VOTING SYSTEMS ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Quarterly Newsletter

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#LACounty VSAP approach: technology in voting is something you do WITH and FOR -- not TO -- voters. lavote.net/VSAP #acelectiontech

MESSAGE FROM DEAN

As the County's Registrar of Voters, I am tasked with ensuring accountable and transparent administration of national and local elections. It is our Department's responsibility to provide the resources necessary so that the election process is accessible and no voters are disenfranchised. In order to maintain the integrity and accessibility of elections, we must have the right systems and processes in place - from the voter registration system, to the machines at the polling places, to the tally system that we use to accurately count the votes.

As we prepare for the Presidential Election this year, the importance of the Voting Systems Assessment Project is reinforced. We must continue our effort to develop a better voting system for our voters by the 2020 Presidential Election. The current technology does not provide optimal accessibility and usability to our voters. As President Obama pointed out, it is "easier to order a pizza than vote." The challenge therefore is to continue seeking ways to develop a voting experience that allows for increased flexibility and convenience for our voters, a system that allows us to meet the voters where they are and serve them in ways that are familiar and meaningful. Our goal is to arrive at a design that allows voters to have choices and an ability to customize their experience in a manner that instills trust, confidence and possibly even excitement in the experience of casting a vote.

In this issue, we share with you the latest design developments and the research findings that have led to those developments. This includes updates to the design of the Vote By Mail packet, Vote By Mail ballots and the Ballot Marking Device.

We encourage your continued participation and feedback as we approach the end of the current phase and move forward with the System Engineering and Certification Phase.

DEAN C. LOGAN
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
Los Angeles County

DESIGN CONCEPT UPDATE

The Ballot Marking Device (BMD) design has been further refined with design modifications incorporated in the last few months. We are close to completing the system engineering and design specifications of the new voting system and all its associated components including the User Interface and the Integrated Ballot Box (IBB). The Design Validation Units (DVUs) will be presented at the conclusion of Phase III. For up-to-date information on the VSAP and design concepts, visit our website at http://www.lavote.net/vsap/design-concepts.

LEARNINGS FROM THE RESEARCH: VOTE BY MAIL USER TESTING

The Department conducted Vote By Mail (VBM) user testing in November 2015 to test the usability and accessibility of the new Vote By Mail design as well as to evaluate the impact of the ballot size and secrecy sleeve on the overall voting experience. We gained significant insights from this research that validated the design and identified areas for improvement. In this section, you will find a summary of some of the findings from the Vote By Mail user testing and our next steps in refining the design.

Participants

76 voters participated in the research. They were purposefully selected according to the following criteria: experienced VBM voters, new VBM voters, seniors ages 65 and up, young people ages 18-25, people with minimal formal education, Spanish speakers, Korean speakers, people with motor impairments and people with mild visual impairments. We were assisted by our partner organizations in the recruitment of participants. These organizations include: League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County, United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles, Korean Resource Center, NALEO Educational Fund and Asian Americans Advancing Justice.

The participants were asked to rate their interaction with the proposed Vote By Mail ballot in different areas: overall lay-out including font size and font style, ease of finding contests and marking selections, completing the ballot, packing up, and mailing a valid ballot.
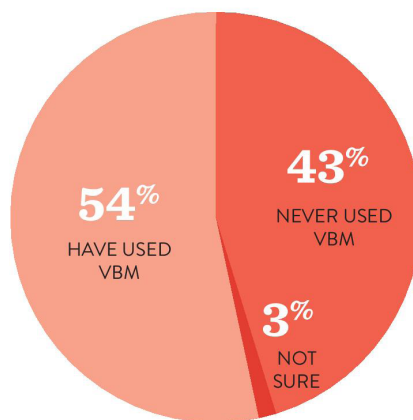
The graphs below and charts that follow provide a general picture of the individuals who participated in the research. In addition to basic demographic characteristics, you can see varying levels of voting experience, access to computers, use of mobile phones, financial situation and educational attainment. The diversity of these participants reflects the larger LA County electorate.
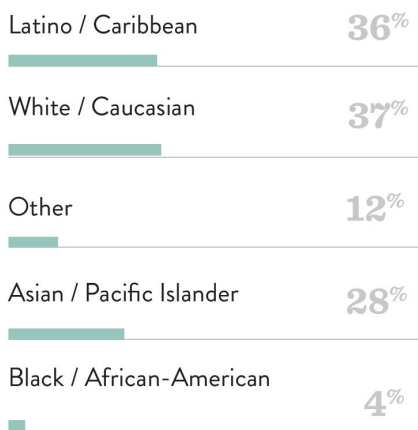
GENDER

66% FEMALE

34% MALE

VOTING EXPERIENCE

54% HAVE USED VBM

43% NEVER USED VBM

3% NOT SURE

RACE / ETHNICITY

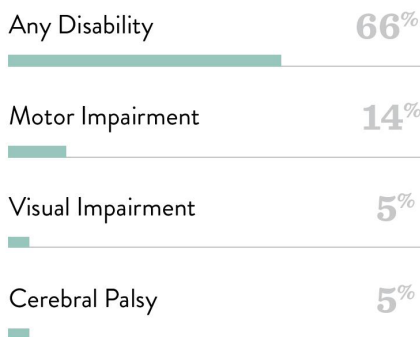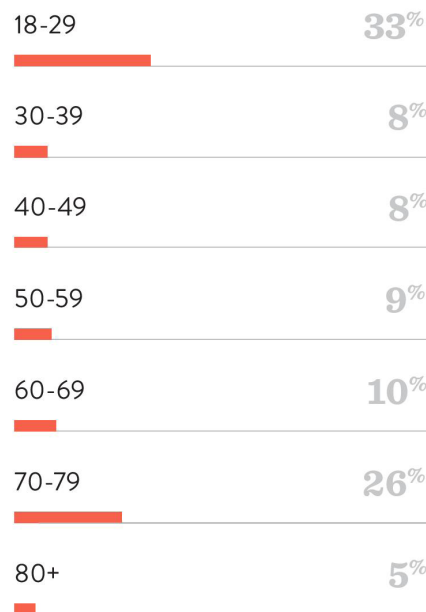|	
Latino / Caribbean	36%
White / Caucasian	37%
Other	12%
Asian / Pacific Islander	28%
Black / African-American	4%
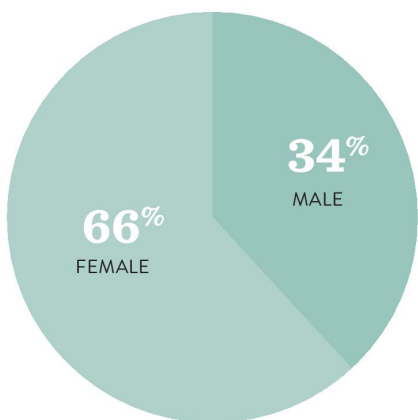
Results add up to greater than 100% as several participants reported mixed racial/ethnicity by marking more than one race/ethnicity category.
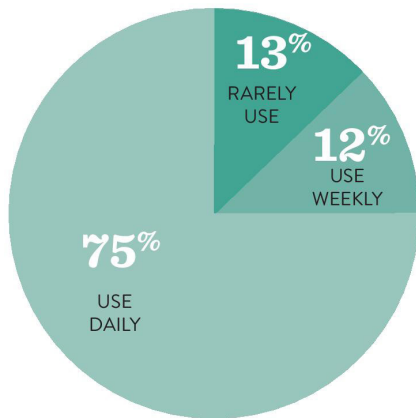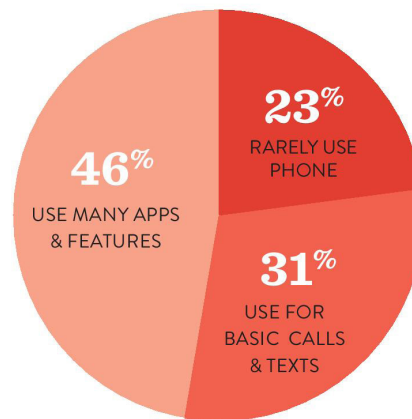
ACCESS CHALLENGE

Any Disability	66%
Motor Impairment	14%
Visual Impairment	5%
Cerebral Palsy	5%

AGE

18-29	33%
30-39	8%
40-49	8%
50-59	9%
60-69	10%
70-79	26%
80+	5%

Participant Breakdown

Participants were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, age, educational attainment, ability, voting experience, technology experience, and financial status.

COMPUTER USAGE

13%
RARELY USE

12%
USE WEEKLY

75%
USE DAILY

MOBILE PHONE USAGE

23%
RARELY USE PHONE

46%
USE MANY APPS & FEATURES

31%
USE FOR BASIC CALLS & TEXTS

FINANCIAL SITUATION

Not enough for basics like food	1%
Not enough for bills	20%
Living month-to-month	36%
Comfortable with a little left over to save	38%
Enough to splurge	4%
Prefer not to answer	1%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

No formal schooling	1%
1-8 Grade	1%
9-12 Grade	8%
High school	12%
Associates or Bachelors	34%
Masters	13%
PhD or professional	12%
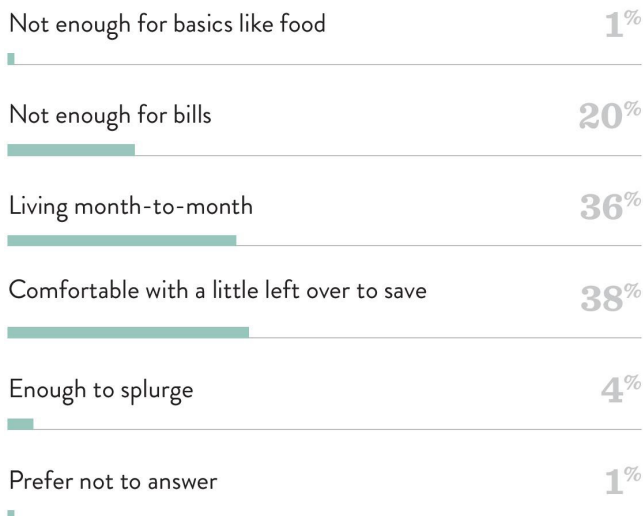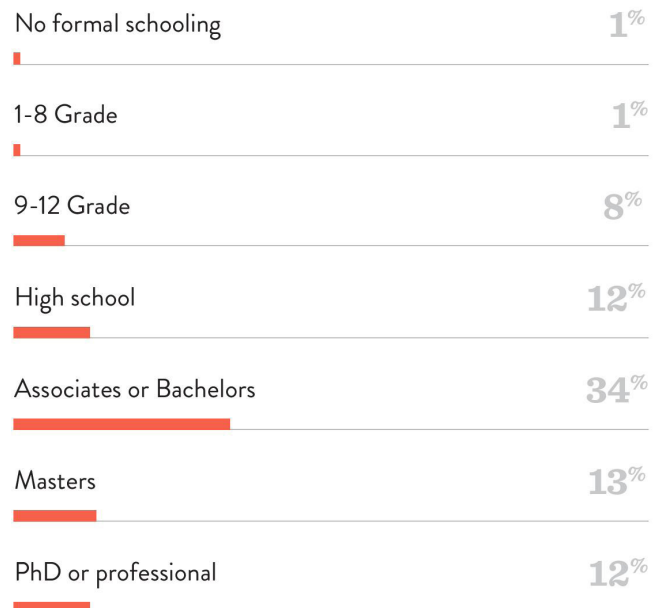
Overall Layout

Participants were asked to narrate their first impressions of the ballot when they first opened the packet. A majority of the voters recognized the simplicity and ease of layout. The voters overwhelmingly embraced the design, commenting that it was efficient and official looking.

91% of participants thought the font was an easy size to read. Voters who usually require a larger font type to read content, such as the participants from United Cerebral Palsy of Los Angeles and those who reported mild visual impairments, found that the font size, the bold letters, and the colors make the ballot readable and legible.

> **It looks less intimidating than current ballots.**

> **It looks kind of modern. Very straight forward. I like the feel. The borders have a nice feel. It seems very efficient, instead of each page being one section. It is nicely put together. It is very user friendly. It looks like something that carries weight and value.**

Usability & Accessibility

The usability of the proposed design was gauged through the ease of finding candidates and measures on the ballot. Participants rated the experience of finding contests on a quantitative scale from very hard to very easy. On average, 7% of the voters rated the finding of contests as hard, 36% thought it was okay while 58% said it was easy to look for contests on the ballot.

> *I like how the judicial offices and state offices are bolded and go with the background. The yes or no's are pretty clear. The size may be helping with this. I think the descriptions are clear. I like how A, J, N are separate on the left and are easier to find.*

Marking the Ballot

As we have learned from previous studies of best practices, ballot systems that allowed voters to read contest information and mark on the same page were more cognitively intuitive than those systems that involve a separate selections sheet. In the proposed design, the selection circles are directly under each contest description. Voters had increased confidence in this system because they are less likely to commit errors while marking their votes than in the current model where they go back and forth between a separate booklet and the ballot.

In addition, all ballots and secrecy sleeves included instructions on how to mark their selection. These design decisions were aimed at enhancing usability and increase accessibility for people with fine and gross motor impairments.

> *It is really superior because the choices are right there in front of you. It's a no brainer that the thing you're inking is exactly there. There's no cross checking, much faster, very much more reassuring. This will assure the paper trail, especially in a recount. There's really so little chance of making the wrong decisions.*

Accuracy of Completing the Ballot

On the analysis of accuracy, this study found that voters completed their ballots with an average of 19.7 correct marks out of 21 contests. 80% of the voters who returned their ballots marked 20 or all 21 contests correctly. A small minority of 6% scored ten or fewer contests correctly.

This research validates many of the key design elements necessary for a usable and accessible design, which are already present in the proposed Vote By Mail ballot. There is room for improvement based on the findings from the user testing. The Department is working with IDEO to further refine the design and incorporate the valuable feedback learned from this research.

The full Vote By Mail research report is available on our website at http://www.lavote.net/vsap/research.

LEGISLATION UPDATE

The Department is closely monitoring proposed legislation that will allow for the effective implementation of the new voting system. Los Angeles County has taken a Support in Concept position for Senate Bill 450. The concepts enumerated in this bill are aligned with the voting experience that the Department envisions for the voters – the establishment of vote centers, a period for early voting, and ballot drop-off locations. On the concept of an All Vote By Mail election, however, the County is proposing an alternative option as an amendment to the bill. We continue to dialogue with the Secretary of State, legislators, and stakeholders, and actively monitor other legislative activity related to election administration.

PHASE IV PLANNING

The VSAP team is preparing the groundwork for the next phase of the project, the System Manufacturing and Certification Phase, which will be launched this summer. In connection with this, a Procurement Strategies Workshop was held on December 15, 2015. The workshop was attended by the VSAP Internal Project Team and representatives from IDEO. Representatives from the Chief Information Office and County Counsel were also present. Among the topics on the agenda were identifying the requirements for the ideal software and BMD hardware contractors, developing a procurement communication and evaluation tool, and a presentation of the different implementation strategies and solicitation models conceptualized by the VSAP team. The input from the workshop will be used as guidelines for the process of competitive bidding in the next phases of the project.
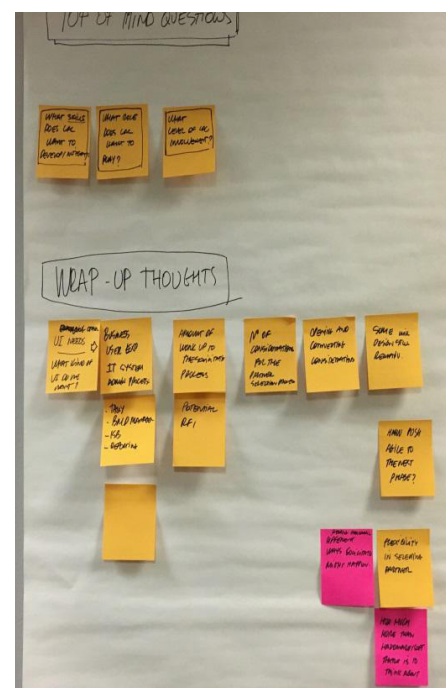
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the course of the project, we have continuously engaged members of the public and community groups. In addition, as the project continues to gain national attention, various individuals from different localities, states and countries have expressed interest in the project and have contacted the VSAP team to learn more about our research and design. To date, we have engaged over 3,200 voters, poll workers, election administrators and stakeholders resulting in a concept for an improved voting experience which includes new processes and new technologies.

Los Angeles County Quality & Productivity Commission | January 25, 2016

The VSAP was invited by the Quality & Productivity Commission to present an update on the BMD design, extensive qualitative research, user testing, community engagement activities and the latest images of the voting system prototype. The Commission provided positive feedback and support for the project.

Community and Voter Outreach Committee (CVOC) | January 27, 2016

We gave a project update to the members of the CVOC. We shared the findings from the Vote By Mail user testing, a summary of community engagement efforts and other on-going activities.

Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) | February 29, 2015

We presented a project update at the most recent VAAC meeting. We shared a brief overview of the Vote By Mail user testing and our efforts on engaging various voting accessibility organizations. An open invitation was also extended to members to observe the upcoming Advisory Committee Meeting on March 16, 2016.

IN THE NEWS

February 16, 2016 - Human-Centered Design for the Voting Experience
http://ssir.org/articles/entry/human_centered_design_for_the_voting_experience

December 8, 2015 - Upgrading California's Elections for the 21st Century
http://www.cafwd.org/reporting/entry/bringing-california-elections-into-the-21st-century

November 9, 2015 - Election Administration Reports - Volume 45, Number 22
http://www.lavote.net/Documents/vsap/press_room/_11092015_november%209-final.pdf0

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Get the latest updates and project developments by visiting the Voting System Assessment Project (VSAP) website at www.lavote.net /vsap. We strongly encourage public input throughout the process and look forward to continuing to work with you on this critical project.