

Using Video to Tell a Story

Issued by The Elections Group



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Videos are ideal tools to illustrate your elections process. Using video circumvents the restrictions of a pandemic, which may prevent you from inviting the public and media into your space. Short videos, ranging from 30-45 seconds, are sufficient to demonstrate a process, highlight voting options, or report your progress in counting ballots.

For example, short videos about mail or absentee ballots (with some suggested titles) could include:

- **Your Ballot is On the Way:** Mail ballots being unloaded at the post office
- **Voted Ballots are Coming In:** Ballots being unloaded at your facility
- **Update on Turnout:** Ballot receiving or sorting area
- **Your Vote is Secure:** Signature verification
- **Your Vote is Private:** Ballot preparation/opening
- **Ballots are Being Counted:** Scanning machines
- Safety protocols you have in place for poll workers during the pandemic
- Election Day update on ballots received, and projections for counting them
- Pre- and post-election processes like testing, audits and canvass

Video should be engaging and visual, but need not be expensive, time-consuming or slickly produced. If you have access to a government television channel, great. If not, you can create videos with a cell phone or tablet, a lavalier (lapel) microphone, a steady hand or a tripod, and editing software on your phone or tablet, such as iMovie, Adobe Spark or the more robust Adobe Rush. (See this [example from Denver County, CO](#), shot on an iPhone and edited in Adobe Rush.)

You'll need an Adobe Creative Cloud license or a web-based program like Canva if you wish to add graphics. Combining still photos with video allows you to create easy transitions while editing.

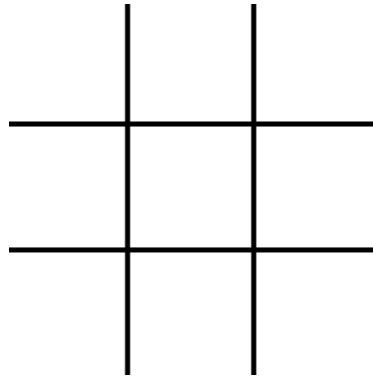
Post your videos to your agency YouTube and website, share on social media, and link in HTML emails (below). Note that videos under 60 seconds can be posted to your Instagram feed but Instagram "stories" are limited to 15 seconds. Make it a priority to send your footage to local news media to prevent them from using misleading file footage.

Don't have the resources listed above? Don't worry. You can still create informative videos with your phone alone.

Good videos tell a story without requiring a lot of narration or any text, but they do need to be visual and show motion whenever possible.

Here are some tips:

- First and foremost, **NEVER** show any voter identifying information. No close-ups of names, return address signatures, or voted ballots.
- Second, always frame your video by using the "Rule of Thirds." You want to fill the screen without a lot of extra headroom. If this tic tac toe was your phone's lens, the focal point would be distributed across the nine squares.



- Third, ask any staff or judges being videotaped for their permission. For example, in a ballot processing room, before you start videotaping (or shooting video) announce yourself and ask if anyone is uncomfortable being on camera. If someone objects, shoot around them or ask the room supervisor to give that person a five-minute stretch break.
- Fourth, if you shoot video on someone else's property, like the post office, your ballot print vendor etc. get permission first and shoot around any work product that belongs to other clients (at the printer), or other county's ballots (at the post office), etc.
- Finally, as we know, elections are social processes. Election judges can be chatty since they perform repetitive tasks in each other's company for hours on end. Tell them that if they see a cellphone in the polling place, assume a voter or poll watcher is recording their conversation. Judges should try to keep extraneous chatter, commentary etc. to a minimum.

Do not be afraid to use cellphone videos to speak directly to your voters. The beauty of cellphone video is you can shoot multiple takes and simply use the best one. This is helpful if you don't have editing capability.

Here are more detailed suggestions for the short videos mentioned earlier:

Your Ballot is On the Way: Mail ballots being unloaded at the post office.

You have two options. You can take a video of your ballots being forklifted out of the semi. The forklifts swiveling around and the "beep beep" sound when they are backing up make great video.

Another option is to use a pallet of your ballots as a backdrop and tell your voters on screen that ballots are on the way. "Hi! I'm [Clerk/Registrar X] We have [X] number of ballots hitting the post office today, keep an eye on your mailbox for yours."

Voted Ballots are Coming In: Ballots being unloaded at your facility.

Grab a walking shot of your transfer cases being unloaded and walked into your ballot receiving area. Create a social post or narrate off camera. "[Jurisdiction] voters, ballots are starting to arrive. Is yours one of them?"

Update on Turnout: Ballot receiving or sorting area.

Grab a shot of transfer cases being emptied. Create a social post or narrate off camera. "[Jurisdiction] voters, look how full these boxes are! Is your ballot one of the [#] cast so far?"

Your Vote is Secure: Signature verification.

Shoot down the row of verifiers to avoid inadvertently showing screens with PII on them.

Narrate/post your tailored key message. If your voters are used to mail ballots, it can be as simple as "Here is where we verify the signatures on your ballot." If your voters, parties, media etc. are new to the process, add a reassuring message. "We verify every single signature on every ballot envelope and our judges are trained to spot discrepancies."

Your Vote is Private: Ballot preparation/opening

Show whatever process protects voter anonymity, the physical separation of ballots and identifying information whether it's manual or mechanical. Create a social post or narrate off camera, "Your voted ballot and any information that identifies you are separated at this stage of ballot processing."

Here are some examples that illustrate what we just covered:

Results being walked in: Bernalillo County, NM

Thank you to our election judges: Washington Secretary of State

Take advantage of in-person early voting: Maricopa County, AZ

Another benefit to cellphone video is the ability to trim it with your phone's edit function. On Android it looks like a pencil; on iPhone you tap the word "edit." In addition to finding the best 30 seconds of a 50-second video, for instance, you can also apply different filters to change the lighting, tint or resolution of the video.

Another great video tool is Facebook Live. It has many pluses, but also a couple of things to be cautious about because... it's live. If you aren't comfortable being live, don't go there.

ANYTIME you use FB Live, make sure anyone you may come across, election judges, voters, watchers etc. know that you will be broadcasting live so you don't end up making headlines you don't intend to make.

FB Live is meant to be interactive. Work with a partner who can use a phone or tablet to look for questions as they appear in the comments. For FB Live, invest in a long-corded lavalier (lapel) microphone that plugs into your phone/tablet so your narration is intelligible to your viewers.

For instance, you can use it for walk-through tours of ballot processing, showing your polling places, or drive-up ballot drop off locations.

Facebook Live is ideal for instant updates. For example, use it to provide regular updates on ballot counting progress. For as many viewers as possible, alert your social media followers with a FB Live teaser at least 30 minutes before you go live, i.e. "Join [Clerk/Registrar X] at 9pm for an update on how many ballots we've counted so far."

That should provide them with enough lead time to settle in somewhere and engage.

Good luck and have fun!