NCSL-Democracy Fund Project: Louisiana State Meeting
Elections 2020: Policy, Funding and the Future

A team of Louisiana legislators, legislative staff, and state and local election officials convened in Baton Rouge on Dec. 15, 2016 to discuss elections technology. Topics included how elections run in Louisiana, national legislative trends in election administration and technology, and potential next steps for Louisiana as it considers its election model and replacement plans for its voting system. Funding for new elections technology remains the most prominent question and challenge in Louisiana.

A Profile of Elections in Louisiana

- Turnout: 59.8 percent in the November 2016 General Election.[1] The national average was 58.9 percent.
- Registered voters: 3,022,075.[2]
- Election administration units: 64 parishes.
- Equipment: The same equipment is used statewide: Sequoia (Dominion). In-person voting on Election Day is done on electronic voting equipment (DREs) without a paper record. Absentee ballots are all paper; these are tabulated by Dominion's ImageCast Central optical scanners. Early voting equipment is a different model of Dominion's DREs.
- Overall rank on The Pew Charitable Trusts' 2014 Elections Performance Index: 33.
- Election Day voting takes place at 2,068 polling places, and early voting takes place at 97 sites.
- Early voting continues to increase, with approximately 29 percent of all voters casting their ballot before Election Day in the 2016 Presidential election, up from 18 percent in 2012.[3] This is a trend across the nation as well.

Presentation from the Secretary of State's Office of Elections

Opening remarks from Secretary of State Tom Schedler revealed a strong sense of passion for continuously improving how elections are run in Louisiana, taking into account several improvements already made. Despite the heightened concern for elections security, Schedler reported no incidents of the sort this election. The secretary closed by outlining the office's priority for replacing elections technology in partnership with the legislature. He indicated an interest in using vote centers that allow any qualified voter in the state to cast a ballot anywhere in the state.

Next, Commissioner of Elections Angie Rogers, Director of Elections Operation Sherri Hadskey and IT Director Scott Mayers presented on the current method of voting in Louisiana, from ballot programming through certifying election results and securing elections technology.

- Louisiana's elections function in a top-down manner, unlike many states. Uniform policies, procedures, deadlines and systems are used in every parish.
- Within the Secretary of State's office (SOS), the state office of elections oversees voter registration, the statewide Elections Registration Information Network (ERIN), purchases and certification of voting equipment, testing and maintenance of voting machines, ballot programming, voter information tools management, and paying for all elections up front (the state ultimately pays 75 percent while jurisdictions pay 25 percent).
- The registrars administer voter registration and absentee and early voting. The clerks of court conduct Election Day voting. Results from each are delivered centrally for election night reporting and certification of the statewide results.

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[1] Percentage of voting eligible population, courtesy of the United States Elections Project

[2] 2016 registered voter statistics, Louisiana Secretary of State Office

[3] 2012 and 2016 early voting and turnout statistics, Louisiana Secretary of State Office

- The SOS office expects to vet options for new elections technology and work with the legislature on funding. It will likely be purchased in two phases. The first phase will be for early voting and the second phase will be for Election Day voting. Leasing elections technology may be of interest.
- The existing voting system in Louisiana is no longer being manufactured. Any new technology will need to be compatible with other elections systems, especially ERIN.
- Currently, all maintenance and programming of all elections technology is done by the SOS office, not the vendor as is common in other states. This results in cost savings and consistent election standards across the state. It requires a significant amount of time and expertise from the SOS office.
- "Express voting" will be explored for early voting whereby voters can make selections on their ballot in advance on their own devices using a bar code system that populates their ballot for review when voters check in to express vote in-person.
- The SOS office provided local election officials this year with simple and consistent talking points on the security of Louisiana's elections systems to help with inquiries.

Panel Discussion with Local Election Officials

A moderated discussion with local clerks and registrars provided the local perspective on running effective elections in Louisiana. Panelists included Steve Raborn, East Baton Rouge registrar of voters, Shanika Olinde, Pointe Coupee registrar of voters, Brian Champagne, St. Charles registrar of voters, and Brandon Abadie, East Baton Rouge clerk of courts. The major takeaways were:
- Legislators increasingly consult with clerks and registrars when considering legislation. This practice helps to produce better legislation. Local election offices can and do invite legislators to make site visits.
- Louisiana's GeauxVote mobile application has reduced the call volume for local officials. In one parish where they received 1,400 phone calls on Election Day in 2012, only 800 phone calls came through in 2016.
- Processing absentee ballots is time consuming, especially those arriving by fax that need to be duplicated.
- The trend towards more technology to administer elections continues. The needs and skills of election commissioners must be considered; some are not tech-savvy.
- Space limitations are an issue for registrars and clerks alike.
- Voter confidence is enhanced when election officials hold public demonstrations of elections technology.

NCSL Presentations on National Election Administration and Technology Trends

NCSL's Elections and Redistricting Program Director Wendy Underhill, and Elections Policy Specialist, Amanda Buchanan presented on national trends in election administration and elections technology:
- Louisiana is one of four states using DRE machines without a paper trail. It is one of the most unified election administration structures in terms of technology, funding for elections, and procedures.
- E-poll books are used in jurisdictions in at least 33 states. E-poll books, which typically come in the form of a laptop or tablet, have the ability to do much more than look up eligible voters. If Louisiana considers adopting e-poll books it should consider how the poll books interact with ERIN, identify redundancies and training for election commissioners.
- States are considering a variety of funding mechanisms for elections technology: leasing, statewide purchase, 50/50 cost split between state and counties, local purchases only, county consortiums, pilot programs, statewide grants or bonds, and directing funds from SOS services, such as map sales, towards technology.
- At least 22 states have provisions allowing some elections to be held entirely by mail. Three of those states (Oregon, Washington, and Colorado) conduct all elections in the state by mail. California will become the fourth state to do so starting in 2018. For more, see NCSL's all-mail elections webpage.
- Louisiana was an early adopter of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a state-run consortium that compares voter lists and helps maintain clean voter lists. Angie Rogers is the chair of the board.

National Expert Presentation on Voting System Selection and Group Discussion on the Future of Elections in Louisiana

The conversation was kicked off by a presentation from Dr. Merle King, executive director of the Center for Elections Systems at Kennesaw State University, on considerations for new voting systems. Key points:
- Request for Proposals (RFP) drive the process for acquiring elections technology, and they are your first and last, best chance to get the system requirements right. Identify the preferred voting model (in-person voting, precinct-based, all-mail etc.) comes first. After that, the appropriate choice can be made.

- The true cost of ownership is the cost to purchase, operate and maintain a voting system over its life span. This includes the need to train poll workers for the demands of the system.
- On security of voting systems, ask the vendor to help articulate the system's security features.

Dr. King then asked the group: What are Louisiana's priorities for elections technology? Responses included:
- A one-size-fits-all approach may not be best for Louisiana. The same elections technology throughout the state may continue to be beneficial, but some parishes may need individualized processes to more effectively serve their voters.
- The challenges faced by urban and rural parishes vary—but, recruitment and retention of election commissioners stands out as a challenge across all types of parishes.
- Are there parishes that do not struggle with adequate staffing of the polls? Would other voting models such as an all-mail or no-excuse permanent absentee voting model that rely less on poll workers suit Louisiana?
- Developing a partnership with a local research university to assist in identifying problems and solutions within Louisiana's elections infrastructure could be considered.
- If the state moves to a vote center model for Election Day voting, thus increasing ease and access for voters but reducing the number of polling places, what will that choice mean for unpredictable traffic patterns at the polls? How can clerks ensure adequate staffing with such a model, and can technology provide help?
- Since early voting is increasingly popular in Louisiana, does this shift the balance of work from the clerks to the registrars?
- It may be helpful to think about how Louisianans are likely to vote in the next 20 years—can the chosen system adapt? Some say younger voters have an expectation to be able to vote on their phones.
- When considering new equipment, it is also important to keep the following in mind: accessibility, usability of the system for all voters, future availability of polling places and the impact of a new system on poll workers.
- In looking to purchase new elections technology, Louisiana continues to find funding a major challenge.

Resources
- Contact NCSL if you would like to see the presentations from this meeting.
- NCSL's Election Technology Overview and Elections Technology Toolkit: Voting Machines and Beyond
- NCSL's Elections 2020: Policy, Funding and the Future
- NCSL's Funding Elections Technology
- Articles from NCSL's election administration newsletter The Canvass:
  - Election Funding for 2020 and Beyond
  - Elections Technology: Nine Things Legislators May Want to Know
  - Voting Technology: Current and Future Choices
  - Voting Technology Standards: What Legislators Need to Know
- NCSL offers technical assistance, testimony and other in-person help as needed, and can provide research on any topics useful to Louisiana policymakers.

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