

Voter education is changing...

Creativity Rules

**Voter education is
changing with the
times, and that's good
for democracy**

Super heroes on the mock election ballot?

Absentee voting on Saturdays?

Vote Centers on wheels?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Election officials are increasingly creative in serving their jurisdictions and a busy electorate. Beyond the obvious charge to hold fair and transparent elections, they support turnout through voter education on everything from election dates and voting locations to sample ballots and how to operate new voting equipment.

It is well understood that voter engagement is good for democracy and that informed voters are more likely to cast ballots. This white paper takes a closer look at some of the approaches that election managers across the U.S. are using to connect with their voters.

The best election officials know their communities and tailor education and outreach as needed. Most ideas reported here are the result of an informal survey of county officials conducted during Summer 2017. ¹

Of course no single idea is good for everyone and different voting processes and challenges – paper ballots, by-mail, electronic or a mix – call for programs designed at the local level. This review of successes and creative strategies from jurisdictions across the U.S. sheds light on options.

¹ Hart InterCivic proprietary survey.

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TAKING IT TO THE STREETS AND THE VOTERS

With the increased use of secure electronic voting and new, more portable voting equipment, Vote Centers are extremely popular with busy voters. Often set up in malls or libraries, Vote Centers can be available for early voting as well as on Election Day. Since voting is not restricted to the home precinct, commuters have more options for stopping by a polling place near work.

One out-of-the-box idea getting a lot of buzz is “Food Truck Voting” created in Ada County, Idaho. Featured in a national [NPR broadcast](#), the mobile voting booth is a refurbished cargo trailer with walk-up windows. It serves the urban Boise area and can be moved to places like downtown with large concentrations of voters.

Sadly, there is no food served alongside the ballots, but the truck concept was inspired by Chief Deputy Clerk Phil McGrane’s tasty hobby: competitive barbecue where cooks travel to contests with trailers and tents.

According to NPR, “The food truck voting system works because of a computerized voter roll, which makes it easy to print off ballots, no matter what precinct a voter lives in. McGrane says the county hired a cybersecurity company to ensure the integrity of the process.”

Other counties may not be rolling out mobile booths, but they are expanding to voter-friendly locations for their centers, often located on major transportation routes:

- An auto parts store
- A home and garden store
- Neighborhood centers
- A grocery store



*Idaho Power’s downtown Boise office is one of the sites that’s hosted the Ada County mobile voting trailer. Idaho is one of the states that has same-day voter registration.
Frankie Barnhill/Boise State Public Radio*

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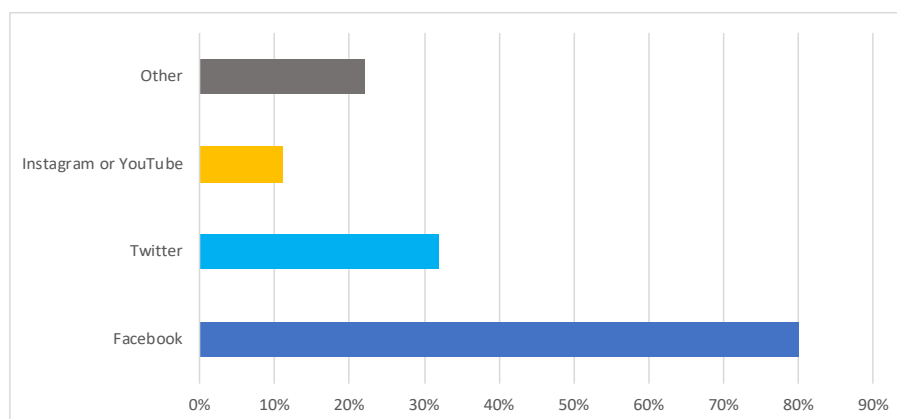
SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE OUTREACH

More jurisdictions are adding social media outreach to their education toolboxes, considering the approach easy and cost effective. Some counties have specific policies allowing use of social media as long as it points back to the jurisdiction's main website.

It is no surprise that Facebook and Twitter are the most popular tools. Here are a few things posted on social media:

- Facebook Live and other videos to introduce new touchscreens or show "how to use a voting machine."
- Answers to questions about polling places and hours.
- Reminders about election law.
- Voter turnout updates.
- Photos and videos of workers delivering equipment. (Thank you, Road and Bridge crew!)
- Vote by mail instructions.
- Links to sample ballots and registration forms.
- Recruiting notes for poll workers.
- One clerk plans to post photos of voters after balloting. They would hold "I voted because ..." with their own handwritten message.
- Information about curbside and other accessible voting.

Facebook and Twitter are the most popular tools for social media outreach



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SPECIAL NEEDS AND HARD-TO-REACH VOTERS

Ensuring that voting materials are accessible to voters with disabilities, the homebound, or non-English speakers can be a challenge. Here are few ideas already in use:

- Recording an audio sample ballot (an mp3 in English and Spanish for this Texas jurisdiction) and posting on the county website for blind or visually impaired voters.
- Loaning accessible voting equipment loaded with a survey to a group such as a local Commission for the Blind for educating citizens. This county has also hired a visually impaired intern to help with outreach.
- Ensuring that ballots are delivered to homeless people who use the Salvation Army as their address.
- Visiting nursing homes and veterans events with portable voting equipment for demonstrations and applications for voting by mail. (Many still choose the mail option but appreciate the choice.)
- Offering curbside voting for those who are unable to wait in line or cannot walk or stand. Publicizing this option and having enough election clerks to assist are key.
- Providing a mock election and registration materials for special need students soon turning voting age.
- Going door-to-door to reach voters with disabilities or the elderly with applications for voting by mail.
- Providing voter registration and education at job fairs and other community events.
- Writing a press release about the accessibility and multi-language translation capabilities of new voting equipment.
- Forming a disabilities outreach committee or speakers bureau.

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NEW VOTERS AND VOTERS IN TRAINING

Voter registration promotion, outreach, and education are especially important for first-time voters. These groups include high school and college students as well as naturalized citizens who have not been exposed to the electoral process.²

After the largest naturalization ceremony at one state, new citizens are greeted by representatives of nearby localities and the League of Women Voters who provide registration materials and voting information. Some jurisdictions send representatives to register first time voters at local citizenship celebrations.

Many jurisdictions work with high schools and colleges to provide voter registration forms and voting information in government classes. Ramping up those efforts has resulted in “Youth in the Booth” activities, including:

- Recruiting high school seniors and college students to work at the polls and election office.
- An Election Page program with local high schools. Between the ages of 16 and 18, Election Pages are allowed to work as volunteers in the polling places. They get an inside look at how elections are conducted and real world learning.
- Raising awareness about mail balloting options and early voting with recent graduates before they leave for college.
- Handing out educational videos on zip drives so that they can be reviewed later.
- Bringing voting machines to local high schools and middle schools for student council or other elections.
- Staging mock elections. At one county fair, students were allowed to vote on their favorite fair animal.
- Demonstrating ballot preparation and counting in addition to voting.
- Loaning out demo machines.
- One county stages a media event with students using new voting equipment and ballots a few days before the beginning of absentee voting.
- Hosting tours at the courthouse so that students can vote in mock elections and see government in action.

2 <http://fairelectionsnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/Local-Options-Toolkit.pdf>

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MORE TRIED AND TRUE TIPS FOR EDUCATION

Resource fairs and city service carnivals are great times to demonstrate voting equipment and to encourage voter turnout. Many adult learners prefer hands-on learning and practice, so officials are wise to take advantage of these opportunities.³

Here are a few more ideas:

- At least one county clerk keeps a voting machine set to demo mode in her office at all times. Anyone who walks in can try it out.
- Inviting the public to watch the preparation and counting process. “They are always amazed!”
- Making absentee and early voting available on more Saturdays.
- Inviting local media outlets to witness the logic and accuracy testing and the sealing of the voter equipment before each election.
- Providing instruction cards at each voting machine.

WHY NOT HAVE FUN TOO?

Some counties add lighter fare to their education and outreach menus:

- Creating a “Be Like Bob” sign encouraging voters to get their mail ballots in early.
- Welcoming visitors with a 6 foot cutout of Homer Simpson holding his Voter ID and a “Register to Vote” sign at the clerk’s office.
- Playing Election Jeopardy and Hollywood Squares to connect with election officers.
- Unveiling new voting equipment at a tractor-pull. (Who says urban districts have all the fun?)
- Trivia questions based on the election process.

³ (Littlefield, J., Engaging Adult Learners with with Technology, http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1236&context=libtech_conf)

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- Mock elections avoid political statements by enlisting:
 - Cartoon characters
 - Media personalities
 - Farm animals (at the county fair)
 - Super heroes
 - Musicians (at a music festival)
 - Sports teams and figures.

Need more inspiration for planning voter education? The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has prepared "[7 Tips to Strengthen Voter Education Programs](#)" including links to real websites, pamphlets, FAQs, apps, and voter toolkits.

Start small if you need to, but start education now. Your well-planned programs can motivate citizens and result in efficient and effective elections.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many election vendors provide these resources:

- Posters – how to mark your ballot
- Quick reference guide – a card to post in voting booth
- Voter education FAQs for county websites and social media
- Instructions for voting by mail

About Hart InterCivic

Hart InterCivic is a full service election solutions innovator. The company's new [Verity Voting](#) system makes voting more straightforward, equitable and accessible—and makes managing elections more transparent, more efficient and easier.

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