

Approach to August and November Elections

With the experience of the April 2020 election under our belts, we are simultaneously digging deeper into what we can learn from that experience and gearing up to apply our lessons learned to our next two elections (August and November 2020).

April 2020 Elections Analysis

Full reconciliation of our election results is underway and is expected to be complete by the end of May. Because we could not reconcile results on election night (tabulators could not be opened until the following Monday), the process has taken longer this year than in prior years. We will share our final data set when this process is complete.

We're also conducting an equity analysis of the election. Work is underway and will continue into June.

Planning for August and November 2020 Elections

We expect that a high percentage of voters will continue to vote absentee (by mail), and that is good for social distancing and public health. However, we also know that voting by mail can disproportionately disadvantage people of color and people living in poverty. National studies indicate that people of color are disproportionately represented in the number of rejected absentee ballots. People living in poverty are more likely to have changes in their mailing address and less consistency in their mail services as a result. So while we'll continue to build up our processes and infrastructure to support an increasing number of absentee (by mail) voters, we will also continue to refine our services for in-person early voting and Election Day voting at the polls.

Specific refinements we are exploring or planning to make include the following:

Support for voters navigating online systems and voter ID uploads: Many voters struggled to register to vote and/or request an absentee ballot through online systems this year, with the process of uploading a valid voter ID being a particularly challenging component. This disenfranchised numerous voters and created a significant staff burden to help people who were struggling. The State is making some improvements to the WisVote online system to make this process easier. We are also brainstorming creative and budget-friendly ways to guide and assist voters through these processes. Ideas range from online videos, easy "how to" handouts as bill inserts, and having in-person support services at libraries and other City service centers to assist people when these facilities re-open to the public.

Absentee (by mail) ballots: We will encourage early online registrations and absentee ballot requests to help smooth out workflow and staffing needs, and will begin this messaging with the improvements to WisVote mentioned above are complete. Ideally, voters would request absentee ballots at least three weeks before the election date. We will also stay in contact with USPS about mail delivery systems for ballots. Drop boxes for returning a ballot were extremely popular in the April election, and are an effective alternative to postal service for ensuring a ballot is received on time. For Madison's population, best practice is to have eleven drop-box locations around the City. We currently have three locations, and are considering an expansion for the next elections. This would require purchasing additional secure ballot drop-boxes.

Curbside early voting: Curbside early voting was a popular service for a segment of voters. It allowed people to vote in person while avoiding contact with a larger number of people on Election Day. We plan to continue offering early curbside voting in the next two elections, and are considering ways to make access to this service more equitable. For example, setting up curbside voting and registration in church parking lots on Sundays may help us reach a broader segment of voters. An exact plan is still under development.

Election Day poll locations: We plan to examine voter turnout by ward and overlay that with demographic data per ward as part of our equity assessment of the April election, and will use that information to refine our targets for the number and locations of polling locations. We are also getting a head start on growing our stock of safety supplies. We're securing masks for poll workers, ensuring we have enough hand sanitizer, and we're planning to build more Plexiglas tabletop shields so that we can better space out poll book tables.

We will continue to strive for best practices and ensure than anybody who wishes to vote can do so easily.