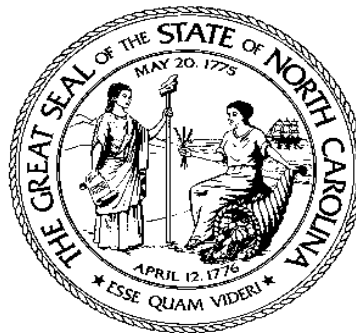


2010 NASCIO RECOGNITION AWARDS

North Carolina State Board of Election Voter Portal

Open Government

05/27/2010



Submitted by:

North Carolina State Board of Elections

Executive Summary

The North Carolina State Board of Elections (SBE) introduced our new voter portal in the beginning of 2008 in preparation for the upcoming 2008 presidential election cycle. The official website for SBE, www.NCSBE.gov, provides a consolidation of all voter registration data in North Carolina. Prior to 2008, the Pew Center on the States sponsored a research project to assess and review all state election websites. This review identified many areas for us to improve upon, including better organization of our citizen access portal, providing more information to the public, improving ADA compliance, and providing online services. This report ranked our website in the middle of all 50 states.

Using this report as a guide, SBE put together focus groups and internal committees to identify and provide solutions to improve our website.

Problem Description

In 2007, the North Carolina State Board of Elections (SBE) set forth a redesign of our website. The goal was to have a user friendly portal where North Carolina citizens could register to vote and easily find the voting information they were looking for. Since the 2008 election cycle was just around the corner, we had little time to define, develop and deploy a site that would cover the needs of the public. This project was completed in 2008, just before the May Primary Election. These needs include:

1. Improved Accessibility
2. Public Engagement
3. Data Sharing Partnerships

Improved Accessibility – In the world of elections and voting, North Carolina is a leader in the realm of accessibility. The state and counties provide accessible voting equipment that is ADA compliant. Voting locations and enclosures must be accessible. SBE has created training videos for county poll workers for accessibility issues. The one place we had failed to address the issue of accessibility was on our website. In the development of our new site, we worked with the North Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure we would meet and exceed all standards to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Priority 1 Level Checkpoints of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Public Engagement – Often the people who develop websites are not the same people who use those websites and services. Understanding this, SBE engaged the following users and created a focus group to gather feedback and list improvements for our website:

- Members of the press
- Members of each political party
- Members of SBE

- Members of County Elections Boards
- A few members of the public

SBE utilized this group of people to review our current website, identify current difficulties or deficiencies, and then suggest changes. The following were some of the suggestions:

1. Not user friendly – Users did not have an easy time finding the information they needed. Links were often not labeled clearly and sometimes took many clicks to get to a destination.
2. Information out of date – There were many broken links and information that was not updated in a timely fashion.

SBE took these and other suggestions to the business and development group to map out a plan for a new design and flow of our website.

Data Sharing Partnerships – In this world you can't do it alone. One of the most frequent questions during the election cycle is "Where do I vote?" The Pew Center and Google partnered to help resolve this question for the voting population in the United States. Their answer was the Voting Information Project (VIP). North Carolina was one of the early sponsors of the VIP and is currently a large contributor to the project. In essence, SBE provides a VIP data feed to Google in a standardized format. Then anyone in the world can create a query to access the data. Google has their own site and query widgets, so when a voter asks the question, "Where do I vote," their site is able to answer the question utilizing the VIP feed. This then gives the voter a single place to find their information without being buried in a nest of links to their destination.

Significance of the Project

The new release of the SBE website and all of the components that surround open, transparent and accessible government completely aligned with our agency goals and mission statement. The new website and innovations provided the following benefits to state government, local government and citizens of North Carolina.

1. Voter Portal – The public has a "one stop shop" for all of their voter information on our website in the "My Election Information" section. There voters can verify their information, find their polling place, check their sample ballot, see when they last voted, and access other options.
2. Standardization – Aliasing allows voters to easily view their county website or contact their county board of election office.
 - a. In NC all county election websites are as follows:
[www.ncsbe.gov/county/\[county_name\]](http://www.ncsbe.gov/county/[county_name])
 - b. In NC all county email addresses are as follows:
[\[county_name\].boe@ncsbe.gov](mailto:[county_name].boe@ncsbe.gov)

Benefit of the Project

Implementation of the new website and other technologies has not only helped state and local governments, but it also provides benefits to the general public:

1. **Accessible Data** – Many state and local government agencies have reported success using our redesigned voter search. The search is simple and easy to use, and all that is needed is a first and last name. For example, Department of Social Services utilizes our voter search to find parents who do not pay child support. Department of Revenue utilizes the site to find individuals who owe back taxes.
2. **Reduced Costs** – State and county election officials have reported fewer calls from voters trying to find out voting information, and statistics show that more and more people are utilizing our technology to find the information they need.
3. **Real Simple Syndication** – RSS feeds allow the public and press to subscribe to our election night return system. When election results change on election night, SBE is able to push that information to all subscribers.
4. **Multiple Access Points** – Sometimes technology moves faster than the public's ability to keep pace. For example, in North Carolina, only about 50-60% of the population has convenient access to the Internet, but over 80% of the population has convenient access to cell phones. SBE gives the North Carolina public multiple ways to access their voting information, including via the web, email, short message service (SMS) and the phone.
5. **Transparency** – SBE believes that the citizens of NC have a right to their data. SBE maintains an FTP site that contains the following:
 - a. Files of all registered voters and their voter history by county
 - b. Files of all past elections starting in 2000 of all election information including absentee, turnout, polling place information, etc.
6. **Improved Accessibility** – Working with DSS agencies and many other interested advocacy groups, our website was coded to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Priority 1 Level Checkpoints of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).
7. **Social Networking Sites** – SBE has a Facebook page that users can subscribe to and receive information, including reminders to vote, to register to vote, and when the voting process begins.
8. **Multiple Platforms** – Not only can voter information be accessed from the website, but our website also is available on all mobile devices. In addition, voter information can be accessed via text messaging (SMS) and email. See images below:

Mobile Voter Search:

North Carolina
State Board of Elections

Voter Lookup

Jonathan

Smith

Northampton

Birthday (mm/dd/yy)

Lookup

Home Voter Lookup Locations Results Contact Us

Polling Place Locator (Where do I vote?)

North Carolina
State Board of Elections

Polling Place Locator

870 North

Main

Madison

Mars Hill

Find Polling Location

Home Voter Lookup Locations Results Contact Us

Mobile Election Night Returns:

North Carolina
State Board of Elections

2008 General Election

Summary | Voter Turnout [Back](#)

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (Vote For 1)

100 of 100 Counties Reporting

| | Percent | Votes |
|--------------------|---------|-----------|
| Obama/Biden (DEM) | 49.70% | 2,142,651 |
| McCain/Palin (REP) | 49.38% | 2,128,474 |
| Barr/Root (LIB) | 0.60% | 25,722 |
| WRITE-IN | 0.32% | 13,942 |
| | | 4,310,789 |

STRAIGHT PARTY (Vote For 1)

100 of 100 Counties Reporting

| | Percent | Votes |
|------------|---------|-----------|
| DEMOCRATIC | 58.76% | 1,283,486 |

Home Voter Lookup Locations Results Contact Us

In addition, below are examples of how voters can use a cell phone or email to find out important voter information if they do not have access to our website. North Carolina is the first in the nation to make this available to voters, and it was a huge benefit to the military and overseas voters.

Email or SMS options:

Send Email to: NCVRS@SBOE.STATE.NC.US
or SMS to: 919-413-5633

Example in subject line: vs,burris,marc,%,%

Instructions below:

This is an Automated Response! The search has been submitted to our systems and you should receive a response within minutes. Peak work hours could slow the response of emails. Response could also be slow if your email client only checks for emails on a timed basis.

If you do not receive your response within an hour, please resubmit your query.

Query Options available:

VOTER SEARCH - vs,last name,first name,middle name,county

PROVISIONAL SEARCH - pv,county,last name,first name,pin number

ABSENTEE SEARCH - ab,voter reg number (12 digits including leading zeros),county,election date

Commas separate the different fields.

No spaces before or after commas.

% can be used as a wild card for only the following:

- 1.) Voter search - all fields
- 2.) Absentee - election date

In conclusion, the SBE website redesign was a huge success in meeting the goals of open government in North Carolina. It improved access to information for voters and was designed with help from citizens. In addition to the website redesign, we also gave voters the ability to find the information they needed via different methods, including our website, email, SMS, and phone.