



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC)**

September 28, 2023 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Recording available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaiq4Hxbegc>

**Meeting Attendees:**

John Arntz, Director, Department of Elections  
Elizabeth Dunlap, Community Member and Poll Worker  
Fiona Hinze, Independent Living Resource Center (ILRC)  
Fred Nisen, Disability Rights California  
Tess Bartlett, Mayor's Office on Disability  
Rakhi Mediratta, Dominion Voting Systems  
Travis Kester, Dominion Voting Systems  
Andy Pastalaniec, Department of Elections  
Christina Chow, Department of Elections  
Clint Wolfrom, Department of Elections  
Colei O'Brien, Department of Elections  
Mayank Patel, Department of Elections  
Jonathan Aaberg, Department of Elections  
Tiff Lee, Department of Elections  
Winter Patterson, Department of Elections

## Meeting Minutes:

### I. Welcome and Introductions

### II. State VAAC Update

- A. Fred Nisen provided updates to the group about meeting with members of the State VAAC along with Director Arntz and Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan.
  - 1. Topics discussed included making the State VAAC and county VAACs more in sync and improving communication between the state and local bodies.
  - 2. More interaction with the State VAAC can be expected in future meetings.

### III. Current and New Laws & Legislation Update

- A. Mayank Patel, from the Department of Elections, provided background and the current status of AB 545.
  - 1. This bill aims to increase polling place accessibility and would go into effect January 1, 2024.
  - 2. It would expand the supplies to be provided at polling places to include signature guides and page magnifiers.
  - 3. It would allow voters to request a paper ballot or use the accessible Ballot Marking Device outside of a polling place (curbside).
  - 4. It would require outdoor signage at polling places to advertise accessible curbside voting and ways to contact poll workers for this service.
  - 5. The bill has successfully passed through the state legislature and now requires the Governor's signature.
- B. Questions and Comments
  - 1. Elizabeth Dunlap mentioned that San Francisco already offers some of these services.
    - a. Mayank Patel confirmed the Department currently offers curbside voting and a page magnifier at all polling places.

### IV. Voting System Update

- A. Travis Kester, from Dominion Voting Systems (DVS), provided an update on pending software updates to the voting system related to improving accessibility.
  - 1. DVS latest version for California is unofficially referred to as CA Version 5.19.
  - 2. 5.19 will include some of the VAAC's previously suggested updates.
  - 3. A mid-2024 install date is targeted for San Francisco. The November 2024 election is expected to be the first use of 5.19 in San Francisco.
  - 4. The options that the Department has requested are certified at the state-level and are therefore available in any California county.
- B. Travis Kester presented lessons learned and best practices for 2024:
  - 1. The Ballot-Scanning Machine (BSM) will not read marks made by highlighters, red pens, or faint pencil marks. It's always best to use black or blue ink.
  - 2. Be sure to mark ballot cards carefully to avoid overvotes.
  - 3. Being patient is important when inserting ballot cards into the BSM.
  - 4. It's a best practice to take care of the ballot cards – avoiding rips and crumpled cards can help the scanning process proceed smoothly.
  - 5. The timing marks (black dash lines) on the sides of ballots can be affected when voters add non-essential markings to these areas.

6. Holding onto a card when the BSM tries to accept it can cause feed path issues and delays.
  7. Remember to ensure the Ballot-Marking Device (BMD) Accessible Controller is activated and plugged in.
  8. Avoid making marks near the BMD ballot QR code as this impacts scanning.
  9. Reminder that printed BMD ballots are just as viable as hand-marked ballots, it's completely up to the voter which method to use.
- C. Travis Kester shared how DVS gathers feedback and recommendations.
1. DVS gathers feedback from customers, across California and other states; the Election Code Administrators, California Secretary of State's office; trusted election partners, such as former customers, industry experts, cyber security, etc.; internal testing to gauge usability; and commissions and committees such as the Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) and county VAACs which included the members of this VAAC
  2. Feedback from San Francisco VAAC members and voters can be submitted at any time and does not have to be related only to accessible voting. Feedback can be emailed to [community.engagement@sfgov.org](mailto:community.engagement@sfgov.org).
- D. Travis Kester described the preventative maintenance that DVS performs on all voting system equipment.
1. The preventative maintenance is standardized across all jurisdictions using DVS equipment.
  2. In San Francisco, DVS performs preventative maintenance on 630 BMD units, 630 BSM units, 16 mail in scanners (ICC), adjudication workstations, servers, and back up batteries, etc.
  3. This preventative maintenance will occur in early December.
- F. Questions and Comments
1. Fred Nisen asked about the status of 5.19's certification.
    - a. Travis Kester answered that 5.19 is currently pending submission to the Secretary of State for review, which should take 3-6 months.
    - b. Fred expressed that he hopes the process is as quick as possible.
  2. Elizabeth Dunlap shared her best practices as a poll worker to avoid ballot jams and assist voters who overvoted with ranked-choice voting.
    - a. Director Arntz confirmed having jams on Election Day is a significant concern because it takes time and attention to get the process rolling again

## V. Department Updates

- A. Jonathan Aaberg, from the Department of Elections – Precinct Services Team, presented data about Ballot-Marking Device (BMD) and Accessible Voter-by-Mail (AVBM) usage in the February, June, and November 2022 elections.
1. February 2022 BMD: 65 uses (58 Polling Place, 7 Voting Center).
  2. June 2022 BMD: 112 uses (110 Polling Place, 2 Voting Center)
  3. November 2022 BMD: 256 uses (232 Polling Place, 24 Voting Center)
  4. Geographically for the November 2022 election, Districts 9 and 5 saw the highest usage of the BMD
  5. February 2022 AVBM: 638 uses (164 local uses, which was 0.09% of turnout and 474 overseas uses)
  6. June 2022 AVBM: 930 uses (243 local uses, which was 0.11% of turnout and 687 overseas uses)
  7. November 2022 AVBM: 2,242 uses (452 local uses, which was 0.15% of turnout and 1,790 overseas uses)
- B. Questions and Comments
1. Fred Nisen pointed out that the increase in the BMD use is part of a larger trend happening also in other jurisdictions.
    - a. Director Arntz asked Fred if he can share other statics from other counties
    - b. Fred will check to see if he has them and will share them
  2. Fiona Hinze asked if there were updates in return method options for AVBM ballots.

- a. Director Arntz mentioned the challenges that come with exploring alternate AVBM return methods, and offered how the San Francisco Public Library can help with printing. Arntz also referred to how legislation that Disability Rights California supported on this topic was opposed by the Secretary of State's office.
- C. Tiff Lee, from the Department of Elections – Outreach Team, provided updates on voter outreach efforts and the Department's website.
  - 1. The Department conducted hundreds of outreach events during the past election cycle, striving to connect with diverse communities throughout the city. The Department has worked with many organizations such as: Access SFUSD, Curry Senior Center, Department of Disability and Aging Services, Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, San Francisco Department of Rehabilitation and Self-Help for the Elderly.
  - 2. In the coming months, the Department plans to work with the Institute on Aging Martin Luther Tower, Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, Mercy Housing, San Francisco Veterans Affairs, and the UCSF Medical Center to further enhance voter outreach and education.
  - 3. The Department has developed a new Outreach Event Calendar for display on its website to view past and future events.
  - 4. The Department has migrated its webpages to sf.gov, a City-wide site that prioritizes accessibility. Sf.gov follows strict accessibility guidelines, and is designed to be mobile friendly and with content written at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Tiff Lee reviewed the Department's Accessibility Voting page which contains a list resources.
- D. Clint Wolfrom, from the Department of Elections – Poll Worker Team, discussed changes to polling places in response to AB 545 as well as general enhancements to polling places.
  - 1. The new "VOTE HERE" sign will be larger than the past sign, and more wind resistant. The new sign will be placed near the curb so it can be visible by cars and people walking towards the polling place.
- E. Questions and Comments
  - 1. Fiona Hinze asked about the previous sign, and whether the new sign will be ready for the March election.
    - a. Clint Wolfrom confirmed it would be ready for March.
  - 2. Fred Nisen asked to be included in discussions of the content for the new sign.
  - 3. Elizabeth Dunlap asked if a person in a wheelchair would be able to see text at the top of the sign, whether the street index will be on this sign, and whether the sign would be water-resistant.
    - a. Clint Wolfrom explained that wheelchair height will be considered when deciding where content should be displayed on the sign. He added that the new sign will reduce the number of posters that poll workers will need to display. He confirmed that the street index will be displayed on the sign and that the Department was taking water resistance into consideration and exploring options.
  - 4. Fred Nisen asked how voters requesting assistance curbside would contact poll workers from outside.
    - a. Clint Wolfrom explained that there will be a number on the sign that voters can use to call the Election Center to coordinate with the polling site staff. Buttons were found to be unreliable because of range-issues, but that it can be explored further.
    - b. Andy Pastalaniec, from the Department of Elections – Precinct Services Team, added that some polling places with extended paths of travel use bells to notify poll workers of a voter outside.
- F. Clint Wolfrom described specifics of the Signature Guide, which will be made of non-slip material, have rounded edges, and feature braille. Mayank Patel added that VAAC member Victoria Post has helped develop this Signature Guide.
- G. Clint Wolfrom shared new feedback regarding the difficulty for a voter with a sight disability to identify the ballot slot on the Ballot-Scanning Machine (BSM). The suggestion of adding braille instructions onto the machine could potentially address the difficulty

## VI. VAAC Projects Update

- A. Clint Wolfrom presented options for instructions to be added in braille to the BSM and requested input from the VAAC members on the subject. Options included “Insert card in slot below”, “Insert ballot in slot below”, “Insert into slot”, or “Insert ballot in slot below. Wait for a confirmation beep”.
- B. Questions and Comments
  - 1. Elizabeth Dunlap proposed adding instructions regarding the confirmation beep to the BSM clerk job card.
  - 2. Fred Nisen requested to review final text and to collect feedback from Lighthouse for the Blind and VAAC members.
    - a. Director Arntz assured the VAAC that proposed text will go out to the group before being finalized.
- C. Director Arntz asked the group to review the Department’s new webpages, specifically the Accessible Voting page to see if there is any information that needs to be clarified or if there are questions the VAAC would like answered.

## VII. Summary and next meeting information

- A. Suggestions for future agenda items
  - 1. Director Arntz proposed to discuss how the Department currently supports American Sign Language at the polling places and voting center.
  - 2. Director Arntz asked the VAAC to begin compiling a list of essential accessible features of any voting system.
- B. Mayank Patel announced the tentative schedule for upcoming VAAC meetings to occur in November 2023 and January 2024.
- C. Questions and Comments
  - 1. Elizabeth Dunlap and Fiona Hinze asked about universal Vote-by-Mail and whether San Francisco will continue operating polling places.
    - a. Director Arntz expressed how San Franciscans are supportive of polling places for a number of reasons.
- D. The meeting concluded.