

## Executive Summary

Record turnout in this year's presidential primaries, along with a dramatic tide of new voter registrations and absentee ballot requests in many places, are driving state preparations for the November 2008 presidential election. A number of secretaries of state are predicting that turnout levels in some states could reach as high as eighty-percent.<sup>1</sup>

Prompted by the obvious excitement among our energized electorate, state election offices are focusing on three basic areas for the general election: 1) encouraging participation and ensuring that voters are prepared to cast a ballot; 2) providing a smooth and positive voting experience through professional polling place operations and contingency planning; and 3) delivering timely and accurate election results. Much of this work is proactive in nature and designed to make sure that everyone—voters and election workers alike—will be prepared for the historical election that will take place in just a few short weeks.

This report, based upon NASS survey data and state election office information compiled from June through early September, takes a broad-based approach to state preparations for the 2008 general election.<sup>2</sup> During the last several years, states have overhauled their election systems under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and successfully introduced major election-administration reforms (with numerous legislative and regulatory changes in some states) on everything from voting equipment to statewide voter registration databases, provisional voting, poll worker recruitment and training, and more. As part of these efforts, they have introduced new and innovative election practices that build upon HAVA's requirements while at the same time addressing the unique history, tradition and legal structure in each state.

To showcase some of these practices and the more general trends among states, this report looks at how states are preparing for another competitive presidential election in the following ways:

First, since the 2006 midterm elections and the passage of HAVA's deadlines, states have made great progress in providing resources and coordinated messaging designed to enhance voter participation. This is particularly true in terms of online tools such as polling place locators, voter registration lookups and provisional ballot trackers. Many states have also introduced targeted outreach efforts designed to reach young voters and other groups, such as disabled and senior voters, military and overseas voters and alternative language voters. The growing popularity of convenience voting options such as same-day registration, vote-by-mail and permanent absentee voting rounds out this work, as the notion of Election Day becomes an increasingly relative term for voters.

Second, although polling place management and operations are largely a function of local government, states are attempting to help cities and counties prepare to handle a rush of voters at the polls. A large part of this outreach work is aimed at broadening the pool of potential poll workers by targeting students, bilingual citizens, private sector employees and state employees while increasing efforts to offer consistency in training volunteers through online training, video refresher resources and monster statewide conferences. Polling place efficiency measures, such as the adoption of electronic poll books and vote centers, are also enabling states to improve administration and enhance customer service at the polls. These initiatives are designed to complement the intensive contingency planning that is taking place this year, as states expand the scope of their efforts beyond natural disaster and security threats to include strategies for dealing with equipment breakdowns, ballot shortages, long lines, poll worker shortages and other election-related scenarios.

Finally, in an effort to maintain transparency and boost confidence in the outcome of the elections, states are offering enhanced election results reporting features for 2008 and shoring up their post-election auditing and reporting procedures.

While the information in the first part of this report is intended to provide an overview of state efforts and activities leading up to the 2008 presidential election, it is neither an exhaustive representation nor a scientific study of these efforts. Readers are urged to check out the state-by-state profiles in order to see what each state is doing for 2008, as well as to get details on state voter hotlines and other resources.

Above all, preparing for a presidential election is a complex and continuous challenge at all levels of administration, with many more elements than what we have included here. Americans should be assured that no matter how many people cast a ballot in this year's general election—especially if there is record turnout among our energized electorate—the nation's election professionals are committed to providing a process that serves voters and democracy well.

## Voter Participation

Voter participation was clearly on the rise during this year's presidential primaries, with some states seeing record-setting levels of registration and turnout. Voter turnout levels doubled—or even tripled—in some states, with young voters making a particularly enthusiastic showing.<sup>3</sup>

As the general election approaches, states and localities are dedicating millions of dollars to vigorous public education efforts designed to increase awareness of voting requirements and deadlines. State officials want to ensure that voters—particularly first-time voters and those who have not cast a ballot in recent elections—are aware of the “tools and the rules” well in advance of Election Day. These efforts, which include new online resources such as polling place locators and voter registration lookups, can prevent voters from being left off of voter registration lists, showing up at the wrong polling place or forgetting to bring proper identification to the polls. Some states are also conducting targeted outreach to encourage participation among young voters, elderly and disabled voters, military and overseas voters and alternative language voters.

The increased availability of convenience voting options—including same-day registration, early voting and vote-by-mail—are impacting state voter participation efforts this year. Officials expect the number of early voters to dramatically increase in the presidential election, and in some places, they are actively encouraging eligible citizens to vote before November 4th.

### Public Education Campaigns

According to NASS survey responses, 24 states (see state profiles) are conducting vigorous, statewide public outreach campaigns for the general election. In a year when voter engagement is particularly high, these initiatives are focused intently on assisting the more than 3.5 million estimated new registrants—many of whom are first-time voters—navigate the electoral process and prepare for what to expect on Election Day.<sup>4</sup> They also want to assist local election officials by increasing the supply of well-trained poll workers who are ready to help provide voters with a positive experience on Election Day.

The large majority (65 percent) of state public outreach campaigns utilize public service announcements (PSAs) designed to provide information on voting procedures and requirements—including election dates and deadlines—as well as identification requirements and absentee or early voting options. In Florida, for example, the secretary of state's office is airing a series of PSAs to familiarize voters with the state's voting

equipment, emphasize the importance of updating voter registration information, and notify them of the kinds of identification that will be accepted at the polls.

Other states are producing more specialized ads. The New Mexico Secretary of State's office held a student film competition to produce a public service announcement aimed at increasing voter turnout among disabled voters. In Maine, the secretary of state's office organizes a Youth Voting PSA Project competition, where students produce public service announcements about voting and the importance of civic participation. The winning entries are aired on television and radio stations and streamed online.<sup>5</sup>

For 2008, three states which require voters to present photo identification—Georgia, Indiana and Michigan—are focusing their statewide voter outreach campaigns on the specifics of their state laws.<sup>6</sup> The goal is to inform voters about what ID to bring to the polls and to tell eligible citizens who lack a photo ID how they can obtain a free, government-issued photo ID card.

While states generally rely upon traditional media such as print, radio, and local or cable television to spread the word, a growing number of states are looking to the Internet and social networking websites to share their messages with voters. The Missouri Secretary of State's office unveiled its "3 Minute Guide to Voting in Missouri" video on the state website and then posted it to YouTube, MySpace and other popular videosharing sites. The Arizona Secretary of State's office plans to do something similar with footage of its statewide town hall meetings on ballot measures and the voting process.

Additional methods of state voter outreach include:

**Voter Hotlines:** Thirty-seven states (see Appendix A) provide toll-free hotlines to collect and respond to voter feedback, questions or complaints during the voting period. Four states (Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana and West Virginia) also have a hotline for reporting suspected incidents of registration and voting fraud.

**Equipment Demonstrations:** Half of all states are doing something to familiarize voters with the equipment they will encounter at the polling place. Twenty-five states (see state profiles) conduct voting equipment demonstrations at locations which can include state and county fairs, schools, colleges, libraries, community centers and shopping malls. Many of these efforts are focused on giving voters the opportunity to get hands-on experience with DRE and optical scan machines, but some states—such as Oklahoma—also set up preview and practice sessions for the state's vote-by-phone system. However, even viewing a walk-through of voting equipment can help; eighteen

states (see state profiles) provide voting equipment demonstration videos on their state elections website.

**Direct Mailings:** While all states conduct mailings to voters, seven states (Alaska, Massachusetts, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington) and the District of Columbia reported mailing voter information guides to every household with a registered voter. In Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, voter registration forms are included in moving packets for people who change their address with the United States Postal Service.<sup>7</sup>

**Outdoor Advertising:** Connecticut and Nevada advertise election dates and deadlines using billboards, while Indiana's election office publicizes this information through transit advertising on buses.

**Workplace Partnerships:** A relatively new undertaking at the state level, five states (California, Indiana, Missouri, Nevada and Rhode Island) reported voter outreach collaborations with the private sector. The California Secretary of State's office partners with businesses through its "MyVote: Democracy at Work" program to encourage the employees of participating companies to vote and serve as poll workers by placing information on paycheck inserts, sending text messages to employees and utilizing company email lists. The Nevada Secretary of State's office provides a toolkit to all state employers for use in educating workers about voter registration and participation, while the Rhode Island Secretary of State's office is hosting voter registration drives at businesses across the state as part of its "Voters in the Workplace" campaign.<sup>8</sup> Missouri's program is designed to recruit new poll workers, while in Indiana, several companies which have partnered with the secretary of state's office to encourage participation have developed their own PSAs or worked to distribute information to customers, as well as employees.

## Online Tools & Resources

Recognizing the power of the Internet to reach voters—particularly younger voters, who tend to be first-time voters as well—all states operate websites featuring election information such as election calendars, voter registration applications, voting instructions, elected official lookups, absentee voting materials and educational videos.

Thanks in large part to the establishment of statewide voter registration databases under HAVA, more

states than ever before are using their websites to communicate registration information to the public. In the majority of states, web users can now look up the status of their voter registration, find their polling place location, contact a local election official with questions or download a sample ballot or a voter registration form.

Two states, Arizona and Washington, allow eligible voters to register to vote online, while Delaware and the District of Columbia offer online registration wizards designed to reduce errors by helping voters fill out their forms for mailing. Still other states, such as Maine, Michigan, Minnesota and West Virginia, offer “candidate finder” features which enable interested visitors to search for information on candidates and elected officials, including searches by voting district.

In general, NASS survey responses show that states are offering the following online tools:

**Polling Place Locators:** In forty-three states (see Appendix B), voters can go online to find out where to vote. Additionally, a number of states such as Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, Pennsylvania and Washington have integrated their online polling place locators with Google or other GPS-based technologies to provide maps to polling place or ballot drop box locations and driving directions.

**Voter Registration Lookups:** Thirty-one states plus the District of Columbia (see Appendix B)—offer online voter registration lookups designed to help voters check their registration status and update their information, if necessary (North Dakota does not require voter registration). State election officials are paying particular care to urge voters, particularly those who have not voted in recent years, to use these registration lookups to confirm that they are registered at their current address.

**Sample Ballots:** Twenty-two states (see Appendix B) provide voters with an online sample ballot. This service enables voters to familiarize themselves with the layout of the ballot and to read, study, print—and even mark up a copy—which they can bring to the polls when they vote.

**Absentee and Provisional Ballots:** Sixteen states and the District of Columbia (see Appendix B) offer an online provisional ballot tracking tool, which enables voters to see if their ballot has been counted. Meanwhile, six states (Alaska<sup>9</sup>, Kansas, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota and Rhode Island) allow voters to check the status of their absentee ballot using the Internet.

**Online Voter Registration:** As previously mentioned, two states—Arizona and Washington—currently offer online voter registration services. According to officials in those states, these tools provide convenience to voters, reduce paper and cut down on processing time for election officials, who don't have to try and decipher illegible writing or try to process incomplete forms.

**Online Election Complaint Forms:** Seventeen states now make their standard HAVA-mandated election complaint forms available online.

## Targeted Outreach for Young Voters & Other Groups

A number of secretary of state offices and state election boards are choosing to conduct proactive outreach to specific communities of citizens, often with the goal of aiding populations which have been traditionally underrepresented among state voters or those which are guaranteed additional protections under federal and state law. Groups being targeted by state election offices in 2008 include young voters, elderly and disabled voters, military and overseas voters and alternative language voters.

### Young Voters

To encourage youth voting and participation in his state for 2008, Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed launched a social media campaign called, "I Will Vote," a photo-sharing initiative which lets people post photos of themselves holding "I Will Vote" signs, rank each others' photos, search for submission by zip code and name or invite friends to participate. So far, it's been very popular with young Washingtonians, who have made such declarations on their bedroom walls, in their workplaces and even underwater.

Reed's program comes at a time when young voter participation rates are surging across the nation. Compared to 2000, turnout among 18-24 year-old voters nearly doubled in the 2008 presidential primaries.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that this is a particularly mobile demographic with many first-time voters, officials say it's important to educate them on the process from state to state.

In a May 2008 survey, 68 percent of states reported conducting outreach directed specifically at young voters.<sup>11</sup> Methods include mock elections, public service announcements, direct mailings, instructional videos, informational pamphlets/brochures, partnerships with nonprofits and state universities, and classroom or campus demonstrations/presentations.

Not surprisingly, states are using the online outreach to reach this Internet-savvy generation. Half of all state websites now contain pages devoted to assisting young voters, while Missouri, Nevada and Vermont offer separate sites for this audience. More than a third of these pages now provide specific guidance for college students who wish to register and vote using a dormitory address as their primary residence (Vermont residents can download a detailed College Voters Guide for help as well).<sup>12</sup>

There has been marked growth in state election office use of social networking and videosharing sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to reach eligible young voters. A dozen states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia) now provide election information via pages or files posted to one or more of these sites.

Additional state youth voter outreach efforts include:

**Birthday Voter Mailings:** Five states (Arizona, California, Michigan, Missouri and Washington) mail “Happy 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday” cards with voter registration applications to 18 year-olds who have registered with the state motor vehicle division.

**High School & College Programs:** Eighteen states conduct outreach at schools or campuses, with Oregon law now requiring such outreach at state colleges. The Rhode Island Secretary of State’s 2008 statewide voter registration initiative is geared towards visiting every high school in the state to register as many eligible voters as possible before November. Ohio’s Grads Vote 2008 program includes voter registration packets along with the diplomas awarded to graduating high school seniors. The Arkansas Secretary of State’s office annually hosts a young voter education program that includes a mock election, a discussion of civil and voting rights in America and opportunities for eligible students to register and vote at the conclusion of the program.

Michigan’s Department of State has its own voter registration van that travels to college campuses throughout the state and offers nonpartisan voter registration services to students, while Nebraska’s Secretary of State established a College Student Advisory Board to review and discuss voting issues related to college students. Indiana and Michigan work with colleges to distribute voting information to students through college email systems, while Washington has a College Civics Program, which partners with state colleges and universities to encourage voter registration and participation.



## Elderly & Disabled Voters

Under federal laws such as HAVA, the Voting Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, states are required to provide polling place accessibility and options for all voters who seek to vote privately and independently. Some state offices are involved in a variety of additional efforts designed specifically to assist elderly voters and voters with disabilities with the voting process. Through this outreach work, which includes attempts to focus on residents in senior residential or assisted care facilities, officials can help make such voters aware of accessible routes into polling places, accessible parking areas or transportation offerings, alternative voting options (such as vote-by-mail or permanent absentee voting), large-print ballots and the availability of assistive devices and resources, such as interpreters, auxiliary aids, Braille materials and listening devices.

For 2008, the Vermont Secretary of State's office has introduced a mobile polling project aimed at assisting voters with physical and cognitive impairments. As part of this initiative, trained election workers are bringing ballots to residential care facilities prior to the general election to enable eligible residents to register and vote. Residents who cannot vote independently are being offered assistance from bipartisan pairs of election workers who have been trained to work with elderly voters, and in particular, voters who may have some cognitive impairment. The state hopes to test and measure the success of this pilot program for use in other places.

Other state initiatives for the general election include:

**Instructional Materials:** Four states (California, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington) provide voting instructions in alternative formats which are designed for senior or disabled voters, while another three states (Michigan, Minnesota and North Dakota) have created and distributed instructional videos for voters with disabilities.

**Equipment Demonstrations:** Two states (Iowa and Wyoming) have put together voting equipment demonstrations for disability organizations. The New York State Board of Elections unveiled a new online voter education initiative, [www.vote-ny.com](http://www.vote-ny.com), to help disabled voters learn more about the ballot marking equipment that is available in their polling place and how it is used.

**Statewide Partnerships:** Five states (Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Michigan and New Hampshire) have established special outreach partnerships with advocacy groups for the disabled. Alabama has a new statewide partnership with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to help reach voters and recruit poll workers. Virginia's State Board of Elections has partnered with the Virginia State

Hospital Association and the Virginia Nursing Home Association to reach disabled and senior voters who may need to update their registration information or vote absentee.

**Vote by Phone:** Five states (Connecticut, Maine, Oklahoma, New Hampshire and Vermont) currently offer vote-by-phone systems to permit voters with disabilities, the elderly and others to vote privately and independently at polling places. These systems allow voters to use the telephone keypad to mark a paper ballot, which is then printed out in an election office to be counted with the rest of the ballots on Election Day. Officials say it has great potential for older and disabled voters who cannot privately and independently mark a paper ballot without technological assistance.

In keeping with this idea, Oregon has introduced an alternative format ballot for individual with disabilities that can be read and marked by voters using their home computers.

**Transportation Assistance:** Minnesota is publicizing a partnership with Target Corporation to provide special transportation to take voters with disabilities to the polls on Election Day.<sup>13</sup>

### **Military and Overseas Voters**

According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, less than a million of the six million eligible U.S. military and overseas voters were able to participate in the 2006 election.<sup>14</sup> For many of those who did not get to vote or have their vote counted, the issue was one of getting the ballot to the voter and then returning it to the proper local election office by the deadline.

As a result, states are focusing on practical ways to engage this voting bloc this year by expediting the delivery and return of their ballots. An overwhelming majority of the states currently accept ballot requests via phone, facsimile or email.<sup>15</sup> While most states still require that a voted ballot must be returned in its original form with a valid signature, twenty states now allow voters to receive a blank ballot by email, and 11 states allow voters to return the voted ballot by email.<sup>16</sup>

The majority of states also have a webpage specifically devoted to assisting military and overseas voters with ballot transmission and other issues (including information on requesting an absentee ballot, contacting their local election office, finding candidate information, and getting help with downloading and filling out a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot), but a few states are doing more. The Alabama Secretary of State's office has created a statewide task force that is studying military and overseas voting issues, including the possibility of implementing Internet voting for Alabama servicemen and women.<sup>17</sup>

Additional state outreach initiatives designed to assist military voters include:

**Online Voter Registration:** Five states (Alabama, Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio and West Virginia) are partnered with the nonpartisan Overseas Vote Foundation to provide an online tool that helps military and overseas citizens complete a voter registration/absentee ballot request form according to state-specific requirements. The site also minimizes user error and provides instructions for where/how to submit the form.<sup>18</sup>

**Online Ballot Submission:** Six states (Arkansas, Iowa, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and West Virginia) have agreed to participate in a U.S. Federal Voting Assistance Program initiative that provides military and overseas voters with the capability to electronically submit a voter registration/absentee ballot request form to their local election office through a secure server. The program also provides the capability to electronically receive the blank ballot from the local election official through the secure server.<sup>19</sup>

**Military/Overseas Voters Guides:** Georgia, Indiana, Minnesota and Oregon provide a downloadable Military/Overseas Voters' Guide to all eligible voters. These guides are geared towards assisting voters navigate the process of requesting and returning an absentee ballot.

### Alternative Language Voters

State efforts to assist voters in this bloc include translating voting materials into alternative languages, providing voting information and assistance at naturalization ceremonies (Connecticut, Michigan and Rhode Island) and targeting announcements to communities of historically underrepresented voters (Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Pennsylvania).

A number of states have dedicated outreach programs for alternative language speakers. Montana and South Dakota, for example, are working with counties to provide interpreters for Native American voters who seek assistance (New Mexico also conducts extensive outreach to Native American populations). Meanwhile, Connecticut is hoping to register 10,000 new Latino voters for the 2008 general election through its recently-launched ¡Tu Voto Si Cuenta! campaign, which includes ten cities with significant Latino populations. And North Carolina's State Board of Elections has a staffer whose job duties include outreach to Latino voters.

To serve their diverse populations of voters, a number of state election offices have also translated their Web sites and voters' guides into multiple languages. For example, Pennsylvania's voter education Web

site is now available in seven different languages, Washington's elections Web site is available in three languages, and Arizona's elections Web site is available in Spanish. New Mexico and Pennsylvania have made their voters' guides available in both English and Spanish.

## Convenience Voting

More than thirty states currently allow some form of early voting, which is defined as any voting that occurs prior to Election Day for which there are no eligibility requirements. Given the potential for high turnout on November 4, voting opportunities that allow eligible voters to avoid crowds at the polls will certainly be attractive to any number of voters.

According to the *Associated Press*, up to a third of all eligible voters could end up casting their vote for president in a non-traditional way this year—using absentee ballots, voting at home by mail or casting votes at a polling place in the weeks leading up to the election<sup>20</sup> Some secretaries of state and state election directors are actively encouraging eligible voters to consider using absentee ballots or other convenience options to help curb the potential for rushes at the polls.

State convenience voting options include:

**Same-Day-Registration:** Eight states now offer same-day registration (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming), and three states—Alaska, Connecticut and Rhode Island—offer Election Day registration for those who want to vote for president.<sup>21</sup> North Carolina also has same-day registration during their early voting period, but not on Election Day. North Dakota is the only state with no voter registration requirement altogether.

**Vote-by-Mail:** Seven states have jurisdictions where mail is the primary method of voting – all voters receive and return their ballots by U.S. mail and there is no use of traditional polling places. Of these states, Oregon is entirely vote-by-mail, and 37 of Washington's 39 counties are entirely vote-by-mail. California, one of several states that have established a "permanent vote by mail" option for some classes of eligible voters, also has two counties using vote-by-mail this year.

**Early/In-Person Absentee Voting:** Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia (see Appendix D) allow in-person, absentee voting before the election without an excuse (also called early or advance voting), and twenty eight states allow absentee voting by mail with no excuse.<sup>22</sup> These options provide convenience to voters and can help reduce long lines at the polls on Election Day.

A few states are trying to encourage voters to consider this option. At least one state—Tennessee—is urging localities to extend their hours for early voting.<sup>23</sup> And in Ohio, election officials in more than twenty counties are proactively mailing absentee ballot request forms to registered voters, hoping they will take advantage of the state's no-excuse absentee voting law.<sup>24</sup>

**Permanent Absentee Voting:** In the name of flexibility and cost-effectiveness for government, voters who are permanently unable to vote in-person on Election Day may apply for permanent absentee voting status (also referred to as “permanent vote by mail” in some states). With the addition of Colorado to the list this year, at least sixteen states now permit this kind of voting.<sup>25</sup>

**Vote Centers:** (See Polling Place Efficiency in the next section.)

## Polling Place Operations

Given the high turnout in the primaries and the large volume of new voter registrations in many states this year, state and local election officials are focusing on preventing lines with long wait times and improving efficiency measures at polling places on November 4. Although polling place management is largely a function of local government, state officials want to help county clerks and registrars identify and resolve administrative issues that could directly impact voters at the polls well in advance of Election Day. The goal is to focus on sound planning practices that anticipate heavy turnout and related personnel needs.

One of the most critical areas of this process is recruiting and training poll workers. The United States Election Assistance Commission estimates that nearly two million poll workers are needed to staff the nation's 200,000 polling places for the 2008 presidential election.<sup>26</sup> To help make the process run smoothly on Election Day, states are turning to new recruiting sources, including high schools, colleges and workplaces. Attracting and retaining bilingual poll workers is a key part of this outreach.

In preparing for this year's election cycle, a number of states have taken steps to enhance the consistency of their poll worker training process. This includes providing localities with additional resources for training and developing new approaches, such as statewide train-the-trainer conferences, online training and video refresher options.

New or updated efficiency measures such as polling place locators, electronic poll books, vote centers and voter feedback forms are being used enhance the Election Day experience by streamlining polling place

management practices and allowing voters to let state election offices know about the quality of their polling place experience.

Finally, the scope of state contingency planning has been broadened to include a variety of election administration challenges, including ballot shortages and polling place wait times.

## **Poll Worker Recruitment and Training**

States are working to help local jurisdictions meet the need for well-trained poll workers through a variety of initiatives. Five states (Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Missouri and Montana) are supplying local jurisdictions with significant funding, including grants and reimbursements, to recruit and train poll workers. One of these states, Missouri, is making \$2,000,000 in grants available to local election authorities to pay for approximately 3,800 new poll workers who are being recruited and trained for November.

The District of Columbia has joined five states (Arkansas, Indiana, Missouri, New Jersey and New York) in offering split-shift options for polling place volunteers, which can attract additional workers who might not be interested in or able to work the long hours often required.

Meanwhile, the Arizona Secretary of State's office established its Poll Worker Recruitment (PWR) Teams in July of this year to help avoid a shortfall in volunteers. This grassroots marketing effort deploys poll worker recruitment teams to malls throughout the state with start-of-the-art equipment designed to educate residents on how they can get involved with working at the polls this election season.

Other state poll worker recruitment efforts identified by NASS include:

**Student Poll Workers:** Eighty-one percent of states that responded to the 2008 NASS New Millennium Survey permit sixteen and seventeen year-olds to serve as poll workers or Election Day volunteers, with many of them offering young people the same pay as regular volunteers.<sup>27</sup> Seven states (see state profiles) have outreach programs specifically designed to recruit high school and college students to serve as poll workers.

For this year, California, Maryland, New York and Ohio have even placed links or poll worker recruitment postings on sites that are popular with young people, such as Craig's List and MySpaceJobs.com.

**Bilingual Poll Workers:** While bilingual poll workers, ballots and other forms of language assistance are required for certain jurisdictions under federal law, a few states are voluntarily

trying to boost their numbers. Pennsylvania's 2008 voter registration application includes a checkbox for applicants who are willing to serve as bilingual interpreters on Election Day. Other states, such as Connecticut and Colorado, are seeking to recruit multilingual election volunteers by working in consultation with community organizations and ethnic media. Some California counties are even offering additional stipends to those who sign up to serve as bilingual poll workers.

In Texas, a state which is required by law to provide election materials in Spanish, the state elections office has urged local clerks to conduct targeted recruiting drives and contact schools to find eligible high school seniors to volunteer as bilingual election clerks.<sup>28</sup>

**Private Sector Recruitment:** A handful of states (see profiles) are finding that corporate and nonprofit organizations can be very responsive to partnerships in recruiting poll workers and nonpartisan phone bank operators. Under Arizona's Corporate Challenge Program, many of the state's major employers—including Arizona State University, Wal-Mart, Target and Qwest—are giving employees a day off (sometimes with pay) to serve as poll workers. California's MyVote Democracy at Work project also works with companies to sign up employees as poll workers, as does Missouri's "It's Your Turn. Be a Poll Worker" initiative. A recent change in North Dakota law is boosting that state's supply of tech-savvy poll workers, due in large part to a recruiting push by local businesses.

**State Employee Outreach:** Delaware's State Board of Elections and the Indiana Secretary of State's office send out mass emails encouraging state employees to serve as poll workers and Maryland's State Board of Elections posts poll worker announcements on state employment websites. Colorado and West Virginia also encourage state employees to sign up as poll workers.

**Training and Materials:** For 2008, consistency is a big part of state poll worker training efforts. After all, it is these volunteers who interface with voters and guide them through the voting process. New research shows that positive interactions with poll workers can give voters more confidence in the process and make them feel better about their experience.<sup>29</sup>

Thirty-two states provide educational assistance in training poll workers. These efforts include conducting train-the-trainer sessions with local election officials, hosting statewide training conferences, producing poll worker training videos, developing poll worker procedure manuals and forging new partnership to enhance procedures.

Examples include:

- The California Secretary of State's office has established a Task Force on Uniform Poll Worker Training Standards to provide recommendations and to ensure that all of the state's poll workers are properly trained in administering voting, handling emergencies and properly using their county's election equipment.
- Minnesota has prepared a detailed procedures guide and a training video for all counties.
- Delaware trains poll workers in a college setting and requires hand-on equipment walkthroughs.
- Iowa hosts a three-day poll worker certification program which is held in each jurisdiction across the state.
- The Vermont Secretary of State's office conducts more than 15 regional training sessions for local election officials throughout the state and conducts additional training upon request.
- Maryland now requires that all returning poll workers receive refresher training prior to the general election.
- Missouri has partnered with the Truman School at the University of Missouri to provide training and educational materials to local election authorities.

Additionally, six states (New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Texas) and several counties in both California and Florida provide online poll worker training. These supplemental programs provide a uniform and convenient way of training workers on polling place procedures.

## Polling Place Efficiency

States are taking steps to help increase polling place efficiency and to minimize the potential for problems and delays. One aspect of this work is ensuring that polling places are adequately staffed and volunteers are well-prepared to assist voters, as mentioned above. Another aspect includes various elements that can impact voter satisfaction, including the time it takes to check in at the polls and cast a ballot. At least one state, California, began encouraging researchers from a state university to conduct research on polling place efficiency and voter wait times during the 2008 presidential primary.<sup>30</sup>

Technology is once again playing a large role in state efforts. From online polling place locators to electronic poll books, tools which can speed up waiting times at the polls and make the work of local



administrators less challenging. Some examples in this area include:

**Polling Place Locators:** As previously mentioned (see page 10), forty states offer online polling place locators to assist voters in finding their local polling place.

**Electronic Poll Books:** Twenty-two states (see Appendix D) currently allow local jurisdictions to use electronic poll books, which substitute for paper voter registration rosters and allow poll workers to more quickly and accurately access voter registration information. With these tools, poll workers can help direct voters to their correct precinct if they happen to end up at the wrong one, and they can use electronic poll books to help voters waiting in line confirm that they are in the right spot.

**Vote Centers:** Ten states (California, Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas, and Washington) are using vote centers in 2008.<sup>31</sup> This relatively new model for establishing voting sites, pioneered in 2003 by Larimer County, Colorado, does away with traditional polling places and allows voters to receive and cast a ballot in one of a number of locations near their home or workplace. For example, Larimer County's 143 precincts have been consolidated into 22 vote centers, which are located in schools, libraries, hotels, churches, shopping centers and government buildings. Voters have the option of choosing any of these locations for casting their ballot, and there is no need to find an assigned polling place.<sup>32</sup>

**Voter Feedback Options:** In addition to 1-800 hotlines that voters can use to get answers to questions or report suspicious election-related incidents, some states have set up hotlines to collect voter feedback. Ohio and West Virginia provide online feedback mechanisms where voters can submit election questions and provide comments about their voting experience, while Georgia provides an online mechanism for submitting election complaints.

## Contingency Planning

With the potential for a tidal wave of voters to literally flood the polls, contingency planning is more important than ever this year. While this is another area where much of the execution is usually done at the local level, secretaries of state are broadening the coordination of weather-related and security response plans to assist with solutions to potential Election Day issues, including ballot shortages, equipment problems, long lines and poll worker shortages.

For example, the Ohio Secretary of State's office recently issued a directive for DRE precincts to provide back-up paper ballots in an amount equal to 25 percent of the precinct turnout in 2004.<sup>33</sup> The state is also producing posters to be displayed in polling sites where DREs are used for the purpose of informing voters that they can choose to vote using paper ballots if they do not want to wait in line to use touch-screen voting machines.<sup>34</sup>

In general, more than half of all state election offices say they assist with contingency planning by sending election preparedness communications to county election administrators advising them on potential areas of concern, such as establishing alternative polling sites and reviewing ballot supplies. Others have put together contingency plans or planning templates at the state level<sup>35</sup>, while Maryland is working with local election officials to develop election contingency plans and coordinating conference calls between election officials and emergency management officials to discuss emergency preparedness. Colorado has even prepared a best practices guide designed to assist local officials with contingency planning.

Still others are trying unique approaches to dealing with problems that may arise. In Nevada, for example, a newly-established task force will serve as a centralized Election Day command center for the secretary of state's office, the attorney general's office and various federal and state law enforcement agencies to track polling place issues, share information with local election officials, deploy investigative personnel where necessary, and respond to problems as they occur. For example, if there are long lines or equipment failures in Clark County—where the state's most populous city of Las Vegas is located—officials can easily respond by setting up ADA-accessible, mobile trailers that can be used as temporary or permanent polling sites.

In similar fashion, the New Jersey Secretary of State's office has made plans to deploy a “mobile voting unit” with the assistance of New Jersey Transit, in the event that such a need arises.

In addition to natural disasters and security threats, two of the most common state-focused contingency planning issues include:

**Ballot Supplies and Equipment Issues:** While most states report they are taking steps to address equipment breakdowns or to provide an adequate supply of ballots at the polls, some are employing new or unique methods for making sure these problems can be addressed quickly and with a minimum of confusion. In the District of Columbia, Kansas, Missouri and Virginia, election officials are either increasing the number of ballots they order or encouraging localities to do so in

anticipation of high voter turnout in November. Virginia is also working on a policy for expedited printing of ballots if shortages arise on Election Day. Delaware keeps Election Day technicians on the road in designated areas so they are never far from a polling place in the event of a voting machine failure, and this year, all polling places will have an immediate backup machine to use until assistance arrives. Meanwhile, 17 states using DRE, touch-screen technology as their primary voting systems provide paper ballots in the event of equipment failure (see Appendix D).

**Polling Place Wait Times:** In addition to urging voters to be prepared in advance by verifying their registration status, reviewing the ballot and familiarizing themselves with voting equipment, states want to provide assistance to local election offices faced with heavy turnout or poll worker shortages, both of which can exacerbate polling place wait times. Arizona's state election office recently created a Polling Place Wait Time Reduction procedure, which is designed to limit voter waiting times. Electronic poll books (see page 20) and the use of polling place greeters are also helping to streamline polling place waiting times and provide customer service to voters.

## Election Results

State responses to the NASS survey on state preparations for the 2008 presidential election highlighted a vigorous effort to harness Internet technologies for providing the public with up-to-the-minute election results on state election office websites. Additionally, states are working to ensure the accuracy and reliability of those results through post-election audits and post-election assessment reports.

### Results Reporting

States are making it easier for campaigns, interested citizens and the news media to monitor election night results. Once the polls close, thirty-eight states now provide election night results on the state election Web sites as they come into the state office (see Appendix B).

The most interesting new feature is election mapping, which uses Internet mapping applications to compliment the publication of election results. Using these systems, visitors have the ability to immediately view election results as they are received by the state office and they can more easily view and analyze them with the help of district maps and other visual representations of the formerly text-based data. Missouri's Election Night Reporting website, unveiled for its 2008 presidential primary, is considered

one of the leading examples of this kind of effort.

## Post-Election Audits and Reports

Twenty-three states currently have laws in place for post-election audits.<sup>36</sup> Election officials in these states add that such practices, in addition to promoting transparency in the process, can lead to greater public confidence that votes are counted accurately and fairly. Post-election verification processes also allow officials to identify errors and set benchmarks for future performance.

The subject of post-election audits has become a major topic in many states this year. California assembled a Post-Election Audit Standards Working Group that has since provided recommendations to improve the state's voting system review process. New Jersey adopted a new law this year with stringent guidelines for post-election audits, while Missouri recently revised its procedures to include more precincts in its process. Kentucky announced plans to conduct a post-election audit of six counties chosen from a random drawing, while Ohio has already piloted a post-election audit project in 11 counties following its March presidential primary.

Nearly half the states that conduct post-election audits do so in randomly selected precincts by comparing a manual hand count of the votes with the machine tabulated results to verify that the machines are accurate. In Minnesota for example, an audit discrepancy of more than .5 percent triggers the review of additional precincts.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, at least three states (Indiana, Missouri and Ohio) will compile post-election assessment reports to evaluate and summarize the 2008 election experience. Indiana intends to review and analyze administrative issues such as voter ID, voting machines, polling place operations and the statewide voter registration system.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Missouri's post-election examination includes a review of the process with recommendations for future elections.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

State efforts to serve and assist this year's highly-energized and engaged electorate are largely directed at three areas of outreach: voter participation, polling place operations and post-election reporting and assessments. The underlying goal of all initiatives which fall under these facets of election administration is to ensure that eligible voters will have a positive voting experience and a process that is fair, accurate, accessible and secure with reliable results.

This report, based upon responses to a recent NASS survey and other related resources—including state election office websites—gives an overview of what states are doing to prepare voters, local election officials and poll workers for the 2008 presidential election. Voter participation outreach efforts focused on public education campaigns, targeted outreach for young voters and other groups, online tools and resources and convenience voting are all part of the equation.

Assisting localities with polling place operations is another major area of state outreach, including poll worker recruitment and training, polling place efficiency measures and contingency planning. In a year when many states could experience record-setting turnout on Election Day, preparing election officials and poll workers to deal with any problems that arise could be the key to delivering a positive voting experience at the polls.

Finally, the dissemination and review of election results through election night reporting features and post-election assessments are aimed at boosting transparency in the process and maintaining public confidence in the outcome of elections.

While no one truly yet knows what November 4<sup>th</sup> will bring, state election officials who are making these issues their highest priority between now and Election Day are excited, confident and prepared to make the voting process a success.