2013 Professional Practices Program

Provisional Ballot Processing Enhancement

Maricopa County, Arizona

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1. **Abstract**

Maricopa County has seen a consistent rise in the use of provisional ballots in our jurisdiction after the 2007 implementation of a Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL); pre-PEVL 1% of voters who requested an early ballot would end up at the polls on Election Day and have to vote a provisional ballot, after PEVL that rose to 3%. After the 2008 General Election which saw almost 100,000 provisionals, technological solutions were sought to address increasing the processing capacity without any retrogressive impact on the integrity or security in the process. A comprehensive scanning and barcoding process was implemented.

2. **Description**

Prior to the implementation of our new Provisional Ballot Processing Enhancement System, provisional ballots were physically transmitted for processing amongst our three facilities. Now one copy of the provisional form is removed from the provisional ballot envelope, scanned, and made available digitally for processing via electronic transmission thus allowing for the physical ballot to remain in one central, secure location. An additional efficiency was built into the system so that for every voter who has a modification to their voter file present on the provisional affidavit, which also serves as a voter registration form, that information is now transmitted from the provisional system to interface and update the voter’s registration record and eliminating any additional keying of that same data.

With the scanning of the provisional forms we are also able to quickly get a close approximation of how many ballots are still outstanding. This can be critical in a close race and allow for more accurate reporting to the media, political parties, and other invested stakeholders. Having the number of provisionals outstanding has enabled us to also build in an auditing interface to aid in the reconciliation audit completed on every precinct prior to the canvass.

Staff access the batches of provisional form images for research and dispositioning. Each provisional is provided with a code which denotes 1) if that provisional ballot will or will not be counted and 2) why that conclusion was reached (IE. “Yes, Voter did not vote their early ballot” or “No, Voter was in the wrong polling location”). As each provisional is researched staff may encounter registration forms with old signatures. The system allows for the ability to flag the latest signature from the provisional form as an update so that the most current is the signature of record.
Because each provisional form is barcoded with the provisional affidavit number it aids in HAVA compliance with the ability to quickly retrieve the outcome of a given provisional. Additionally, after all the provisionals are researched and staff begin to remove the ballots that will go on for tabulation, dispositioning of the ballots is quickly done by scanning the ballot envelope barcode on a hand-held scanner which reads “YES” in green if the ballot is to be counted or “NO” in red if it is not to be counted; the voter’s name is also displayed to ensure the correct ballot is being reviewed. Staff verify that they have the correct voter and prepare the ballot either for tabulation or archiving.

3. Worthiness

Roughly 14% of our provisional ballots contain a registration file update. The cost to key in the information is estimated at roughly $.75 each registration if it had to be keyed a second time (rather than using the new system with a singular input). In the recent General Election of 2012 that saved the County more than $17,000 in that one election alone.

Live ballots are no longer being transmitted between our offices for processing thus increasing the level of security and reducing the opportunity for misplacement of batches. Retrieval of the scanned images, if we have a discrepancy or an investigation, results in more timely resolution without need for a trip to the archives.

4. Usability of System

This system is incredibly easy to train to and utilize for both permanent staff as well as the multitude of temporary staff brought in post-election. The interfaces and administrative screens have been developed for ease of use and intuitiveness.

5. Cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>$25,881.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanners</td>
<td>$12,900.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**TOTAL COST:** $38,781

6. Results

In 2010 the ability for a voter to sign up for the PEVL was added to our voter registration form (both the traditional paper form and the online application) which resulted in an explosion in the volume of provisionals to almost 9% of our early voters going to the polls in the November General Election of 2012. Although we had a 20% rise in the number of provisional ballots we processed, and the same statutory period with which to research, verify, and tabulate those ballots we were able to complete the task a full day sooner than in 2008.
Originally all the provisionals were distributed as a packet with the form attached and the ballot inside:

This was improved so that the forms were distributed throughout our three offices:
NEW PROCESS

1. Provisional Ballot Boxes from the precincts await processing.
2. Separated for those still requiring ID.
3. Copy of form removed for scanning.
4. Ballot envelopes await dispositioning.

PROVISIONAL PROCESSING

- After scanning the provisional form, the images are retained in batches by precinct number and staff process them electronically.
- Here staff process the provisionals without the handling and transportation of the paper records.
PROVISIONAL PROCESSING

- The system checks to be sure the voter is eligible based on:
  - Age
  - Date of registration
  - Polling place
  - Party affiliation

- It also checks to see if they have already voted:
  - Returned EV
  - Voted at PP

Staff receive notifications in red with exclamation marks to bring the issue to their attention.

- Because we also scan in the Signature Rosters used at the polls Election Day on election night, the system can pull the captured image of the voter’s signature to be sure it is the same person (and that someone didn’t sign in the wrong place).
**PROVISIONAL PROCESSING**

- Saves $$$!
- This new system allows for the automatic update to the voter’s registration record from the PROV system:
  - Residence address
  - Mailing address
  - Name change

**VOTER HAS MOVED**

- The system interfaces with GIS to be sure the voter is in the correct district
HAND HELD SCANNERS AND SCANNERS HOOKED UP TO LAPTOPS WERE USED TO RETRIEVE BALLOT DISPOSITIONS. PRIOR TO THIS PRACTICE REPORTS HAD TO BE GENERATED:

THE ENVELOPES ARE OPENED AND THE BALLOTS PLACED IN A TRAY TO GO TO THE TABULATION CENTER: