

IT STARTS WITH A TEAM:

Building Your Election Security Working Group



As the cyber, physical, and operational election threat landscape continues to expand, the partnerships and resources required to manage those threats have grown along with it.

Election officials recognize the essential value of convening partners for an election security working group composed of key players who may be called upon in the event of an incident or emergency. Continuously working together can strengthen relationships, establish lines of communication, maximize resources, and develop plans that optimize your ability to respond.

Essential Principles of a Successful Election Security Working Group

Forming an Election Security Working Group in your jurisdiction is a highly effective method to reduce your risks and build important partnerships. To do this:

- **Identify and invite partners** that you may rely upon during an emergency or incident affecting your elections or who can help you in advance.
- **Share your story and intelligence** in order to have a common knowledge set of the process, roles, and risks to be managed.
- **Establish a clear mission** to ensure all partners have an understanding of the purpose and scope of the working group.
- **Agree on a meeting cadence**, location, and standard running agenda.
- **Keep an action plan** by maintaining records such as meeting minutes, follow-up action items, and reference materials including key contact information.
- **Update incident response and communication plans** to speed response.
- **Practice your plans** through tabletop exercises and simulations. Review and confirm response plans routinely, and at a minimum, prior to each election.

The Who, How, and What of the Election Security Working Group

Maintaining the integrity and security of elections takes a team effort. Election officials can't, and shouldn't, go it alone. By engaging with partners across IT services, emergency response, law enforcement, municipal services, and others, election officials can build partnerships, share information, establish lines of communication, and develop response plans that will help ensure they are prepared and have the resources needed to respond.

Who to include? Depending on the nature of your election office (whether state, county, or municipal) and the size and complexity of your community, membership will vary. Ask yourself who you will call in the event of various emergencies, and include those people. Typically, the indispensable partners include law enforcement, emergency managers, IT administrators, and communications teams.

Identify and reach out to key security and infrastructure partners, such as:

- State, county, and/or municipal emergency response entities (emergency management, fire, law enforcement, etc.)
- IT support services such as the CISO at the state level and/or jurisdictional level IT staff, whether in-house or managed service provider.
- Jurisdictional support services (as applicable) such as facilities managers, road maintenance teams, parking/traffic enforcement, parks and recreation officials, and school officials.
- Representatives of utilities departments (e.g. power, water, etc.).
- Transportation offices to coordinate timing and scope of new road construction or maintenance projects near polling sites.
- Communications staff to coordinate public messaging.
- Elections' legal representatives and other jurisdictional legal counsel.
- State and federal partners such as National Guard, FBI, CISA, USPS, and your local Fusion Center.

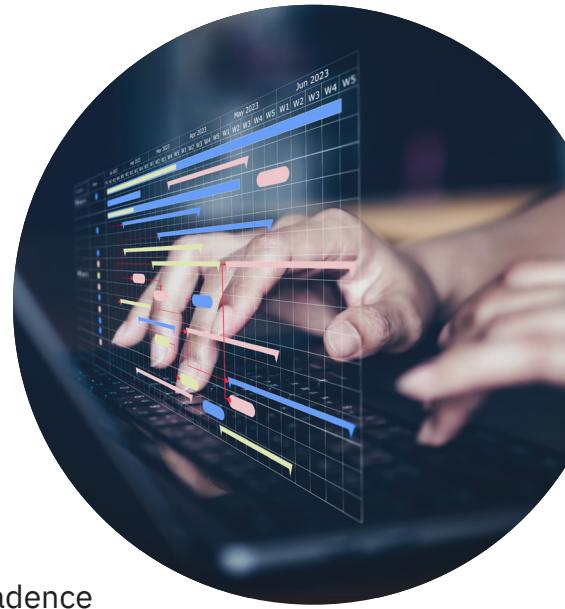
How do we scope and establish the mission? Develop a mission statement to define the purpose and scope of your group early. Clarify whether the group focuses on cyber, physical, operational, or all election security domains.

Clearly identify the leadership, which is typically the chief election official and the chief emergency management professional for the jurisdiction. The mission should be clear: the purpose is nonpartisan and apolitical, focused on protecting the security of the process and the safety of election officials and voters.

How do we share information and experiences? Establish clear channels for routine and emergency communications. Identify liaisons between the elections office and the other entities, recognizing that these may need to be staff members rather than the head of the elections office and the sheriff, for example, as they may not be as easily accessible during a crisis.

Share resources and expertise to aid all members in being better prepared for all hazards including, but not limited to:

- Election calendar
- Intelligence reports
- Contact information
- Communications platforms for emergency and non-emergency situations
- Relevant election laws and processes
- Polling place locations (early voting and election day) and post-election canvas and certification sites



When and how often should meetings be held? Meeting cadence varies based upon the timing of the election.

- **Monthly or Quarterly.** Many election jurisdictions have found that monthly, or at minimum quarterly meetings, are effective. These meetings build an understanding of the election process and how the partner entities operate and allow sufficient time to prepare and develop action plans.
- **Weekly or Every Other Week.** As the election gets closer, consider increasing the cadence to weekly or bi-weekly.
- **After the Election.** Complete each election cycle with an after-action meeting to discuss lessons learned and ways to improve.

What should the meetings look like? Meetings can be held in person or virtually. To ensure the most participation, a hybrid model is ideal. The election official (Election Director, County or Municipal Clerk) and chief emergency management professional should chair the group and lead the meeting. This ensures the focus will be kept on relevant threats specific to elections. The agenda will vary depending on the nature of the group and level of government, but a typical agenda might include:

- Updates on threat intelligence or alerts (CISA, EAC, FBI, USPS, MS-ISAC, EI-ISAC, vendors, local law enforcement)
- Review of any recent physical and cybersecurity incidents or near misses, including those in other jurisdictions that can provide lessons for best practices.
- Status updates on risk assessments including walk throughs of election facilities and polling places.

- Incident response plan development and enhancement. The incident response plan should be viewed as a living document to be updated as circumstances evolve and change.
- Review of upcoming events (elections, trainings, major process changes, IT maintenance windows, emergency management deadlines/time lines).
- Discussion of resource needs or funding opportunities.
- Planning for tabletop or other functional exercises.

How to keep moving forward:

- Maintain an Action Plan: Keep records such as meeting minutes, follow-up action items, and reference materials including key contact information.
- Create a communications template/plan for sharing information and intelligence to maintain awareness of emerging threats.
- Develop and practice response plans through tabletop exercises and simulations. Review and confirm response plans routinely, and at a minimum, prior to each election.
- Promote joint training and exercises. Engage the group in cybersecurity awareness sessions, continuity of operations planning, and post-election after-action reviews. Tabletop exercises can be an invaluable way to engage the group in hands on discussion of responses to various types of incidents.

Pro Tips and Keys to Success

Don't reinvent the wheel! Use existing structures. If your jurisdiction has a local emergency planning committee or cybersecurity working group, coordinate with them instead of duplicating efforts. If your state, county, or municipality has a model emergency response plan, use it as a starting point.

Define roles. Ensure that everyone understands their role in election security. At the first meeting, allow each partner to describe how they see their or their department's role. The Election Official should provide a high-level overview of election administration and their election calendar so that the partners can understand your security concerns and needs.

Chat it up! Consider "activating" the working group when voting begins and on Election Day through a web emergency operations center (Web EOC), chat space, and/or open virtual meeting.

Focus on relationships and trust. The most valuable outcome is not a document, it is collaboration and mutual understanding among partners before an incident happens.

It's a work in progress. If the only thing you initially get from this group is the contact information of who to call when a particular incident occurs, it is a success!

As an election official, you and your team do not have to go it alone when it comes to incident response. While security is now one of the many hats election officials wear, effective response comes from drawing on the skills of those who are trained and focused on security and incident response. Bringing these partners together will help ensure that the professionals in your community, who may be called on in the event of an emergency impacting the election, are ready. You can never predict what may happen, but you can build the team you need around you to respond.

Further Resources and Templates

Additional resources and templates are provided below to supplement the information in this document. This is not an exhaustive list, but it provides a helpful starting point.

- Your State/County/Municipal Emergency Response Plan
- *Public Sector Primer to Partnership Mapping*, Center for Tech and Civic Life
techandciviclife.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Public-Sector-Primer-to-Partnership-Mapping.pdf
- *Fostering Resilient Elections: Opportunities for Stronger Election Administration and Emergency Management Collaboration*, Center for Tech and Civic Life
techandciviclife.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Fostering-Resilient-Elections-FINAL.pdf
- *Five Steps to Safer Elections*, Committee for Safe and Secure Elections
safeelections.org/five-steps-to-protect-our-elections-from-the-committee-for-safe-and-secure-elections
- *CooP Chapter 11.4 (Community Partners)*, Election Assistance Commission
eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/Chapter_11_Contingency_Planning_and_Change_Management.pdf
- *Election Security in a Time of Disturbance*, The Elections Group
electionsgroup.com/resource/election-security-in-a-time-of-disturbance