



Election Modernization Coalition Recommendations for Implementing Early Voting

In May 2014, the Massachusetts legislature passed an historic reform of our state’s election laws. As part of the new law, it established early voting starting with the November 2016 election. Early voting is one important way to expand access to our democracy. It allows people whose work or family obligations preclude them from standing in line or even getting to the polls on Election Day, more opportunities to vote. The early voting period starts 11 business days preceding the election. Within that period, municipalities are required to have at least one voting site open during normal business hours. But beyond these simple specifications, there is a great deal of flexibility in how the law may be implemented.

In order to ensure the effectiveness and success of early voting, the Massachusetts Election Modernization Coalition proposes the following standards for municipalities implementing the law. We believe these recommendations will ensure that early voting meets its goals: easing access to the ballot for Massachusetts voters, shortening lines at polling locations, and improving the voting experience. Our recommendations are divided into two categories, and are followed by an overview of the inaugural **Early Voting Challenge**, which we are issuing to all Massachusetts cities and towns.

Recommended Standards

Multiple Locations

The new law requires Massachusetts municipalities to have at least one early voting location and leaves the possibility of multiple sites up to each community’s discretion. While only one site is necessary in smaller towns, more populated areas need additional locations to ensure that voters are able to vote without undue delay and inconvenience. **We recommend that municipalities provide at least one early voting site for every 35,000 people.***

- This figure comes from [a Common Cause survey of election administrators](#) across the U.S., and reflects the average population reported for multiple sites in other states.
- We encourage all municipalities besides Boston* to round up and consider exceeding the minimum recommended standard.
- The number of voting locations should also be subject to considerations like geography and transportation access.

Population Count	# of Recommend Early Voting Sites
0 – 35,000	1
35,000 – 70,000	2 or 3
70,000 – 105,000	3 or 4
And so on...	And so on...

When selecting venues for additional sites, we recommend municipalities consider non-traditional locations, such as grocery stores. National research has shown that voters often prefer locations where they have other business. All sites should have accommodations for those with disabilities, have access to public transportation and parking, be easily recognizable, and contain floor plans that reduce congestion. In addition, **all of the**

different kinds of ballots for a given municipality should be available at each site. This will increase ease of access and facilitate more effective publicity by removing the need to get voters to a particular location.

Evening and Weekend Hours

For all municipalities, evening and weekend hours will be an important and effective method of maximizing the impact of early voting. We recommend:

- **Municipalities provide evening hours at least two times per week during early voting.**
- **Municipalities provide weekend hours at least once during early voting.**

To help limit the cost of extending operations to include evening and weekend hours, some municipalities may want to shift some normal hours (of the same duration) to incorporate evenings and weekends.

Once established, advertising of hours and locations should be maximized, particularly in the first year of early voting. Beyond announcements in local newspapers, municipalities should consider publicity options such as: press conferences, TV and/or radio ads, plugging early voting in voter guides, billboards, presentations at local civic organizations, and announcements in schools.

The Inaugural Early Voting Challenge

In order to maximize the impact of the new law in Massachusetts, the Election Modernization Coalition is conducting the inaugural **Early Voting Challenge**, which will be supported by a grassroots campaign. The coalition will issue electronic medals to cities and towns that meet or exceed our recommended standards. We will honor award winners online and use the challenge’s results to examine how early voting went in its first year. The table below summarizes the challenge and its requirements:

	Gold Medal	Silver Medal
Municipal Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have at least 1 early voting site for every 35,000 people* • Have evening hours at least 2 times per week during early voting. • Have 6 or more hours of weekend time available during early voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have at least 1 early voting site for every 35,000 people.* • Have evening hours at least 1 time per week during early voting. • Have at least 4 hours of weekend time available during early voting.

**The City of Boston is so large and so densely populated that the 35,000 figure leads to 17 early voting sites, which may be more than is necessary, especially during the first year of implementation.*

