

California Voter Foundation



To: Sacramento Voters Choice Act Coalition
From: Kim Alexander, President, California Voter Foundation
Date: June 21, 2018
Re: Recommendations for improving the VCA model in Sacramento County

At the beginning of the VCA implementation process, back in May 2017, the California Voter Foundation urged the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors to make some extra efforts beyond what was required by law if they chose to adopt this voting model. These were:

1. Provide postage-paid ballot return envelopes.
2. Direct the Registrar of Voters to contact voters whose ballots are rejected due to signatures not matching and give them the opportunity to correct and “cure” their ballots so that they are counted and those voters are not disenfranchised.
3. Direct the Elections Department to locate a vote center in every designated community in the county.
4. Encourage the Elections Department to coordinate its outreach with other government agencies within the county.

Of these, all but #1 were implemented. CVF’s letter to the Board is online here:

https://www.calvoter.org/issues/votereng/advocacy/2017-18/Sac_County_Supervisors_Letter_CVF_May_23_2017.pdf

In Sacramento County, election workers contacted voters with missing and challenged signatures and asked them to provide a valid signature. Here are the “cure” rates per the Interim Registrar Alice Jarboe:

- The county mailed out 756 “no match” letters, 505 cured, 251 not cured, resulting in a 67% cure rate; and
- The county mailed out 1,798 “no sig” letters, 973 cured, 825 not cured, resulting in a 54% cure rate.

Based on my observations before and on Election Day, CVF has some additional recommendations we’d like to see the county implement in future VCA elections:

1. We still strongly urge the county to provide postage-paid return envelopes (many ballots were dropped off so it would not have been as expensive as the registrar told the supervisors it would have been to provide this; two VCA counties did provide postage paid envelopes - San Mateo and Nevada; the other two may be considering it for the Fall).

2. Place “I voted” stickers inside the VBM mailings sent to all registered voters (this would cost \$35,000 per Alice Jarboe). These stickers are very important to voters.¹ One big advantage of doing this is that voters who send in their ballots early can wear their stickers for weeks!
3. Add the election department’s phone number and web site address to the ballot envelope - voters were out with their voted ballots trying to drop them off at closed locations and did not know what to do.
4. Relocate the accessibility hole punched over the date line on the envelope.
5. Make all drop-off locations available for voters to use on Election Day between 7am - 8pm. This could be achieved by recruiting volunteers to staff pickup locations during hours when the locations are not open for business.
6. Install additional external drop-off locations open 24 hours (Sacramento currently has just one, at the county election office).
7. Provide web-based lookup tools that are accessible by location - if you used the Secretary of State or county’s web site to try to find a voting location near you, you needed to have the address of a registered voter in that area for the lookup to work (apparently the county’s app did work based on one’s physical location but their web site did not direct people there for a lookup by location).
8. Track voters’ requests for “to go” ballots at vote centers (they were not tracked and it was possible for voters to request more than the maximum number of ballots permitted by law).
9. Train election workers at vote centers how to properly fold the ballots they printed so they’d fit in the envelopes.
10. Help vote center election staff keep occupied during slow times (it was very slow at many locations up until Election Day).
11. Allow more time for voters to cure signature problems - with so many ballots arriving on Election Day it was not possible for county election staff to identify all the missing and mismatched signatures within the 8-day timeframe given to voters to provide a valid signature. Sacramento still reportedly had over 132,000 ballots to process by June 13 when the signature cure window closed.

¹ See Dr. Mindy Romero’s 2017 vote center survey findings which show that nearly two-thirds of voters who go to polling places do so to obtain an “I voted” sticker”: <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/california-voters-don’t-idea-new-vote-centers-uc-davis-study-finds/>