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

Yes, and the service/subscription model means that election offices can expect regular updates to those services as the technology improves - they’re no longer faced with the prospect of buying a system that will be out-of-date almost immediately. We also believe this model supports closer relationships between election offices and tech providers, resulting in more collaborative designs that better reflect the needs and realities of modern elections.

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

The biggest shift is the rise of organizations like Democracy Works - mission driven non-profit or social enterprise players who can share the cost of developing new tools and provide those tools at a lower price point than for-profit vendors. That also means more innovation, since organizations like ours can pursue good ideas before they are profitable. On the technical side, the tools we build have to be incredibly flexible and customizable, so that they can accommodate different processes across jurisdictions. Building one-off solutions isn’t sustainable anymore.

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

Building ‘with’ election officials rather than ‘for’ them is the best way to support innovation in this space. It’s not enough to consult with election administrators when you design or roll out a new tool - you’ve got to be an active part of the community and let the community drive the whole process. When election administrators are identifying the problems and opportunities they see, proposing solutions they want to try, evaluating and improving upon existing solutions, that’s when you see the most progress.

What developments in the field are you the most optimistic about? Which ones worry you the most?

We’re excited about the movement towards open-source voting technology, led by places like Travis County, Texas and both Inyo and Los Angeles counties in California. There’s an obvious cost benefit to open-source technology, and that’s the main driver for the counties, but there are significant benefits in terms of security and reliability with open-source technology, too. That’s a great example of what can happen when election officials are empowered to push the technology forward. On the flip side, it’s disappointing to see how many systems still lack the ability to integrate with other tools. That should be a basic requirement by now.

Anything else you think the election community – and especially state legislators and staff – should know?
There’s a significant ecosystem of low and no-cost election technology providers now, so it pays to look outside traditional vendors. Partnering with a non-profit to pilot a new idea in a few places is a cost-effective way to try out new technology before committing to it statewide, too.