

# FIVE STEPS TO SAFER ELECTIONS

## STEP 5: IN FOCUS

*Practice: Applying the Security Plan in Realistic Scenarios*

### INTRODUCTION

A plan is only as good as your ability to put it into practice. Law enforcement agencies will be familiar, and election offices increasingly so, with **the Tabletop Exercise (TTX), a method for putting participants into a security scenario** to test aspects of the plan, reinforce understanding and strengthen adherence to its principles and components.

This section will provide an Election Security "TTX in a Box," presenting scenarios and paths through them, as well as providing pointers on creating and facilitating the TTX with your security partners.

Some agencies may even consider **a real-world simulation, in which some participants may not be aware it is merely a training exercise**. While some in the election community have successfully used such drills, the risks of misapprehension by unwitting participants are significant. If local election security partners are interested in such a drill, we recommend developing it with careful attention to such risks.

Finally, we suggest **regular meetings with security partners**, first to plan out the practice session, and then at agreed intervals to discuss the changing threat environment.

### TTX IN A BOX: TABLETOP EXERCISE PLANNING

#### Exercise Purpose

Identifying strengths and gaps in existing security plans protecting against intimidation, physical threats and disruption; resolving issues and filling gaps with best practices and new ideas from participants; exploring techniques to prevent incidents, de-escalate and eliminate threats and end disruption.

#### Objectives

1. Discuss preparedness to identify emerging threats and respond appropriately.
2. Test stages of event response.
3. Increase understanding of and adherence to Rules of Engagement and preventive, emergency and protective responses to threats and disruptions.
4. Practice internal and public communications around election security.
5. Refine response rules and response plans.
6. Improve partnership and mutual understanding between agencies.

#### 1 MEET

Meet with counterparts and other stakeholders

#### 2 SHARE

Share experiences, contact information, election details, and expectations

#### 3 AGREE

Agree to work together regularly and define rules of engagement where voters are present

#### 4 PLAN

Plan incident response, information sharing, and crisis communications

#### 5 PRACTICE

Practice information sharing and response plans

# IN FOCUS: STEP 5

## MODULE 1: SCENARIO

### October 1

Election staff receive threatening calls and emails at the office which seem close to the line – comments such as they will “get what they deserve” or “should be careful, because people know things.” A man in the office parking lot is seen writing down license plates. One staffer believes he was followed home, but couldn’t provide information on the car or driver.

### October 10

A caller tells a staffer she’s “the only good-looking one of the election cheaters,” and saying she should quit or something might happen because she’s so cute. Caller ID showed the call coming from (102) 371-3742. Using Google, election staff find a name, but they’re not sure how accurate the info may be.

### October 16

An email from dragon224@gmail.com has a message alleging that early voting is rigged, and patriots will be doing something to stop it.

### October 22 (Morning)

On the first day of early voting, a group of 20 protesters at one site, chanting “No cheating... or no peace” demands that early voting and mail voting be stopped, and all voters required to vote on election day. A counterprotest forms with about 30 people. Each protest includes people video-taping other protesters, election personnel, voters, and law enforcement.

### October 22 (Early Afternoon)

Early in the afternoon, three protesters, one using a cell phone camera, enter the voting site and, still filming, approach a voter marking her ballot to tell her the tabulating machines are rigged.

### October 22 (Late Afternoon)

After the group filming inside is arrested, protesters outside become angry. The larger counter-protest group approaches the protest. People argue in clusters, pointing fingers.

## MODULE 1: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Intelligence and Information Sharing

- Do election personnel know where to report incidents and what information is needed?
- Who is compiling information on such incidents? Do they know names of key election personnel?
- What type of threat/harassment information is actionable? Can non-actionable information be held to establish a pattern of harassing behavior?
- What methods of investigation might help identify those making threatening/harassing calls or emails?

### Preventive Security

- At what point does harassing behavior justify a visit from law enforcement?
- Who should staff call? What information is necessary to share with police?
- Do law enforcement know all election locations and have name and contact information for election workers?
- What public communications may stifle the appetite for escalation of those involved in harassment?
- What level of threat justifies a change in the physical presence of law enforcement at various election facilities?

### Emergency Response

- How do you assess the threat level of a crowd?
- How do you set the balance between sensibilities of voters, for whom heavy law enforcement presence may be alarming, vs. the need to deter disruptive activity?
- What actions (or requests) would prompt law enforcement entry into a polling place? Or activity inside?
- Are law enforcement familiar (through a Pocket Guide?) with election law, the rights of formal observers and observer actions that are prohibited? And how 1st amendment rights may affect protest space at election sites? Do they know Rules of Engagement specific to election settings?
- What de-escalation methods can be helpful, both in interpersonal disputes (as within the polling place) and between groups and crowds (as outside)?

### Intelligence and Information Sharing

- What advice or support should election personnel be given as threat levels rise?
- What specific protection might be given to specific targets?
- What general measures of protection can be taken to 'harden' the office and other facilities?
- What public communications can help deter additional disruptive activity? What can be said to reassure voters that they will be safe casting their ballots?

## MODULE 2: SCENARIO

### November 4

Election watchers are expecting a very close contest, with anger building. Elections and law enforcement meet for a final briefing and to consider security arrangements.

### November 8 (Election Day)

Only minor disturbances happen during election day. At the end of election night, the two candidates for governor are separated by about 1,000 votes out of 1 million cast. There are 30,000 mail ballots that could still come in, and they would be counted if they're postmarked by election day and arrive within one week. However, almost all will arrive on Wednesday or Thursday.

### November 9

Large groups of protesters and counterprotesters throng around the county building, which is the main office of the election agency. The situation is boisterous but not threatening. At the end of the day, after most have left, the election office announces updated results, which, combined with results from other counties, show the candidate who had led is now 1,000 votes behind.

### November 10

Tensions are rising in the counting room, with observers sometimes crossing 6-foot marks established to give workers personal space and a sense of security. An observer begins shouting at a bipartisan pair of election workers opening ballots, and moves to the table where they're working.

Outside, amid ongoing squabbles between clusters of people, a small armed group appears. The protest group starts to move towards the doors of the facility, with some people trying to push past barricades.

## MODULE 2: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What changes to the physical security of buildings can be made as threat levels rise?
- In particular, what changes at a central office or central counting space that may draw larger crowds and offer a 'higher value target'?
- How will you address the balance between the right of peaceful protest and efforts to deter escalation?
- How does the value of law enforcement visibility change in the post-election setting?
- Does your existing plan offer flexibility, including options to prevent, deter, de-escalate and/or overcome violent actors and those who might incite crowds?
- In the event of a breach of the building, do you have a plan for securing ballots, cartridges, tally devices and other crucial materials.
- Can the counting space be completely secured in the event of unauthorized entry into the building?
- What communications may help deter additional incidents as counting and other post-election processes continue?
- What new strategies will you adopt to ensure election workers continue to feel safe in returning to work?

## FACILITATING A TTX

### Roles of Attendees

First, you'll want one or more **facilitators** to provide situation updates and moderate the discussion. The facilitator is usually someone closely involved with planning the TTX. **Players** can be grouped in teams and given particular roles - election worker, election observer, election administrator, law enforcement commander, dispatcher, patrol officer, etc. In some TTX's, one or more **evaluators** watch in order to take notes, compare player behavior to expectations and the security plan and prompt post-event discussion about performance and potential changes to procedure or policy.

### Exercise Timeline

You'll want to create a timeline, including:

- Welcome & Briefing on the Election Security Setting
- Module 1 Activity
- Guided Discussion of Module 1
- Module 2 Activity
- Guided Discussion of Module 2
- Closing Comments

A longer discussion of how to host a TTX is available from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) at [Elections Cyber Tabletop Exercise Package - January 2020 \(cisa.gov\)](https://www.cisa.gov/elections-cyber-tabletop-exercise-package-january-2020); see the section of General Information and the Appendices.