



**United States Election Assistance Commission
Public Meeting**

**Testimony of David Burgess
Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary for Planning and Service Delivery
Concerning the 2010 Election Day Survey**

**1225 New York Avenue, NW
Suite 150
Washington, DC 20005**

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Chairwoman Beach, Vice-Chair Hillman, Commissioner Davidson, and Executive Director Wilkey — good afternoon.

My name is David Burgess and I serve as the Deputy Secretary for Planning and Service Delivery at the Pennsylvania Department of State. In this capacity, I am responsible for all aspects of the Department's current and future information technology (IT) initiatives, and I develop and implement the Administration's strategic direction to improve customer service delivery programs for the department.

Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's public meeting. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the Election Day Survey Instrument, the efforts to collect precinct-level data, and the potential impact of making changes to the survey.

As we begin looking at the Election Day Survey Instrument, it is beneficial to consider it from a historical perspective.

As you know, there have been three Election Day Surveys conducted, in 2004, 2006 and the most recent in 2008. The process for collecting this information is a three-tiered process and involves the EAC, the states and the local jurisdictions, and has also evolved through lessons learned on all three tiers during these survey periods.

2004 Election Day Survey

In the 2004 data collection process, the EAC provided a few detailed instructions along with simple spreadsheets to collect the “core data elements” such as voter registration statistics, number of votes cast, UOCAVA absentee ballot information and provisional ballot information. These “core data elements” were all collected at the county level. At this time the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE) — the commonwealth’s central voter registration system — was not used to collect any information. Instead, Pennsylvania used a simple text document to survey the counties for this information. This document was distributed and returned by the county election offices. The majority of the data that was collected was compiled manually by the commonwealth and entered into the department’s internal elections systems and then the spreadsheets provided by the EAC. The end result was transmitted via e-mail by the commonwealth back to the EAC.

2006 Election Day Survey

In 2006 the data collection performed by the EAC evolved to incorporate a Web-based interface for collecting the various data elements. The survey grew in complexity with 57 questions and the need for the survey to be completed at the state and county levels. In

Pennsylvania, this equated to one state-level survey and 67 county-level surveys requiring completion. The Web site was aesthetically pleasing and provided an easy-to-read survey; however, the connectivity challenges experienced by Pennsylvania and other states, coupled with the cumbersome and time-consuming process of manually entering all of the data elements, resulted in an impractical procedure for the states and local jurisdictions to follow.

During the 2006 survey we also made changes within our state process. More of the data was collected electronically via the SURE system and the internal elections database, resulting in the state sending a smaller text survey to the county elections offices for completion. By using these systems, Pennsylvania was able to provide more data to the EAC; although, as previously stated, once the data was collected it still had to be manually entered into the Web-based data collection system provided by the EAC.

During this time period, the commonwealth was also developing the SURE Portal application. The SURE Portal has allowed the commonwealth to expand the array of services provided to the general public, county election personnel, and internal agency users. It has also enabled the commonwealth to move some election administration processes outside of the SURE environment to optimize performance of SURE's core voter registration functions.

Though the SURE Portal Project was in its embryonic stage at that time and, therefore, no survey data was collected through the SURE Portal, the 2006 data collection experience helped guide the strategy for development of some aspects of the Portal reporting functionality.

2008 Election Day Survey

In 2008 the data collection process evolved further. In this survey the EAC once again asked for the information to be provided via spreadsheets, but this time the data was collected via

two formatted, formula-inclusive spreadsheets, one for county level data and one for precinct level data¹. The EAC's vendor provided an area for uploading the spreadsheets via the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and also offered substantially more technical support. The level of detail within the survey resulted in a very large and complex survey instrument, and the instructions were also more detailed and thorough.

During the 2008 process Pennsylvania also continued to evolve our process. This evolution was primarily due to the award of 2 million dollars from the EAC to build an electronically enabled collection system. This allowed the commonwealth to electronically collect the majority of the data elements via the SURE system and the SURE Portals. Due to the complexity of the data and the need to present the data in spreadsheet form, the data still needed to be merged manually and reconciled. Once this reconciliation procedure was complete, the process of submitting this to the FTP site was easily completed.

The commonwealth is continuing to build out this environment to allow for the easier collection of local level data.

Summary of Election Day Survey (Historical View)

From Pennsylvania's perspective, the form of the Election Day Survey and the methods utilized by the EAC to collect the data contained therein have improved over the past three federal elections.

Though the core elements of the survey instrument have been somewhat consistent (voter registration, votes cast, absentee ballots, etc.), the form of the survey instrument and the method for transmitting results have changed with each federal election.

¹ Precinct data required of 5 grantee states – Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Our experience has demonstrated that an instrument that allows limited “manual intervention” is the optimal method for gathering and collecting data. The “manual intervention” is best at the reconciliation stage of the process and not during the collection or submission process. Limiting the amount of manual keying of information is far superior to the 2004 and 2006 processes because it reduces the number of induced errors in the data elements being collected. Incorporating precinct level data increases the reconciliation process to ensure that any anomalies are understood and explained.

Pennsylvania’s Perspective of the Election Day Survey – 2010 and Beyond

Summary of Mission

It is clear, based on the willingness of Congress to appropriate \$10 million to improve and expand the scope of election data gathering, that the collection, compilation, and dissemination of election statistics via the Election Day Survey instrument is an important public service. In fact, recent years have demonstrated that timely and reliable statistical data relating to the administration of elections promotes the integrity of the process by enabling election administrators and independent observers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the election administration processes.

For example, the availability of reliable data regarding the number of voters who cast a ballot vs. the number of votes cast for a particular office enables election officials to identify unusual patterns in “under vote” rates. This, in turn, enables officials to determine if there is a weakness or gap in the election administration system, such as poor ballot design, which may have contributed to an unusually high rate of under votes.

As election-related technology continues to progress, the ability of state and local

jurisdictions to collect and compile data is in turn augmented. Therefore, it is natural for the EAC and for state governments to expect to collect ever-increasing amounts of data. The EAC must understand the impact on changes as this process evolves over time.

By increasing the use of technology and automated processes, changes to the surveys are more complex and costly. No longer can an element be inserted into the process without understanding the impacts on the data collection system at all levels of the process, the EAC, states and local jurisdictions. Use of industry best practices to manage the complexities of these changes is imperative. In return the amount of data and the integrity of that data collected will continue to increase allowing greater transparency and confidence in our electoral process.

Survey Continuity and Timing

Although certain core data elements have been consistently represented in the survey instrument from one federal election to the next, the lack of overall continuity from year-to-year does not allow state and local jurisdictions to strategize and implement, with any certainty, for the “next” federal election. As a result, state and local jurisdictions are often limited in their planning for future federal elections.

State and local jurisdictions frequently do not see the final survey until several months prior to the federal election for which the data must be collected. Based on mutual conversations we have had with the EAC and other state officials, there appears to be a consensus among state and local officials that more “lead-time” is necessary (10 months or more prior to the election) for jurisdictions to properly train and prepare for the efficient collection of survey data.

As the process continues to integrate into the various states’ systems for data collection and the states are able to expand the scope of the election data they can collect from local

jurisdictions, it is essential to promote continuity by decoupling the EAC's instrument from the process. There is a need to establish a standardized method of data transmission between the states and the EAC using open standards such as XML with industry best practices in change management. This would enable the process of collecting, reconciling and submitting the data to be increasingly automated and cost effective, while also enabling changes to occur in a controlled manner. Open systems architecture and change management practices enable every state to participate as they are fiscally able and still provide the information as needed by the EAC. Promoting continuity will enable states to take the "long view" as they consider specific enhancements to their election data collection methods.

Clearer Focus

Though continuity is the most important aspect of improving survey data collection efforts among the states, it is also important to consider and clearly identify which data elements are most crucial from the EAC's perspective, and package the XML document in such a way that this data is always collected. It is easy for a state or local election official to feel some level of anxiety over the number of questions and sub-questions presented in the survey instrument. Although state and local jurisdictions can infer, based on statutory mandates and past experience, which data elements are most important to the EAC, clearly identifying those items and creating the XML document in a prioritized format to allow for degrees of compliance would greatly assist state and local jurisdictions to prioritize and focus resources. Knowing what is most vital will also help reduce the level of anxiety felt by state and local officials because they will be able to visualize completion of the survey in stages, from most important to least important.

Once this format is established, changes would be appended onto the XML document in a

controlled manner so that the electronic means of data collection can be augmented over time. This would also allow for a more stable release approach to changes allowing states to implement as funds are available and still provide the core information for the survey.

As we consider where we go from here, we acknowledge there is increasing interest in expanding the survey instrument to include more detailed information regarding the Election Day experience. Reliable information is sought by election officials and independent observers relating to the technical and administrative challenges that voters and poll workers must sometimes overcome on Election Day.

Should the EAC determine that it is necessary to expand the scope of the survey in 2010 to include the collection of detailed information regarding Election Day challenges; it is worthy to note the importance of timely defining, to the extent possible, the exact nature of the information being requested. For example, collecting reliable information about such things as voting system issues and long lines would likely require additional training of those individuals on the “front lines” of election administration. It would also require, in many cases, the development of additional reporting processes to ensure that the information is collected efficiently at the precinct level.

At this point concentrating on the 2012 election may be more effective. Defining and identifying the types of Election Day challenges required for 2012 in advance of next year’s election and prioritizing the information would allow the states and local jurisdictions to strategically develop effective methodologies building what is needed into the systems in a multi-year approach while also training poll workers and collecting the requested information. The high priority information may be implemented prior to the 2010 election.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank the EAC for giving me the opportunity to present these observations at today's meeting. I also want to thank the EAC for its commitment to help Pennsylvania and other jurisdictions implement the provisions of the Help America Vote Act. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.