Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC)

Wednesday, February 19, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

1. **Welcome, Call to Order, Roll Call, and Declaration of Quorum**

   VAAC members present:
   - Fred Nisen
   - Mathew Ptacek
   - Mike Nguyen
   - Rebecca Donabed
   - Mary Helen Gallagos
   - Roxana Castro

   Members of SOS:
   - Justin Hirai – Election Security Unit Manager
   - Kirsten Larsen – Election Administration Manager
   - Adam Quintana – Voter's Choice Act (VCA)
   - Debra Ledsinger – Office of Voting System Technology and Assessment
   - Paige Kent– Legislation

   Quorum was met.

2. **VAAC Member Updates**

   Rebecca Donabed
   - In Fresno County for the election held on November 20, 2024, they had 330,000 voters. 65,000 of those voters were in person, 29 voters voted curbside and voting increased in Merced County. Ballots cast was around 87,000 that's the second most that they had cast- about 85% voted by mail and about 15% were either voted in person or in person using same day registration voting.

   Mike Nyugen
   - In Santa Clara County they had a VAAC and LAAC meeting last month and the next one is going to be in April.

Mathew Ptacek
- Recruited another member to their local VAAC. March 18th is the goal for their next meeting.

Mary Helen Gallagos
- No updates

Roxana
- Orange County had their first VAAC meeting of this year in January. They increased attendance from some of our local Community College students with disability groups. Next meeting is in May, however, on March 20th, they are having an EAP vision meeting. This year is our EAP update year for VCA and in preparation for the upcoming consultation readings and workshops to bring together our local county VAAC and LAAC's. Our local outreach committee is to get their feedback on how they want the EAP feedback process to look like.

Fred Nisen
- Attended new law conference about education and outreach. One of the advocates in Los Angeles is working with LA county on a project for voters with disabilities in jail.

3. **Secretary of State**

Office of Voting System Technology and Assessment

Debra Ledsinger:

- Democracy Dominion Suite 519 public hearing will be Friday, February 28, 2025, at the Secretary of State building.
  - The reports from this system are now online.
- 10X solution e-pollbook is currently in the testing phase with no estimated completion date yet.
- There are two other voting system that will be going through testing later this year.
  - They are set to start testing in the 2nd half of this year.
    - Hart Verity 3.2.2
    - LA county VSAP 4.0, they also have their interactive sample ballot 4.0 (RAVBM) that will be going through testing concurrently with their VSAP system.
    - Noten 3.9 e-pollbook system

Fred: Wondering when the California voting system standards will have their updates?

Debra: I don't have an exact date to provide you currently.

ML Barajas: I am from San Joaquin County. I had a question regarding the certification that you mentioned for the no ink poll pads. Had a meeting earlier today with the Secretary of State, and she mentioned poll pads were already certified?

Debra: They are, but it may have been a different version of this new release that they are currently developing.

Voter Choice Act

- **Adam Quintana**: We are working right now on Senate Bill 1450 which was VCA has been busy implementing Senate Bill 1450 which became effective January 1, 2025.
    - Create a VCA Taskforce, their primary role with be to review elections conducted under the VCA and make any comments or recommendations within 6 months to the legislature after each election. The taskforce will be made up of county elections officials, individuals with demonstrated language accessibility experience, members of the disability community, or organizations that advocate on behalf or serve individuals with disabilities. This taskforce will also include experts with demonstrated experience in elections.
    - VCA is already taking steps in the creation of the taskforce. The membership application has already been created and will be uploaded by today, or most certainly by the end of the week for those interested in joining.
    - They will also be developing a VCA taskforce website and once that is available it will contain the role of the taskforce and the meeting minutes once the meetings begin.
    - VCA Counties with 500,000 voters or more will need to create a Voter Education and Outreach Committee (VEOC).
    - SB 1450 also made changes to the direct contacts required after 6 statewide elections.
    - It also made several changes to the development of county elections administration plan such as providing a deadline for when VCA counties must adopt their EAPs which is normally no less than 120 days before the election.
    - VCA is putting together a CCROV for the counties to help inform them of the changes from this bill.
    - They have also created a suggested EAP calendar for VCA counties to be able to use for those counties that are going through their renewal process.

- Calendar includes guidance in engagement of the LAAC, VAAC, and VEOC EAP renewal process.

Fred: What do you envision the Task Force doing?

Adam: The primary function of the taskforce is to look at data from VCA counties, look at how the election were run and produce a report within 6 months. Making recommendation on what the Task Force believes are something we should consider in the election process.

Fred: What about the EAPs? Will the task force help the SOS review the EAPs?

Adam: I understand that that may have been one of the functions during the first task force that was created when the VCA was implemented I do understand that there were opportunities to review some of those election administration plans to make recommendations to those counties as to how they could improve their election administration plans. According to the new statue by the legislature it appears that that may not necessarily be a requirement for the VCA task force however I strongly recommend that you share that information if you consider becoming a member.

Fred: Thanks for talking about the EAP calendar, are there any new counties that will be adopting the VCA?

Adam: No final determination, but there is 1 county that might be joining. Can't share the information until it is confirmed, but if it works out, it will happen in 2026.

ML Barajas: I understand a lot of the prerequisites that are being required for the code enforcement here are for counties the voting centers. Will it be specified what will be required for counties with no voting centers?

Adam: The Secretary of State is responsible for reviewing and approving one component of the EAP and that is the outreach and education plan so yes according to the statute there are specific requirements that counties must follow when creating and adopting their outreach and education plans when we receive those, we at the Secretary of State make sure that compliance and requirements are being met.

Mike: How big will the Voters Choice Task Force be?

Adam: Estimated to be 12-15 people. We want to make sure there is representation from advocacy groups, election officials, and staff from the legislator.

<u>Legislation</u>

Paige Kent: Assembly Bill 25 is a spot bill and hasn't been referred yet to committees. This bill imposes a voter ID requirement for voting at the polling places and vote centers. It also would implement some changes to sit the signature review process.

Next is Assembly Bill 72 this has been referred to committee on elections so this bill will require elections officials to provide a voter with voter registration as well as election materials in the language of Bengali specifically if a voter requests it. This would be a requirement beyond the current federal and state requirements of section 203 and 14201.

Assembly Bill 287 relates to polling locations and vote centers has the opportunity to be heard in committee on February 22nd. This bill would require vote centers polling locations among other things regarding election storage supplies and things like that it would expand a parking requirement to include accessible parking spaces and curbside voter assistance parking if the elections official request it.

Senate Bill 266 relating to election materials and language. This is a spot bill, it states the intent of the legislature to enact legislation that provides more equitable access to election materials for limited English proficient voters, for several different underserved language communities in California.

4. **Working Groups**

- Petitions/ Signature Verification
  - o **Mike**: We are planning to meet with someone from the elections committee, mainly to advocate with issues related to signature and the petitions verification.
- Curbside Voting
  - o **Fred**: We sent the document to the SOS in October, but we haven't heard back. Plans to meet before the next VAAC meeting. Aaron Navarez went over that document at New Law, but he is not present to provide any updates.
  - o **ML Barajas**: Asked clarifying questions on who can use Curbside Voting.
  - o **Fred**: Explained that use of Curbside Voting is detailed in Elections Code.
  - o **Emily Elliot**: I am from Sacramento County, at our busier voting centers, voters who didn't need the curbside voting service saw the long lines and we're hoping to skip ahead or have a more comfortable waiting period.

- Outreach to Voters with Disabilities
  - **Mary Helen**: The purpose of this working group is to discover ways to reach voters with disabilities who do not affiliate with organizations. Each country makes every effort to reach as many voters as possible and outreach efforts are endless. We want to reach the voters with disabilities who rarely ask for assistance that's the question, and this is an ongoing quest together we can make a difference. So far, we are requested two questions be sent to all the counties.
  - 1. How do we conduct outreach to voters with disabilities not affiliated with an organization?
  - 2. What resources would help you reach voters with disabilities who aren't affiliated with any organizations?
  - This working group is reviewing what has been done and what else can be done one of the one thing is for sure that we want to get input from all the counties so that we can collaborate and share ideas and hopefully that reaches out to their local VAAC's and get ideas from their different organizations throughout the state.
  - Mathew would like to join this working group.

5. **Future working group discussion**

  - **Fred**: We are done with the RAVBM working group. Wanted to bring back the American Sign Language working group. Discuss providing statewide procedures for implementing an American Sign Language interpretation providing the SOS with additional topics on ASL and to make videos in ASL.
  - **Mary Helen:** Previous ASL group worked well, counties challenged with ASL accessibility. This is an ongoing project that can open doors.
  - Fred motioned to make ASL a working group
  - Mary Helen Second it
  - New Working Group name is Increase Accessibility for Voters who use ASL.
  - Committee members: Fred, Mary Helen, and Roxana.

6. **Public Comments and Future Agenda Items**

- Activism through Policy at UCLA presented a policy proposal to improve voter education accessibility in California by adding a QR code to mail-in ballots that would link to an online voter guide. Members highlighted the lack of easily understandable voter information and the impact on voter decision-making. They emphasized the need for greater accessibility, particularly for voters of color, disabled individuals, and non-English speakers. The proposal aims to empower voters with unbiased information

and increase decision-making confidence. The group shared personal experiences and observations to support their proposal. They concluded by offering to answer any questions regarding the policy memo.

- Concerns were raised about who would be responsible for providing unbiased and understandable information, with suggestions for the Secretary of State's office to handle this task. There were also suggestions for additional accessibility features such as audio commentary for voters with disabilities. Questions were asked about where to find the policy memo and the group's intentions regarding endorsement and lobbying efforts. The importance of considering accessibility for all demographics, including those less tech-savvy, was emphasized, along with the potential benefits and challenges of implementing a QR code system for voter education.

7. **Adjournment**