The Elections Group

Operational Tabletop Exercise Guide

For Participants

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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 those 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 plan and rehearse their responses to dealing with these situations.

Purpose

The foundation for successful election administration is thorough 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.

Each exercise session will:

- Require participants to point to standard procedures or other written protocols they have in place that would help respond to the issue.

- Require participants to point to crisis communication plans they may have to help address the error and maintain public confidence in the election process.

- Allow participants to learn about existing resources that may be used to build or enhance their own:

    - Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

    - Crisis Communication Plans

    - Incident Response Plans

    - Continuity of Operation Plans (COOPs)

    - 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 will allow

participants to discuss and respond to each exercise session collaboratively as a team. Each session will vary in length as guided by the facilitator or the exercise lead.

Each session of the exercise will contain 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 to use 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 of 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 presents various fictional scenarios to encourage discussion and participation. These materials are for training purposes only and should be adapted to meet the election preparation needs, policies and laws of the participants' jurisdiction. Election officials or other facilitators can tailor the exercise by adjusting scenarios, omitting sessions, adding discussion questions or making other changes to help engage participants and increase readiness.

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.

Scenario 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

Session 1: Staffing 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
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.
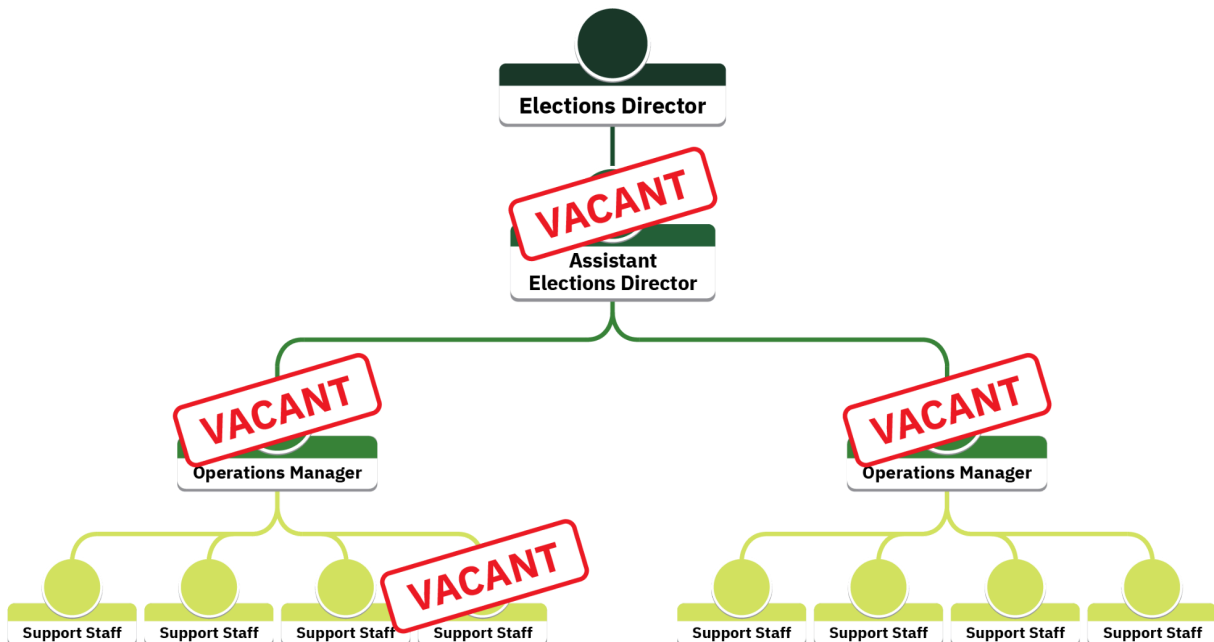
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____

_____

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

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Operational Procedures and Protocols

1. **For the reasons above marked with an "X", what are some preventative 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?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. **Note the timing of the staff departures above in the "Situation Details." How would staff leaving a week before Election Day impact your operations?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

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

    _____

    _____

    _____

7. **Think about your current cross-training process in the office. Do staff 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 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?**

    _____

    _____

    _____

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

_____

_____

_____

Communications Strategy

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

Session 2: Cybersecurity Event

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. 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, money and effort resources to improve 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 all included in its 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).
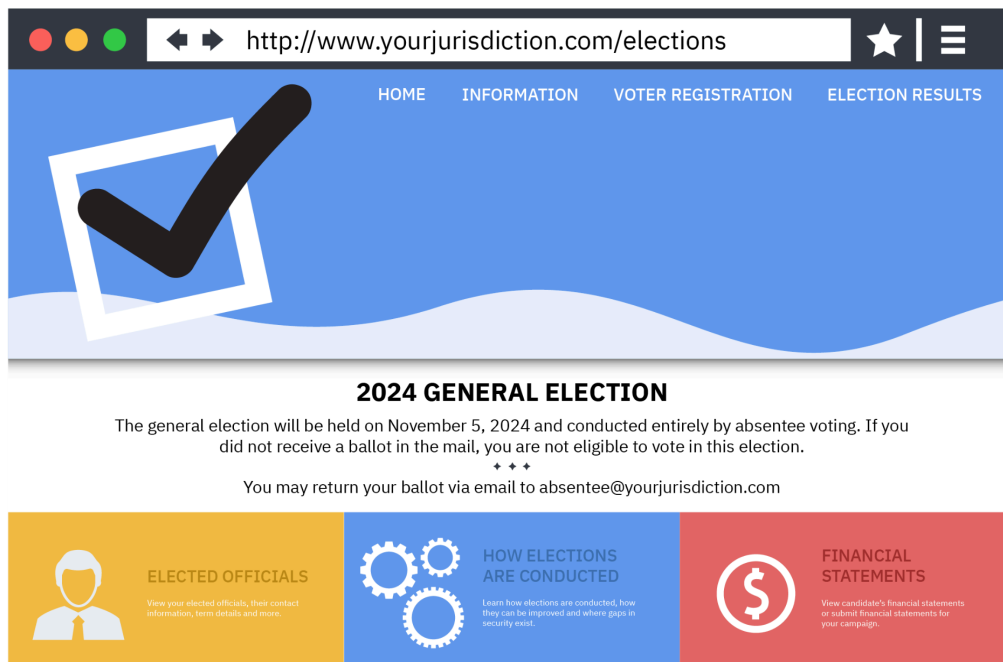
2024 GENERAL ELECTION

The general election will be held on November 5, 2024 and conducted entirely by absentee voting. If you did not receive a ballot in the mail, you are not eligible to vote in this election.

❖ ❖ ❖

You may return your ballot via email to absentee@yourjurisdiction.com

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?

   _____

   _____

   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?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____

2. *Individually*, **answer the questions below.**
    What has your jurisdiction done to prevent website spoofing? List actions you have taken to reduce the vulnerability.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

5. _**As a group**_, **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 the 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 the issue. Provide a holding statement below that can be provided to the press and that staff can use when providing information to the public.**

_____

_____

_____

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.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   2c. Will you draft a press release in this situation?
   (circle one)
   Yes | No

   2d. Why or why not?

   _____

   _____

Session 3: Ballot Proofing Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. 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 by 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. 14,000 ballots had to be duplicated manually and rescanned. Another printer was acquired for future elections.

- 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 ⅓ 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.
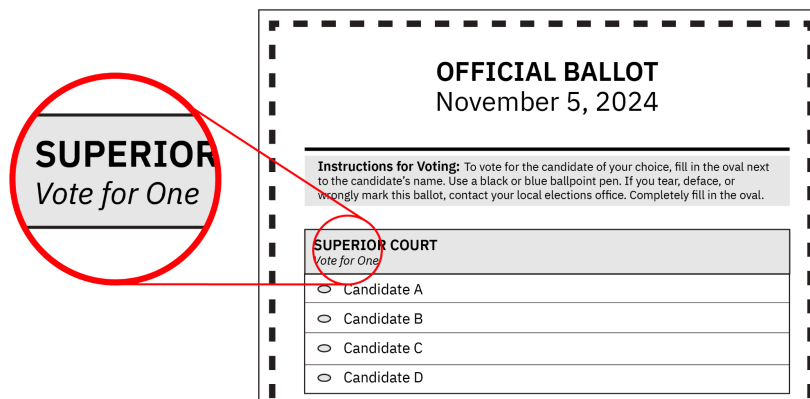
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

1. **What are possible explanations for the error?**

    _____

    _____

    _____

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

    _____

    _____

    _____

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?**

    _____

    _____

    _____

Operational Procedures and Protocols

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

    _____

    _____

    _____

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?

_____

_____

2d. Is the process outlined in checklist form?

_____

_____

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

(circle one)
Yes | No

2f. If yes, who are they?

_____

_____

3. *As a group*, **discuss the responses above.**

Communications Strategy

1. **Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.**

	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?**		

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 4: Election Results Reporting Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. 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 then tabulated by ballot scanners. Each election, several hundred precinct scanners are utilized. After the close of polls on Election Day, USB drives used to record 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 the drive or rescan the ballots returned on Election Night. Once all the drives are returned and all ballots scanned and tabulated, the unofficial election results are finalized and published.

Scenario Detail
Several USB drives from a particular polling location were returned to be tabulated but were not loaded and imported into the election management system on Election Night. For the unofficial results released after the polls are 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.
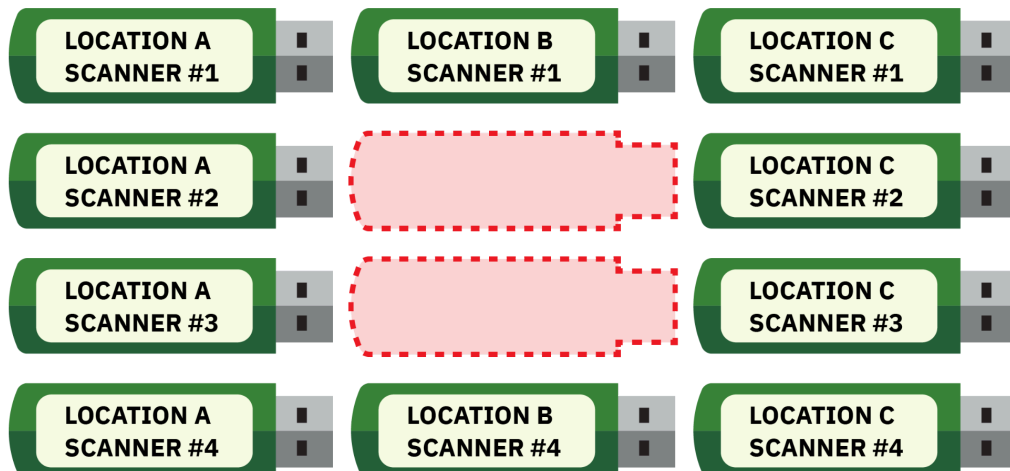
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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 the missing results contained on the USB drives.**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. **In the situation above, the staff turnover between elections was at 50%. Three of the four individuals who helped to manage operations, which includes 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?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

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. **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 this situation?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 5: Ballot Management Issues - Before Canvass

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. Work together with your fellow participants as a team (or as individuals where noted) to complete various activities. Discuss and record your responses to the questions that follow.

Situation Details

Time and Date
13 days after Election Day (EDay+13)

Jurisdiction Details
Voters cast approximately 200,000 ballots in the election. Voting consists of early in-person voting before Election Day, mail voting and in-person voting on Election Day. Nearly 60% of voters vote on Election Day, and 40% vote before, with about half of the early votes cast by mail. 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.

Scenario Details
During the period after Election Day, staff worked long hours processing around 500 mail 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 against the number of voters credited with voting. Comparing the EMS report to the voter credit report from the electronic poll book 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.

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		
Ballots Cast		
Precinct 101	–	62
Precinct 102	–	58
Precinct 103	–	75
Precinct 104	–	43
Precinct 105	–	83
All Precincts	**–**	**321**

Voter Credit Report		
Check-Ins		
Precinct 101	–	51
Precinct 102	–	58
Precinct 103	–	75
Precinct 104	–	43
Precinct 105	–	59
All Precincts	**–**	**286**

Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

4. **What action steps are missing above?**

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

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

   _____

   _____

   Ballots cast by mail

   _____

   _____

   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?

   _____

   _____

1e. Does the office create a ballot manifest?

(circle one)

Yes | No

1f. When do you begin the reconciliation process?

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

"Our 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.

Session 6: Poll Worker Shortage Issues

Participant Instructions

Review the situation details below. 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):

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    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?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

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**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

3. *As a group*, **consider the reasons poll workers may not return as poll workers. List strategies for preventing this from occurring.**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____

_____

_____

Operational Procedures and Protocols

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

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

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

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)?**

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

Communications Strategy

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.

Session 7: Mail Ballot Insertion 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, the incorrect ballot was delivered to over 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.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Operational Procedures and Protocols

For the questions below, note that the issue resulted simply because a default setting was incorrectly 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.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. **What other quality controls should take place during the insertion process?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    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.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

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.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

Communications Strategy

1. **Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.**

	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?**		

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?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2b. What methods do you use?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2c. List out four to six talking points.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 8: Ballot Shortage 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**
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.

Scenario 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.

LOW
PAPER STOCK
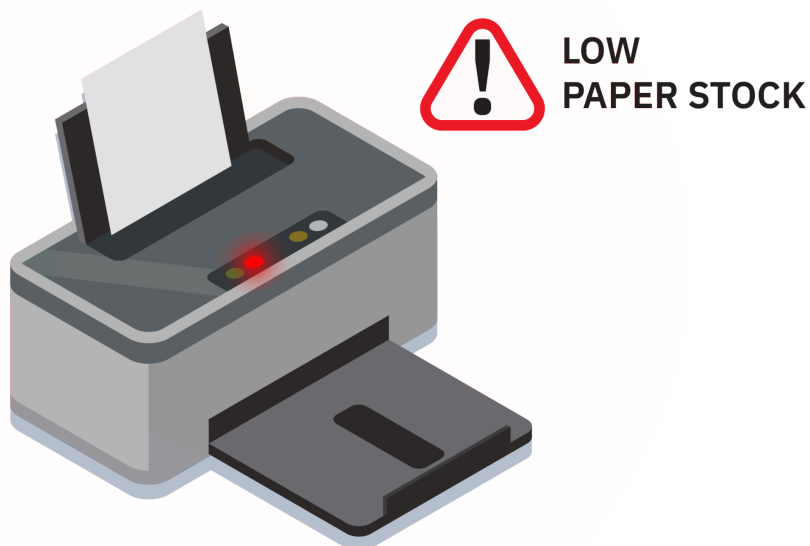
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

2. _As a group_, share and discuss the questions above. Share any best practices and record them below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

2. **Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.**

	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?		

Session 9: Electronic Poll Book 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 poll books. 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 poll book 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 **all** polling locations for Election Day. The polling locations open in 30 minutes.

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

Operational Procedures and Protocols

In answering the questions below, note that the root cause of the issue was the electronic poll books 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? Are they written and accessible? Are the necessary individuals trained on the backup procedures?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

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.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

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?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

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.**

    Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.

	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?**		

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.
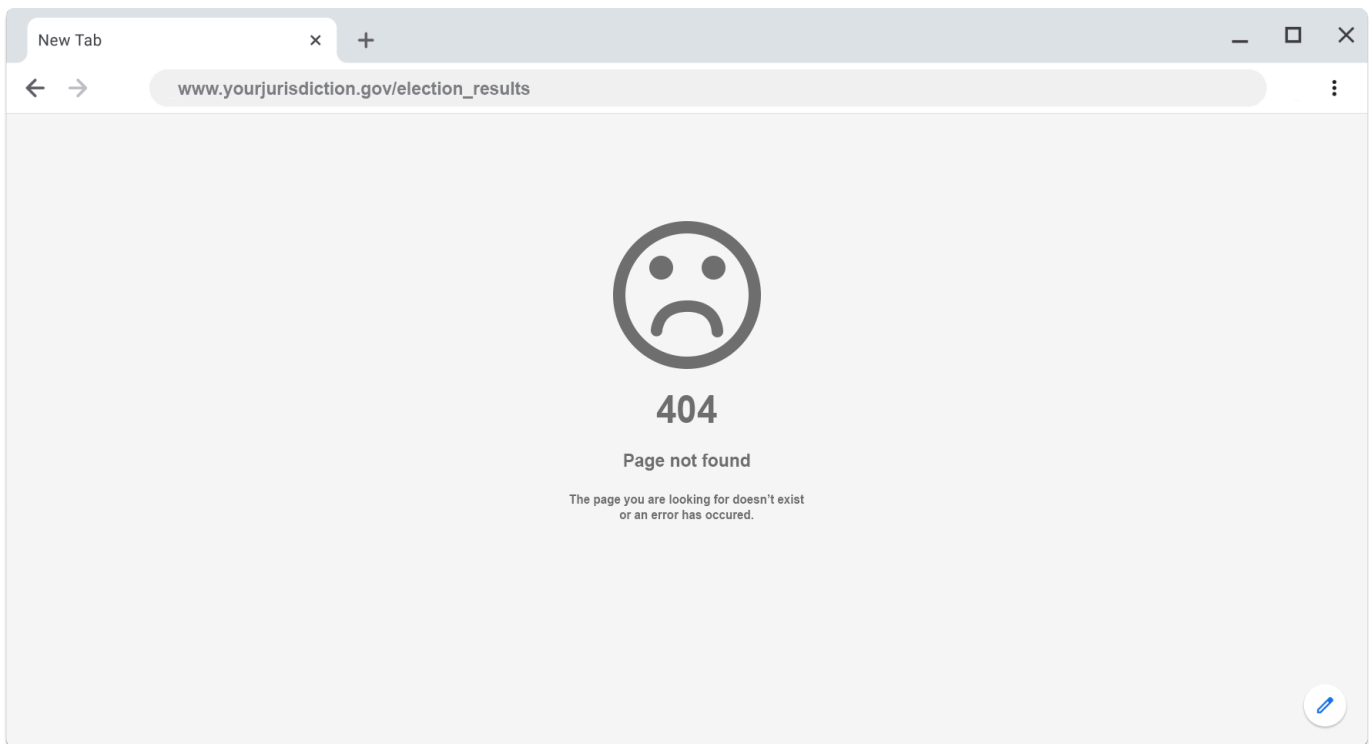
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

2. *Individually,* 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.

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

Communications Strategy

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

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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 from within each vote method.

This was the election director's first Presidential election and also the first year using a new print vendor. With only some minor issues, the election was perceived as a success by staff and the public.

Scenario 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 noticed 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.

Results for Your State
U.S. President

50.05%	**49.95%**
CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B

2. On some ballot styles, the layout of the races on the back of some ballots were 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 did receive it. The office reviewed its records and realized that some voters were not sent a letter. Their ballots did not count.
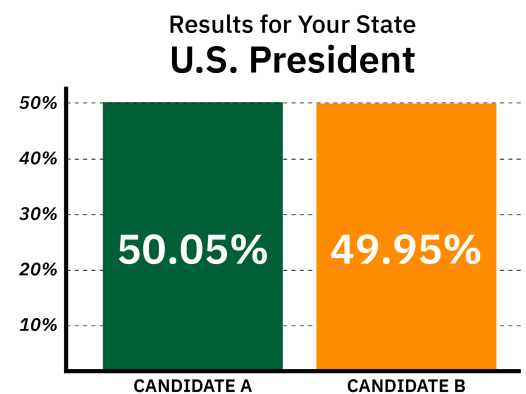
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

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

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

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?

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?

_____

_____

_____

1d. Do these procedures exist in your office?

(circle one)
Yes | No

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

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

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?

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____

_____

_____

Communications Strategy

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

   Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
Who are they?		
Which stakeholders are directly impacted by this situation?		
Which stakeholders are likely to assist in this situation?		

	Internal Stakeholders	External Stakeholders
How do you contact them?		
Do you have their contact information readily available? **Where is it located?**		

2. List out four to six talking points.

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.

Scenario 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?**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **Who ultimately decides what to do?**

   _____

   _____

3. **Who contributes to the decision making process?**

   _____

   _____

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

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

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?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

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.

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

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.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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.

Scenario Details
To ensure the office has enough poll workers, it 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 contact them.

Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

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?

    _____

    _____

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

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

    _____   _____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Communications Strategy

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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).

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

3. How can your stakeholders help?

_____

_____

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.

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

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

   _____

   _____

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

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

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

   _____   _____

   _____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

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?

_____

_____

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.**

_____

_____

_____

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

Communications Strategy

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

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

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

Session 15: 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 ballot errors. 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. 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 ⅓ 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.
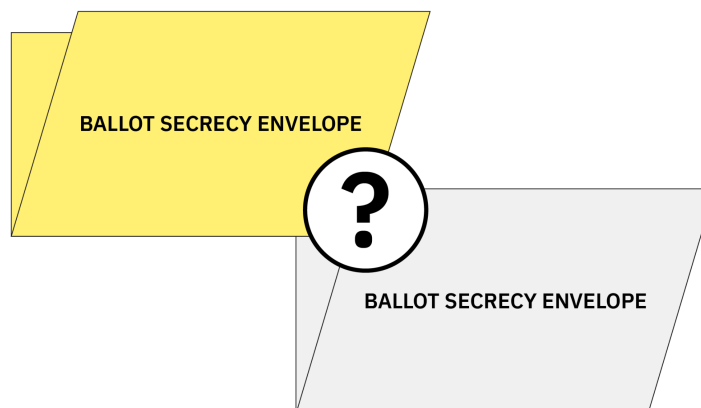
Assessment, Investigation, and Response

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?**

> _____

> _____

> _____

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

> _____

> _____

> _____

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?**

> _____

> _____

> _____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

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

(circle one)
Yes | No | In Progress

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?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   1c. Is the process outlined in checklist form?

   _____

   _____

   _____

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

1e. If yes, who are they?

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.

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?**

Communications Strategy

1. **Identify who the stakeholders are for your election jurisdiction. Complete the chart below by filling in a response to each question in the space to the right of each question.**

	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?**		

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

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.**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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

Explain why this score was given.

_____

_____

_____

4. **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%

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

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

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

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

7. **Was there something you learned about coping with this situation that you did not know or realize before today?**

    (circle one)

    Yes | No

    If yes, what did you learn?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. **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)

_____

_____

10. **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?