

SCALING CENTRAL COUNT TABULATION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19



Clear Ballot

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Tuesday, July 7, 2020





Many industries are finding that constraints posed by the coronavirus are forcing companies to adapt and improve their services to meet demand and heed safety warnings. Restaurants are getting apps to administer online orders and pickups. Faith communities are learning how to live stream worship services. Every industry has been affected by COVID-19, and the election industry is no exception.

While much of the impact of coronavirus has been negative, some industries are using this opportunity both to progress in ways that will meet their current challenges and serve them and their communities in the future.

AVAILABILITY OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

In 2018, the Elections Assistance Commission announced that nearly 25% of voters in the United States cast their ballot by mail. ¹

All 50 states have some form of absentee voting, as listed below: ²

- 5 states conduct elections entirely by mail (CO, HI, OR, UT, WA).
- 2 states have a majority of ballots cast by mail (CA, MT).
- 27 states and the District of Columbia offered “no excuse” absentee vote-by-mail before the pandemic (AK, AZ, DC, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, KS, MD, ME, MI, MN, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OH, OK, PA, RI, SD, VA, VT, WI, WY)
- 12 states require an “excuse” to vote absentee but have relaxed restrictions in response to COVID-19 (AL, AR, CT, DE, IN, KY, LA, MA, NH, NY, SC, WV).
- 4 states require an “excuse” to vote absentee and have not relaxed restrictions, despite COVID-19 concerns (MO, MS, TN, TX).

With increased sanitation protocols and many polling locations closed, as was the case in many primaries, polling places will be operational bottlenecks in November. The long lines and congestion of voters, who may or may not be wearing adequate personal protection, will cause lines and present health and safety concerns. The Presidential Preference Primaries in Georgia and Wisconsin offered ominous foreshadows. Voters faced potential disenfranchisement as they waited outside their polling locations in hours. ³

Direct-recording electronic voting machines, commonly referred to as “DREs” would need to be sanitized between voters, adding to the cumulative wait time to vote. If the machines are not sanitized to save time, voters face possible microbial transference.



SCALING VOTE-BY-MAIL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Industry experts estimate that 70% of ballots cast in the General Election in November will be cast by mail. States and counties need to scale vote-by-mail capacity across the country so that any voter can choose to cast their ballot from the safety of their own home, and without interacting with other people. Expanding vote-by-mail capacity this election year won't just ensure access to the ballot, it will save lives.

CHALLENGES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

Local governments may face challenges in their attempt to scale vote-by-mail, but none of these challenges are insurmountable. Election officials who have already gone through the process of fully expanding vote-by-mail recently offered a few best practices in a [publicly available webinar](#).⁴ Here is a summary of a few of those challenges and advice for how to overcome them.

VERIFYING IDENTITY

Verify each voter's identity by having a forensic handwriting expert review the signature and compare it to other signatures in that voter's voter file.

REACHING VOTERS

Anticipate some undeliverable ballots and factor in the amount of time it may take to send a ballot two or three times in order to reach a voter.

STAFFING THE ELECTION

Vote-by-mail elections require fewer polling location staff members, but more staff on the back end – verifying ballots and scanning them into whatever central count tabulation systems that municipality uses.

TRACKING BALLOTS

Tracking ballots helps give voters peace of mind and provides transparency and visibility into the process for voters who are concerned about voting not at a polling location.

EDUCATING VOTERS

Most importantly, communicate with voters! Make sure that they know there is another option for casting their ballot than going to a polling location where the chance of contracting COVID-19 may increase.



MISCONCEPTIONS

Misinformation suggests that voting by mail is less secure, increases fraud, or is too difficult to administer. These are all false. Having hundreds of polling locations with hundreds of volunteers and staff administering elections can increase mistakes like voters receiving the wrong type of ballot or voters not being properly screened. With a vote-by-mail system, there is one ballot for each voter, which is delivered directly to their home and can be dropped off to a central, secure location to be counted.

It's important that voters know the facts that will provide the assurance they need to trust their democratic system. Voters should know that the rolls are compared constantly to make sure voters aren't enrolled in multiple states at the same time, that voter rolls are updated consistently, and that voters are validated through a vote-by-mail system.

HOW DO WE KNOW IT WORKS?

Many local governments – both county and state – offer vote-by-mail and have had successful and secure elections. Vote-by-mail states report fraud very rarely because mail is a secure system. States that have embraced vote-by-mail run successful elections every year, process the results on closed networks, and provide results that voters can trust.

This year poses new challenges but presents the opportunity for enormous growth and progress in elections. By scaling vote-by-mail operations, we can protect our democratic systems while keeping voters safe and healthy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clear Ballot has introduced a new class of tools and a modern approach to voting, enabling record speed, accuracy, and transparency that officials and the voting public have asked for. Designed for ease-of-use, Clear Ballot's browser-based software, used in conjunction with commercially available hardware, scales to election jurisdictions of all sizes, and responds directly to the budgetary realities of counties and municipalities. Clear Ballot election technology is used in nine states, and the ClearVote voting system is EAC certified.



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