

NACIO 2008  
Montana  
Voter Verification  
Government to Citizen

## Executive Summary

Montana's Voter Verification service allows voting officials to verify the identity of voters and voter applicants, as required by the Help America Vote Act, using both the state's driver record database and the Social Security Administration database. This cooperative service allows officials from the Secretary of State's office and all 56 counties to search for information on the Department of Justice's driver record database and the Social Security Administration's database, illustrating a successful collaboration between federal agencies, multiple state agencies, and counties.

The national Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and Montana law requires citizens to present legal identification when registering to vote and at polling stations. The Voter Verification service is an efficient way to make the process easy for hundreds of voters. The collaboration between the Secretary of State's (SOS) office, which oversees the elections processes, the 56 counties, which oversee polling locations and count the ballots, and the Department of Justice (DOJ), which maintains the driver record database and coordinates with the Social Security Administration (SSA), is an innovative way to address the difficulties that the regulations may create. The service allows county elections administrators and the SOS office to validate the identity of a voter by entering the voter's first name, last name, date of birth, and either their driver license number or the last four digits of their social security number. The information is used to search the DOJ's mainframe system and the SSA database for the individual. The service returns a message stating whether the information was verified.

Prior to the HAVA, Montana did not require voters to bring identification to register to vote or to the polls to cast their vote. The change in the law meant that voters who did not bring legal identification could be turned away. HAVA and Montana law provides for a provisional ballot for citizens whose identity cannot be verified when they register to vote or when they arrive to cast their vote. The provisional ballot, however, requires voters to bring identification to their county elections administrator by 5:00 p.m. the day following the election or their ballot will not be counted. Additionally, the provisional ballot must be separated from all other ballots cast on Election Day, then once the county receives verification of the voter's identity they must have the ballot officially counted. The provisional ballots, while necessary for voters, are not very efficient. The Voter Verification service ensures that ballots can be cast and counted when the citizen votes without requiring an additional trip to the county elections administrator or any additional research time from the county staff. In 2005 a law was passed that allows Montana residents to register to vote up to the date of the election instead of 30 days prior to the election. This change in the law creates a new challenge for the county elections officials; many more voters must be registered and verified prior to the election. The Voter Verification service helps make the verification process quick and easy and allows new voters to register and vote in upcoming elections.

## Description

The Voter Verification service is simple and easy to use making it possible for officials to quickly and efficiently verify the voter or voter applicant's information. It is an Internet based service so the only equipment that the county elections administrators need is a computer with Internet access. In order to protect the information and monitor who has access to the information, an assigned username and password is required to enter the service. Once an elections administrator enters a username and password they will be asked to enter the first name, last name, date of birth, and either the Montana driver license number or the last four digits of the Social Security number (SSN) of the individual. The information is used to search for the individual on the Montana driver record and the SSA databases. If the information matches a driver record then the service will display the search criteria, a message stating that the record was verified, and the basic driver record information allowing the election administrator to verify the information. If a match is made on the Social Security Number, the service displays the search criteria and a message stating that the SSN was verified. If the information does not match a driver or a SSN record then the service will display a message that tells the official that the individual was not verified.

The service includes several search tips that may be helpful for the elections administrator as they are using the service. The service also includes contact information for the Secretary of State's help desk clearly provided on the site. Tabs are provided on every page with instructions, search tips, and a feedback form. The Voter Verification service has been designed to meet the Montana eGovernment Service Certification Guidelines and links to the privacy and accessibility statement are clearly published on the website.

## Significance

Montana's Voter Verification service allows voting officials to verify the identity of voters and voter applicants, as required by the Help America Vote Act, using both the state's driver record database and the Social Security Administration database. This cooperative service allows officials from the Secretary of State's office and all 56 counties to search for information on the Department of Justice's driver record database and the Social Security Administration's database, illustrating a successful collaboration between federal agencies, multiple state agencies, and counties.

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### Benefit of Service

Mt.gov did not use a formal return on investment method to assess the Voter Verification service. As with all of the services built by mt.gov, there is a value added benefit for the customer. The Voter Verification service is easy to use, more efficient than the prior validation process, and is another way to verify a voter or voter applicant's identification.

The Montana Voter Verification system was initially used for the state's 2004 primary and over 600 searches were performed. Since that election, the service has been used for both primary and general elections. In April 2008, a new, enhanced version of the Voter Verification service was launched. The enhanced service saw over 7,200 searches in the first two weeks after its launch.

By not paying development costs for the service, the Secretary of State's office saved over \$8500.00. Maintenance and enhancements to the service are also provided at no charge.

The Voter Verification service was required to fulfill HAVA requirements and mt.gov projected that would have 500 searches in the first election after the service went live. In the primary election there were 600 searches performed. The enhanced version of the Voter Verification service was launched on April 30, 2008 after just six weeks of coding and testing. Since its launch, there have been over 7,200 searches. It is estimated that the primary election and the general election will see substantial improvements in the time it takes to verify a voter or voter applicant.

The Voter Verification service was developed and maintained without the use of tax dollars or a state general fund appropriation. This is possible through a public/private alliance between the state of Montana and mt.gov.

