

ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

How electronic processing overcomes
traditional obstacles

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ABSTRACT

Many state and provincial government election officials like the concept of election day registration (EDR) — and the pursuant idea of increasing voter participation. But a litany of operational hurdles and the prospects of a significant capital investment have historically prevented the deployment of EDR pilots, programs or initiatives. Recent advances in electronic voter processing, however, have some election officials conducting pilots or seriously contemplating them. In most cases, an electronic EDR solution is a module in a larger voter processing solution aimed at replacing paper poll books and automating error-prone manual processes.

The upside of EDR: Participation

In the United States, nine states currently offer Election Day Registration (EDR). When those states have measured the impact of EDR, they have reported that approximately 10-20% of the voters in a typical election will register and cast votes on election day. When compared to marketing and communications initiatives conducted by partisan or non-partisan groups aimed at increasing voter participation, EDR appears to deliver much stronger results.

Obstacles to EDR: Cost and control

Many election officials, while in favor of EDR outcomes, have resisted deploying programs — or even conducting pilots — because they envision a process that clogs poll sites on election day. In most cases, poll workers are temporary or contract employees with minimal training or experience. The idea of asking them to verify a voter's identity and eligibility in the midst of election day traffic is daunting. Adding staff to handle the increase in traffic puts additional strain on already stretched budgets. Also, an imperfect and paper-based process could open the door to intentional or unintentional voter fraud. Simply interpreting a voter's handwriting on an EDR form can lead to errors both on election day and after the election, when a state is trying to update its voter registration database.

The solution: Electronic EDR

Electronic EDR technology brings speed and simplicity to the process. Deploying an electronic EDR system allows poll workers to simply scan an approved credential — such as a driver's license — and verify and register a new voter almost as quickly as they process someone who is already registered. The most effective approach is to choose an electronic EDR system that is offered as a module within a larger electronic poll book solution. An electronic solution helps to eliminate the delays and errors associated with manual registration and check-in processes. Voter registration data gathered on election day can be verified instantly and uploaded to a state or central database in a fraction of the time required by a manual, paper-based process.

How electronic EDR technology works

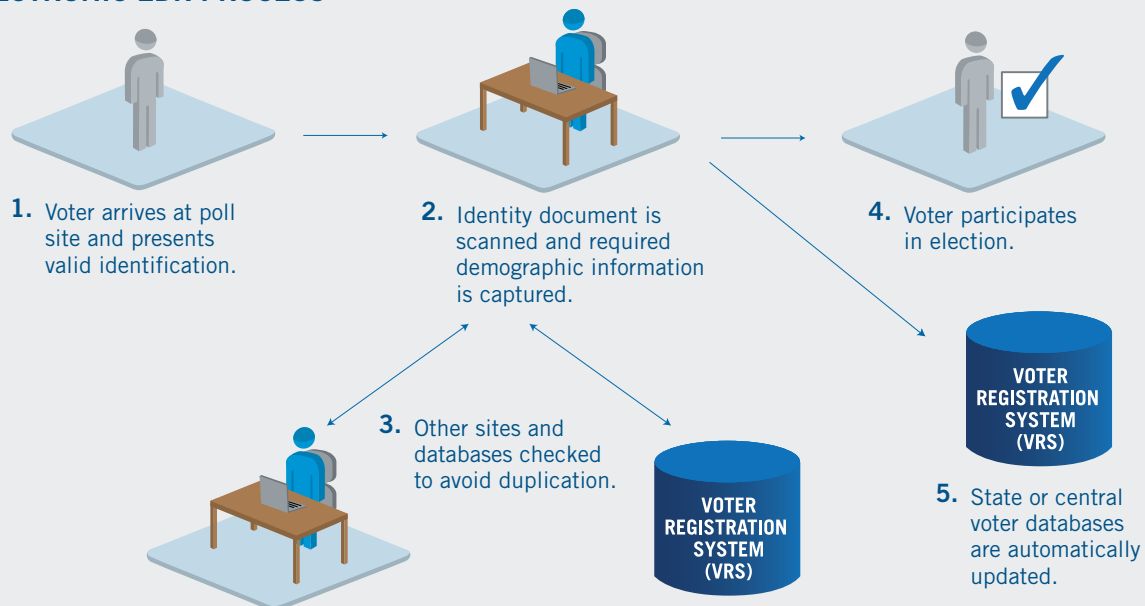
Typically on Election Day, an unregistered voter must complete an application. The election judge then must confirm the form is complete and verify that the voter's application and identification documents comply with established statutes and rules.

An electronic EDR solution replaces this process with electronic data capture. In some cases a driver's license or other approved identification document can be scanned and the required demographic information is automatically populated into the voter registration system. Even if the data is entered at a PC or notepad, accuracy is improved because there are no hand-written forms to read or interpret. Also, most systems require poll workers or election officials to provide complete information before the applicant is allowed to vote. This prevents downstream problems, such as county officials having to contact voters to collect missing or inaccurate information.

Electronic EDR solutions have been shown to:

- Ensure new voters register at the proper location and receive the correct ballot style
- Audit and verify voter registration data prior to upload
- Comply with local laws and procedures
- Improve speed by automating multiple manual process steps
- Automate management of voter registration
- Shorten lines and eliminate the time and cost of paper poll books with automated electronic voter check-in

ELECTRONIC EDR PROCESS



A BRIEF CASE STUDY

Electronic EDR in the city of Minnetonka

Minnesota was the first state in the U.S. to offer EDR and the first to establish a statewide voter registration database. State officials estimate the process has increased voter participation more than 10% each year it has been in place. In keeping with this heritage of election day innovation, the city of Minnetonka, Minnesota conducted an electronic EDR pilot program in one of its precincts.



The system featured a pre-loaded database of all registered voters in the precinct. Paper poll books were eliminated. Voters who were loaded into the system moved through the polls so quickly, the city decided it could conduct future elections with fewer poll workers and election judges.

Voters registering on election day were processed faster than ever. The fast and efficient process was initiated with a high-speed scan of the voter's driver's license. The unregistered voter's name, address and birth date were automatically matched to the database and a printed report was issued. There were no paper forms to be completed. No validation steps were accidentally omitted. And voters registering on Election Day moved through the polls almost as quickly as voters who already resided in the database.

Benefits on Election Day included faster processing, shorter lines and no registration errors. Post-election benefits included automatic updating of the voter registration database for that precinct — without the complications, delays and errors associated with hand-written forms.

“The entire process is fast, accurate and fully auditable,” said David Maeda, City Clerk for Minnetonka. “The pilot showed us we will have opportunities to cut costs by employing fewer election judges and reducing the need to have city staff reconcile collected forms and results from poll sites. We will also have to print fewer forms and spend less money on couriers and copies after the elections are completed.”

Maeda added, “We surveyed judges and poll workers after the pilot and they unanimously said they liked the technology. I was a little concerned going in that there would be resistance to a new technology, but it was well received.”

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