



# Fixing the Problem of Low Voter Turnout in US Local Elections: A Data-driven Solution



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# Executive summary

**L**ow voter turnout, especially in local elections, is the dirty little secret of the U.S. democratic system. The increasing low rates of participation – in many local races overall turnout can be measured in single digits – continues despite the enormous impact local government has on the day to day lives of citizens and the over \$1 trillion in public funding dispersed at the local level.

While many reasons exist for low voter turnout, one of the most salient factors is the complexity of the U.S. voting ecosystem. There are over 90,000 local governments nationwide, and tens of thousands of local elections take place across the country every year. This complexity lends itself to an enormous information gap that significantly complicates the task of being an informed voter. Knowing what or who is on the ballot, much less where and when and how to vote, become daunting tasks that are effective barriers to local voting.

U.S. Vote Foundation (US Vote), a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the proposition that “every citizen is a voter” is building a new solution to this problem. US Vote’s local election dates and deadlines data service, named “LOCelections”, has been designed to be the repository of record for information on dates, deadlines and eligibility for all US local elections. The LOCelections data resource will contain information on local election dates, deadlines, eligibility and other key data from across the country to enable intelligent, informed voting at the local level and to help improve local voter participation.

US Vote doesn’t do this alone: LOCelections is built in part on US Vote’s decade-long relationship with thousands of local election officials across the country. While LOCelections is a work in progress, US Vote and its partners believe that as LOCelections matures it will become an essential tool to help enable increased voter participation across the U.S.

Importantly, while US Vote provides LOCelections-based services directly on its website, LOCelections is designed to be used by third party voter services providers. Providing this access, through a database application programming interface, or API, allows US Vote to continue its on-going mission to support organizations that provide voter services. Licensees of US Vote’s data span a wide gamut of organizations, including voter outreach organizations, individual states, national campaigns, and corporations interested in helping employees, particularly expatriates, with their voting needs.

In addition to these traditional US Vote licensees, LOCelections will have significant use in academic research as a resource for comparative and longitudinal studies of voting behavior. Media organizations looking for nation-wide information on local voting will also be able to make use of LOCelections.

There are many reasons for a lack of voter participation, but unfortunately these problems are deeply entrenched and do not lend themselves to easy remediation. Tackling the problem of the information gap, however, is the one solution that can be implemented now. US Vote is in the process of implementing that solution in the form of LOCelections. We welcome your help and participation in this effort.

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## Introduction: Low Voter Turnout and the Democratic Process

**T**he dirty little secret of the U.S. democratic system is that it has among the lowest voter turnout results of any democracy on the planet. While most democracies are able, on average, to count on the participation of a majority of eligible voters on a regular basis, in the U.S. this majority, at best, votes every four years during the general election campaign for the presidency. Otherwise, participation rates for local and off-cycle elections are in the low double-digits, or worse.

Perhaps more telling, these participation rates are not correlated with low registration rates. Overall registration rates nationwide average above 60 percent, and of those voters up to 90 percent participate in the general election every four years. This means, quite simply, that the pool of eligible voters does exist to drive participation rates at the local level. While it's important to advance the cause of registration across the country, the total number of registered voters has virtually no impact on participation in local and off-cycle elections.

All of this means that an enormous amount of the decisions at the local level that should be made under the aegis of a representative democracy are instead ceded to a minority of the voters and the representatives they elect. These decisions, which govern approximately \$1 trillion in government spending, effect the day to day lives of citizens in more direct ways than many federal and state programs.

The reasons for this lack of participation are complex, but there is one common denominator: a dearth of readily available information on local election dates, deadlines, and eligibility. Take the fact that there are an enormous quantity of local election districts — over 90,000 across the U.S. — and most of the hundreds of thousands of elections that take place during the four-year run-up to the general election do not coincide with state or federal elections. This means that the majority of citizens are hard-pressed to know when these local elections are slated to take place, not to mention what is on the ballot, who is running and what issues are at stake.

U.S. Vote Foundation (US Vote), a non-partisan, 501 (c)(3) organization dedicated to the proposition that every citizen should be a voter, is building a new solution to this problem. U.S. Vote's local election dates and deadlines data service, named "LOCelections", has been designed to be the repository of record for information on dates, deadlines and eligibility for all elections across all 90,000 voting districts. While LOCelections is a work in progress, US Vote and its partners believe that as LOCelections matures it will become an essential tool to help enable increased voter participation across the U.S.

This report is intended to educate voters, elected officials, and potential funders on the rationale behind the development of LOCelections and help describe its purpose and functions. While LOCelections alone can't drive greater participation rates, when used in conjunction with other voter outreach services, such as those provided by US Vote's partners, LOCelections can be an important resource to help turn back the tide of low voter turnout and enhance participatory democracy in the U.S.

# Turnout in Local Elections: Reaching New Lows

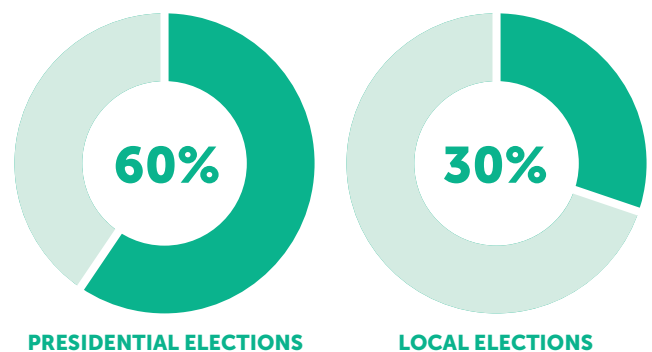
**T**he complexity of local voting in the US is staggering: there are around 90,000 local governments, districts, and commissions comprised of approximately 500,000 elected officials, more than 20 times as many officials as exist at the federal and state levels. Local governments in the US spend over \$1 trillion annually, or over 50% of all government spending. The total number of elections held at the local level is in the tens of thousands every year.

Importantly, average turnout in local elections is significantly lower than presidential or state elections, an issue that has been the subject of considerable research in recent years: Although voter turnout during the last four presidential elections, from 2004 to 2016, hovered around 60%, the average turnout in local elections is around 30% or lower, according to numerous studies. In some mayoral elections turnout has been as low as 2%. As such, increasing voter registration is not likely to have a significant impact on local election turnout: it's clear that the main problem is the fact that eligible voters are staying away from the polls, and not necessarily that a large body of prospective voters are prevented from voting.

The trend has not been favorable in the last four decades, according to researchers Neil Caren of the University of Michigan and Melissa Marschall of Rice University. Between 1979 and 2003 the turnout in local elections declined by an average of 20 percent, representing a loss of one percentage point of voter turnout per election cycle. In smaller towns and cities, as many as 79 percent of local elections are uncontested. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the average number of candidates running for mayoral election has declined from roughly 2.5 during the years 2000 to 2003 to just over 1.5 from 2012 to 2015.

Considering the often under-emphasized importance of the role of local governments in our democracy, low and declining levels of voter turnout in municipal elections are a cause for concern for the future health of civic society in the US.

## VOTER TURNOUT FROM 2004 TO 2016



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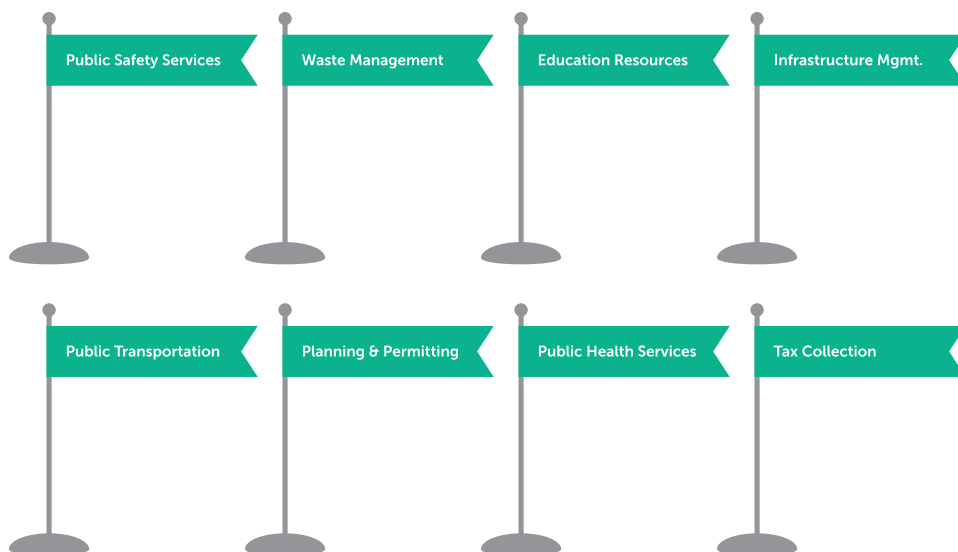
## Low Turnout, High Impact: The Role of Local Government in Civic Life

**T**he role of local government, according to the National League of Cities, can have more real day to day impact on the lives of citizens than other levels of government. The major points of impact include:

- Police, fire and public safety services
- Sewage, water treatment and waste management
- Schools, libraries, and other education resources
- Infrastructure management: Roads, paths, bridges, and overpasses
- Public transportation
- Planning, permitting, and enforcement
- Public health services, including mental health, and services to the disabled
- Tax collection and disbursement

In addition, local governments can also act as laboratories for policy experimentation in areas ranging from policing and education to social policy and the provision of business services. The most successful of these policies can often be quickly adopted by other states, cities or municipalities. And local governments are the crucible for the development of political leadership: a large number of local office holders go on to seek office at the state and federal level.

In the aggregate, these factors, in combination with the overall budgetary authority of local districts, show the overarching importance of local elections in the day-to-day lives of citizens. This broad impact contrasts deeply with the relative lack of attention on the part of the electorate to the tens of thousands of local electoral races taking place across the country each year.



# The Impact of Low Voter Turnout in Local Elections

**T**he dismal turnout in local elections across the United States has multiple impacts on civic life. One of the most direct and obvious impacts is how local election turnouts fail to be representative of the socio/economic/demographic makeup of the various electoral districts.

Low voter turnout means that the voters who do turn out in local elections often do not reflect the overall demographic makeup of their respective voting districts. This guarantees that, at the local government level, decisions are being made without input from a representative sample of residents and specific cross sections of local civic groups.

Research by Sarah Anzia of the University of California, Berkeley, and others show that this lack of political engagement at the local level offers opportunities for politically active and well-organized interest groups to further advance their causes and be disproportionately represented by local government. This bias towards interest groups potentially disadvantages other less active groups whose opinions on government policy can be significantly different than those of the more active interest groups. For these underrepresented minority groups, Anzia believes, the costs required to cast a vote in local elections (such as registering and going to a polling place to cast a ballot) may outweigh any benefits they believe that will receive from participating in the voting process. Their absence at the polls is the result.

A lack of interest or engagement at the local level may also reduce the potential candidate pool for future local leaders, with negative consequences for future voter choice. Local government is often the entry point into political office for politicians and officials who later move up to hold state and federal office. A declining lack of engagement in politics on a local level can impact the environment for fostering the development of future political leaders at all levels of government. A vibrant democracy requires both voters and candidates, but at the local level both are all too often in short supply.

This is particularly worrisome for US civic society as a new generation reaches voting age. According to the Survey of Young American's Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service, by Harvard's Kennedy School – Institute of Politics, only 10 percent of millennials have participated in a governmental, political or issue-related organization. Furthermore, 76 percent of millennials believe there is a 10 percent or lower probability that they will run for elected office in their lifetime. Having this potentially enormous and influential demographic so disinterested in holding office augurs poorly for the future of civic life, particularly in light of the already declining rates of voter participation noted by researchers Marschall and Caren.

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## The Causes of Low Turnout

**W**hile the factors contributing to low turnout in US local elections are manifold, in the VoteLocal study published by the Knight Foundation, these five factors constitute the main reasons for low turnout:

- Local electoral processes
- City size and demographics
- The potential for contested outcomes in a race
- Voter information gaps
- Lack of trust in local government

The first three factors, local electoral processes, city size and demographics, and the potential for contested elections, do not readily lend themselves to easy solutions, even though the first, particularly with respect to the timing of local elections, is clearly one of the most salient factors in low voter turnout. Regardless, it's clear that changing most electoral processes can be difficult, to say the least, particularly when it comes to changing the timing of local elections. Needless to say, changing the size and demographics of cities themselves does not lend itself to a simple solution. There exists a similar inability to influence the degree to which an election is contested.

The latter two issues, however, do lend themselves to remediation. We will propose our potential solution following a brief discussion of these five factors.

### Local electoral processes

Leading researchers such as Sarah Anzia, Melissa Marschall, Jessica Trounstone, Neil Caren, and John Lippie cite various aspects of the local electoral processes themselves as a major contributor to low turnout. There are three components of the local electoral process that are at play:

**Election timing:** Off-cycle elections (those held in odd numbered years and/or when no national elections take place) are identified as one of the largest institutional causes of low turnout, as noted by Prof. Marschall and others. This is due to the fact that national elections are able to draw many more voters to participate in local elections than during off-cycle elections. Turnout in off-cycle elections has been calculated as being the cause of a 14 - 30 percent drop in turnout vis-à-vis on-cycle local elections.

**Governance system:** Different forms of local governance can also elicit different levels of turnout. Prof. Caren's research has shown that elections for city council that appoint a council manager as the chief executive of the city tend to have a 7.5 percent lower turnout than cities with a "strong mayor" form of government.

**Voting processes:** Districts that don't make it easy for voters to be informed about upcoming elections tend to have lower turnouts than districts that do. Research by Jessica Trounstone of the University of California, Merced has shown that districts that don't mail voting information to their citizens or set early deadlines for registration far in advance of the actual vote tend to have a 4-5 percent lower turnout than those that facilitate the voting process. Indeed, the more a district forces its voters to make upfront or additional investments to participate in the election, the lower that district's turnout will be. By contrast, states that offered same day or automatic registration, vote by mail, and online registration tend to see higher voter turnout.



As noted above, although these are clearly significant factors in low voter turnout, they don't necessarily lend themselves to easy solutions. However, doing more to lower barriers to voting can have an impact. Insofar as access to information, or a lack thereof, about candidates and issues constitutes an important barrier, US Vote's LOCelections data service can be seen as contributing towards improving this one aspect of local election processes.

### Prospective outcome-based issues

Races that are decisive or close generate higher voter turnout. Research by Neil Caren shows that decisive elections generate on average an eight percent higher voter turnout than less contested primaries or other preliminary elections. He has also shown that every five percent point increase in the margin of victory correlates with a one percent point decrease in turnout.

The question of whether a candidate is an incumbent or not, or if a race is contested by a relatively large number of candidates, can also impact voter turnout. Research by Caren shows a potential two percent-age point drop in turnout when incumbents are on the ballot, and his research shows that elections with more than two candidates see an increase in voter turnout of 1.5 percent on average when the third-place finisher obtains for than 10% of the vote.

Like the factors surrounding local election processes, while it is easy to see an impact from incumbency and other factors related to prospective outcomes, there is little effective action that can be taken to remediate these factors' impact.

### The Voter Information Gap

While the above issues, however salient, are difficult to systematically remediate, the problems that stem from a widespread voter information gap do lend themselves to a series of potential solutions, some of which LOCelections is designed to tackle. The information gap among voters regarding candidates, issues, timing, and other factors is well-established. This is particularly true among young voters, according to a recent study by the Knight Foundation. As millennials are now the largest single population cohort in the US, having surpassed the boomer generation in 2015, a look at their sentiment on this issue provides an important lens for understanding how the information gap issue will evolve.

According to the Knight study, a lack of information was the dominant factor in the lack participation by millennials in local elections – surpassing issues like geographic mobility and a lack of home ownership by a significant margin.

The information gap issue further breaks down into the categories in table 1 below:

**Table 1: The Millennial Information Gap**

BARRIERS	
I don't have enough information about the candidates.	75%
I don't know enough about the local issues.	62%
There's not enough news coverage of local elections.	40%
I don't know when local elections are held.	20%
I don't have enough time to vote in local elections.	17%
It's not worth it. My vote doesn't matter.	17%
I don't feel a connection to the city.	12%
Local elections are less important than the national ones.	10%
I don't know where my polling place is.	7%
I haven't lived in the city long enough to know who to vote for.	5%

(Source: *Why Millennials Don't Vote for Mayor*, Knight Foundation, 2015)

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It's important to note that the respondents in the Knight study report that they lack access to a broad range of information that actually does exist, albeit scattered among many sources and encumbered by a lack of standards for availability and formatting. This includes information about local candidates and local issues, when local elections will take place, and where local polling places are located.

While the Knight research relied on a relatively small sample size, these results correlate well with other research. The Harvard Kennedy School – Institute of Politics survey, taken five months following the 2016 election, directly confirmed the information gap problem and its demotivating influence on millennial voters. When respondents were asked to comment on the need for “more practical information about politics” in order to be more engaged, fully 41 percent agreed that more information would help them “get involved.”

Other research confirms the systemic nature of the information gap. Hayes and Lawless note that the declining circulation and availability of local newspapers are a major contributor to engagement in local elections, and Lee Shaker of Portland State University cites the closure of local newspapers as a factor in the overall reduction in political engagement.

The geographical mobility of millennials also has an important impact that contributes to this information gap. Rapid urbanization with high growth rates is seen as a factor in low participation, according to the Knight Foundation. This is due to the fact that geographical mobility means that new residents aren't necessarily sure they will remain in the city they currently live in, and this lack of commitment translates to a lack of participation in local elections.

Importantly, scholars suggest that these newcomers in turn lack sufficient knowledge of local politics and political institutions. In addition, the lack of quality housing stock, a common issue in many cities, limits home ownership. Trounstein finds that home ownership is correlated with a higher tendency to vote, while Marschall and Lappie identify that turnout rates in cities with newer housing stock is higher than in those cities with lower turnout rates. This implies that the lack of available high-quality housing stock further suppresses voting.

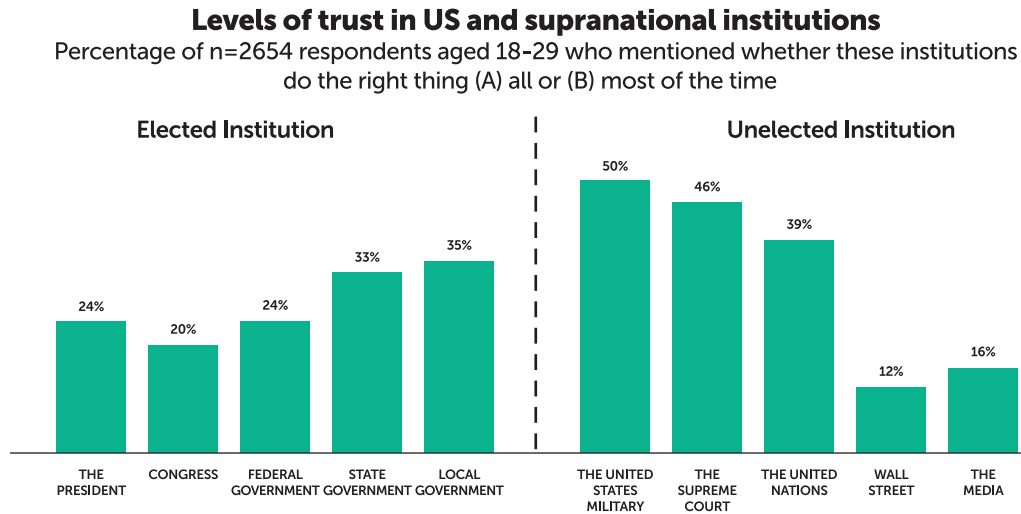
## Trust in Local Government, Millennials, and the Information Gap

It's no secret that overall trust in government has been waning for some time. That lack of trust affects both national and local races, and its impact is a matter of discussion in the media, in academia, and of course within the different branches of government itself. A look at the research from the Kennedy School in figure 2 below shows the overall degree of mistrust in most institutions of government in stark detail.

The relative levels of trust in different branches and types of government, however, is revealing, according to the data in figure 2: trust in local government among millennials is higher than any other elected institution. The cohort that, in a limited fashion, trusts local government more than any other governmental institution, is the same cohort that reports that their lack of participation is due to an information gap regarding local elections.

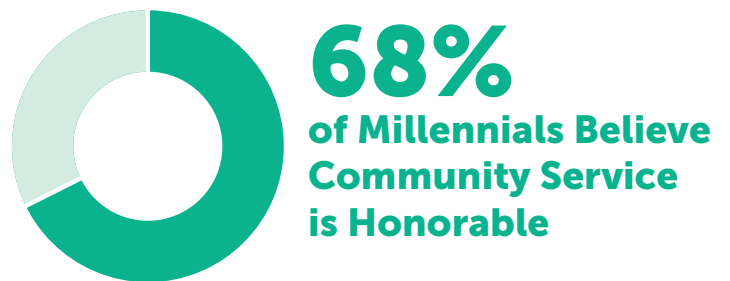
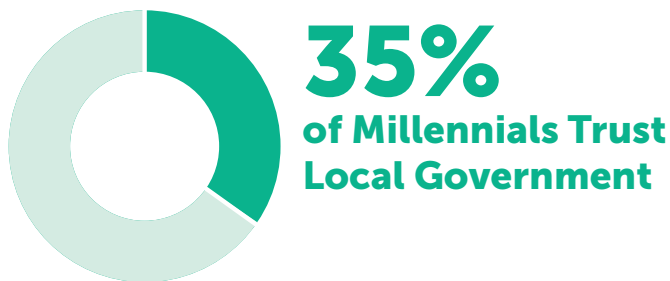
While a “trust” score of 35 percent is hardly a ringing endorsement of local government, the Kennedy School research cited above shows that the respondents are interested in potentially increasing that score. A plurality of respondents believe political engagement can yield “tangible” results, and a plurality also agree that running for office is “honorable” and that their vote does make a “real difference.” Perhaps most telling, 68 percent of respondents believe that community service is also an “honorable” endeavor.

Figure 2: Levels of Trust in Governmental and Non-Governmental Institutions



(Source: Survey of Young American's Attitudes towards Politics and Public Service, 33rd Edition. Harvard Kennedy School – Institute of Politics March 2017.)

What seems clear from these and other data is that the seeds of greater participation, however dormant today, have been scattered widely in the political system, particularly among the crucial millennial cohort that is positioned to be the dominant force in American politics. The question is how to cause those seeds to sprout and flourish. The answer, in a word, is information.



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## LOCelections: A Non-partisan Information Resource for Local Elections

**U**S Vote's LOCelections is a direct response to the problems of low voter participation in local elections that stem from the information gap and its attendant impacts.

LOCelections dates and deadlines data resource is designed to be the country's first comprehensive, verified resource for voters, voter support and service organizations, researchers and other stakeholders interested in local elections. LOCelections is designed to be an expert-sourced database that bridges the information gap in providing data on all local elections across the country.

The initial deployment of LOCelections will include:

- **Upcoming local election dates**
- **Associated deadline dates for all voting methods and voter types**
- **The number of seats up for election**
- **Links to voter services for registration, early and absentee voting**
- **Links to voting eligibility information**
- **Links to candidate listings**
- **Links to voting locations**
- **Contact information for local election officials**

Importantly, while US Vote provides LOCelections-based services directly on its website, LOCelections is designed to be used by third party voter services providers. Providing this access, through a database application programming interface, or API, allows US Vote to continue its on-going mission to support voter services providers. Licensees of US Vote's data span a wide gamut of organizations, including voter outreach organizations, individual states, national campaigns, and corporations interested in helping employees, particularly expatriates, with their voting needs.

In addition to these traditional US Vote licensees, LOCelections will have significant use in academic research as resource for comparative and longitudinal studies of voting behavior. Media organizations looking for nation-wide information on local voting will also be able to make use of LOCelections.

**Secret Sauce:** Local election officials, expert-sourced data and multi-standard support. While there are other organizations collecting local election data, LOCelections represents a specialized approach to this complex problem in two important ways: expert-sourced and verified data, and a unique approach to the problem of linking voters to the physical location of their voting districts.

Expert-sourcing of election data directly from local election officials, as opposed to "data scraping" and other indirect methodologies, is a particular strength of US Vote. Over the course of its 13-plus years of experience providing voters with eligibility and registration information, US Vote has built relationships with thousands of local election officials across the country.

These relationships have been a key element in the accuracy of the information US Vote provides: getting local election data directly from the source ensures that these data are accurate to a degree no other method can provide. Local election data in LOCelections is also verified to ensure data quality, something automated methods struggle to provide.

The other key value-add of LOCelections comes from its embrace of multiple standards for matching voter addresses to the appropriate voting district. Because districts often have boundaries that overlap or differ dramatically from one another, the problem of matching an individual voter to the appropriate district can be daunting: voters voting in the same municipal election may likely be voting in very different special elections depending how the special voting district's boundaries are set.

There are two ways in which the location problem can be solved, both of which involve the use of standardized data tied to specific geographical entities across the country, and both of which LOCelections supports.

The first is the Federal Information Process Standard (FIPS), which provides a unique five-digit code for every county in the country, as well as extra-territorial entities such as overseas possessions. The FIPS standard is in wide use across governmental agencies, private industry, and academic researchers who need unique geographical identifiers for their work.

The second standard, called Open Civic Data Identifier, or OCD-ID, is a broad-based, emerging standard for data relating to elections, jurisdictions, candidates, and legislation, among other election-related information. While OCD-ID, when it is complete, will provide much more granular forms of data, as an emerging standard there are still numerous details and elements to be finalized.

An important component of LOCelections is that US Vote has chosen to support both standards. While supporting OCD-ID is the wave of the future, the widespread use of FIPS across Federal and State governments, in particular the Census Bureau and other key data sources, makes it an important standard to support as well: The availability of FIPS data will allow more comprehensive analysis of LOCelections data, particularly in conjunction with Census Bureau datasets as well as historical academic data. Using FIPS will also allow LOCelections to proceed with its services as the OCD-ID standard emerges.

Supporting both standards means that LOCelections can function as a comprehensive data resource that supports the broadest possible use of local election data for the greatest number of stakeholders.

### LOCelections: Phased approach

The development of LOCelections is being undertaken in a three-phased approach.

**The first phase** was focused on research and development, supported by a Knight Foundation Prototype Fund grant in 2016. Working with a team of research, usability and technical experts, US Vote was able to design and build a prototype system that was then used to garner feedback directly from election officials. This system became the kernel of the new LOCelections data resource.

**The second phase** focuses on the consolidation of US Vote's election databases and API's as well as significant feature development and system scaling to accommodate the volume of data that LOCelections will acquire and curate from all 90,000 districts and to facilitate the use of LOCelections by third parties. This development phase is underway and will involve another round of system piloting with election officials and collaborators.

## Data Acquisition and Curation: The Keys to LOCelections Success

The acquisition of the local elections data and its ongoing curation are what will determine the success of the LOCelections initiative. It is in this area where US Vote is particularly strong in its processes and legacy experience. LOCelections is designed to advance US Vote's highly-successful "expert-sourcing" methodology, which has made the current election data on the US Vote site reliable, accurate and complete. In particular, US Vote's Election Official Directory, the most comprehensive election official contact database available, is a product of the combined efforts of thousands of local elections officials across all states and territories working with the US Vote elections team. This "know-how asset" will transfer directly into LOCelections to underpin its success.

US Vote's State Voting Information service reflects another area of strength that the organization brings to LOCelections: the ability to standardize, normalize and present in everyday language, the dynamic and disparate voting eligibility and requirements rules from across all states. The standardize, normalize, and present, in every day language, the dynamic and disparate demonstrates US Vote's strength in using civic tech to transform unwieldy, nonstandard information from multiple sources into a standardized, useable dataset that can drive innovation in voter tools, outreach and communication. This capability of US Vote drives the design, development and usability of the LOCelections Initiative.

**The third phase** will focus on integration with other related datasets and include a broadening of the LOCelections database to include other data elements that would be useful to voters, licensees, and researchers. The prospective new data elements include:

- **Candidate information for upcoming and past elections**
- **An overview of the policy areas that the respective municipal government or district is responsible for**
- **A nonpartisan, unbiased overview of the local issues for upcoming elections**
- **Census data for each municipality**
- **Historical turnout and election results for the municipality**
- **Historical voting patterns by demographic**
- **Information on campaign funding and candidate spending**
- **Information on local media outlets covering the election**
- **Other external information such as weather data**

The information to be added in phase three will increase the scope of LOCelections and position US Vote to meet our stated goal: **to develop LOCelections to become the most trusted source of information on local elections in the US.**

Thirteen years ago, in US Vote's original incarnation, known then as "Overseas Vote Foundation" (OVF) the organization developed and launched the first-ever, online process for overseas citizens, including military and other expat communities to produce a comprehensive, state-specific absentee ballot request form with instructions and the specific mailing address for their local election office. These new capabilities, pioneered by OVF, helped transform the overseas and military voting process. OVF, recast as US Vote, will take its visionary ideas and techniques and apply them to the local elections quandary. The result, US Vote expects, will in turn, transform local election participation the way the organization transformed overseas and military voting.

# Conclusion: LOCelections and the Future of Local Elections

**W**hile we acknowledge that LOCelections by itself cannot solve the entire local election turnout problem, its role as a trusted, curated source of information about local elections will have an enormous impact on the current information gap. In particular, the close cooperation and collaboration with local election officials that is a key element of the LOCelections methodology will ensure an unmatched level of data quality for this all-important resource: empowering local voters with correct and complete information is a sure way to build the trust of these prospective voters. US Vote's 13-year track record of providing high quality, expert-sourced and verified data to a broad range of voter engagement organizations is a unique qualification in the civic tech world.

Armed with the most complete local election data possible, LOCelections will impact a broad range of potential stakeholders: voters, local election officials, media organizations, researchers, private corporations, and other interested parties.

**Voters** will be able to use LOCelections as either a supplement to their existing local election information gathering efforts, or, in many cases, as their sole information resource regarding the local elections in their districts. In this regard, not only would LOCelections create greater awareness of upcoming elections, it would also enable voters to enrich their knowledge about issues important to their local communities. This may foster greater political interest on a local level, which in turn could benefit civic society as a whole.

**Local election officials** will be able to use LOCelections to publish and store information about upcoming and prior elections without the need to learn complicated new technologies or interfaces. Voter outreach and media organizations, especially local media outlets, will be able to use LOCelections as a key information resource for managing the coverage of local elections and issues, and allow them to stay up to date on candidates, issues, ballot eligibility and other local voting information from multiple districts simultaneously.

**Academic and private researchers** have struggled with the lack of comprehensive local election data and the limitations this has had on a wide range of research agendas. A central source of local election information research would allow scholars to more efficiently meet existing and future research goals in this poorly understood area of the US political system.

**Civic Tech Developers** can use the LOCelections data resource to build new tools, apps, and services to expand the overall voting experience. Developers can also use LOCelections data to support development of new features and information in existing systems. US Vote knows from its existing data licensees that the creativity and imagination of civic tech developers is only limited by the data they can find to work with and that there is a potentially high demand for LOCelections data. Supporting a network of developers to bring this vital information forward to voters is a core goal of the overall LOCelections program.

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**Private corporations**, as well as **public and private interest groups**, will be able to use LOCElections to better track and understand issues and elections that could have an impact on long-term and short-term planning, in the realm of regulatory or licensing issues.

## **Democracy in the U.S.**

The biggest beneficiary, however, is democracy itself. Voter participation is a hallmark of the democratic process, and in the world's most complex democracy – no other democracy has as many voting districts and local elections – exercising the right to vote has been historically hindered by the very complexity that underlies our uniqueness. While there are many paths to reducing the complexity of our electoral system, these paths themselves – synchronizing local elections to fall on the same day as national elections, for example – will be complex to resolve, and will be years in the realization.

Tackling the problem of the information gap, however, isn't just orders of magnitude less complex, it's the one solution that can be implemented now. US Vote is in the process of implementing that solution in the form of LOCElections. We welcome your help and participation in this effort.



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