



COCHISE COUNTY ELECTIONS UPDATE FOR 2016 ELECTION CYCLE

Many changes have been instituted during 2015 that will enhance the voting experience for voters in Cochise County beginning in the 2016 Election cycle.

Following a difficult election cycle in 2014, the Board of Supervisors, County Administration and Elections staff met to review what had gone wrong and how to prevent a recurrence of these same problems. The new Elections Director was mandated to:

- Identify and procure new voting equipment to replace the aging election system
- Review and revise procedures as necessary to ensure smooth operations, streamline processes, avoid errors and ensure absolutely accurate results
- Obtain necessary training for staff responsible for election functions and ensure the election system is sustainable
- Establish a back-up plan and identify and obtain cost-savings wherever possible
- Conduct substantial voter outreach and regain voters' confidence in the integrity of the election process in Cochise County.

Elections staff spent several months researching and investigating available elections systems and evaluating their fit for Cochise County. Of critical importance was that the system be certified by the Arizona Secretary of State, that the system be easy for Poll Workers and voters to use and that the system had built in safeguards to prevent some of the problems occurring in the past. Staff visited other counties, attended conferences and vendor shows, arranged in-house demos, met with staff from multiple firms, discussed findings with other

county elections departments and ultimately made a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors for the Elections Systems & Solutions (ES&S) new hardware and software: an end-to-end elections solution that met all of the requirements.

Vote Centers: Staff also recommended, and the Board approved, consolidating the polling locations (previously one per each of the 49 precincts) into 17 Vote Centers. Vote Centers will be like large polling places. There will be more people, more equipment and more assistance available to voters at each of the Vote Centers. Also, importantly, voters will have the choice to go to ANY Vote Center they choose in the County. No longer must a voter vote only in his/her precinct. If a voter lives in Benson, but works in Sierra Vista during the day, the voter can vote in Sierra Vista! Once a voter signs-in wherever he/she chooses to vote, that information is communicated to all other Vote Centers; this prevents the voter from signing in again and voting a second time elsewhere in the County. Vote Centers will provide more convenience to the voters by allowing them to vote where they are and the consolidation of people and equipment will provide better service. Going to the Vote Center model also meant that the County had to purchase less equipment, which is a savings of taxpayer dollars!

At the Vote Centers: The new system is state of the art and, for those voters who vote at a Vote Center, they will begin with check-in using the new electronic tablets (ePoll books) which contain the voter registration roll and registration status for the entire County. Once a voter signs the ePoll book, the voter will be given a ballot card (about 5" wide)

which will have only a printed bar code at the top. The bar code contains the appropriate ballot style for that voter (i.e., party (for Primary elections), and the precinct and precinct splits (fire district, water district, school district, etc.) reflecting the races that the voter is entitled to vote). There is no information about the voter's identity in the bar code.

The voter then takes the ballot card and feeds it into an ExpressVote. This device is a universal ballot marking device. The ExpressVote guides the voter through the process to make selections in each race. Voters will no longer have to fill in ovals on a paper ballot. Just like an ATM, voters will use the touch-screen technology on the ExpressVote to select choices for each race, and then review all of their choices for accuracy. Once the voter is satisfied that the races are all voted as intended, the voter will press "Print Ballot" and the machine will do so. The printed card will contain only the selections the voter made, for each race the voter voted. (This device is fully ADA-compliant and has many features to assist voters who are blind, low-vision, or who have difficulty reading; in addition, the device presents the ballot to the voter in either English or Spanish (voter's choice)).

After the ballot card is printed, the voter feeds the card into the DS200 Tabulator which reads the voter's selections and counts the ballot.

That's it!

Early Voting: Early voting remains an option and, in fact, the number of registered voters who vote Early ballots has historically been increasing by approximately 10% each major election cycle (i.e., every two years).

With the new system, Early voters will still receive a paper ballot, although it should be more "user friendly" with clearer separation between federal,

state and local races. Using the new Electionware software, the Elections staff will be programming all of the ballots and will have the ability to customize the ballot to make it easier to read.

The envelope the voter will use to return the ballot to the Recorder has also been redesigned. No longer will there be two envelopes (inner and outer); instead, the return envelope has a secrecy flap that covers the voter's signature on the affidavit, eliminating the need for two envelopes. In addition, the Election's & Recorder's offices have established a joint contract with a Vote By Mail provider who will be printing all of the ballots, and assuring that all Early voters receive the correct ballot by a bar-code tracking system that matches the ballot style the voter is supposed to receive with the bar code for the same ballot style and after confirming the match, inserts the ballot/instruction sheet and return envelope into the outbound envelope. By eliminating the inner envelope and taking advantage of digital printing technology and services, the two departments are saving money and time, Early voters will receive the correct ballot and the entire process is auditable!

One word of caution: If you plan to vote an Early ballot, put it in the mail at least one-week before the Election! This is because all of the US Postal Service mail in Cochise County is now routed through either Phoenix or Albuquerque and you must allow time for the return mail to be **received at the Recorder's Office on or before Election Day!** If your ballot arrives after Election Day, it will not be counted.

You can also choose to drop off your Early ballot at the Recorder's Office by Election Day, OR drop it off at any Vote Center in the County *on Election Day*. However, keep in mind that Early ballots dropped off at Vote Centers on Election Day have to be

counted after the election, thus potentially delaying election results in close races.

Bottom line: If you are going to vote an Early ballot, MAIL IT IN EARLY – ONE WEEK BEFORE ELECTION!

Voting an Early Ballot on-site: The Recorder’s Office will continue to use their Bisbee location as an on-site Early voting option. Those who choose to vote Early on-site before Election Day will be voting on the same ExpressVote ballot marking device that will be used at the Vote Centers.

Counting Early Ballots: The new system also includes a high-speed digital scanner which has the capability of counting more than 300 ballots per minute. The processes for batching Early ballots have also been streamlined, and additional verification checks have been instituted. The combination of new equipment and procedures will ensure that Early ballots will be processed accurately and quickly.

The election process in Cochise County has been changed to provide a more efficient, user-friendly process for our voters; a more economical approach to staffing/equipping and servicing voting locations and utilizes state-of-the-art technology and systems to assure accurate and timely results.