Shifting to voting by mail

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Michigan

No-excuse absentee voting passed in 2018
Size of change: Flint, Michigan

- Flint is one of 25 communities with more than 30,000 residents reporting an increase of MORE THAN 100% in mail ballots issued.

- **From 2016 to 2020, Flint’s mail ballot requests increased for the presidential primary by 854%** (Source: MLive.com 28 February 2020)

- Statewide, requests were up 70% for the primary
### Communities with 30,000 or more residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flint city</td>
<td>Genesee</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1,870</td>
<td>854%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownston Twp.</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>2,903</td>
<td>695%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Blanc</td>
<td>Genesee</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>274%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield Twp.</td>
<td>Washtenaw</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>3,090</td>
<td>242%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Lansing</td>
<td>Ingham</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>2,721</td>
<td>198%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novi city</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>2,521</td>
<td>7,184</td>
<td>184%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastpointe</td>
<td>Macomb</td>
<td>1,102</td>
<td>3,086</td>
<td>180%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalamazoo city</td>
<td>Kalamazoo</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>4,174</td>
<td>169%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livonia</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>4,019</td>
<td>10,610</td>
<td>164%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Heights</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td>2,887</td>
<td>159%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Communities with fewer than 30,000 residents, and at least one absentee ballot issued in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menominee Twp.</td>
<td>Menominee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>15,300%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolland Twp.</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.300%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark Twp.</td>
<td>Gratiot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.800%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivet</td>
<td>Eaton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.700%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otsego</td>
<td>Allegan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>2.653%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan Twp.</td>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.400%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariette Twp.</td>
<td>Sanilac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.600%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dncatur Twp.</td>
<td>Van Buren</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1.522%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottawa Twp.</td>
<td>St. Joseph</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>1.517%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakefield Twp.</td>
<td>Gogebic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.500%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Size of change: Michigan
Downstream administration issues

Going from a state with little vote by mail to a lot presents complications

- Do you count at precincts or centrally?
- When can you start processing ballots (not counting them)?
- When can you start counting?
- Who does the counting and where does that happen?
- How do you ensure that precincts know whether someone has already voted absentee?
- What if voters don't remember that they requested an absentee ballot?
Vote by mail is awesome for many voters

- Convenient — the ballot comes to you
- No need to take time off or reschedule things around going to the polls
- No waiting in lines
- Plenty of time to research candidates and issues
Find out about an election
Learn that you can vote absentee
Find out how to request a ballot and what the deadlines are
Fill out a request online or on paper
If on paper, put it in an envelope and mail it to the right place with the right postage
Wait for your ballot to arrive in the mail
If the ballot doesn’t arrive, request another one, go to the polling place, or don’t vote

• Mark the ballot
• Put the ballot inside the secrecy envelope
• Sign the envelope
• Put that inside the return envelope
• Find appropriate postage
• Mail it in
(Or in some cases, drop at a polling place)

It is not free of effort
Vote-by-mail is not great for all voters

• It’s not accessible for many people with disabilities

• People who have low literacy and low English proficiency struggle with instructions and affidavits

• Challenging for people who are homeless or who have university addresses
For students and others

• If someone has requested an absentee ballot but it hasn’t been mailed yet, contact the election office.

• If you’ve requested an absentee ballot and ballots have been mailed, you’ll probably have to fill out a form saying you didn’t get the old one and you want a new one.

• If you decide you want to vote “at the polls,” you are likely to have to vote “curbside.”
Vote-by-mail landscape
All-Mail Elections (aka Vote-By-Mail)

Introduction

Five states currently conduct all elections entirely by mail: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington and Utah. At least 21 other states have laws that allow certain smaller elections, such as school board contests, to be conducted by mail. For these elections, all
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civicdesign.org
States with blended policies in the Step 3 - 4 - 5 range.

- UT: 100% VAH in 2019
- HI: 100% in 2020
- CA: targeting 2022/24

- NE has 11 counties on 100% VAH for 2020
- ND has 30 counties using 100% mailed-out ballot voting

- OH sends absentee request forms to all 5M voters, for some elections
- MI, MN, & PA have a permanent absentee list, but periodically send request forms, not ballots, to voters
- AL, KS, & WI offer permanent absentee status to voters with disabilities
- DC offers Step 4 to its voters
Communicating with voters
Answer voters’ questions

- Dates and deadlines — be specific
- Signatures — present and matching
- Rules — who can return your ballot
- Tracking — how to follow your ballot through the process

Pocket Guide for Voters available at ElectionTools.org
Set expectations

- New voters don’t know where to start
- People new to a process don’t know what to expect
- Help people know what to do if there’s a problem or they make a mistake

Be careful about how you talk about change

- Not everyone knows what the old way was
- People who do know the old way now are new voters
Communicating with voters

Tailor the level of detail to the delivery channel
- printed booklets to help voters plan
- your website to help voters take action
- radio/tv to help voters' awareness of elections or changes
- social media to keep the conversation going with voters before, during, and after elections

Treat communication as a conversation
- choose a tone and voice
- be polite, personable, and positive — just like you are in person
- use personal pronouns, like “you” and “we”
- use the same voice across all media.

Make sure that important information stands out
Use visual design to support meaning:
- have a consistent style
- choose one style of icons
- one idea per bullet
Resources

• National Vote at Home Institute (voteathome.org)

• National Conference on State Legislatures (ncsl.org)

• MIT Election Data + Science Lab (electionlab.mit.edu/)

• Brennan Center for Justice (brennan.org)

• Democracy Fund (democracyfund.org)

• Center for Civic Design (civicdesign.org)

• Center for Technology and Civic Life (techandciviclife.org/)
Questions?
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