



MEDIA RELEASE

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Independent review of March election recommends stronger oversight, training and technology testing

A range of software, staffing and vendor-management issues resulted in unnecessarily long wait times for some Los Angeles County voters in the March 3rd primary, according to an independent review of the county's new Voting Solutions for All People election system.

The report noted that the county's new system, which was 10 years in the making, was a "highly ambitious project that dramatically changed the experience of voting in the nation's most populous county." The new system received high marks from a majority of voters, but many others experienced hours-long wait times.

Breakdowns in new technology systems, a lack of trained election workers and technical support staff, and insufficient oversight of outside vendors were the root causes of the delays, according to Slalom Consulting LLC, a Seattle-based business and technology consulting firm.

"Design and testing issues with the voter check-in technology caused the system to freeze frequently, resulting in long delays and bottlenecks during check-in at Vote Centers," the report said. As a result, election workers had to provide provisional ballots to many voters who otherwise would have been permitted to vote in the traditional manner.

There also were shortages of electronic poll books and election workers, along with insufficient information technology and call center staff to respond to the heavy demand for technical assistance with the new system.

The review was commissioned by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in March. The Board also asked the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) to conduct an internal investigation to determine the causes of the wait times at some voting centers. That [internal report](#) identifies a series of improvements underway in advance of the November election, in collaboration with the Secretary of State and a broad range of community stakeholders. Slalom was commissioned to independently review all issues presented during the 2020 primary elections and review the RR/CC report and action plan.

The two reports came to similar conclusions about the causes of the delays.

The debut of the new voting system in March ushered in a number of simultaneous changes: new voting machines and technology, a shift from neighborhood polling places to larger Vote Centers, and an expanded 11-day voting period in which voters could cast ballots at any voting location in the County.

To address the issues that arose during the primary, Slalom validated the corrective actions and findings in the RR/CC report and highlighted additional recommendations, including:

- Select Vote Center sites and begin staff recruitment earlier—up to a year before major elections
- Implement more monitoring and testing of electronic equipment in advance of an election, along with more training of technical staff and Vote Center workers

- Require stronger oversight and management of the vendors hired to run the system, particularly in the areas of technology, call-center support, transportation and logistics and voter outreach
- Enlist professional communications assistance to develop better ways to reach and educate voters about the new system

The consultants also reviewed the expansion of the County’s Vote by Mail efforts, which have taken on greater urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to public health concerns and distancing requirements, the Board of Supervisors has directed the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk to send a Vote by Mail ballot to every registered voter in Los Angeles County for the November general election. In its review of the Vote by Mail expansion, Slalom recommended improved vendor management as well as a robust cost planning process to assess a wide range of variables.

The study was conducted over seven weeks, and included interviews with more than 50 county stakeholders and Vote Center workers, surveys of more than 250 voters, and a review of extensive performance data collected during the election.

Despite the challenges during the primary, Slalom said that the County is committed to implementing recommendations to improve the process: “With improved Vote Center staffing approaches and training, increased technology capacity, more effective communications and outreach, and stronger vendor management, Los Angeles County can enhance the voter experience and election systems for November 2020 and beyond.”

In addition to providing a Vote by Mail ballot to all eligible registered voters, a number of other improvements are underway to ensure access and success in November, including:

- Increasing oversight, adding requirements and monitoring vendor performance to ensure improved performance and accountability
- Improving performance and rigorously testing the ePollBooks used to check-in voters including new, streamlined voter look-up features and increasing the number of devices provided at each voting location
- Revamping the specifications for Vote Center selection focusing on larger spaces with more capacity for equipment, staffing and queuing responsive to new requirements for social distancing
- Providing new tools for voters to track wait times at Vote Centers and identify in advance locations with shorter wait times
- Expanding technical support resources onsite at each Vote Center
- Executing a comprehensive, multi-cultural voter outreach and education campaign to ensure voters are well informed of their voting options and available support services

An executive summary of Slalom’s findings and recommendations can be found [here](#).

A copy of the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk’s report and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors can be found [here](#).

Contact: Sylvia Boyadzhyan, Communications Manager
Chief Executive Office/Office of the Chief Information Officer
Email: sboyadzhyan@cio.lacounty.gov



County of Los Angeles, Chief Executive Office | 500 W. Temple St, Los Angeles, CA 90012



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