



Producing Election Materials SUSTAINABLY

Tips to Reduce
Environmental Impact





INTRODUCTION

The need to preserve our natural resources is nothing new, but increased awareness of the impact we have on our environment has illuminated the importance of taking urgent steps in reducing our collective footprint. With government regulation and more consistent mandates addressing these concerns, Election Officials are turning to their print vendors for solutions for producing ballots and election-related materials.

The print industry has responded to this important call for action and as a result, changes in production technologies and best practices are evolving at lightning speed. For example, the recycling of paper in the United States has reached 68% as of 2018. The U.S. is now experiencing a significant reduction of waste in our landfills, utilizing more energy-efficient equipment and packaging more effectively for final distribution. This reduces waste of our most precious resources.

Here are a few items Election Officials can consider when seeking a vendor to meet the sustainability goals of cities and counties:

CHOOSE PAPER RESPONSIBLY

Ballots

Ballot paper must meet the standards of the tabulation devices used across the Country. Higher Post-Consumer Waste (PCW) content in recycled papers often interferes with the accuracy of tabulation. As a result, much of the paper used for ballot printing contains 10% or less recycled content.

Supporting Materials

Instructions for voting, informational guides and envelopes used to deliver vote-by-mail ballots all can have higher content of PCW, usually 30% or a little more. Requesting responsibly sourced paper from carefully managed forests is another way to protect our environment. Trees are a renewable crop and improve the air and water as they grow. Consult with your vendors on the right solution for your project.



TECHNOLOGY

Newer is Better

With digital print technologies leading the way, the concern with Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) emissions has been eliminated in modernized production facilities. Print providers leveraging these new technologies don't use petroleum-based inks or harsh chemicals in the process of printing.

This may not hold true in many conventional printing companies utilizing these older technologies. Ask your vendor which processes are employed to minimize VOCs.

Another benefit to the new technologies is reduced paper waste during the print run. With traditional print companies, make-ready and set-ups consume a significant amount of paper before "sellable" work is produced. Digital printing produces sellable work in less time with less waste. The need to "overrun" is decreased as well, since more is produced with fewer finishing steps required. Newer technologies generally use less electricity — another footprint reduction.



DESIGN

Size Matters

Election Officials can seek advice on the best ways to maximize the paper needed for a project, for example, with supporting printed materials. Adjusting a finished size by a fraction could result in a paper savings that not only reduces costs, but also reduces waste. It may even reduce overall postage costs for mailing pieces. Remaining open to new layout ideas could yield a much more environmentally friendly and cost-effective outcome.



DISTRIBUTION

Getting Ballots to the Voter

Product must be moved once it is completed, and there are some ways to minimize the impact of carbon emissions. Does your partner utilize alternative fuels for service vehicles? Do they contract with trucking companies who offer biofueled trucks? For vote-by-mail states and counties, are you talking with your print vendors about delivery via USPS rather than having your vendors move product to your location and then drop in the mail? Even small changes could yield substantial, positive outcomes.



OTHER VENDOR CONSIDERATIONS

- 1** For counties that offer vote-by-mail, request that envelopes be made from the highest PCW possible. Ask if the outside of the envelope can be used for messaging, so an insert doesn't have to be printed.
- 2** Confirm what your print vendors are doing about recycling—not just paper waste, but electronic **and** chemical waste. Do they recycle on-site? Is there a facility recycling program in place?
- 3** Does your current print provider utilize digital technologies? Today's digital presses use no water, generate no VOCs, and require no harsh chemicals to clean and service.
- 4** Is your paper coming from responsibly managed forests through proper Chain-of-Custody protocols?
- 5** What are your vendors doing to decrease water and power consumption in—and around—their facilities?
 - Are they utilizing solar and/or wind technologies?
 - Buying carbon offsets?
 - Using low-water use commodes and faucets?

Compelling Data about Paper and Managed Forests:

When advocating for printed materials, keep these facts in mind!



More than 56% of U.S. forests are privately owned, much of it by family forest owners who manage their lands to provide value to future generations.



Recovered paper accounts for **more than 38% of fiber used to make new paper products** in the U.S.



In the U.S., forests and forest products store enough carbon each year to offset **approximately 12% of the nation's CO₂ emissions**.



Today, the United States has **20% more trees** than it did on the first Earth Day celebration in 1970.



1/3 of the United States is forested which equals 751 million acres.
91% = Privately-owned forests
6% = tribal forests
2% = federal forests



U.S. paper recovery for recycling reached a **record 68.1%** in 2018.



CONCLUSION

“Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”
-Archbishop Desmond Tutu

These are just a few of the ways Election Officials and Staff can work towards reaching environmental mandates and organizational objectives. It is possible some of the vendors currently working for your jurisdiction have some sort of recycling and environmental mission as part of their organizational culture. Hold them to it and ask the questions! You will be glad you did, and you may even discover some pretty creative solutions, too.

As the quote above indicates, *every little bit helps*. There are many ways Elections Officials and Staff can maintain and ultimately advance sustainability efforts.



Runbeck Election Services, headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, produces ballots and election related material for over 90 counties across the United States in our 90,000 sq. ft. purpose-built facility using the power of the sun. Our commitment to the environment includes generating nearly 80% of our daytime electricity from our rooftop solar power grid, gray water capture and re-use, LED motion sensor lighting throughout, Xeriscape LEEDs-designed landscaping, whole facility recycling program and onsite secure waste-paper recycling and bailing while producing ZERO VOC emissions.

**For more information or to learn how we can partner
to meet your environmental and production goals,
contact Jim Suver at 602.230.0510 or jsuver@Runbeck.net.**