

Planning Your Next Voting System Purchase

5 TIPS

FOR MAKING VOTING SYSTEM
PURCHASE DECISIONS



The process of selecting a new voting system can be intimidating. The five tips in this paper serve as a starting point so you can proceed with confidence.

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State and local officials responsible for decisions about replacing voting equipment often find it difficult to know where to start. The process can seem time-consuming and fraught with the negative ramifications of choices that do not live up to expectations when the rubber hits the road at election time. The five tips in this paper can serve as a starting point for the process.

Little known fact: Trusted voting system vendors can provide valuable information to help you make educated decisions.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you or other decision makers take the first step toward replacing voting equipment, it's crucial to engage all stakeholders in the process from the get-go. To minimize risk and maximize the odds of making the right decision and obtaining ultimate buy-in, solicit input from those who will need to obtain funding, facilitate the purchase, or use the system that is ultimately purchased – for example, county commissioners, purchasing department staff, election officials, poll workers, auditors, IT, and any other key stakeholders.

Once elected officials and other stakeholders have been consulted, it will be easier to choose a voting system that meets everyone's needs.

1

KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO REPLACE AGING EQUIPMENT.

It can be difficult to give up on existing equipment, even when it is troublesome and obviously overdue for replacement. However, when aging voting equipment increasingly needs costly repairs, replacement parts become difficult to find, election processes require time-consuming workarounds, and you can't be sure that the system will perform reliably during elections, it is time for a complete voting system refresh.

Supporting out-of-date technologies – hardware and software – is costly in terms of time, money, and the public's trust in the reliability of electoral outcomes. In addition, older systems simply cannot meet requirements that only new technology supports, such as the ability to manage voter data from fast-growing jurisdictions or for near-instant tabulation and posting of results from all locations on government websites after polls close. Older systems can also have difficulty accommodating changing statutory mandates. Another consideration is that voters lead busy lives and need for voting to be easy and efficient.

2

IDENTIFY FEATURES TO LOOK FOR – AND FEATURES TO AVOID.

Modern voting systems ensure that the election office is able to cost-effectively deliver lawful, fair, accessible, and accurate elections – and a voting experience that is efficient and instills confidence. To ensure that a voting system can meet these requirements, decision makers need to be aware of certain features to look for, and others to avoid.

A good modern voting system includes certain crucial features:

Easy to use by everyone. The system must be easy to use by everyone from warehouse staff and election managers to poll workers, voters, and auditors – seamlessly, throughout the entire election cycle, from creating ballots and deploying elections all the way through vote tallying, reporting, and auditing.

The system must provide the same easy voting experience for all voters, with voting equipment that includes adaptive accessibility controls that meet the standards of the American Disability Association (ADA). Avoid equipment that uses different ballots for voters of different abilities, or that is difficult and cumbersome to transport, set up, and use.

Versatile to adapt to changes over time. Purchasing a new voting system is a big investment of time and money – the new system must use technology that can cost-effectively adapt to accommodate change for 10 or more years (for example, to switch from paper-based to electronic voting or vice versa). EAC-certified systems that use the right combination of enterprise-grade commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) components and reliable purpose-built equipment are ideal, reducing costs while mitigating risks.

Able to ensure trust in elections. Crucial to the success of the new voting system is its ability to ensure trust in electoral outcomes by means of secure recording of all votes, along with features that enable easy adjudication of unresolved votes, user-friendly comprehensive audits, and efficient, reliable recounts. Avoid systems that do not seamlessly integrate built-in security features across all system processes. Also avoid systems that do not include plain-language tools that make it easy for anyone – not just computer-savvy programmers – to understand how votes were resolved and tallied, so everyone has complete confidence that elections are fair.

Able to integrate election data from disparate sources. The latest technologies include the ability to increase efficiencies by integrating data from many sources, such as voter registration and state databases, expediting the import and export of data and reducing the need for time-consuming and error-prone manual manipulation of voter information.

Comprehensive, streamlined reporting capabilities. To meet the needs of election administrators and the expectations of the public, the system must include the ability to quickly and easily produce reports on Election Night. In addition, the system must enable election officials to easily create custom reports that meet their jurisdiction's specific requirements – without requiring assistance from the system vendor.

3

UNDERSTAND ROI – THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING LONG-TERM.

What seems like a smart purchase in the short-term may not be the best investment over the long-term. It's important to take a hard look at the value factors that contribute to the total cost of ownership and a higher return on investment. A simple shorthand equation to keep in mind is:

Total Cost of Ownership = initial expenditure + (ongoing costs x 10)

As you consider the ultimate cost of a new voting system, keep in mind the initial expenditure, such as the price of the system and implementation and training costs, as well as the value of those expenditures – for example, the ability to cost-effectively scale and adapt to change as necessary over time and the value of a new, user-friendly technology that is easier and less time-consuming for staff and poll workers to learn and use.

Next, apply the same considerations to ongoing costs, such as the costs and related values of ongoing support, storage and transportation, and maintenance.

4

SELECT THE RIGHT VENDOR.

Selecting the right voting system vendor is as important as selecting the right equipment, and can make or break the success of the system. Look for a voting system vendor that possesses these qualities:

Proven success. The vendor must have a long, solid history of meeting the challenges of on-time, pain-free implementations of voting systems and a track record of thousands of successful elections.

Excellent support. Choose a vendor that has proven to be immediately responsive when boots-on-the-ground election staff needs them, and with a reputation for excellent customer service.

Financially secure. It's important that the vendor can demonstrate financial strength and long-term dependability.

100% focused on election solutions. Select a vendor with the deep experience and knowledge that comes from being completely devoted to elections – not one whose election services are merely part of a larger, non-election company. You want the vendor to serve your jurisdiction as though the life of their company depends on it.

Able to accommodate specific needs. A good vendor will offer flexible configuration options – both for systems and for services – to meet the needs of your state and local jurisdictions. This is especially important for statewide voting systems, where a one-size-fits-all approach cannot serve all jurisdictions. The vendor must also have the ability to provide jurisdictions with as much or as little independence as needed. For example, some jurisdictions may choose for the vendor to provide pre-election services (designing and printing ballots, defining elections), whereas other jurisdictions prefer to do everything themselves.

5

EXPLORE FUNDING OPTIONS.

Figuring out how to obtain a new voting system in the face of always over-stretched budgets is rarely easy. However, if it is not possible (or desirable) to purchase a system outright, other types of funding are available. Voting system vendors can provide information about creative options such as: financing over time, leasing instead of purchasing, and banding together to increase buying/negotiating power. For example, create a statewide purchase program or team up with neighboring counties or regions. Other funding options include bonds, tax rates, and Certificates of Obligation.

SUMMARY

As you and other decision makers plan your next voting system purchase, keep in mind that help and information is readily available from trusted voting system vendors. Armed with input from all stakeholders and knowledge about voting systems and voting system providers, the process will be easier and the likelihood of success far greater.

Hart InterCivic is a full service election solutions innovator,
partnering with state and local governments to consistently
deliver secure, accurate and reliable elections.



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