

# Voter Registration

Update to 2018 Evaluation Report

January 2019

## Problems Identified

- **Duplicate and Inaccurate Application Processing.** Voter registration applications pose challenges for county election staff due to unnecessary re-registrations, illegible handwriting or typographical errors, and incomplete information.
- **Overtaxed Registration System.** The Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS), first developed in 2004, is not designed to handle the current volume of transactions from county and city election officials, particularly those related to absentee ballots.
- **Counties Not Complying with Poorly Articulated Post-Election Sampling Requirements.** The requirement for counties to send address verification postcards to a random sample of election day registrants within ten days after an election, as currently implemented, does not serve a useful purpose. A sample size of 3 percent of election day registrants, set by the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) through rulemaking, is not large enough to yield useful data in counties with small populations. Moreover, county officials we interviewed did not send the postcards to a random sample of *registrants*, and several counties did not complete the task within the required ten days.
- **Incomplete Identification of Potentially Ineligible Voters.** An SVRS report identifies some potentially ineligible voters, but it does not identify a particular subset of such voters who were “inactive” (generally, people who had not voted in Minnesota for at least four years). Additionally, many county election officials do not use the report to identify possibly ineligible voters.
- **Unclear Expectations of Agencies.** The law requires state agencies to provide “voter registration services for employees and the public.” The law does not define such services, and it may be impractical for some agencies to facilitate voter registration for members of the public.

## Changes Implemented

- **Online Registration Updated to Improve Application Processing.** In May 2018, OSS updated the online application to include a step that checks whether a person is already registered to vote and to include a “please review” screen before submitting the application.
- **New Report Developed to Identify Additional Possibly Ineligible Voters.** OSS developed an SVRS report to identify inactive voters with potential eligibility issues for use beginning with the August 2018 primary elections. OSS has reminded county election officials to use all reports from SVRS to identify eligibility issues and duplicate voters.

## Action Needed

- **Modernize SVRS.** If the Legislature and Governor authorize the use of federal funds that Congress has allocated for election security and system modernization, OSS should work to modernize SVRS.
- **Remove or Clarify Purpose of Post-Election Sampling.** The Legislature should amend *Minnesota Statutes* 2018, 201.121, subd. 3(a), to remove or clarify the post-election random sampling requirement.
- **Clarify Expectations of Agencies.** The Legislature should amend *Minnesota Statutes* 2018, 201.162, to clarify its expectations of state agencies to provide voter registration services to members of the public.