Testimony before the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

PUBLIC HEARING – APRIL 16, 2008

EAC Resources for Ballot Design

Submitted by Connie Schmidt, CERA
Co-Project Manager, Election Management Guidelines

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of ballot design and preparation resources provided in the Election Management Guidelines and Quick Start Guide series.

As a former election official, I truly appreciate the efforts of the Commissioners and EAC staff in continuing their mission to conduct research and collect guidelines and best practices. The availability of these resources is a giant step towards the improvement of election administration nationwide.

Recognizing the need to provide information to election officials as quickly as possible, in August 2007 the EAC issued the *Quick Start Management Guide for Ballot Preparation/Printing and Pre-Election Testing*. The Guide provided several tips and suggestions, such as:

- Understand the significance of the placement of ovals, folds, timing marks, and precinct/ballot style identifiers. If the ballot is folded on an oval, it may impact the scanner's ability to read the ballot.

- To prepare for recording audio ballots, ask the candidates to record the pronunciation of their names when they file for office.

- Use vendor-certified or pre-qualified printing companies. Remember that if the ink density on the ballot is too light, the scanner may have difficulty reading the timing marks. Also, the weight of the paper stock may cause the scanner to jam.

- Immediately conduct a logic and accuracy test whenthe ballots arrive from the printer. This test should be successfully completed prior to mailing or distributing ballots to voters.

- Develop a Plan B in the event ballots are not delivered on time or there is a shortage of ballots on Election Day.

A soon to be released new chapter in the Election Management Guidelines is also devoted to Ballot Design. As you know, one of the goals of the Management Guidelines project is to appropriately integrate this document with the Voluntary Voting Systems Guidelines (VVSG) and the EAC Testing and Certification Program Manual.

The EMG Chapter on ballot design does reinforce the requirements of the VVSG. Within the chapter, specific VVSG requirements that pertain to ballot design are referenced, followed by an easy to understand example of how to implement the requirement. Within the chapter, the reader is reminded that the word, SHALL, is a mandatory VVSG requirement, and the word, SHOULD, is a VVSG recommendation.

Examples of the VVSG requirements referenced in this chapter are:

- When an instruction is based on a condition, the condition SHOULD be stated first, and then the action to be performed. For instance, use "In order to change your vote do X", rather than "Do X, in order to change your vote."

- The ballot SHALL clearly indicate the maximum number of candidates for which one can vote within a single contest.

- The relationship between the name of a candidate and the mechanism used to vote for that candidate SHALL be consistent throughout the ballot. For example, the response field where voters indicate their votes must not be located to the left of some candidates' names, and to the right of others.

- The voting system SHOULD NOT visually present a single contest spread over two pages or two columns. We do note that if a contest has a large number of candidates, it may be infeasible to observe this guideline.

- The system SHOULD issue instructions on the correct way to perform actions, rather than telling voters what not to do. For example, "Fill in the oval for your write-in vote to count" rather than "If the oval is not marked; your write-in vote cannot be counted."

The above are examples of information contained in the EMG chapter. There are a total of 24 references to the VVSG requirements that pertain to ballot design included in the chapter.

The remainder of the chapter discusses issues that are common to all ballots. These include such things as providing instructions in plain language and

separate from the other ballot content, use of separation/delineation marks, and print font and size.

- The section on optical scan ballots addresses such issues as coordinating with printer(s), reviewing ballots for text relative to fold lines, timing mark positions, ink quality, bleed through, and paper opaqueness. Ballot on demand and chain of custody issues are also discussed.

- The touch screen section addresses such issues as the use of color and texture, instructions for ancillary input and feed back devices, the avoidance of three column screens, and recommendations for testing ballot style layouts.

- The audio ballot section provides guidelines for choosing synthesized or natural voices and male or female voices, using visually impaired persons to test the ballot, and maintaining uniformity of style and volume throughout the ballot.

In closing I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide this brief update to you. I am available to answer any questions you may have.