



# Voter Education Strategies for Los Angeles' New and Modern Voting Experience

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## Summary

This report provides strategies to consider for voter education and outreach under Los Angeles County's new voting model. Future of California Elections (FoCE), a nonpartisan network and sponsor of the Voter's Choice California (VCC) project, draws on its experience managing a successful statewide Voter's Choice Act implementation project in 2018, available research on the 2018 election cycle and reports from partners of the voter experience in the Los Angeles 2019 Mock Election.

## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Los Angeles’ new voting experience .....	3
Lessons from the 2018 Election Cycle & LA Mock Election .....	4
Start voter education early and align with election administration milestones .....	4
Give voters the information they need.....	5
Incorporate messages to encourage early voting.....	5
Direct voter contact is best to reach traditionally underrepresented voters.....	6
Voter education and outreach may require more resources .....	6
Coordinating messages and leveraging partnerships .....	7
Collect information to improving future elections .....	7
Conclusion.....	8
Additional Resources .....	9

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The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any other organization.

## Introduction

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The 2020 Presidential Primary Election will give Los Angeles County voters the first experience of a brand-new voting model, transitioning voters from a single place and a single day of voting to the option of voting anywhere in the county over multiple days. An election administration changes this big require significant voter education. This document provides a brief overview of factors organizations may want to consider as they develop their voter education strategies. While there are currently no best practices for conducting voter education under Los Angeles County's new voting model, we draw on lessons learned from 2018 election cycle and observations from the recent Los Angeles County Mock Election.

## Los Angeles' new voting experience

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The 2020 Election cycle will bring big changes for LA voters. It is the first time Los Angeles County will have elections under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) and it is the first time voters will use the new Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) voting system countywide.

The Voter's Choice Act has the potential to make voting easier and more convenient for voters. It is an optional law and 15 counties, representing over 50 percent of the California electorate will vote under the new model in 2020. Los Angeles County has an important role in the success of this model, given that one in four California voters resides in Los Angeles County.

Under the VCA, voters can cast ballots up to 10 days before Election Day and through Election Day, including weekends. Additionally, voters can vote anywhere in the county. Neighborhood polling places are replaced by upgraded vote centers, which offer same day voter registration and improved services to voters with disabilities and limited English proficient voters. Vote-by-mail voters will also experience enhancements through the VCA through additional ballot drop boxes, secure deposit boxes for voted ballots, which will be available inside and outside buildings throughout the county. The VCA has special provisions for Los Angeles County. Mainly, Los Angeles voters do not automatically receive a vote by mail ballot as they will in other VCA counties. Only Los Angeles voters who are registered as permanent vote by mail voters or who request a mail ballot will receive a ballot in the mail. Additionally, Los Angeles County must make available more vote centers and more drop boxes per voter, than other VCA counties

One of the most unique features of the VCA is public engagement. The VCA requires that elections offices consult with voters to develop the election administration plan (EAP), which identifies locations for vote centers and drop boxes as well as the county voter education and outreach plan. The EAP must be posted publicly and the law requires that it be revisited for future elections. Therefore, it is important for community members to provide feedback to their elections office on how to continue improving the administration of elections in their communities.

Public engagement was an important component of Los Angeles' new voting system technology the Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP). The VSAP was developed by the Office of the Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC), in consultation with many partners and Los Angeles voters. The new VSAP voting system is fully accessible for all voters and includes a new ballot marking device, an interactive sample ballot and an electronic poll book. The VSAP allows voters with disabilities to use their own assistive technologies to mark the ballot and offers limited English proficient voters the opportunity to access a translated ballot in 13 languages. Most importantly the VSAP is still a paper based secure voting system.

### Lessons from the 2018 Election Cycle & LA Mock Election

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California's new vote center election model under the VCA is very new and there are currently no best practices for a county as unique and complex as Los Angeles County. We can, however, look to the 2018 election cycle for lessons learned by Future of California Elections and partners as they worked to support implementation of the new law. Additionally, in September 2019, Los Angeles County tested the new voting model through a weekend long Mock Election. Here we bring together what we learned from these experiences and offer some areas to consider for voter education and outreach strategies in the 2020 election cycle.

#### [Start voter education early and align with election administration milestones](#)

The new voting model focuses on expanding voting options and removing the constraints of voting at one location on a single Election Day. Under the new model voters can vote early and can vote anywhere in the county in advance of Election Day. It is therefore important to start education of the new voting options early so that voters can take full advantage of the new model.

Strategies should consider election administration milestones under the new model and the voting preferences of the type of voter being reached. For example, vote by mail voters will receive their vote by mail ballots starting 28 days before Election Day. Ideally, they would have information about how to return their ballot before they receive it in the mail. For voters who vote in-person it will be important to communicate the options to vote early and to inform them of the opportunity to vote on a weekend starting 10 days before Election Day and through Election Day.

Below are a few of the election administration milestones to consider for voter education and outreach:

- 28 days before Election Day – Ballots are mailed and ballot drop boxes are available to receive ballots.
- 15 days before Election Day – Administrative deadline for voter registration, voters may still register and vote up through and including on Election Day. However, they may not receive all the services offered by their elections office.
- 10 days before Election Day – Selected vote centers open, including weekends
- 7 days before Election Day – Last day for voters to request a vote by mail ballot

- 4 days before Election Day – all vote centers are open
- March 3, Election Day – last day to vote, voters can still register to vote and vote on the same day

In summary, organizations should know who they are trying to reach and start voter education early to align with key election administration milestones so voters can take advantage of the convenient early voting features of the new model.

#### [Give voters the information they need](#)

We learned from the 2018 election cycle that there is a spectrum to how much voting information voters want regarding the new voting model. With so many changes to the voting model, even seasoned voters may be overwhelmed to learn everything in one conversation. It is therefore important to take cues from your audience on how you approach voter education. We found that voter education should begin by giving voters the information they need to cast a ballot by their preferred method for voting and then building information from there.

Start voter education by helping voters develop a vote plan, the plan of how, when and where they will cast their ballot. Once the voter decides how they want to vote they should be given the information they need to successfully cast a ballot by their preferred method. A vote by mail voter should know when they can expect to receive their ballot in the mail and their options for returning their ballot. An in-person voter should know their new location for voting and that they can vote early and anywhere in the county. By giving voters the information they need you ensure they can participate under the new voting model. Additionally, all voters should know that you can make changes to their voter registration or register and vote right through Election Day at any vote center.

Once the basics of a vote plan are established and a voter seems interested to learn more, then your organization may decide to continue voter education and offer voters information on their full voting options. The advantages of this method of voter education is that voters are prepared to cast a ballot should their preferences change.

Research by NALEO Educational Fund shared at FoCE's December Planning Meeting with LA County nonprofits, found that some voters want more information. They are afraid of making a mistake and want to make sure they have all the information they need so they are ready to cast a ballot.

This is consistent with FoCE's findings in 2018, that while a majority of voters wanted to have information just about their preferred voting method, other voters wanted to feel prepared and know their full voting options. Therefore outreach plans should include some information on all the options for voting that can be shared with voters who want more information.

#### [Incorporate messages to encourage early voting](#)

Switching to a new voting system takes time. Counties that transitioned to vote center elections have historically experienced long lines on Election Day. This is because

voters are accustomed to voting on a single day. There is a transition period before voters start learning that they can vote early.

Research by NALEO Educational Fund showed that voters do have concern about long lines on Election Day under the new voting model. As organizations prepare their outreach plan emphasizing and encouraging early voting should be central to voter education messaging.

Turnout numbers in the 2018 election cycle for California's VCA counties showed that most voters voted on Election Day. Organizations in these counties are reevaluating messaging to encourage more early voting in 2020.

Recognizing that long lines on Election Day are part of the transition experience of vote center elections, it will be important to encourage Los Angeles voters to vote early in voter education messaging. Encouraging voters to vote early, even the weekend before Election Day, will result in a smoother election experience for all.

#### [Direct voter contact is best to reach traditionally underrepresented voters](#)

To reach traditionally underrepresented voters, our partners saw the greatest engagement from their community members by using direct contact strategies. This was true for both the 2018 election cycle and the Los Angeles Mock Election.

In the 2018 election cycle, partners learned that one of the most effective ways for voter education was to build voter education into existing programming. This allowed direct engagement with voters or potential voters that may not seek out this information in a standalone event just focused on voting. Creating the in-person opportunities also allowed voters to ask questions and address their individual concerns.

For the Mock Election, organizations did one-on-one voter education outside of community spaces like schools and markets, they engaged in phone banking, making direct voice calls to voters, as well as voter education workshops. Additionally, for the Los Angeles Mock Election partners saw some success with ethnic print media outreach and more limited success with targeted social media ads and emails.

Overall, direct outreach from trusted community partners proved more successful because these strategies seek out voters where they are. The Voter's Choice Los Angeles network, which focused on reaching traditionally underrepresented voters, found that few people knew about the Mock election or the changes until these groups reached them. The reason is that traditionally underrepresented voters do not always access voting information through the same avenues that mainstream voters do. It is important to consider direct outreach strategies in order to inform traditionally underrepresented voters of the new voting options.

#### [Voter education and outreach may require more resources](#)

Organizations should be prepared to expend more resources as they engage in voter education of the new vote center model. There are two factors driving the increased

use of resources. The first is that teaching voters about the new voting model requires spending more time with each voter. Additionally, voter education is happening over several weeks and competing with the other news and information entering the voter's daily life.

The New Electorate Study research brief "*How Did Voters Experience the VCA in 2018?*", shows that despite robust voter education efforts in each county, 33 percent of eligible voters in the VCA counties had heard "nothing or very little" about the changes to their voting experience in the 2018 election cycle.

Voters are not expecting their voting experience to change and are not looking for this information actively. It will be important for organizations to factor the increase of resources needed in their voter education plans.

### [Coordinating messages and leveraging partnerships](#)

One of the most important lessons that we learned from the 2018 election cycle was the importance of coordinating message and leveraging partnerships because it allowed our networks to amplify each other's messages and reach.

In 2018, our project Voter's Choice California, developed education materials that organizations could customize for their own use. This helped create more streamlined messaging and voters saw similar language explaining the changes to their voting model throughout their county.

In San Mateo County, the elections office worked with community organizations to develop and distribute flyers because they recognized that community organizations were the best messengers for their communities. This partnership was so successful they are continuing this practice in 2020.

Another important partnership for education and outreach is the news media. Working closely with ethnic media, including local television, radio and newspapers that communities trust was another important strategy in 2018 to ensure accurate information was being shared with community members.

Coordinating messages also contributes to reducing voter confusion, especially for translated materials. Using the official translations and terminology is important to ensure that voters are not confused by varying translations of election terminology. For the Los Angeles Mock Elections, partners used the flyers and videos produced by the RR/CC. These high-quality resources were especially helpful to ensure consistent messaging and reduced the load from community organizations having to translate materials themselves.

### [Collect information to improving future elections](#)

A unique feature of the Voter's Choice Act is that it requires review and public comment of a county's election administration plan continuously. The Act requires that the plan be revisited two years after the first VCA election and then every four years thereafter.



Additionally, elections offices solicit public comment and must post their plans for the public before adopting a final plan.

Organizations should therefore collect information on the voter experience of their communities to inform future revisions of the election administration plan. Specifically, information on the locations of vote centers, ballot drop boxes, and media outlets are important to help improve the voter experience for future elections.

However, in Los Angeles County you do not have to wait until the County reviews their administration plan. The Los Angeles County RR/CC has several community committees where organizations can participate year-round and help inform the election experience. These groups are the Community and Voter Outreach Committee, the Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Language Accessibility Advisory Committee.

## Conclusion

Los Angeles County's new voting experience truly transforms and modernizes elections. The positive reviews given by voters at the Mock Election demonstrate that Los Angeles voters are ready for change and a voting model that adapts to their needs. Transitioning to a new voting model is never easy but the promise of a fully accessible voting system that meets the needs of every voter is overdue.

The key to successful implementation of Los Angeles' new voting model is a strong voter education program that focuses on the key messages of convenience and early voting and reaches widely to every corner of our vast county. Voters must learn about their new voting options for voting on weekends and voting anywhere in the county, whether it is near their place of work or by their child's school.

Los Angeles County is too large and too diverse for any one organization or government agency to do this voter education work alone. As organizations committed to ensuring every voter can cast their ballot this election season, we must work in partnership to ensure every eligible Los Angeles voter learns about their new, modern and inclusive voting system.



## Additional Resources

### **Voter's Choice Los Angeles Resources**

Main website for Los Angeles [voterschoice.org/la/](https://voterschoice.org/la/)

### **Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk Resources**

Main website [lavote.net](https://lavote.net)

Community and Voter Outreach Committee <https://www.lavote.net/home/voting-elections/community-voter-outreach/community-voter-outreach-committee>

Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee <https://www.lavote.net/home/voting-elections/community-voter-outreach/voting-accessibility-advisory-committee>

Voting Solutions for All People (VSAP) <https://vsap.lavote.net/>

VSAP Demo Centers <https://www.lavote.net/home/voting-elections/community-voter-outreach/demo-center>

Election Administration Plan <https://vsap.lavote.net/election-administration-plan/>

LA County Mock Election <https://www.lavote.net/home/voting-elections/current-elections/mock-election>

### **Disability Rights California**

Los Angeles County Mock Election Vote Center Monitoring Report Fall 2019

<https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/post/los-angeles-county-mock-election-vote-center-monitoring-report-fall-2019>