

Navigating Change:

Considerations and Resources for Election Leaders



In the elections arena, major changes have far-reaching effects. With these strategies, resources and tips, election leaders can successfully steer the course.

“Progress
is
impossible without
change,
and those who cannot change
their minds
cannot change anything.”

- *George Bernard Shaw*





For election professionals, change is a fact of life. Whether you are an enthusiastic agent of change or it is thrust upon you by circumstances beyond your control, the capacity to manage change gracefully—or at least effectively—is an essential component of your success as a leader.

This white paper examines the forces that drive change in the elections arena. We look at how a single change, adopting a new voting system, ripples throughout the election office and the community. Finally, we present strategies and resources to successfully navigate a significant change such as this while minimizing its distractions and optimizing its positive effects.



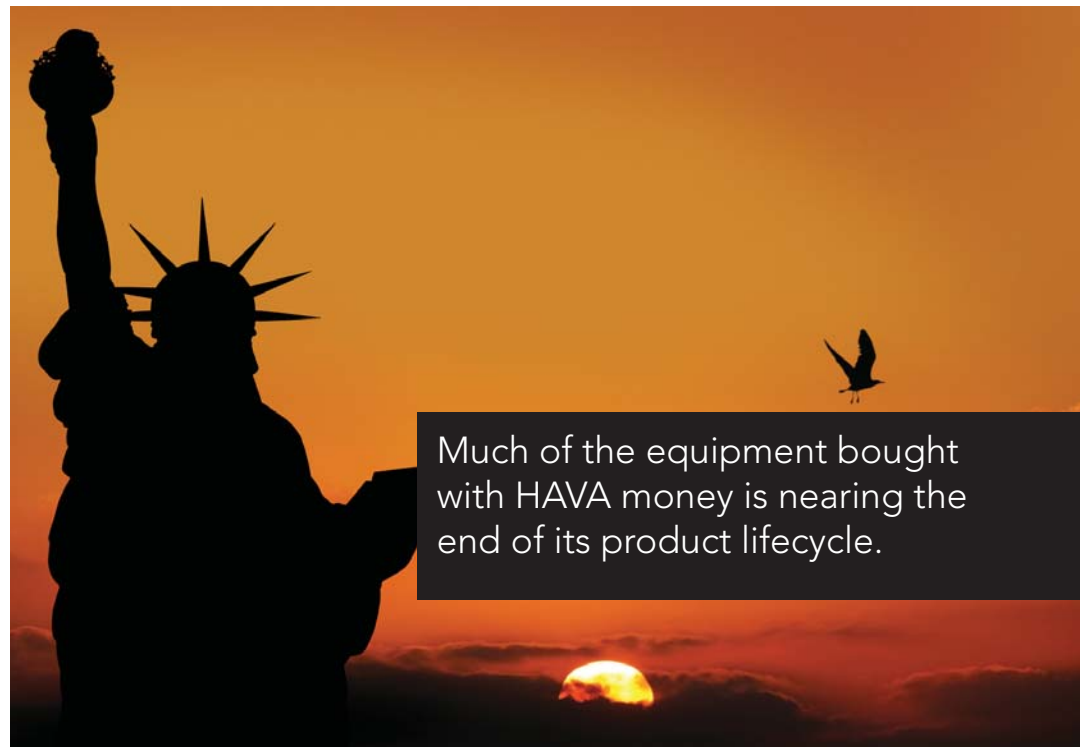
CHANGE DRIVERS

In election management, many factors can and do drive change. Planned changes can result from legislative shifts, election office staffing changes, and updates to the voting technology in use or the adoption of new technology, to name a few. A disaster such as a warehouse fire or a hurricane can dictate unplanned change. Preparing for unplanned change moves into the realm of disaster preparedness, which is outside the scope of this paper.

It is the election leader's role to balance the natural anxiety that comes with change with the necessity of incorporating new equipment and new procedures.



The legislative landscape for elections is in constant flux. With the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) came the widespread adoption of direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting machines to meet requirements for accessible voting. Since that national groundswell, some jurisdictions' governing entities have mandated a return to paper ballots. Other legislative initiatives have enabled centralized, or vote center, voting. Still others permit a broader use of early voting or by mail voting.



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As many top election officials age out of the workforce or otherwise finish their terms, new leaders are taking the helm. The year 2015 rang in more than 15 new state chief election officials across the U.S. With these new officials come fresh sets of priorities and alternative approaches to managing elections.



Two primary motivators prompt election changes.

1

The first is the ongoing dedication to fulfill the election office's mission: to deliver lawful, fair, accessible and accurate elections.

2

The second is the desire to continuously improve the quality of the voting experience and the efficiency and effectiveness of the election process.

When a jurisdiction introduces a new voting system, the effects are far-reaching. The initiative touches administrators, clerical staff, warehouse personnel, poll workers, community advocates and, of course, voters.



Over the lifecycle of a jurisdiction's voting equipment, upgrades to the hardware or software may cause needed adjustments in its use. A larger transition occurs when the jurisdiction adopts new voting technology. Much of the equipment bought with HAVA money is nearing the end of its product lifecycle, and many jurisdictions are weighing budget constraints against the costs and reliability tradeoffs involved in maintaining aging machines. As modern technology newly introduced to the market offers the promise of better use of existing resources, leaders may decide the benefits of using that new technology outweigh other considerations.

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VOTING SYSTEM CHANGE AND ITS RIPPLE EFFECTS

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) defines “major change” in an election office as “a change in software, voting systems, poll worker training, new election laws, i.e. early voting or vote by mail, etc.”¹ For the purposes of this white paper, we will use the example of the adoption of new voting equipment.



When a jurisdiction introduces a new voting system, the effects are far-reaching. The initiative touches administrators, clerical staff, warehouse personnel, poll workers, community advocates and, of course, voters. New technology inevitably changes election office and polling place workflows and policies. The organizational structure and roles within the office may morph as well.

¹ U.S. Election Commission (2007, October). *Managing Change in an Election Office: Quick Start Management Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/workflow_staging/Page/246.PDF



In planning for a trouble-free rollout, it is important to remember that the humans involved—from administrators to poll workers to voters—are by nature resistant to change. It is neurological; the brain is hard-wired to protect the status quo. As Gail Kinsey Goman describes our brains' response to change in her *Forbes Magazine* article, "Why We Resist Change, and What Leaders Can Do about It," change stimulates the prefrontal cortex, which is "directly linked to the amygdala (the brain's fear circuitry, which... controls our 'flight or fight' response)." ² The clerical worker whose role has shifted and whose familiar routines are disrupted may feel the value of his or her knowledge, experience or job is in question.



² Goman, Carol Kinsey (2011, December 19). "Why We Resist Change and What Leaders Can Do about It." *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2011/12/19/why-we-resist-change-and-what-leaders-can-do-about-it/>

ENLISTING SUPPORT

Successful implementation requires that adaptation occur. Taking time to plan for change is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Keeping stakeholders in the loop and engaging them in decision making and problem solving throughout the planning process and as the new system comes on line cultivates buy-in and reduces resistance to the changes unfolding. It is the election leader's role to balance the natural anxiety that comes with change with the necessity of incorporating new equipment and new procedures.

The most effective place to start with a change initiative is to enlist the support of team members and others who have a stake in the change. This starts with instilling a clear vision of the desired outcome of the change. With a voting system implementation, the vision might be "Modernizing our voting equipment to ensure that we provide the most reliable, efficient and accessible election experience to all concerned."

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In the early planning stages, it is critical to listen to those invested in a successful implementation. This enables you accommodate stakeholders' needs and understand how the ultimate system users define success. For the warehouse worker, success might consist of compact, stackable, easily transported components. For the poll worker, it might be an intuitive voting workflow and thorough training in all the new procedures.



LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES



A combination of change management approaches offers election leaders a strong foundation for guiding their organizations through major change. A mixture of two approaches, 20/20 Change Agent and ADKAR, can be particularly effective.



20/20 Change Agent Approach ³

The 20/20 Change Agent change management method concentrates on clarity of vision and communication. The method this approach prescribes to navigate change boils down to the following steps:

1. Take an honest look at your current situation to identify what is working and what is not.
2. Communicate the goal of the desired change so concisely that you could write it on a scrap of paper.
3. Map the journey from where you are to where you want to go, measuring team members' performance against defined measures as you "focus relentlessly on the things that move you toward your goal."
4. Keep lines of communication open among all stakeholders throughout the process.

³ Breen, Bill & Dahle, Cheryl. (1999, December). "20/20 Change Agent: A Four-Point Plan for Bringing Clarity to Change." *Fast Times*. Retrieved at <http://www.fastcompany.com/38605/20-20-change-agent>



ADKAR Approach.⁴

ADKAR is an acronym; its component parts are Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. As this method applies to a voting system implementation, ADKAR translates to the following sequence of actions:

1. Establish awareness of the upcoming change to new equipment, along with awareness of the reason for the switch and its likely impact. Articulate goals and performance measures.
2. Foster the desire for team members to participate and support the transition. Promote open and honest communication about apprehensions, positive challenges and hurdles.
3. List current and future roles and responsibilities and plan training to address any knowledge or skill gaps.
4. Use available tools to implement the change on a day-to-day basis, enhancing team members' ability to make decisions.
5. Reinforce what works and fix what does not so that team members do not revert to old ways of doing things.

⁴ Prosci. (n.d.). "ADKAR Model: A Model for Individual Change." Retrieved at <http://www.prosci.com/adkar-model/overview-3/>



RESOURCES FOR LEADERS

Many resources exist to support election leaders in safely guiding their teams and stakeholders through the twists and turns of change. Among these, a positive change culture, change management materials developed by the EAC, and assistance from your election solution provider are especially useful.

Positive change culture. You can cultivate a proactive, positive attitude toward change among your election stakeholders by building ongoing process improvement into your operations. Regularly engage your team in assessing current procedures and finding ways to streamline steps and improve results. Keep the lines of communication open throughout each change. Supply ample training and resources to perform confidently and to get questions answered—especially on Election Day. The resulting tendency to embrace change will serve you and all involved.

Change management materials from EAC. The EAC has developed the following change management guides specific to election leadership:

- “Managing Change in an Election Office” –This quick-start management guide summarizes the information contained in the chapters of the EAC’s Election Management Guidelines, developed in collaboration with state and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. Find the guide here: http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/workflow_staging/Page/246.PDF
 - “Contingency Planning and Change Management” –This chapter of the EAC’s Election Management Guidelines provides guidance, tips, worksheets and examples to assist election professionals in leading change initiatives. Find the chapter here: http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/workflow_staging/Page/268.PDF
- Assistance from your election solution provider.** Your election solution provider should be a wealth of support for change navigation, especially if you are instituting new voting system technology. When selecting a trusted partner for such a change, look for a vendor who incorporates the following practices:
- The provider offers a solution set that is tailored to your unique needs and is not simply a “cookie cutter” product. The solution provides exactly what is required and does not cause unneeded changes.
 - The provider uses an established process that has been tested and improved over thousands of implementations. The process is scalable and replicable. It is based on industry-standard best practices such as those established by Project Management Institute. Tools and libraries smooth the change process.
 - The implementation process incorporates a



“Nothing endures but change.”
-Heraclitus

thorough business process analysis (BPA) that starts with listening to understand current processes, stakeholder roles and needs and intended outcomes. The primary BPA deliverable is a report that identifies existing and future procedures and includes a gap analysis and a plan to bridge any gaps.

- Training is designed to accommodate adult learning styles; it employs hands-on methods to ensure knowledge transfer, bolster confidence and optimize learner independence. Training for leaders explicitly addresses change management.
- The provider offers creative voter education and outreach (VEO) support to assist the jurisdiction in announcing the new system and educating voters before and during Election Day.
- Ongoing support is delivered in a way that encourages vendor independence while providing responsive assistance when needed.

CONCLUSION

Change happens. With ever-evolving legislation, the advance of technological improvements and the drive to improve operations and the voting experience, election officials must lead the charge to move forward. By adopting change management practices that work, these leaders are well positioned for success.

TIPS

1. Begin change management activities early.
2. Proactively identify risks and plan mitigation.
3. Follow strategic plans – like the Variance Analysis and the Project Plan.
4. Communicate, communicate, communicate.
5. Make certain every team member knows his/her role and responsibilities.
6. Work effectively with your team – delegate, empower, encourage.
7. Take full advantage of training opportunities.
8. Ask for help when you need it.



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