



Voter Registration Application

When completing this form, review the General, Application, and State specific instructions.

This space for office use only.

Are you a citizen of the United States of America?

Yes
 No

Yes
 No

Are you 18 years old on or before election day?
If "No" in response to either of these questions, do not complete form.
State-specific instructions for rules regarding eligibility to register prior to age 18.)

Miss
 Ms.

Last Name

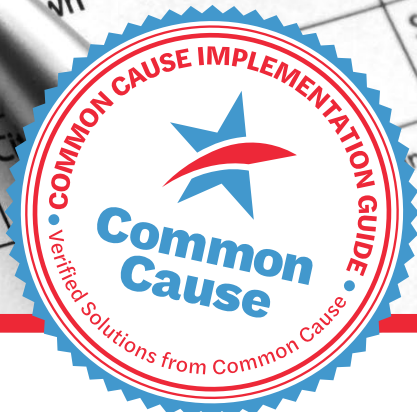
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Delivering on Automatic Voter Registration's Promise:

Implementation Lessons from the States

May 28, 2019

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
I. Introduction & Project Motivation.....	4
II. What is Automatic Voter Registration?.....	5
III. Our Target States.....	8
IV. Existing Voter Registration Practices & Implications for AVR.....	11
V. Considerations & Recommendations for AVR Implementation	15
Phase 1 – Diagnose Current Conditions.....	15
Phase 2 – Prepare Key Components.....	21
Phase 3 – Maintain Momentum	29
VI. Moving Beyond the DMV	30
VII. Conclusion.....	34
Bibliography	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Automatic voter registration (AVR) has emerged as a promising 21st-century innovation to reduce registration errors, which can lead to problems at the polls and often serve as a barrier to participation. By making voter registration an integral part of government services, AVR offers states an opportunity to create a modern, secure, efficient and accurate voter information system that promotes rather than frustrates voter participation. That system is built on the crucial assertion that all eligible citizens¹ should be registered to vote by default unless they decline. As of April 2019, 17 states and the District of Columbia had adopted or pledged to adopt AVR (or some enhanced version of the National Voter Registration Act).

Despite the system's growing appeal, efforts to capture early reflections and lessons from AVR implementation have been sparse. Uncertainty about the technicalities of AVR continues to impede states that have passed legislation but still need to implement it. This report seeks to fill that gap. We outline practical considerations and recommendations on the execution of AVR, based on interviews with election administrators, advocates and experts from five states: Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont. Equipped with a better picture of AVR's key components, election administrators, advocates and policymakers should be better positioned to deliver on the system's promise.

We begin by defining AVR and outlining the different policy models that states have adopted. Second, we offer a brief update on the status of AVR implementation in five states. Third, we examine current voter registration practices across the country and the interplay among AVR, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and online voter registration. We then present considerations and recommendations on AVR implementation. Finally, we examine how states might feasibly expand AVR beyond the driver's license agencies (DMVs)² and into every government agency that deals with the general public. This expansion is an important step because not all eligible voters interact with the DMV, particularly people with low income and people of color.

The following takeaways provide a high-level summary of our recommendations on AVR:

Interagency Collaboration: AVR hinges on strong interagency collaboration. Election authorities must actively seek buy-in from collaborating agencies and take measures to understand their partners' competing priorities, clientele and operating systems, meeting agencies where they are.

Data Management: AVR's greatest improvements to data quality and efficiency come from a paperless process, and this may be the most difficult transition for some state agencies to make. Agencies vary dramatically in their abilities to collect, transmit and authenticate large quantities of voter registration data digitally. Election administrators must remain conscious of the intricacies of data management and actively engage technical and operational staff in the planning process. Administrators must also consider how shifts in data management affect front-line staff working in AVR source agencies and local election offices.

Eligibility: Maintaining accurate voter files and preventing accidental registration of noncitizens and other ineligible voters remain key concerns. To address these issues, implementers must proactively engage a wide variety of community advocates and stakeholders, carefully engineer interactions with the public and design forms to minimize confusion and build in quality control checks — plus legal protections — in the event that errors are made.

1 The authors choose to use the term citizen throughout acknowledging some municipalities permit noncitizens to vote and, in such jurisdictions, such individuals should be registered through AVR systems.

2 The authors use DMV throughout for consistency though some states have other names referring its licensing authority.

Voter Engagement: The registration process should be designed with voters in mind. The way questions are posed — and, ideally, how online screens are designed — could make or break the project. Everything related to AVR must have clarity as its number-one aim. Administrators responsible for AVR implementation should optimize their interactions with the public, including the usability of forms employed by state agencies. This should be done with support from designers experienced in developing highly usable forms and web pages, and in engaging diverse populations. Through public education, advocates and implementers should also prepare citizens to navigate the new registration process successfully.

Maintaining Momentum: Implementers should adopt systems that support continuous learning, enforcement and improvement of AVR. Regularly required data reporting, training and interagency meetings can help sustain AVR's momentum.

I. INTRODUCTION & PROJECT MOTIVATION

The United States has a long and tumultuous history with the right to vote. After a centuries-long struggle to expand the franchise, voter turnout remains low in part because registration is still needlessly a burden for a sizable portion of the electorate.

State lawmakers, administrators and advocates increasingly acknowledge that barriers to voter registration and participation damage democracy and undermine the legitimacy of our elections. Automatic voter registration (AVR) has emerged as a solution to meet these challenges. By removing barriers to voter participation while creating a modern, secure and efficient voter data system, states with AVR stand to improve the quality and representativeness of American democracy. Thus, AVR has rightfully been celebrated as a potential solution to one of America's long-standing democratic problems.

Since 2015, AVR has generated immense interest among election administrators, advocates and lawmakers; it represents a commonsense, 21st-century solution to shortcomings in our voter registration process. Legislators in more than 30 states introduced AVR legislation in 2017 alone. As of April 2019, 17 states and the District of Columbia (DC) had legislatively or administratively adopted AVR. Several have fully implemented the reform, and many more are in the process of doing so.³

Thanks to national momentum and organizing, many states now confront the reality of implementing a functional AVR system. More will certainly follow. AVR's success hinges on strong execution, cross-agency collaboration and recognition of legal and practical limitations. Its success also depends on the implementation of strong protections to avoid the rare event of a state agency erring and including an ineligible person for voter registration. While some states may engineer these systems with relative ease, elsewhere, the transition may require long-term preparation and complex system upgrades. Above all, states must adopt AVR in a manner that enhances the credibility of our democratic processes and reinforces public confidence.

In this report, we offer a set of practical considerations, lessons learned and recommendations to help new states realize the promise of AVR. These considerations can also inform legislative design. Our analysis and recommendations are based on interviews with election administrators, agency officials and advocates from five early AVR states: Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont. Certainly, lessons and expertise from other states would enhance the discussion in this report.

We begin by defining AVR and outlining the different policy models that states have adopted. Second, we offer a brief update on the status of AVR implementation in five states. Third, we examine current voter registration practices across the country and the interplay among AVR, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) and online voter registration. We then present considerations and recommendations on AVR implementation. Finally, we examine how states might feasibly expand AVR beyond the driver's license agencies (DMVs)⁴ and into every government agency that deals with the general public.

This report targets policymakers and election administrators in states that have already passed, or are seriously considering, AVR legislation or adoption but have reservations about feasibility. We hope this guidance will prepare practitioners and lawmakers to tackle the practical challenges associated with AVR and to deliver on the system's promise of strengthening our democracy.

The goal of this report is to improve AVR implementation. It does not attempt to solve political challenges or to catalog why AVR is sound policy. Organizations such as the Brennan Center for Justice⁵ and Demos⁶ have already contributed substantially to those discussions.

3 "Automatic Voter Registration," Brennan Center for Justice.

4 The authors use DMV throughout for consistency though some states have other name referring its licensing authority.

5 "Automatic and Permanent Voter Registration: How It Works," Brennan Center for Justice.

6 Liz Kennedy, Lew Daly, and Brenda Wright, "Automatic Voter Registration: Finding America's Missing Voters," Demos.

II. WHAT IS AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION?

“Automatic voter registration” is an umbrella term for a new wave of government-led voter registration efforts that build on the NVRA. AVR transforms registration into a secure, accessible and automatic process that encourages every eligible citizen to vote, limits or eliminates administration errors, and helps governments maintain more accurate voter rolls. Though AVR systems vary considerably across states, they have three key features in common:⁷

1. The presumption that all eligible voters should be registered, or their records automatically updated, unless they choose otherwise — moving registration from an opt-in to an opt-out process.
2. Deeper integration of voter registration into the services already provided by state agencies.
3. A shift away from paper-based voter registration to digital registration systems.

AVR Models

States have devised several distinct models to achieve the goals of AVR. Differences between these systems are often subtle but essential from an implementation perspective. We differentiate among AVR systems according to two primary characteristics:

1. The number of agencies involved: whether **one or multiple agencies** participate in AVR.
2. Whether the same AVR rules and standards apply to all involved agencies (which largely depends on an agency’s technical capacities and/or the type of information it collects).
3. When a citizen can **opt out of registration**: either during a transaction or later. If the individual can opt out during the transaction, it’s typically referred to as a “front-end” or “point of service” transaction. If the opt-out option is available at some point after the transaction (typically through mail), it’s a “back-end” one.

Figure 1: Basic AVR Models⁸

Number of Agencies	Opt-Out Mechanism	States
Single Agency	Back-End	Alaska, Oregon,
Single Agency	Front-End	California, Colorado, Connecticut (administratively required to provide AVR at DMV, but not yet implemented; AVR legislation has since been introduced to move this to a multiple-agency back-end model), District of Columbia, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Vermont, West Virginia
Multiple Agencies	Back-End	Massachusetts

7 “Automatic and Permanent Voter Registration: How It Works,” Brennan Center for Justice.

8 Description of states and models is current as of May 2019, subject to change.

Multiple Agencies	Front-End	Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey (required at DMV, with potential to be implemented at other agencies), Rhode Island (required at DMV, with potential to be implemented at other agencies), Washington
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Single Agency

Under this model, a single state agency that interacts with a broad base of eligible voters implements AVR. The state selects this agency because it collects reliable voter eligibility information and can share registration data electronically with election authorities. Most AVR states today use the single-agency model, in partnership with the DMV. States rely on DMVs because of their broad reach, extensive data collection and existing role in voter registration, as already required by the NVRA. Alaska is the notable exception to this rule, instead leveraging its Permanent Dividend Fund⁹ to register voters.

Back-End Opt-Out (Single Agency): In a backend opt-out system, an eligible citizen visits a designated AVR agency and completes a transaction without being offered the opportunity to decline registration. The interaction is consciously structured to filter out ineligible voters using reliable data. After the agency transaction is complete, the state election authority contacts the individual and offers the chance to opt out of registration or to register with a political party — a necessary act to vote in primaries in most states. If voters do not respond, they are automatically enrolled, or their record is updated. (Notably, their party affiliation will be left blank, potentially leaving some people unable to vote in primaries.) It must be stressed that the only agencies that should provide AVR through a back-end opt-out system are those that do an effective and safe job of (1) identifying for AVR purposes who is and who is not an eligible citizen (through documentation, attestation, etc.) and (2) internally separating in their own data of eligible citizens from ineligible noncitizens. These actions are key to avoiding agency error.

Front-End Opt-Out (Single Agency): In a front-end opt-out system, an eligible citizen visits an AVR agency, completes a transaction and has the chance to opt out of registration during the transaction. (In the case of DMVs, this might resemble the opt-out process for organ donation in some states.) If a voter does not opt out in that moment, meets the eligibility criteria and clears any other relevant reviews, they will be registered to vote or their record will be updated. (The agency will transmit the citizen’s data to the local elections official for registration.) Most AVR states, to date, plan to use a single-agency, front-end opt-out approach, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, DC, Georgia, Vermont and West Virginia.

Multi-agency

In this model, multiple agencies participate simultaneously in the AVR process, to reach a broader set of voters. Such agencies could include the DMV, public assistance and health agencies, or other state agencies that collect the right data for voter registration (see Section VI). Participating agencies may be named in legislation or by election authorities on a rolling basis. Illinois, Rhode Island and (more recently) Washington each have committed to multi-agency AVR. However, no state has fully defined what implementation will look like for agencies beyond the DMV. The key is to ensure that only agencies that already collect citizenship data, and other pertinent information, be used for AVR purposes.

Differential Implementation & Enhanced NVRA Compliance: These terms apply to states, like Illinois, that do not expect all public assistance agencies to fully implement the core provisions of AVR. While Illinois plans to adopt

⁹ Alaska’s Permanent Dividend Fund (PDF) annually compensates state residents (who have resided in Alaska for one calendar year and intend to stay indefinitely) based on profits from natural resource extraction — notably oil drilling. Because of its compensatory nature, the Alaska PDF maintains a highly accurate and up-to-date database of residents and serves as a strong information source for voter registration information.

a front-end opt-out AVR system in the DMV, public assistance agencies and the Department of Corrections will likely only be required to enhance their implementation of the NVRA – perhaps by moving to electronic transfer of registration records, as opposed to the current paper-based system. The registration process within some agencies is unlikely to be “automatic” or “opt-out” in the truest sense. Of course, that could change, and at least some agencies that routinely collect citizenship and eligibility data might start adopting full AVR.

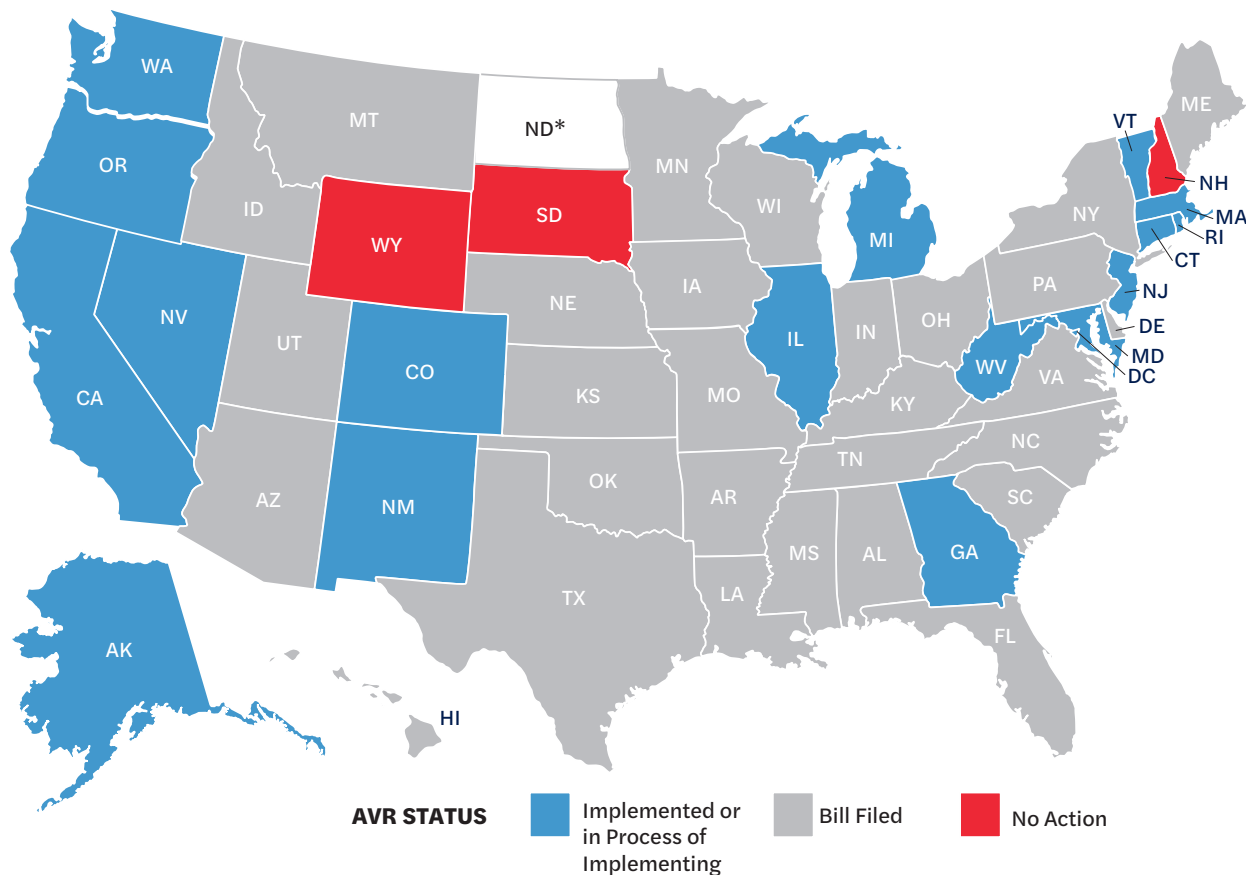
Retroactive Registration

In addition to registering voters automatically, states can retroactively register voters who have recently visited a designated AVR agency. Only Oregon has conducted an “AVR look-back.” The state first identified all eligible individuals who interacted with the DMV within the two-year period before AVR took effect. Election administrators notified eligible voters via mail that they would be registered (or have their records updated) unless they opted out. This process requires even more extensive preparation and accurate data collection than a typical AVR system. It additionally runs the risk of using outdated address information, but it has the potential to register large swaths of eligible voters.

Record Upkeep Agencies

States could identify additional agencies that purely support address updates to improve the accuracy of the voter rolls. These agencies would not necessarily be forward-facing and would not actively register new voters. For instance, the state taxation agency could be tapped to support address updates as part of the broader AVR system. No state has tested this approach.

Figure 2: Status of Automatic Voter Registration, March 21, 2018



*ND has no registration requirement

III. OUR TARGET STATES

The research and analysis presented here are limited to the ongoing AVR implementation experiences of Connecticut, Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island and Vermont. Given the timetable for this report, we focused on a subset of AVR states to manage our scope and ensure feasibility of adopting these recommendations. These states are also in different phases of implementation and employ distinct AVR models, from which we hope to glean a broad range of lessons.

First, we chose to study the two states with the most experience carrying out AVR: Oregon and Vermont. These states provide a holistic picture of AVR preparation, rollout and continued implementation. We selected Illinois and Rhode Island to learn from their efforts to integrate public assistance agencies into the AVR process in addition to launching AVR in DMVs. We included Connecticut because it adopted AVR through an administrative order, which we believed might yield a unique set of considerations. (To date, Connecticut has not yet implemented the reform. Legislation requiring AVR at multiple agencies, though, was introduced in March 2019, and local advocates believe it will be passed. Still, it's worth reviewing what Connecticut administrators learned during the process of issuing the order.)

We recognize that all states face unique challenges and can impart lessons about election administration and voter registration. Further study of other AVR states would strengthen the analysis presented here.

Status of Implementation in Target States

Connecticut

In May 2016, Connecticut adopted AVR through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the secretary of state and the DMV. State officials agreed they could better achieve the goals of the NVRA by adopting AVR and established an August 2018 deadline for a full system rollout. The MOU first established an interim system that required the DMV to provide applicants with partially pre-filled registration forms using the information provided for license applications. Although some of these processes remain manual or paper-based, the terms of the MOU aim to make the entire process electronic.

As of March 2018, Connecticut had modernized its voter registration interface at the DMV and established a daily, electronic data transfer between the DMV and elections officials. However, the initial deadline of August 2018 for implementation of a complete AVR system was not met. The technology in place at the DMV requires more extensive updates and investment than initially anticipated. For now, the state continues to use an opt-in registration system.¹⁰ In late March 2019 — a year after the state entered an MOU to adopt AVR — several bills on AVR were introduced in the state legislature. Advocates, legislators and the secretary of state now believe that the best way to advance the reform, and make it as strong as possible, is to do so legislatively, rather than administratively.

Illinois

The Illinois Legislature passed AVR legislation in August 2017. It is the first state to legally name multiple government agencies, other than the DMV, as AVR participants. “Designated AVR agencies” include the divisions of Family and Community Services and Rehabilitation Services of the Department of Human Services, the Department of Employment Security, the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, the Department of Natural Resources, or an agency that has “access to reliable personal information [meaning, governmental records that verify an individual’s eligibility to vote] and has entered into an interagency contract with the State

¹⁰ Kristin Sullivan, “Automatic Voter Registration in Connecticut,” Office of Legislative Research.

Board of Elections.” The law allows voters to opt out of registration at the point of service.¹¹ Illinois was due to begin implementation in July 2018, but implementation has been delayed.

On Dec. 13, 2018, Common Cause Illinois sent a notice letter to the State Board of Elections and the secretary of state (ILSOS) to alert them to violations of the Illinois AVR statute and the NVRA. In subsequent discussions Common Cause has had with the state attorney general’s office and the ILSOS, the ILSOS agreed not to implement its flawed opt-out program until advocacy groups and the state could reach an accord.

Oregon

In 2015, Oregon became the first state to adopt automatic voter registration — locally termed the Oregon Motor Voter (OMV) program. Implementation of AVR began in January 2016, and the system was fully operational for the Nov. 8, 2016, general election cycle. Between 2012 and 2016, Oregon’s voter turnout surged by 4.1 points — more than any other state.^{12,13} The Oregon Elections Division reported that 272,702 new voters were automatically registered as of Oct. 31, 2016, and that over 98,000 (approximately 36 percent) of these voters subsequently cast ballots during the presidential election.¹⁴ The Center for American Progress analyzed the demographics of the OMV program and found that 40 percent of the voters who were automatically registered were 30 years old or younger.¹⁵ The center additionally reported that OMV registrants, on average, came from neighborhoods with lower median incomes and lower education levels. Compared to traditional registrants, OMV registrants also lived in less urban and more suburban areas, and were more likely to be people of color.

In May 2017, Oregon officials conducted the first and only AVR look-back, which registered voters who had visited the DMV in the two years before the AVR rollout. A look-back was possible in Oregon because the DMV had begun electronically documenting proof of citizenship in 2014 as part of an upgrade to its REAL ID system.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island adopted AVR legislation in July 2017. The law explicitly requires the DMV to participate in AVR but also prompts the secretary of state to incorporate new agencies if they collect the appropriate voter eligibility information. In contrast to Illinois, which actively lists agencies, Rhode Island’s law gives enormous discretion to the secretary of state to identify new partners and to design the overall AVR system.

AVR implementation in Rhode Island has proceeded smoothly, overall. AVR went live at the Rhode Island DMV on June 11, 2018. No problems have been reported with the system. Early data indicates a significant increase in electronic transfers to the state’s central voter registration system from the DMV. However, the data is not disaggregated to indicate how many are new registrations or address updates.

Vermont

Vermont legislators adopted a front-end opt-out AVR system — in which the eligible voter may opt out of registration during a DMV transaction — in April 2016. The system came online in early 2017 but temporarily paused

11 An earlier Illinois AVR bill, vetoed by Gov. Bruce Rauner, would have automatically registered voters with a back-end opt-out system like Oregon’s.

12 Rob Griffin et al., “Who Votes With Automatic Voter Registration? Impact Analysis of Oregon’s First-in-the-Nation Program,” Center for American Progress.

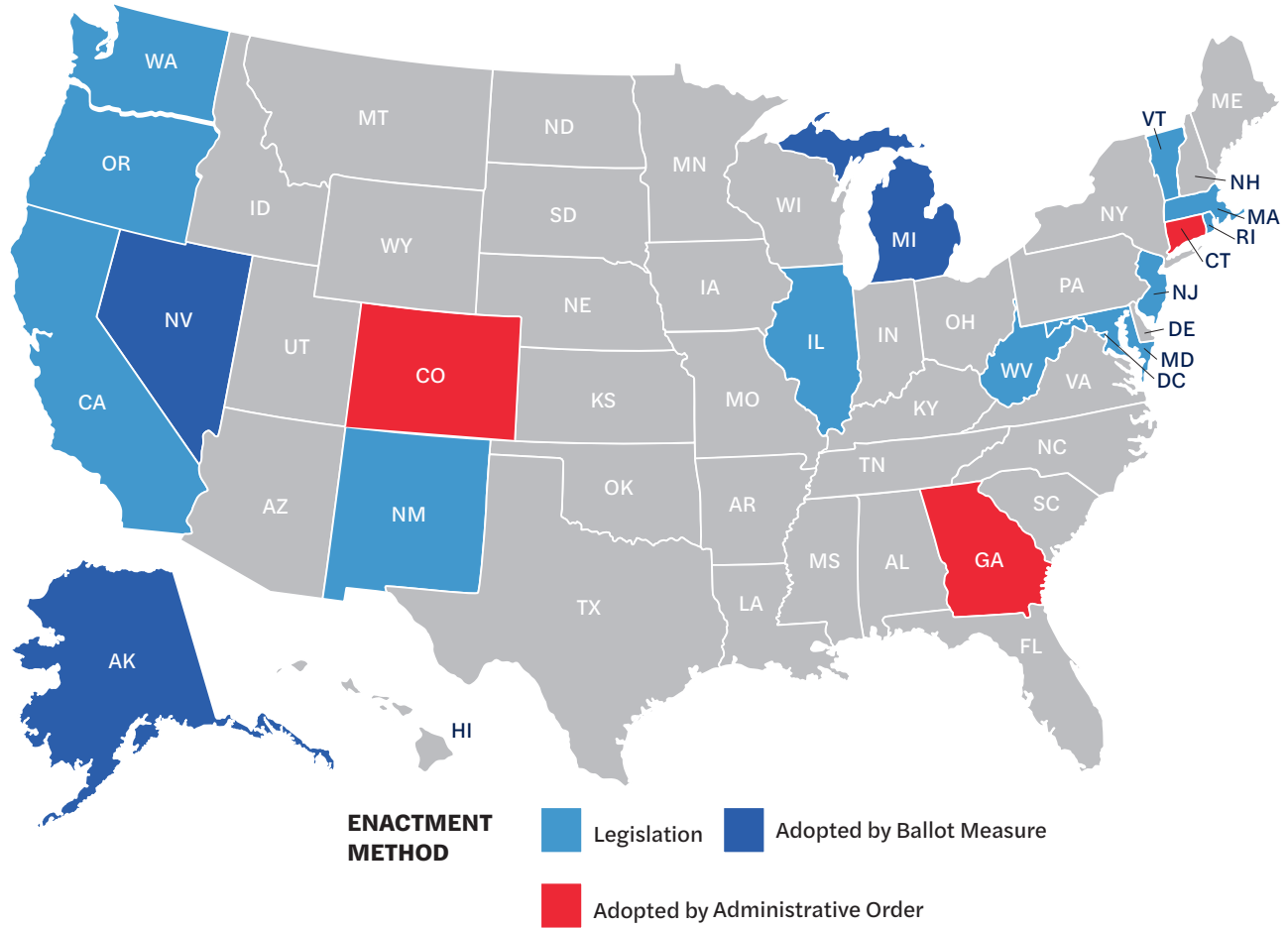
13 Notably, Oregon is one of few states that automatically mails ballots to all registered voters (a.k.a., all-mail elections), and this system may affect AVR’s overall impact.

14 This figure does not include how many voters have had their registration records updated through OMV. That information is not publicly available.

15 Rob Griffin et al., “Who Votes With Automatic Voter Registration? Impact Analysis of Oregon’s First-in-the-Nation Program,” Center for American Progress.

in January 2017 after several ineligible green card holders were mistakenly registered through the DMV.¹⁶ Administrators quickly identified the problem, which was caused by human error. The system has since been reactivated and is running smoothly.

Figure 3: How States Have Enacted AVR



16 Dan D'Ambrosio, "VT Pauses Automatic Voter Registration After Problems," *Burlington Free Press*.

IV. EXISTING VOTER REGISTRATION PRACTICES & IMPLICATIONS FOR AVR

This section reviews laws, practices and innovations in U.S. voter registration that have helped shape AVR. We first summarize how voter registration has traditionally worked in the U.S. and then discuss how the NVRA and online voter registration relate to AVR.

Traditional Voter Registration

For most of U.S. history, voter registration has been a citizen-initiated, opt-in exercise. Under traditional registration, a citizen completes a paper registration form before a pre-specified deadline to be added to the rolls. Upon the person's submission, a state or local elections official reviews the documents and registers the individual if eligible.

While the process seems straightforward, it is notoriously prone to error and delay. Human error, by either the applicant or administrator, is common with paper-based registration and can block a voter from successfully registering or produce an inaccurate record. Paper forms are also easily lost or create backlogs at election offices, delaying registration and possibly disenfranchising voters. Some states with "exact match" laws – some of which may violate federal law – will reject or place on hold registration applications that contain information that does not exactly match up with other publicly available data on the individual.

Although the exact rules governing voter registration vary by state, traditional mail-in registration follows this process:

1. The prospective voter completes a registration form and mails or emails to the appropriate location or drops it off in person. This form contains state-specific instructions, including any ID requirements. The individual signs the form and attests to meeting the U.S. citizenship requirement, state residency requirements, age requirements, mental fitness requirements and any criminal record requirements.
2. The completed form is sent (either directly or through an intermediary entity) to state election authorities.
3. Elections officials input the voter's information as a new record in the state's computer system. This information is checked against existing state records (e.g., DMV data) to confirm the individual's name, address and driver's license, state ID or social security number. In states with precise data matching criteria, omitted or incorrect information can invalidate a voter's application.
4. The voter's signature attesting citizenship is saved (in hard copy, electronically or both) by election administrators or the registering agency.
5. Assuming a positive match is made, the individual is added to the voter roll.
6. The election administrator sends the voter confirmation of registration or requests additional information.

The National Voter Registration Act & AVR

The concept and execution of AVR are inextricably linked to the letter and history of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 – a law that made sweeping changes to state-run voter registration practices. Building on successful, state-based experiments throughout the 1980s,¹⁷ the federal government mandated that certain government

¹⁷ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote: And Why Politicians Want It That Way*, Beacon Press.

agencies offer registration to eligible voting populations. Thus, the NVRA established legal relationships and sought to enshrine mutual responsibility among election authorities and other state agencies. To date, most AVR states have worked to deepen interagency relationships first brokered through the NVRA.

Here, we review the core provisions of the NVRA and draw lessons and recommendations from the act's sometimes-difficult implementation history. Many of these lessons also apply to AVR.

Overview of Relevant NVRA Requirements

The NVRA governs the conduct of voter registration for federal elections and establishes procedures to increase the number of eligible citizens registered to vote. The law standardizes voter registration forms, mandates registration through designated state agencies (requiring some to aid in completing voter registration forms) and outlines how states should maintain accurate voter rolls. Sections 5 and 7 of the law pertain most directly to AVR.

Section 5 of the NVRA mandates that all state DMVs allow license applications to serve dually as voter registration applications. To minimize the burden on voters, the NVRA requires DMVs to integrate voter registration into their forms and forbids requiring applicants to provide duplicate information. DMV-centric models of AVR build on this provision but swap registration from an opt-in to an opt-out system.

Section 7 orders states to designate all public assistance agencies and agencies providing services to persons with disabilities as voter registration providers. Section 7 further requires states to appoint “other” state or local government offices — such as public schools, libraries and county government branches — as voter registration agencies. Designated agencies must distribute voter registration applications to all visitors, help voters complete their applications and accept and transmit forms to elections officials. The precise language outlined in Section 7 will likely affect states experimenting with multi-agency AVR.

NVRA Successes and Shortcomings

The NVRA has helped millions of Americans register to vote and participate in our democracy.¹⁸ The act established a culture in which government shoulders more of the voter registration burden and in which voters expect registration opportunities to be more widely available. Unfortunately, the NVRA hasn't reached its full potential due to haphazard compliance across state agencies. Compliance issues broadly stem from a lack of rigorous oversight and accountability and/or a lack of technological capacity within states and the federal government. Execution of Sections 5 and 7, in particular, suffered when states had insufficient technical assistance, when agencies faced stretched human and financial resources, and when agencies lacked full buy-in.

A 2015 report from Demos revealed that a majority of states were out of compliance with core aspects of Section 5 and that many more had applied the law inefficiently.¹⁹ In 2016, Project Vote found the majority of state DMVs were not carrying out the NVRA's change-of-address requirement — that is, they were not providing individuals with the option of updating their voter registration as they updated a change of address with the agency.²⁰ A 2013 assessment by Pew concluded that almost no states could “document the degree to which their motor vehicle agencies are offering citizens the opportunity to register to vote or update their registrations.”

Section 7 compliance faces even more significant challenges. A 2008 report from Demos and Project Vote revealed that the number of public assistance agency registrations declined by a staggering 79 percent between

18 J. Mijin Cha, “Registering Millions: The Success and Potential of the National Voter Registration Act at 20,” Demos.

19 Stuart Naifeh, “Driving the Vote: Are States Complying with the Motor Voter Requirements of the National Voter Registration Act?” Demos.

20 Archita Taylor and Sylvia Albert, “Changes of Address and the National Voter Registration Act: How State DMVs Are Failing Voters & Violating Federal Law,” Project Vote.

the law's first year and 2007.²¹ In some cases, agencies lacked onsite applications altogether, or staff members were entirely unaware of their obligation to offer registration to visitors. The increased use of third-party contractors as front-line staff in Section 7 agencies has exacerbated these problems.²² Agencies now also process more cases remotely (e.g., online or via telephone), but many have not updated their voter registration systems to maintain compliance with the law.²³

Despite persistent implementation shortcomings, legal action and memoranda of understanding initiated by public interest groups and the Department of Justice have forced dramatic improvements in agency registration over the past decade.²⁴

NVRA Lesson Learned for AVR States

The NVRA has faced an uphill implementation battle over its 25-year life. Years of mismanagement and negligence by states on Sections 5 and 7 have yielded essential lessons on effective policy implementation and offer a path forward for states considering AVR.

First, oversight and enforcement of voter registration laws matter and can boost registration rates tremendously. Second, state agencies need both resources and technical support to re-align their practices with new and existing voter registration laws. Such resources include support for deploying new technology that saves time and money while improving legal compliance. Third, formally appointing statewide and agency-specific coordinators to oversee NVRA (or AVR) implementation can help smooth agency transitions and ensure compliance. Fourth, systematic and uniform data collection, transmission and reporting practices are central to a functional voter registration system. Fifth, turnover among state agency staff and the use of third-party contractors necessitate continuous and consistent training on voter registration obligations. Finally, public education can help ensure that citizens enjoy their rights under state and federal voter registration laws and that registration agencies are held to account.

Online Voter Registration

Voter registration has modernized as technology has advanced — although at a slower pace than many realize. Until the past decade, registration relied predominantly on paper forms or in-person visits to government agencies. Today, 37 states and DC offer an online voter registration (OVR) option, which has saved millions of dollars in administrative costs.²⁵ It also largely fills a gap in NVRA compliance because most states require that all online applicants have a state-issued driver's license or ID. In states such as California and Arizona, more than 50 percent of registrations occur online.²⁶

With online registration, voters enter their information directly via the web, bypassing the need for manual data entry or transcription by government clerks, thus reducing the chance for mistakes. Clerks then receive digital forms and review and validate voter applications electronically. In most states, clerk validation requires a comparison with DMV records, meaning that voters must have a DMV-issued ID number to register online. Clerks rely heavily on DMV records to verify a voter's name, birthdate and address and to check whether the state has a record of the voter's signature.

21 Douglas R. Hess and Scott Novakowski, "Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007," Project Vote and Demos.

22 Sarah Brannon et al., "Letter to Secretary Reagan: NVRA Compliance," ACLU.

23 Archita Taylor, "Report From US Commission on Civil Rights Highlights Crucial NVRA Section 7 Compliance Requirements," Project Vote.

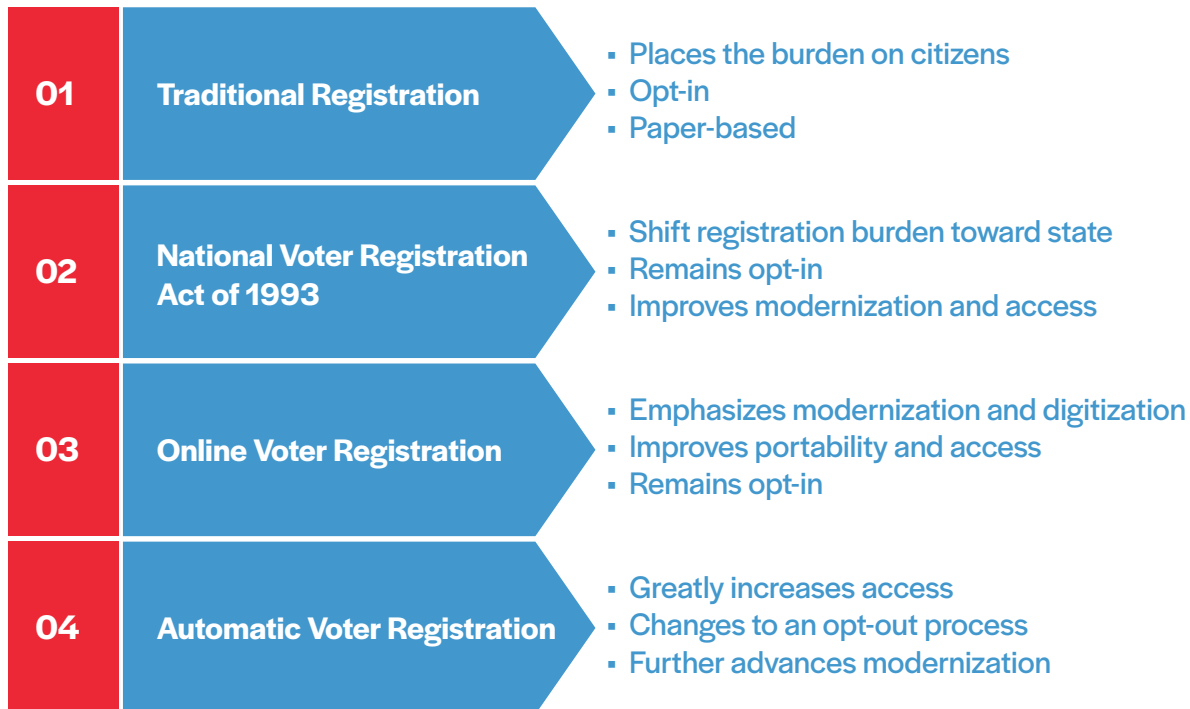
24 Lisa J. Danetz, "Increasing Compliance With Section 7 of the NVRA: How Effective Implementation of Section 7 of the NVRA Helps Millions of People Get Registered to Vote," Demos.

25 "Online Voter Registration," National Conference of State Legislatures.

26 "Online Voter Registration: Trends in Development and Implementation," Pew Charitable Trusts.

OVR offers both lessons and foundational systems that may help states push AVR forward (elaborated on in Section V). For instance, like AVR, online registration in many places is thoroughly dependent on the DMV – particularly to facilitate signature capture. The issue of signature capture, which in some ways restricts the reach of OVR, also factors prominently in the ongoing challenge to expand AVR to new agencies (discussed in Section VI).

Figure 4: Changes to Voter Registration in the U.S.



V. CONSIDERATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AVR IMPLEMENTATION

This section consolidates the varied implementation experiences of our five target AVR states. Based on 40 interviews with election administrators, agency officials and advocates, we offer considerations and recommendations to orient stakeholders on core elements of AVR implementation.²⁷ We phase our considerations in three, loose chronological stages:

- 1. Diagnose Current Conditions**
- 2. Prepare Key Components Necessary for AVR Implementation**
- 3. Maintain Momentum – and Ensure Consistency**

We also organize considerations according to four major themes in AVR implementation: **interagency collaboration, data management, eligibility and citizen engagement.**

Above all, we recognize that the complex state-based non-uniform nature of elections in the U.S. and the myriad ways in which states have modeled their AVR systems make it difficult to execute blanket recommendations. These recommendations should, of course, be modified in whatever way makes them most useful in a given context.

Phase 1 – Diagnose Current Conditions

AVR planning and implementation should begin with a thorough diagnostic period that helps administrators detect challenges and opportunities the system may encounter early. This requires a sober assessment of each involved agency's appetite and capacity for AVR, as evidenced by its record on NVRA compliance (if relevant), its technological capacity, its internal politics and priorities, its ability to capture citizenship and other eligibility data and its efficiency in doing so, and its relationship with election administrators. Governments should consider the items in the list below to identify and mitigate likely problems before AVR implementation begins. To the degree possible, consideration of these factors during legislative drafting could also improve the design and eventual success of a given AVR system.

²⁷ Many recommendations stem from direct state examples or suggestions from expert interviews. Other recommendations are our conclusions based on common themes that emerged from our research.

Phase 1: Diagnose Current Conditions

Theme	Challenges and Recommendations
Interagency Collaboration	1.1 Consider the Many Government Stakeholders 1.1.1 Map Stakeholders 1.1.2 Assess Relationships
	1.2. Understand Interagency Priorities 1.2.1 Form an Intragovernmental Working Group
	1.3 Comply with the National Voter Registration Act 1.3.1 Review NVRA Compliance
Data Management	1.4 Start with Online Voter Registration 1.4.1 Assess the Utility of OVR
	1.5 Evaluate Existing Data Management Systems 1.5.1 Update Election Management Software 1.5.2 Include Reporting and Transparency Functions 1.5.3 Evaluate Partner Agency Systems
	1.6 Assess the Status of Data Transfer Technology 1.6.1 Consult Technical Experts 1.6.2 Consult States With Effective Data Management Systems 1.6.3 Understand the Data Formats of Different Agencies
Training	1.7 Training, Capacity Building and Education 1.7.1 Agency Staff Training 1.7.2 Local Elections Staff Training 1.7.3 New Tech Hires 1.7.4 Public Education

1.1 Interagency Collaboration: Consider the Many Government Stakeholders

Challenge: The cross-agency nature of AVR is a primary challenge to effective implementation – this hampered the NVRA. Any AVR measure will rely on an agency whose core mission and responsibilities are unrelated to elections to perform voter registration. Whether a state decides to focus on the DMV alone or other agencies as well, AVR’s success will depend heavily on the organization that employs front-line workers and is responsible for

transmitting registration data to election administrators. Before the NVRA, most states had little to no connection between the DMV and their election authority. Today, the nature of DMV-election administrator relationships varies widely. In some places, both the DMV and election management fall under the same principal authority, generally the secretary of state. Elsewhere, while the relationship is legally mandated by the NVRA, it may be perfunctory and noncollaborative or virtually nonexistent.

Examples: Rhode Island chose to involve both the DMV and public assistance agencies in its AVR system. Knowing that implementation would begin with the DMV, elections officials have stayed in close contact with leaders at the Rhode Island DMV. The DMV and secretary of state's office have held regular meetings as they prepared to launch AVR and, consequently, have maintained a positive and productive working relationship, which will help the system succeed. The DMV allowed the secretary of state's office to conduct usability testing for the new AVR language at locations in Cranston and Woonsocket prior to launch.

In Vermont, a recent effort to improve voter registration data transmission between the DMV and secretary of state created the technological and relational backbone for AVR. Since the secretary of state had worked closely with the DMV to establish a straightforward electronic data transfer system, adding the "automatic" element to voter registration proved uncontroversial within the DMV. The DMV joined the coalition that advocated in favor of AVR, in part, because of this healthy relationship.

Recommendations:

1.1.1 Map Stakeholders: At this early phase, stakeholder mapping can help identify the crucial reporting relationships and individuals within organizations affected by AVR. Mapping requires determining what agencies, relevant subdivisions and individual staff members will work on the implementation and rollout of AVR. This exercise can and give involved players a more definite sense of what will be asked of whom. Stakeholder mapping can also support relationship formation and management.

1.1.2 Assess Relationships: Most election authorities have some relationship with their DMV; however, in many places, these relationships have become strained or unproductive. It is crucial for lead AVR implementers to have a clear-eyed understanding of relevant interagency relationships and to make a concerted effort to mend and improve agency ties before kick-starting AVR. It's also necessary both before AVR legislation gets passed (or the state adopts the reform administratively) and afterward – during the implementation phase – for election authorities and DMV and/or other source agency officials to meet to determine what capacity the agency has to accurately capture eligibility data. That way, all those tasked with implementing and enforcing the AVR can identify the appropriate source agencies from the start and complete any fixes or upgrades to an agency's system before implementation.

1.2 Interagency Collaboration: Understand Interagency Priorities

Challenge: AVR requires the buy-in of government organizations that do not focus on voter registration, and these agencies' ongoing priorities must be considered. In the DMV's case, adding an additional and potentially complex step to the licensing process contradicts the goal of reducing wait times and boosting the number of transactions. The same tradeoffs are likely true of many social service providers. These agencies all serve critical functions of profound importance to citizens and the state. Agencies must continue serving the public, unabated, and deserve respect and acknowledgment from the outset.

In addition to their daily priorities, state agencies may also have significant internal reform projects or goals that consume staff energy. For example, many states are just now beginning to implement REAL ID at DMVs or are in the process of modernizing DMV technology. The same may be true for other state agencies. Introducing AVR may complement those efforts if it is integrated appropriately, or it could cause problems with implementation if not carefully undertaken.

Examples: Rhode Island and Illinois adopted multi-agency AVR. Illinois has faced some delay with AVR implementation due to competing priorities at the DMV (involving REAL ID and internal technology upgrades).

In Rhode Island, unexpected issues with the statewide unified public benefits portal (known as UHIP)²⁸ at Health and Human Services (HHS) have effectively ruled out integration with AVR for the time being. Recognizing HHS' priorities, the secretary of state has decided to pursue AVR implementation with HHS once UHIP is ready. The secretary of state continues to explore non-DMV options after the successful 2018 launch.

Recommendations:

1.2.1 Form an Intragovernmental Working Group: An intragovernmental working group can help resolve issues such as reporting responsibilities, relationship management and organizational priorities. By bringing all relevant actors into the same room on a regular basis, all involved players can understand the challenges their partners face and how to support them. Such groups also create an informal system of responsibility, whereby each agency must report on its progress even if no formal sanctions exist for missed deadlines. Such working groups have succeeded as both formal and informal bodies. At these meetings, too, staff can identify competing priorities and determine how to navigate them alongside AVR implementation.

1.3 Interagency Collaboration: Comply With the National Voter Registration Act

Implementing a fully functional OVR system effectively tests an election authority's ability to establish and maintain a new technological platform, without introducing the intergovernmental complications of AVR.

Challenge: As discussed, the NVRA created the overarching framework for AVR and serves as the system's closest analog. Existing compliance with the NVRA can shed light on how a state's DMV and Section 7 agencies might handle automatic registration. Before implementing AVR, governments should evaluate their NVRA compliance records and understand what aspects of the act have challenged different agencies. Understanding the NVRA's successes and failures in advance can help states establish realistic goals for AVR.

These assessments can also help lawmakers design appropriate legislation, especially if specific state agencies have not complied with the NVRA to date.

Example: Before implementing its AVR system, Oregon established an NVRA Task Force to review compliance in the DMV and Section 7 agencies. Task force meetings helped to reinforce and build the relationships necessary for AVR implementation. Through these meetings, Oregon discovered that the DMV fully complied with the NVRA, but that address updates remained an issue. These meetings also revealed that Section 7 agencies, for a variety of reasons, were not yet ready to contribute to a fully automatic system.

Recommendations:

1.3.1 Review NVRA Compliance: Forming a (formal or informal) panel to review NVRA compliance can help states identify where agencies have struggled with voter registration and set realistic expectations for AVR. Such an effort may also strengthen the relationships required for successful AVR implementation.

1.4 Data Management: Start With Online Voter Registration

Challenge: AVR may pose a nontrivial technological problem for state agencies — especially if they don't have any voter registration modernization in place already. While it is not necessarily a prerequisite, OVR can create the technological backbone for AVR and can cultivate deeper technical expertise within relevant agencies. Im-

28 Ellen Liberman, "All You Need to Know About the UHIP Disaster," *Rhode Island Monthly*.

plementing a fully functional OVR system effectively tests an election authority's ability to establish and maintain a new technological platform, without introducing the intergovernmental complications of AVR. OVR requires election administrators to overcome the technological intricacies of paperless voter registration and to address the data management, security and accuracy challenges associated with this shift.

Example: Oregon's online voter registration system created both the momentum and technological know-how for its future AVR system. The cost of executing OVR also substantially offset the cost of AVR, because many of the same technologies and experts were already in place.

Recommendation:

1.4.1 *Assess the Utility of OVR:* States without OVR should consider whether its adoption could help prepare for or complement AVR implementation. The two reforms can also be taken on simultaneously, with staff working on one reform that informs work on the next.

1.5 Data Management: Evaluate Existing Data Management Systems

Challenge: The quality and compatibility of information technology (IT) systems within election offices and source agencies may hinder AVR implementation. States update election technologies relatively infrequently, and many use outdated and inefficient election management systems. These systems often rely heavily on manual entry and do not provide real-time information on an elections official's pending workload. State agencies, including the DMV, are also often hamstrung by outdated data management systems. Without modern technology, interagency data sharing and systems integration may be more difficult. Antiquated front-end systems at AVR agencies may also prevent implementers from optimizing interactions with the public.

State agencies, including the DMV, are also often hamstrung by outdated data management systems. Without modern technology, interagency data sharing and systems integration may be more difficult.

When implementing AVR, it's key to ensure that — for front-end opt-out registration transactions — the language during interactions (and on the screen) is clear and concise and appropriately translated or interpreted for low-English-proficiency individuals and individuals with disabilities.

Developing the language used for the transaction as well as the technical interface for both the public and employees should be done with usability experts who can ensure that the processes are working as intended. Often, this will require a technical upgrade.

Agencies that are equipped to offer back-end opt-out registration options will also need to ensure that they do a safe and effective job of identifying who is and who is not an eligible citizen before mailing out notices to would-be voters. This, too, likely requires sophisticated and modern technology. These system upgrades may be expensive and require time-intensive testing, which some states may not have the resources to pursue.

Examples: Before AVR began in Vermont, the secretary of state's office had launched a new election management system designed to facilitate greater information sharing and transparency between town clerks and the State Election Office. This new software allowed election administrators to view and manage the flow of voter registration records between state and local offices. It also gave state-level officials a better understanding of workflow challenges facing local election administrators in real time.

Implementers in Colorado capitalized on a major ongoing upgrade to the DMV's licensing software and began to automate voter registration transactions mandated by the NVRA. Digitizing voter registration at the DMV was

Colorado's first step toward AVR. Understanding the DMV's IT system and upgrade plans allowed the secretary of state's office to identify the opportunity for AVR.

Recommendations:

- 1.5.1 *Update Election Management Software:* Many states are due for an update to their systems, and many have considered updates following the 2016 election. While such a procurement may be expensive and disruptive, it can smooth the adoption of AVR by reinforcing the technological base of an election authority and by reducing the eventual cost of AVR. A software upgrade can also facilitate buy-in from local elections officials and improve state oversight of AVR implementation.
- 1.5.2 *Include Reporting and Transparency Functions:* An up-to-date election management system can help facilitate transparency and reporting between different levels of election administration if it has the correct functionality. Such a system can facilitate the implementation of AVR by allowing state-level officials to understand how AVR has changed workloads. It may also assure local officials that changes in their workloads are appreciated by state-level officials.
- 1.5.3 *Evaluate Partner Agency Systems:* Elections officials should evaluate the data management systems used by partner agencies and understand challenges and opportunities posed by these systems. In addition, implementers should be knowledgeable about ongoing or planned upgrades to partner agency IT systems that might impact AVR.

1.6 Data Management: Assess the Status of Data Transfer Technology

Challenge: AVR requires a secure, timely and accurate data transfer system that links each involved agency with election administrators. Effective data sharing also requires harmonized data formats and collection processes. These standards exist partially within DMVs, but to a much lesser extent in Section 7 agencies. Simple issues such as file format or the logging format of data (e.g., by “last name, first name” as opposed to “first name, last name”) can cause significant issues for voter registration.

Existing data transfer systems must be checked for security, accuracy and capacity to handle a higher influx of records. Where there is no interagency data transfer mechanism, one must be built or procured, which requires both time and money.

Example: In Vermont, a recent effort to improve data transmission between the DMV and secretary of state's office created the technological foundation for AVR. Having an efficient system in place promoted interagency buy-in and put Vermont in a position where only minor changes to the wording of the DMV form were required to turn the existing system into AVR.

Recommendations:

- 1.6.1 *Consult Technical Experts:* Assessing the status of data transfer technology is one of the more technologically demanding aspects of AVR implementation and is also one of the areas of expertise least likely to be found in-house. Bringing in technical experts may be appropriate when assessing how best to upgrade a state's voter registration data transmission system. Experts with the Electronic Registration Information Center have extensive experience with voter registration data management and matching and could be tapped for support.
- 1.6.2 *Consult States With Effective Data Management Systems:* Again, some states have done this well already and will be able to provide information to peers looking at this issue for the first time. These states may also be willing to share portions of their software or offer vendor recommendations.

- 1.6.3 *Understand the Data Formats of Different Agencies:* Particularly when dealing with public assistance agencies, elections officials must begin to understand the different methods by which other agencies collect data and understand their data formats. Often this information is not known by agency heads, but rather resides with technology officers or front-line staff.

1.7 Training, Capacity Building and Education

Challenge: Financial constraints can hamper AVR implementation, particularly in states that have not laid the technological groundwork through earlier reforms. States with a robust technology infrastructure might find AVR to be a relatively inexpensive upgrade and one that may save money in the long term. Where AVR requires a more substantial administrative and technological leap, resources must be allocated ahead of time. Once these are secured, and the AVR system implemented, states will likely see cost savings compared with what was previously spent on paper registrations.

Once these are secured, and the AVR system implemented, states will likely see cost savings compared with what was previously spent on paper registrations.

Recommendations: Below, we highlight several components of AVR implementation that may require additional resources.

- 1.7.1 *Agency Staff Training:* Front-line staff at participating AVR agencies will need to be retrained before the system comes online. Elections officials and agency leaders should jointly map out the costs and logistics of staff training and come to a financial arrangement that ensures strong follow-through and continued buy-in from the source agency (e.g., sharing costs of retraining between the source agency and election authorities, if no additional funding is allocated to the agency).
- 1.7.2 *Local Elections Staff Training:* If a state's AVR system alters the data management process at the local level, states may need to retrain local elections staff.
- 1.7.3 *New Tech Hires:* Depending on a state's existing election technology infrastructure, elections officials may need to hire individuals to program new internal data collection and management systems to facilitate AVR, as well as technical project managers.
- 1.7.4 *Public Education:* Ideally, implementers should dedicate some resources to educating and engaging the public on AVR. These efforts do not need to be costly and can easily be scaled up or down, depending on resource availability and needs in the local context.

Phase 2 – Prepare Key Components

During this phase, implementers should turn their focus outward and prepare for the public-facing and people-centered elements of AVR, while also addressing any remaining internal agency challenges. These actions should occur after or concurrently with the considerations in the Diagnostic phase.

Phase 2: Prepare Key Components

Theme	Challenges and Recommendations
Eligibility	<p>2.1 Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1.1 Legally Protect Accidental Registrants 2.1.2 Assess Documents Accepted by AVR Agencies 2.1.3 Link REAL ID and AVR Implementation 2.1.4 Test and Retest the Public Interface 2.1.5 Build in Multiple Eligibility Checks 2.1.6 Verify Accuracy of Transferred Registration Data
	<p>2.2 Consideration of Special Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2.1 Consult a Wide Range of Advocacy Groups 2.2.2 Hold Public Hearings on AVR Implementation 2.2.3 Integrate Checks for Address Confidentiality
Data Management	<p>2.3 Changes to Data Flow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.3.1 Evaluate Impact on Local-Level Workload 2.3.2 Meet Officials From Other AVR States
Citizen Engagement	<p>2.4 Usability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.4.1 Specify Outcomes and Testing in Legislation 2.4.2 Conduct Usability Testing 2.4.3 Observe Pre-AVR Agency Processes 2.4.4 Tailor to Limited-English and Low-Literacy Users 2.4.5 Review Voter-Facing Language Used in Peer AVR States 2.4.6 Check Language for Legal Compliance
	<p>2.5 Initial Front-Line Staff Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.5.1 Develop a Central Set of Training Materials 2.5.2 Emphasize Voter Eligibility in Staff Training 2.5.3 Pilot AVR Staff Trainings Before Rollout
	<p>2.6 Public Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.6.1 Produce Simple AVR Explainer Materials 2.6.2 Engage Local Media and Editorial Boards 2.6.3 Post Explainer Materials in Participating Agencies 2.6.4 Encourage Public Education by Civic Groups
	<p>2.7 Party Registration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.7.1 Understand the Significance of Party Registration 2.7.2 Educate Voters About Party Registration 2.7.3 Engage Parties on AVR

2.1 Eligibility: Citizenship

Challenge: It is essential to put systems in place to avert mistaken registration of noncitizens and other ineligible voters. It is also important to note that while not eligible to vote in federal elections, some cities and towns allow non-citizens to vote in local elections. While AVR aims to reach eligible, but as-yet unregistered, individuals to register and vote, the system simultaneously seeks to preserve and improve the accuracy and security of voter lists. Under existing federal law, any noncitizen who registers or votes in a federal election may face the threat of criminal prosecution — and even deportation. This could include noncitizens who attest to citizenship, who fail to opt out due to confusion while conducting a transaction at an AVR agency (for front-end registration transactions) or who are automatically registered in error (through the back-end) and then mistakenly believe they have the right to vote.

While many AVR states offer legal immunity to accidental noncitizen registrants, these individuals are not immune from federal prosecution and deportation. (State officials are advised to work with federal officers on these matters to ameliorate problems if mistakes do occur.) Given the grave consequences of erroneous registration for noncitizens, any state preparing for AVR must take great care not to capture ineligible voters, and should — like other states — include protective measures for those who are unwittingly registered through no fault of their own.

Examples: In Vermont, individuals served at the DMV attest to their citizenship by answering a simple question on the driver's license application form²⁹ (which dually serves as a voter registration application). Applicants must also sign a separate part of the form attesting they meet the voter eligibility criteria, with the penalties of false claims clearly stated. Before the DMV transmits voter registration records to the secretary of state's office, a data manager filters out all applications that do not profess U.S. citizenship. All individuals who claim citizenship and do not opt out of voter registration are automatically registered to vote, pending a final review by the relevant town clerk.

Notably, in Vermont, a simple human data transmission error resulted in the accidental registration of about a dozen noncitizens in January 2017. Instead of filtering out applications submitted by noncitizens, the DMV mistakenly transmitted the records from all its agency transactions to the secretary of state. This error was caught and addressed swiftly but led to a temporary pause in the overall AVR system.

Although AVR implementation in Illinois has been delayed, the state has tied citizenship verification at the DMV to the implementation of REAL ID. This system will require front-line DMV staff to key in the identity documents individuals present during their transactions (e.g., if an individual presents a U.S. passport, a birth certificate or a foreign passport), which would trigger further voter registration action.

Oregon currently uses a similar process and leveraged its DMV's early adoption of REAL ID protocols to facilitate AVR.

Recommendations:

2.1.1 Legally Protect Accidental Registrants: When designing AVR legislation, lawmakers should include language that shields ineligible individuals — particularly noncitizens — from liability in the event of accidental registration. As it does in California, this type of legislation should include protection for noncitizens who are mistakenly registered through AVR and subsequently cast ballots due to confusion over eligibility.³⁰

2.1.2 Assess Documents Accepted by AVR Agencies: Implementers should think carefully about which identification documents prospective AVR agencies already accept. This includes mapping out the full range

29 "Application for License/Permit," Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles.

30 AVR legislation should also protect ineligible felons registered in error through AVR, as this community also faces harsh punishments for mistaken registration and voting. (Note that criminal-justice-impacted populations are not discussed at length in this report.)

of documents that agencies receive from individuals and determining how these documents factor into voter eligibility decisions. This will help implementers anticipate challenges and opportunities for verifying voter eligibility early.

2.1.3 *Link REAL ID (where used) and AVR Implementation:* Documentation requirements set forth by the REAL ID Act support the transition to AVR. REAL ID requires state driver's license agencies to accept a strict set of pre-approved personal identification documents, including proof of citizenship or legal residency. These requirements form a reliable basis on which to filter out ineligible residents. Individuals who supply REAL ID-compliant citizenship documents should be captured as eligible voters. The presentation of REAL ID-compliant documents that demonstrate non-citizenship, such as a foreign passport or green card, should prevent further questions regarding registration.

2.1.4 *Test and Retest the Public Interface:* Designing straightforward and customizable interactions with the public and interfaces at AVR agencies reduces the chance of capturing ineligible individuals. In particular, states with front-end opt-out AVR systems should employ user interfaces that do not offer ineligible visitors any prompts related to voter registration. Once a visitor presents documentation that demonstrates foreign citizenship, either the computer or the agency worker should skip any further mention of voter registration.

Registration opt-out prompts should also be designed to maximize the chance that an ineligible voter who has mistakenly seen a registration prompt opts out (i.e., unmistakable language indicating that only U.S. citizens can vote). Administrators should engage design experts in this work and must ensure that testing occurs with a representative set of people served by the agency, including eligible and ineligible visitors with diverse backgrounds. (See consideration 2.4 Usability.)

2.1.5 *Build in Multiple Eligibility Checks:* AVR implementers should build in multiple checks to verify voter eligibility before placing an individual on the voter roll. For instance, the front-line AVR agency should first filter out records from individuals who did not present citizenship documentation or attest to their citizenship during their visits. Registration records transferred to elections officials should include only eligible voters who visited the agency. Election administrators, either at the state or the local level, should then double-check eligibility before officially placing voters on the rolls.

2.1.6 *Verify Accuracy of Transferred Registration Data:* Elections officials and the DMV should periodically audit batches of voter records to verify that only appropriate files are transferred. This will help ensure that registration records transferred to election administrators do not constitute mistaken or mis-filtered data dumps that could result in accidental registration of noncitizens or otherwise ineligible voters (see the Vermont example under 2.1 Citizenship). These tests should occur repeatedly before an AVR system comes online and should be conducted periodically after the system is live. In-house IT or data management staff could perform these checks, as could an outside expert or auditor.

2.2 Eligibility: Consideration of Special Communities

Challenge: AVR may pose problems for at least three voting communities: survivors of violence, law enforcement officials and people with disabilities.

Survivors of violence (including those who have experienced stalking), judges and other law enforcement officers may require special privacy protections. States must ensure that these voters' registration information is not automatically made public under AVR.

People with disabilities may be excluded from or disadvantaged in AVR systems that rely solely on the DMV, given that specific disabled groups are not able to obtain driver's licenses; low-income Americans are also less likely

to visit a DMV office. Eligible voters with disabilities may also be less likely to visit government offices in person if these spaces are difficult to access or physically challenging to navigate inside.

Example: Before Oregon implemented AVR, the secretary of state conducted a listening tour to gather citizen input on the system's design. During this process, advocacy groups provided nuanced feedback on AVR regarding the needs of domestic and sexual assault survivors. As a result of this feedback, DMV officials now check for and filter applications from individuals participating in the state's Address Confidentiality Program³¹ before transferring voter data to election authorities.

Recommendations:

- 2.2.1 *Consult a Wide Range of Advocacy Groups:* Election authorities should engage a broad group of advocates representing persons with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence, individuals with limited English proficiency and other vulnerable communities to ensure AVR enhances accessibility and considers different community needs.
- 2.2.2 *Hold Public Hearings on AVR Implementation:* Public hearings provide an opportunity for individuals and community groups to come forward and share their concerns about the design of the system.
- 2.2.3 *Integrate Checks for Address Confidentiality:* Before automatically adding a voter's name to a publicly accessible voter roll, agency staff or elections officials should verify whether the individual has opted to participate in an address confidentiality program.

2.3 Data Management: Changes to Data Flow

Challenge: Depending on the state, AVR may fundamentally alter the nature of work for election administrators. Early experience suggests that AVR generates many more registration records and normalizes the stream of updates compared to traditional registration.

For instance, in less than one year, Oregon registered over 272,000 new voters using AVR and, as a result, saw a 4.1 percent increase in turnout during the 2016 election.³² While the digital nature of AVR can reduce the costs, administrative burdens and errors associated with paper forms,³³ local officials directly managing voter rolls may be concerned with how the reform will impact their workflow — particularly given the expected surge in records. Buy-in from elections staff at all levels is crucial, and concerns from front-line administrators should not be trivialized.

Recommendations:

- 2.3.1 *Evaluate Impact on Local-Level Workload:* The possibility of a substantially increased number of registration requests, whether in the short or long run, should be met with a roughly corresponding increase in resources. While hiring additional staff is the most obvious solution, some governments rotate staff from other agencies to help elections officials during times of heightened stress, such as around Election Day. A similar approach — sending workers from one agency to a town or country clerk's office for several months — could help improve implementation and buy-in from local officials.
- 2.3.2 *Meet Officials From Other AVR States:* To secure buy-in for AVR from local elections officials, states could gather testimonies from or arrange meetings with peer officials from other states.

31 "Address Confidentiality Program (ACP)," Oregon Department of Justice.

32 Rob Griffin et al., "Who Votes With Automatic Voter Registration? Impact Analysis of Oregon's First-in-the-Nation Program," Center for American Progress.

33 Liz Kennedy, Lew Daly, and Brenda Wright, "Automatic Voter Registration: Finding America's Missing Voters," Demos.

2.4 Citizen Engagement: Usability

Challenge: Agency worker scripts or forms with poorly constructed designs and language — specifically AVR opt-out language — can confuse voters and depress registration rates. Poor design can especially impact limited-English proficient persons and those with disabilities. Elections officials must balance concision, accuracy and detail while creating a user-friendly experience. This exercise requires tradeoffs.

For instance, registration documents must meet the requirements of the NVRA and should minimize the possibility of ineligible registrants. User-facing AVR language should also account for the DMV’s and visitors’ particularly keen interest in reducing transaction times. Outdated technology can further impede the process of making forms more usable. For instance, agencies may be reluctant to make substantial structural changes to their forms (beyond simple language tweaks) to avoid having to reprogram old systems.

Examples: Many states considered usability early on as they prepared for AVR. Rhode Island, for instance, worked with the Center for Civic Design (CCD)³⁴ to test public-facing language at the DMV. CCD conducted two rounds of testing over two days at DMV offices in Cranston and Providence. It presented draft AVR language to 15-20 individuals, adjusted the language based on direct observations and user feedback, and retested the updated text with another group of prospective registrants. CCD documented its findings and reported directly to implementers at the secretary of state’s office.

In Colorado, CCD helped update the voter registration script delivered by front-line workers at the DMV. The new script, rolled out in April 2018, is quicker and more conversational, which CCD found reduced registration opt-out rates.

Recommendations:

- 2.4.1 *Specify Desired Outcomes in Legislation (rather than dictating specific language):* Where AVR legislation is still in development, administrators should caution legislators against over specifying voter-facing language. Instead, legislation should emphasize the system’s end goals and it should require user testing. This approach can help ensure that AVR is carefully tailored to the reality of agency operations and optimized based on user feedback. These sorts of details can be managed in the regulations phase.
- 2.4.2 *Conduct Usability Testing:* States should conduct usability testing within participating agencies before the full rollout of AVR. Such testing entails delivering agency transactions with “draft” AVR language, observing people’s reactions and iterating changes to scripts, form wording or layout until a wide range of individuals pass through the process seamlessly. Depending on available resources, this exercise could be scaled up or down (i.e., more or fewer rounds of testing and iteration; larger or smaller groups of individuals tested).
- 2.4.3 *Observe Pre-AVR Agency Processes:* Officials designing AVR language and interfaces must have a clear understanding of pre-existing processes within participating agencies. Elections officials should observe agency transactions and interview agency workers, managers and the public. Strong knowledge of agency processes and direct input from staff will contribute to a well-tailored and seamless AVR experience.
- 2.4.4 *Tailor to Limited-English-Proficient and Low-Literacy Users:* Voter-facing AVR language must be designed to be comprehensible to individuals with limited proficiency in English and low literacy. This is not a new consideration for election administrators, but it must not lose visibility in the push for automation. Also, in jurisdictions covered by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, appropriate translations must be made. (Many states and counties will want to consider including translations for languages prevalently spoken in their areas, even if they’re not covered by the federal law.)

34 CCD has developed robust expertise in AVR usability and has supported administrators in several states, including California, Colorado and Rhode Island.

- 2.4.5 *Review Voter-Facing Language Used in Peer AVR States:* If another state uses a similar model of AVR and has conducted usability testing with its voters, that state's voter-facing language could serve as a strong starting point.
- 2.4.6 *Check Language for Legal Compliance:* As front-facing language is drafted and redrafted, administrators should engage counsel to ensure there are no gaps in legal compliance.

2.5 Citizen Engagement: Initial Front-Line Staff Training

Challenge: Both the DMV and elections officials may experience changes to internal processes as a result of AVR. It is critical that front-line staff understand the new system and its importance.

Example: Elections officials in Colorado supported DMV managers in the design of front-line staff training on voter registration. In trainings, managers emphasize the importance of sticking to the registration script while giving workers tips for slight deviations to maintain a conversational tone with the public. Striking the right balance between mandated language and a natural-sounding interaction will help to boost the utility of AVR.

Recommendations:

- 2.5.1 *Develop a Central Set of Training Materials:* Training on AVR for agency staff should be conducted uniformly across the state to ensure even adherence to new rules and processes. AVR training materials for front-line staff should thus be developed by the state. Election administrators or AVR agencies could also organize trainings of trainers to ensure that a core set of individuals are prepared to carry out training for front-line staff.
- 2.5.2 *Emphasize Voter Eligibility in Staff Training:* Front-line staff at AVR agencies are positioned to help prevent ineligible voter registration. While a highly automated system that removes human error is ideal, well-trained staff can help when people are confused about voter registration. Front-line staff training should appropriately emphasize voter eligibility requirements and encourage attentiveness to individuals' questions or confusion.
- 2.5.3 *Pilot AVR Staff Trainings Before Rollout:* Before rolling out AVR staff training, election administrators should pilot their training program with a subset of front-line staffers to address any confusion.

2.6 Citizen Engagement: Public Education

Challenge: The public is a critical stakeholder in AVR, but elections officials often lack the resources to engage voters directly. Thus, they leave the task to civic groups. Regardless of the conduit, residents must understand how AVR will affect their transactions and registration status. Eligible voters must also know when AVR will *not* work and whether their visit to an agency will register them in time to vote on or near Election Day. In addition, government officials, civic groups and party activists should take steps to educate and mobilize newly registered voters.

Example: In Oregon, funding for public education was not available during the AVR preparation and rollout. So, the secretary of state depended on partners in the advocacy community and free media. Activists from the Oregon Bus Project (a youth civic engagement group) organized door-to-door canvassing to engage Oregonians on AVR directly. Meanwhile, the secretary of state's office focused on capturing media attention. The secretary met with every editorial board in the state and, while traveling to meet with each county clerk, visited local newspaper offices to raise awareness about AVR.

By contrast, California's statute requires the state to conduct a public education campaign on AVR.

Recommendations:

- 2.6.1 *Produce Simple AVR Explainer Materials:* Elections officials should work with participating AVR agencies and civic groups to develop a simple set of public education materials that succinctly explain the new registration process to voters. This may include one-pagers, graphics or short videos that concisely walk citizens through the AVR process and their options for registration. Education materials should be available in multiple languages, depending on demand.
- 2.6.2 *Engage Local Media and Editorial Boards:* Senior elections officials should engage media outlets throughout the state to ensure that content on AVR permeates local television and newspapers.
- 2.6.3 *Post Explainer Materials in Participating Agencies:* The DMV and any other participating agency should prominently post flyers or posters that explain AVR. If the state has reached its “registration cut-off date” close to an upcoming election, participating agencies should post clear signage that indicates that individuals will not be registered in time for the upcoming election.
- 2.6.4 *Encourage Public Education by Civic Groups:* Nongovernmental civil society organizations and political parties play a central role in voter education. AVR implementers should coordinate with civic groups and parties, encouraging these organizations to conduct public outreach on AVR and to reach out to newly registered voters.

2.7 Citizen Engagement: Party Registration

Challenge: While AVR can substantially raise voter registration rates, the process can complicate political party registration (this is more typical of back-end processes). Particularly in states with closed primaries or registration requirements for party ballot access, election authorities may have difficulty integrating party registration into the AVR system.

Back-end opt-out systems provide an even more significant hurdle in ensuring that voters return mailings with their party selection.

Example: Due to its closed primary system, Oregon had to integrate party registration into its AVR system. In Oregon, only 11 percent of automatically registered voters returned postcards declaring a party affiliation.³⁵

After receiving a new batch of voter registration data from the DMV, the Oregon Elections Division mails notices to voters allowing them to either (1) opt out of registration (or a registration update) or (2) register their party affiliation. Eligible voters have 21 days to return a prepaid postcard to the Elections Division with their decisions to opt out or select a party. If voters miss the 21-day return window, they are automatically registered as “Unaffiliated” but may update their registration records directly through the county clerk’s office (in person, online or by phone).³⁶

Recommendations:

- 2.7.1 *Understand the Significance of Party Registration:* It’s vital for election administrators to understand the relative importance of political party registration in their state and to tailor the design of AVR accordingly. Party registration by voters affects their ability to participate in primary elections and affects a party’s ability to access the political process. AVR systems should be designed to facilitate party registration. States with closed primaries may prefer a point-of-service opt-out model.

35 Rob Griffin et al., “Who Votes With Automatic Registration? Impact Analysis of Oregon’s First-in-the-Nation Program,” Center for American Progress.

36 While Oregon voters may update their party status at any time, voters must declare a party affiliation 21 days before a closed primary election to cast a ballot.

- 2.7.2 *Educate Voters About Party Registration:* Alongside general public education on AVR, elections officials should provide instruction on the party registration process and its importance for interested voters (see key consideration 2.6 Public Education). Such instruction is particularly crucial for AVR states with closed primaries.
- 2.7.3 *Engage Parties on AVR:* Implementers should ensure that all political parties understand the AVR process and are equipped to conduct outreach and recruit new members.

Phase 3 – Maintain Momentum

Even after a state successfully launches an AVR system, implementers must actively maintain momentum to ensure high-quality, sustained compliance. The NVRA taught the elections community this crucial lesson. If no formal system for feedback or maintenance exists, the effort may lose steam and slowly become less effective.

Theme	Challenge and Recommendation
Citizen Engagement	3.1 Ongoing Training and Oversight
Interagency Collaboration	3.2 Continue Collaboration and Maintain Relationships
Data Management	3.3 Regular Reporting Requirements

3.1 Citizen Engagement: Ongoing Training and Oversight

Over time, staff turnover and shifting priorities can cause front-line agencies to lose track of their voter registration responsibilities. This occurred in many DMVs, and particularly in Section 7 agencies, after the first few years of the NVRA. By ensuring that AVR remains part of regular front-line staff training, states can help safeguard the system’s long-term viability. AVR implementers can also periodically enlist agency managers to verify that front-line workers consistently adhere to scripts on voter registration — particularly when those scripts have been tested and optimized to meet certain goals.

3.2 Interagency Collaboration: Continue Collaboration & Maintain Relationships

As mentioned above, AVR requires effective interagency collaboration. The NVRA again offers an important lesson about *planning* for long-term collaboration. In many states, compliance with the NVRA faded as implementation became less of a political imperative and as leaders left their respective agencies. To shield AVR from a similar fate, state officials should consider organizing regular meetings to anticipate and troubleshoot implementation issues and lagging compliance. Regular meetings can also ensure that election administrators maintain awareness of agency priorities in the long-term and not just during the initial rollout.

3.3 Data Management: Regular Reporting Requirements

Policymakers and citizens should be able to evaluate the impact of AVR and ensure consistent compliance through regular reporting. Implementers should issue and distribute reports on the number of new registrants per source agency, the number of updated records and the number of people who decline registration or updates. These reports can provide transparency as well as early warning signs for lax compliance or administrative problems. They may also offer instructive data on where to expand AVR, as well as valuable information for political parties, researchers and policymakers.

VI. MOVING BEYOND THE DMV

The real promise of AVR lies with its potential to correct troubling, long-standing imbalances in the American electorate. To achieve this critical goal, policymakers, administrators and advocates must work to expand AVR beyond the DMV. Historically, citizens with low incomes and some minority citizens have registered to vote at dramatically lower rates than other Americans; this gap has real implications for the leaders and policies governing this country.³⁷ By expanding the AVR model into agencies that serve underrepresented citizens, policymakers can make our democracy more representative and equal.

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Despite the system’s promise, expanding AVR beyond the DMV remains a genuine challenge.³⁸ The analysis in this section is a starting point for states considering this important advancement. We first describe the main structural barriers that states may encounter when working to integrate additional agencies into AVR, particularly social service agencies. We also anticipate unique complications that multi-agency AVR systems of the future may confront, compared to

today’s single-agency setups. We then offer a set of evaluation criteria that states can use to select new partner agencies, and we conclude with strategic recommendations to help advocates and implementers move AVR forward.

Challenges Posed by New Agencies

Below, we review the structural challenges that new types of agencies present for AVR — particularly public assistance agencies.

Absence of a Voter Registration Mandate

Very few public assistance agencies have adopted voter registration as a core objective — despite provision of voter registration services being legally required by the NVRA — and it may be difficult for agency heads and staff to embrace this new responsibility. This problem includes agencies required to offer registration under Section 7 of the NVRA. Unlike the DMV, Section 7 agencies never had to streamline voter registration into their regular services and processes. AVR would, therefore, still represent a huge leap for these and other agencies.

Nonexistent Interagency Relationships

While elections officials have worked with DMVs since at least 1993, relationships in many states between elections officials and social service agency personnel are superficial or nonexistent. AVR implementation necessitates strong interagency ties, and these may take time to establish.

Low Programmatic Understanding

Many elections officials are also unfamiliar with the programs and processes of other state agencies. Elections officials and reform advocates we spoke with openly acknowledged that they knew little about the intricacies of programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including how these

37 Sean McElwee, “Why Voting Matters: Large Disparities in Turnout Benefit the Donor Class,” Demos.

38 While Alaska is implementing AVR through its Permanent Dividend Fund (explained in footnote 7 [will need to be renumbered if note 2 is actually note 1]), this model is unique and does not fully reflect the experiences other states may have moving beyond the DMV. Nonetheless, its model warrants further study.

programs' transactions compared to the DMV. Understanding how these programs are administered — including knowing which require collection of citizenship data and which don't — is essential to gauging AVR's potential to expand. Indeed, given these issues, some agencies may not be suited to provide AVR.

Weak Technological Infrastructure

As in many election offices, many state agencies rely on legacy systems for data collection, storage and transmission. Weak technological infrastructure — and the lack of resources to upgrade these systems — is often a direct impediment to AVR implementation.

Improper Documents Collected

Potential AVR agencies may not possess all the information required to verify voter eligibility and to facilitate registration —namely citizenship, age, residence and signature. Many agencies will collect some of this information, though the absence of even one key piece of data may disqualify an agency from participating in AVR. Citizenship verification and signature capture will likely be the two biggest documentation impediments.

Remote Transactions

Public assistance agencies increasingly interact with individuals remotely, via phone or online. The nature of this transaction may inhibit or complicate steps crucial for AVR, namely capturing a voter's "wet" signature. If AVR is to expand to new agencies successfully, the traditional mode of implementation through in-person transactions must adapt.

Sensitivity of Transactions

It is important to acknowledge the sensitivity surrounding many public assistance programs. Applying for these programs often carries a sense of urgency that is distinct from a visit to the DMV. Additionally, some medical benefits programs may be governed by strict privacy guidelines. If AVR is to be expanded to agencies that serve citizens in moments of economic and emotional turbulence, implementers should account for the sensitive and urgent nature of these interactions.

Legal Barriers

Certain state agencies or programs may be legally prohibited from activities fundamental to AVR. For instance, some programs that receive federal funding may not be allowed to inquire about citizenship status or share data externally. Restrictions on the use of federal funding for voter registration may also complicate AVR implementation in new agencies.

Challenges Introduced by Multi-agency AVR

An AVR system that integrates multiple agencies will require closer coordination and strategic thinking than a single-agency model. Although this approach has not been tested, elections officials considering multi-agency AVR should prepare for the challenges posed by an agency expansion.

Data Collection and Management

Multi-agency AVR may complicate voter registration data management, as different agencies may not be positioned to use the same data collection and transmission systems. Elections officials will need to consider whether to allow participating agencies to use different data management processes and must understand how these differences could negatively impact data centralization and validation. While new agencies will prefer data collection systems that minimally disrupt existing operations, elections officials must also weigh their capacity to manage incoming data from multiple sources — particularly if that data is not transmitted or formatted consistently across sources. Ultimately, for the system to work, officials may decide to require uniform data standards across agencies.

Conflicting Data

With multiple agencies feeding into the voter registration system, elections officials may encounter conflicting data on a single voter (e.g., if a voter visits two participating AVR agencies). Determining which source agencies provide the most reliable and up-to-date data and developing a protocol to resolve data conflicts may pose a challenge.

Security

Adding points of entry into the voter registration database may create additional pathways for nefarious access. States must recognize this issue early in the AVR implementation process and take proactive steps to limit authorizations that would allow for any manipulation of voter registration files.

Personnel Management

Multi-agency AVR will require more intensive personnel management, including continuous training of front-line staff at source agencies. When onboarding new agencies, both elections and agency leaders should adopt rigorous staff management and oversight plans. Doing so can help ensure that, once integrated into AVR, careful implementation at public agencies does not drop off over time (as occurred with NVRA compliance).

Identifying a Partner Agency

Identifying a reliable partner agency is perhaps the most important decision in expanding AVR. This decision will require a series of tradeoffs that may pull policymakers and administrators in different directions.

Logically, agencies that directly serve large and diverse groups of citizens, such as social service providers, are more likely to be impactful AVR partners. High-impact partners will also have distinct clienteles from existing AVR source agencies or possess more up-to-date information on voters to facilitate address updates (e.g., agencies that voters visit more frequently than the DMV).

An agency's **will** to adopt AVR is as important as its potential impact. To properly integrate voter registration, an organization's leaders and core administrators must actively make voter registration part of their agency's mission. The critical importance of buy-in may result in a smaller, willing agency — rather than one with the largest footprint — being a more strategic place to start.

Relatedly, elections officials must understand any **competing priorities** of potential partners. Agencies experiencing major technological upgrades, political problems or legal challenges may struggle to dedicate time to AVR.

An agency's pre-existing **technological capacity** should also influence the decision to push for AVR. While AVR requires more than advanced technology to succeed, a robust technology infrastructure can expedite implementation and minimize costs.

Finally, states must consider any **legal constraints** that may inhibit an agency or a program from becoming part of an AVR system. While many restrictions will have workarounds, implementers should review any legal impediments that might constrain or direct how AVR is rolled out.

Strategies for AVR Expansion

While there are real obstacles to expanding AVR, we offer several strategies policymakers, elections officials and advocates can explore to push through this next, important frontier. The first three strategies concern identifying new partner agencies, and the final two address larger structural barriers to scaling AVR.

Mandate Feasibility Reports

As discussed above, election stakeholders are often unfamiliar with how major public assistance programs are administered and with the political and technological challenges these agencies face. One way to close this knowledge gap is to require government agencies to produce short reports on the feasibility of incorporating AVR into their existing programs. Such reports could help elections officials identify strong partners and could turn up previously unidentified opportunities for collaboration. Further, if election administrators are required to continuously investigate paths for expansion, feasibility reports can also keep the pressure on reluctant or slow-moving officials.

Elections officials must understand any competing priorities of potential partners.

Leverage Pre-existing DMV Relationships

In almost every state, the DMV has formed the backbone of AVR planning and implementation. In addition to connecting with elections officials, DMVs typically have data-sharing agreements with a variety of other state agencies. These relationships could, theoretically, be leveraged to expand AVR. By identifying pre-existing partners of the DMV, elections officials may be able to identify partner agencies with cultures of collaboration and technology platforms that allow for straightforward data sharing. In addition, the DMV's partners could, potentially, adopt interim AVR systems linked to the DMV's signature data — mirroring online voter registration in many states.

Approach Data and Information Officers

Governments increasingly recognize the promise of big data for improving service delivery. Consequently, many states now have chief information officers and IT directors whose job it is to share and find creative ways to use data. These individuals may provide the technological expertise and political weight to push for the expansion of AVR. Elections officials and advocates should consider consulting with agency chief information officers to identify partners, explore solutions to data sharing and management problems, and cultivate additional support for AVR at the highest levels of government.

Eliminate the Wet Signature Requirement

States commonly require every voter to have a physical, or wet, signature on file. This rule directly impedes AVR's expansion to new agencies, particularly as more government interactions occur remotely. While most online voter registration systems require that applicants have signatures on file with the DMV, this setup would fall short of the goals of expanding to public assistance agencies — namely by omitting traditionally marginalized populations without access to DMV-issued IDs.

To avoid prohibiting AVR with this subset of applicants, states could consider allowing electronic signatures or other personal identifiers for voter registration. Allowing voters to submit pictures of their signatures might be the easiest solution. Signature images would enable online transactions to serve as voter registration transactions and would allow elections officials to maintain traditional signature files for future use. States could also explore using digital signatures or social security numbers for registration, as states like Pennsylvania and Minnesota already do.

Model AVR Flexibly

Voter registration will challenge state agencies in different ways, meaning that AVR should never be one-size-fits-all. To minimally burden partner agencies, implementers may need to model AVR in distinct and creative ways, sometimes by adopting interim systems. Even if a partner agency cannot adopt AVR in the truest sense today, elections officials can consider how to engage new partners in the overall voter registration effort (with full AVR as a future possibility). For certain agencies, enhanced NVRA compliance or even the simple introduction of a voter registration question during a transaction might be the most logical first step.

VII. CONCLUSION

Automatic voter registration, as a policy, has captured the attention of U.S. lawmakers and democracy advocates. Building on the legacy of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, AVR has revitalized the ideal that voting in America should be a right — one that our government *guarantees and facilitates*, while ensuring a safeguarded system that we can all have faith in.

AVR has revitalized the ideal that voting in America should be a right — one that our government *guarantees and facilitates*, while ensuring a safeguarded system that we can all have faith in.

The significant promise of AVR hinges on thoughtful and operationally conscious legislation, careful planning and execution by state and local officials, and steadfast engagement from advocates. We hope this report helps current and future AVR stakeholders achieve these goals and bridge the gap between good policy in theory and effective policy in practice.

Recognizing the significant variation across states, we sought to capture a common set of considerations, challenges and recommendations for AVR implementation that states may use to support their planning. The analysis and lessons presented here draw upon research and 40 expert interviews from five target states. Additional research and reflection from other AVR states — such as Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Washington and West Virginia — and DC would add nuance and insights to this discussion. As more states move past legislation toward implementation, additional lessons and best practices will emerge that will help future practitioners.

We also endeavored to examine how states can realistically expand AVR's impact through agencies beyond the DMV, a change that advocates have long supported but one that remains elusive in practice. We hope our findings will initiate a deeper investigation into the operational realities of multi-agency AVR. In particular, we hope that implementers will actively seek and share ways to integrate state agencies that serve marginalized communities with traditionally low voter participation rates.

Although AVR, in some cases, has proven difficult to execute, we have witnessed firsthand the commitment of elections officials and advocates alike to making our democracy stronger. We are confident that, despite the operational challenges AVR poses, the passion and drive among the elections community will help this model succeed.

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