

Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC)

How will upgrading voter registration impact costs?

The traditional system is not cost-effective given its reliance on paper records, inaccurate information, and manual processing. Each state contributes to start-up costs associated with implementing the upgraded system and configuring statewide voter registration systems to make use of the improved data. Those costs will be recouped over time as invalid registrations are removed, more registration management is done electronically, less data processing is done by hand and mailing and printing costs are reduced. States that have already begun modernizing their systems have recovered costs within two to four years and continued to build up additional savings in subsequent years.

Pew has made a significant investment toward building the data-matching exchange, and participating states will be responsible for funding the system's maintenance beginning in 2013. States with remaining Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds will be able to use some of those funds to pay for any necessary capital expenditures and ongoing expenses associated with improving the administration of elections.

How will the data-matching exchange minimize privacy risks?

Privacy has been built into the design from the beginning to reduce any potential risks for security. Pew engaged leading privacy and technology groups to apply proven safeguards that have been used successfully in the private sector and other areas of government. For instance, the data-matching exchange:

- Reviews and contains information that is only directly relevant and necessary for voter registration.
- Anonymizes, before the data leaves state control, any private or confidential data (such as drivers' license numbers or the last four digits of Social Security numbers) by converting information into an indecipherable string of characters so it is unreadable and unusable to potential hackers.
- Maintains tamper-proof audit logs that track every activity conducted in the system—including access, data entry and reports—and will conduct regular independent audits to monitor security as a whole.
- Requires states to adhere to agreements establishing the highest standards of security and restricting use of the data for election administration purposes only.

- Receives regular guidance from an advisory board of privacy experts to ensure robust privacy protocols at all times.

Won't this result in states giving up their control over voter registration and voter records?

No. The interstate data exchange is not an official record, and states continue to maintain control over their voter lists and records. The data-matching exchange is a tool to help states crosscheck information and keep more accurate voter rolls—not build a national database. Indeed, since states have access to more accurate data about the voters on their rolls, their ability to maintain and control their own voter lists will be enhanced.

Will the exchange automatically update or add voter records to each state's list when it finds new information?

No. The exchange gives each state reports identifying questionable, duplicate or inaccurate voter records, but each state will maintain control over its own voter list and make decisions on how to update records based on the information it is provided. No action will be taken to modify or create a voter's record without an affirmative confirmation from the voter.

Will participating states still be required to comply with the National Voter Registration Act?

Yes. While the system helps states better achieve the goals of the National Voter Registration Act, it does not exempt states from the law's requirements.

Will this system add a flood of unchecked individuals onto the voter rolls?

No, the system does not automatically add registrants to states' voter lists, but it allows states to add eligible citizens to their lists more efficiently. Through the wealth of information crosschecked in the exchange, states can identify unregistered citizens who are potentially eligible to vote. Each state implements their own procedures for reaching out to these individuals and allowing them to register. In no case are voters registered without some affirmative act on their part indicating they desire to be registered and meet the necessary eligibility criteria.

Will this system improperly purge voters from the rolls?

No, the system does not automatically purge states' voter lists, but it allows states to eliminate inaccurate or invalid records more efficiently. The exchange provides better data to inform each state's decisions on how to update and maintain their voter list, consistent with the National Voter Registration Act and other law. As a result, states may see a reduction in the size of their lists—not because of improper purging, but because their lists will reflect a greater degree of accuracy in capturing eligible, active voters.