A profile of elections in Wisconsin

- Registered Voters: 3,378,487\(^1\)
- 72 percent turnout in the November 2012 General Election\(^2\)
- Election jurisdictions: 1,852 municipalities and 72 counties
- Equipment used: Paper ballots are hand counted or counted by optical scanners at the polling places or a central location; a few towns use Direct-Recording Electronic (DRE) machines
- Strong post-election audit system
- Wisconsin has received a total of $55,298,934 in federal (HAVA) funds for elections

The Morning: A Presentation by State, County and Municipal Election Officials

Presentations were given on most aspects of the election process from state, county and municipal election administrators. The Government Accountability Board (GAB) demonstrated Wisconsin’s various election management systems and the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS). County clerks discussed their role in creating the ballot and in data collection and storage. Municipal clerks detailed all of the other processes involved with elections, including absentee voting, security protocols, Election Day setup, tabulating results and completing the canvass.

- Municipalities have seen an increase in the number of voters casting absentee ballots. Statewide the percentage of absentee voters grew from 6 percent in 2000 (when Wisconsin first permitted no-excuse absentee voting) to 22 percent in 2012. In larger elections in Sun Prairie the majority of absentee voters vote in-person, which requires additional resources, whereas in smaller spring elections the majority of absentee voters mail in their ballots.
- The Sun Prairie City Council is supportive of technology, allowing the city to stay on the cutting edge.
- Processes vary from county to county and in rural vs. urban areas. Some locations don’t have access to Internet and clerks conduct business from their homes. They therefore have different technology resources and needs.
- In order to ensure the quality of the voter registration list, list maintenance is ongoing at the state and local level.
- Election workers visit nursing facilities to conduct absentee voting. They have to be flexible with these visits and are challenged by the requirement to publish the times of the visits in local papers.
- Sun Prairie uses laptops and software that it developed in-house to register new voters on Election Day. The system includes many of the functions of an electronic poll book, including address look-up capability, an automatic check against invalid voter lists, and prompts to assist the election workers.
- The GAB has created a variety of technological solutions to facilitate communication between the state, county and local clerks, and voters. One such system is the nation’s most comprehensive elections data collection system.

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\(^1\) Wisconsin Government Accountability Board (GAB), as of June 1, 2014

\(^2\) Percentage of voting eligible population, courtesy of The Pew Charitable Trusts’ Elections Performance Index
The Afternoon: A Conversation About Technology and Efficient Elections

Participants identified issues that Wisconsin may face in the next several years. Merle King, executive director of the Center for Election Systems at Kennesaw State University, moderated.

The Voting System Marketplace
- For jurisdictions that are considering replacing older equipment, the market offers limited choices.
- Pilot projects, such as the one Wisconsin conducted using Prime III, are a good way to experiment and see what works. Prime III is an in-development software-based system that would allow jurisdictions to buy commercial off-the-shelf hardware as an alternative to traditional voting system hardware.
- The current certification process for voting equipment does not have the flexibility needed to address emerging technology. Some states may be increasing their focus on state-level certification solutions, including a potential collaborative effort between states.
- The Legislature could consider new funding models to ensure that local governments can replace equipment when needed. One way to do this may be to move toward a unified voting system in the state.

Technology and People
- Technology never stands alone. It must serve the needs of poll workers and clerks.
- Investing in people and providing training opportunities is essential for the successful conduct of elections.
- Wisconsin has a variety of trainings available for clerks and chief inspectors. Vendors conduct training on voting systems; the GAB runs a “train the trainer” program, posts webinars online, travels to regional meetings to reach clerks, and conducts hands-on trainings for the statewide voter registration system; the municipal clerks association has a mentoring program for new clerks; and local clerks train their poll workers on current processes and legislative changes.

Electronic Poll Books
- In 2014, the GAB studied every aspect of e-poll books. The GAB’s research shows it would be more effective for Wisconsin to build their own, customizable electronic poll book rather than use a vendor.
- The GAB board concluded that there are too many security concerns associated with e-poll books to recommend their use at this time. If it is a priority of the legislature to go forward, the GAB is ready to proceed.

Other takeaways
- Collaboration between legislators, the GAB, county clerks and municipal clerks has helped make Wisconsin elections top-notch.
- Technology is a tool. Regardless of what methods are used, the most important thing is that results are accurate and that voters have confidence in election results.
- Always remember the voter.

Resources
- NCSL’s webpage on Absentee and Early Voting (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL’s webpage on Online Voter Registration (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL’s webpage on Electronic Poll Books (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL’s webpage on Electronic Transmission of Ballots (additional backup material is also available)
- NCSL’s webpage on Maintaining Accurate Voter Registration Rolls
- The U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s website on Testing and Certification
- NCSL offers technical assistance, testimony and other in-person help as needed
- NCSL can provide research on any topics useful to Wisconsin as policymaking proceeds

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