

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the COVID-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenges, my office has been committed to administering secure, transparent elections while successfully maintaining public health guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local officials.

For the April 7, 2020 City of Westminster Special Recall Election, the Governor's executive order providing direction to conduct the election as an all-mail ballot election was issued after election materials were already mailed out to voters. My office responded quickly to streamline our operation to follow the order, including cancellation of in-person voting, public closure of our office, physical distancing, and public notices to inform the public of the changes. Having the experience of already pivoting quickly to adjust election operations, we were well prepared to successfully conduct the May 19, 2020 City of Santa Ana Special Recall Election as an all-mail ballot election once the Governor issued a similar subsequent Executive Order. Beyond that, my office was able to continue implementing public health measures during the recount of the City of Westminster Special Recall Election and risk-limiting audits in May and June of 2020.

With our experience conducting two elections in the COVID-19 environment and our preparations for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election, this COVID-19 Report provides a basic overview of what changes are necessary in order to safely conduct the election while maintaining adequate services for voters in a manner that is aligned with transparency and integrity. This report will go over how the Orange County Registrar intends to implement the following:

- A reduction from 11 days to 5 days for in-person voting at Vote Centers.
- Health and safety practices designed to keep Vote Center Customer Service Representatives and voters safe in accordance with state and county public health standards.
- Steps voters can take to ensure they vote and return their ballot safely.
- Additional language coverage for education and outreach required under California Elections Code Section 14201.

I reaffirm my commitment to prioritize the protection of the health and safety of voters and staff while providing access to voting in a fair and transparent manner with integrity.

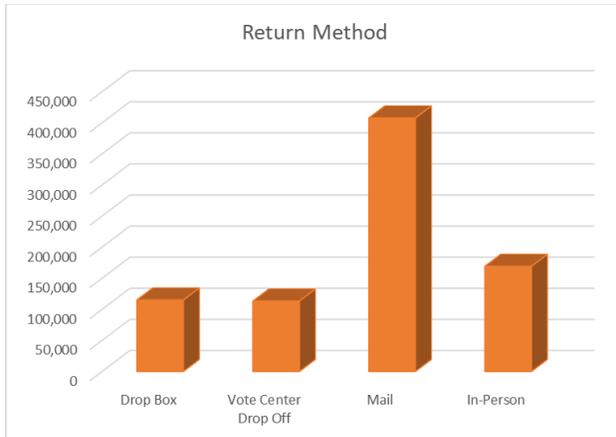
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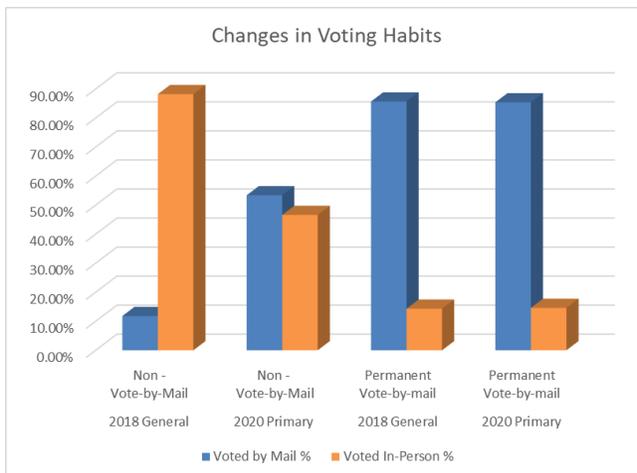
Neal Kelley
Registrar of Voters
Orange County, CA

Supporting Evidence for the Reduction of 11 Days of In-Person Voting to 5 Days

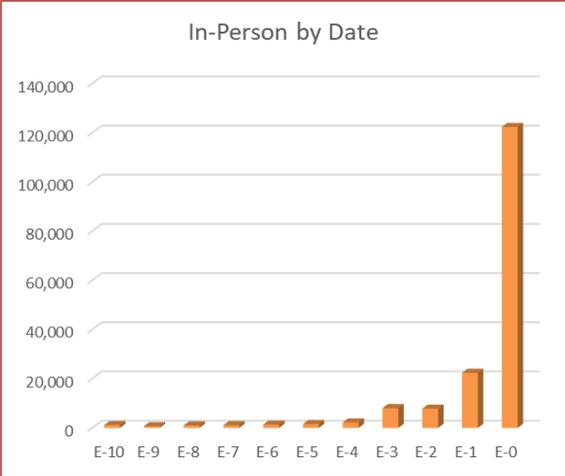
For the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election, the Orange County Registrar of Voters (OCROV) conducted its first countywide election under the Vote Center model. Analysis of voter turnout showed that the transition to Vote Centers was positively received by voters. In fact, turnout for this election (50.1%) was the highest for a presidential primary election since 2000. Additionally, 82% of voters opted to vote by mail as opposed to 18% choosing to vote at an in-person voting location.



In comparison to past major elections, trends show that the voting by mail is becoming more popular and utilized among voters even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Despite having fewer in-person voting locations, voters exercised their ability to vote at any Vote Center and on days leading up to Election Day. Few voters visited Vote Centers during the first seven days of early voting and waited until the last weekend prior to Election Day to cast their ballot. There are several explanations such as waiting for political activities to occur and feeling a sense of urgency as the last day to cast a ballot nears.



Given the uncertainty of what will change between now and Election Day, OCROV is taking proactive steps and analyzing voter patterns to best serve voters in order provide a positive voting experience. Based on the analysis of voting patterns, OCROV's request for a partial waiver to only operate Vote Centers four days prior to Election Day balances supporting in-person voting and minimizing unnecessary exposure to Vote Center staff when there will be very minimal demand for in-person voting.

Vote Center Health and Safety Best Practices

Despite the requirements now in place due to COVID-19, the facility recruitment process has traditionally favored facilities with larger rooms. With physical distancing guidelines, the need to secure larger spaces is critical to ensuring the safety of staff and voters. In the early phase of recruitment, OCROV will work closely with municipal partners and public agencies to identify all available facilities.

In addition to identifying larger voting rooms, OCROV will also pursue facilities that have large parking lots to accommodate drive-thru ballot drop off options, which supports physical distancing and creates more options for voters to return their ballot. Additionally, facilities that can offer ample open space outside of a voting room's entrance are desirable as it allows voters to maintain proper physical distancing while waiting in line. OCROV will also take into consideration whether these facilities have pre-defined COVID-19 guidelines or procedures, such as revised maximum occupancy for the rooms we are pursuing.

Given the challenges raised by COVID-19, OCROV will continue to avoid using facilities that house and offer services to individuals who are at a higher risk for COVID-19, such as senior residential facilities. OCROV also intentionally excludes schools from the facility recruitment process as an ongoing commitment to campus security and instead targets school district offices. However, OCROV will continue to pursue the placement of Vote Centers on university, college, and community college campuses.

Vote Center layouts will need to be sensitive to the accessibility needs of voters, accommodate the varying shapes and sizes of each voting location, and minimum space requirements to allow for physical distancing between each voting station, within the line queuing area, and throughout the entire voting space.

In both the online and in-person components of training, CSRs will be given guidance on how to properly clean and disinfect the Vote Center and voting equipment. Not only will this prepare CSRs to perform these tasks while working at a Vote Center, but it will also keep the training equipment clean for the next CSR and subsequent in-person training classes.

The opening and closing routines will be practiced during in-person training, so training equipment will receive regular cleaning. CSRs will also be advised to regularly wipe down commonly shared or touched surfaces throughout the day. This includes, but is not limited to, handles, styli, check-in tables, voting booths, and screens. Every CSR attendant role should be ready to clean shared surfaces to maintain a safe and healthy environment in training and at Vote Centers.

CSRs will be trained to follow a schedule of cleaning and disinfecting requirements that outlines the areas to disinfect, when to do so, frequency and items to use for cleaning. A daily checklist will be provided to CSRs to use as a guide for each day of the voting period.

To protect voters who may be at higher risk, high-touched surfaces and voting booths will be required to be sanitized between use. This includes high-touch areas such as: ePollbooks, styli, handrails, door handles, modification equipment, printers, printer tables, the headphones and tactile controller on BMDs, and the voting booths. Disposable pens and single-use disposable ear covers for headphones will be provided so that each voter has access to an unused and clean equipment.

Per Elections Code §14201, OCROV is required to provide translated reference ballots at targeted precincts and a sign indicating that translated reference ballots in Tagalog, Farsi (Persian), Japanese, Hindi, and Gujarati are available at targeted precincts. Translated reference ballot will be posted in a binder on a table at every Vote Center and copies will be available as a reference guide for voters. In addition to receiving a translated reference ballot at a Vote Center, voters who indicate a preference for translated election materials in one of the identified languages and is registered to an address that is a targeted precinct will be mailed a translated reference ballot. As a result of COVID-19, translated reference ballots will be laminated so they can easily wiped down and disinfected between use.

In addition, OCROV will implement the following at all Vote Center locations to protect those that might be at higher risk of COVID-19:

- Personal protective equipment for CSRs (hand sanitizer, gloves, face coverings, face shields, tissues)
- Increased signage explaining physical distancing protocols while inside and outside Vote Centers
- Increased opportunities for curbside voting (where possible)
- Opportunities for drive-thru ballot drop off voting
- Cleaning supplies to support periodic disinfecting of all voting equipment including all modification equipment (this may include disinfectant wipes, paper towels, no-touch trashcans, fabric disinfectant)
- Disposable items to minimize multiple contacts between voters (ear covers for headphones, pens, secrecy folders)
- Hand sanitizer will be available
- “I Voted” sticker dispenser to eliminate a CSR having to manually hand out to voters or left out as a roll for many voters to touch
- Promotion of digital resources such as the VIG and Sample Ballot

As outlined above, OCROV will be making all necessary adjustments to Vote Center operations to prioritize the health and safety of staff and voters in order to offer safe, accessible, and secure in-person voting options in the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election.

Safe Voting Options

Vote-By-Mail

Every registered voter in California will receive a vote-by-mail ballot per Assembly Bill 860. Orange County acquired equipment and updated its operations for the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election to successfully mail a ballot to every voter. OCROV has the necessary equipment and experience to do so again for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election.

Vote-by-mail ballot mailing will begin on Tuesday, October 5, 2020 and be completed within five days. To check on the status of their ballot, voters may utilize OCROV's ballot tracking system, OC Ballot Express, for real-time updates on when their ballot leaves OCROV, is received by the US Postal Service, out for delivery, on its way back to OCROV, and whether it has been processed and accepted. Notifications can be received by email or text depending on the voter's preference.

Remote Accessible Vote-By-Mail

The passage of Assembly Bill 860 permits any voter to cast their ballots through Remote Accessible Vote-By-Mail (RAVBM) system whereas it was previously limited to voters with disabilities, overseas voters, and military voters. As such, messaging to voters will change to inform them of this voting option. During a recent special election, RAVBM messaging was changed to: "the Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail ballot provides voters with disabilities, those with medical impacts due to COVID-19, and overseas voters the option to request a vote- by-mail ballot to be delivered electronically." While this messaging was helpful, the messaging will need to be altered to remove the word "medical" for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. This will ease any confusion that a voter must only be under quarantine or have COVID-19 in order to utilize this voting option.

It is important that voters be able to find RAVBM information easily on the OCROV website. OCROV is exploring developing more simplified messaging that is included with any communication sent out on RAVBM; for example, "Access, print, mark and mail your ballot all from home by using RAVBM." Clear and concise messaging will be provided in the Voter Information Guide (VIG), on our website, on the RAVBM portal, and on our social media platforms. Potential other educational materials, such as videos and informational flyers could be developed and shared to OCROV social media platforms and sent out to our accessibility partners for additional outreach.

Ballot Drop Off Boxes

Voters will have the ability to drop off their ballot at 110+ ballot drop boxes conveniently located throughout Orange County that will be open to the public 24/7 after ballots are mailed. Nearly all ballot drop boxes will be sited at the same locations that voters used in the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election. Additionally, the list of ballot drop boxes will be listed in the Voter Information Guide and online at ocvote.com.

When picking up ballots from ballot drop boxes, each Ballot Collection Team will carry cleaning supplies to clean the Ballot Drop Box. This includes an all-purpose spray cleaner, isopropyl alcohol, cleaning rags, a cleaning sponge and nitrile gloves. The ballots are loaded into the vehicle while observed by both staff members. The team is always maintaining radio contact with OCROV when they arrive and depart from the ballot drop box location.

In-Person Voting at Vote Centers

On the steps OCROV is taking to promote health and safety at in-person voting locations, please refer to the previous section on Vote Center Health and Safety Best Practices.

Education and Outreach to Language Communities

Orange County's diverse communities receive news updates and information from a variety of sources, including language media outlets. OCROV has dedicated full-time staff to serve as liaisons to language communities and have developed strong relationships with language media partners in communities that speak Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Farsi (Persian), Tagalog, Gujarati, Hindi, and Japanese. Information on the upcoming election and the toll-free voter assistance hotline will be shared with language media partners.

OCROV is developing a suite of over 70 videos of varying lengths and themes (translated in all required languages). The videos will be informational as well as instructional such as notifying voters of the date of the election and different options for returning a ballot. Filming will take place at various sites throughout Orange County, showcasing a sample Vote Center layout while observing physical distancing and how voters can safely cast and return their ballot. The videos will be open-captioned and be in accessible formats to be inclusive of voters who are hard of hearing or deaf and voters who are blind or visually impaired. Additionally, videos will be audio-recorded in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Farsi (Persian), Gujarati, Hindi, and Tagalog. Content will be provided to general media partners and language media partners.

To supplement in-person support to voters requesting language assistance, video conferencing will be available to provide multilingual assistance at all Vote Centers. This will ensure that voters needing language assistance will be able to interact with trained bilingual staff who can verbally and visually guide the voter to meaningfully participate in the voting process, even if there is not bilingual staff physically present at the Vote Center. Telephone support will also be available depending on the preference of the requesting voter.

Lastly, OCROV will host bilingual workshops with community partners (in English and/or in-language when possible) per Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act and Elections Code Section 14201 over August and September 2020 to inform language communities of the upcoming changes to voting and elections for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Potential community partners have been identified and planning is in process at the time of publication.

Presentations created for the bilingual workshops will also be used for subsequent community presentations to enhance outreach to language communities.

Conclusion

As of this publication, planning is already significantly underway, and changes are happening quickly as government entities such as the Secretary of State releases additional guidance and more is known about COVID-19. With limited time to secure in-person voting locations, prepare equipment, and acquire materials and supplies, we believe our analysis and efforts build a strong case that in-person voting needs will be met through five days of Vote Center operations at all sites.

Additional efforts to protect the health and safety of voters and staff will be implemented as new challenges arise and situations change. Based on what is known and can be projected, OCROV proactively sought to position Orange County in response to the public health challenges during this rapidly changing crisis through the following:

- Providing one-time use supplies for in-person voting, such as pens, disinfectant wipes and face coverings for voters to promote health and safety
- Arranging virtual opportunities for candidates and members of the public to receive services and information
- Developing methods for the public to safely observe the elections process either at home or at the office
- Creating remote learning opportunities for Vote Center staff and reconfiguring in-person training to meet physical distancing and safety guidelines
- Complying with physical distancing through public access requirements, making appointments available for assistance
- Implementing a comprehensive media and outreach plan to inform the public of the changes to voting and elections and how to safely cast and return a ballot

With our experience conducting two elections in the COVID-19 environment and our preparations for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election, it is our belief that flexibility and modifications are necessary in order to safely conduct the election while maintaining adequate services for voters in a manner that is aligned with transparency and integrity.