



State Office: Iowa Secretary of State

Nominating Official: Secretary Paul Pate

Contact Information:

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Title of Program: Upholding Election Security: Election Guidance for Iowa Law Enforcement

Project Lead: Eric Gookin, Deputy of Operations

Brief Description:

A first-of-its-kind guidebook developed collaboratively with law enforcement and election officials to improve incident response and understanding of election laws at polling places.

Subject Area: Elections

II. Executive Summary

HISTORY

The Iowa Secretary of State's office and Secretary of State Paul Pate developed and distributed a first-of-its-kind Law Enforcement Guidebook for Iowa Elections in the summer of 2024 to address a potential gap in election security. When polling place incidents occur, law enforcement officers, especially in rural communities, often arrive without a comprehensive understanding of election-specific laws and procedures. At the same time, election officials often struggle with knowing when to call law enforcement and how to work with them efficiently and effectively. This challenge was amplified by significant turnover of election staff – one-third of Iowa's county election commissioners had no prior experience administering a presidential election before 2024.

Data presented by the Center for Internet Security shows that many anticipated election day incidents could be prevented or better managed with proper preparation and understanding. The Iowa Law Enforcement Guidebook was developed to provide practical and accessible guidance on election laws and procedures that can be referenced in patrol cars or on-site during incidents. Through direct collaboration with law enforcement and election officials, including county sheriffs and county election commissioners (auditors), the office solicited input and feedback from real-world end users. This meant the guidebook would be useful and easy-to-use – something that would work for everyone involved, not just a training manual on a shelf.

The collaboration has strengthened partnerships between election offices and law enforcement, offered opportunities for improved incident response coordination, and created a replicable model that other states could adopt. With minimal ongoing costs and a high potential for impact, this collaborative approach demonstrates how targeted collaboration and tailored resources can significantly support and enhance security and infrastructure.

SIGNIFICANCE

Strong Partnerships: The Law Enforcement Guidebook for Elections is the result of direct collaboration between the Iowa Secretary of State's office, county sheriffs, and election officials statewide. Breaking from traditional top-down training documents, the developers went straight to the source – working directly with law enforcement officials to understand what they *actually* needed when responding to election-related calls.

This wasn't just about compiling existing information – new scenarios and response practices were established. The most common scenarios in which law enforcement get called to polling places and other potential situations were easily identified through feedback from sheriffs and other officers. Developers reviewed the law and election procedures from there to develop detailed guidance and action steps.

Law Enforcement Buy-In: Through direct collaboration with the Iowa State Sheriffs and Deputies Association, which boasts members from all of Iowa's 99 counties, the office gathered input on what information would prove most valuable to law enforcement and how to best structure the resource, ensuring the final product would be widely used and easily accessible.

Accessibility and Efficacy: Based on sheriff feedback, it became clear that an electronic version would prove vital to the resource's efficacy – officers needed something they could pull up in patrol cars or reference on-site during incidents. Hard copies were also distributed for departments to have on hand.

Dual Purpose: Unlike traditional training materials that focus on single audiences, this guidebook serves both audiences – educating election officials on law enforcement's role while providing officers with practical, actionable information they can access in patrol cars or on-site during incidents.

Content Structure: The guidebook includes specific sections on Iowa election laws, polling place procedures, common incident types, escalation protocols, and contact information. Each section provides straightforward, actionable guidance with real-world scenarios and appropriate responses.

IMPACTS / RESULTS

Building Ongoing Partnerships: The collaboration has already fostered stronger relationships between law enforcement and election officials that extend well beyond this project. Notably, following the partnership, the Iowa State Sheriffs and Deputies Association invited staff from the Iowa Secretary of State's office to present to their board and members for the first time. Thus far, the Iowa Secretary of State's office has been present at several board and member meetings, presenting on the resource and other election security best practices.

Since 2019, the Iowa Secretary of State's office and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) have collaborated on district-level tabletop exercises (TTX) with local election officials. Recently, attendees have expanded from county auditors and their staff to other members of the election security team: IT, emergency management, and law enforcement. For many, these TTX opportunities were the first time all members of a county's election security team had been in the same room, allowing them to workshop and prepare for any potential incident. Stronger relationships between election officials and law enforcement have allowed the Secretary of State's office to build credibility with law enforcement and promote TTX opportunities to bring in a larger law enforcement presence.

Maintaining Knowledge Amidst Turnover: The guidebook has facilitated better understanding between election officials and law enforcement. Election officials have reported improved communication and coordination with their local law enforcement partners, including participation in TTXs. County auditors reported much better coordination with their local law enforcement partners. One auditor testified that the guidebook helped her explain to the sheriff exactly what she needed for election day security, leading to better resource planning and deployment. At a time when turnover among election officials is high, this guidebook serves as an accessible resource for new staff.

Replication Potential: Once developed, the guidebook requires minimal ongoing investment while providing substantial value through improved coordination and incident prevention. To complete the guidebook promptly, a legal intern was hired to lead the project, dedicating a majority of her time to developing the document over 10 weeks, or around 120 hours. This process can be replicated using other states' legal frameworks, making this innovation highly scalable across jurisdictions.

Long-Term Impact: Once developed, the guidebook requires minimal ongoing investment. The collaborative relationships built during development have resulted in ongoing conversations and partnerships, ensuring numerous opportunities to receive additional input for updates and improvements.

Dynamic and Adaptable: The guidebook was designed to evolve with changing laws and emerging scenarios. The framework allows for regular updates without starting from scratch.

STRENGTHENING ELECTION SECURITY IN OTHER STATES

Iowa's successful development and distribution of the Iowa Law Enforcement Guidebook demonstrate how a targeted, collaborative approach can be adapted to meet the needs of other states. Because the guidebook was built using a flexible framework and developed in close consultation with end users, it can be replicated using any state's legal and procedural context. The core objectives of engaging law enforcement and election officials directly, identifying common incident scenarios, and creating actionable guidance can be applied universally. With minimal investment and high impact, this model offers a scalable solution for strengthening election security partnerships nationwide.

MAINTAINING IOWA'S ELECTION SECURITY IN THE FUTURE

This project represents a shift in how we think about election security partnerships. Instead of waiting for problems to occur, we're building understanding and communication before incidents happen. The guidebook is just one tool, but it has created a foundation for ongoing collaboration between election officials and law enforcement that makes the state's entire election infrastructure more resilient. The success of this approach has provided numerous opportunities for exploring other collaborative projects with key partners in election administration. By strengthening key partnerships today, this project is solving current challenges, strengthening Iowa's holistic election security team, and building a collaborative framework to protect and maintain safe and secure election infrastructure in the future. The Iowa Law Enforcement Guidebook provides a strong framework for supporting and enhancing election integrity in Iowa and other jurisdictions by focusing on proactive security measures and innovative collaboration between election security partners.

III. Supplemental Materials

TESTIMONIALS

"I was the 2024 Iowa State Sheriffs' & Deputies' Association (ISSDA) President, and I still do a lot of work for ISSDA, including serving as the website administrator. The guidebook is super handy for us to hand out to our deputies on election day so they can quickly find answers to common questions and address various situations. Because we are in uniform and present on Election Day, the public expects us to have all the answers and to know what the law says. Deputies don't deal with election laws every day, so the Law Enforcement Guidebook helps us quickly find some of those answers. The guidebook provides a quick reference to common questions, helping us be better prepared to assist citizens during the election process. Thankfully, we haven't had too many issues, but the guidebook gives us confidence that if a problem does arise, we can figure it out to help everyone have a good election day. Our officers find this information and the ease of using the guidebook very helpful on Election Day."

- Sergeant Shawn Ireland #57-114, Linn County Sheriff's Office
2024 President of the Iowa Sheriffs' & Deputies' Association (ISSDA)

LINKS + ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Full PDF version of Iowa's Law Enforcement Guidebook available here.](#)

GIS Maps

In addition to the guidebook, the Iowa Secretary of State's Office has 300ft. Geographic Information System (GIS) maps are available for each County Auditor's office and county election precincts. These maps were provided to local election officials and law enforcement.

Per Iowa Code § 39A.4, no campaigning is allowed within 300 feet of a poll center on the day of an election, unless it is private property per Iowa Code § 68A.406.

Example of GIS map provided to law enforcement.



Adair County Auditor
400 Public Square
Greenfield, IA 50849

Per Iowa Code § 39A.4, no campaigning is allowed within 300 feet of a poll center on the day of an election, unless it is private property per Iowa Code § 68A.406. For penalties, see 39A.

 Auditor's Office
 300 feet from polling location*
*Disclaimer: the green line is approximately 300 feet from the building.