PLEJ PARTNERSHIP FOR LARGE ELECTION JURISDICTIONS

Issue Guide on Election Day Communications

As an election official, communicating with voters, media, and other community stakeholders is important. This generic, nonpartisan document provides sample statements to help guide your discussions with key audiences on what to expect on Election Day:

- Length of Time for Counting Ballots
- Timeliness of Results
- Calling Elections vs. Counting Ballots
- Unofficial vs. Official Results
- Unforeseen Delays in Counting
- Voting Location Closures
- Voting Location Threats
- Voting Location Violence
- Voting Access Updates
- Replacement Ballots
- Security Breach
- Recording at Locations
- Changing Legal Landscape
- Voter Eligibility Review
- Internet Connectivity & Voting Machines
- Federal Presence

We encourage you to customize the material below based on the particulars of your jurisdiction. You may also refer to our Media Engagement Toolkit for general guidelines, best practices, and tips around: building media relationships, earning coverage, preparing for interviews, staying on track during interviews, and following up afterwards. None of the examples or information in this document are intended as legal advice. Be sure to check with your county or state attorney if you have legal questions about communications with voters and other stakeholders.

LENGTH OF TIME FOR COUNTING BALLOTS

On why counting takes time

Before a ballot is counted, we check that it was cast by an eligible voter and meets state and local requirements. Results take time because ballots must be verified, processed, and counted before they can be reported. The totals available now are unofficial and may continue to change as more ballots are processed.

On when to expect next results update

We will post the next update by **[time]** at **[website or other channel].** We are processing and reconciling ballots carefully and will continue sharing results as they become available. We remain committed to delivering results accurately and securely, so voters can have confidence in the outcome.

On why results may change

Unofficial results are released on Election Night and in the days that follow are **unofficial** because ballots are processed in batches. Expect unofficial results to fluctuate as more ballots are processed, counted, and reported.

After counting is complete, **[INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]** will review and certify the results as **official** for the **[INSERT DATE AND NAME OF ELECTION**, *i.e. November X, 20XX General Election*] by **[INSERT DATE]**, as required by state and local laws.

TIMELINESS OF RESULTS

On how voting activity prior to Election Day went in your jurisdiction:

As of **[INSERT DATE]**, we have seen *[insert local observations and enhancements made, for example: record-breaking turnout this cycle and with the addition of three more regional voting centers, we have improved overall processing times and the voter experience.]*

On how higher pre-Election Day voting affects timing of results:

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Ballots cast prior to Election Day, including mail ballots and early in-person votes, are included in the first wave of results posted after polls close. [**INSERT DETAILS ABOUT TURNOUT THUS FAR**, *i.e. because more voters cast their ballot before Election Day this year, we are likely to see a larger share of votes in the early results posted online.]*

On releasing results (states that allow pre-processing):
In **[STATE]**, election officials may begin preparing mail ballots before Election Day, such as **[insert details,** *i.e. checking return envelopes, verifying signatures, and other steps***]**. The work completed in advance helps us report results sooner after polls close. Results are not released before **[TIME OR LEGAL MILESTONE]** and remain unofficial until certified.

On releasing results (states that require processing to wait until Election Day):
In **[STATE]**, election officials must wait until Election Day to begin processing mail ballots. Starting at **[INSERT TIME PROCESSING BEGINS]**, our office will [**INSERT STEPS**, *i.e. verify signatures on return envelopes and prepare ballots for counting].* Because the work cannot begin earlier, we will share updates as results are available. Rest assured that we remain committed to processing all valid votes accurately and carefully.

CALLING ELECTIONS VS. COUNTING BALLOTS

Context:
News organizations and election offices have different roles. News organizations analyze available results and other information to project who is likely to win. Election offices count eligible ballots, complete required checks, and report and certify results under state law.

A media projection is not an official result. Vote totals may continue to change as additional eligible ballots are received, processed, and counted within the deadlines set by law. The timing and steps vary by state. Close races may take longer to resolve because every eligible ballot must be accounted for and the final margin may depend on ballots that have not yet been counted.

On why news outlets project winners before official results are final:
News organizations make projections based on the information available to them. Our responsibility is to count eligible ballots and complete the steps required by law before results are final. We report results as that work proceeds and will share updates clearly and promptly.

On why vote totals change after Election Day:
Vote totals can change as additional eligible ballots are processed and counted. That is a normal part of the process. Our office follows the procedures and deadlines set by law to ensure every eligible ballot is handled accurately and securely. That means counting every eligible ballot, verifying signatures, canvassing ballots while public observers are present, cross-checking tabulations, and more. We aim to do this as quickly as possible while ensuring the count is above reproach, and we ask both the public and the media to respect that responsibility.

UNOFFICIAL VS. OFFICIAL RESULTS

Any results published on Election Night or in days that follow are unofficial until **[INSERT ELECTION AUTHORITY]** certifies them under state law. Unofficial vote totals are expected to change as additional eligible ballots are processed and counted. This is a normal part of the process. In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, certification of the **[INSERT DATE AND NAME OF ELECTION**, *i.e. November X, 20XX General Election*] is scheduled for **[INSERT DATE]** before the **[INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**.

While a candidate or news organization may declare or project a winner before certification, our results become official though the certification process required by state law **[insert local context]**.

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UNFORESEEN DELAYS IN COUNTING BALLOTS

Earlier today, while verifying and counting ballots cast in the **[INSERT DATE AND NAME OF ELECTION**, *i.e. November X, 20XX General Election*], our office became aware of **[INSERT UNFORESEEN DELAY]**. We are **[INSERT MEASURES BEING TAKEN OR HAVE BEEN TAKEN]**. The safety and security of ballots cast by eligible voters was never compromised and we expect to have more unofficial election results **[INSERT REALISTIC TIME FRAME]**.

Unofficial vote totals are expected to fluctuate as more legal ballots are tabulated, as occurs in every election, until the results are certified. In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, certification of the **[INSERT DATE AND NAME OF ELECTION**, *i.e. November X, 20XX General Election*] is scheduled for **[INSERT DATE]** before the **[INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**.

VOTING LOCATION CLOSURES

Earlier today, our office **[had to temporarily/permanently]** close **[INSERT PRECINCT NUMBER AND NAME OF VOTING LOCATION(S)]** in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** due to **[INSERT CAUSE]**. As soon as our office became aware of **[INSERT SHORT CAUSE SUMMARY]**, we ensured voters affected by the closure could vote **[INSERT ALTERNATE LOCATION(S)]**.

We have taken steps to notify those voters whose normal voting location had to close and apologize for the inconvenience. After the general election is over, we will conduct a full review of the closure**[s]** to try and prevent a recurrence. The safety and security of ballots already cast by eligible voters **[in that precinct/in those precincts]** was never compromised.

VOTING LOCATION THREATS

We are grateful for the swift response from **[local]** law enforcement today to ensure that a **[INSERT NATURE OF THREAT: e.g. bomb, fire, shooting, etc]** threat against **[INSERT NAME OF LOCATION AND LOCATION: e.g. precinct 10 at Anytown Elementary School]** did not prevent voters from exercising their right to cast a ballot and have their voice be heard. When the threat was received by **[INSERT WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT]**, we immediately **[INSERT ACTION AND RESPONSE TAKEN]**.

While the authorities investigate, we remain vigilant for other attempts to disrupt our smooth operations on Election Day here in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**. **[INSERT IF APPLICABLE:]** Voters in line at a voting location where a disruption occurs can vote at any other precinct in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** or will be given alternative voting location instructions by an election official on-site.

VOTING LOCATION VIOLENCE

Today, **[BRIEF, CONFIRMED DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT]**. occurred at **[LOCATION]**, resulting in **[CONFIRMED IMPACT ON VOTING]**. The safety of voters and election workers is our priority. We are committed to ensuring every eligible voter in **[JURISDICTION]** can cast a ballot safely and securely.

We thank **[RESPONDING AGENCY]** for their response. Our office is **[SPECIFIC ACTION BEING TAKEN]**, and voting at this location **[CONFIRMED CURRENT STATUS]**. **[INCLUDE ANY NECESSARY VOTER INSTRUCTIONS.]** Our next update will be posted by **[TIME]** at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE]**.

VOTING ACCESS UPDATE

During today's General Election, **[INSERT APPROXIMATE NUMBER OR SIZE OF GROUP]** demonstrators **[INSERT TYPE OF DISRUPTION]**. This caused **[INSERT ANY IMPACTS TO VOTING OR PRECINCTS]**.

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We are committed to ensuring every eligible voter in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** can cast a ballot safely and securely without intimidation. The safety and security of ballots already cast by eligible voters **[in that precinct/in those precincts]** was never compromised by today's demonstration.

We thank **[local]** law enforcement for their **[DESCRIBE RESPONSE,** *for example, prompt/professional/thorough***]** response and ask all individuals to respect the sanctity of the election process and our legal system. Every voter has the right to peacefully cast a private ballot for their candidates of choice.

REPLACEMENT BALLOTS

If you have not received your requested [**ABSENTEE/MAIL-IN/MAIL**] ballot, contact our office at [**CONTACT INFORMATION**] as soon as possible for assistance with a replacement and available voting options.

If your original ballot arrives after you request a replacement, **[INSERT INSTRUCTIONS FOR WHICH BALLOT TO USE]**. Our office tracks returned ballots to ensure only one ballot per voter is counted.

Return your ballot using **[APPROVED RETURN OPTIONS]**, following **[APPLICABLE DEADLINES AND RETURN REQUIREMENTS]**. Instructions are available at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE]**.

SECURITY BREACH

While there may have been rare instances where voter registration systems (not tabulation systems) have been temporarily breached in prior years, data integrity has not been compromised. There is no evidence that integrity has been compromised. **[INSERT SECURITY PROTOCOLS,** *i.e. We use Albert sensors, provided by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), which acts as an intrusion detection system and provides real-time information of any attempted breach of voter registration and administration systems***].**

We thank our **[state and federal]** partners for ensuring security of elections in **[INSERT NAME OF LOCAL JURISDICTION]** is not compromised and we remain vigilant to protect the election process.

RECORDING AT VOTING LOCATION

We are aware of an **[AUDIO/VIDEO]** recording of election workers at **[LOCATION**] on **[DATE]**. Our office is reviewing the circumstances and **[CONFIRMED ACTION BEING TAKEN]**.

We are committed to supporting our election workers and protecting voter privacy while providing the public access required under applicable rules. **[INSERT CONFIRMED STATUS OF ELECTION OPERATIONS.]** Updates will be shared at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE/CHANNEL]**.

CHANGING LEGAL LANDSCAPE

Our office is following **[COURT ORDER OR UPDATED REQUIREMENT]**, which directs us to **[BRIEF, PLAIN-LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION OF REQUIRED ACTION]. [EXPLAIN THE CONFIRMED EFFECT ON VOTING, BALLOT PROCESSING, OR RESULTS REPORTING, INCLUDING ANY ACTION VOTERS NEED TO TAKE.**]

We remain committed to administering this election accurately and transparently. Our next update will be posted by **[TIME]** at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE/CHANNEL**].

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VOTER ELIGIBILITY REVIEW

On **[DATE]**, our office received information concerning the eligibility of an individual who cast a ballot. We are reviewing the relevant records and following **[APPLICABLE REVIEW PROCEDURE]**.

Our office uses **[BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RELEVANT ELIGIBILITY CHECKS]** to verify voter eligibility. We will share confirmed findings and any next steps at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE/CHANNEL]** once the review is complete.

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY AND VOTING MACHINES

Version A - Never Connected
The equipment used to mark and count ballots in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** operates offline. Our office tests voting equipment before each election and verifies results before certification using **[BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF VERIFICATION PROCESS]**. Information about our equipment and procedures is available at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE]**.

Version B - Briefly Connected
In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, equipment used to mark and count ballots operates offline throughout voting. After polls close, **[SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT]** transmits unofficial results using **[CONFIRMED TRANSMISSION METHOD]** so the public can receive timely updates.

Before certification, our office verifies results against **[OFFICIAL RECORDS USED FOR VERIFICATION].** Information about our equipment and procedures is available at **[OFFICIAL WEBSITE]**.

FEDERAL PRESENCE

We are aware of **[REPORTS/CONFIRMED PRESENCE]** of **[AGENCY]** personnel **[AT/NEAR LOCATION]**.

We are working with **[COUNTY COUNSEL/COUNTY LEADERSHIP/PUBLIC SAFETY/OTHER APPROPRIATE AGENCY]** to verify the circumstances and ensure voters feel safe and can continue to access election services.
Election services at **[LOCATION]** are **[OPERATING NORMALLY / OPERATING WITH THE FOLLOWING ADJUSTMENTS / TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE]**.

[IF ACCESS REMAINS OPEN]: Voters may continue to use this location normally.
[IF ACCESS IS AFFECTED, AND ALTERNATIVE VOTING LOCATIONS ARE AVAILABLE]: Voters who prefer or need to use another location may visit **[ALTERNATIVE VOTER SERVICE LOCATION/DROP SITE]**. A full list of official locations is available at **[URL]**.

Questions about voting or election services should be directed to our dedicated contact **[PHONE/EMAIL]**. Questions concerning federal law enforcement activity should be directed to **[APPROPRIATE AGENCY/COUNTY CONTACT]**.

We will continue providing verified updates about election operations through **[WEBSITE/SOCIAL CHANNELS]**.