

Back to Basics: A Strategic Initiative for Fall 2012 General Election

Background

Over the last two years, Wisconsin's local election officials have had to deal with significant changes to federal and state election laws, new legislative districts, court decisions and unscheduled recall elections – all at a rapid and changing pace. In response to these challenges, the Government Accountability Board focused its training efforts on ensuring local officials had the knowledge and tools necessary to implement the new procedures and requirements.

In response to issues and incidents reported during recent elections, the G.A.B. determined that Wisconsin would benefit from a renewed emphasis on the fundamentals of election administration. Shortly after the June 5 Recall Election, the Director and General Counsel convened a Fall Election Strategic Planning Team which has developed a *Back-to-Basics* initiative for ensuring a problem-free General Election in November 2012. The team identified the following key areas for statewide emphasis:

- Clerk and Poll Worker Basic Election Administration Training
- Voter Education 101: Rights and Responsibilities
- Enhanced Use of Technology

Details of G.A.B.'s *Back-to-Basics* Initiative

The goal of the G.A.B.'s *Back-to-Basics* initiative is to empower our customers, to deepen and refresh their understanding of election fundamentals, and to ensure a fair and impartial General Election.

Clerk and Poll Worker Election Administration Training and Support

Wisconsin's election partners – county and municipal clerks, poll workers, special registration deputies, greeters and canvass board members to name a few – are entrusted with the responsibility of conducting open, fair and transparent elections. Election officials acquire necessary knowledge through ongoing education, training and technical assistance to properly manage and conduct elections. Examples of this support and assistance include:

- In addition to regularly scheduled core training, the G.A.B. is using webinar technology to conduct education and training sessions, host teleconferences and develop educational modules. Local election officials are encouraged to attend these sessions while they are being conducted live or watch the recorded version on the G.A.B. website. These webinars include topics such as acceptable proof of residence, absentee voting, voter registration, and election integrity.
- The G.A.B. has updated manuals, forms, and other reference guides to provide clerks and election inspectors with critical and up-to-date election administration information

about current processes and procedures as well as new state statutes.

- Since 2008, on Election Day, G.A.B. has dispatched teams to conduct onsite accessibility audits of polling places to ensure that there are no barriers that restrict the ability of electors with a disability to gain access to the polling place, to maneuver inside and throughout it, and be able to vote independently and privately. In addition to accessibility, auditors also check security tags and logs for electronic voting equipment. The G.A.B. will continue to safeguard polling place accessibility and voting equipment security as fundamental features of Wisconsin elections.
- Ongoing and comprehensive election administration training aims to provide consistency in conducting elections throughout the state. The G.A.B. is also providing targeted support to several municipalities which have identified unique election administration needs.

Voter Education 101: Rights and Responsibilities

Voting is a right guaranteed by the Wisconsin Constitution, but voters also have significant responsibilities. In preparation for the November 2012 General Election, the G.A.B. is producing and distributing educational materials in a variety of formats designed to inform voters about their rights and responsibilities, titled *Voting 101*. The voter education efforts will provide information that puts voters in control of their voting experience.

This voter education campaign includes information about:

- Voter registration requirements
- Acceptable proof of residence documents
- Consequences of committing voter fraud
- Rules for election observers and voter challenges

These voter education materials and messages are being distributed in several ways:

- Reference Materials: Brochures, pamphlets, flyers, and other documents in paper and electronic formats highlighting the fundamentals of voting in Wisconsin.
- Informational Videos: Presentations on election topics made available to the public.
- Social Media: Use of Facebook and Twitter and other platforms to better educate and engage voters.

In addition, the G.A.B. has created a Voting 101 speaker series for staff to make presentations to community groups on voting in Wisconsin. Speakers may be requested by calling 608-266-8005 or by sending an e-mail to gab@wi.gov with “speaker request” as the subject line.

Enhanced Use of Technology

The G.A.B. has developed innovative new technological advancements that are being deployed for the November 2012 General Election.

My Vote WI: My Vote Wisconsin (myvote.wi.gov) is the G.A.B.'s new voter-focused website that provides the public with additional tools and resources. This site includes the functions formerly located on the Voter Public Access website, including polling place lookup and ballot information, as well as the following new features:

- Voter Registration Tool: A new feature on the My Vote Wisconsin website gives eligible Wisconsin electors an easy, intuitive and efficient way to register to vote or to update their voter record. Electors may complete the Wisconsin Voter Registration Form online, then print it out, sign and date it, and either mail or hand-deliver the form to their local municipal clerk. The system captures the applicant's information in pending status in the Statewide Voter Registration System so that no data entry is required by the clerk.
- Military and Permanent Overseas Voter Online Absentee Ballot Delivery System: Military and permanent overseas voters now have the ability to securely register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and print the ballot, which must be mailed back to the local municipal clerk. The new system gives military and permanent overseas voters access to their ballots at their convenience. This guarantees that military and overseas voters will be able to receive, mark and return their ballot in time to have it cast and counted.
- My Vote WI SmartPhone App: The new mobile elections app assists both the public and local election officials by bringing election information to their fingertips. Smartphone users may look up their voter registration status and voting history, find their polling place with GPS directions, view sample ballots, find clerk information with GPS directions, and much more. The My Vote WI app is scheduled to be available to the public before the November election.

Facebook and Twitter: G.A.B. has been on Facebook and Twitter since early 2012. Staff regularly posts important elections information on these two social media sites. Voters are encouraged to like the agency on Facebook and follow it on Twitter to keep up with the latest news.

G.A.B. Website: Voter education pages of the Board's main website (gab.wi.gov/voters) have been restructured significantly to improve navigation and make the content easier to understand.

These technology advancements will empower voters, reduce the workload on local election officials, and help ensure fair and transparent elections.

Conclusion

By providing better training, voter education, and new technology tools, the G.A.B. is able to support local election officials and the public to be better prepared for Election Day. Through its *Back-to-Basics* initiative, the G.A.B., in partnership with voters and election officials will continue Wisconsin's proud tradition of ensuring open and fair elections. Back-to-Basics Project Initiatives

The following is a dynamic and non-exhaustive list of tasks that are included in G.A.B.'s Back-to-Basics program:

Election Officials

- A webinar series for clerks on topics including:
 - Preparing for the August Primary
 - Absentee Voting
 - My Vote Wisconsin
 - Special Election Administration Topics
 - Important Reminders for the November General Election
 - Election Day Duties
- Revised the Election Administration and Election Day Manuals
- Provided extra assistance and direction to municipalities with recalls or referendums
- Attended poll worker trainings in Racine
- Conducted audits of polling places in the cities of Racine and Milwaukee
- Conducted baseline training for chief inspectors
- Conducted core training for municipal clerks
- Provided additional Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) data quality support and reports
- Revised SVRS Training Manual
- Conducted SVRS training for clerks and staff throughout Wisconsin
- Produced SVRS training videos
- Conduct election preparation webinars for law enforcement and district attorneys

Public Outreach

- Created and distributed a Voter Rights and Responsibilities document
- Provided additional instructions to observer groups about observer regulations in the polling place
- Issued a student residency memo and guide
- Conducted student residency teleconference with University of Wisconsin schools and municipalities
- Expanded use of Facebook and Twitter
- Launched My Vote WI smart phone application
- Implemented Voting 101 speaker series
- Developed improved voter information pages at G.A.B. website
- Developed MyVote.WI.gov website
 - Voter registration tool
 - Military and permanent overseas absentee ballot system
 - Personalized Voter information