

Building and Maintaining Relationships with Law Enforcement: A Roadmap for Election Officials

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Law enforcement (LE) plays a critical role and is a key partner in the work of keeping elections safe and secure. This guidance highlights recommendations and best practices election officials should consider in building and maintaining relationships with relevant law enforcement counterparts before Election Day.

I. Identify relevant LE stakeholders in the community.

- Determine which law enforcement leaders at the local, state, and federal levels have historically provided support during election season or could prospectively provide support. This list could include police chiefs and sheriffs covering your jurisdiction, the state police, and the Election Crimes Coordinator (ECC) at your nearest [FBI field office](#).
- Familiarize yourself early on with which agencies can provide support and how to tap into their network.

II. Identify what your office needs and can expect from LE.

- Identify the specific security needs of your organization, including:
 - The security of election officials and staff;
 - The security of physical offices, poll sites, count facilities, drop boxes, and other physical election locations;
 - The security of ballots, voting machines, and equipment; and
 - Communicating public safety expectations to the public.
- Identify all those who are impacted, such as: elected/appointed officials, election workers, voters, community members, etc.
- Identify the type(s) of LE support you would find helpful, such as: security assistance, response to threats, threat assessments, protest management, de-escalation and conflict management training for election staff, etc.

III. Consider strategies for engaging with LE.

- Directly reach out to LE leaders to hold an introductory call or meeting. Coordinate an introductory call through elected/appointed officials (e.g., the mayor or county commissioner may be able to facilitate an introduction).
- Use existing relationships to provide introductions (e.g., the police chief may be able to introduce you to the county sheriff's office, etc.).

IV. Prepare for the initial meeting with LE representatives.

- Designate one or more points of contact in your organization to manage LE relationships.
- Set shared expectations and goals and identify any existing security or training needs.
- Share resources before the meeting with LE, including basic information about your office's scope of work and responsibilities during election season.

V. Set an informed agenda for the initial meeting.

- Obtain an understanding of how the LE agency views its role during election season and how it has operated in past elections.
- As part of the planning process, understand how relevant laws apply to LE work during election season and what the agency's available resources are.
- Share resources after the meeting to deepen mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Make a plan to continue communication between the offices and how to stay in touch about any threats or security needs.

VI. Develop a plan for continued collaboration.

- Formulate a plan for subsequent engagements between your team and LE partners. Next steps/engagements to consider may include:
 - Conducting trainings for elections office staff, e.g., on de-escalation;
 - Conducting trainings for law enforcement agency staff, e.g. on election laws;
 - Facilitating tabletop or other scenario-based planning exercises to prepare for the election;
 - Maintaining regular communication between key representatives during the election season; and
 - Considering whether it makes sense for your office to set up a dedicated channel with LE—such as an email inbox or a specific officer—where election officials and workers can send information concerning threats.
- Start with easily achievable goals. Even if small, a quick win will help lay the groundwork for the next goal.

VII. Identify methods for maintaining the relationship as election season ramps up.

- Develop a routine schedule to meet.
- Avoid the “one & done” effect—decide on your next meeting at the end of the first.
- Use technology to keep connected, e.g., ensure you've exchanged cell phone numbers among key points of contact on your team and with LE.
- Keep the relationship relevant by adapting and innovating.

Helpful resources

- From the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): [Federal Election Crimes: The FBI's Role in Protecting Your Vote](#)
This resource provides a helpful overview of the FBI's role in responding to election-related crimes. Review before setting an agenda for a meeting with the FBI ECC.
- From the National Policing Institute (NPI), the States United Democracy Center (SUDC), and 21st Century Policing Solutions (21CP): [Policing in a Time of Elections](#)
This report explains how local and state law enforcement agencies may prepare for election season.
- From States United Democracy Center (SUDC): [Keeping Statewide Elected Officials Safe](#)
This resource provides best practices for keeping election officials safe.
- From the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections (CSSE): [Five Steps to Safer Elections](#)
This resource details five steps that law enforcement and election officials can take together to prepare for election season.
- From the US DOJ Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office): [What's New In Blue: Preparing for a Safe Election Season](#)
This video features law enforcement leaders from Arizona and Wisconsin sharing lessons learned about preparing for election safety.