

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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WEC Receives Federal Honor for Election Security Training

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) has received an award from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) for Outstanding Innovations in Elections for its cybersecurity training program series intended to better secure the statewide election system.

EAC announced its Clearie award winners February 14 to recognize best practices in election administration and highlight exemplary models which can serve as examples to other officials and jurisdictions. The Clearie gets its name from EAC’s mandate to serve as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration.

“On behalf of the Commission and our outstanding team of trainers and elections specialists who produced the ‘Securing WisVote’ series, we are honored to receive this award,” said Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief elections official. “This training series is just one of the many steps we took in 2018 to secure our systems and ensure the integrity of Wisconsin elections.”

“Election officials are some of the greatest civic leaders our nation has to offer,” said EAC Chairman Thomas Hicks. “They are the stewards of the bedrock of our democracy, who often implement innovative solutions with limited budgets and zero margin for error. The annual Clearie awards give the EAC an opportunity to recognize their vital contributions on a national stage and highlight best practices within the field of election administration. Each recipient of this award represents the very best of what it means to be an election administrator. We at the EAC applaud them for their dedication, and hope their work can serve as an example to others.”

Wisconsin elections are built on a partnership between the WEC and the state’s 1,850 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks. WEC provides a statewide computer system used by those clerks to manage voter registrations and election data. The challenge of securing the system is compounded by the large number of users, many of whom are part-time and do not have IT departments to support them.

After researching several commercial options to provide cybersecurity training, the WEC concluded the most effective option was to create its own series of online learning modules focused on cybersecurity best practices, tailored for election officials across the state. By creating a baseline training program open to all local governments, the WEC helped bridge cybersecurity awareness gaps among system users and enhanced overall cybersecurity in local governments statewide.

Wolfe noted that in addition to creating cybersecurity training for local election officials, WEC took extraordinary steps in 2018 to enhance security of its systems and prevent interference by working closely with its technology and law enforcement partners in state and federal government. These steps include:

- Encrypting data on WEC servers and between the servers and users, so in the unlikely event of a breach, any data stolen would be unusable.

- Creating and presenting tabletop training exercises for county and municipal clerks that simulate cyber incidents and other emergencies that can occur on or before Election Day.
- Instituting a new system access policy requiring all users to complete the online training series that received the Clearie award. New users must complete security training before gaining access to the system and existing users were required to complete the training prior to the November 2018 election.
- Implementing Multi-Factor Authentication for system access before the November 2018 General Election. All WisVote users must now use a third identification factor, in addition to their username and password, to gain access to the system.
- Upgrading existing monitoring tools to alert staff of any suspicious activity within the system.
- Completing risk, vulnerability, and penetration assessments in conjunction with U.S. Department Homeland Security and the Wisconsin Department of Administration – Division of Enterprise Technology (DET). The assessment found no evidence of any unauthorized access to Wisconsin’s elections systems.

More information about election security in Wisconsin is available here:

<https://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/security>.

This year, WEC will be working closely with county and municipal clerks to identify long-term election security priorities for the balance of the \$6.9 million in federal election security grant money the agency received in 2018. “We need to know how we can help local election officials with their technology and training needs,” Wolfe said.

About the EAC and the Clearie awards

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission was established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). It is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with ensuring secure, accurate and accessible elections by developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. EAC accredits testing laboratories, certifies voting systems, and administers the use of HAVA funds.

Now in its third year, the EAC’s Clearie awards recognize the innovative efforts of election officials across America. Entries were judged based on each initiative’s efficacy, innovation, sustainability, outreach efforts, cost-effectiveness and replicability. More information about Clearie awards is available here: <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/eac-clearinghouse-award-winners-2018/>

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.