Hart InterCivic Responses


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

At Hart, we do not see the industry transforming from a products to a service model. Specialized products with very specific requirements will continue to be required in elections for the foreseeable future, in addition to service and implementation expertise. Those are both areas where Hart is a leader – i.e. developing, testing, and achieving certifications for comprehensive, election-specific solutions, including rigorous VVSG standards, and also providing service expertise. We take both of those things very seriously, as evidenced by our most recent EAC certification, as well as customer satisfaction ratings of 95%.

To be sure, the industry is changing, and there is customer demand and innovation in certain niche areas that can be met with less purpose-built hardware and software. A growing number of solutions in the “election management” space, for example (i.e. everything surrounding certified voting systems), might follow slightly different models.

At the end of the day, however, we at Hart believe that significant, widely-adopted changes would need to take place with certification standards before the technology and the standards can be aligned enough to move away from specialized products to “services and integration” only. Unless a great number of states relax their requirements for testing to federal standards, and until such time as the federal VVSG standards are modified to be less design-prescriptive, specialized, purpose-built products will continue to be necessary.

What this means for our company and our clients is that successful implementations of voting technology require not only very specialized product expertise (with EAC certified systems, as well as uncertified election management tools) but also a high degree of competence and experience with change management and logistical support.
Again, Hart has deep experience in all of these areas. We continue to be committed to customized integrations and development of election management solutions that do not fall under the sphere of voting system certification, as well as maintaining our expertise in achieving VVSG compliance and EAC-certification of comprehensive voting systems. (Verity, our newest system, is the first completely-new-from-the-ground-up voting system to achieve EAC certification in many years. It is not a modification of an older system; it is more than simply adding a new device to an older system. It is new, comprehensive, and EAC-certified. We are proud of that.)

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

Short answer: elections cannot stop, and their complexity is growing, so innovation will have to continue despite the absence of federal funding.

Given the fact that increasing scrutiny is placed on voter service, convenience, and robust participation in the electoral process, industry-leading professionals cannot afford to “stand pat” with old solutions whose reliability may be increasingly at risk. Nor can they afford to simply “get by” with solutions that cannot rise to the level of accommodating more complexity and more demands for better voter service.

In the medium- to long-term, it will increasingly fall upon state legislators and local jurisdictions to voice their needs, to plan for them, and to secure funding through a methodical process that may take years to bear fruit. In short, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” We have seen an increasing number of states coming up with creative funding methods to respond to those demands – and they do not happen overnight. As we talk to customers and prospects across the country, we have seen a broad spectrum of preparedness for this need; some jurisdictions began planning for this refresh in their budgeting cycles a few years ago, some have not begun the process at all; and most are somewhere in between.

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

At Hart, we believe that one of the most important ways we can support policymakers and election officials is by educating them about the complexities of the regulatory environment in which we must operate and how their own reliance on different kinds of standards can impact the nature and pace at which new technology can be developed and delivered. If policymakers and election officials better understand why and how the current delivery of technology is profoundly shaped by the application of different kinds of standards, the potential for more innovation in the future can be optimized.

Furthermore, there are many ways that procurements can be structured to increase or decrease the diversity of options that may be available to buyers in the marketplace. Through education, the private sector can help states and localities understand what their options are (e.g., how laws are written, or how requirements might be stated in a RFP, for example). Through this education process, policymakers and election officials can gain greater control over their own destiny, by dramatically increasing (or contracting) the election technology solutions that might be available to them.
And, needless to say, we can of course continue to listen to the needs of policymakers and election officials to help shape our solutions. Tracing those practical day-to-day desires or pain points into tangible solutions is what we strive to do -- whether it involves technology, flexible financing, or meeting some other need.

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

   **Most optimistic:** After more than a decade of running elections since HAVA, more and more election professionals are savvy and discerning about what they need in the future. That’s exciting because it is fertile ground for new ideas and innovation. When election professionals are seeking specific solutions to specific challenges, it demands more ingenuity.

   Stated another way, we are optimistic because the specific human needs that the technology must serve are being talked about with more sophistication and more clarity. At Hart, we are always looking to capitalize on all of that new learning by incorporating it into new election technology with human-centered design goals of **usability, adoptability, and transparency.**

   **Most worrisome:** The rigidity and design-prescriptive nature of the federal standards are not always neatly aligned with the goal of enhancing voter service and technological efficiency.

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

   Like you, election technology providers take their mission very seriously. One of the things that we like most about our profession is the fact that it’s directed toward something as meaningful as voting and democracy.

   With that in mind, we are committed to innovation and solving problems. We want to make things better for voters and for the entire community of stakeholders in your respective states.

   To do that, it should be recognized that the complexity of election administration – which is only growing – makes this a very specialized space for products and services. Laws and regulations can play a critical role in determining whether change feels like turning a battleship, (very slowly), or alternatively, whether a conscious desire for agility and creativity is sufficiently prioritized; either way, very purposeful choices in laws and policies can set the boundaries of what is possible.

   We like listening and talking with you to help solve problems. The more we talk, and the less everyone reflexively relies on “the way things have always been done,” the greater the likelihood that optimal outcomes will result.