Demos

Keeping Pace with Motor Voter

A Motor Vehicle Agency Guide for Implementing Effective Motor-Voter Programs

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About Dēmos

Dēmos is an organization that powers the movement for a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy. Through cutting-edge policy research, inspiring litigation, and deep relationships with grass-roots organizations, Dēmos champions solutions that will create a democracy and economy rooted in racial equity.

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Introduction

As the front door and face of government for the vast majority of citizens, motor vehicle departments (DMVs) have a critical role to play in protecting and strengthening our democratic process and institutions.

Although many states have long had DMV-based voter registration, the DMV came to play a nationwide role in election administration when Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA). The NVRA allows Americans to register to vote or update their registrations whenever they interact with a government agency, with the goal of increasing the number of citizens who register to vote and making sure that those citizens' registrations are kept up to date. As part of this system, the law requires DMVs to incorporate voter registration services into their driver's license application, renewal, and change-of-address processes. Because most Americans have a driver's license or identification card issued by their state's DMV, the DMV is central to the NVRA's scheme of agency-based voter registration and gives the NVRA its nickname: "Motor Voter."

Since Motor Voter's passage, DMV registration services have been the single most important source of voter registration activity across the country in the jurisdictions where it applies.[1] In the most recent reporting period, 45 percent of voter registration applications or updates came through the Motor Voter process. Although Motor Voter is the most common source of voter registration activity in the states, data suggest that Motor Voter may not yet have reached its potential. The number of eligible Americans registered to vote remains stubbornly low, ranging from 60 to 75 percent in any given presidential election year, which leads to depressed turnout rates: In the 2016 presidential election, turnout among eligible voters was only about 55 percent.[2] When looking at registered voters, however, the picture changes: over 87 percent of registered voters participated in 2016.[3] These statistics suggest that more eligible Americans will participate in our democracy if they are registered to vote. Ensuring full access to voter registration through DMVs is a part of this picture.

For states to realize the NVRA's promise, they must make registering to vote and updating voter registration addresses an integral part of obtaining a driver's license or state identification card. Experience has shown that *how* states integrate voter registration into their driver's license application, renewal, and change-of-address processes can have a dramatic impact on the number of voters who take advantage of the opportunity to register to vote or update their voter registration address. Indeed, the attentiveness with which states design and implement their Motor Voter programs can dramatically affect whether DMV customers benefit from voter registration services.

Building an Effective "Motor Voter" Program

In February 2015, Demos issued ***Driving the Vote: Are States Complying with the "Motor Voter" Requirements of the National Voter Registration Act?***,[4] the first nationwide review of how states were implementing Motor Voter. The report found that, while some states had robust and effective Motor Voter programs, the majority had substantial room for improvement. Rates of voter registration through motor vehicle agencies varied dramatically from state to state; states with the most effective Motor Voter programs were outperforming their less effective counterparts by more than 20 to 1. The reasons for this disparity had little to do with a state's size, demographics, or politics. Rather, we found that when voter Motor Voter programs were more customer-focused—when information was presented clearly and when the voter registration process could be completed without adding significant time or complexity to the driver's license transaction—DMV customers were much more likely to take advantage of the chance to register.

This guide outlines a number of steps DMVs can take to improve the effectiveness of their Motor Voter programs. Some improvements can be made without substantial changes to current programs. Others

are more appropriate to consider when the DMV is planning upgrades to existing hardware or software. In addition to describing some of the tools the DMV can use to improve its Motor Voter programs, we highlight stories from states that have used these tools to dramatic effect. Several of these states have found that they have not only been able to enhance the customer experience and increase utilization of Motor Voter programs, but have simultaneously reduced transaction times and significantly lowered costs associated with those programs—in one case saving as much as 25,000 staff hours per year.

In summary, to make voter registration through the DMV more customer-service oriented and ensure that as many eligible Americans as possible can take advantage of Motor Voter's simple, accessible voter registration process, DMVs should consider taking the following steps.

Lay the Groundwork

- Appoint a single senior-management-level DMV employee to be responsible for the DMV's Motor Voter program.

- Use technology to incorporate voter registration into DMV online portals and to streamline in-office processes and data transfer to election officials.

- Ensure that RFPs and design specifications for DMV information systems incorporate best practices for voter registration services, both at the point of service and in the back office.

- Review business processes to improve and streamline processing of voter registration transactions.

- Update employee training programs on the roles and responsibilities of DMV representatives with respect to voter registration, and conduct regular trainings.

- Ensure relevant contracts with third parties or inter-agency agreements require provision of voter registration services, and that employees of third parties receive appropriate training.

- Build strong, collaborative relationships with state election officials and other stakeholders.

Client Transaction

- Conduct a design review to ensure language regarding voter registration is accessible and easy to understand, and that process flows are clear and work as expected.

- Incorporate any needed modifications into the voter registration services to accommodate people with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency.

- Ensure changes of address reported to DMVs—both residential and mailing—are forwarded to election officials unless the customer affirmatively indicates that the address change does not apply for voter registration purposes.

- Make information about voter registration at DMVs available to clients before they arrive at the DMV field office or while they are waiting to be served.

Accountability

- Review monitoring and oversight systems to ensure they provide thorough and up-to-date information concerning the performance of Motor Voter systems and allow for timely resolution of issues as they arise.

- Solicit feedback from customers about the voter registration services to learn more about customer service issues that may need to be addressed.

The remainder of this guide discusses each of these steps in more detail.

Laying the groundwork

Build strong relationships with state election officials and other stakeholders.

DMVs are frontline partners in election administration, implementing policy for which election officials are responsible. Unsurprisingly, then, the most effective Motor Voter programs have been developed through close collaboration between motor vehicle agencies and election officials, at the state and the local level. For voter registration procedures to function smoothly, the agencies need to be coordinated on multiple fronts, and this coordination is critical no matter how sophisticated the technology involved. IT systems may need to talk to each other, either directly—through an API, for instance—or indirectly, such as through an intermediary data file that is mutually

understandable by both systems. Where paper forms are used, those forms need to include all relevant information and allow for efficient input of the data by each agency. Critically, channels of communication among agencies need to be open so problems can be surfaced and addressed no matter where they arise.

Before embarking on any initiative to modify Motor Voter IT systems or processes—whether DMV or election administration oriented— DMV and election officials need to have open lines of communication to collaborate, and all involved should be invested in the project. It can be particularly important to involve local election officials, as they play a critical role in the voter registration process and usually have limited resources, so their buy-in on any proposed new system is essential. And building a role for external stakeholders—for example, through community advisory groups—increases accountability, public support and good will, and also protects against potential litigation.

> *Case Study: Colorado. Colorado recently implemented significant changes to its Motor Voter registration system in an effort to make it more user-friendly and reach more of the state's voters. Critical to the success of this program was the relationship of trust that had been built between election officials and the DMV, from the leadership down to the operational level. As described by researcher Lisa Danetz:*

>> *Both Elections Director Judd Choate and DMV Senior Director Mike Dixon recognized and prioritized relationship-building and communication between their offices to address and upgrade the state's Motor Voter registration processes. Over several years, the development of a strong and trusted relationship between their teams allowed process upgrades to come to fruition. The initiation of the state's NVRA Working Group [which included representatives from the Secretary of State's office, DMV, county clerks, the Office of Information Technology, community groups, and vendors] was especially significant, bringing all stakeholders together to provide input and buy-in, and to recognize the potential of the DMV IT system modernization project.[5]*

Identify individuals responsible for oversight.

Designating a single high-level DMV employee with overall responsibility for the agency's Motor Voter program is one of the best ways for

the DMV to hold itself accountable for the program's performance and effectiveness. When responsibilities are distributed among a number of individuals, with no single person answerable for program performance, accountability can suffer. The responsible individual should monitor the program's performance, stay abreast of developments in the field, identify areas for improving efficiency and effectiveness, and ensure others within the agency have the training and resources they need to fulfill their own Motor Voter responsibilities.

To enable the Motor Voter coordinator to be effective, DMVs should write the job functions related to Motor Voter oversight into the description for the position to which this role is assigned, as well as into performance review protocols. Including Motor Voter responsibilities in the job description ensures that the oversight obligations are clearly defined, and that when a vacancy occurs, continuity in Motor Voter coordination responsibilities is maintained.

Make smart use of existing technology.

Even without large investments in new technology, there are steps states can and should take to improve and streamline their Motor Voter implementation. The most successful Motor Voter systems effectively incorporate technology in 2 primary ways: (1) to integrate voter registration into the driver's license transaction through, for example, a customer-facing electronic or online registration system or a DMV-representative-facing system for processing applications, and (2) to transmit voter registration information between the DMV and election officials.

Integration of DMV and elections information systems requires an up-front investment of effort and money but, fortunately, many states already have significant infrastructure in place that is simply not used to its full capacity. Under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), states are required to use a voter registration applicant's driver's license number to verify residence and identity. Most states have built systems allowing election officials to verify the driver's license electronically, meaning there is already an integrated system of electronic communication between election officials and the DMV.

Going one step further, states with online voter registration systems (nearly three-fourths of the states at the time of this writing) typically have a mechanism, often as an add-on to the HAVA verification, to transfer an electronic image of the voter's signature from the DMV to the voter registration system. Most commonly, the voter's signature is scanned from the driver's license application or captured on an

electronic signature pad during a driver's license transaction. In addition, many online voter registration systems already provide the capability for automated processing of voter registrations. For example, Pennsylvania offers an application programming interface (API) for its online voter registration system to allow third-party registration organizations to pass voter registration applications to election officials electronically.[6]

Where a state's online registration includes these features, a paperless voter registration system can be built for the DMV using existing technology—both for in-office and online Motor Voter transactions. Often, these states need to do only a limited amount of additional integration work to provide for seamless registration of voters during DMV transactions.

Remember Motor Voter when investing in new technology.

DMVs across the country have invested and will continue to invest substantial time and resources to modernize their technology for their core licensing and vehicle registration operations. Whenever agencies plan upgrades or investments in technology, they should pay attention to Motor Voter programs at the outset. If the Motor Voter requirements are not considered when design specifications and RFPs are prepared, states may find that technology they have procured to satisfy the needs of licensing and registration operations is not suitable for voter registration. For example, an electronic signature pad that does not incorporate a touch screen may be fine if all the DMV needs to do is capture signatures. If the DMV wants to offer voter registration through the same customer-facing device, however, the specifications are different. Taking the needs of Motor Voter programs into account as technology is upgraded can extend the life of those investments and accelerate the move to entirely paperless Motor Voter systems.

States moving from paper-based to online or electronic voter registration systems recover their upfront costs over time, given that electronic registrations are cheaper to administer than paper-based ones. For example, as noted below,[7] Virginia estimated that the move from a paper-based to an electronic Motor Voter system saved approximately 25,000 staff-hours per year—which amounted to 2-3 hours per day in a single busy field office. In addition, Virginia saved on paper and postage by eliminating voter registration mailings to DMV customers. Delaware estimates that the move from paper-based to electronic voter registration allowed the DMV to eliminate 8 positions statewide and to repurpose existing storage space, and that it brought the voter registration portion of each DMV transaction

from an average of 90 seconds down to 15 seconds.[8] Colorado's move away from paper shaved 20 to 30 seconds from each DMV transaction and also reduced customer wait-times at DMV offices.[9]

> *Case Study: California. When California passed its automatic voter registration law in 2015, the DMV had to rethink planned equipment purchases and software specifications to accommodate the anticipated increase in demand for voter registration services. The DMV had planned to use touchscreen devices at the point of service, but with the expected upsurge in Motor Voter activity, the DMV opted instead to move the bulk of the voter registration process to separate self-service terminals, requiring a change in its business process design and procurement plans.*

Likewise, software requirements must be specified with Motor Voter in mind. For example, to offer the best user experience for customers—which will allow them to make a more informed choice about whether to register—voter registration services must be part of the design specification for online DMV services.

When DMVs plan upgrades to hardware or software, they should think about the following best practices for Motor Voter systems:

- Signatures should be captured digitally. Digital signature capture reduces transaction time and costs by obviating the need for scanning paper registration forms or signature cards.

- Voter registration information and digitized signatures should be transferred electronically to elections officials. Electronic transfer is more efficient and reduces opportunities for data entry error.

- During in-office DMV transactions, the voter registration process should be conducted through an electronic interface, and as much as possible should be placed in the hands of the customer, for example, through kiosks or customer-facing terminals.

- Online DMV services should integrate voter registration into the transaction flow and should require a response to the voter registration offer prior to completing the DMV transaction.

- Online DMV address change transactions should automatically result in transfer of the new address information to election officials unless the customer clicks a box to indicate otherwise.

- There should be a real-time link between the voter registration system and the statewide voter registration elections database. A real-time link allows the DMV's voter registration system to present more relevant options to the customer.

Case Study: Virginia. *Virginia provides a model that uses several of these best practices to improve the Motor Voter experience. In 2016, Virginia replaced its cumbersome, paper-based DMV voter registration system with an electronic system.[10] The new system was implemented using credit card readers for the customer interface and signature capture, and includes a real-time connection to the statewide voter registration database.[11]*

During the driver's license application process, after the clerk enters the customer's information into the system, the customer uses a touchscreen credit card terminal for the next step in the transaction.[12] While the clerk is continuing to do data entry, the DMV system connects to the statewide voter registration database to determine whether the customer is already registered to vote.[13] If the individual is already registered, a question will appear on the credit card terminal asking whether the person would like to update his or her voter registration.[14] If the individual is changing his or her address, the credit card terminal will show the new address and confirm the change for voter registration purposes.[15] If the individual is not already registered to vote or there is some connection problem between the two databases, the customer will be guided through a series of voter registration questions on the touchscreen.[16] Those questions must be answered before completion of the driver's license transaction.[17] If the customer has opted to register and if their answers to the voter registration questions indicate they are eligible, an electronic voter registration application is generated.[18] The application is held on the DMV system until the customer's signature is also entered, and then the two are packaged together and sent electronically to elections officials.[19]

The result is a streamlined voter registration process that ensures customers have an accessible opportunity to register through the DMV and that they remain registered when they update their addresses. Virginia's upgrade led to a dramatic increase

in the number of DMV customers who choose to register to vote.[20] And while there was an upfront cost to implementing the system, it allowed the state to save money by virtually eliminating paper from the Motor Voter process, and DMV officials estimate that the new process saved approximately 25,000 staff hours per year.[21]

Even with the most sophisticated technology, many DMV customers will continue to engage in paper-based transactions, such as those conducted by mail, for the foreseeable future. New investments in technology offer an occasion to revisit business processes that govern paper-based and other customer transactions and to ensure that they allow for appropriate handling of voter registration information. Business processes must guarantee that customers who wish to register to vote and have provided the required information and attestations are able to do so, even when the driver's license transaction itself cannot be completed for one reason or another. For example, if a customer neglects to include the required payment for a transaction conducted by mail or fails an eye exam during an in-person transaction, those factors should not prevent the customer's voter registration from being processed. The DMV must also ensure that its business processes allow for the transmittal of the voter registration information to the relevant election authorities within the time limits set forth in the NVRA.

Train, train, train.

DMVs, like all other state agencies, regularly train new and current employees on their duties and responsibilities. Training on voter registration responsibilities should be incorporated into existing trainings and should be made part of procedure manuals, PowerPoints, or other materials used in training front-line personnel. Short quizzes conducted afterward can help ensure comprehension. In-person role plays are also a good idea. The more streamlined and routinized the training process, the better.

The employee responsible for a state's Motor Voter program should regularly review training programs to ensure they are keeping up with changes in the way Motor Voter services are offered. Greater automation of the driver's license transaction and voter registration processes, and the shift of control of that process from DMV employees to customers, may change the nature of employee responsibilities, but they do not eliminate the need for employee training. Indeed, in some cases, they heighten the importance of effective training. As customers—who may be coming into contact with the voter registration process for

the first time—are increasingly registering on their own at an in-office kiosk or online, the nature of the questions they are likely to have will change, and employees need to be prepared to answer new questions. For example, frontline DMV staff should know what to tell a customer if, after deciding to register to vote, the customer doesn't see their party of choice in the list. In a state with mail-ballot voting, such staff should know answers to common questions that customers ask about signing up for it. Training on these issues can ensure smooth—and relatively quick—transactions.

Turn contractors and other partners into allies in Motor Voter success.

In many states, third-party contractors or other state or local agencies perform a substantial share of DMV services. When selecting contractors or partnering with other agencies, the DMV should take care that they understand their Motor Voter responsibilities and have the capacity and resources they need to carry them out. These understandings should be spelled out in contracts and inter-agency agreements. Agreements should also ensure that employees of third parties receive appropriate training on Motor Voter programs. The DMV can assist in this effort by providing the necessary training itself or sharing their training resources with their contractors and agency partners.

Customer transaction

Review the design and usability of the voter registration system.

Well-designed voter registration systems that are easy to navigate provide a better customer experience, increase the number of people who take advantage of voter registration services, and reduce errors that impact election official colleagues. These systems should use clear language to ensure that individuals (1) are aware of the opportunity to register to vote or update their address, and (2) understand the eligibility requirements for registration and whether or not they meet them. Well thought-out process flows help the customer make appropriate choices about their voter registration and ensure that, at the end of the process, government agencies have clear and unambiguous information about the individual's intent.

Until recently, not enough attention has been paid to user experience in the design of Motor Voter registration systems. Many systems use formal and overly legalistic language rather than plain English. Process flows in electronic systems have been designed with a focus on collecting the required information rather than meeting the needs of the people who interact with the system.

Fortunately, there are now good resources available to help agencies improve the design of Motor Voter registration processes, and DMVs can take simple steps to make systems more accessible without a wholesale redesign. With respect to language, the Center for Civic Design, a national non-profit that provides pro bono design resources and consulting on voter registration and election systems to government agencies, offers the following recommendations:

- **Reduce the number of questions to the essentials**. Every question slows down the customer and makes the whole transaction take longer. Reducing the number of questions means more people will complete the registration process.

- **Word all questions, answer choices, and instructions in a way that customers understand**. It makes their answers more accurate, and they take less time completing the transaction

- **Be sure that important reasons not to register are clear**, so that anyone who should not register at the DMV—for example, because the customer is not eligible or because s/he needs to have his or her address protected—gets the message.

- **Present voter registration eligibility criteria as a list**, not a series of questions. With this format, people are more likely to understand that they have to meet all the criteria.

- **Present any legal declarations as clearly as possible**. Break semi-colon phrases into bullets so they are easier for customers to scan.[22]

In jurisdictions that offer Motor Voter registration services in languages other than English, it is critical to ensure that translations are accurate and comprehensible to all potential users. In some cases, differences in regional origin of non-English speakers—even when they nominally speak the same language—can affect how particular words or phrases should be translated, and the Center for Civic design therefore recommends that agencies consult with members of the relevant communities rather than relying only on national translation vendors. For example, during usability testing of a new online Motor Voter system, California discovered that people were misunderstanding a literal translation of the question "Are you a United States citizen?"— and giving an answer that was the opposite of what they intended.[23] In consultation with representatives of the state's diverse immigrant

communities, California adjusted the translation to allow for greater comprehension by all those coming into contact with the system.

With respect to process flow, the Center for Civic Design suggests a few simple guidelines that apply both to electronic Motor Voter systems and scripted in-person conversations between the customer and DMV representative.

- At the beginning of the registration process, tell people what's going to happen and why.

- Ask as few eligibility questions as you can.

- Ask key eligibility questions, such as citizenship status, as early in the process as possible, and put the rest at the end.

- Allow people to go back to the previous screens to correct mistakes without having to start over or leave the registration process entirely.

- Give people who are confused about their eligibility (or hesitant to share it) ways to leave the registration process, such as by offering a "decline to answer" option on eligibility and voter registration questions.

- If people choose not to register, don't show them other voter registration questions.

- If voters are asked to pick a party, give them options rather than asking them to fill in a blank space.

- At the end of the process, provide a summary screen that includes all answers and allows the applicant to correct any of the information they provided.[24]

Whenever states are making changes to, or changes that impact, their Motor Voter registration systems, they should work with design specialists in order to ensure language is clear and that process flows are optimal. As part of the design review process, states should conduct thorough usability testing with real users (DMV employees as well as customers) to ensure those who need to use the system understand what's happening and what information they are being asked to provide at every step in the process.

Case Study: Colorado. *In 2016, Colorado began the process of implementing modernized Motor Voter procedures as part of a wholesale upgrade of its DMV information systems. The upgrade included implementation of a new, fully integrated online voter registration system as well as revamping in-office voter registration procedures, changing from a paper-based system to scripted dialog between the customer and the DMV representative, and capturing the voter's signature on an electronic signature pad.[25] The effort also incorporated robust data collection and monitoring.[26] After the new system was implemented, the data indicated that registrations had increased, but not by as much as state officials had anticipated. Not nearly as many voters were taking up the opportunity to register during the in-person transactions as during online transactions.[27]*

Working with the Center for Civic Design, the state determined that the language and process flow of the transactions were confusing for both voters and DMV personnel, leading some DMV workers to depart from the script and resulting in confusion on the part of voters over what they were being asked. Together, they developed and tested new language for both in-person and online transactions that is clear, concise, and easy to understand.[28]

- For in-office interactions, the DMV's voter registration script now asks, "While you're here, let's make sure you get your ballot for the next election. I'll use the information you've given me today to keep your voter registration up to date or register you to vote, if that's ok with you."

- For online interactions, the voter registration system states, "Let's make sure you get your ballot for the next election. The information you're entering today will be used to keep your voter registration up to date or register you to vote, unless you decline by checking the box below."[29]

These changes led to further increases in the number of Coloradans availing themselves of the opportunity to register to vote or update their voter registration address during Motor Voter transactions, and they played a role in a substantial reduction in DMV wait times.[30]

Keep voter rolls up to date when customers move.

The NVRA requires that any driver's license or identification card change of address must also serve as a change of address for voter registration services, unless the voter indicates otherwise. The reason for this requirement is clear: DMVs are usually the state agency with the most complete and up-to-date databases of a state's residents and their addresses. From a customer service perspective, the state's voter rolls should be kept up to date with address information already available and, more significantly, citizens should not lose the right to vote just because they have moved.

The voter registration address update aspect of Motor Voter is critical to meeting the NVRA's dual objectives of increasing participation and ensuring accurate, up-to-date voter rolls. Because Americans move on a frequent basis and because driver's licenses are typically valid for several years before renewal is required, the majority of Motor Voter transactions are change-of-address transactions. If states fail to make use of this ready source of current information about their voters, their rolls quickly become out of date. For example, in 2018, Demos worked with one medium-sized state that had an estimated 400,000 voter registrations—representing over 10 percent of the state's registered voters—with addresses that did not match DMV records. Indeed, in a well-implemented Motor Voter program, a substantial majority of Motor Voter activity will be attributable to address updates.[31]

Unfortunately, many states implement this address update mandate backwards: They use DMV changes of address to update voter registrations *only* if the voter affirmatively requests the change, potentially leading to voters being turned away when they appear at the wrong polling place and increasing the burden on election official colleagues of identifying and removing or updating outdated registrations. To avoid this situation, DMV officials must ensure that change-of-address forms and procedures also include automatic voter registration address updates—and that the information is forwarded to election officials unless the voter has expressed a clear intent that it not be.

Provide needed modifications and accommodations to the voter registration services offered to people with disabilities or limited English proficiency.

DMV agents should be prepared to provide appropriate assistance to customers who have limited English proficiency and/or to customers with disabilities. This assistance can be offered in many

ways, from translating forms for limited-English proficient persons to designing websites that are accessible to screen-readers for people with vision loss. Experience from public assistance agencies, which are required to offer assistance with voter registration, indicates that more people register to vote when assistance is more readily available. Providing needed assistance for voter registration improves the customer experience and enhances the likelihood that customers will successfully complete a voter registration application.

Educate clients about voter registration before they get to the head of the line.

States should provide customers with sufficient information to engage meaningfully with the voter registration process before they are confronted with questions about eligibility and whether they wish to register. Most Americans have come to expect voter registration to be available at their DMVs—and that's a good thing—but not everyone who comes into contact with the DMV has complete or accurate information about the voter registration opportunities that are available to them. Low cost ways to improve the Motor Voter experience and to engage more voters in the democratic process include posters about voter registration, such as placards that list eligibility criteria, which should be placed in lines and/or on the walls of the facility. DMV websites and computer kiosks in DMV offices should explain up front that eligible individuals will have an opportunity to register to vote during their DMV transaction. This gives clients time to consider the service before they conduct their transaction, which could help the lines go more quickly in offices and make for more informed decisions.

Audit and review progress

Collect and review voter registration transaction data on a regular basis.

One of the best ways to gauge the effectiveness of a state's Motor Voter program is to collect and review data metrics. Having good metrics is not only useful on a day-to-day basis to help identify problems and anomalies as they arise. It also sets up the DMV to effectively evaluate new initiatives and changes to the existing system by providing a baseline against which the impact of the new system can be measured. Often, some of the necessary data is already being collected by or for election official colleagues, and the DMV may be able to make use of

this existing information. To effectively assess Motor Voter programs, however, data collection must be built into the DMV's business and IT processes. In the Colorado case study above, for example, the need for a design review was flagged because customers were registering to vote during online driver's license transactions at roughly 3 to 4 times the rate of customers conducting in-office transactions.[32] This kind of analysis is only possible if the DMV is tracking Motor Voter transactions at a fairly granular level.

Creating a transaction audit trail—which allows DMV and election officials to track each voter registration as it is created during the DMV transaction, and then as it moves through validation checks and is received and processed by election officials—can provide more fine-grained information to ensure benchmarks on transaction processing times are being met and to drill down on issues identified in the aggregate transaction data. In one example of the kind of problem that can occur when audit trails are lacking, one state we recently worked with discovered that several thousand voter registration applications initiated through the state's Motor Voter process had gotten caught in the DMV's automated identity verification process and had never been received by the state election office. Because there was insufficient auditable data attached to each record indicating what issues had caused the records to enter the screening process and what was preventing them from leaving, it took the state substantial time and effort to identify and resolve the problem. With an audit trail, this type of investigation requires significantly less time and effort.

Solicit feedback from customers and other stakeholders.

In addition to quantitative transaction data, qualitative information collected from randomized surveys of customers and review of customer complaints can provide additional insight about the effectiveness of a state's Motor Voter program and can help identify the source of problems that may appear in monitoring aggregate data. To get the most useful feedback, surveys should ask customers about their experience with the DMV transaction as a whole, including the voter registration portion, and should ask questions about specific aspects of the transaction and the reason for the customer's responses to individual questions.

DMVs can also glean helpful information by reviewing customer complaints to identify potentially systematic issues. Likewise, communication with key external stakeholders can help agencies identify issues that may not surface through internal data or complaints. For

example, if groups conducting voter registration drives are repeatedly encountering unregistered voters who believed they had registered at the DMV, that feedback may help identify whether there is a technical or usability issue that must be addressed.

Conclusion

To fulfill their central role in our state-based election administration system and provide their customers with a meaningful opportunity to register to vote, DMVs must ensure that their Motor Voter programs are well designed and effectively implemented. A number of states have pioneered effective Motor Voter procedures that streamline the voter registration process and ensure compliance with the requirements of the NVRA. By taking the simple steps outlined in this paper, DMVs can better serve their customers, enhance the effectiveness of their Motor Voter programs, and bring more of their state's citizens into the democratic process.

Endnotes

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6   Pennsylvania Department of State, "Pennsylvania's Online Voter Registration Web Application Programming Interface (PA OVR WebAPI)," https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/OtherServicesEvents/Pages/PA-Online-Voter-Registration-Web-API---RFC.aspx.

7   *See* page 9.

8   Interview by Lisa Danetz with Jennifer Cohan, November 8, 2017.

9   Danetz, *Improving Motor Voter Registration*. Some of the reduction in wait times is attributable to the increased utilization of the DMV's online portal. *Id.*; *see also* The Pew Center on the States, *Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient*, February 2021, https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2012/pewupgradingvoterregistrationpdf.pdf.

10   Saundra Jacks, Director of Data Management Services, Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, "Voter Registration and the DMV," Presentation at AAMVA International Conference, August 23, 2018.

11   *Id.*

12   Interview by Lisa Danetz with Edgardo Cortes, Liz Howard, and Samantha Buckley, October 27, 2017.

13   Interview by Lisa Danetz with Josh Elkins, Charlie Sheldon, Jamie Habecker, and Dave Brown, November 30, 2017.

14   Interview by Lisa Danetz with Edgardo Cortes, Liz Howard, and Samantha Buckley (Oct. 27, 2017).

15   *Id.*

16   *Id.*

17   *Id.*

18   *Id.*

19   *Id.*

20   Virginia Department of Elections, "Registration Statistics and Polling Places," https://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/registration-statistics.

21   Interview by Lisa Danetz with Richard Holcomb and Saundra Jack, November 17, 2017.

22   Center for Civic Design, "Modernizing Voter Registration," https://civicdesign.org/projects/voter-reg/.

23   Whitney Quesenbery, "On Beyond Translation," presentation at Election Assistance Commission Language Access Summit 2018, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/event_document/files/whitney_quesenbery_on_beyond_translation.pdf.

24   Center for Civic Design, *Voter Registration Modernization Design Best Practices,* Updated October 2018, https://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CCD-VR-modernization-design-best-practices-v4.pdf.

25   Danetz, *Improving Motor Voter Registration*, at 4.

26   *Id.* at 5.

27   *Id.*

28   *Id.*

29   *Id.* at 5-6

30   *Id.* at 7.

31   See, e.g., Danetz, *Improving Motor Voter Registration*, at 10, Graphs 3 & 4.

32   *Id.* at 5.