

Session title: Election Day – Gearing Up for Your Super Bowl

Moderator/Panelists:

Anton Boegman, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Elections BC, in replacement of Keith Archer

Lori McKee-Jeske, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Alberta

Kelly Bateman, Assistant Executive Director, Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

Michael Winn, Director of Elections, Travis County, Texas

Date and time: Monday, December 9 2013, 10:25 am

Rapporteur: Audrée Ross

Session Summary

The three panelists described how they prepared for elections by comparing the process to a Super Bowl game, i.e. a major, public event that must occur on the selected date, requiring significant planning during which chosen strategies and unforeseen circumstances result in serious challenges that have to be met.

The presentations of the three panelists identified several common challenges.

First of all, preparing for an election is crucial, and human resources are a critically important component of the process. All jurisdictions rely on temporary workers to be the front-line voting staff, and these employees must be hired and trained, in some cases numbering in the tens of thousands. For training, many jurisdictions are using or considering online models which provide access to training materials right up to election day. Employee replacement strategies must be in place to ensure that substitutes can be found should anyone be absent. It is interesting to note that jurisdictions are targeting younger (late high school) workers thus making it easier to find personnel. Some jurisdictions also have a code of conduct to provide its employees with guidance during polling. Kelly Bateman explained that the City of Chicago deals with employment agencies that assign workers and replace them when problems arise. For those jurisdictions in which election dates are not known in advance, a difficult task is to find employees who will commit to working on election day when that date is still unknown.

A second component of the process is ensuring voting systems are ready when needed. Jurisdictions must be sure to test their voting systems before polling day, as well as to plan how they will move any machinery from one polling station to another. Similarly, they must have the capacity to rapidly replace electronic systems should they be defective.

Jurisdictions must also meet the different needs of kinds of voters. Electoral officers must ensure that people with disabilities, the elderly, multilingual and illiterate people, the military, and anyone living overseas all receive the services to which they are entitled. To ensure that this transpires, teams can make home visits, make use of mail-in ballots or other absentee provisions thus making voting easier. Technology has the potential to improve voter services in this area.

Another key component of effectively preparing for elections involves having a good communications strategy. Several options for reaching employees, voters, and the media must be available at all times during polling. It is also recommended that the communication of results be planned with various national media outlets. Certain jurisdictions choose one coordinator to interact with the media to ensure a consistent message is provided.

Contingency planning needs to be prioritized as well. Jurisdictions must plan various emergency procedures to deal with all situations that could undermine the safety and security of electors or the integrity of the voting process. For example, electoral officers should make sure that procedures have been established in case of a fire, a flood, an epidemic, a suspicious package, a disruptive demonstration or unruly citizens, etc. Procedures securing voting materials, should a poll have to be shut down or relocated, should also be in place. Along with all these challenges, the geography of one's jurisdiction must be well understood to be able to carry out one's work effectively.

Finally, it is important to be prepared at all times and to maintain voter trust by guaranteeing free and fair elections. In summary, planning down to the smallest detail, having the capacity to deal with all contingencies, and being flexible are a winning formula for ensuring your election is a successful Super Bowl event!