



**RESPONDING TO
ELECTION
INFORMATION
REQUESTS IN
2022 & BEYOND**

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Responding to Election Information Requests

Over the last decade, citizens have become increasingly aware of the election environment. Whether this heightened awareness is due to legitimate questions on the elections process or harmful MDM, the public is asking questions. It is not a matter of "if" queries will come, rather "how to respond, when the questions come". When it comes to election information, the election officials are the source of truth.

Responding to citizens' questions is a major responsibility of the election official's job. Similar to a retailer answering questions from a customer, how the response is made is as important as the response itself. The TRUST the customer affords is directly related to how the communication is handled.

It's easy to ask.

Communication platforms have grown exponentially. Electronic communication and social platforms allow for speedy transmission of information.

Mal-intent.

There are Individuals whose goal is to spread mis-, mal- and disinformation (MDM), diverting attention from the assigning elections role. As you reply, remember the response may actually fuel someone's position.

Interest groups are plentiful.

Formal and Informal groups pass along Information to their constituents, Including suggested "calls to action". An elections office may receive multiple requests from a variety of sources, each with the same wording.

Trust.

Trust In the process and election officials. Let's not lose sight that this may be the reason for an Information request. Constituents are curious and want proper Information on how public officials are conducting the elections.

It's paramount for public servants to gain and retain the constituents' trust. The public wants assurances that the election process is transparent and non-partisan. This trusted relationship is enhanced with a quick and reliable response to constituents requests for election information.

Developing TRUST with our Citizens

TRUST in the election process is the goal. It's paramount for public servants to gain and retain the constituents' trust. The public wants assurances that the election process is transparent and non-partisan. This trusted relationship is enhanced with a quick and reliable response to constituents requests for election information.

The Elections Office is the source of information regarding the election process. Providing easy access to the elections process and information with full transparency and visibility is a great first step. A trustworthy environment is better if the process of citizens asking questions and getting answers is simple, safe and secure.

As it's reasonable to expect information requests, it seems wise to prepare. When it comes to the election process, there are two main areas of information requests.

- **The information itself.** There are predictable data points which will be requested. With a logged history of requests, it's easier to prepare for future requests.
- **Processing the requests.** Having an easy-to-use and clearly auditable Project Management System in place is an industry "best practice". Relying on shared spreadsheets and homemade tracking solutions may not be effective.
- **Questions about PEOPLE include:** How have election workers been trained, prepared and scheduled? Are election officials following well-established procedures?
- **PROPERTY questions include:** the machines used and election sites. Is the election equipment safe and used appropriately? Are the election locations safe and secure

Most election process information requests center around the PEOPLE who run the elections and PROPERTY supporting the PROCESS.

Developing TRUST with our Citizens

These questions address **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and HOW**. As the two pillars of PEOPLE and PROPERTY often overlap & interact, it's important to have a system which has the entire election eco-cycle information stored in one, interactive environment. This allows for accurate data storage and reporting. Data from multiple and various systems may provide conflicting results. A single environment allows for changes in one area to be carried over to other areas within the entire system. This provides efficiencies and accuracy, building **TRUST**.

It's reasonable to expect the public's information requests, especially regarding our elections process. If it's likely to happen, it seems wise to prepare. **We WANT our citizens to come to the election officials with questions.** The Elections Office and election officials are the primary source of information regarding the election process.

WE WANT OUR CITIZENS TO COME TO ELECTION OFFICIALS WITH QUESTIONS.

These are some of the major topics of Inquiries received by election officials,
Election equipment certification.

- Who certified the machines?
- What supporting documentation is available?
- What is the timing for certification? Which machines were certified?

Equipment Inventory

- Which versions of voting equipment were used?
- Who manufactured these?
- When were they last maintained and by whom?

Election Officials' training

- Were election officials trained for their role?
- Who trained them?
- What curriculum was used?

Election Officials' Oath

- Did each officer sign an oath?
- Do you have written confirmation of this? Is this on file?

Political Party affiliation of poll workers and poll watchers

- Were there bi-partisan poll workers and poll watchers at election sites?
- Is there documentation of attendance?

Chain of Custody of Election Equipment and Ballots

- Who was involved?
- Which assets? (equipment or ballots)
- When was this done? (date and time)
- Where did the assets travel?
- How were they transported? Which vehicles were used?
- Were assets safe and secure throughout the process?
- Is the audit trail fully documented, with sign-offs of the "hand offs" of personal responsibility?

**An important feature of democracy is the public's ability to access information from those who serve.
This is especially true of the election process.**

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was passed in 1967, providing a process for citizens to request access to public records. Federal and state agencies have FOIA guidelines for what information is available or guarded. In the area of Elections, **the public has become increasingly interested** in accessing information regarding the safety and security of processes, the people involved and the election equipment.

Public requests for election information continue to be received even years after an election. While immediate requests do happen, be prepared for **requests of historical information**. As well, today's current information will be the future's historical-request. Store critical information in a safe and secure area. Information about the current election will need to be accessible, years from now.

It's not only the data itself, but the people who have knowledge of the elections. For many, reliable election officials have the process and procedures well-established. They know how it's done and follow regulations properly. Yet, The Great Resignation has affected the elections sector. With high turnover in the election space, many election officials, who were our human storehouses of information, are no longer working in elections. The high-turnover trend doesn't appear to be slowing down. **Capturing the institutional knowledge of election administration is critical**, now more than ever. Delaying the implementation of digital forensics to store the election processes only makes the future more difficult.

Sometimes, the timing of when we get inquiries is challenging. Questions from the public may be appropriate and legitimate, but the timing may not be ideal. Pause and remember that (1) the public wants to get the right answers and (2) we have the information they want. Having an information process in place, with the responses easily available, reduces stress levels and enhances the public's TRUST. This establishes a process to reach the trusted source of information. The likelihood of requests coming to the election office will increase. Providing an easy process for the requests and responses provides a trusted communication path.

There are **real advantages to storing information in a safe and secure digital environment**. It is important to have data experts review the election process to determine what the digital storage environment looks like. Know if devices are manufactured domestically, Know if the data is stored on a secure domestic / local government server. If possible, utilizing GOVCloud - a FedRAMP certified environment - follows the industry standard.

Third Party Vendors - For third party software solutions, determine where the data is stored. Ask if the data is being used for an alternative revenue stream. If a 3rd party solution's cost is very low, this may be an indicator that the data is being used for additional profit streams. After all, the vendor needs to stay in business.

It is common practice to use **personal "home grown" systems**, such as legacy spreadsheets and processes developed over the years. It's important to know who has access and can edit these files. When an employee leaves their role, access must be withdrawn. These spreadsheets must be understood by the necessary officials on the team. It's important that one person doesn't "hold the keys" to all of the information. Remember, by relying on spreadsheets and a variety of solutions for storing data, the information may vary and provide conflicting information. It may be challenging to aggregate data from a variety of sources to process the information being requested.

Accessing the RIGHT information at the RIGHT time to make the RIGHT decisions is critical. Having an information request process in place will make the response to requests easier and allow TRUST to be built with your citizens. This process should allow those working on the response to have complete visibility of where in the process the request stands and what steps are needed to close out the request.

SOLUTIONS

It's an important part of the election official's job to provide responses to the public's questions. These questions should be welcomed and responded to promptly. Preparing for information requests and having a plan & process in place is critical.

Two next steps.

1. Have a unified, secure environment for your election data. Information about election officials, election equipment and election locations should all be in one environment. As information and changes in one area affects others, allow technology to make the downstream changes. This helps avoid redundancy and error, creating a more efficient and effective process.
2. Have an easy to access FOIA process. The TRUST the public has is built through quick responses to inquiries.

Having these solutions in place will make the response to requests easier and allow TRUST to grow with your citizens.



2023

About US



At Soch, we are driven to come alongside government sector employees to leverage technology to reduce mundane and complex tasks. Our products are designed BY government officials FOR government officials with state-of-the-art technology.

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