

# CN

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# Work at the local level vital for success of 2020 election

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Discussions about the 2020 election typically gloss over the fact that it will be the sum of thousands of moving parts. The individual counties conducting the elections in hundreds of polling places will face challenges and changes as they gear up for a high-turnout year.

Los Angeles County's voting experience hasn't been that different than the end of the Johnson administration, when punch cards were introduced

in 1968. That's going to change when voters in the nation's most populous county, with 5.4 million registered voters, get the choice of 11 days to cast their votes from any polling place in the county.

"It's about moving to where (the voters) are," County Registrar/Recorder Dean Logan said

while participating in a recent panel discussion held by the Election Assistance Commission. "I think there's no doubt we're going to have unprecedented turnout in November."

"(We're) moving away from a system where the voters need to seek out the voting experience and actually approaching

it from the standpoint of being visible in the community over the course of that 11 days so that when voters have that intrinsic movement, desire to have their voice heard...they're going to see that there's a place they can go in and cast their ballot and

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## CDC: Prep for 'social distancing' to combat potential coronavirus

# Poll worker recruitment is key to county election administration

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have their voice heard."

The longer voting period allows election workers to train on the job in the first few days and be ready to handle more responsibility as Election Day approaches.

"What's exciting is that it addresses a lot of the challenges we've seen on Election Day in the past," he said. "It gives us that full 10-day period to predict and see and react rather than on a single day."

Logan said his office spent 10 years of study gathering data and designing the new system, which should reduce the number of provisional ballots cast, which happened most commonly because a voter went to the wrong polling place. And this year, eligible inmates will be able to cast ballots from inside the county jail, rather than voting by mail. That will be available to more than 2,000 inmates who have retained their voting rights. Cook County, Ill. will also



Los Angeles County, Calif. Registrar-Recorder/Clerk Dean Logan speaks during a recent Election Assistance Commission panel at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. From left, EAC Commissioner Donald Palmer; Logan; Navajo County, Ariz. Recorder Doris Clark; Sarasota County, Fla. Supervisor of Elections Ron Turner; Cook County, Ill.; Clerk Karen Yarbrough and Fairfax County, Va. General Registrar and Director of Elections Gary Scott. Photo by Ron Sachs, Consolidated News Photos, courtesy of the Election Assistance Commission

bring voting machines into its jail this year.

The machines are new, and Cook County Clerk Karen Yarbrough has a good feeling about them, after her office used some of them in a pilot project in 2019.

"The experience for our area was good, so good that one of the people who voted said, 'I love the machines, I want to

marry the machine,'" she said.

Running all of these operations typically falls to poll workers, and Gary Scott, Fairfax County, Va.'s general registrar and director of elections, said that's a hot topic among his colleagues.

"Like everyone else we have a problem recruiting and retaining election officers," he said, recounting a conference where a fellow registrar described the average age of an election officer as "deceased."

"How lucky you are, ours have generally been dead for three years," he recalled thinking.

Scott recruits from local high

moving to year-round recruiting for poll workers.

"We have a number of elections workers who stay with us through several election cycles because they like what they do," he said. "I don't think it's necessarily because they enjoy the 15- or 16-hour days and the large pay that we give them," he joked, "but I do think that they enjoy a sense of civic pride in carrying out their jobs."

Reaching voters means speaking to them in a language they understand. Navajo County, Ariz. has been undergoing a continuous process to make sure its 76,000 registered

process," Clark said.

Fairfax County's population is diverse, and that creates another hurdle for Scott's poll worker recruitment.

"It's a difficult sell for us to go into those communities because the cultural background is different than ours. For many of them, being from the government is an item of suspicion."

Ron Turner pointed out that Sarasota County, Fla. essentially has three Election Day operations. He's the supervisor of elections there.

"We have early voting, vote by mail and Election Day voting," he said. "It's about one-third

Scott recruits from local high schools and universities, but it's hard.

"Trying to bring younger people into the election officer pool is a big challenge," he said.

Adding to that, Virginia has a general election every year, so election work is an even heavier load. Scott did say the state's county registrars opposed a state bill to select election workers the same way jury pools are elected.

"We don't want any non-volunteers working in our elections," he said.

Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Ron Turner said his office has found good results

make sure its 76,000 registered voters, spread out over nearly 10,000 square miles and as members of 20 different native American tribes, can all have access to voter education.

"To this day, there are still people out there that don't have electricity and running water," said Recorder Doris Clark. "We can't advertise on TV, but every home has a battery-operated radio."

Because those messages will be coming from a single place, the county needed to develop a consistent glossary so the terminology used in communications would be consistent.

"Reviewing that is an ongoing

he said. "It's about one-third in each. We have a number of poll workers who stay with us through several election cycles."

Turner noted that a court order requiring 32 counties to provide language assistance was an opportunity to do their jobs well.

"We try to embrace it in a positive way," he said. "We're helping voters, we're helping those with limited language ability... this is the positive change for us and we're in the customer service business, that's how we have to look at this, not as a purely bureaucratic function. These are our customers. We want repeat customers." **CN**