes

Due to the fact that all electronic poll books are affected, it is important to get ahead of the situation and issue a press release or statement to the press to help control the narrative. Explain the remediations that will be implemented to ensure a smooth voting process.

4. Individually, answer the questions below.

4a. Does the office have a crisis communications plan?

(circle one)

Yes | No | In Progress

4b. If yes, is it printed?

(circle one)

Yes | No | No Plan

4c. Holding statements are essential to have on hand when a situation arises. Are holding statements for various events prepared and printed?

(circle one)

Yes | No

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss their responses.

4d. Create a holding statement you would use to address this situation.

Facilitator Notes

An example holding statement might read:

This morning the office learned of a technical issue affecting the electronic check-in system at all polling locations. As we investigate the issue, the office is working with all polling locations to quickly implement back-up check-in procedures to ensure that voting is not interrupted. Election Day voting is our top priority, and we will provide updates on the situation as soon as they become available.

4e. What should NOT be stated in a holding statement?

Facilitator Notes

When issuing a holding statement, do not overcommit or make assumptions. The holding statement should address the issue but not provide guarantees. It is ok to inform the public that more information will be forthcoming. Stress the facts.

5. Generally, the public may view negative events as a reason not to trust the election process.

What prebunking, or fact-driven communication, could have been done to prevent distrust in this situation?

Facilitator Notes

Prebunking examples include:

- Our office has backup plans in place should any form of technology not function as expected.
- All systems are thoroughly tested before each election. While we do not anticipate function problems, we have back up equipment in place to ensure an accurate and smooth voting process.

- If a problem does occur on Election Day, please be patient.

Session 10: Election Results Not Displaying

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

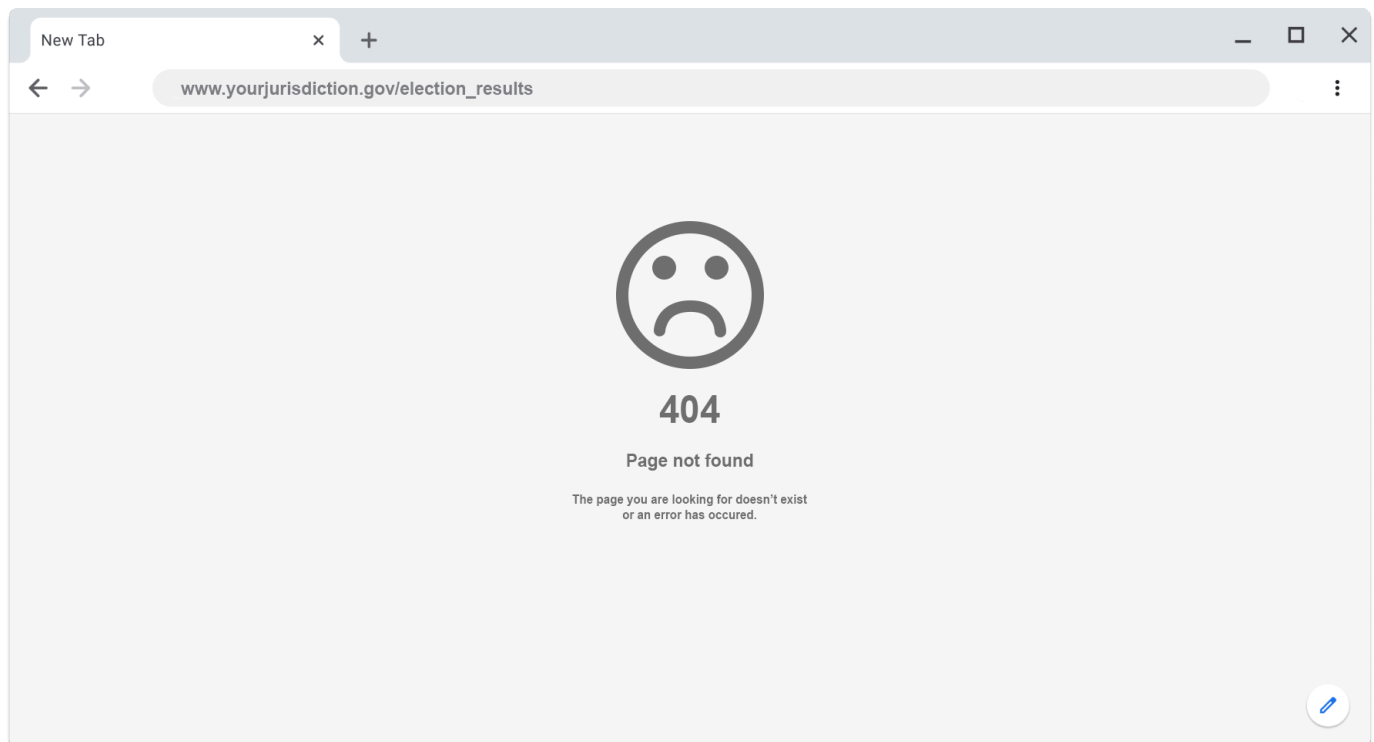
Election Day

Jurisdiction Details

The election office uses a software product to post results on Election Night. The jurisdiction is large, with over 500,000 total ballots typically cast in an election. The results site is well advertised and is very popular among the public.

Scenario Detail

The recently upgraded software was tested after the update was loaded. After the close of polls, some results were loaded and showed as expected. A half hour later, the website was no longer displaying. The vendor was contacted but could not be reached immediately.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. What would you do if the results were not displaying and the vendor was not responding?

Facilitator Notes

Ask the website administrator to post a .pdf of the election results or direct website visitors to another source where the results are posted (e.g., state results website, social media, etc.). Print and post copies of the unofficial results in your office or dedicated press room.

2. List some possible causes for the results not displaying.

Facilitator Notes

Possible causes include:

- Denial of service attack,
- The application, hosted in the cloud, was not “right-sized” to accommodate an increase in traffic,
- The upload or import corrupted the underlying database, or
- Application was not properly tested to ensure setup was correct.

3. What are your alternative methods the public has to review the results?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss other methods for publishing or releasing results. See notes under #1 above.

4. List some possible consequences that may result from the results not displaying.

Facilitator Notes

Some possible consequences include:

- Public distrust due to a perceived lack of transparency,

- Pressure from angry stakeholders, or
- Focused attention on ENR issue may cause other important steps to be missed.
- Bad actors may use this as an opportunity to spread general distrust.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. Individually, answer the questions below.

1a. Do you have documented procedures that cover this situation?

1b. Describe your testing procedures for reporting election results.

1c. What is the backup plan for reporting election results? Have you had to use them? Is the backup plan tested?

Facilitator Notes

For the questions above, encourage participants to think about their office's procedures and allow time for participants to share their responses.

2. Review the possible causes of the failure. Does your plan address each of the possible causes?

(circle one)

Yes | No

3. As a group, discuss your responses above.

List four to six best practices to follow for reporting election results.

Facilitator Notes

Best practices may include:

- Thoroughly test the election night reporting site to ensure it displays correctly. This should occur before and on Election Day by ensuring zero votes are displayed in the application.

- Ensure that the contractual agreement includes vendor support before and on Election Day. The service-level agreement must detail the vendor's incident response plan.
- Document all backup methods for displaying results and train staff on the procedures to follow.
- Ensure the public is aware in advance of where results might be posted if not available on the website.
- Communicate with stakeholders in advance to inform them of the secondary methods of receiving election results in the event the website is not displaying the results on election night.

Communications Strategy

- 1. Describe four to six steps for communicating with stakeholders, the public and the media.**

Facilitator Notes

Steps may include:

- Adding instructions to the website informing the public of where to go to receive the results,
- Providing talking points to staff who are responding to inquiries about election results,
- Emailing unofficial results to stakeholders and media outlets for dissemination, or
- Contacting key stakeholders by phone to inform them of the situation. Key stakeholders include the press contacts and the state's chief elections office.

- 2. What are some strategies for prebunking, or fact-driven communication, that could be used to help the press and the public prepare for what to do when results do not display?**

Facilitator Notes

Strategies include:

- Clearly setting expectations for how and when results will be released,
- Emphasizing the the results released on election night are unofficial, or

- Providing, if available, other options to view displayed results.

Session 11: Ballot Management Issues - During Recount

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

18 days after Election Day (EDay + 18)

Jurisdictional Details

In the general election, the jurisdiction has 30,000 ballots cast. This rural area had a strong turnout of 84%. It uses pre-printed paper ballots for Election Day. Ballots are stored in a secured room. The room is not monitored by surveillance cameras. Storage shelves and colored bins are used to separate the ballots by vote method: mail, early voting, Election Day and provisional ballots. Write-in ballots are also segregated within each of those bins.

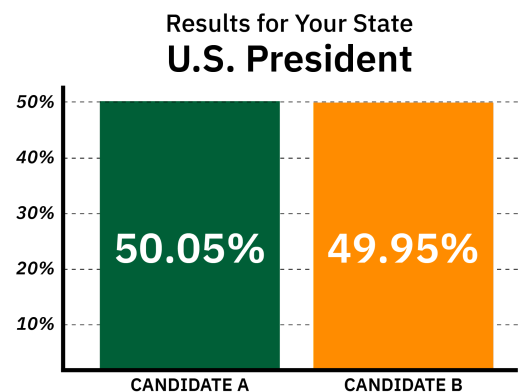
This was the election director's first presidential election and the first time the office used its new print vendor. With only some minor issues, the election was perceived as a success by staff and the public.

Situation Details

The results of the presidential race for the entire state were within the margin that prompted an automatic recount.

In organizing for the recount, staff notices several issues:

1. On some mail ballots, the print quality was so bad that some of the ovals did not print. Therefore, some of the candidate choices were circled by the voters.
2. On some ballot styles, the layout of the races on the back was different between the mail and ballots used by in-person voters. On the mail ballots, an issue contest appeared at the bottom of the second column. For the same ballot style used for in-person voting, the same issue appeared at the top of the next column.



3. The office is getting inquiries suggesting that not all voters who should have received a notice to cure their ballot received one. The office reviews its records and realizes that some voters were not sent a letter. Their ballots did not count.

Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Review the various issues above. Which is most significant and requires immediate attention? Why?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage group discussion and debate. Both issue #1 and #3 may have remedies or solutions that should be explored. For that reason, they require attention. Both #2 and #4 are also “significant” but do not require immediate attention.

2. What is your action plan for handling issues 1 and 2?

Facilitator Notes

Suggested responses include:

- Contact the Secretary of State.
- For #1, determine if state law permits a ballot to be counted if the voter did not mark the ballot according to the instructions.
- If possible, ballots must be inspected and those that can be remade, separated and duplicated.
- For #2, all ballots that were printed incorrectly and do not match the EMS database must be remade in order for the voter’s responses to be properly tabulated.
- After approval, all ballots will need to be rescanned (if permitted).

3. What, if anything, can be done to address issue 3?

Facilitator Notes

There is likely no method to remedy the situation. The office will need to determine how it communicates about its failure to contact individuals and make legal counsel aware of the situation. The office must also ensure that the appropriate procedures and oversight are in place to prevent this issue from occurring again.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. *Individually*, diagnose each issue and complete the questions below.

1a. For issue 1, what procedures might prevent the print quality issue before the ballot is mailed to the voter?

Facilitator Notes

Procedures include:

- Performing quality control checks on a predetermined number of ballots (e.g., one out of every 25) to ensure the print quality of the ballots.
- Training staff involved in the printing process to perform quality control checks.
- If using a vendor to print ballots, ensuring that the appropriate quality assurance standards are included in the contract.

1b. Do these procedures exist in your office?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. For issue 1, what procedures might address this issue after the ballot is returned by the voter?

Facilitator Notes

Staff in charge of the opening and extracting process could check ballots that may not have been properly marked. This would ensure they are separated according to office procedures for duplication.

1d. Do these procedures exist in your office?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1e. What procedures should have been in place to prevent issue 2?

Facilitator Notes

It is likely that a change was made at some point causing a separate ballot file to be provided to the printer resulting in the difference in the ballot layout. The office should utilize a checklist to ensure any changes that are made to a ballot file do not cross impact files that have already been provided to a printer. Carefully proofing must be done if a last-minute change is performed.

1f. For issue 3, does your office have a written policy to address the handling of the “cure” process?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1g. If yes, what is the policy?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to detail elements of the policy.

2. As a group, discuss your responses above and answer the questions below.

2a. If policies and procedures are not in place to help prevent or mitigate the issues above, list the resources that should be used to implement them.

Facilitator Notes

Resources include incident response plan templates, TEG’s crisis communications plan and resources that may be borrowed from other jurisdictions that already have some of these plans in place.

2b. What are the potential cross impacts this issue may have?

Facilitator Notes

Potential cross impacts include legal challenges and litigation, changing of outcomes and public distrust in the election process.

Communications Strategy

1. Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction.

Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		
How do you contact them?		
Do you have their contact information readily available? Where is it located?		

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to complete and discuss the chart.

2. List out four to six talking points.

Facilitator Notes

- Elections staff have discovered formatting differences on some ballots, as well as ballots with low print quality.
- We are working with the Secretary of State or the State's Chief Elections Official to resolve these issues.
- We have mailed letters to voters who received problematic ballots to explain the issues and the processes in place to address them.
 - In cases where voter intent was not clear, the letters provide instructions to help voters cure their ballots, or in other words, fix any issues to ensure their votes in all ballot contests are part of the election results.
- We are committed to ensuring the accuracy and integrity of this election.
- Voters with questions or concerns should contact our office at [email] or [phone number].

Session 12: Emergency Polling Location Changes

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

1 day before Election Day (EDay-1)

Jurisdiction Details

There are 100 polling locations that will be open on Election Day. About 25 are located at public schools, many of which have recently been the victim of phoned-in bomb threats, disrupting numerous school days in the past month.

Situation Details

In a likely effort to disrupt voting on Election Day, four schools received bomb threats (the day before Election Day). The school administration notified the elections office that as a precaution, the school will remain closed for Election Day. Law enforcement will not allow students or faculty to return while it conducts a thorough sweep of the location. Therefore, they are advising that no voting take place on Election Day.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. What immediate response would you take to this situation?

Facilitator Notes

Suggested responses include:

- Meet with staff to discuss roles and responsibilities.
- Refer to the COOP to contact alternate locations and prepare for setup of the facility.
- Contact available staff to assist with preparing these locations.
- Update information on the website and social media.
- If available, use automated services to contact affected voters.
- Inform the press and media outlets to help with communicating the changes.
- Place signage at the school locations informing voters of the new location.
- Prepare additional supplies and equipment that may be required for the new locations (if the delivered equipment cannot be retrieved from the schools).

2. Who ultimately decides what to do?

Facilitator Notes

It is important that the question of “who decides” is made before these issues exist. Time will not be on your side. Encourage participants to make these determinations in advance.

3. Who contributes to the decision making process?

Facilitator Notes

Law enforcement, the location staff, and the elections office all contribute to making this decision.

4. List the stakeholders who may support the office with this situation.

Facilitator Notes

Stakeholders include:

- Temporary and full-time staff,
- Delivery services,
- Other government partners (that can help with relocation of supplies/equipment),
- Media outlets,
- Voting organizations, and
- The new locations,

5. Individually, answer the questions below.

5a. Do you meet with the stakeholders before each election?

(circle one)

Yes | No

5b. How frequently do you meet?

5c. Do the stakeholders help draft the incident response plan or continuity of operations plan (COOP)?

(circle one)

Yes | No

5d. Summarize the elements that are incorporated into the plan?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their own office and the plans that they have in place.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

- 1. As a group, discuss and record the steps to take when an issue like this arises. List in order of priority.**

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to create a list that may serve as an SOP checklist for these situations.

2. List other circumstances that occur that make a COOP essential to operations.

Facilitator Notes

Other circumstances include issues that may occur at the election’s office that required evacuation or relocation such as a fire, long-term power failure, or long-term network failure.

3. Individually, answer the questions below.

3a. What would your office do if it could not use its facility on Election Night? Describe below the options you have.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss agreements that may be in place with neighboring election jurisdictions to aid in ballot tabulation.

3b. If allowed, do you have plans in place to utilize another jurisdiction's tabulation equipment?

(circle one)

Yes | No

3c. If no, why not?

3d. If yes, have you ever tested the plan?

(circle one)

Yes | No

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to discuss the questions above to understand why some may not choose to

enter into agreements. Encourage participants to address how to test such a plan.

4. As a group, share any experiences you have had in utilizing a COOP.

List four to six essential items to incorporate in a COOP.

Facilitator Notes

Possible items include:

- Having supplies and equipment on hand at the alternate COOP facility,
- Ensuring employees have access to the COOP facility,
- Contracting or having an MOU with the secondary facility with a complete description of resources needed such as network access, use of equipment, etc., and
- Assurancing that any alternate location has physical security and cybersecurity controls that protect both election staff and data.

Communications Strategy

1. Individually, answer the questions below.

1a. What methods would you use to communicate a change in polling locations to the public?

1b. Are those methods documented?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. Do you have direct contact with various law enforcement agencies?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1d. How do you treat a “recommendation?” Who has the final say?

1e. Which stakeholders do you rely upon most to help with communication?

List the stakeholders and how they help below.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to answer the questions above and then share responses.

Session 13: Incorrect Information on Website

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

1 day before Election Day (EDay-1)

Jurisdiction Details

There are approximately 150,000 registered voters in your jurisdiction. Your office has had tremendous success in engaging community leaders and the public to rely heavily on the information your office supplies on its website. Two to three staff have worked together to ensure the website and social media is up to date. The jurisdiction even received an award for its website.

Situation Details

To ensure the jurisdiction has enough poll workers, the office recently consolidated polling locations. In addition, a recent state law changed the identification requirements for in-person voting. Staff who are normally actively engaged in updating the website have not been able to put as much time into it amidst their other responsibilities.

Unfortunately, several web pages included out-of-date information for some time, including the polling location information for about 25% of the voters. The identification requirements listed are also not updated in all locations. And to make matters worse, the test data from a previous election is showing results on the election results page.

The press is aware of the issue after a number of angry voters contacted them.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Working in pairs, discuss and list the steps you would take to respond to this issue.

Facilitator Notes

Possible steps to take may be:

- Prepare a holding statement and talking points for staff to share with the public who may contact the office.
- Document exactly what information was wrong on the website so you know who may be impacted.
- Attempt to determine the number of website hits, especially to the pages that were wrong.
- After documenting thoroughly, correct the issue.
- Issue statements to the press.
- Contact stakeholders that are impacted to make them aware of the issue and request support.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. *Individually*, answer the questions below.

1a. Does your office have more than one person who is responsible for website updates?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1b. Does your office have more than one person who is responsible for website updates?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1c. How do the responsible individuals know when to make a change to content or information provided on the website? How do they keep it up to date?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to analyze their process for updating the website and the flow of information required to make accurate changes. Encourage participants to share their various approaches.

1d. List ways this issue could have been prevented.

Facilitator Notes

Possible ways to prevent this issue include:

- Hold weekly meetings to ensure all staff are aware of possible changes.
- Utilize an application or spreadsheet to track and record what information must be updated on the website.
- Assign staff who update the website tasks and track completion.
- Develop a communication strategy to ensure staff updating the website are aware of changes that necessitate updates.
- Dedicate staff to review the website for accuracy, especially during election periods.

2. As a group, detail four to six best practices for ensuring an up-to-date website and social media pages.

Facilitator Notes

Possible best practices include:

- Assign staff to regularly review and update content on the website and social media,
- Prepare staff through website training courses,
- Review other election jurisdiction websites for ideas,
- Use web site monitors and other tools that are provided by content management systems, and
- Use social media tools to follow trends and respond timely to questions and comments.

Communications Strategy

1. List some talking points you would use to address this issue.

Facilitator Notes

- Our office recently experienced delays in providing updated information on our website.

- As we worked to consolidate polling locations and implement the state's new identification requirements for in-person voting, we failed to make important website updates.
- We are grateful to the press and the voters who called attention to this issue.
- New polling location and identification information, as well as all information on our office's website, is now current and correct.
- To avoid delays and ensure accuracy moving forward, we have improved our internal procedures with enhanced information tracking and full-time website coverage.

2. Knowing some voters may have visited the website and received the incorrect information, list actions you can take to provide the correct information (other than correcting the website).

Facilitator Notes

Possible actions include:

- Ask friendly press contacts to run a story to help with clarity.
- Send notices by mail or text messages to the voters affected by the polling location change.
- Use social media to help broadcast the correct information.

3. How can your stakeholders help?

Facilitator Notes

Stakeholders can help to spread the word and may utilize their websites to help broadcast the correct information. Other government agencies could include information in their mailers that help transmit the correction.

Session 14: Supplies and Ballots Provided to Wrong Locations

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

Presidential General Election Day

Jurisdiction Details

This jurisdiction has about 350,000 registered voters and approximately 135 polling locations. Equipment and supplies are delivered in secured “cages” to all polling locations about 4 days prior to the election. Temporary staff typically assist with the delivery and work together in bipartisan teams. Each team is provided with a checklist and custody log to complete.

Scenario Details

A team of temporary election workers delivered equipment and supplies to several polling locations. This was the team’s first time. They used a checklist to ensure proper delivery of the necessary equipment and supplies to each location. Although the first few stops went smoothly, they took longer than expected.

A mail merge issue with the custody log caused confusion about the allocation of equipment and supplies, leading the new staff to be less careful in subsequent deliveries due to being rushed.

On Election Day, the election office received numerous calls reporting ballot scanners not accepting the ballots. Additionally, other supplies, including electronic pollbooks, were labeled with the name of a different polling location.

This issue is causing delays, and voters are expressing frustration.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. *Individually*, answer the questions below.

1a. List some temporary solutions that could be quickly implemented to offset further delays.

Facilitator Notes

Possible solutions include:

- Deliver reserve hand-marked ballots (from mail ballot printing or in case of emergency) to the locations that were not provided the correct ballots.
- Contact partners such as the emergency management or law enforcement to see if they can assist with relocating some of the supplies.

1b. What stakeholders do you engage with to help with a response?

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think outside of the box. See notes above.

1c. List the possible consequences the office will face.

Facilitator Notes

Public may scrutinize this operational failure and as always, any mistakes can impact confidence in the voting system. Some voters may contact the press and other organizations, or legal counsel to address these concerns. Election officials must address the issue quickly to reduce the backlash.

1d. Think about what may have gone wrong with the delivery. List the possible reasons the issue occurred.

Facilitator Notes

Possible reason include:

- Staff assigned the task were not properly trained and did not have any or enough “on the job

training” to complete the task.

- Staff did not use an asset tracker tool to help ensure proper delivery of the supplies/equipment.
- The custody logs were not proofed properly to ensure accuracy.

2. As a group, decide up on the best course of action. List in order of importance.

Facilitator Notes

Possible actions include:

- Determine if the office has any reserved ballots that could be distributed to locations to prevent further voting delays.
- Utilize any backup voting equipment that could be provided to locations with the wrong equipment.
- Send instructions to poll workers using an automated system that allows for mass text.
- Instruct poll workers to inform the office which supplies/equipment they do have to help with the transfer to the correct locations.
- Encourage the usage of any accessible voting equipment or ballot marking devices that could be used to produce the correct ballot.
- Send staff to locations to transfer supplies to the correct location.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. What could have been done to prevent this issue from occurring? What tools or strategies could have been utilized to prevent this from occurring?

Facilitator Notes

Possible preventions include:

- Ensure staff are properly trained for the delivery.
- Proof all documentation to ensure accuracy, especially when using a mail merge program to create documentation. Small changes to the data set can result in problems.
- Utilize another set of staff to perform quality checks at each location after delivery.

- For those locations which are setup before Election Day, ensure poll workers perform supply and equipment checks prior to the opening of the polls.

2. Think about the documentation that exists for this type of logistical process in your office.

Individually, explain where the documentation exists, who is responsible for updating it, and who is responsible for training on this process.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to think about their processes and provide details.

3. As a group, share ideas on how to streamline and make this process more efficient. List four to six best practices.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to use responses to previous questions as a base for providing the best practices.

4. Discuss what a backup plan would be for this circumstance. What items may need to be on hand? What human resources might be needed? Briefly describe the plan below.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage staff to structure a backup plan. A backup plan would require supplies and ballots to be on hand to provide to locations timely. Extra temporary staff must be “on-call” to help with unforeseen events, especially during the morning period.

Communications Strategy

1. How do you communicate any new instructions to the poll workers? What method do you use?

Facilitator Notes

Some methods may include:

- Contacting poll workers via text message using an automated system typically used for emergency contacts.
- Using built-in messaging on the electronic pollbooks.
- Contacting personnel that may be in the field to relay a message (if there is no other way to communicate).
- Utilize a MARC radio system to broadcast a message.
- Contact the poll workers via cell phone or at the location. Pre-providing cell phones may be helpful in this instance.

2. List four to six talking points you would use in this circumstance.

Facilitator Notes

- Some locations received the wrong equipment and supplies. Our office is working quickly to correct the misdelivery.
- Our office has procedures and processes in place to address these issues and election workers are following them.
- Voters may experience some delay today when they vote. Please be patient and we will process voters as quickly as possible.
- Every vote will count.
- The issue does not impact the security of this election. All equipment is securely stored until Election Day in controlled facilities.

3. Discuss and describe your communications approach with the press/media. Do you proactively engage the press? How soon do you contact them?

Facilitator Notes

The talking points above can be utilized in communicating with the press. Using the contact list the office compiled, key media personnel should be contacted and talking points will be provided. In this situation, depending on the time it takes to recover from the issue, it is recommended to contact the press to make them aware.

Session 15: Instruction Proofing Issues

Participant Instructions

Carefully review the situation details below. Then, you and your fellow participants will work together as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions provided.

Situation Details

Time and Date

21 days before Election Day (EDay-21)

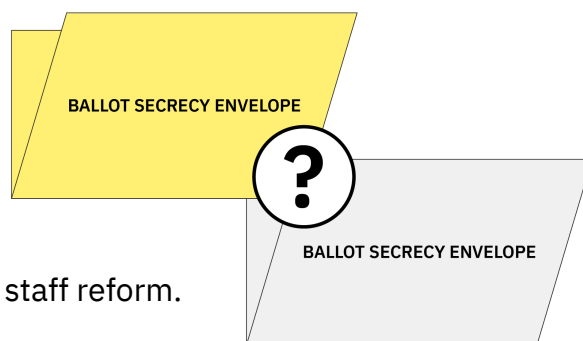
Jurisdiction Details

The jurisdiction has struggled with ballot errors. In each election, about a third of all ballots cast are by mail ballots. For the past three years, ballots have gone out to voters with some sort of mistake. Here is a summary of the errors:

- 2021: A ballot printing error made it impossible to scan the ballots automatically. 14,000 ballots had to be duplicated manually and rescanned. The printer was fired.
- 2022: Similar issue - ballots were printed with the wrong ID code, preventing machines from being able to read them. The problem involved about 21,000 mail ballots, of which about $\frac{1}{3}$ scanned properly.
- 2023: Superior Court race - voters were instructed to vote for one, but it was supposed to be a vote for two. The issue was caught and replacement ballots were provided.
- The jurisdiction has approximately 150,000 registered voters and 10 staff.

Scenario Details

The ballot instructions included with the mail ballot for this election were wrong. Instead of referring to the yellow secrecy envelope provided to the voters, the instructions tell voters to use a white secrecy envelope. Voters are calling in constantly. The press is up in arms. Other community leaders are calling for staff reform.



Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. Review the possible facts below. Respond to the questions provided.

Fact #1: Staff proofed the instructions before they were printed by a vendor. They have evidence showing that the proof the printer provided for approval was correct.

1a. What are possible explanations for the error?

Facilitator Notes

Possible explanations may include:

- There were likely multiple proofs and the vendor simply used the wrong one. The actual print job was never verified by the staff of the elections office.
- The vendor never acknowledged receipt or never received the latest email.

1b. What should have been done, by the election staff or the vendor, to prevent this issue?

Facilitator Notes

Example actions include:

- Elections staff should have gone onsite where materials are printed to review the actual printed version of the instructions together with other printed materials including the ballot, envelopes, and other inserts.
- The vendor could have met virtually with staff of the elections office to show the actual printed instructions.
- Implement a procedure to require a final written approval for all facets of the ballot package (ballot faces, instructions, outbound envelope, inbound envelope, sticker).

Fact #2: An emergency change to the instructions was performed last minute. The version sent to the printer was correct.

1c. What “corners” were cut?

Facilitator Notes

Possible “cut corners” include:

- An updated proof was never received from the print vendor for review.
- Staff likely did not approve an actual printed version of the updated instructions.

1d. How might this be similar to a last-minute change or “update” to a voting system, electronic pollbook, or other critical software application?

Facilitator Notes

Last-minute changes are often risky and challenging because it may seem like there is not enough time to follow normal testing or proofing procedures. One seemingly insignificant change can also change other items that go undetected without full review or testing. Election officials must follow strict “change control” protocols to prevent cross-impact.

2. What steps can you take to help remediate this issue? List five to 10 steps in order of priority.

Facilitator Notes

Allow participants to generate the steps, focusing on both communication that needs to occur as well as steps to correct the issue.

3. Refer to the “Scenario Details” above that occurred in 2023.

3a. How do some of the steps above change if the ballots were sent to voters with incorrect information or missing contests?

Facilitator Notes

Issues with ballots are somewhat more significant and may result in needing to send corrected ballots, which may result in a jurisdiction creating another database for those ballots that were corrected. It also may result in sorting and separating mail ballots as they are received. If there was an error on the ballot, it may result in a halt of ballot processing while the ballot is corrected and tested. Allow participants to identify and discuss those additional challenges.

3b. How does that change the timeframe for recovery?

Facilitator Notes

The steps needed to correct ballots will take more time. Further proofing, testing, and mailing will delay a prompt fix to the issue. Communication with voters will be key. Staff may have to focus solely on resolving this issue leaving other functions at a stand still, especially depending on the number of staff available.

3c. Does your office have an incident response plan for these situations?

(circle one)

Yes | No | In Progress

Facilitator Notes

Encourage discussion around this topic. Participants must work with partners to review and/or create a plan to deal with these circumstances.

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. Think about your current proofing practices for documents like ballots, instructions, website pages, etc.

1a. How would you rate your current procedures on a scale of one to 10 with one being *very poor* and 10 being *perfect*?

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

1b. Is your process for proofing documented? Where is it located? Are staff trained to proof?

Facilitator Notes

Election offices must have standard operating procedures to ensure proofing is performed. Encourage participants to share how their office accomplished these tasks and how to improve this critical task. Ask participants to share how they train staff, where the procedures are for their office, etc.

1c. Is the process outlined in checklist form?

Facilitator Notes

Checklists are important tools to utilize for this process. Ask participants to identify if they have a checklist and encourage sharing of how it was formulated. Encourage conversation to expose who is involved in the proofing process from a staffing standpoint. Other questions to consider are:

- Do individuals outside of the elections office assist in proofing? Who?
- Who verifies that the checklist was completed?
- Is there a review or audit process in place?

1d. Does your proofing process involve using external partners?

1e. If yes, who are they?

Facilitator Notes

See notes above. Ask participants to share which external partners review materials/ballots/documents and how this has been beneficial to the office.

1f. If you use a vendor to print and/or mail ballots, what process details are written into the contract? For example, is there a requirement to share a “live” test packet before producing the actual mail ballots.

Facilitator Notes

Encourage participants to develop contracts which outline the proof review and approval process carefully. Participants should consider ensuring “live” ballots are not only reviewed but tested to ensure scannability.

2. What if there is not enough time to issue replacement ballot packets before Election Day?

3. What alternatives could be offered to voters?

4. What creative approaches could you take (if your state law allows for it) to securely deliver ballots?

Facilitator Notes

For the questions above, promote discussion around this topic. Ask participants what plans are in place when a corrected ballot cannot be provided in time. Discuss the impact laws may have on this process.

Communications Strategy

1. Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Add responses to the right of each question to complete the chart below.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		
How do you contact them?		

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
<p>Do you have their contact information readily available?</p> <p>Where is it located?</p>		

Facilitator Notes

Ask participants to complete this chart. Note that this chart will be helpful in a variety of different circumstances and oftentimes the stakeholders will not change. Ask participants if something like this is already incorporated into any incident response or crisis communication plans.

2. Which stakeholders can help with communicating with the voters?

Facilitator Notes

Ask participants to discuss how stakeholders, other than just the media, should be engaged to help with communication.

After Action Review Session

What is an After Action Review?

An After Action Review (AAR) is a structured process for analyzing and evaluating the results of a project, event, or operation. It is also known as a “hot wash” or debrief. It is commonly used in various fields, including the military, business, and emergency response.

Did you know?

The term “hot wash” stemmed from soldiers using extremely hot water to clean their weapons immediately following an exercise or mission. Dirt and grit would get on their weapons and equipment during the mission. The longer it sat, the harder it was to remove—and the more likely it was to cause a misfire later.

An AAR is a dynamic, candid, professional discussion of the actions taken during the event itself. Everyone can, and should, participate. Insight, observation, or questions will help identify and correct deficiencies or maintain strengths.

An AAR is not a critique or a complaint session. No one individual has all of the information or answers. AARs maximize the learning experience by offering an opportunity to discuss the topic frankly. AARs are not a full-scale evaluation or evaluation report: they do not grade success or failure. There are always weaknesses to improve, strengths to sustain, and opportunities to learn from the experience.

Ultimately, an AAR answers four major questions:

- What was expected to happen?
- What actually occurred?
- What went well, and why?
- What can be improved, and how?

The AAR sections below will allow you as an individual and as a group to evaluate the responses you provided during the exercise. It will also allow you to evaluate the exercise itself to determine if the purposes were achieved.

After-Action Review - Self-Assessment

Individually, answer the questions below.

1. How did the exercise help you in your role?

2. What is one key takeaway (or one thing you learned) from today's exercise that you want to share with others?

3. Did you experience something that can be shared with colleagues and partners?

(circle one)

Yes | No

4. What is something you experienced today that you are likely not prepared to handle?

5. Rank the sessions you covered today with the top session listed being the most difficult and the bottom being easy. List the session number and title.

<hr/>	<hr/>
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<hr/>	<hr/>
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6. How effective was today's exercise on evaluating your plans, procedures, and protocols with one being "Not Effective at All" and 10 being "Extremely Effective?"

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

7. What areas of improvement, if any, do your plans need?

8. List some resources that were shared during the exercise that you want to utilize.

After Action Review - Session Evaluation

Using the session assigned to your team, answer the questions below. Each team must choose a spokesperson to present some of these answers to other teams participating in the event. Each team will then share their responses with the other groups. The spokesperson will begin by providing a brief summary of the session’s situation details followed by an overview of the responses to the questions above. Feel free to share lessons learned, what went well, and areas that need improvement.

Assigned Session: _____

1. How would you rate the difficulty of this session if it were to occur in real-life with one being “easy-peasy” and 10 being “Almost Apocalyptic?” Agree on a group answer.

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

2. Explain why the session was given this rating.

3. On a scale of 1-10, with one being the lowest score and 10 being the highest, rank how effective your team was in mitigating and managing this session.

(circle one)

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

4. Explain why this score was given.

5. On average, approximately what percentage of the group has policies, procedures, plans, or other documentation to aid their office in dealing with this situation?

(circle one)

0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100%

6. Consider plans and protocols you may have in place. What areas need improvement?

7. What are some strong points of the documented processes that exist?

8. Was there something you learned about responding to this situation that you did not know or realize before today?

(circle one)

Yes | No

If yes, what did you learn?

9. What stakeholders are most impacted by this situation and what stakeholders are most likely to aid you in this situation?

10. What plans, policies, and procedures need to be in place to be properly prepared for this type of situation?

(check all that apply)

- Crisis Communications Plan
 - Incident Response Plan
 - Continuity of Operations Plan
 - Standard Operating Procedures
 - Other(s): (describe)
-

11. Upon evaluation, does your team feel more prepared to respond to this situation as a result of today's exercise?

(circle one)

Yes | No

Why or why not?

After Action Review - TTX Evaluation

As a group, discuss and answer the questions below. Each group will be assigned a session to discuss as part of the After Action Review.

1. For the TTX activity itself, what went well?

2. What can be improved?

3. Did today's TTX help prepare you for administering future elections?

(circle one)

Yes | No

Why or why not?

4. How did the team interact with one another? How could the interaction improve?

5. How did the TTX help prepare you to administer future elections? How did it fall short?
