

Larimer County, CO
Clerk & Recorder
"Vote Centers-A New Polling
Place Model"



SCOTT DOYLE
CLERK & RECORDER

Larimer County Clerk and Recorder

27, May 2005

Beverly Kaufman
Harris County Clerk
1001 Preston, 4th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Ms. Kaufman:

Enclosed is a completed submission for the Election Administration Best Practice Award. The submission introduces our office practice of developing a new polling place model for voting on Election Day, known as Vote Centers.

I thank you in advance for the opportunity to submit this paper for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Scott Doyle at (970) 498-7852 if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

SCOTT DOYLE
CLERK AND RECORDER

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Larimer County, Colorado is characterized by high growth in its expanding urban centers and a commitment to preserving the open spaces of its rural towns. With 143 precincts and a population of over 270,000, the county's anticipated implementation costs of the Help America Vote Act were considerable. A mobile, growing population coupled with additional accessibility requirements led Larimer County to develop an innovative system of voting known as Vote Centers. The Vote Center Model replaces 143 precinct specific polling places with 15 to 30 non-precinct specific Vote Centers, depending on the anticipated voter turnout for an election. Every ballot style is available at each site, allowing electors to cast their ballot correctly anywhere in the county, regardless in which precinct they reside.

Vote Centers are easily managed, cost-effective and allow the implementation of HAVA requirements without difficulty. The ease of management comes from reducing the actual number of polling sites so drastically. Logistical oversight of material control is simplified. Recruiting and supervising poll workers are done more effectively as fewer poll workers are required. Specialized training allows judges to develop an expertise of knowledge in particular processes within a Vote Center. Management of fewer sites allows for more direct security and contingency planning on Election Day. As well, the Vote Center Model has proven to be more cost-effective than precinct polling places. Fewer sites require fewer judges, less supplies and less facility rental fees.

Converting to Vote Centers allowed our office to effectively implement new requirements of HAVA in two ways. First, budgeting for new voting machines was more economical with fewer sites. Second, many of our traditional precinct polling places would have required permanent structural improvements in order to meet new

accessibility requirements. The flexibility of the Vote Center Model allows us to locate facilities based in part upon whether they were accessible to the voting public.

Vote Centers meet the interests of the public by being more accessible, flexible and efficient than the traditional precinct-specific model. The Vote Center Model provides the public with polling places in modern facilities that meet stringent accessibility guidelines. Because voters can cast their correct ballot style at any Vote Center in the county, they never have to worry about being disenfranchised by voting in the wrong precinct. If a voter lives in an outlying area but commutes to an urban center for work, then he or she can vote during lunch outside his or her home precinct without having to cast a provisional ballot. Should any contingency impede voting at any one location, voters can be re-routed to the nearest alternate Vote Center.

In a recent conference on election reform held by the Commission on Federal Election Reform, Larimer County was lauded as an example of professionalism in elections management. The Vote Center Model was recognized as being effectively service-oriented such that electors are "treated like customers." The new model was further praised for being "convenient, accessible and efficient" for voters.

The use of an electronic pollbook at each Vote Center increases voter security by preventing voter fraud and voting twice. The electronic pollbook is used by pollworkers to efficiently process voters, to determine whether voters are eligible to vote and to determine whether voters have already voted. Using live, 128-bit encrypted connection over dedicated T1 lines, Larimer County can monitor voter activity throughout Election Day and even assign correct ballot styles to voters who need to update their address according to statutory guidelines.

Vote Centers have proven to be efficient for the voting public. Even during a Vote Center's busiest hours, voters are processed and cast their ballots within an average of 20 minutes from their arrival. Using layout software, statistical information and site surveys, our staff develops a layout for each site that is designed to process voters efficiently and correctly. Labor is divided within a Vote Center and poll workers are trained to work a specific job all day, allowing them to assist voters more effectively.

The Vote Center Model affords specific benefits to both the Elections Department and the voting public. As federal legislation deadlines draw near and the cost and complexity of running an election increase, Larimer County is confident the Vote Center Model will meet and exceed these new demands.