

AK EPWG 1/30 Meeting Notes

Attendees

EPWG Members

- Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott
- Mead Treadwell, Fmr. Lt. Gov.
- Liz Medicine Crow, First Alaskans Institute
- David Becker, The Center for Election Innovation & Research
- Jacob Kipp, The Center for Election Innovation & Research
- Bruce Botelho, Self
- John Shively, Self
- Joyce Anderson, League of Women Voters
- Johni Blankenship, Kenai Peninsula Borough Clerk
- Nanci Ashford-Bingham, Fairbanks North Star Borough Clerk
- Cindy Allred, ANCSA CEOS
- Joelle Hall, LABOR
- Roy Mitchell, DCRA Language Preservation Council
- Marna Sanford, Tanana Chiefs
- John Lindback, ERIC
- Laurie Sica, City & Borough of Juneau Clerk
- Kacie Paxton, Ketchikan Gateway Borough Clerk
- Senator Gary Stevens
- Josie Bahnke, DOE Director
- Lauri Wilson, DOE Election Supervisor
- Carol Thompson, DOE A&P Manager
- Shelly Growden, DOE Project Manager
- Claire Richardson, Chief of Staff, Office of the Lt. Gov.
- Indra Arriaga, DOE Language Compliance Manager
- Libby Bakalar, AAG
- Julie Husmann, DOE Election Supervisor
- Brian Jackson, DOE Election Program Manager

Other Attendees

- Sara Peterson, Sitka City Clerk
- Sharon Hildebrand, Doyon Village Outreach Coordinator
- Evan Anderson, Alaska Center
- Beverly Christie, USPS BME Manager
- Tito Tungul, USPS AK Supervisor
- Dawn Peppinger, USPS AK Marketing Manager
- Eli White, Office of Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins
- Griffin Plush, Office of Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins
- Catherine Schlingheyde, Office of Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins
- Tara Rich, ACLU

- Michaela Thompson, DOE
- Beth McKewen, City & Borough of Juneau
- James Brooks, Juneau Empire
- Sara Race, PFDD Director
- Anne Weske, PFDD Operations

Welcome

- Breakdown of agenda (Josie)
- Lt. Governor's opening remarks
- David Becker's opening remarks

Memo (Improving Alaskan Elections: 2018 and Beyond)

- Guiding Principles
 - Maximized Accessibility
 - all have access regardless of ability, cultural background, age, etc.
 - Coordination & Buy-in
 - Voter Satisfaction & Confidence
 - Tough; used to be linked to partisanship (e.g., if a republican won, republicans satisfied/confident)
 - Changing now - even partisan win doesn't necessarily result in greater confidence
 - Security & Integrity
 - Bad narrative going around that nothing has changed since 2016 and election officials don't care
 - ◆ False: been talking about this since May, there's been significant advancement and election officials have been leading the way
 - ◆ Integrity: maintenance of accurate, accessible voter lists
 - Voter Outreach
 - Problem: voters don't think about elections until it's already on top of them
 - Cost Effectiveness
 - Longevity in the Solution
 - 10+ years
- Comments/Questions?
 - Sen. Stevens
 - need youth education (importance of voting)
 - One of the failures of our country: people don't vote, especially young people
 - One effort in place: DOE advertising and regional offices are supporting
 - David Becker:
 - ◆ Turnout among youth lowest since 1972 (when 18 y/o given right to vote); turnout also down especially for non-presidential year elections
 - ◆ This is all despite voting being easier now than ever before
 - Accessibility is necessary and creates the environment for turnout, but accessibility itself does not drive turnout

- ◆ Defining success by whether turnout has increased is setting yourself up for failure - should look at more closely related metrics (e.g., voter satisfaction, efficiency, etc.)
- ◆ Attitudes about voting
 - No one thing appears to change voter turnout
 - Few longitudinal studies look into this
 - Washington Post article about study that “proves” the CO model improves turnout is problematic - study doesn’t use a control group
- Some groups are shooting for 80%+ voter turnout; David sees that as unrealistic, instead suggesting 40% as a more realistic goal
- Liz Medicine Crow
 - ◆ Why not develop ideas with a youth council? (Youth council as an incubator)
 - ◆ Significant disengagement among young people
 - ◆ David Becker: previous research did focus groups with young people
 - when asked about what it means to be a citizen, those groups never suggested voting as an answer
 - ◆ Indra
 - Looking at ISER focus groups in Bethel
 - Youth focus group was one of the things on the table
- Libby
 - ◆ To what extent is turnout driven by candidates?
 - ◆ David: this happens but we don’t focus on this b/c there are other things that can impact turnout
- What about other changes to how elections are run/decided?
 - ◆ E.g., ranked choice, none of the above option
 - ◆ Can introduce voter confusion

PFD Update

- Carol
 - Nearly done w/ 2017 implementation
 - 27,300 manually processed
 - 15,589 new registered voters
 - 11,108 updated
 - remaining were commercial addresses or some other problematic address (those voters were written to for clarification)
 - 2947 opt outs
 - 1188 of those were current existing voters
 - 1759 of those could not be tracked to a registered voter
 - In 2018
 - Getting list from PFDD as the year goes on
 - Looking for ways to improve managing data
 - Seeking opt out legislation to permit electronic opt out

- Josie
 - 2018 plan: fully implement PFD automatic voter registration
 - get all voters updated and registered well before primary
 - long-term cost savings would be around \$200k/year
- Sarah & Anne, PFDD
 - reviewed proposed legislation
 - Support giving people the option of opt out up front
 - Eliminates administrative cost
 - working with DOE to work out kinks
- David: has seen similar work in other states and this is entirely normal - nobody gets it 100% right the first time
- Joelle
 - volunteer to help advocate for bill passage
 - encourage use of separate, non-governmental entity that can help push things along
 - Want to coordinate advocacy efforts
 - Offline conversation to decide who to bring to the table
 - Voter turnout issue likely to come up in discussing PFD AVR
 - Important to remind them that the numbers might go down because of the increase in registered voters
 - David: recommend *not* use registered voters as the denominator - instead, use *eligible voting age population* (US Election Project)
 - ◆ If voter turnout does not increase, does not mean this is a failure
- Libby Bakalar
 - Likely intro'd as governor's bill
- Kacie
 - Can draft legislation be shared?
 - Josie: EPWG packet is online; correct/updated version of draft legislation will be sent out by email
- Sen. Stevens
 - Time is of the essence
 - With procedural hurdles, could take some time
 - 2 weeks passed of 12 weeks total for legislative session
 - legislation likely to go through 3 committees
 - Josie: wanted comments/blessing of EPWG before moving forward

Memo Conclusions (continue from before PFD Update)

- Replace aging voting systems
 - CO framework modified as necessary to fit Alaska seems to be where we're going
 - Done by 2020
 - Joelle: what's the strategy to pass through the legislature?
 - Josie: one action to be taken in 2018 is to identify legislative changes necessary (a list of specific statutes that will need to be changed is starting to be collected)
 - Joelle: 2020 is not reasonable (don't see how could be passed in one session)

- Josie: plan for this session is to advocate for replacing the voting system while also doing the PFVR work
 - Joelle: we should have a plan B (alternative timeframe)
 - David: there will also be new federal VVSG coming soon, may change the voting systems vendors have available
 - Claire: April 3 in Anchorage will be a huge turning point
 - ◆ If it works, likely opens legislators
 - Regarding scheduling vendor demonstrations
 - Sen. Stevens
 - ◆ Apr. 15 is last day of legislative session
 - ◆ Hard to get their attention/attendance close to the end
 - Vendor demonstration details
 - ◆ Audience
 - EPWG
 - Election officials
 - Legislators
 - ◆ Timing
 - Juneau first week of April?
 - Anchorage in May?
 - Both Juneau and Anchorage over two days?
 - ◆ Determine scheduling offline
- Unified voting experience for Alaskans
 - similar experience regardless of ability, language, etc.
 - Clerks' perspective
 - Waiting to hear what's going to happen statewide so decisions can be made locally
 - Unified voter experience & the next conclusion ("If it doesn't work for rural Alaska") go hand in hand
 - Will it be possible to have the same experience locally as statewide?
 - ◆ David: if locals don't want to do the same thing, that introduces a different issue
 - ◆ Purpose of these talks is to try to get as much local buy-in as possible at an early stage - hopefully locals will like and implement the solution
 - Bruce: viewing this as aspirational makes sense; may not be possible to implement single unified system in short term, but long-term should be the goal
 - ◆ David: also helps with RFP process when looking to buy new system - gives vendors something to work toward
 - What's the legal process when local law requires use of specific equipment that the state no longer provides?
 - David: similar thing happened when HAVA passed in 2002
 - ◆ many systems were not compliant at that time (e.g., NY mechanical pull lever machines were still in use)

- ◆ do not want to get into a system where local and state officials and laws are in contention
 - Bruce example of possible problem: Fairbanks has already resisted switching to vote by mail; they would probably want to stick with the same machines
 - Laurie: not all localities use optical scan systems (e.g., some count by hand)
 - David: is there some form of preemption in Alaska?
 - ◆ Regardless, want buy in from localities (but may not be realistic - constituencies' points of view may not be resolvable)
 - ◆ Tara: localities *don't have to follow the state's direction* - don't have to worry about preemption or something along those lines
 - David: Regardless of the practicalities, we can agree on the desirability of having a unified voter experience
- Mead Treadwell: concern about voting by mail - can't change your vote if you've already voted
 - Some states allow voters to replace a previously cast ballot (for the same election), but this is not common
 - AK will not allow voters to replace a previously cast ballot; same as existing absentee voting
- John Shively: how to make sure that the person claiming to be the voter is actually the voter
 - David: variety of ways, e.g. signature verification
 - John Lindback: re. Signature verification
 - ◆ Needs to be rigorous for vote by mail (plenty of examples around country - no need for AK to reinvent the wheel)
 - ◆ Process for verification needs to stand up to legal scrutiny (if you throw out a ballot, you need to be able to clearly indicate why)
- Has to work for Rural Alaska
 - Must be robust in-person voting option (we haven't yet specified what this means because we're waiting on ISER research results)
 - Details will likely be largely left up to those who know their voters best
- Actions to be taken in 2018
 - ISER research
 - Demonstration of election equipment
 - Legislative changes to improve PFD AVR
 - Cost analysis of EPWG recommendations (helpful for showing legislators that actions are being taken as good stewards of AK money)
 - Identify legislative changes needed for EPWG recommendations
 - Keep momentum going - 2020 aspirational goal is tight, but need to keep pushing forward
- Comments?
 - Sen. Stevens: what if a community knows it only wants to vote in person?
 - ◆ David: don't deal with this on a community by community basis; instead allow individual voters to decide

- E.g., on voter registration form, allow to check “prefer to vote in person” (code it as part of voter file)
 - ◆ Laurie: already an option in many locations to vote at absentee location instead of polling place
 - ◆ David: only change here is where a voter receives his/her ballot
- Liz: possible confusion in using “Voting Center” - should we keep calling it a “precinct” instead?
 - ◆ David
 - Doesn’t matter what you call it, but may want to differentiate from past ‘precincts’
 - As it stands, a voter can vote at one precinct/poll center; new system will allow voter to vote at any location within a given area
 - ◆ Liz: maybe more of a rebrand then
 - ◆ Josie: In CO, they’re called Voter Service and Polling Centers
 - ◆ Liz: nobody understood “Absentee in Person Voting” - focus on what works for them rather than what we want to call them
 - ◆ Libby: polling place is a tradition for rural Alaska; central civic role to consider
 - ◆ David: For all of the terms we’re talking about, we should approach from the view of the voter
- John Lindback: what’s the plan for rural Alaska under the proposed plan?
 - ◆ David: rural Alaskan voters, just like all Alaskans, would receive ballots in the mail
 - Have not figured out what a “robust in-person voting option” looks like for rural Alaska as compared to more urban areas
 - ISER research should help inform this
 - Libby: must continue to honor state’s Section 203 obligations
- John Lindback: want to avoid situation where voters are jumping between voting systems (e.g., Anchorage voters this cycle - Anchorage implementing by mail then forced to use outdated system in next election)
 - ◆ David: good research opportunity - judge voter confusion, satisfaction, etc. when made to switch between election systems
- Bruce
 - ◆ Discussion should be had re. what the role of the state in primaries is
- When is EPWG making formal recommendations?
 - ◆ Josie: aiming for May

ISER Research

- Survey
 - Bethel and Dillingham
 - Survey instrument is in the packet
 - ISER review board met on January 19, Survey was approved
 - ISER is now rolling w/ it, moving on to the next phase

- Not able to accommodate Yup'ik due to time/money constraints
- PFD-verified registered voters were identified to be contacted
- Focus Groups
 - In Bethel
 - Yup'ik speaker will be involved in process
 - Preliminary work will be done this month
 - Looking to finish focus groups by end of March
 - 3 groups
 - With leadership in the region
 - With public
 - With young people
- Language Summit
 - First time, excited about it
 - March 19-20
 - Preliminary agenda likely to change
 - Christy McCormick (EAC) will be attending
 - Room for training on Day 2
 - Registration not live yet
 - Questions
 - Intended audience?
 - ◆ Indra: designed to educate/inform, for anyone who wants to come out; want people from regions that work at polling places (train the trainer training)

Final Comments/Thoughts

- Josie: recognized DOE staff and other support that has been instrumental in powering improvements in election administration
 - Next Meeting: May? (Possibly when doing a vendor demo)
 - EPWG slated to provide formal recommendations in May