

The Importance of Former Election Officials Serving in Leadership Roles with Private Sector Election Technology Providers

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The Elements of a Successful Election

There are four elements necessary to conduct a successful election: candidates; voters; election officials; and private sector providers.

Candidates –

Each year, thousands of dedicated citizens from all corners of this great nation step forward to become candidates for federal, state, or local public office. They run in open, transparent elections, develop platforms consisting of a multitude of planks, and expose their every weakness, and virtually every word ever uttered or written, to public examination and analysis. They subject themselves to media scrutiny, and open themselves up to rumors, lies and innuendo perpetrated by the press and those who oppose their candidacy, all in an effort to shape the public policy that may benefit their local society or even the entire nation.

These candidates work tirelessly meeting voters, explaining their credentials and justifying their political positions. They raise and spend millions of dollars and they are vital to the success of the electoral process, as without them, the entire ritual would be unnecessary.

Voters –

Likewise, many Americans, on average about fifty-five percent of voters, participate in the presidential election every four years¹ by casting a vote for the candidate they perceive to be the best person to represent their interests and those of our nation. Some become more involved by working for the candidate(s) of their choice. Those candidates, as well as the electorate who cast votes for them, are vital to the success of the electoral process, as without them, there would be no need for an election.

Candidates and the electorate comprise the first two of four essential elements of a successful election, or one that contains no hidden surprises, is easy to understand and produces an obvious winner on, or as close to election day as possible.

These two elements are intertwined in a variety of ways. Candidates must possess the skills necessary to explain their platforms to the electorate in a concise, easily understood manner, thereby motivating the electorate to participate in the election process. The electorate must interrupt their otherwise busy work schedule to cast a vote for their candidates of choice in a variety of elections from the local school board to the President of the United States.

¹ University of California Santa Barbara Study, Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections 1868 – 2016.
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>.

It is not good enough, however, to simply hold an election. Elections must be transparent, easy to understand and successful in every way. A successful election, however, requires the participation of two additional elements, the public and private sectors.

Election Officials –

The role of the public sector is apparent to most voters. It is comprised of those government employees serving as election officials who take on the awesome responsibility of –

- voter registration,
- maintaining an accurate voter registration database,
- candidate compliance with general laws, rules and regulations, including finance laws,
- creation of an election timeline that conforms to both federal and state laws and regulations,
- creation of a well-designed ballot,
- election communication and outreach,
- providing voter support,
- processing applications and verifying and processing mail ballots,
- complying with all applicable laws on accessibility to the ballot,
- selection of polling places and opening and closing those polling places on time,
- complying with all applicable laws on polling place accessibility, campaigning, etc.,
- selection and training of polling place workers and volunteers,
- voter check-in at the polls,
- providing for an easy in-and-out voting process,
- tabulation of accurate and secure election results,
- dissemination of the results to the public,
- conducting audits and recounts.

Government officials who comprise the public sector are responsible for maintaining order, providing transparency, and ensuring the integrity of the election process. And, the public sector role does not begin or end on election day as it is also responsible for conducting recounts, the certification of the winners, and in some cases the swearing-in to their new public office, those candidates who were successful on election day.

The Private Sector:

The final, yet equally critical element of a successful election is the private sector. It is the work of this sector that provides the equipment and supplies necessary for the execution of a flawless election. From voter registration systems to tabulators, from accessible mail ballot programs to accessible polling place equipment, no election in the modern age could be accomplished without the efforts of the private sector.

Developing the equipment, supplies, and technical programs necessary for the seamless experience of the voter requires a comprehensive knowledge of the election process and a particular set of skills that joins the conceptual to the actual in the provision of a structure that will accomplish a distinct yet essential portion of the entire system. Enabling those with a disability, for example, to vote privately and independently, from home or in the polling place, preserves the integrity of the election for a particular segment of the voting population which is now estimated to have reached seventeen percent². Ignoring those needs violates the constitutional rights of the individual. Meeting the need, however, requires the imagination and labor of the private sector which can happen only through an intense understanding of what is needed by the candidate, the electorate, and the public sector.

By taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of a public sector employee, a private sector company is best suited to meet the specific and particular needs of the public sector, the candidates and the electorate it works to serve. Doing so brings the voting experience full circle and unites the four essential elements of a successful election.

About the Authors

Paul F. Caranci served as Rhode Island's Deputy Secretary of State from 2007 to 2015 where his responsibilities included oversight of that office's role in Rhode Island elections. Paul also served as a local elected official from his hometown of North Providence from 1994 to 2010. It was in his role as a North Providence Town Council member that he distinguished himself by exposing a deep-rooted political corruption scheme. His efforts working undercover with the FBI resulted in eleven indictments and ten convictions earning him the Margaret Chase Smith American Democracy Award for Political Courage, the highest honor awarded by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS).

Paul has a degree in political science from Providence College and has completed many Master's-level courses from Roger Williams University. He is an award-winning author of fourteen published books including one on how to run for local elective office.

Lori Augino has 28 years of experience leading both state and local elections and leading a national elections non-profit organization. She has dedicated her career to expanding safe, secure, and accessible voting options for voters.

Lori serves as a member of the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections, is a participant on the Bipartisan Policy Center's Task Force on Elections and served as a member of the Council of State Government's Overseas Voting Initiative. Previously, she served as the President of the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED), a member of the Election Assistance Commission's Technical Guidelines Development Committee, and the Department of Homeland Security's Elections Critical Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council. She was a founding member of the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing & Analysis Center.

² Schur, Lisa, and Kruse, Douglas, Rutgers University study entitled, Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2018 Election. Professors at the School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University, 50 Labor Center Way, New Brunswick, NJ, 08901.

Previously, Ms. Augino served as the Executive Director for the National Vote at Home Institute where she advocated for the expansion of vote-by-mail and supported election officials across the country. She served as the Director of Elections for the Washington Office of the Secretary of State where she was responsible for the oversight of all federal, state, and local elections. Prior to serving as Director of Elections, Lori worked for the Pierce County Auditor's Office for nearly 18 years, where she was named County Election Employee of the Year by former Secretary of State Sam Reed.

Lance Gough is the former Executive Director with the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners. Throughout his 32-year tenure as Executive Director, Gough was responsible for managing voter registration and election administration for over 1.5 million voters. He managed change during an era of unprecedented changes in election administration. Examples included: the transition from punch cards to optical scanners and touch screens; the introduction of electronic poll books; expanded registration with online and election-day programs; and the launch of in-person early voting, no-excuse vote-by-mail and secure drop boxes. According to Gough, these transformations had a significant and lasting impact on his role as Director. In addition to modernizing administrative processes, Gough has sought to prioritize engagement with voters and ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities and language barriers.