



10 Steps Mayors Can Take to Improve Election Security

By Danielle Root, Liz Kennedy, Michael Sozan, and Jerry Parshall March 14, 2018

Executive solutions

1. Establish an election security commission to carry out investigations and studies on the election security preparedness of your city and provide recommendations for improving overall election security. The commission should comprise experts across background and disciplines, including local election officials, cybersecurity experts, computer scientists, voting rights advocates, and members of relevant agencies.
2. Develop emergency protocol and contingency plans for election-related cyberattacks or widespread machine malfunction on Election Day and during early voting periods. Ensure that election officials and relevant personnel at all levels are properly trained and prepared for carrying out these plans.
3. Actively recruit and retain cyber- and tech-savvy local election officials and staff. Appoint cybersecurity liaisons and experts across all relevant agencies to make sure election security defense is coordinated effectively. Partner with the technical experts at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, to the extent possible, to identify and assess threats to voter registration systems and election infrastructure.
4. Dedicate funds to provide mandatory and ongoing cybersecurity training to all election officials, including on avoiding spear-phishing attacks. Any individuals with access to voter registration records and databases should receive training. Cybersecurity training should also be mandatory for local officials who share office space with election personnel in the event of a targeted cyberattack on buildings dedicated to election administration.

Use your role as a mayor to engage with election officials

5. Create an open line of regular communication with other mayors across the state as well as your state's top election official. Share information on suspicious activity and Election Day concerns, as well as tips and advice for what has worked or is working well pertaining to election security preparedness in your respective jurisdictions.
6. Conduct regular meetings or forums with your local election officials. Ask them what support they need in administering elections and any potential problems they have observed or expect for upcoming elections.¹ Maintaining an open line of communication with election officials who are on the front lines of U.S. elections is key to identifying and addressing potential vulnerabilities from the outset.

Educate the public and advocate for improving election security preparedness

7. Use communication channels, speeches, op-eds, and letters to the editor to support election security reforms in your city and state, such as paper ballot voting systems and strong postelection audits.² In doing so, mayors could remind the public that, in the face of threats to the United States' democratic society, it is even more important that people participate in elections and maintain confidence in the overall integrity of the system.
8. Partner with other mayors across the state to release joint statements on the election security needs and vulnerabilities in your cities, in order to apply pressure on governors and state legislatures to enact policy and dedicate necessary funds for the purposes of improving election security preparedness.
9. Issue a proclamation designating an "election security day" to educate the public about existing threats to and vulnerabilities in election infrastructure as well as steps your city is taking to improve election security preparedness. For example, your city can hold a town hall to answer questions the public may have about their city's election security preparedness and can feature local election officials and election security experts. Under the current threat environment, public awareness is critical to help spur urgency and apply pressure on governors and state legislatures to do more to protect elections.
10. Advocate to Congress for funding and resources to fortify your state's election infrastructure.³ Apply pressure to members of Congress representing your state by providing details of how federal funding would benefit your city specifically.

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Endnotes

1 Danielle Root and others, "Election Security in All 50 States: Defending America's Elections" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/02/12/446336/election-security-50-states/>.

2 Danielle Root and Liz Kennedy, "9 Solutions to Secure America's Elections" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/08/16/437390/9-solutions-secure-americas-elections/>.

3 Michael Sozan, "On HAVA's 15th Anniversary, Congress Needs to Make U.S. Elections More Secure" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/10/26/441417/on-havas-15th-anniversary-congress-needs-to-make-u-s-elections-more-secure/>.