Voting Systems Assessment Project (VSAP)

This initiative seeks to modernize the County's aging voting systems infrastructure and improve the voter experience in Los Angeles County. The project was launched in 2009 with a community symposium at the California Institute of Technology. Over the past six years, the project has made great strides towards the design of modernized voting systems. The goal is to design and implement a new ballot marking device, paper ballot, and tabulation system through a participatory model that is research driven and focused on the needs of voters. The project aims to implement voting systems that utilize publicly owned source code and leverage commercial off-the-shelf components to help reduce reliance on single-source vendors and to increase transparency.

The Department's work through the VSAP is regarded nationally for its innovation and leadership in pursuing voting system design that is voter-centered and grounded by stakeholder participation and expert technical guidance. Citizens, community organizations, academics and other election experts have greatly contributed to the design process and will continue to be engaged through implementation. The design process is guided by a set of General Voting System Principles (attached) which were adopted to ensure voters always remain at the center of the process.

Project Accomplishments
- September 2009 – "Technology, Diversity, and Democracy: The Future of Voting Systems in Los Angeles County" Symposium to launch the VSAP
- March 2010 – Conducted countywide voter and pollworker survey and focus groups, in partnership with CalTech and MIT Voting Technology Project (VTP) and funded by the James Irvine Foundation
- March 2011 – Established VSAP Advisory Committee
- August 2011 – Adopted VSAP General Voting System Principles
- March 2013 – Established VSAP Technical Advisory Committee
- April 2013 – Kick-off of project design phase
- December 2013 – Presented a proposed ballot marking device model
- November 2014 – Launched system engineering phase

Awards and Recognitions

2012 – Election Center Professional Practices Freedom Award for Innovation

2012 – Quality and Productivity Commission Certificate of Recognition

2010 – National Association of County Officials – 2010 Achievement Award

Next Steps

The Department is currently working with IDEO, a global human-centered design and innovation firm, to develop detailed design and engineering specifications for hardware manufacturing and the development of the software architecture. This is being done using an iterative design process which engages voters throughout the development process.

At the completion of the detailed engineering specifications phase, the Department intends to begin a competitive bidding process for the manufacturing of a new ballot marking device and the development of ballot tabulation systems and other key system components. Please note that IDEO is not a voting system vendor and this is not a manufacturing agreement. IDEO will not solicit or compete for the manufacturing of the ballot marking device or related voting system components that will be delivered as a result of the sole source agreement.

The project envisions a phased implementation of the ballot marking device beginning in the 2017-2018 election cycle.

Additional Information

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For a detailed history and background of the project, please visit:

http://apps1.lavote.net/voter/VSAP/

Attachment

General Voting System Principles
Los Angeles County

Adopted on
August 24, 2011

1. The voting system must provide for transparency. The processes and transactions associated with how the system is set up, run, and stored should be easy for the public to understand and verify. This should include making hardware components available for inspection, and source code to the extent that the manner of doing so would not jeopardize system security or availability.

2. The voting system must be scalable. The system must provide sufficient technical and physical capacity to accommodate large and complex ballot styles, growing language needs, extremely large numbers of precincts and consolidation of elections with local districts and municipalities.

3. The voting system must be flexible. It must provide the ability to adapt to different election types, environments, and changing regulatory requirements, without the need to replace the entire system or to undertake costly system modifications that potentially compromise security.

4. The voting system must instill public trust by having the ability to produce a physical and tangible record of a voter's ballot to verify the ballot was marked as intended before it is cast and to ensure auditability of the system. It must demonstrate to voters, candidates, and the general public that all votes are counted as cast.

5. The voting system must have integrity and be accountable to voters and follow existing regulations. System features must protect against fraud and tampering. It should also be easy to audit and produce useful, accessible data to verify vote counts and monitor system performance.

6. The voting system must offer a variety of options to cast a vote to ensure that a single/fixed method of voting does not prove to be a barrier and source of disenfranchisement for any group of voters. The system should allow for variety in the location, time, and equipment used to cast a ballot.

7. The voting system must guarantee a private and independent voting experience for all voters, including voters with a full range of types of disabilities and voters with limited English proficiency. Voting system features must allow the voter to select the language, adjust display features, alternate ballot formats (e.g. Audio Ballot), and method of controlling the marking tool, allowing voters to cast a ballot independently.

8. The voting system must be easy for all voters to use, in particular, for voters with a full range of types of disabilities and voters with limited English proficiency. The system must support plain language and be intuitive, user-friendly, and accessible to all, in order to minimize and easily identify voter errors. It should also provide all voters the ability to easily correct any errors that appear on their ballot prior to casting their ballot.

9. The voting system should be easy and reliable for election workers to use, set-up, breakdown, and explain.

10. The voting system must be portable. It should be lightweight and compact enough for transportation, set up, and efficient storage. A portable system could include features such as hand grips, handles, straps, and wheels that make transporting and maneuvering the voting system easy.

11. The voting system must include features for safe and secure storage. It should include features such as locks and security seals to protect the integrity of the machine while in the custody of election workers or in storage with election officials.

12. The voting system must have minimal and/or flexible power and connectivity requirements. It should not require such an extensive amount of power and connectivity that it limits locations where the voting system can be deployed.

13. The voting system must have minimal requirements for system boot/programming at polling sites and/or vote centers. It must also provide intuitive and quick fix troubleshooting solutions to empower election workers on Election Day. It should be easy to set up for operation by election workers at polling sites and/or vote centers.

14. The voting system must be cost-effective. Costs considered should include procurement, operating, and maintenance costs as well as consideration of expected system/equipment lifespan.