A BIPARTISAN INITIATIVE

DEFENDING DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

HARVARD Kennedy School
BELFER CENTER
for Science and International Affairs
Defending Digital Democracy Project

Turning Your Election Staff Into a Battle Staff

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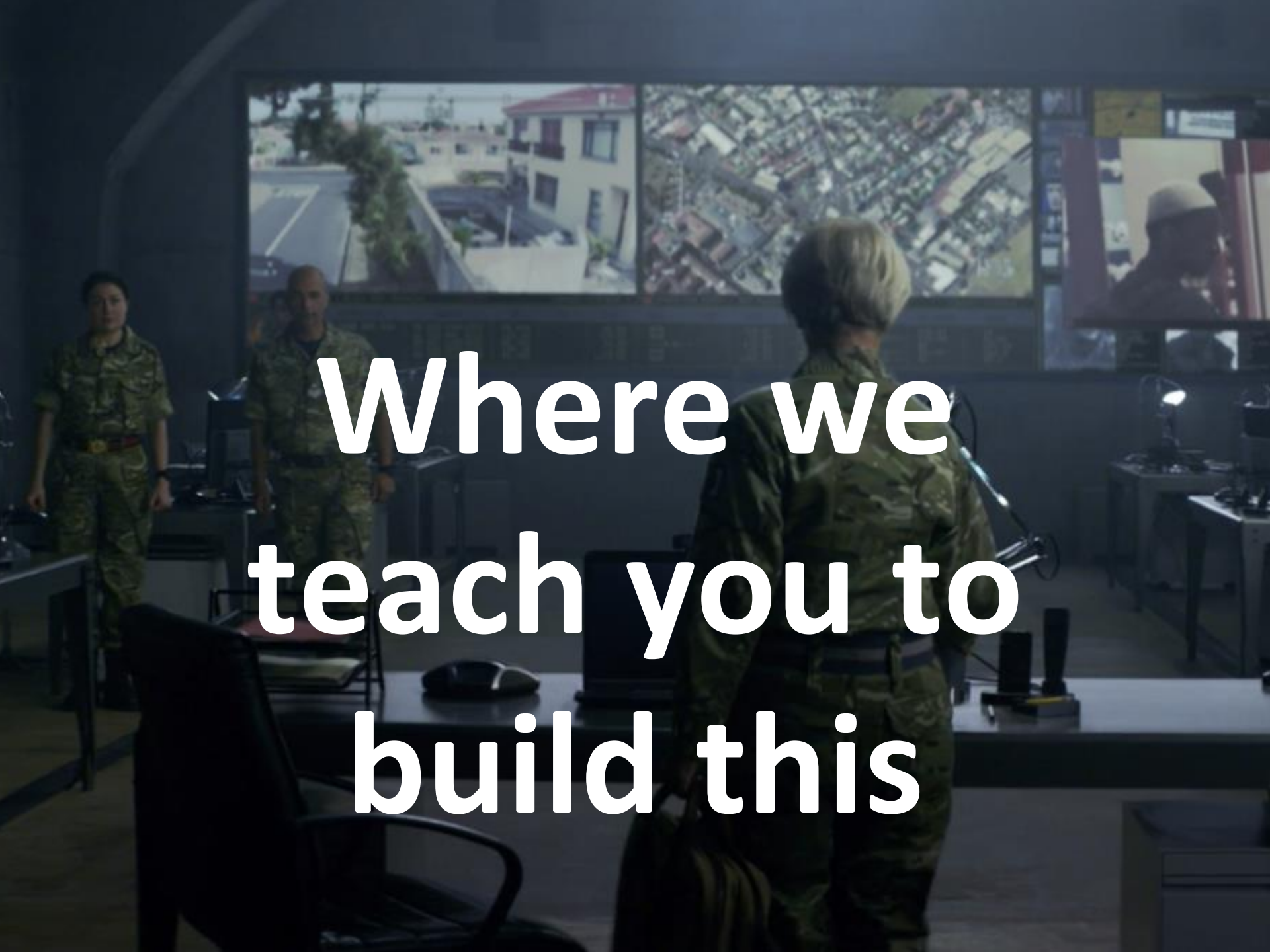

Where we
teach you to
build this

AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

PEOPLE AND PURPOSE

SHARED SITUATIONAL AWARENESS THRU COMMUNICATION

TAKING ACTION: INCIDENT TRACKING, ANALYSIS AND RESPONSE

OPERATIONS CENTER

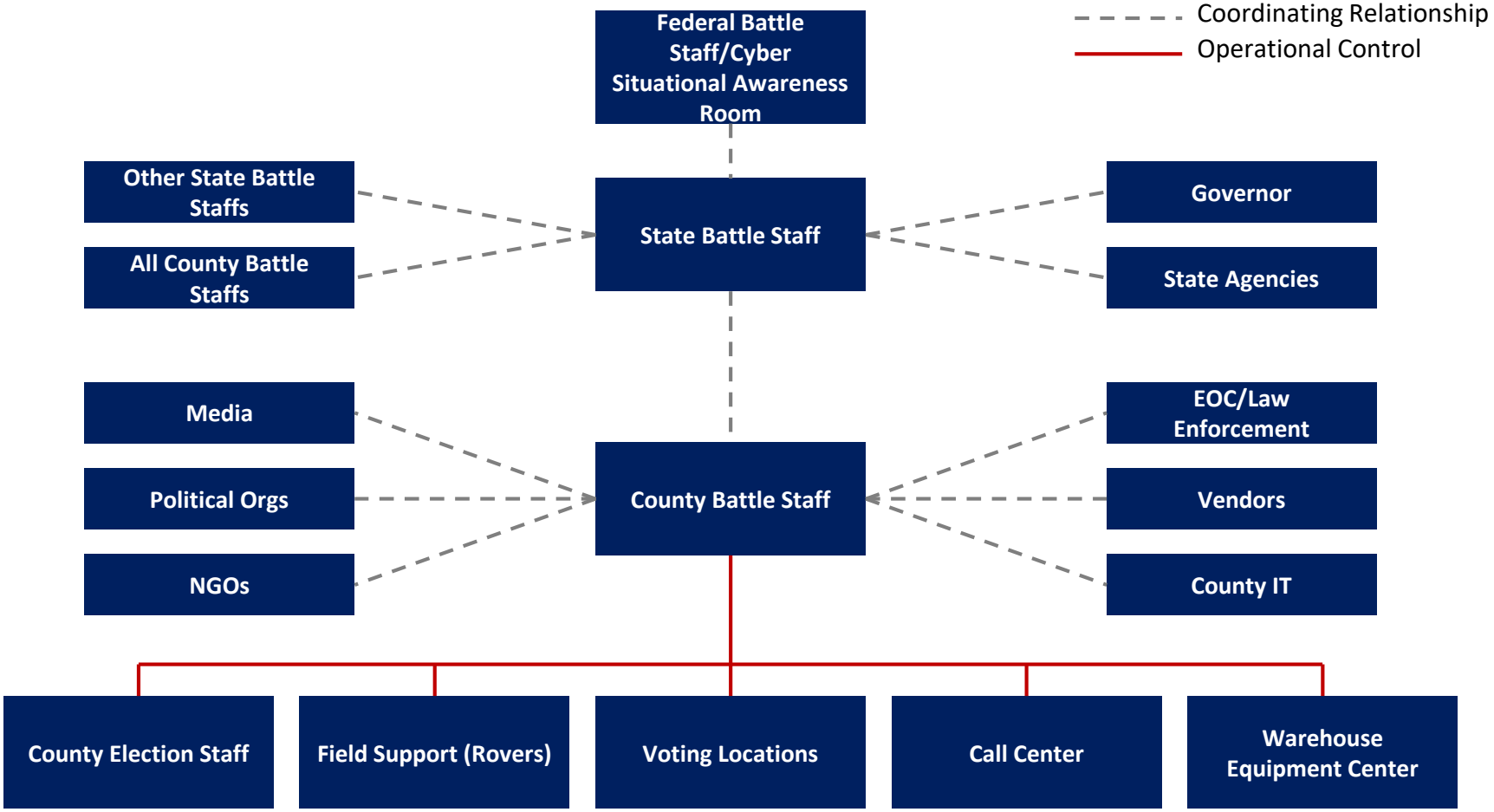
What is a Battle Staff?

Battle Staff

A Battle Staff is a military headquarters element activated to support ongoing operations across multiple echelons (levels of organization). A Battle Staff optimizes decision-making by improving cross-functional **collaboration and increased understanding** of the operating environment in order to ensure mission critical processes are **reliable, repeatable, and efficient.**

People and Purpose

Map Out Your Election Ecosystem



Sharing the Load: Distributing Lines of Effort Across the Team

Incidents encountered during election operations generally can be divided into one of three categories, which in turn **drives who is responsible for the resolution**.

Problem	Responsible
Simple An expected problem with a known solution that does not require expertise to resolve.	**Firstline Staff** *Call Center Employees, Poll Workers* Can solve the overwhelming majority of simple issues by following SOPs.
Complicated A problem (expected or unexpected) that requires expertise to resolve.	**Technically Trained Staff/Skilled Experts** *IT, Election Coordinators, Rovers* Can address complicated issues.
Complex A problem that involves too many unknowns for standard procedures to resolve and requires both expertise and critical thinking.	**Battle Staff** *Subject Matter Experts* Core of coordinating and managing election operations at all levels.

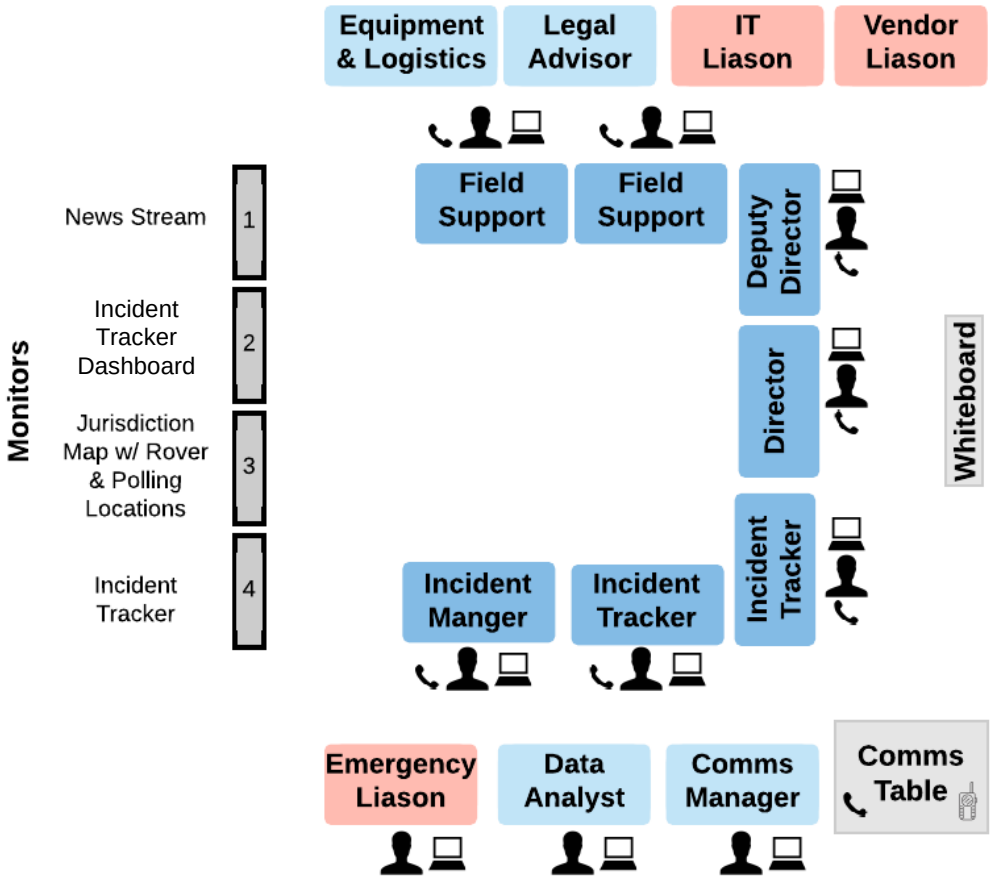
Increasing Efficiency and Reliability

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

- **S**tep-by-step instructions to perform routine operations for common or anticipated events.
- SOPs help teams perform **efficiently and effectively**

A good SOP is **concise, easily repeatable, unambiguous,** and clearly defines what is flexible or inflexible.

Election Operations Center

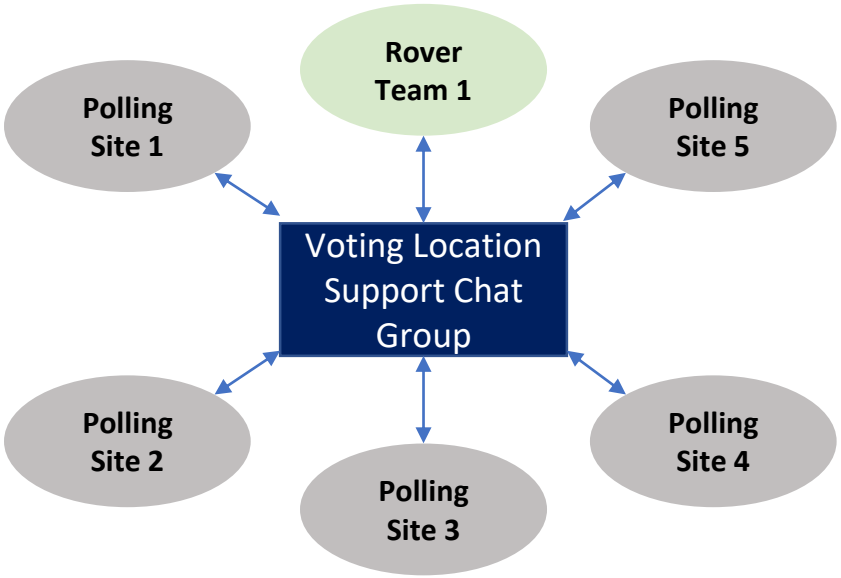


Shared Situational Awareness through Communication

Step 1: Identify Communication Paths (Who)

Communication Paths

Based on your elections ecosystem, identify your communication paths: **Identify who needs to communicate with whom.**



While we are focused on the ***who*** here, think through ***why*** these specific teams need to be connected.

Step 2: How to Communicate (What)

Your primary method of communication should always be the **most time efficient and reliable**. The best way to achieve this will depend on the **type and purpose** of the information being conveyed.

Step 3: PACE Plan (What)

Determine Backup Communications Plans

- **Identify** available communication methods, including web-, phone-, radio-based and in-person (the Battle Staff in the operations center should have a list of all available methods of communication)
- **Decide** which are most effective and reliable based on the path's purpose.
- **Choose** the four best methods
- **Create** a PACE Plan for each Critical Communication Path

Here's an Example…

Primary: Text via Chat Group

Alternate (Secondary): Phone call point-to-point (use call roster list)

Contingency: Email notification

Emergency: Tactical/Emergency Radio (if available) or in person

Step 4: When to Communicate (When)

Scheduled Information

- Initial Guidance Brief
- Periodic Update Briefs
- External Stakeholder Updates

Unscheduled Information

1. **Who** was affected by the event? **Precinct 4**
2. **What** happened? **Poll worker told about tweet accusing County X of voter discrimination**
3. **When** did it happen? **Tweet posted at 9:00 am; reported at 9:20 am**
4. **Where** did it happen? **Online: Twitter**
5. **Why** is it important: Does it answer a Critical Information Requirement (CIR) or require additional action from someone? **CIR #7**

Taking Action: Election Incident Tracking, Analysis, and Response

Why is an Incident Management Process Needed?

- Connecting people, resources, and information
- Streamline responses and operations
- Keep stakeholders informed at the right level with the right information

Information to Capture

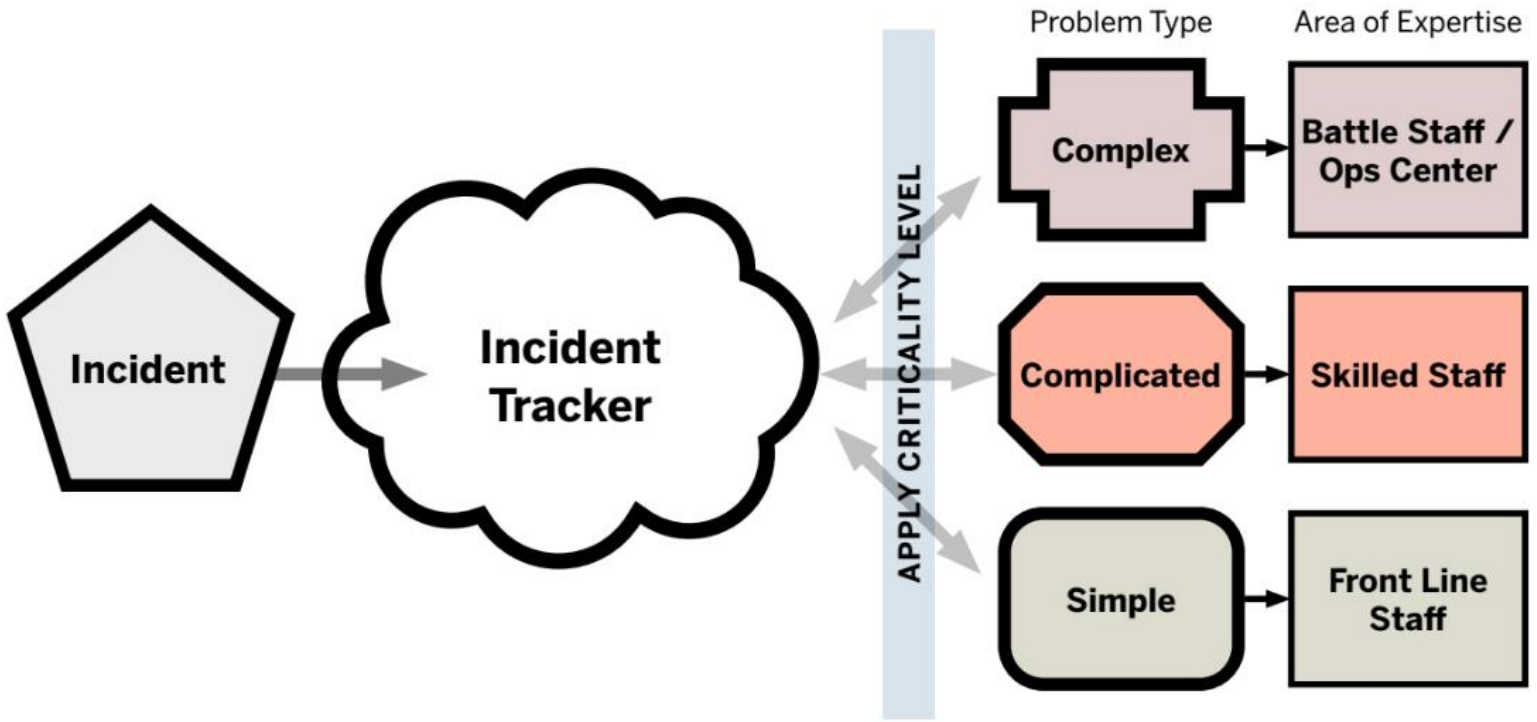
1. *What information do I need in order to make decisions?*
2. *How will information be input, collected, and analyzed?*
3. *How will the system enable and empower everyone involved to have the most accurate information at a given point in time?*

PRACTICE: Your team tells you about an incident impacting voting operations. Voters are unable to cast ballots. Discuss with your neighbor how you would use the questions above to prepare your team to adequately respond to this type of incident.

Identifying Critical Information Requirements (CIRs)

CIRs	Criticality Level
Has the integrity of the voter registration database been compromised? Has the accuracy of results been compromised? Has the integrity of ballots or ballot definition files been compromised? (i.e., Are contests listed multiple times or left off of ballots entirely? Do ballots have candidates missing or in the wrong contest?) Has the election-night reporting website been defaced with misleading information?	1
Is an incident going to force the voting location to open late? Is voting equipment error impacting overall voting location operations, resulting in voter inability to cast ballots? Will the voting location need to be relocated? Is an incident or circumstance requiring voting hours to be extended? Is an incident going to significantly delay reporting of results? (i.e., a jurisdiction having issues connecting to the statewide election-night reporting system at or after the close of polls?)	2

Incident Handling Examples



Analysis and Resolution

Election Day - Critical Incident Dashboard

Criticality Level: 1 Status: Open County: ALL Polling Site: ALL

Criticality Level	Open	Closed	Daily Total
1	6	6	12
2	7	11	18
3	5	17	22
4	14	17	31

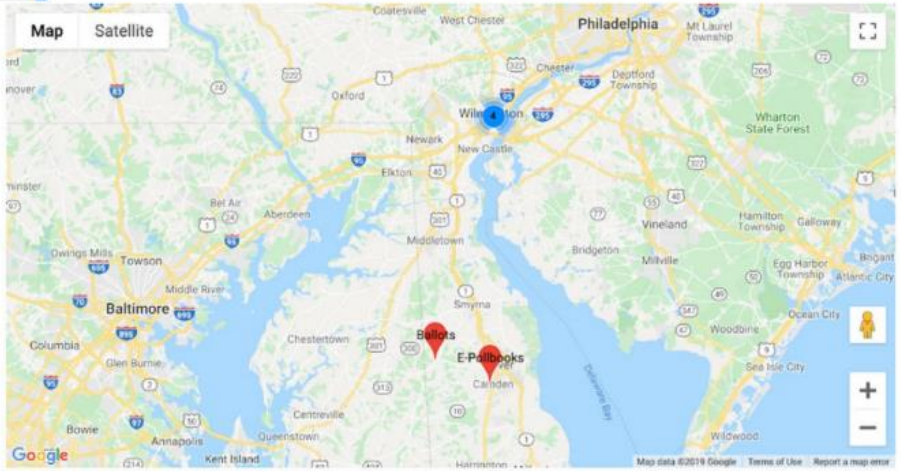
Category	Open	Closed	Daily Total
Ballots	2	2	4
Power / Connectivity	1	0	1
E-Pollbooks	2	2	4
Media	1	2	3

Location: HARTLY FIRE HALL
Time: 2:40:16 PM
Level: 1
Category: Ballots
Summary: At 11:15 AM Precinct 23 discovered that our remaining boxes of ballots are misprinted, and have three races missing. Polls have been temporarily closed and new ballots are needed ASAP

Location: BANCROFT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Time: 4:28:25 PM
Level: 1
Category: Power / connectivity
Summary: Pipes burst in the school's locker room and the room where we were storing voting machines is partially flooded. We've moved the voting machines to another room for now but would like HQ to come verify there's no damage or provide replacement machines.

Location: CARVEL STATE OFFICE BLDG (FED)
Time: 4:36:31 PM
Level: 1
Category: Ballots
Summary: Someone spilled coffee on our remaining absentee ballots and we're down to the last 30 or so - need more as soon as possible.

Location: BANCROFT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Time: 4:21:13 PM
Level: 1
Category: E-Pollbooks

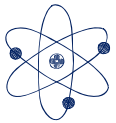


Bringing it all Together: The Operations Center

Purpose of an Operations Center

What an Ops Center **IS**	A centralized location where a leader and key staff come together to command, control, and coordinate all operational activities.
What an Ops Center **ISN'T**	A 'team room' or a place to hang out; a place for 'peripheral' actors (e.g., media)

What an Operations Center Can Do For **You**



CENTRALIZES

Provides a central place to manage ongoing operations.

STRUCTURES

Provides structure and predictability to operations through established ‘battle rhythms’ and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

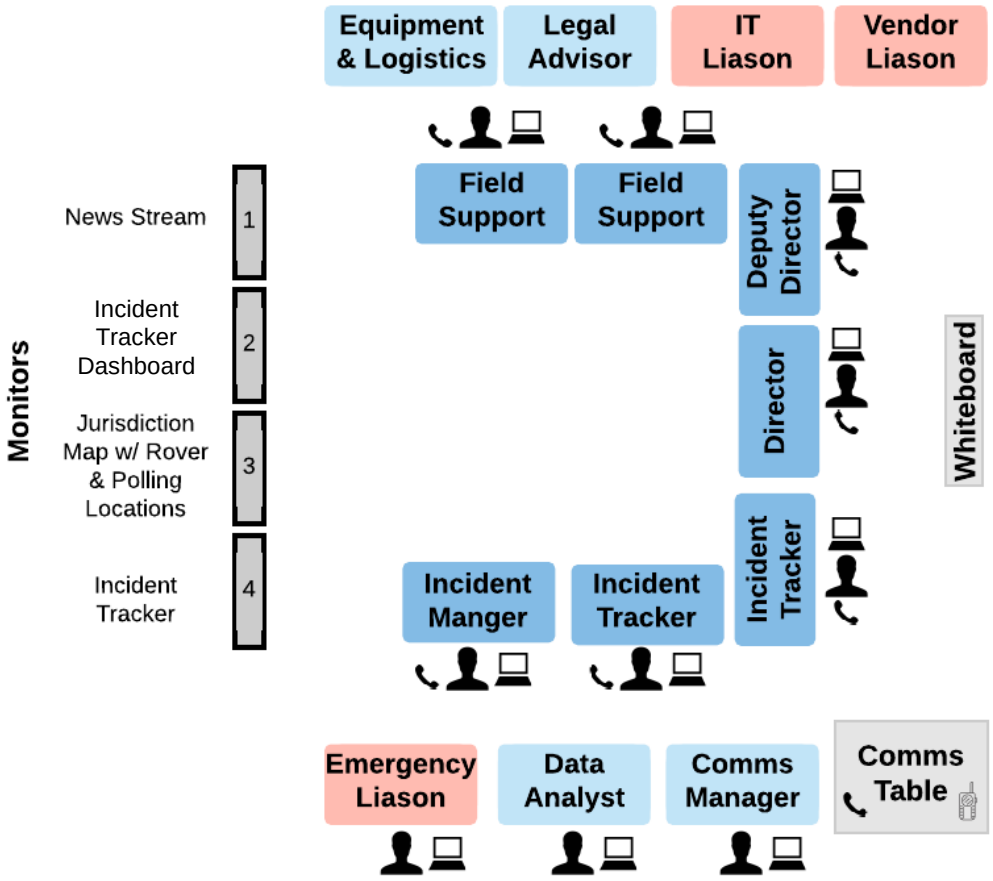
MITIGATES RISK

Layout and structure mitigates preventable issues/risk through effective dissemination of key communications and information

FACILITATES UNDERSTANDING

Facilitates each individual member’s holistic understanding of the operation (making the whole greater than the sum of its parts).

Election Operations Center



https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/elections-battle-staff-playbook