

# THE STATE OF ALASKA **ONLINE BALLOT DELIVERY AND RETURN**

## SOE Election Management White Paper

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Alaska selected the SOE **Clarity eBallot Delivery** solution to offer an electronic voting alternative to all absentee voters. Previously, ADOE relied on faxed ballot returns as the primary electronic return method. The ADOE recognized that faxing was an outdated form of data transmission and wanted to offer a secure and private way for voters to vote electronically.

A taskforce was assembled to evaluate online voting systems. The ADOE was looking for a system that would:

- Make it easy to return ballots through mail, fax or online.
- Allow for an automated ballot duplication process utilizing 2D bar code technology.
- Provide easy to use on-screen marking with detailed information for ballot return.
- Ensure voter privacy, voter integrity and a high level of security.

In June of 2012, the ADOE released an RFP. Six vendors specializing in electronic ballot delivery and return responded to the RFP. The vendor selected had to have both the experience and technology capable of securely distributing a ballot to all voters requesting to receive one online and ensure the system was in place for use during the 2012 Presidential Election.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The ballot delivery solution would need to meet the following requirements:

- Notify voters of ballot availability and, upon voter authentication, allow voters to access an online platform to obtain their unique ballot style and vote the ballot as an online intuitive electronic ballot.
- Allow the voter to print a ballot that utilizes a 2D bar code technology containing specific ballot style information and voter's ballot choices - information contained in the 2D bar code must not contain information identifying the voter.
- Allow the voter to print his/her ballot and all required voting materials, certificate and return instructions. In addition, the system also allows all required voting materials to be uploaded and returned online.
- Provide detailed audit logs of any and all events or actions associated with utilization of the system by any person, to include voters.

The ADOE also required full roll out prior to the November 2012 Presidential Election. In order to meet the deadline, the vendor was required to work hand in hand with the ADOE implementation team to ensure that mutually agreed upon project goals and timelines were met. Staff training had to be completed by September 20, 2012 and the system had to be accessible by constituents by September 22, 2012 to ensure that absentee ballots were available 45 days prior to Election Day. The project was tracked using approved project management tools and weekly conference calls to communicate the status.

“We selected SOE in August and the system went live three weeks later,” says Gail Fenumiai, Director, Division of Elections for the State of Alaska. “Our biggest challenge was the development of the ballots. We use the GEMS system and a lot of testing was required. Although we worked right up to the deadline, we were able to launch the system on time.”

## THE SOLUTION

**Clarity eBallot Delivery** is an electronic ballot transmission and onscreen marking tool specifically designed to fulfill the requirements of the MOVE Act. It is a web application that enables all absentee voters in the State of Alaska to securely receive and return their ballots online while preserving the integrity and privacy of their vote.

**Clarity eBallot Delivery** is hosted for the ADOE and it provides a uniform, interactive platform that can be managed by ADOE officials using separate user accounts and interfaces. The system offers two functionality sets: one for the election official and one for the voters.

For ADOE election officials, the system offers an Internet-based statewide tool to facilitate the configuration and customization required for importing ballot contents and instructions from election management systems at the State level. An import and reporting tool provides an easy to use import capability that eliminates the need to re-key/enter information from one system to another, allowing for the seamless movement of data between systems.

During the 2012 General Election, Alaska utilized SOE’s Clarity eBallot Delivery to provide all absentee voters an online alternative to fax to receive and return their ballot.

Clarity eBallot Delivery accepts data in a number of formats including VIP XML, OASIS EML, and other XML based formats as well as ASCII. The data entered is aggregated into the statewide wizard that is published as ballots for marking and downloading by the State’s voters.

In addition, the import and reporting tool generates customizable reports to assess system statistical information. This tool has been carefully designed to ensure a very simple, yet powerful, user experience utilizing specialized security measures.

## MOVING FORWARD

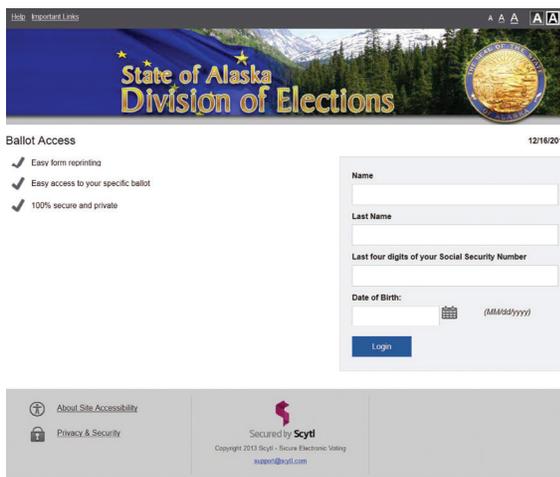
The system, which is fully compliant with Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, will continue to:

- Provide a wizard allowing voters to obtain their correct ballot.
- Allow voters to download the marked ballot for printing and to return the completed ballot via mail or online.
- Provide all ADOE required forms and envelopes pre-populated with jurisdictional information.
- Allow all required voting materials to be uploaded and returned online.

For future elections, Clarity eBallot Delivery will offer an interactive UOCAVA-specific voter education portal that provides essential and easy to understand voting information.

## ADDRESSING ALASKA’S REQUIREMENTS

Notify voters of ballot availability and, upon voter authentication, allow voters to access an online platform to obtain their unique ballot style and vote the ballot as an online intuitive electronic ballot.



Clarity eBallot Delivery offers an automated process which generates email messages to the voters providing a link to a secure site where they can authenticate themselves and access their online ballot. Once a voter is authenticated, using the data elements determined by the ADOE, the voter is then associated logically with the correct ballot style. The voter marks his/her selections in each contest online and is guided from contest to contest.

The contests appear exactly as they would if the voter voted at his/her home precinct. Once a voter has completed all contests available, the voter can review and change selections.

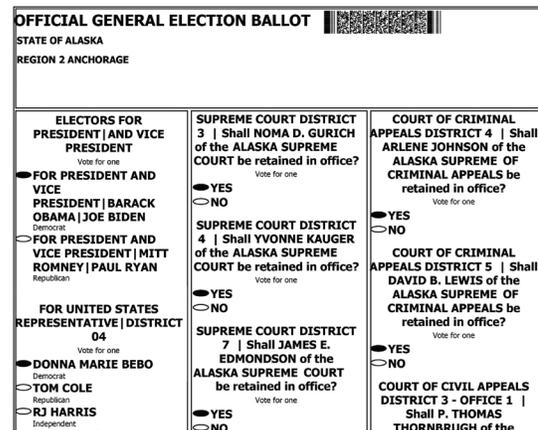
Once the voter is satisfied with the selections, he/she may download and print the marked ballot and the other materials required. These additional materials determined by the ADOE include secrecy envelopes, attestation statements, instructions and return envelope. All the additional materials are delivered to the voter in PDF format in one downloadable zip file.

Allow the voter to print their ballot that utilizes 2D bar code technology containing specific ballot style information and the voter's ballot choices. Information contained in the 2D bar code must not contain information identifying the voter.

The system encodes each ballot with a 2D bar code which contains the following information:

- The unique ballot style is downloaded by the voters
- The candidate/contest selections made by the voter
- Any write-in text entered by the voter

Clarity eBallot Delivery does not encode ballots with any information that can possibly be used to trace a voter to any voted ballot. No session data can be used, even by system administrators, to determine voters' vote selections at any stage of the online ballot marking process.



**OFFICIAL GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT**

STATE OF ALASKA  
REGION 2 ANCHORAGE

<p><b>ELECTORS FOR PRESIDENT   AND VICE PRESIDENT</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT   BARACK OBAMA   JOE BIDEN Democrat</p> <p><input type="radio"/> FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT   MITT ROMNEY   PAUL RYAN Republican</p> <p><b>FOR UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE   DISTRICT 04</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> DONNA MARIE BEBO Democrat</p> <p><input type="radio"/> TOM COLE Republican</p> <p><input type="radio"/> RJ HARRIS Independent</p>	<p><b>SUPREME COURT DISTRICT 3   Shall NOMA D. GURICH of the ALASKA SUPREME COURT be retained in office?</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> <p><b>SUPREME COURT DISTRICT 4   Shall YVONNE KAUGER of the ALASKA SUPREME COURT be retained in office?</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> <p><b>SUPREME COURT DISTRICT 7   Shall JAMES E. EDMONDSON of the ALASKA SUPREME COURT be retained in office?</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p>	<p><b>COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS DISTRICT 4   Shall ARLENE JOHNSON of the ALASKA SUPREME OF CRIMINAL APPEALS be retained in office?</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> <p><b>COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS DISTRICT 5   Shall DAVID B. LEWIS of the ALASKA SUPREME OF CRIMINAL APPEALS be retained in office?</b> Vote for one</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO</p> <p><b>COURT OF CIVIL APPEALS DISTRICT 3 - OFFICE 1   Shall P. THOMAS THORNBURGH of the</b></p>
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Allow the voter to print their ballot and all required voting materials, certificates and return instructions. As an option, also allow all required voting materials to be uploaded and returned via the online system.

The Clarity eBallot Delivery system permits voters to download marked ballots and all associated materials determined by the ADOE. The additional materials may be customized to the voter's specific information (e.g. to dynamically include the local address to which materials are to be mailed) or may be static. Additional documents provided by the ADOE in the Clarity eBallot Delivery platform include:

- Voter certificate
- Secrecy envelopes
- Return mail envelopes
- Voter instructions

All downloadable documents are provided in a single zip file which contains each document in an individual printable PDF format. In addition, the system allows all required voting materials to be uploaded and returned online.

Provide detailed audit logs of any and all events or actions associated with utilization of the system by any person, including voters.

Clarity eBallot Delivery includes immutable audits logs that provide near absolute accountability and transparency to the system. This is done by recording the main actions of the application and users in special log files that are digitally signed at periodic intervals. Digital signatures ensure that each entry into the log is protected from undetectable manipulation.

## BENEFITS TO THE STATE OF ALASKA

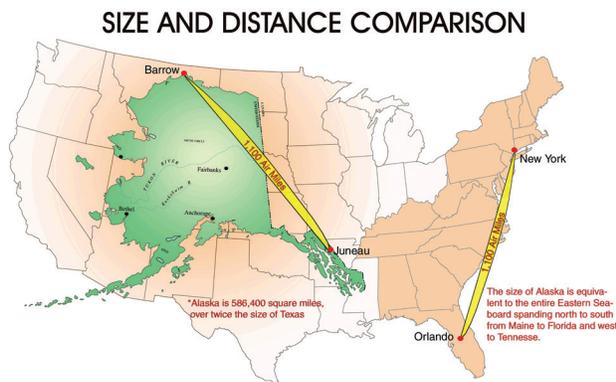


The ADOE now has a modern, secure electronic method of delivering ballots to all absentee voters. The State now provides multiple methods of voting including a secure online way to receive and return ballots. “We needed a better technological solution than the fax machine. The **Clarity eBallot Delivery** solution fits the bill,” says Fenumiai, Director, Division of Elections for the State of Alaska.

The ADOE implemented a soft rollout which meant that the new system was available and anyone requesting an absentee ballot used the **Clarity eBallot Delivery** solution, though it was not widely promoted. Fenumiai continues, “Although we did not advertise its availability, absentee voters requesting ballots online were all directed to the system. By offering this alternative we dramatically reduced the number of faxed ballots. Over 7,000 ballots were requested through **Clarity eBallot Delivery**, and 70% of the online ballots requested were returned. Plus, we received a lot of positive feedback from voters who used it.”

The State of Alaska Division of Elections has also benefitted from working with a provider that has deployed systems across many locations. “We wanted to partner with a provider who had experience deploying a system across many and remote locations. We are challenged with connectivity and latency issues due to great distances and remoteness,” says Carol Thompson, Absentee Manager, Division of Elections for the State of Alaska.

The following diagrams illustrate the vast distances between locations and connectivity constraints in remote areas.



The distance between Barrow and Juneau is 1,100 air miles. The distance between Nome and Juneau is 1,107 air miles. This is about the same distance between New York and Orlando. Overall, Alaska is over 586 square miles, over twice the size of Texas.

“Even with the accelerated launch, once the system went live it stayed up and running for the duration of the campaign. We did not experience any downtime. We did experience some operator error issues but working with the SOE help desk we were able to promptly address all of the them,” Thompson continues.

## CONCLUSION

Now that the ADOE has experience with the system, they are prepared to handle an increased use of the **Clarity eBallot Delivery** solution for upcoming elections in 2014 and beyond. "We wanted to be able to provide a better voting alternative to voters, one that offers more convenience. By doing so, we fully expect to see an increase in its usage," Fenumiai says.

"It was important for us to modernize our voting processes and options for ballot delivery and return. In addition to UOCAVA and other overseas voters, there are many challenges to voters statewide that make it difficult for them to get their polling place," says Fenumiai.

In many states, constituents are asking for online methods to make it easier for military, overseas and other absentee voters to exercise their right to vote. In addition to meeting its own goal of making voting more accessible and convenient, the ADOE has become a model for other states that are looking to implement an online system for ballot delivery and returns.

In addition to meeting its own goal of making voting more accessible and convenient, the State of Alaska has become a model for other states that are looking to implement an online system for ballot delivery and returns.

## ABOUT

SOE, a ScytI company, is a nationally recognized, leading provider of election technology solutions that modernize elections. SOE provides intuitive election management and administration software solutions that span the entire election process, from pre-election preparation through Election Day results reporting, and post-election auditing and analysis. SOE's solutions include Electronic Ballot Delivery, Online Voting, Online Poll Worker Training, Electronic Pollbooks, Voter Education Web Portals and Election Night Reporting. These solutions assist local, state and federal election officials in increasing the security, productivity, efficiency, transparency, accessibility and auditability of their election processes. To date, SOE has conducted election technology implementations - including over 18 statewide projects - in over 1,600 jurisdictions across 37 States and U.S. territories, plus the District of Columbia. SOE is based in Tampa, Florida.