

FIVE STEPS TO SAFER ELECTIONS

STEPS 1 AND 2: IN FOCUS

Meet & Share: Building a Partnership Between Election Officials and Law Enforcement

INTRODUCTION

Election offices require a secure environment so voters have the confidence to vote and workers can carry out assigned tasks. In the current atmosphere, law enforcement assistance may be needed to keep voters and workers safe. **Cooperation is essential.**

Election officials and law enforcement officers have distinct operating protocols, each of which center on the same mandate: following the laws as they are provided. Meeting will help each institution understand the other and learn how to work together.

In addition, because **different communities have different perspectives on law enforcement**, it may be useful to convene meetings with local community stakeholders to discuss the goals of cooperation and the boundaries.

CONVENING LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ELECTION OFFICIALS

The starting point is a meeting between members of the election office and the relevant law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction – typically the sheriff's office. Collaboration could also include other local and state election offices and other layers of law enforcement including state police, county sheriff, city police, prosecutors and emergency management agencies.

The **primary goals of the initial meeting** are:

1. Sharing the history of election worker and voter intimidation to establish the need for cooperation
2. Understanding each other's operating environment
3. Sharing details of election administration (calendar, locations, etc.)
4. Sharing contact information of liaisons and key staff
5. Setting expectations and boundaries
6. Mapping a path forward
7. Acknowledging that community stakeholder groups may need to be kept informed

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

□ Share the History to Establish the Need for Cooperation

While the topic of intimidation of election officials and voters has become mainstream news, providing examples will help build a common understanding on why security measures are necessary.

Discussion Prompts

- The Appendix to this guide offers some notable examples with links.
- The FBI has [compiled](#) 1,000 instances of threats and intimidating behavior, with more than 100 meeting the threshold for criminal investigation.
- Citing incidents that occurred locally or nearby will be especially compelling.

□ Discuss the Distinct Operating Environments

Successful cooperation requires mutual understanding of the other's operating environment. In a portion of the initial meeting, each agency should describe their operations and explain aspects of their work that outsiders may not recognize.

Discussion Prompts

Consider these aspects of the law enforcement setting:

- Law enforcement encounters threatening behavior regularly, so threats provoking fear in election officials may seem less unusual to them
- Law enforcement may be required to investigate credible allegations of criminality by observers, voters, campaigns, poll workers or even someone in the election office.
 - Such authority in an election setting may be limited by state law.

Consider these aspects of the election setting:

- Election officials are governed by rules and procedures that implement election law and facilitate the orderly, transparent conduct of the election. These rules may also restrict who may handle election materials or be present in voting locations, including law enforcement.
- Election officials hold primary enforcement authority on election matters, requiring significant deference.
- Election officials work under the eyes of potentially antagonistic observers, who nonetheless have a strong claim to the right to monitor and scrutinize.
- Election officials must serve a broad range of voters with varying perspectives on law enforcement, who all have the right to feel secure as they vote.

Consider the budgetary impact of security planning and discuss how to cooperate to meet that need.

Share Election Details and Contacts

Election offices should provide some important core details.

Prepare Key Information

- Election events and dates
 - Candidate filing
 - Hearings where candidates might be removed from the ballot
 - Logic & accuracy testing and public demonstrations of the voting system
 - Mail ballots go out (and expected first returns, voter verification)
 - Early Voting period
 - Voting equipment shipping out
 - Election Day (Including Election Night and all continuing tabulation)
 - Key post-election dates
- Site addresses (with photos if available)
 - Equipment warehouse / mail processing site
 - Training sites
 - Ballot drop boxes or sites
 - Early voting and election day polling places
- Names of leads at each site
 - Supervisors for central facilities
 - Lead poll worker at polling places
 - If unavailable, direct law enforcement to ask for the person in that role.
 - Where poll workers govern each site as a group, explain that.

Designate Liaisons

Establishing preferred lines of communication will be helpful as the relationship matures and in the event of an incident.

Considerations

- Communications need not occur at the agency head level.
- Liaisons should have decision-making authority within the chain of command.
- Give each liaison some responsibilities to sustain momentum.

Set Expectations and Boundaries

A shared understanding of potential threats and of operating protocols of agencies involved should foster broad agreement on how law enforcement and election offices will work together. This meeting should help define that broad agreement.

Discussion Prompts

- In what settings is the election office seeking increased security support?
- How much routine assistance does law enforcement have the capacity to provide?
- Are there boundaries or restrictions on law enforcement activity during routine election operations (such as entry into polling places, parking patrol vehicles in prominent positions) that are helpful to ensure the comfort and support of voters, participating communities, and stakeholder groups?

Mapping the Path Forward

Steps 1 and 2 of the Five Steps to Safer Elections plan have been accomplished when you've held the initial Meeting, Shared information, and developed a broad, common vision for what must be done.

Discussion Prompts

- When and how often should the agencies meet, either as a group in smaller staff meetings?
- The companion documents "Step 3 – Agreeing on Rules of Engagement and Routine Assistance" and "Step 4 – Planning the Response to Security Incidents" suggest one way to coordinate.
 - Consider whether they suggest an appropriate agenda for two additional meetings, or how your joint work should proceed.

☐ Meet with Community Organizations

The primary goal of meeting with community organizations is to ensure that a security plan that you deem important for your staff and voters doesn't decrease trust among any sectors of the voting public.

Discussion Prompts

- Who should convene the meeting?
- Share history to create a shared understanding of the need for security planning.
- Elicit concerns of attendees.
- Talk about boundaries discussed in initial meetings with law enforcement.

APPENDIX – THREATENING INCIDENTS

Faces in crosshairs: death threat website

The website "Enemies of the People" targeted officials in swing states and others who publicly said the election was fair. The site, attributed to the Iranian Government by the US intelligence community, called for their assassination, posting their faces in crosshairs along with home addresses.

Link: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/iran-election-fraud-violence/2020/12/22/4a28e9ba-44a8-11eb-a277-49a6d1f9dff1_story.html

Death threats by phone and email

A GOP city election commissioner received multiple death threats, personally and to his family, some targeting his religion, after he defended the integrity of the local election results.

Link: <https://nypost.com/2020/11/08/philadelphia-vote-counting-staff-getting-death-threats-official-says/>

County staffer followed

A county staffer who was transporting phones unrelated to any voting equipment was followed for 10 miles by someone live-streaming the incident on Twitter and claiming that the real cargo was election computers. The staffer ultimately called 911 and remained in-vehicle at a county facility till police arrived.

Link: <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/politics/elections/gwinnett-county-election-worker-followed/85-d5556699-200d-49ee-8ce0-5e8d793aa510>