Preparing for the 2020 Election

A framework for public safety agencies to advance planning for the election and post election period.
Additional information and links to detailed resources follow.

NORMING

Pre- Election:
1. Publicly communicate expectations around safe in-person voting in the community
2. Understand your state and local laws regarding in person voting
3. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights

Election Day:
1. Publicly communicate expectations around supporting safe in-person voting for all eligible voters in the community
2. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights

Post Election Period:
1. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Pre- Election:
1. Leverage relationships & build community partnerships
2. Convene conversations with key stakeholders to share information
3. Exchange contact information with community leaders
4. Provide guidance on the law to election workers, observers, advocates and candidates
5. Coordinate with stakeholders who can help diffuse tensions on the street
6. Establish position, criteria and role for Police/Protestor Liaison Officer

Election Day:
1. Be prepared to receive communication from election officials, poll workers, poll watchers and community members
2. Coordinate and strategize with stakeholders to keep different groups separate from each other
3. Designate a Police/Protester Liaison Officer

Post-Election Period:
1. Actively maintain communication with the community to intervene and deescalate emerging crises
2. Engage with Police/Protester Liaison Officer

SAFETY

Pre-Election:
1. Understand local election laws & interaction between election officials & police
2. Be aware of state laws on open carry and unsanctioned militias
3. Refresh all relevant trainings
4. Assess opportunity for conflict based on publicly available data & identify opportunities for de-escalation
5. Draft & implement Incident Action Plan (IAP)
6. Plan a Unified Command Center
7. Review state laws and prepare for collaboration with partners including the National Guard & Emergency Management

Election Day:
1. Establish Unified Command Center & operations room with community stakeholders
2. Include trusted objective community observer(s) in decision making
3. Proceed with updated IAP
4. Anticipate potential for disruptive activities including violence

Post-Election Period:
1. Conduct debriefing & include community
2. Maintain Unified Command Center & operations room with community stakeholders
3. Engage trusted, objective, community observer(s) to advise on key decisions
4. Follow IAP holding all parties accountable
5. Follow PIO plans

COMMUNICATIONS

Pre- Election:
1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)
2. Create a crisis comms. plan & share with security & community partners (internal)
3. Prepare plan for election day social media posts to share accurate & timely information (external)
4. Assemble a team for monitoring social media info. and devise verification plan (internal)
5. Educate staff & partners on disinformation campaigns (internal)
6. Use comms. plan to dispel inaccurate information (internal & external)

Election Day:
1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)
2. Execute comms. plan to monitor social media and inform the community (external)
3. Use plan to monitor sites and dispel misinformation (internal & external)
4. Support mayors with communication to the community about role of the National Guard (external)
5. Follow PIO format & work with social media team to ensure consistent messaging (internal)

Post-Election Period:
1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)
2. Coordinate with external partners (external)
3. Actively monitor sites to dispel misinformation (internal)
4. Ensure social media messaging is consistent with PIO (internal)

Preparing for the 2020 Election

Pre-Election

Norming

1. Publicly communicate expectations around safe in-person voting in the community

Some states have started early in-person voting with others starting soon. Irrespective of our personal political beliefs or preferred candidate, law enforcement is prepared to support and ensure that all persons can vote safely. Communicating the department's commitment to this, including through social media posts and outreach to the community, is an important step in building trust and setting expectations.

2. Understand your state and local laws regarding in-person voting

State laws vary greatly regarding the responsibilities, training, and behavior required from election workers and poll watchers. Encouraging command staff to review the law and communicate the expectations to officers is necessary to ensure safety at the polls and affirm that votes will be counted fairly. Work with state and local government to confirm preparation is coordinated. (Suggested resource: State Laws on Authorized Poll Watchers & Voter Challenges - National Association of Secretaries of State)

3. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights

Recognizing the individual right to free speech, including the right to peaceful protest and demonstration, can help dispel fears and avert conflict with groups who are exercising their constitutional rights. State laws vary regarding what is required from groups wishing to protest and demonstrate. **All states have laws prohibiting unsanctioned militia.** Understand these laws and communicate them to your officers in advance of Election Day. Armed actors, including militia, congregating at polling places on or before election day may intimidate voters and interfere with a free and democratic election process. (Suggested resources: (1) Protests & Public Safety: A Guide for Cities & Citizens – Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law (2) Addressing the Rise of Unlawful Private Paramilitaries State Fact Sheets – Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (3) Ballot Security and Voter Suppression: What It Is and What the Law Says – Brennan Center for Justice)

Community Outreach

1. Leverage relationships and build community partnerships

Public safety officials should immediately reach out to community organizations with whom they have built strong relationships to set expectations and improve information-sharing. Collaborating with community partners could be very important in calming tensions in the event of conflict. (Suggested resources: (1) Building U.S. Resilience to Political Violence A Globally Informed Framework for Analysis and Action – Project Over Zero and The New Models of Policy Change Initiative at New America (2) Engaging Communities as Partners: Strategies for Problem Solving – PolicyLink; (3) Electoral violence prevention – Sarah Birch and David Muchlinski:)

2. Convene conversations with key stakeholders to share information

Hold small convenings with key stakeholders, community groups, and all political candidates to share information in advance of the election. Discuss their plans as well as your department's expectations and strategies.

Community Outreach (continued)

3. Exchange contact information with community leaders

There's a cliché that "you don't want to be exchanging business cards in the middle of a crisis." Providing community leaders with key contact information, including contact information for the Police/Protestor Liaison Officer (see below), is a critical but sometimes overlooked step in preparation for large-scale events. Get the contact information for key community leaders and be ready to provide the contact information and a pre-incident introduction to Liaison Officers.

4. Provide guidance on the law to election workers, observers, advocates, and candidates

Promoting understanding among election workers, poll watchers, advocates on all sides, and local candidates on the laws governing what is permissible with respect to voting, polling places, and public gatherings will help to ensure that the groups most likely to observe or be impacted by any illegal activity understand the rules. (Suggested resource: State Laws on Authorized Poll Watchers & Voter Challenges - National Association of Secretaries of State)

5. Coordinate with those who can help diffuse tensions on the street

Whether through convenings or through individual contacts, coordinating with community leaders, candidates, and others who can help defuse tension is an important component in preventing conflict escalation. Law enforcement and public safety officials should reiterate their commitment to and support of 1st Amendment rights and safe voting. The group should discuss expectations with stakeholders and review de-escalation plans as necessary. This may also be a good time to identify and recruit individuals to serve as trusted community observers. (See Safety recs. below)

6. Establish position, criteria, and role for Police/Protestor Liaison Officer

Creating a role and naming an individual as a Police/Protestor Liaison Officer will help ensure that community groups, candidates, and other external stakeholders have someone to work with about their concerns, safety issues, and plans for peaceful protest and demonstration. Establishing this position and selecting an appropriate candidate can help build and sustain community trust in police during a difficult period. The liaison will be part of the planning process and should engage with organizers or representatives before and during events. This individual will act as the face of the police on a demonstration route, affirming and restating the expectations, safety requirements, and agreed-upon protocols. The liaison should have an identifiable vest for easy visibility throughout the event. (Suggested resources: (1) Policing Professional Profile: Police Liaison Team Officer – College of Policing; (2) The use of Police Liaison Teams in the policing of events – College of Policing)

Safety

1. Understand local election laws and the interaction between election officials and police

Make sure that both election officials and public safety personnel know their roles in accordance with local or state ordinances. Understand local election laws and the interaction of election officials and police. Educate staff on what constitutes voter intimidation and how to respond in the event that this occurs. Coordinate with state and local government partners to ensure that you are on the same page. (Suggested resources: (1) Ballot Security and Voter Suppression: What It Is and What the Law Says – Brennan Center for Justice, Voter Intimidation – pages 7 and 8, Voter Misinformation or Deceptive Practices – pages 9 and 10; (2) Fact Sheet: Protecting Against Voter Intimidation - Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law)

Safety (continued)

2. Be aware of state laws on open carry and unsanctioned militias

Ensure that all persons can exercise their right to vote without fear of intimidation by being clear on laws pertaining to weapons and firearms near polling places. All states have at least one constitutional or statutory provision that applies to paramilitary or private militia activity at rallies. See suggested resources for more information regarding your state's laws. (Suggested resources: (1) Protests & Public Safety: A Guide for Cities & Citizens – Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law. pages 18 to 26 and 40 to 43; (2) Prohibiting Private Armies at Public Rallies - Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law; (3) Addressing the Rise of Unlawful Private Paramilitaries State Fact Sheets – Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law.)

3. Refresh all relevant trainings

With the high probability of election-related protests in some communities, public safety is advised to ensure that their officers are mindful of relevant methods for managing demonstrations. Trainings to focus on should include de-escalation, protest response, crowd control, 1st Amendment rights, Incident Command System (ICS), and others. Ensure your training academy is ready to refresh trainings, or see the following resources for examples of online available trainings. (Suggested resources: (1) The Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: Promising practices and lessons learned – Police Executive Research Forum ,Training – pages 29 to 38; (2) Verbal De-Escalation Training for Police – Crisis Prevention Institute; Correctional Clinician Trainings)

4. Assess opportunity for conflict based on publicly available data and identify opportunities for de-escalation

Departments should consult with publicly available datasets to assess the risk of violence and conflict provoked by bad actors. In working closely with your community, keep the dialogue open and be prepared to engage. In addition, ensure that links to your state and regional fusion centers are operational. (Suggested resources: (1) US Crisis Monitor Data – Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) and Bridging Divides Initiative at Princeton University; (2) How to access and use data from Bridging Divides Initiative at the community level, Bridging Divides Initiative at Princeton University)

5. Draft and implement an Incident Action Plan (IAP)

Understanding that multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional events are often complicated, using the best practice of the ICS provides a framework for managing personnel and staying well informed. The IAP should include a role for the Public Information Officer (PIO), who will be responsible for interfacing with the public, media, and other agencies. (Suggested resource: National Incident Management System – Federal Emergency Management Agency ,ICS and Unified Command overview pages 20 to- 33, Writing an IAP Pages 105 to 110)

6. Plan a Unified Command Center

Create a plan to set up a Unified Command Center, preferably in an established Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and use best practices to ensure interoperable technology and incident management doctrine. (Suggested resource: National Incident Management System – Federal Emergency Management Agency ICS and Unified Command - pages 24 to 40)

Safety

7. Review state law and prepare for collaboration with partners including the National Guard and Emergency Management

Social media can be used by public safety agencies throughout the election period to provide accurate and timely information to the public and the news media. In a crisis, social media may be the best way to get information into the hands of those who need it most. For example, following the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, police used Twitter to relay information to the public including information about road closures and investigations. Social media posts during this period should integrate norming information, including posts affirming support for safe in-person voting and peaceful exercise of 1st Amendment rights as well as posts that address and correct disinformation narratives. (Suggested resource: Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies Strategies for Effective Community Engagement – Urban Institute and Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons from Boston)

Communications

1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)

With the potential for prolonged protests, continue to remind law enforcement officers and the public that the 1st Amendment will be protected by police. (.Suggested resource: The Challenge of Policing in a Democratic Society: A personal journey)

2. Create a crisis communications plan and share with security and community partners (internal)

Effective communication with the public and news media is a crucial service during a crisis. Establishing and formalizing a plan for how communication will be relayed, what information will be shared, and by whom, where information will be shared and all other relevant logistics reduces the already heavy load and strain that can be placed on public safety agencies during emergencies. The PIO and their team should work with other participating agencies to craft a message that reflects a shared understanding of the situation. (Suggested resources: (1) Volusia County (FL) Crisis Communications Plan; (2) Strategic Communication Practices: A Toolkit for Police Executives – U.S. Department of Justice, Officer of Community Oriented Policing, Crisis Communications – Planning and Execution – Page 87 to 105)

3. Prepare plan for Election Day social media posts to share accurate and timely information (external)

Social media can be used by public safety agencies throughout the election period to provide accurate and timely information to the public and the news media. In a crisis, social media may be the best way to get information into the hands of those who need it most. For example, following the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, police used Twitter to relay information to the public about road closures and investigations. Social media posts during this period should integrate norming information, including posts affirming support for safe in-person voting and peaceful exercise of 1st Amendment rights as well as posts that address and correct disinformation narratives. (Suggested resource: Social Media Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies Strategies for Effective Community Engagement – Urban Institute and Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons from Boston)

4. Assemble a team for monitoring social media information and devise a verification plan (internal)

If staffing levels permit, assemble a team to monitor social media networks, paying closer attention to local networks and sites to identify disinformation, and misinformation. Develop a plan to verify or refute information among the team and work with the PIO to develop a strategy for drafting, vetting, and dissemination. (Suggested resource: The 101 of Disinformation Detection – Institute for Strategic Dialogue)

Communications (continued)

5. Educate staff and partners on disinformation campaigns (internal)

Misinformation is information that is false but is not created to cause harm. Disinformation, however, is false and deliberately created with the intent to dismiss, distract, or distort. In the pre-election period there has been a lot of disinformation. Educating staff and partners on what constitutes disinformation, the reasons why it is shared, and how to recognize it, is a valuable component in developing effective communication with the community. (Suggested resources: (1) Developing a Civil Society Response to Online Manipulation, Institute for Strategic Dialogue; (2) SpotTheTroll.org – Clemson University Media Forensics Hub)

6. Use communications plan to dispel inaccurate information (internal & external)

Disinformation is sometimes used by bad actors to intentionally provoke conflict. Public safety agencies should seek to address and discredit disinformation where possible as a de-escalation strategy.

✔ Election Day ✔

Norming

1. Publicly communicate expectations around supporting safe in-person voting for all eligible voters in the community
Reiterating this message on Election Day itself is important to assuage public fear and anxiety about a tense election season.

2. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights
Similar to allaying concerns about in-person voting, repeating the message that peacefully exercising 1st Amendment rights is supported and will be protected is important to reducing demonstrators' fears and inflaming any conflict, real or perceived.

Community Outreach

1. Be prepared to receive communication from election officials, poll workers, poll watchers, and community members
On Election Day and throughout in-person voting, departments should be prepared to receive and respond to communication from poll workers, poll watchers, and community groups. Rapid and proportional response along with the expressed commitment to safe voting and exercising 1st Amendment rights will assure election officials and others that law enforcement is prepared for any scenario, furthering community trust. (Suggested resource: Protests & Public Safety: A Guide for Cities & Citizens – Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, Georgetown Law, Building relationships – page 102)

2. Coordinate and strategize with stakeholders to keep different groups separate from each other
A strategy sometimes employed by bad actors, including those sowing disinformation, is to bring opposing groups into close contact with each other, hoping to inflame tensions and create physical conflict. As much as possible, law enforcement should appropriately and peacefully coordinate with groups to create physical distance and proactively reduce opportunity for conflict. (Suggested resource: The Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: Promising practices and lessons learned – Police Executive Research Forum, Competing protest groups – page 15)

3. Designate a Police/Protestor Liaison Officer
On Election Day and thereafter, designate a Police/Protester Liaison Officer and empower them to work directly with community leaders and those leading any demonstrations. Create an operational line of communication between the Liaison Officer and the Command Center to ensure that community input and information can be quickly acted upon by the appropriate group, officer, or unit and that all intelligence is collected and analyzed. (Suggested resource: The use of Police Liaison Teams in the policing of events – College of Policing. pages 9 and 10)

Safety

1. Establish a Unified Command Center and operations room with community stakeholders
Follow through on the plan to set up a Unified Command Center, preferably in an established EOC and using best practices to ensure interoperable technology and incident management doctrine. (Suggested resources: (1) National Incident Management System – Federal Emergency Management Agency, ICS and Unified Command - pages 24 to 40; (2) The Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: Promising practices and lessons learned – Police Executive Research Forum, The Incident Command System – pages 49 to 54).

Safety (continued)

2. Include trusted objective community observer(s) in decision making

Public safety leaders will be well served to identify a trusted objective community observer or observers to provide a non-law-enforcement perspective on important decisions. Being aware that community actors may have different perspectives and serve different constituencies, public safety leaders should select individuals who they think represent the range of perspectives present in their community. As much as possible, the observers should be individuals who are aware of local laws and community issues, including local conflicts. In Northern Ireland, the UK, and Scotland this person is often a human rights specialist. In Boston, the police commissioner has called upon the following people on different occasions: a former US Attorney, a former elected prosecutor, and a minister.

3. Proceed with updated IAP

Utilizing and following the Incident Action Plan will make certain that all public safety command staff and officers are on the same page regarding the framework for managing personnel, situations in the field, and other resources. Elements of the plan may never be utilized, but the value of putting forethought into responses to potential scenarios is significant. As the situation changes, make updates to the IAP and communicate those changes through the PIO.

4. Anticipate potential for a range of disruptive activities including violence

Public safety leaders should plan for various scenarios that reflect a range of activities. Created scenarios should anticipate a variety of activities and conflicts, develop plans to protect officers, protect the community, and protect 1st Amendment rights in equal measure.

Communications

1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)

Regularly communicate this expectation with the community and with officers. In Philadelphia during the Occupy Protests, commanders read the 1st Amendment at every roll call. (Suggested resource: The Challenge of Policing in a Democratic Society: A personal journey)

2. Execute communications plan to monitor social media and inform the community (external)

Follow communications plan to update and respond to any emerging challenges. If needed, implement crisis communication plans.

3. Use the plan to monitor sites, and dispel misinformation (internal & external)

Utilize the plan developed in the pre-election period to monitor communications and quickly respond to incorrect information that is being shared by social and traditional news media. The PIO and their team should monitor the media, social media, and other sources of public information, transmitting information to the components that need it within the incident command organizational structure.

Communications (continued)

4. Support mayors with communication to the community about the role of the National Guard with state activation to local streets (external)

Connect with local government leaders to inform them of coordination and collaboration with National Guard forces in the event of state activation. (See website: civiliansinconflict.org)

5. Follow PIO format and work with social media team to ensure consistent messaging (internal)

To promote accurate and reliable information sharing, communications should be routed through the PIO. The PIO and their team are responsible for gathering, verifying, coordinating, and disseminating messages to the public, social media, news media, and other agencies. Depending on the size of the operation, the PIO may work with a social media team to draft and publish messages that address misinformation in a consistent and timely fashion.

🏛 Post-Election Period 🏛

Norming

1. Publicly express commitment to the safety of all peaceful demonstrators exercising their 1st Amendment rights
With the possibility that the results of the presidential election may not be determined for days or weeks following Election Day, public safety leaders should be prepared to reiterate their support for 1st Amendment rights.

Community Outreach

1. Actively maintain communication with the community to intervene and de-escalate emerging crises
With the possibility that the election results may not be finalized for several days or even weeks after the election, public safety leaders should be prepared to maintain communication with community leaders, stakeholders, and leaders of demonstration groups.

2. Engage with Police/Protester Liaison Officer
Developing a regular reporting schedule and structure for the Police/Protestor Liaison throughout the post-election period will ensure that community input and information is quickly and accurately acted upon. (Suggested resource: The use of Police Liaison Teams in the policing of events – College of Policing, page 20)

Safety

1. Conduct debriefing and include the community
As with any large-scale event or activity, conducting a thorough debriefing or after action review process can aid future decision-making. Leaders should engage their command staff in a review of activities, decision-making, and outcomes – the potential protracted nature of this period suggests a routine review of responses and actions. (Suggested resources: (1) How to Conduct an After Action Review – Department of Justice, Office of Community Policing; (2) IncidentReviews.Org)

2. Maintain Unified Command Center and operations room with community stakeholders
In the event of conflict, utilize the structures and processes put into place to manage the situation, including the Unified Command Center.

3. Engage trusted, objective, community observer(s) to advise on key decisions
In situations and decision points where it would be helpful to have an outside perspective, utilize the trusted community observer(s) who you have previously identified for this purpose.

4. Follow IAP, holding all parties accountable to the plan
Work within the Incident Action Plan and make sure that partners adhere to the plan as well. Make changes to the plan as necessary and communicate those changes to the other parties that need to stay informed.

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Safety (continued)

5. Follow PIO plans (and work with social media team)

Keep the PIO involved and provide regular, timely, and routine information to the public. Gaps in information sharing create opportunities for incorrect information to be shared. To disrupt any chance for incorrect information to spread, speak often. The influence of social media is huge and safety agencies need to use it to communicate authentic information. Social media communication is timely and can reach large numbers of people. The safety agency can create a record, correct the record, and share critical information in real time. (Suggested resource: Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons from Boston)

Communications

1. Support 1st Amendment rights (external)

Regularly communicate this expectation with the community and with officers. In Philadelphia during the Occupy Protests, commanders read the 1st Amendment at every roll call. (See: The Challenge of Policing in a Democratic Society: A personal journey)

2. Coordinate with external partners (external)

Continue to work with previously established partners and stay connected with stakeholders.

3. Actively monitor sites prepared to dispel misinformation (internal)

Public safety leaders and government websites will be looked to for accurate information. Be ready to share it. Do not rely on the media to share the most up-to-date information.

4. Ensure social media messaging is consistent with PIO (internal)

As the post-election period continues, discipline is needed to maintain messaging consistent with the Incident Command System model. The PIO should continue to work with a social media team to draft and publish messages that address misinformation in a consistent and timely fashion.