1. Do you see the “election business” changing from a products to a service model? What does that mean for your company and clients?

Absolutely. As technology continues to advance at an increasing pace, the public is going to demand more and more from election officials. Additionally, as election administration becomes more politicized there will be more and more election legislation requiring changes to the ways elections are administered. This means voting systems are going to have to be more adaptable, and the way to do that is through software based systems where software is a service. In this way elections administration and requirements can change, but the voter experience can remain the same since the software can be changed without having to change the way the ballot looks, or the scanner it is scanned with.

This is why Clear Ballot has moved down the road to a software based voting system with commercial off the shelf hardware. It gives jurisdictions greater flexibility and allows electoral jurisdictions to customize the voting system for their jurisdiction in the most efficient way.

2. What is the future of the industry in an environment where federal funding is gone and state/local funding is so challenging?

Election administrators continue to be asked to do more with less, and they succeed which makes it harder for them to get the funding they need because they are able to get by on their limited budgets. It is almost a martyr mentality in many places. State and local governments are going to have to continually request funding for their voting systems. Gone are the days when a voting system will last 40 years. With a move to a service model for administering elections there will be larger annual costs, but without the huge costs of hardware purchases every decade or less as is the norm now. This service model will help flatten out the funding requirements for election officials so that it is at a more constant amount from year to year without major spikes.

Data from newer systems and new ways of administering elections will help election administrators justify their funding needs through their presentation of that data to justify their budget requests.

3. How can the private sector work with policymakers and election officials to support innovation and otherwise support election administration?

All stake holders have to have a seat at the table. Vendor has become a bad word and yet they are true partners with election administrators to produce accurate and secure elections. We have to recognize the value that test labs, vendors, election officials, and governing bodies all bring to the table and that we can’t have efficient elections or encourage innovation if any one of those groups is not fully engaged in the process.

Stephen N. Trout, Director of Election Innovation at Clear Ballot
4. **What developments in the field are you the most optimistic about? Which ones worry you the most?**

I am most optimistic about a move to component certification. This will allow jurisdictions to have more options and will not force them to accept lesser systems or portions of systems because they have to buy a complete bundle. This will be especially valuable for accessible portions of systems since there seems to be even more rapid development of new technologies to serve voters with special needs. Election officials should not have to wait 8-10 years to replace their accessible solution when they replace their tally solution when there are better and cheaper accessible tools being developed.

I am also optimistic about systems that implement newer technology that provide more data. Data helps in planning elections, explaining needs to legislators and local policy makers, and making for more efficient administration of elections.

I am most worried about the attempted politization of election administration and unreasonable expectations by the public. At some point in this business someone is going to have to be trusted. Suspicions and conspiracy theories are damaging the public’s confidence in our elections. If you have evidence then let’s see it and let’s prosecute it fully, but if you don’t have evidence and are just hurling accusations and suspicion then you are a big part of the problem. More people are going to lose in an election than are going to win but that in no way indicates problems with the election. The public’s lack of understanding of election processes and timelines, combined with the media’s looking for “problems” has created a climate where public expectations are unrealistic.

5. **Anything else you think the election community – and especially state legislators and staff – should know?**

Having election administrators at the table when sending election legislation through the process is essential. An example from Oregon was a bill to allow multiple political parties to nominate a single candidate (cross nomination). The original draft of the bill called for up to two political parties, but at the last minute it was amended to three without checking with election administrators. The problem was that there was a text character limit on the ballots and two parties would fit but three would not. The bill passed and was unable to be implemented which led to lawsuits and interested persons being upset.

Election administration is not a partisan activity. Election policy making can be, and often times is partisan, but election administration is not.

Election results can be provided faster, it just requires more resources.
Stephen N. Trout, Director of Election Innovation at Clear Ballot