

OVERVIEW



CUSTOMER: The City of Williamsburg, Va., population 12,000, is well-known for its rich history, including Colonial Williamsburg, which features restored and reconstructed buildings from the American Revolution.

CHALLENGE: During peak turnout, the traditional paper-driven voter check-in process was causing long lines and inordinate delays in voting. The paper-based process also made it difficult to identify and redirect voters who were waiting in line at the wrong precinct.

SOLUTION: The Datacard™ electronic poll book solution automates the distribution and collection of authorized voter data from the Commonwealth of Virginia to the county to the individual precincts. It allows precincts to perform voter check-in electronically, without a paper book.

RESULTS: The Datacard solution enabled Williamsburg precincts to reduce long lines during a recent primary election. The solution helps speed up voter check-in and gives election officials immediate access to information that previously took weeks to compile.

Updating an antiquated system

The city of Williamsburg in the Commonwealth of Virginia has a population of more than 12,000. Together with Jamestown and Yorktown, Williamsburg makes up the Historic Triangle of Virginia. The city is well-known for Colonial Williamsburg, a restored area that provides a glimpse of American life in the late 18th century. But this did not stop the city's Voter Registrar, David Andrews, from seeking to update a voter check-in process that had remained largely unchanged since the early 1800s.

Andrews knew it was time for a change when the traditional paper poll book started causing long lines and leaving voters unhappy.

"In large precincts, the paper-based check-in process generated major delays, especially during presidential elections when voter turnout was high," Andrews said. "Even when we split the poll book into sections, the process was slow. You would see a long line behind the 'A to M' station, with nobody waiting in the 'N to Z' line."

Voters waiting in line at the wrong precinct added another layer of frustration to the situation. After waiting in the long lines, these voters found they were not listed in the book. Then a poll worker had to call Andrews' office to determine the voter's registration status and correct polling location. In a high-turnout election, poll workers at 20 precincts were calling simultaneously, resulting in a 45-minute wait.

The Datacard™ solution

The Datacard™ electronic poll book solution is specifically designed to address the problems Williamsburg was experiencing. The user-friendly software application automates the distribution and collection of authorized voter data from the

state (or commonwealth, in this case) to the county to the individual precincts and back again. File exchange can take place offline, using a USB Flash drive or CD-ROM, or online over a network or the Internet. Most important, the solution enables poll workers to perform voter check-in electronically on a laptop computer, eliminating the need for the computer printouts on fanfold paper most cities use.

After learning about the Datacard solution, Andrews decided to authorize a trial run during the Virginia Dual Party primary in June 2005. The advantages of electronic voter check-in became immediately apparent.

"Our poll workers processed voters more efficiently and cut down wait time considerably," Andrews said. "Voters were verified more quickly and with greater accuracy than with the paper poll book. Voters who showed up at the wrong polling place were identified right away, then given the name and address of their proper polling place. This is a big benefit, because if these voters had grown tired of waiting and voted a provisional ballot in the wrong precinct, their votes would have been disregarded."

Reducing operational costs

The Datacard solution also provides financial benefits. Right now, for example, Virginia spends tens of thousands of dollars annually to produce and print paper poll books, deliver the books to each locality, and process the data after the election. Each print run consumes more than 300,000 pages of 8.5" x 14" fanfold paper. Localities spend thousands of hours correcting the poll books before they are delivered to precincts on election day. Localities must also provide storage space for the books.

"All of these costs are unrecoverable, and we have to budget for them every year," Andrews said.

"With the Datacard electronic poll book solution, we can eliminate these costs."

Improving access to voter data

The Datacard solution also allowed Williamsburg election officials to process voter data much more quickly than before. Because the solution uses electronic transmission, it can be processed in days instead of weeks.

"While it can take us up to eight weeks to generate basic statistics such as the list of voters and age and gender demographics, the Datacard solution provided us with results we could share immediately with candidates, political parties and the media," Andrews said.

Additional features in the solution allow precincts to see instantly how many voters have checked in and compare the number to actual votes cast. Election workers can perform audits at any time to detect irregularities, as well as generate a variety of standard and custom voter reports.

Easy to use, easy to integrate

The electronic poll book solution is customizable for local requirements. For example, it replicated all of the local Williamsburg voter status codes. Also, it is built on the Microsoft® .NET architecture, so it is deployable virtually anywhere and can import data from almost any type of database. These were important factors in Andrews' decision.

"We were very pleased to find a software solution that didn't require costly hardware," he said. "The software's open architecture design made it easy to load onto off-the-shelf laptop computers."