

2026

New Voter Center Communication

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to have a written plan for communicating the change to vote centers from precinct-based voting. Originally, we had thought we would be going to vote centers for the 2026 election cycle, but it was turned down by the election board. However, we do anticipate that as more counties go to vote centers in Indiana, Hamilton County will change to this method of running an election soon. Thus, this project will pave the road for how we “get the word out” once the inevitable happens.

Historically, Hamilton County has relied on precinct voting for over 150 years. In 2011, the option to transition to vote centers was passed by Indiana legislation. Due to the growth of the county, Fourteen (14) additional precincts were added this year. Currently for the 2026 Primary election, Hamilton County has 234 precincts with 105 polling locations. If vote centers had passed, the plan was to have Fifty – Sixty (50-60) vote centers. With the continued growth, it will become more difficult to maintain precinct voting. Finding poll sites and poll workers was more difficult for the upcoming primary.

Between 2010 to 2022, the 65+ population has been the fastest growing in the county, increasing by 112.6%, nearly half of the early votes in 2024 coming from this age group. This age group tends to be less tech savvy, thus is less likely to be informed on the change to vote centers. The problem we aim to overcome is making sure we properly educate the public on what a vote center is, along with informing them of the change from precinct-based polling stations to vote centers. While keeping in mind that we must incorporate methods that will reach the 65+ population. This is to help avoid overburdening the election department with phone calls during election season and reduce confusion over the change for our voters.

Project Goals

Hamilton County has over 287,000 registered voters. Our objective is to establish a comprehensive communication framework that ensures every Hamilton County resident is educated on the transition to vote centers. By proactively preparing this strategy now, we ensure immediate, clear, and efficient implementation the moment approval is granted, minimizing voter confusion and administrative strain.

To turn this framework into an actionable plan, our goals are to focus on awareness, accuracy, and adoption. During our planning phase, we have identified five key communication channels to help implement the plan: traditional media, social media, USPS/mail, community outreach, and word-of-mouth.

The ultimate result we are looking for is to prevent confusion and frustration from both the voters and election employees. With the information we have gathered we will create a SOP of sorts, so that anyone can easily have access to an effective outreach strategy.

Success means that on Election Day, the election office receives *minimal* phone calls related to vote center confusion — including questions about locations, hours, eligibility, and navigation. A low call volume in this category would indicate that voters received clear, accessible, and timely information beforehand.

Methods

Our outreach initiative follows a structured schedule designed to increase public awareness of upcoming vote center changes. The planning phase focuses on five key communication channels: traditional media, social media, direct mail, community outreach, and

word-of-mouth engagement. The following are methods of communicating to the public as well as contact information gathered for these methods.

- Traditional Media

Goal: Establish legitimacy and broad reach.

- Local news broadcasts

- WTHR- Emily Longnecker- elongnecker@wthr.com
- WRTV- Logan MacDonald- logan.macdonald@wrtv.com
- WISH TV- Garrett Bergquist- garrett.bergquist@wishtv.com
- FOX 59- Russ McQuaid- Russmcquaid@Fox59.com

- Newspapers

- Times of Noblesville, 54 N. 9th St. Noblesville 46060, 317-773-9960, Joe LaRue- joe@thetimes24-7.com.
- Hamilton County Reporter, 136 S. 9th St., Ste 12, Noblesville 46060, 765-365-23126, Stu.Clampitt@gmail.com, news@ReadTheReporter.com.
- Current Publishing, LLC, 525 North End Dr., Ste 175, Carmel 46032, 317-489-4444, Ben Weir- ben@youarecurrent.com.

- Social Media

Goal: Rapid dissemination and real-time Q&A.

- Instagram, Facebook with County Election Board's approval

- Tammy Sander, Director of Communications, 317-517-9520, One Hamilton County Square, Ste. 157, Noblesville 46060, tammy.sander@hamiltoncounty.in.gov. Tammy handles social media

platforms for Hamilton County. Once County Election Board approves vote centers, Tammy can post on Facebook and Instagram.

- Update Voter Registration and Elections' website pages through Civic Plus- Web Editor with vote center information. When approval is given, we will have an elections page on the Hamilton County website that lists the vote center locations with a frequently asked questions section.

- USPS- Mail

Goal: Reach 100% of households, specifically those less active online.

- Add a link/ QR code to any mailings that are sent from Voter Registration and Clerk's offices to inform voters of vote centers along with addresses of locations.
- Update Voter Registration Acknowledgement Postcards to remove precinct information and replace with vote center information. Once that has been completed, new postcards could be mailed to all active Hamilton County voters.
- Mail flyers to Assisted Living Homes; Activities Directors in the county.

- Community Outreach-

Goal: Reach voters through established, non-partisan local leaders.

- During school or community events where Voter Registration has been invited, having flyers or a magnet that has the vote center information would be beneficial to inform voters of the new change.

- Word of Mouth

Goal: Turn informed citizens into ambassadors.

- Informing during our day-to-day interactions

- Any time we talk to anyone about an upcoming election, we should bring up vote centers, answer any questions they have, and/or direct them to the county website.

Before any voter-facing information is released, all messaging will first be submitted to the Election Administrator and the Clerk to verify accuracy and compliance with election procedures. Once approved, the messaging will then be forwarded to the Election Board for final approval to ensure all information aligns with legal requirements and office standards. No materials will be distributed until both approvals are complete. The projected timeline should be upon approval and then thirty (30) days before the election. Local newspapers and television stations, including Fox 59, WTHR, WRTV, and WISH TV, will be contacted to help disseminate information to a broad audience. The Clerk's office has an established relationship with the local newspapers, and the news stations have contact information available on their websites. Social media messaging will be prepared in collaboration with the county's social media administrator, Tammy Sanders, ensuring consistent and timely updates across Hamilton County platforms. Direct mailers will be sent to active voters using SVRS data, each containing a QR code linking to detailed vote center information sixty (60) days before the election. Additional efforts will include in-person outreach to assisted living facilities and intentional word-of-mouth communication in daily interactions with community members. Resources such as Seniorhomes.com support targeted outreach to senior living communities.

Our communication plan is designed to address a clear future problem: limited voter awareness of changes to vote center locations. By combining multiple communication methods, using clerk-approved messaging, and directing voters to accessible information sources such as the county website, mailers, and social media, the initiative provides a comprehensive solution. A variety of tools and resources will support this work. SVRS, the Hamilton County website, and

social media platforms serve as primary tools, while local newspapers, television stations, and Seniorhomes.com function as key informational resources. Materials such as QR-coded mailers, approved social media content, and informational scripts will ensure consistent messaging across all channels.

The communication plan was created by using Word and will be saved on the computer. A copy of our plan will also be kept in a binder for quick reference.

Evaluation of the outreach effort relies on several metrics. Digital indicators such as website traffic and social media engagement will provide insight into online reach. Feedback from assisted living facilities and voter inquiries offers qualitative measures of community response. Election data, particularly turnout and the volume of vote-center-related questions, allow for comparison before and after the outreach campaign. Finally, tracking published and broadcast media coverage helps to assess the effectiveness of traditional media engagement.

CEATS Principles & Tools

We used the CEATS Legal Framework (Session 1) to identify the specific mandates (IC 3-11-18.1-9 and IC 5-3-1-4 (2024)) that dictate our public notification timeline. This ensured our project remains legally viable rather than just theoretically beneficial. The former IC code says that the election board must publish notice of vote centers in accordance with IC 3-11-8-3.2. This code states that notices should be given to the public in the manner given in IC 5-3-1-2. Finally, when reaching this code, you get a timeline of election-based information which should be done no later than 21 days before an election. This means that we must send out vote center information before this deadline. The latter IC code states that if a notice is affecting the

political subdivision, they shall publish it in two newspapers. This gave us a minimum of what we must do when getting the word out on vote centers, but we wanted to come up with as many ways to reach the voters as we could.

By applying the Vote Center Analysis Tool (Session 4), we were able to quantify the "Precinct vs. Vote Centers" trade-off. This tool allowed us to prove that moving Hamilton County toward this model addresses the specific pain point of "wrong precinct" turn-aways and increase voter turnout while optimizing long-term county savings.

We could use the CEATS statewide database to compare Hamilton County with the 67 Indiana counties already using this system. This provides the "proof of concept" needed to show that our proposal isn't an experiment but aligns with a decade of successful state implementations.

To summarize, CEATS helped to provide a legal roadmap to ensure compliance and the analytical tools to prove the fiscal and social return on investment for Hamilton County.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though vote centers have not yet been approved in Hamilton County, our project will help lead the way when we need to communicate the transition to the public. Through our thorough list of traditional media, social media, mailing, community outreach and word-of-mouth, we have proactively done the work of finding our sources of outreach. This will make it so we can both have an easier time when it is needed and show our preparedness when reintroducing the idea of vote centers to the election board. Hopefully, this will not take too long to occur as having vote centers will prove to ease the election process for both the elections office and the public.

Our next steps for this project will be to continue maintenance of the documents so that every contact is up to date. Of course, when the time comes, we will also need to act on everything we have proposed here. If we are correct in how useful this prepared information is, then the results of our project will be immense savings on time and stress. Especially when it comes to day-of confusion from our voters in Hamilton County. Other counties could benefit by using this data as a blueprint to find what sort of data to look for in their locations. We may have Hamilton County specific media listed in our report, but using that as a jumping off point, another county could more easily find what they should look for.

Acknowledgements

We would like to show our gratitude to Beth Sheller, our elections administrator, for helping us occasionally come up with ideas based on her 15 years of experience. We would also like to thank Lisa Gray for helping us through the process of developing our project.