

STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE:

Lowering the Impact of Logistical Issues



Election administrators routinely encounter logistical challenges such as materials and staffing shortages, equipment breakdowns, programming errors, and last-minute voting location changes. Although each issue or disruption is distinct, the organizational actions needed to mitigate them or lessen their impact are surprisingly similar.

Four Ways to Strengthen Operational Resilience

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:

- **Decide Who Makes Decisions and How Information Moves.** Create clear channels for communication and escalation.
- **Implement Real-Time Monitoring and Rapid Response Mechanisms.** Track operations continuously and empower staff to act immediately when issues arise.
- **Develop Redundancy Across People, Processes, and Resources.** Ensure backups such as personnel, vendors, facilities, and supplies reserves in place.
- **Conduct Regular Exercises, Debriefs, and Planning Reviews.** Use drills, simulations, and debriefs to find vulnerabilities and institutionalize improvements.

1. Decide Who Makes Decisions and How Information Moves

Communication breakdowns make operational issues worse. Whether the problem involves ballots, pollbooks, or polling places, clear communication determines the speed and accuracy of the response.



Key practices:

- Maintain **updated contact lists** for personnel, including vendors and other external partners.
- Provide every staff member and poll worker with a single, clear **path to report issues** and escalate concerns.
- **Meet with your partners** before a crisis occurs, to develop clear communication channels.
- **Define the command structure** to identify who is in charge of making decisions and who is responsible for carrying out various assigned tasks.
- **Schedule status updates** to those in charge of the incident.
- Update **trusted media contact list** to support accurate, reliable, and transparent public communications.

Clear communication determines the speed and accuracy of the response.

2. Implement Real-Time Monitoring and Rapid Response Mechanisms

Real-time understanding of the situation provides you with the ability to respond quickly and effectively to incidents. Developing a system to track incidents and the response steps that are taken does not have to be overly sophisticated, but is important to offer a clear picture of the issues as they occur.

Key practices:

- Establish a physical central operations or command center and a way of tracking incidents that can be accessed remotely. This can be as easy as using a spreadsheet that allows for multiple users to update at the same time. For an example of what a real-life command center and incident response process looks like, see the video [here](#).¹
 - » Require periodic check-ins from those directly responding to the incidents, and provide a method for receiving **regular updates** from voting locations during setup, open hours, and closing.
- **Empower designated staff** to make immediate decisions (e.g., dispatching extra supplies, rerouting drivers, sending technicians).
- **Deploy a field technicians force** capable of rapid on-site observation and intervention.

¹ See the “Election Day Command Center Video” here: <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/tech-time> or see this direct link to go straight to the video: <https://youtu.be/bIETImL1bcY>

Gather with your partners when a crisis occurs and track the incident details and response steps.

3. Develop Redundancy Across People, Processes, and Resources

Elections are fragile when they rely on a single person, vendor, or supply source. Redundancy is the backbone of resiliency. Everything must align across time, people, and suppliers to create a resilient supply chain.²

Key practices to start (if you haven't already):

- **Invest in cross-training and temporary employees** so that operations can continue if staffing is impacted.
- **Identify redundant suppliers** where possible (e.g., secondary print vendors, multiple supply sources) and discuss with them their role as a backup if the need arises.
- Where redundant suppliers aren't feasible, ensure your primary **vendor has backup plans** in place, including technicians and equipment.
- Establish **backup voting locations** in the event the primary location is unavailable.
- Arrange for alternate, contingency, and emergency communication methods when primary communication channels are not working (i.e., PACE).³
- **Train staff on alternate processes** as needed, such as paper check-in processes on Election Day, if the e-pollbook isn't functioning.
- Document processes by creating **standard operation procedures**⁴ to reduce reliance on institutional memory.



Always spend time testing backups and alternate options to make adjustments ahead of time.

2 **For more on supply chain risk management:** RAND's "Security U.S. Election Against Cyber Threats" <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA512-1.html>, or CISA's guide "Supply Chain Risks to Election Infrastructure" https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/supply-chain-risks-to-election-infrastructure_508.pdf

3 **Learn more about PACE - primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency communication methods here:** https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024_NCSWICPTE_Leveraging_PACE_Plan_Emergency_Comms_Ecosystems.pdf

4 **"Recipe for Success: How to Write and Maintain Effective Standard Operating Procedures"** <https://elections-group.com/resource/sop-resources/>

4. Conduct Regular Exercises, Debriefs, and Planning Reviews

The most resilient election offices go further by practicing before the real event and learning after every cycle. Organizations consistently emphasize **exercises and after-action review** as tools that drive improvement. In fact, the EAC Election Management Guidelines note that continuity of operations and disaster planning are now essential.⁵

Key practices:

- Convene an **Election Security Working Group**⁶ composed of key emergency response partners to coordinate roles and responsibilities in advance.
- **Build slack time into your production calendar** in order to accommodate events that may otherwise cause cascading delays to election-related tasks.
- Conduct nightmare scenarios and use **“what-if” planning**. “What if this vendor does not meet the deadline by two days?” or “What if turnout spikes by 20%?” are questions to answer.
- Conduct **tabletop exercises** focused on realistic operational challenges (e.g., ballot printing issues, employee or poll worker call offs, and equipment malfunctions).
- After each election, hold **structured debriefs** that capture lessons and update procedures.⁷

5 **The best prevention begins months before Election Day.** The EAC resources Election Management Guidelines https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/EMG/EAC_Election_Management_Guidelines_508.pdf and Clearinghouse Resources on Planning & Logistics <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/clearinghouse-resources-planning-logistics>

6 **For more information on election security working groups, check out Election Security Exchange resource:** <https://securingelections.org/it-starts-with-a-team-building-your-election-security-working-group/>

7 **Check out the The US Alliance for Election Excellence “Election Debrief Handbook”** <https://electionexcellence.org/resources/election-debrief-handbook/>, The Elections Group resource “The Election Debrief Handbook” https://electionsgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Debrief-Guide_20241120.pdf, and the Center for Civic Design’s “Running a post-election debrief workshop” <https://civicdesign.org/debrief-the-election-with-this-new-toolkit/>