

Michigan City Clerks to pilot cutting-edge election security measure

After the 2018 November General Election, City Clerks in Rochester Hills, Lansing and Kalamazoo will pilot a type of post-election audit, a risk-limiting audit that is new to Michigan and much of the country. Robust post-election audits have been recommended by the U.S. Senate Select Intelligence Committee and are one part of a strong and resilient election security infrastructure. A risk-limiting audit is a comprehensive post-election audit, which uses statistical methods to confirm whether reported election results are correct, and detect possible anomalies in areas that may need further scrutiny due to human error, possible manipulation, cyberattacks or a variety of other factors.

“Election security measures, such as risk-limiting audits, are an important element to ensuring election integrity - from the beginning of the process through the certification of the winner,” said Tina Barton, Rochester Hills City Clerk. “My job is not only to administer fair and accurate elections, but also to maintain voter confidence in the system. This process, which will include Michigan voters reviewing paper ballots, may be a cost-effective option to provide additional assurance to our voters.”

The three Clerks will trial cutting-edge risk-limiting audit procedures using Michigan’s new voting equipment in this pilot, which is being conducted in partnership with the following: Michigan Bureau of Elections, Jerome Lovato of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Ron Rivest and Mayuri Sridhar of the Massachusetts Institute for Technology, Philip B. Stark of the University of California, Berkeley, the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, Verified Voting, and Indiana’s Voting System Technical Oversight Program.

“This pilot project will allow us to explore a number of effective and efficient audit procedures that will further strengthen our election security profile,” said Michigan Secretary of State Ruth Johnson. “While the initial use of risk-limiting audits in other states has been intriguing, we are excited to partner with some very respected officials in this field to test this concept in Michigan’s unique, decentralized election structure. The feedback we obtain from these pilots will enable the Bureau to assess how to best move forward with this concept on a statewide basis, and further strengthen Michigan’s post-election audit process.”

“Unfortunately, today’s realities require election administrators to be even more vigilant and I’m delighted to pioneer a new tool that may be helpful in our ongoing efforts to protect elections. Pairing our election security measures already in use with a robust post-election audit to check election results seems like a common-sense step forward,” said Chris Swope, Lansing City Clerk.

Michigan’s election system already incorporates many important recommendations by national security and cybersecurity experts, including the use of paper ballots, mandatory pre-election testing on all voting equipment used in every election, and

performance-based audits that also verify that key pre-election, election day and post-election tasks are successfully completed. Risk-limiting audits could be an important complement to the existing system safeguards that ensure election procedural and equipment compliance. These pilot audits will incorporate a number of variations of the basic procedure to evaluate operational efficiency and ease of use.

“It’s important for us, as election administrators, to make sure that our election process worked as we planned and that the results obtained are consistent with voters’ intentions at the polls,” said Scott Borling, Kalamazoo City Clerk. “Conducting a logic and accuracy test prior to an election can be compared to auditing your budget, while conducting a risk-limiting audit after an election is like auditing your actual financial statements at the end of the year.”

Currently, three states, Colorado, Rhode Island and Virginia, require risk-limiting audits. A handful of jurisdictions across the country have conducted risk-limiting audit pilots, including Marion County, IN and Orange County, CA.

Detailed information, including the pilot dates for each city, will be available after Election Day. For additional information about risk-limiting audits, read “A Gentle Introduction to Risk Limiting Audits,” and “A Smart and Effective Way to Safeguard Elections.”