



A. Cover Page

NASCIO 2008 Award Submission

Title: Statewide Voter Registration Database Project

Category: Digital Government – Government to Government

New York State

B. Executive Summary

After the 2000 Presidential Election debacle in Florida, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to ensure more effective elections and reduce voter fraud through improved voting machines and the implementation of statewide voter registration databases. Subsequent NYS HAVA legislation required the NYS Board of Elections (BOE) to implement a “bottom-up” statewide voter registration database whereby counties would maintain their existing county voter registration databases and feed registration data to a statewide database. The statewide database would then cross check the voter registration data with other systems to verify the identity of the voter and assign a statewide voter ID number. Prior to HAVA, county Boards of Elections maintained their own voter registration database with little or no integration with other counties or state agencies (such as the DMV) to identify duplicate voters between counties or to verify that voters were eligible to vote. With HAVA, NYS was required to develop a statewide voter registration database from 62 different counties in NYS. BOE completed this implementation by effectively collaborating with NYS counties and the State of Washington.

BOE considered options ranging from custom building an application to purchasing a COTS package. BOE learned that the State of Washington was building a custom voter registration database and that the county/state “bottom-up” relationship was similar between the two. After conducting a feasibility analysis and engaging county and state stakeholders in the process, the BOE voted to transfer the Washington solution to NYS because of the large degree of fit to NYS requirements.

NYS BOE was able to select an implementer, design, build and test the system (called NYSVoter) and train counties on the new system in one year. NYS was also able to leverage an SOA architecture and the public internet to securely integrate the 62 county voter registration databases in “near real-time” with the statewide voter registration database and other state and federal agencies.

The estimated cost for implementing a statewide voter registration database (including hardware, software, training and services) was \$25M. Actual implementation costs were approximately \$15M.

More important, NYSVoter has transformed the voter registration process in NYS. Key benefits achieved include:

- Improve the integrity of the voter registration process through data-sharing between the state and counties to identify ineligible voters
- Provide on-line reporting and look-up capabilities for counties to determine voter status and investigate potential ineligible voters
- Encourage increased voter participation in the electoral process by providing citizens with an on-line look-up tool to determine their voter status and poll site locations

C. Description

The Business Driver

After the 2000 Presidential Election debacle in Florida, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to ensure more effective elections and reduce voter fraud through improved voting machines and the implementation of statewide voter registration databases. Congress provided Federal funds to assist states with purchasing new voting machines, making poll sites more accessible to handicapped voters and implementing a statewide voter registration database.

The HAVA legislation signaled significant changes to the way states administer elections. First, in New York (NYS) as in most states, the bulk of election administration is conducted at the county-level including establishing and maintaining a voter registration database. With HAVA, the responsibility of maintaining the official voter registration database shifted to the state. This led to significant technology, governance and business process changes for NYS including integrating 62 separate county voter registration databases into one official and uniform statewide voter registration database.

Defining the Future State of Voter Registration in New York – Jointly Addressing the Challenges and Opportunities

Prior to HAVA, county Boards of Elections maintained their own voter registration database with little or no integration with other counties or state agencies (such as the DMV) to identify duplicate voters between counties or to verify that voters were eligible to vote. With HAVA, NYS was required to develop a statewide voter registration database from 62 different counties in NYS.

Based on additional HAVA legislation passed by the NYS Legislature, NYS was further required to implement a “bottom-up” statewide voter registration database whereby counties would maintain their existing county voter registration databases and feed registration data to a statewide database. The statewide database would then cross check the voter registration data with the DMV and Social Security Administration to verify the identity of the voter and assign a statewide voter ID number. This information would then be updated in the county voter registration database.

One of the challenges NYS Board of Elections (BOE) faced was time. The NYS HAVA Law was passed in the summer of 2005 and the Federal law required statewide databases to be implemented by January 1, 2006. There was also a tremendous amount of change management and governance activities that needed to occur in preparation for the implementation because of the traditional role of counties and the new role of the statewide voter registration database as mandated by HAVA.

Another challenge other states have had with implementing statewide voter registration databases is the conflict between the traditional role of counties being responsible for registering voters and the new requirements of HAVA for state board involvement. In one state, the schism between counties and the state was so great that the counties sued the state board of elections. With this delicate balance between county and state ownership of the registration process, NYS immediately established a joint governance board with county elections, state IT and state elections business owners to establish and confirm county/state system requirements, statewide database solution requirements and developing and implementing a statewide communication plan for the effort.

Through proactive workshops with county and state stakeholders, NYS BOE was able to identify and confirm the mandatory business, technical and implementation requirements for the statewide database within 3 months.

The buy-in and participation of county stakeholders was a critical success factor for NYS. This buy-in allowed NYS and its counties to transform the way NYS registers voters and identify opportunities to better share data and ensure the integrity of the voter registration process. Once the requirements were confirmed and the solution selected, BOE established policy and technical governance committees to address business or technical issues during the implementation and support. These committees were again formed with state and county representatives to ensure continuous collaboration and buy-in from all stakeholders. Throughout the implementation life-cycle, BOE executed its communication plan including establishing a project website, conducting workshops with county stakeholders throughout the life cycle to keep them informed of progress and issues affecting them and published a monthly newsletter as well.

The Technical Solution – Collaboration between State and counties of New York and the State of Washington

Given the system requirements and urgency for implementing a statewide database, BOE considered many options, from custom building an application to purchasing a COTS package. Through research with other states, BOE learned that the State of Washington was building a custom voter registration database and that the county/state “bottom-up” relationship was similar between the two. NYS visited Washington to view their systems, talk to stakeholders and project staff to understand “lessons learned” and other critical success factors and to determine the degree of fit of the Washington solution and NYS’ requirements. After conducting feasibility analysis and engaging county and state stakeholders in the process, the BOE voted to transfer the Washington solution, free of charge, to NYS because of the large degree of fit to NYS requirements to expedite the implementation (over 70% of the requirements by the Washington system “out of the box”). With a solution in place, BOE was able to focus on contracting with an implementer to customize the Washington solution to meet the needs of NYS.

The Implementation

BOE was able to select an implementer, design, build and test the system (called NYSVoter) and train counties on the new system in one year. NYS was also able to leverage an SOA architecture and the public internet to securely integrate the 62 county voter registration databases in “near real-time” with the statewide voter registration database and other state agencies and the Social Security Administration to meet the requirements of HAVA.

BOE selected Saber Consulting through a competitive procurement to customize and implement the NYSVoter system. BOE created a central project team led by a BOE project director, a Saber project manager and Gartner (who provided quality assurance and oversight services). Business and technical resources from BOE, Saber and Gartner made up the core team. BOE also had an extended implementation team consisting of county business owners and county voter registration vendors during the implementation to ensure business process alignment, systems integration and successful conversion of county voter registration data into NYSVoter.

Using a Joint Application Design (JAD) approach to confirm gaps in the Washington solution, BOE conducted design sessions during the fall of 2006 with Saber, county business and technical owners and county voter registration vendors. From the JAD sessions, the final system design was confirmed for NYSVoter and the Washington solution was modified for NYS. Several counties

volunteered to participate in User Acceptance Testing (UAT) during the early spring of 2007. UAT tested end-to-end voter registration processes and the SOA architecture between NYSVoter and the county voter registration systems. NYSVoter was piloted to several counties during the summer of 2007 and fully rolled out in the fall of 2007.

NYSVoter successfully passed its first election test with the NYS Presidential primary in February, 2008.

Total Implementation Cost

At the outset of the project, the estimated cost for implementing a statewide voter registration database (including hardware, software, training and services) was \$25M. Actual implementation costs were approximately \$15M, saving NYS \$10M.

D. Significance

The implementation of a statewide voter registration database has transformed the way elections are conducted in New York. Specifically, NYSVoter supports the democratic election process by facilitating:

- On-line statewide and county voter registration reporting and inquiries
- The identification or resolution of duplicate, felon or deceased voters to ensure the integrity of the election process
- Providing on-line look-ups for voters to determine their correct polling place
- Providing “near-real time” integration with county voter registration systems for adding and updating voter registration data
- Assigning a statewide voter ID to facilitate voter moves within and between counties

With NYSVoter in production, BOE has also been able to support other states as they investigate potential voter fraud. With a statewide voter registration database, BOE was able to supply Florida information on NYS voters who may have also voted in Florida elections.

Key Success Metrics

NYSVoter is in production 24X7 to support the county boards of elections with the voter registration process. There are approximately 1,000 end users at the state and county levels that access NYSVoter on a daily basis. During the initial data conversion process to NYSVoter, NYS was able to successfully convert over 11.2 million records and identified over 164,000 duplicate records in the process.

Since the fall of 2007, NYSVoter has helped counties identify 16,908 duplicate voters, 2,704 felony voters, 151,909 who moved between NYS counties and 62,231 deceased voters through information sharing at the county, state and Federal level.

E. Benefit of the Project

The implementation of NYSVoter began as a Federally-funded mandate through HAVA. Due to the transformation of the voter registration business process since the implementation of NYSVoter, the state has realized mostly non-financial benefits; however NYS saved \$10M in

projected implementation costs by transferring the Washington voter registration system and implementing NYSVoter in one year.

Benefits Achieved

- Improve the integrity of the voter registration process through data-sharing between the state and counties to identify ineligible voters
- Provide on-line reporting and look-up capabilities for counties to determine voter status and investigate potential ineligible voters
- Encourage increased voter participation in the electoral process by providing citizens with an on-line look-up tool to determine their voter status and poll site locations
- Set foundation for inter-state data sharing of voter registration information if NYS decides to participate in such arrangements with neighboring states
- Increased collaboration between BOE and NYS counties, as well as among the counties themselves, to ensure effective voter registration business processes
- Application sharing and best practices for future system enhancements between NYS and Washington