

# FINDING VOTING LOCATIONS AND POLL WORKERS



*This document is one in a series created as part of the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Subsector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. These documents provide guidance for state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials on how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of the COVID-19 epidemic.*

## OVERVIEW

While many election officials have responded to COVID-19 by focusing on increased mail voting, they will still hold in-person voting and will need to find voting locations and poll workers to staff sites. There will be challenges finding locations that will open to the public and workers who will be willing to staff them. This document provides input on risks and associated mitigations that relate to in-person voting.

## CHALLENGES ACQUIRING VOTING LOCATIONS

If current conditions continue, usual voting locations, such as assisted living homes or nursing homes, may no longer be available or appropriate for upcoming primaries or November 2020. If usual locations are available, many may not be large enough to accommodate the newly recommended layout and line management advice.

Size and space considerations are important in determining the viability of a voting site. Consider the impact of spreading out voting booths, machines, and check-in tables, as well as the impact of line length and how many voters and workers can remain inside the facility. Consider which locations are still available and what new locations you may be able to choose.

Some disruptions that may affect location availability include:

- Some large sites that could be or have been used for very large voting centers or super-sites (e.g., containing many precincts) are currently being used as makeshift or overflow medical facilities for when hospitals run out of space.
- Drawing outside traffic to voting locations at long-term care facilities, senior centers, and other facilities associated with senior citizens or healthcare presents risks to vulnerable populations associated with those facilities. Such use may even be prohibited.
- Some private facilities may not agree to serve as voting locations.
- It may be necessary to disinfect a location before and/or after the election.

One option for increasing the number of sites available to serve as voting locations is to enact changes to laws, regulations, or policies governing how sites are chosen. Public facilities, including schools, are likely to be a useful option for election officials. When working with policy makers, it is important to consider:

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- While many states provide election officials authority to use public facilities, there may be community resistance to using public facilities, such as schools. It may also be helpful to rely on the persuasive authority of senior political leadership to obtain the facilities.
- Some jurisdictions are discussing mandating the closure of schools for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday around Election Day. When describing space and needs with legislators, be sure your request includes adequate time to set up, clean and disinfect, and tear down voting locations.

Often providers of voting locations allow use of some space for election purposes but continue to conduct other business unrelated to voting. The best practice is likely for the voting location to be a single-use facility where the regular use is suspended during the time of voting (e.g., a school would not hold classes that day while voting occurs in the school's auditorium or library). If the voting location must remain a multi-use building, it will be important to find out the following:

- Will you have exclusive use of the room where voting will take place?
- What other activities are occurring?
- What is the expected volume of people on-site that day who will be associated with non-voting activities?
- What is the time and duration of the non-voting activities?
- What are the expected high-volume times during the day for non-voting activities? How do they compare to expected high-volume voting times?
- What population is being served by the non-voting activities?
- Has the CDC warned that this population is at particular risk for COVID-19?
- Can the activities be successfully isolated with separate entrances and exits?
- Can restrooms for use by poll workers and/or voters be isolated from those using the building for non-voting activities?

## **WHAT CONSIDERATIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS OR VOTE CENTERS?**

Voting locations used as large vote centers, especially those used for early in-person voting, may present many of the same considerations as traditional Election Day voting locations, but it may be challenging to implement new accommodations, such as additional space or the sole use of a facility, over the entire early voting period.

Arranging to share some of the costs of these accommodations may help you reach agreement with potential voting location facilities. Consider some of the following:

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- Increasing the financial stipend offered to locations.
- Covering the costs of disinfecting and cleaning the location after use.

For a more detailed discussion, please see *Considerations for In-person Voting* on the CISA [COVID-19 & Elections](#) webpage.

## **WHAT CONSIDERATIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR TEMPORARY VOTING LOCATIONS?**

Some locations have succeeded in establishing temporary facilities for particular situations, including the following:

- Creating mobile voting locations (i.e., voting location on wheels).
- Implementing drive-through voting or curb side voting.
- Renting event or wedding tents to use as voting locations.

Some of these examples, ideas, and their implementation are discussed in detail in the *Extraordinary Measures and New Solutions* on the CISA [COVID-19 & Elections](#) webpage.

Check with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to verify whether Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds, including Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds, can be used to cover these additional costs. FAQs and other information can be found on the EAC's CARES Act grant [site](#).

## **CHALLENGES OF FINDING POLL WORKERS**

Election officials should prepare for significant changes to the election-support labor force. Poll workers who have worked in past elections may not return for the 2020 election. If you expect a shortfall of poll workers, increasing poll worker compensation may help with recruitment. Also consider expanding or varying recruiting efforts to attract new workers.

General considerations related to recruiting poll workers during the pandemic include:

- Workers in the at-risk population, including the elderly and immunocompromised, may want or need to avoid service. This population is large and includes the most experienced poll workers.
  - Workers in this population may decline to serve, possibly without notice to election officials or even after previously signing up to work.
- The CDC has not yet reported those who have recovered from COVID-19 infection are immune to the virus. The data is not yet strong enough to base recruitment efforts around this assumption. Similarly, antibody testing should not be used for this purpose, based on the CDC's current understanding of these tests. Please check for further CDC guidance on this topic.
- Election officials may also find it prudent to institute a protocol, as appropriate and if consistent with applicable law for taking the forehead temperature and other symptom

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screening of their poll workers. Such actions may influence the ability and willingness of some to serve.

Recruiting new poll workers is an exercise all election officials undertake. States are trying a variety of methods to recruit new poll workers in light of COVID, including:

- Recruiting and messaging coordination with other public officials in government, like the governor, or legislature.
- Creating strategic partnerships with stakeholder organizations like political parties, unions, businesses, high schools, colleges/universities, voter advocacy groups, and other state or local government agencies.
- Increasing poll worker pay. See the contracting and financial implications discussion below for more information on this specific consideration.
- Record numbers of people have become unemployed as a direct result of COVID-19. While many may return to work before the election, some of these people may be available to serve as poll workers. If it is possible for those who are on furlough or earning unemployment benefits to be compensated for serving as poll workers without suffering a complete loss of unemployment benefits—emphasizing this fact may be important to recruitment messaging.
- Splitting shifts. One obstacle for potential poll workers can be the length of the work day. Splitting the day means you may need more poll workers, but a shorter day could make service more attractive to others.

Other considerations regarding the recruitment and assignment of poll workers to be considered in planning:

- Training in a social distancing environment will be more difficult for poll workers and election officials.
- Online training will require poll workers have access to the Internet and basic computer skills.
  - Poll worker training may still require some in-person training sessions, including training those who need hands-on familiarization with voting equipment, electronic pollbooks, or other technologies used at voting locations.
- If there are fewer voting locations, poll workers may have to travel further to work in areas further from their home, making it less attractive to some individuals.
- It is also important to consider the length of time election officials will be willing to serve. If you are considering additional days of early voting, extending the election period, you may encounter difficulty when recruiting people to work for the duration of the newly extended election period.

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We recommend election officials seek guidance from their respective legal counsel on the applicability of state and local laws, regulations, and policies involving employment of poll workers.

## NEW OR GREATER CYBER AND PHYSICAL RISKS

- The use of new locations comes with potential issues regarding IT infrastructure, such as connectivity, and infrastructure should be fully tested before implemented. If election IT will be riding on the Internet backbone of other organizations, for example, this will require extra testing and awareness of their security posture.
- Increased use of online training could contribute additional cyber risks, such as insecure coding and SQL injections in the training platform.
- Frequent communication with poll workers requires trustworthy communications platforms.
- Changes to voting locations and materials receiving stations bring operational, cyber, connectivity and physical layout challenges to meet physical security requirements.

## CONTROLS FOR MANAGING RISK

- Run vulnerability scans and conduct remote penetration testing on your publicly facing websites, such as new online training sites.
- Invite your regional Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Physical Security Advisor (PSA) for an [Assist Visit](#).
- Work with your PSA after the visit to fill out the [Infrastructure Survey Tool](#) (IST) to identify and document the overall security and resilience of the facility.
- Access the services described above in the [CISA Election Infrastructure Security Resource Guide](#). All services can be requested at [EISSA@cisa.dhs.gov](mailto:EISSA@cisa.dhs.gov). All these services are available at no cost to election officials.
- Use a .gov top-level domain for your official website.
- To gain situational awareness of the threats to the election infrastructure, become an EI-ISAC Member by visiting <https://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac/>.

## RESOURCES

### Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- [CDC Situation Summary webpage](#)—This page provides updated information and guidance on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- [CDC Coronavirus index webpage](#)—This page provides links to all CDC resources on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.

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- **CDC List of State and Territorial Health Department Websites**—This page provides links to all websites of state and territory health departments, which the CDC recommends consulting for state-specific information on the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- **CDC Recommended Precautions for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Election Polling Locations, including Cleaning and Disinfection**—This guidance provides recommendations on the routine cleaning and disinfection of polling location areas and associated electronic equipment. It suggests actions poll workers can take to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by limiting the survival of the virus in the environment. According to the CDC, this guidance will be updated if additional information becomes available.
  - There is a section on recommendations for processing mail-in ballots. The CDC states workers handling mail in ballots should practice hand hygiene frequently and no additional precautions are recommended for storage of ballots.
- **CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020**—This interim guidance for businesses may be relevant to election offices. It seeks to help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings. The guidance also provides planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19.

### Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)

- **CISA Coronavirus webpage**—This page provides information on CISA's efforts with federal partners concerning coronavirus and COVID-19 and links to other federal resources.
- **CISA Insights: Risk Management for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**—This brief provides recommendations on how to address physical supply chain and cyber security issues that may arise from the spread of the novel coronavirus. This resource is helpful for election officials to prepare for possible impacts of the novel coronavirus.

## ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (EAC)

- **EAC Disaster Preparedness and Recovery webpage**—This page features presentations from election administrators about how they conducted elections in the face of a variety of natural disasters. Their examples of preparedness and recovery could be helpful for election officials as they address the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.
- **EAC Contingency Plans webpage**—In preparation for the 2016 elections, the EAC collected continuity of operations plans (COOPs) and resources from election officials



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at the state and local levels. This includes state-specific examples for H1N1 flu preparedness.

- **EAC Election Management Guidelines Chapter 11: Contingency Planning and Change Management**—This 2009 resource was created to assist state and local election officials in effectively managing and administering elections. Each chapter explores a different aspect of election administration and provides examples and recommendations.
- **EAC 2020 CARES Act grants webpage**—This page features information on 2020 CARES Act grants for election administration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*This document was finalized on May 28, 2020. The situation and resultant guidance are subject to change. For current public health guidance relating to COVID-19, see [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). Election officials should also consult their state and local laws, including any applicable executive orders, regarding social distancing and other required or recommended public health practices (such as the wearing of masks by non-medical personnel).*