



LIFE IN THE

FAST

LANE

PREPARED BY ELECTION SYSTEMS & SOFTWARE

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE:



HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN IMPROVE THE ELECTION DAY VOTER EXPERIENCE.

Many headlines dominated the 2016 Presidential Election Cycle. From cyber security to data crunching, one common theme was the role of technology in the elections process. There is one area of election administration that has improved, yet received little fanfare. That advance is directly tied to technological advances in voter education and poll place line management; thanks in part to [a report](#) published by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA) after the long lines that marked the 2012 Presidential Election.

Among their recommendations to improve the voter experience, was the advice to make available online sample ballots for voters and to utilize available technology that allowed the voter to bring in their pre-filled sample ballot to expedite the voting process. And while this technology has been around for quite some time, first conceptualized in 2014, not many jurisdictions have implemented it; wanting to do more research and better gauge voter's perception of it. But much like the increased popularity of mobile boarding passes to get on planes, consumers want more convenience when doing everyday tasks like traveling or voting for who they'd like in office.

INCREASED EDUCATION

The PCEA report found that well-informed voters could help reduce waiting time. If a voter was unfamiliar with their ballot, they would need more time to evaluate and make the right decision for them, possibly even looking up a candidate or contest information at the polling booth (if their jurisdiction allows phone use). In the span of a few years, the number of states who followed this recommendation, making sample ballots available for voters online, has increased. Likewise, certain groups such as The League of Women's Voters and the Voting Information Project (VIP) have created micro-sites and customizable tools for jurisdictions where a voter can input their zip code and pull up information about candidates and issues that will appear on their specific ballot. App developers (and groups like VIP) have also thrown their hat in the arena, developing similar programs that bring up sample ballots by zip code or full address. As a result, voters are utilizing online sample ballots to make their decisions ahead of visiting the polls, decreasing the time they have to spend at the voting booth.



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STILL WORK TO DO

Issues can arise with all of these scenarios, however. A voter may move to a new jurisdiction but not update their voter registration, causing their sample ballot to be incorrect. Another could print off their sample ballot and then lose the piece of paper before making it to their poll place. Additionally, most apps only have access to publicly available data, causing some generic online sample ballots not to reflect everything a voter will be asked to consider. And what happens if a voter has no idea where their polling place is? Two secondary pieces to the PCEA's sample ballot recommendation could eliminate these issues easily with today's available technology.

PROVIDING GENERAL VOTER EDUCATION

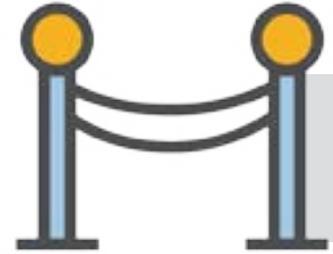
A part of the sample ballot recommendation by the PCEA not as widely addressed has been the ability to utilize technology to provide additional election-related information, such as polling locations and hours or voter identification requirements. While this information is available on a state's election-related website, some voters may not have access to the site while on the go. One quick fix to this dilemma is for jurisdictions to provide this information in printable format alongside their current sample ballots. An even nicer way to improve their Election Day experience? Utilizing technology to have this information sent and downloaded to their smartphone. A voter may lose a piece of paper, but it's less likely they will lose their \$100+ phone.



TAKING TIPS FROM TARGET

Another section of the PCEA's sample ballot recommendation reads similar to Target's ship to store program. Systems that allow voters to mark a sample ballot prior to Election Day can also reduce the time a voter spends at the polls. In fact, technology now could allow a voter to fill out and download a sample ballot at home. A voting machine can then scan the sample ballot's barcode, so as to populate the ballot on the screen for the voter to verify his or her choices. The voter could still make changes to the ballot in the privacy booth, of course.

A voter can research the items on their ballot, make selections, walk into the polling place and verify said selections and confirm -- casting their actual ballot in person; in the same way a Target customer would order online, ship to store and confirm they received the correct items while there in person. While just as convenient, like with all election technology, the voter maintains anonymity – the barcode only contains voter's choices, not their personal information. The ability to always change a selection also provides flexibility for the voter while still decreasing the time spent in the voting booth. Allowing this to be done via barcode or QR code on a smartphone has the additional benefit of being environmentally friendly and saving on printed paper.



"FAST TRACK" YOUR LINES

As jurisdictions think about these new ways to incorporate technology to alleviate long lines, the opportunity exists to also reward informed voters with an enhanced voting experience. Imagine someone telling you that you could "skip the line" or get an express lane to the front, simply by making your vote decisions ahead of time? Should jurisdictions make the investment in updated technology that allows voters to bring in a sample ballot with barcode, certainly separate check-in lines or voting systems can be designated for sample ballot users. The concept isn't new; people are willing to pay extra or put in extra front end work to skip some wait time such as Disney's FastPass+ or TSA Pre-Check. The plus here is the voter doesn't have to pay money, and anyone whose jurisdiction utilizes the technology can access it with an internet connection or smartphone.

ADDITIONAL FEARS



Another worry about sample ballots and barcode technology is the possibility of vote buying, where an outside party could influence someone into making certain vote choices through intimidation or monetary bribes. As a sample ballot, a voter is always able to change any choices they make once at the polling place. Think of it as the “local newspaper sample ballot” for the 21st Century. The barcode doesn’t reveal what choices a voter selected, making it virtually impossible for a voter to “prove” they voted one way or another (again the barcode is not proof of voting, just a method for saving choices to be reviewed/confirmed later at the polling place). In other words, although the selection process happens while on a computer, tablet or smartphone, no votes are ever recorded or tabulated. Much like the advent of the secret ballot, more public use of the technology plus reinforcement that choices contained within the barcode can’t be changed will help reassure all parties that the eventual vote cast is the one the voter intended.

A SMOOTHER DAY FOR ALL

Non-Presidential Election Cycles are the perfect time to implement new systems and technologies for jurisdictions. By following the PCEA’s recommendations, jurisdictions can proactively ensure a better Election Day for not only voters but their poll workers as well. Providing a voter-specific sample ballot cuts down on time spent reading over the actual ballot in the voting booth and pondering selections. Allowing people to access information about where their poll place is, hours of operation and voter identification requirements can empower voters to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right items on Election Day.

Conducting pilots of new technology also allow voters to familiarize themselves with a new Election Day experience and for election workers and officials to gauge the best methods to implement. Encouraging voters to complete their sample ballots and “rewarding” them with a more expedient path to the voting booth will ensure the option is utilized and work in election administrators favor. Luckily; technology is a jurisdiction’s friend when it comes to educating voters on the ballot and reducing wait times efficiently.

