

Voter's Choice Act Research Brief Series

Best Practices: Collaboration to Support Implementation

This best practices summary is a companion to the research brief California Voter's Choice Act: The Impact of Collaboration on the Implementation Process, based on the CCEP's extensive study of the five counties that adopted the Voter's Choice Act in 2018.



Collaboration Supports VCA Implementation

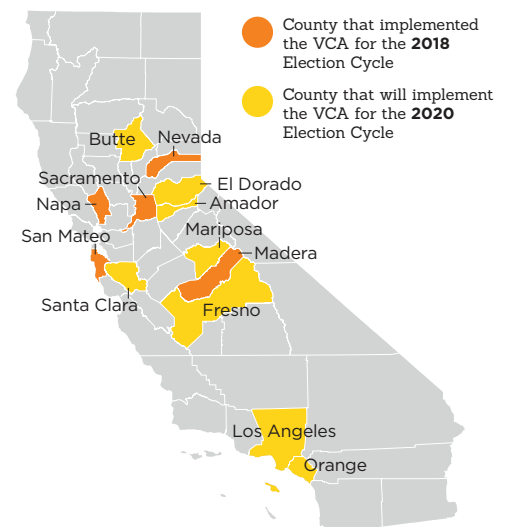
Collaboration is important to implementing the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA). Adopting the VCA model affects all voters, necessitating thorough planning and widespread communication. Moreover, the law requires community consultation in developing an election administration plan. Collaboration with a range of stakeholders and partners can facilitate VCA adoption, assist with public consultation, and support the success of VCA planning and implementation. For example, benefits of partnering with city and county officials can include stronger buy-in on VCA adoption and assistance with planning and outreach. Collaborating with community organizations and coalitions can yield, among other advantages, voter education materials and implementation processes better suited to local populations.

Best Practices for VCA Collaboration

These recommendations for VCA county election offices and community stakeholders are based on the experiences of election officials and community advocates interviewed as part of the study.

- Commit sincerely to strong community engagement and input.** Commitment to meaningful collaboration plays a key role in VCA implementation success, boosting community buy-in and improving partner assistance with planning and outreach. County election offices seeking strong community engagement should be publicly transparent about the VCA adoption process. They should communicate frequently with community partners; provide ample time and notice for input; and publicly report how community feedback is informing VCA implementation. To strengthen collaborative practice for future elections, counties can hold a post-election convening to debrief on collaborative successes and desired improvements.
- Form a VCA coalition.** Organizing VCA partners and stakeholders into a coalition streamlines communication and allows for more structured roles and responsibilities. The VCA study found substantial benefits of election offices formalizing relationships with VCA coalitions, including oversight leading to problems being quickly identified and addressed, and smoother recruitment of facilities to be used as vote centers.

Participating Counties



About the Voter's Choice Act

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) provides California counties the choice of adopting a new voting model that includes replacing neighborhood polling places with vote centers and mailing Vote-By-Mail ballots to all registered voters. New vote centers will offer a variety of services including in-person voting, accessible voting options, language assistance, mail ballot drop-off and conditional voter registration. They will be distributed throughout the county, and available to all voters up to ten days before Election Day. Five counties adopted the VCA model for the 2018 election cycle, and an additional eight counties will adopt it for the 2020 election cycle, in total comprising approximately half of the state's current registered voter population.

"We had something absolutely wonderful that came out of the coalition... and that is working with our communities... in a way that we've never been able to do before."

– VCA county coalition member

Counties should encourage broad engagement by involving a wide variety of organizations in the coalition, particularly from underrepresented communities. Where funding allows, a lead organization or paid staff person should manage the coalition's recruitment, work, and communication needs.

- **Use collaborations to make logistical and creative improvements.**

Existing VCA counties report that collaboration has led to better translation of materials, more effective use of visuals, and improved signage and accessibility at vote centers. For effective collaborative work, county election offices must be clear with partners which decisions are open for input and which are determined by the VCA law. They should establish relationships with city governments, county agencies, and other stakeholders to support voter education and outreach. In addition, they should seek collaborative partnerships with language minority groups where those populations are harder to reach.

“Everybody needs to know that you’re a VCA county.. In order to get that word out, you need to use your partnerships.”

- VCA county election official

- **Tap into the expertise and resources of Future of California Elections (FoCE).** FoCE launched Voter’s Choice California (VCC), a statewide project to support counties transitioning to the VCA. Existing VCA counties note that VCC is a valuable resource, facilitating peer exchange and access to expert guidance by connecting counties to each other, to the Secretary of State, and to local organizations. ([see VCC Voter Education Materials](#)).

- **Troubleshoot limitations.** Establishing effective collaboration is not without challenges. These common limitations—and strategies to mitigate them—are drawn from the experiences of VCA counties:

Collaboration Challenges

Helpful Strategies

Unfamiliar territory

- *Community engagement is new for many county elections offices.*

Listen well and seek common ground

- *Embrace a willingness to listen, learn, and evolve in collaborative efforts.*
- *Use a meeting facilitator to bring partners and stakeholders together around a shared purpose and goals.*

Limited resources

- *The VCA does not provide direct funding to counties for collaborative work.*
- *VCA county election officials and community advocates alike reported insufficient funding for their 2018 VCA efforts.*

Plan within capacity and tap opportunities

- *Acknowledge voluntary commitments and balance partner capacity with planning and outreach requests.*
- *Seek funding from Board of Supervisors, California Secretary of State, other government agencies, and foundations.*
- *Consider collaborating on outreach with adjacent counties that share a media market.*
- *Provide VCA voter messaging to local political campaigns to piggyback on their voter outreach.*

Strict deadlines

- *The VCA implementation process involves a series of firm deadlines.*
- *Meaningful community engagement and open dialogue take time, yet community interest may be low well before an election.*

Recruit partners early

- *Share deadlines and commitment to collaboration with key stakeholders early on to spark engagement.*
- *Build in time to meet with community groups early in the development of the election administration plan, prior to publication and the public comment period.*
- *Develop a systematic process that gives time for community advocates to provide feedback on educational materials.*