*CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE
ON TRUST IN ELECTIONS*

FINAL REPORT

APRIL 2024

CONVERGENCE

INTRODUCTION

For nearly fifteen years, **Convergence Center for Policy Resolution** (Convergence) has brought together diverse experts across political, ideological, sectoral, and other divides as participants in Collaboratives that build trust, find common ground, forge consensus solutions to gridlocked challenges, and work as unlikely allies to advance their implementation. Convergence's evidence-based approach to collaborative problem-solving is informed by many years of practice and continued advances in contact theory, neuroscience, and psychology, as well as significant adaptation of best practices from the disciplines of facilitation, mediation, deliberative democracy, bridgebuilding and international peacebuilding. This approach has allowed Convergence to regularly succeed in forging trust among even the most improbable collaborators.

Convergence starts by identifying issues where division stands in the way of progress. Over the past several years, few issues have been as divisive as the reliability and trustworthiness of the United States election system. In early 2023, Convergence began researching and assessing the issues surrounding election distrust to surface opportunities for cross-partisan, cross-sectoral collaboration that could improve the public's trust in elections. In August 2023, Convergence convened a small, but meaningfully diverse, group of experts to consider what kinds of public messaging could increase trust before the 2024 Presidential election. This report shares the results of Convergence's discovery research and the resulting deliberations of the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections*.

In parallel to the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections*, the national movement, Braver Angels, held 26 separate grassroots workshops over a 3-year period (from October 2020 to November 2023) to gather input on how elections might be made more trustworthy. During these sessions, small groups of "Red" (conservative-leaning) and "Blue" (liberal-learning) participants from across the country engaged in open, moderated dialogue. Braver Angels shared workshop findings with Convergence, elevating grassroots perspectives and priorities as Collaborative participants narrowed scope and audience. The *Braver Angels Trustworthy Elections Report* highlights 23 solutions, informed by the 727 points of agreement (values, concerns, and soultions) that were unanimously accepted in workshops across the country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PROBLEM:
SIGNIFICANT DISTRUST OF THE U.S. ELECTION SYSTEM

Fair and free elections are fundamental to a healthy, thriving democracy. They represent an essential right of the people: the ability to choose their own leaders. If trust is lacking in an elections system, so too is trust in the validity of the results and elected leaders. Concerningly, trust in elections in the United States is declining and doing so along increasingly partisan lines.

Widespread, unfounded claims of voter fraud around the 2020 presidential election resulted in only **15 percent of Americans** saying they were very confident the country's elections were administered properly – a near historic low. Only two years later, in the 2022 midterm elections, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to believe there was significant fraud (**43 percent of Republicans vs. 8 percent of Democrats**). Democrats were **twice as likely** to believe the 2022 midterm election results were "accurate." **This sharp division and rise in distrust occurred despite election experts, administrators, law enforcement officials, and others observing little, if any, voter fraud or errors in election administration.**

15%

Only 15% of Americans were very confident the country's elections were administered properly after the 2020 presidential election
Pew Research Center

Voters distrust elections for a variety of reasons. Some of the **most common reasons** include:

➤ Belief **voter fraud** is taking place

➤ Thinking **unregistered voters** and/or **noncitizens** voted

➤ Believing **multiple voting** was encouraged

➤ **Delays** in results

➤ Issues with **counting**, **tallying**, and **auditing**

The **skepticisms fueling distrust do not all arise on their own**. Many of them **stem from mis- and disinformation**, sometimes spread directly by candidates and political campaigns, amplified by social media and by mainstream media covering elections claims. Moreover, it is useful to make a distinction between election deniers and election doubters or skeptics. Deniers include people who are convinced that an election was not accurate and those who operate on the electoral system as part of a larger strategy. Skeptics are citizens who have often reasonable questions and insecurities about the integrity of the process.

Mis- and disinformation can be especially harmful during elections when communicating effectively with the public is already challenging. Why? One challenge is the **decentralization of elections administration** in the United States, resulting in the way ballots are cast, accepted, and counted varying from state to state and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. This is compounded, among other factors, by a **lack of basic understanding** from the voting population at large **about our elections system**. Variation in elections administration is easily capitalized on and treated as a reason to distrust the system, rather than an ingenuity that bolsters election security and allows for election officials to meet the needs of their local communities.

Election deniers: includes people who are convinced that an election was not accurate and those who operate on the electoral system as part of a larger strategy.

Election doubters or skeptics: citizens who have often reasonable questions and insecurities about the integrity of the process.

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON TRUST IN ELECTIONS FINAL REPORT

Beyond these systematic challenges, the **credibility of our elections system is increasingly undermined by**:

- ➤ **Beliefs the election is legitimate only if your preferred candidate wins**

- ➤ **Beliefs that elections are being overseen by political actors**

- ➤ **Unsubstantiated assertions that voter fraud is impacting election results**

- ➤ **Claims voter identification laws are suppressing turnout**

- ➤ **Media and political parties sensationalizing anecdotes about voter suppression, fraud, or insecure voting systems that might be factual but are not highly prevalent.**

> **Addressing the increasing levels of mis- and distrust requires a multipronged effort across elected leaders, educators, community leaders, civic engagement initiatives, and others committed to our democratic process persevering.**

Elections in the United States have not traditionally put the citizen at the center. They are designed for political parties to identify and turn out their voters, while allowing administrators to easily count votes. These **cross-cutting incentives make it challenging to communicate clearly and accurately about elections in the United States**. Addressing the increasing levels of mis- and distrust requires a multipronged effort across elected leaders, educators, community leaders, civic engagement initiatives, and others committed to our democratic process persevering.

DISCOVERY: WHAT WE LEARNED

In the spring and summer of 2023, **Convergence conducted a landscape analysis to better understand the various points in the election process that create the most confusion, disinformation, or misinformation, and how targeted, credible messages could bolster voter confidence going into the 2024 elections.** Through this process, we interviewed over 120 of the nation's leading stakeholders in elections, including Secretaries of State, local election officials, leaders of civic organizations, researchers, academics, lawyers, and communications experts. Those we interviewed were demographically and ideologically diverse. We also heard from citizens at the grassroots level thanks to our colleagues at Braver Angels. These are the questions we asked and some key takeaways from what we learned:

(1) **How would you break down the election process (voting, election location monitoring/security, counting/processing results, reporting results) and at what point, or juncture, do you think there is the most confusion, disinformation, or misinformation?**

- The public is not well-informed about electoral procedures and therefore highly susceptible to misinformation on the subject, in addition to **significant "loser bias"** (when the legitimacy of elections is questioned more by the voters of losing candidates).

- Elections are decentralized, leaving open the possibility that people trust their local elections, but not elections that happen in other states.
- New and ever-changing voting procedures, such as vote-by-mail, increase doubts about election results; transparency is the key to combatting these concerns.
- People are paying attention to election procedures for the first time, which means they are not familiar with the processes and are relying on sources they trust to provide them with the information.
- Young voters are especially vulnerable.

2   **What types of messages and/or narratives will bolster voter confidence among all voters?**

- Hearing from people of different ideologies and parties helps to increase public trust in the information given so it does not seem partisan in nature. However, it makes accountability, such as from nonpartisan organizations on the outside, difficult. Partisan actors need to hold each other accountable.
- Election officials can be a trusted source for elections as they are usually bipartisan and can speak directly and knowledgeably to their local communities. However, many concerns are about national processes, such as the electoral college, to which local election officials cannot speak.
- Transparency from beginning to end can help to pre-bunk false narratives and increase public trust.
- Information should be standardized and accessible so that people can have election information specific to their locale.

3   **What are some communities or groups that have the highest concerns about election transparency and credibility? Why do those groups feel that way and are there any opportunities for intervention?**

- The groups that tend to be more skeptical of elections are conservatives, especially in 2020, and policymakers. Policymakers are not well-versed on issues of elections, just the talking points.
- However, both sides have a narrative to increase turnout that promotes distrust in elections. The left has voter suppression, and the right has election fraud.
- Latino voters, who are being targeted constantly by many groups and sides are also vulnerable to misinformation about elections, as they are especially vulnerable to anti-communist and anti-Marxist propaganda.

   CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON TRUST IN ELECTIONS FINAL REPORT

4 **Where do you think gaps lie in the public's ability to have confidence in election results? Do we have a substantial problem with this or did the recent election help mitigate it?**

- The 2022 election was an improvement, but there is a fundamental distrust in the government that is undergirding the mistrust in elections.

- The nationalization of every election has caused gaps in the public's ability to trust elections as they are more likely to trust their local elections but distrust other counties', cities', and states' elections.

- Debunking is not an effective way to change the narrative that the election was stolen, specifically for Republicans. Tours of election sites are more effective.

5 **Who are the trusted messengers who can communicate with parts of the public to help in bolstering trust?**

- Election officials can speak directly to electoral procedures, which can make them trusted messengers. However, election officials often do not have the public relations training or the platform to be messengers. Consider messages about election officials that humanize them.

- Political parties can also be trusted messengers since they are the most trusted by the people "on their side". It is important for elected leaders to tell the truth about elections and not spread misinformation, regardless of the repercussions.

- Corporate leaders, business leaders, employers, and church leaders can also spread trusted information.

- Local and national news anchors still enjoy some public trust.

- Resources like CISA (the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) can help people to understand the electoral process.

6 **Do you see recent improvements that have helped and/or can be scaled up? Have you done/tried things to help on this front?**

- In 2022, election denial wasn't at the expected level. People can be persuaded to trust elections, primarily through transparency and political party involvement.

- In Arizona, having both parties involved in the recount and having those with concerns tour the recounting facility increased trust.

- However, some jurisdictions are increasing transparency to a risky level to increase trust.

- Nonprofits are also uniquely situated to help because they may be national organizations that have many local chapters.

7 **What are some ideas to influence or change the narrative around the election process, results, and credibility?**

- Paper ballot measures can help to ensure security, which can change the narrative of the election process.
- Highlighting the work of election officials and being transparent about what they do can be very helpful as well. Use videos that walk the voters through the election process.
- Also, when it comes to voter enfranchisement, vote-by-mail and universal voting can help solidify that trust.
- Hold elections in voting places that are integral to the community, like baseball stadiums.

8 **If you were gathering a set of sector leaders (from non-and for-profit organizations, community leaders, behavioral change specialists, and election officials or administrators and others) to work on this, who would you include?**

- Election officials and nonpartisan, nonprofit leaders are the most likely candidates.
- Political parties, the media, local governments, vendors, civil rights groups, election lawyers, civility rights groups, and young people are also key contributors.

Overall, while perspectives on the problem and related solutions often diverged along political lines, some cross-cutting themes emerged:

- A lack of information is a key cause of election skepticism; more information is the solution.
- It is difficult to spread accurate information with the wealth of disinformation that has spread over the last several years.
- Transparency in all things is the most effective way of increasing trust.
- Election officials are the most knowledgeable, but they are not always equipped to be the best messengers.
- Pillars of the community, such as church leaders, business leaders, veterans, and sports leaders, however hesitant they may be to enter the political arena, are trusted across political ideology.
- The simpler the message, the better.

Irrespective of political leaning, there was broad agreement from stakeholders that trust in elections is critical for our democracy to survive and thrive.

THE CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON TRUST IN ELECTIONS

Purpose and Scope

Based on Convergence's thorough research and assessment of the issues surrounding distrust of U.S. elections, the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections* brought together **cross-ideological and cross-sectoral leaders with deep expertise in elections at national, state, and local levels, alongside communications and behavior change experts** to discuss approaches and solutions for equipping election administrators with credible messages for educating and informing their constituents, thereby increasing trust in elections. The group of 13 experts met six times from August 2023 to February 2024.

The Collaborative initially set out to identify:

> Groups that have **above-average levels of concern** about the elections.

> **What messages and which messengers** would most effectively speak to those populations.

They thoughtfully deliberated the many challenges around creating messages or media that, when balanced correctly, can improve trust in elections. Ultimately, **the Collaborative decided to focus on supporting local election officials**. Viewed as trusted explainers to the public, many of them are on the front lines, inundated with requests, but with very little communication support. With better support, they could be equipped to play a unique role in bolstering trust in elections.

Participants

Trey Grayson, *Frost Brown Todd LLP*
Trey is the partner and leader of the Lobbying and Public Policy Group. He works with his clients at local, state, and national levels to navigate their government, political, and regulatory challenges. Prior to this, Trey served two terms as Kentucky's Secretary of State.

Ellen Gustafson, *We the Veterans*
Ellen is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of We the Veterans, a non-partisan, non-profit organization that empowers the veteran and military family community to strengthen democracy. As Executive Director, Ellen oversees all general management and operations.

Bridgett King, Ph.D., *University of Kentucky*
Bridgett is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Kentucky. Her research focuses on election administration, public policy, citizen voting experiences, and representation.

Jesse Littlewood, *Common Cause*
Jesse is the Vice President of Campaigns at Common Cause. He leads efforts to increase the size, political power, and influence of Common Cause members and supporters through winning campaigns that shift power.

Luis Lozada, *Democracy Works*

Luis is the CEO of Democracy Works, a civic tech nonprofit organization on a mission to help America vote no matter what. Prior to this, he was General Counsel at Democracy Works.

Amber McReynolds, *U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors*

Amber was appointed to the Postal Service Board of Governors by President Biden and will serve for a seven-year term until December 2026. She currently chairs the Board's Election Mail Committee and is a member of the Operations Committee.

Omar Parbhoo, *Ideas 42*

Omar is the Managing Director at Ideas42, focusing on programs that promote greater civic engagement and charitable giving in the United States. Prior to joining the team, he served as a Senior Advisor to the U.S. Department of State.

Jackie Salit, *Independent Voting*

Jackie is the President of Independent Voting advocating for the rights of independent voters. Her network is a sought-after coalition partner for structural reform. She co-directs the ASU Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy.

Ingrid Sundlee, *We the Veterans*

Ingrid is the Chief of Staff at We the Veterans. She previously served as the Director of Civic Engagement where she helped with the launch of the Vet the Vote Campaign.

Matthew Tate-Smith, *Campaign Legal Center*

Matthew is the Communications Manager at CLC where he works with the communications team to promote ongoing voting and elections campaigns. Prior to joining CLC, Matthew served as Public Affairs Coordinator for the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

Lizzie Ulmer, *States United Democracy Center*

Lizzie is the Senior Vice President of Strategy and Communications at States United. Before joining States United, Lizzie focused on state-led advocacy and campaigns at the Democratic Attorneys General Association.

Anonymous Election Official

A seasoned election official took the time to contribute their expertise and firsthand experience to this group. For their safety, we did not include their name.

Note: Individuals are listed with professional affiliation only for identification purposes. Organizations listed do not endorse this report or its findings.

# CHALLENGES FOR INCREASING TRUST IN ELECTIONS

The participants in the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections* carefully discussed the many obstacles inherent in increasing trust in our elections.

Lack of civic education

The United States today does not strongly prioritize civic education, which would include instruction on elections administration. Only **ten percent of class time** is devoted to social studies in elementary school. In middle school, **as of 2022**, only five states require a stand-alone civics course. In high school, 38 states and the District of Columbia require a civics course but only seven of these were for an entire year (with the remaining 32 for a semester). This means a large swath of eligible voters **lack a strong foundational understanding** of how federal laws work in concert with state laws on any topic – let alone the ins and outs of elections administration.

Lack of trust in institutions

There is a well-documented decline in trust in institutions of all types, ranging from the medical system to public schools to banks and more. Public trust in the United States government is at a **near-record low**, with less than 20% of Americans saying they trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" (1%) or "most of the time" (15%). **Local elected officials** are one of the few public-facing roles the majority (56%) of Americans trust.

Less than

20%
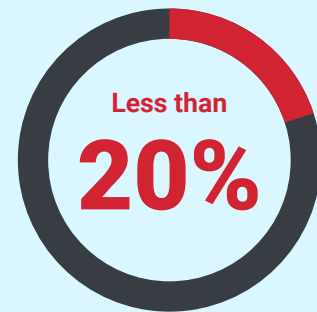
Less than 20% of Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time"

Pew Research Center

Elections are hyper-localized

The United States Constitution **explicitly states** that the exact details of elections administration are up to individual states. As a result, **each state has different rules** about the types of ballots cast, how in-person voting works, and how votes are counted, among other things. **This makes communicating nationally and generally about elections challenging.**

The complexity of elections is exploitable in the digital age

Against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized nation, effectively communicating complex election information is difficult. **Social media is designed to capture and monetize our attention**, which **uniquely exacerbates the acceleration, reach, and scale of inflammatory and false information.**

Partisans turn out and vote

In the 2020 presidential election, **about two-thirds** (66%) of the eligible voting population turned out to vote, one of the highest turnouts on record. **Of those who voted**, 37% identified with the Democratic party, 36% identified with the Republican party, and only 26% identified as Independents.

Elevated levels of partisanship can incentivize parties to influence voters' perception of the trustworthiness of the elections system through calls of voter fraud, voter suppression, intimidation, or other means, especially if their party or preferred candidates do not win or when elections have particularly close margins.

Different types of voters are distrustful of elections for different reasons

Certain groups of voters have above-average levels of distrust in our elections, including but not limited to:

> **Different groups of voters, and subgroups within them, require unique messages to effectively build trust in the credibility of our elections system.**

- Young voters
- Latinos
- Far right voters
- Veterans
- Evangelical Christians
- Non-voters

However, **voters are complex and have a variety of cross-cutting identities**, including race, gender, age, level of education, religion, and political affiliation, **which further complexify voter understanding of and perceptions of trust in elections**. Consequently, different groups of voters, and subgroups within them, require unique messages to effectively build trust in the credibility of our elections system.

TARGETED AUDIENCES FOR ELECTION MESSAGING

The discovery research that informed the design of the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections* elevated several populations – **Independents, Veterans, and Evangelical Christians** – as groups currently most distrustful of elections for targeted election messaging. After initial discussions, it was quickly clear that the **localization of the elections process and the intricacies of every jurisdiction make mass messaging about elections, even to a small and specific voter constituency, ineffective or impossible**. Additionally, the micro communities and identities represented in the larger groups of Independents, Veterans, and Evangelicals each have their own nuances that would need to be tested to inform message creation and delivery.

For example, designing a message for all Independent voters made little practical sense as some Independent voters are newly registered, young individuals, or Veterans. Increasingly, individuals are registering or affiliating themselves as Independents, although they may have other identities that messaging could target.

The Collaborative segmented its thinking around potential audiences into two buckets: election skeptics and election deniers. Election skeptics are individuals who are persuadable – they have not flat out denied election results, but have questions around the process, how it works, and ways to improve it. All election skeptics are not alike. A **subset of voters** distrusts elections, partisan actions, or information that generates doubt about how the system functions and are not necessarily persuaded by exposure to more accurate information.

> The Collaborative chose to target a second subset: voters who are distrustful of elections because they lack information about the process, but are open and responsive to new insights.

With these election skeptics as our target audience, we could **focus on creating messaging for voters who could be persuaded through exposure to more detailed or accurate information.**

Collaborative participants referred to "knowledge attribution bias" as the tendency of someone to believe what they already know, rather than integrate new information that challenges their pre-existing views. As a result, voters who have repeatedly participated in elections would be more challenging to influence with information about the integrity of elections or information about electoral processes because they are already primed towards a certain understanding of the election system. For this reason, **the Collaborative decided to focus on young and newer voters who have the lowest knowledge attribution bias**.

"Knowledge attribution bias"

The tendency of someone to believe what they already know, rather than integrate new information that challenges their pre-existing views.

CRAFTING MESSAGES TO INCREASE TRUST IN ELECTIONS

The Collaborative discussed how to craft messages that could instill greater trust in elections at length. They deliberated about what types of information, what degree of detail, and what medium, as just a few of the variables involved. Where some participants involved in elections administration felt information about all aspects of elections would be necessary to address mistrust, others emphasized a need for brevity to maintain the audience's attention, with sources cited to validate the different approaches. The group kept returning to a few salient challenges:

Elections are hyper-localized. Variations across geographies and jurisdictions were repeatedly pointed to as an obstacle. Effective messages would have to account for differences in practice, terminology, and more across jurisdictions. For example, where **some states** use the term "mail-in ballot" others may say "absentee ballot." Some use both terms to mean the same thing. Some use both to denote different types of votes. **Accounting for that variability in a single message without creating additional confusion is difficult**.

There is such a thing as too much information. The group continually returned to the "**Goldilocks Effect**" in messaging. **The Goldilocks Effect suggests that there is a "right amount" of information to give someone, especially when communicating about elections**. Too little may not provide voters with enough information to correct their points of mistrust in the system. Too much, however, may overwhelm voters and leave them with more questions than answers.

Ultimately the Collaborative participants coalesced around creating a tool for local election officials to educate and inform young and new voters about what happens in their jurisdiction after a ballot is cast. Information about the portion of the election process after a ballot has been cast, including local rules, timelines, and activities, is not uniformly available for locations around the country, nor is there detailed information that addresses this topic on a federal level. **This gap represents an opportunity for local election officials to educate their constituents about this part of the process.** This approach has the benefit of ensuring that the information a voter receives is accurate and correct for their jurisdiction, and it capitalizes on the role local election officials can uniquely play as trusted sources of local information. This solution resonated with every Collaborative participant, regardless of ideology or expertise.

A TEMPLATE FOR LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS

Local jurisdictions have different ways of registering to vote, voting, counting votes, and more. Distrust in the elections system can arise at all these points on questions of the overall structure, process, security, and timeline of results. **The group developed a template local election officials could customize to communicate about the election processes in their jurisdictions**.

The template addressed the following concerns of the Collaborative and balanced the priorities of communications, elections, and legal experts around the table:

- Focusing on the local level meant the message developed would not inadvertently mislead voters by over-generalizing or accidentally omitting information about elections in their jurisdiction.

- Local election officials are **some of the most trusted figures** in elections administration. Crafting a message utilizing information provided by local election officials should increase trustworthiness.

- Young, newly registered voters are a discrete group to target, and they are less influenced by knowledge attribution bias.

- **A growing portion** of young, new voters are registering as Independents. Reaching them was a priority for the Collaborative as how they engage in elections is different from voters affiliated with a party. For example, in many states Independents cannot serve as **poll workers** or **vote in primaries**.

Thus, the group decided to design a template that would provide local election officials with the opportunity to explain – succinctly and clearly – the entire voting process in their jurisdiction. The template includes:

- ✅ An instruction page on how to use the template.

- ✅ Messaging guidance with advice for local election officials about how to share the content in the template, suggested talking points, and key messengers in addition to local election officials for increasing trust in the electoral process.

- ✅ A fillable PDF that election officials can use to communicate the ways to vote in their community, what happens after polls close on Election Day, and information about voter roster updates and audits that ensure the integrity of elections.

The complete template for local election officials can be found in the **Appendix**.

DISSEMINATION STRATEGY AND NEXT STEPS

Re-instilling lost trust in our elections system is critical to maintaining a healthy, thriving democracy. Ensuring transparency throughout the entire electoral process is crucial for preempting false narratives and fostering trust. We must do so urgently, effectively, and thoughtfully.

The *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections* deliberated the challenges and opportunities for increasing trust in the electoral process. This group of cross-ideological and cross-sectoral leaders with deep expertise in elections, communications, and behavior change strategies created a template to assist local election officials – highly credibly in their communities – with communicating accurate and clear information about the election process with different segments of the public, focusing especially on young and newly registered voters who are most likely to be responsive to new information about elections. The template will be available for public download and use here: **convergencepolicy.org/election-essentials/**.

The Collaborative will also share this report and the template for local election officials with organizations, associations, and related groups working with election officials and young and new voters, such as the National League of Cities, the National Association of State Election Directors, the League of Women Voters, Generation Citizen, and many more.
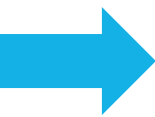
We call upon all those invested in a healthy democratic republic to apply the learnings from Convergence's discovery into trust in elections, to consider the deliberations and approach for increasing trust in elections developed by the Collaborative, and to share the template with local election officials where it can have the greatest impact.

These resources developed by the *Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections* are but one piece of a larger puzzle. **Multiple solutions, actions, and investments are needed to instill and rebuild trust in our institutions, elected leaders, and democracy**. There must be policy change to clarify and strengthen election laws, both nationally and locally. There must be renewed investment in civic education and engagement for all ages and communities. Only a combination of these approaches will allow for trust to be restored and rebuilt. **We are pleased to amplify the complementary efforts, strategies, and resources of colleague organizations in their efforts to increase trust in elections.** When individuals regain the confidence that our current system is a fair and just way to determine which laws and leaders move forward, our country's future will shine brighter.

Acknowledgements

ELECTION ESSENTIALS:

VOTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Information about the template for local election officials to communicate about the voting process:

The following template was created by the _Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections_, a cross-sectoral and cross-ideological group of 13 leaders with deep expertise in elections at national, state, and local levels along with communications and behavior change experts. The group met six times from August 2023 to February 2024 to discuss approaches and solutions for equipping election administrators with credible messages for educating and informing their constituents, thereby increasing trust in elections.

The template that follows is meant to help local election officials succinctly and clearly explain the entire voting process in their jurisdiction. To learn more about the rationale behind creating a template, please read the _Convergence Collaborative on Trust in Elections_' Final Report.

How to use the template:

Step 1: Review "Election Messaging Guidance" on the next page. These are talking points developed by the group. It includes advice on how to share the template and points of emphasis when communicating with voters who are skeptical of the elections process.

Step 2: Complete the template in accordance with the rules of your jurisdiction. This resource is a fillable PDF and you will need to fill in every blank and check box before sharing it with voters.

Step 3: Share the template with your constituents. This could be in the form of pamphlets, flyers, on social media, or any other means you use to communicate with voters in your area.

If you have any questions please contact info@convergencepolicy.org. We would be happy to assist you with questions related to the template or the Collaborative's work.

ELECTION ESSENTIALS:
VOTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Election messaging guidance for local election officials:

- The U.S. Constitution was designed so that voters have the right to choose their elected representatives by **voting in each election process**.
- Elections are governed by federal, state, and local laws. It is a **highly regulated environment**: from voting system certification to regulatory measures governing security to regulations for voter registration.
- Local election officials are on the **frontlines of our representative democracy** providing voting services for all eligible voters in each election cycle.
- **Poll workers are essential** to running elections. In our district, our poll workers are our teachers, nurses, mail carriers, colleagues, neighbors, and others who care about helping our community thrive.
- Remind your audience and voters that **election officials and poll workers** are people **from their communities**.
- To prevent confusion and any instance of information gaps, it is important to **be very specific** about the **voting and election process** in your state, town, and county.
- Make sure to **describe any checks and balances** in place to promote accuracy in your area, and explain how secure the voting and election systems are.
- Emphasize and reinforce facts that speak specifically to the election process and **prioritize educating voters** over trying to persuade them.
- **Be confident in your content** and do not allude to any systemic or human errors in your information.
- **Be cautious about unintentionally amplifying election mis- or disinformation.** Instead of sharing such posts on social media or repeating bad information, start from the facts and reinforce that elections are safe, secure, and accurate and then address any issue that was raised.
- **Enlist small and medium business leaders** as conduits/messengers.
- Use message pairings that combine a **subject matter expert** and a **person with community reach**. Some examples:
  - Local media personality + Local election official
  - Local poll worker + Local faith leader

ELECTION ESSENTIALS:

VOTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

What are the ways to vote in _____
(location)

for the _____ **on** _____ **?**
(name of Election) _(date)_

☐ By mail (_____

_____)
(if applicable, add more detail here)

☐ In-person **ahead of** Election Day

☐ In-person **on** Election Day

☐ Other: _____

_____

If this is a primary election, read on! If not, move onto page 2.

If you are registered to vote in _____
(location, abbreviated)

and did **not** _choose a party affiliation, you:_

☐ **ARE** allowed to vote

☐ are **NOT** allowed to vote

in the upcoming primary election on _____.
(date)

In order to cast a ballot, you must be registered and eligible to vote! If you have questions about your voter registration status, eligibility to vote in this election, or anything else related to your ballot, please contact:

_____
(name)

_____
(contact information)

Or visit our website:

_____
(website)

Do you want to vote by mail?

Here is some important information to know about mail-in ballots in

_____ for the _____.
(location)   (name of Election)

- To register to vote by mail in _____ please go to:
(location)

_____.
(website)

(!) The deadline to register to vote by mail in _____ for the
(location)

upcoming _____is _____.
(name of Election)   (date)

- In _____ we require that:
(location)

  ☐ Absentee   **be** →   ☐ postmarked by _____
  (date)

  ☐ Mail-in ballots   ☐ received by _____
  (date)

  to be processed and counted towards the final election result. To ensure timely

  delivery, in _____, we suggest that you mail your ballot no later
  (location)

  than _____. If after _____, we suggest you drop off your
  (date)   (date)

  ballot at one of _____ drop off locations within _____.
  (# of dropoff locations)   (location)

- In _____, voters can return their ballots in person at:
(location)

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____
  (locations where voters can return their ballots in person)

  See our full list of locations to return your ballot in-person on our website:

  _____.
  (website)

- Our ☐ State → ☐ allows → mail-in ballots to be dropped
  ☐ County   ☐ does **not** allow   off on Election Day.

- Our state law ☐ requires → the mail ballot processing in _____
  ☐ allows   (location)

  to begin on _____.
  (date)

- Mail-in ballot processing begins on _____ and ballots counting
  (date)
  begins on _____.
  (date)

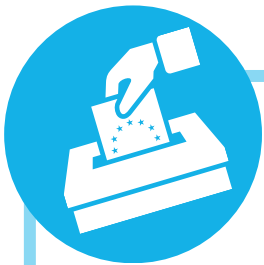- Mail-in ballot verification in _____ is done through:

_____

_____

_____
(explain process of mail-in ballot verification)

- We verify the identity of a mail-in ballot voter at _____ by:
  (location)

_____

_____
(explain process of identity verification)

Do you want to vote in-person?

Here is some important information to know about voting in-person in

_____ for the _____.
(location)   *(name of Election)*

- Early in-person voting:
  - ☐ **is** ✔ → available in _____ for the
    (location)
    _____.
    (name of Election)

  > **If early in-person voting is available:**
  > Early in-person voting starts on _____ and goes until
  > *(start date)*
  > _____. Check this link for more information about early
  > *(end date)*
  > in-person voting locations: _____.
  > *(link to local source)*

- Voter registration:
  - ☐ **is** ✔ → available on Election Day in _____
    (location)
    on _____ for the _____.
    (date)   *(name of Election)*

- The polls on Election Day in _____ open at _____ and close at
(location)   (time)
_____. If you are in line when the polls close, you are still allowed to vote.
(time)

? Who can serve as poll workers in _____ for the _____ ?
(location)   (name of Election)
Here is a short list of the types of people in our community who work the polls, process

ballots, and count votes for our upcoming election:

_____

_____

_____
(list types of people)

Here is what happens after the polls close on Election Day in

_____ **on** _____
(location)   (date)

for the _____:
(name of Election)

⟶ Ballots cast in-person on (or before) Election Day are processed _____

_____

_____

_____
(explanation of how ballots are processed in jurisdiction)

⟶ Unofficial election results from _____ are shared
(location)

_____
(explain where or with whom it is shared)

by _____.
(date)

⟶ Election results in our state are certified by_____

_____
(name of overseeing body)

Voter Roster Updates + Audits

Our state/county updates voter registration records every

_____.
(timeframe)

The process to update our voter lists is _____

_____

_____
(explain process for updating voter lists)

Our district will be participating in an audit after this election. We prepare for

this audit by _____

_____

_____.
(explain process for preparing for audit)

The audit results are available _____

_____.
(how to find audit results)

Need more help? Visit our website at:

_____
(website)

This form was completed by _____
(name and title)

on _____.
(date)

(signature)

Contact Us

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