Running Elections During A Global Pandemic
Two Overarching Goals

- Protect Vermonter’s health and safety during the pandemic.
- Protect Vermonter’s ability to exercise their Constitutional right to vote.
“(a) In the year 2020, the Secretary of State is authorized, in consultation and agreement with the Governor, to order or permit, as applicable, appropriate elections procedures for the purpose of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of voters, elections workers, and candidates in carrying out elections, . . . “
July 20, 2020

First Statewide Elections Directive

Election Procedures for Statewide Elections in 2020

Pursuant to the authority granted in Act 92 (2020) and Act 135, (2020) the Secretary of State issues the below Directive for the 2020 primary and general elections.

This Directive reflects our best effort to balance every Vermonter’s constitutional right to vote with the health and safety concerns we all share in these unprecedented and unpredictable times during this COVID-19 health crisis.

Further, this Directive departs as little as possible from our voting traditions and our safe and secure voting processes while proactively ensuring no Vermonter has to choose between their health and their right to vote.

The intent of this Directive is not to cast doubt upon our recovery prospects - we have no way of knowing what the coming months will bring. However, we do know if there is a resurgence a few months from now, as we are already seeing, it will be too late to act to avoid compromising Vermonters’ health and the exercise of their sacred franchise.

Notwithstanding any provisions of law contained in Title 17 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated to the contrary, and pursuant to the authority granted to the Secretary of State by Act 92 (2020) and Act 135 (2020), the Secretary of State issues the following directive with regards to election processes for the August Statewide Primary and November General Election in the year 2020:
About 440,000 active voters

Ballots mailed centrally by our office and returned by voters to the 246 town clerks.

Postage paid in both directions

275 distinct ballot styles shared among/within towns.

Each voter needed correct ballot paired with correct clerk return address.
Other Provisions

- Early processing of ballots into ballot box or tabulator.
- Use of secure drop boxes.
- Drive-thru polling places.
- Outdoor polling places.
- Emergency Change of Polling Place Locations.
- Appointing Election Officials who aren’t voters.
August Statewide Primary

August Primary:

Historical Turnout Rates:

- 2012: 12%  17% AB
- 2014: 9%   15% AB
- 2016: 26%  19% AB
- 2018: 22%  16% AB
- **2020: 34% 73% AB**  --  169,000 total votes, 123,000 of those absentee
November General Election

November General:

Historical turnout rates:

- 2012: 65% 25%AB
- 2014: 45% 17%AB
- 2016: 68% 30%AB
- 2018: 56% 26%AB
- 2020: 74% 75%AB -- 371,000 total votes, 280,000 of those absentee
Why Did It Work?

- Keeping it local/simple/Vermont style –
  - Blending current process with the mailing.
  - No bells and whistles
  - Only what was necessary to accomplish our two goals

- Partnerships
  - USPS – envelope design; postage; logistics; incident response; Election Day efforts/communication.
  - Clerks – from day one the message was teamwork/cooperation/and support for each other and the SoS. Nothing more vital to the success.
  - Vendors – Envelopes; Ballots; mail house; PPE; letter openers – each one stepped up and took on tasks they don’t normally perform.
  - State colleagues: DOH, SEOC, AG, and law enforcement