BRENNAN
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

Online Registration Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is an online voter registration system?

Answer: An online voter registration system allows voters to register to vote — and to check and update their voter registration records — through a secure and accessible online portal.

Question: Is online voter registration a new registration tool? How many states have implemented online voter registration systems to date?

Answer: Online voter registration has been in use for over a decade. Arizona was the first state to implement an online voter registration system in 2002. Now at least 28 states[1] currently, or will soon, offer online voter registration. Delaware, Minnesota, and Missouri do not require a DMV ID number to access the online registration system.

Question: Is online voter registration secure?

Answer: Yes, online voter registration can be a modern and secure method of registering voters. The system can be designed to protect the security of user's information through a number of ways. For example, online registration systems can run frequent, automated scans of registration activity; incorporate software to prevent hacking or automated attacks on the system; force an application to "time out" automatically after a certain period of inactivity; and include CAPTCHA tests.

Question: How expensive is implementing online voter registration?

Answer: Startup costs have been low and can be recouped in as little as one election cycle. The price of implementing the system depends on many factors, including the technological capabilities of the election official's existing software. For example, Colorado's online registration system cost approximately $30,000, New York's cost $500,000 and Oregon's cost approximately $200,000.

---

[1]Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Question: Do states save money when they implement online voter registration?

Answer: Jurisdictions that have implemented online voter registration systems save money because they need to print fewer registration forms and dedicate less administrative time to manually processing registration forms and updates. For example, Maricopa County, Arizona estimated that it takes approximately 83 cents to process a paper registration form, but only 3¢ to process an online one. Further, counties in Washington State are saving between 50 cents and two dollars on each online registration, and Washington saves approximately 25 cents for each online registration processed. In Colorado, online registration applications cost approximately a quarter of the amount to process.

Question: Are there other benefits associated with implementing online voter registration?

Answer: Online voter registration boosts the integrity of voter rolls. Since voters are directly responsible for entering their own data in the system, it reduces the opportunity for human error in transcribing paper voter registration forms, which may be illegible or incomplete. Moreover, an online voter registration system prevents the submission of incomplete forms by requiring registrants to complete all necessary fields before final submission. Data from jurisdictions that have implemented online voter registration show that electronic records are five times less likely to contain errors. For instance, after implementing paperless registration, Arizona election officials received far fewer calls from voters complaining about inaccurate registration information.

Question: How do election officials capture voters' signatures when they register online?

Answer: States use several methods for capturing voters' signatures when using an online voter registration system. Most states utilize existing electronic signatures on file with the state's motor vehicle authority or any other agency that maintains electronic signatures. The state could also allow voters to provide an electronic signature via an electronic signature device at an agency. The state could require the voter to mail in a paper voter registration form with the signature and scan such signature so that it is available for future electronic use. No matter what mechanism is used to collect signatures, the state should also allow a registrant to finalize her record by providing her signature at the polls on Election Day, and voting a ballot that will count for that election.

For more information, please contact:

DeNora Getachew
Campaign Manager & Legislative Counsel
(646) 292-8357
denora.getachew@nyu.edu