

NASS Ideas Award Nomination:

Name of Secretary of State:

Frank LaRose

Contact information for questions/ Follow-ups:

Tamara McBride (Tmcbride@ohiosos.gov)

Project Name:

Verify Ohio



Project Lead:

Tamara McBride, Director of External Affairs

Brief Description of the program:

Verify Ohio is a digital initiative aimed at debunking false information and educating Ohioans on two of the core functions of his office: elections and starting a business. The account has become synonymous with trust as well as being a source of accurate information. Verify Ohio can be found on all major platforms: X (Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram. Verify Ohio has successfully battled misinformation by fact-checking myths, addressing commonly asked questions, and helping prepare Ohioans for upcoming elections. These important functions have helped direct Ohioans to solutions and accurate information, including on Election Day with our “rapid response” operations.

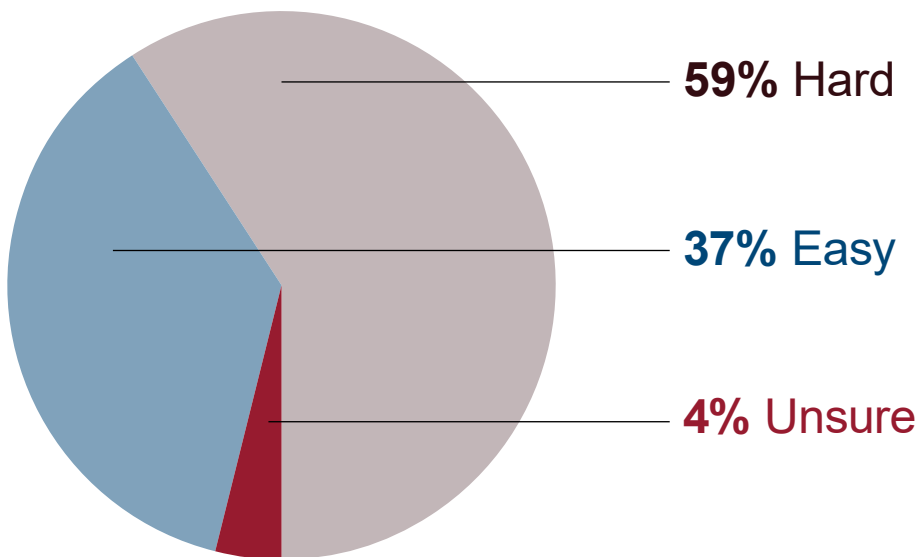
General Subject area of nomination:

Business and Elections Information

Executive Summary:

Misinformation poses a long-standing challenge to elections administration. However, the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections illustrated the present-day issues presented by the spread of mis- and disinformation. NPR conducted a survey in 2022 that showed 70% of respondents said democracy is more at risk of failure now than it was in previous elections. Furthermore, the National Intelligence Council concluded that Nations like Iran, Russia, and China actively sewed seeds of disinformation in order to influence the 2020 election. Knowing the possible harm misinformation possess, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose implemented @VerifyOhio in 2022 to dispel the myths and misinformation that were put out by bad actors seeking to destabilize the democratic process. In 2022, the Ohio Secretary of State garnered national attention for its efforts to combat election misinformation from the New York Times and the Brookings Institution. The office is proud to reinforce @VerifyOhio has a continuation of that legacy. By combating mis and dis-information where it is most prevalent, social media websites, we are able to help Ohioans tell the difference between fact and fiction.

Poll: On the whole, do you think it is easy or hard to tell the difference between what is fact and what is misleading information?



Source: pbs.org/newshour/politics/social-media-disinformation-leads-election-security-concerns-poll-finds

In addition to fact checking, Verify Ohio provides “rapid response” on election day. On the day of all primary, general, or special elections our team closely monitors Twitter(X), Instagram, and Facebook to field reports of any instances of fraud, intimidation, or misinformation. This content is flagged for review and one of our experts will provide fast and accurate information where necessary.

In this example, a misinformed citizen was concerned whether or not the electronic pollbooks used at the county board of elections were connected to the internet and whether this was a secure practice for an important election.



Verify Ohio also educates constituents on the business filing side of the Secretary of State's office, which is often overshadowed by the office's elections department. Verify Ohio seeks to educate business interested parties on everything from FinCen beneficiary filings to nonprofit donations.



With over 84% of Ohio households connected to the internet,¹ social media provides the perfect balance of cost efficiency and rapid response for combatting misinformation.

Since the Ohio Secretary of State Office is a government entity, we do not need to pay for any verifications on social media sites. Government accounts are identified by a grey checkmark on Twitter(X) meaning constituents know when information is from a reliable source.



Verify Ohio accounts span over three social media sites and account for thousands of posts. Depending on which site and what topic these posts can have thousands of interactions only hours after providing outreach to the people of Ohio. Experts review non-biased information and then @VerifyOhio provides detailed, verified responses that Ohioans can hopefully look to for truth. This has garnered respect from even the most vocal critics of the office:



For educating Ohioans on the processes of elections and entrepreneurship, the importance of Verify Ohio cannot be understated. The use of social media for constituent outreach and education provides a cost-effective alternative to traditional styles more commonly used by other government agencies. The “rapid response” segment of the Verify Ohio account used on election day allows voters insurance that the democratic process is easy, safe, and secure.

As Ida B. Wells so aptly stated, “the way to right wrongs is to shine the light of truth on them.”

¹ Source: communitysolutions.com/exploring-digital-divide-ohio