



ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION Talking Points

1. **Legislation allowing individuals to register to vote online has been gaining popularity across the country.** Online registration is currently available in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Legislation is pending in the 2011 session in California, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, and Nebraska.
2. **Online registration saves states money.** Online registration is an innovation with great potential for saving the government money and staff time, and for minimizing data entry errors that are common when information is transferred to the registration database from handwritten paper forms. Arizona, for example, has reduced the cost of each registration from 83 cents to 3 cents since implementing online registration.
3. **Online registration may not help all groups equally.** One risk of the shifting emphasis to a computer-generated registration system is that those without computers or without regular access to computers are disproportionately left out of the electoral process because they're on the wrong side of the "digital divide." Not surprisingly, these are the same demographic groups that have traditionally been under-represented in the electorate: low-income people, racial minorities, and people with disabilities.
4. **Currently, most online registration programs require a signature on file.** Typically, the states that have implemented online registration have done so with the use of signatures from the state's drivers' license database (or signatures from non-driver identification records, usually administered by the same agency). Only applicants with signatures in that database are able to avail themselves of the online registration option, thus exacerbating the digital divide.
5. **However, online registration can be implemented without requiring a signature on file.** Project Vote's Model Bill opens online registration to all eligible applicants, whether or not they have signatures on file with the state. The bill provides that the applicant may attest to the truth of statements in the application by executing a computerized mark, a process that is increasingly common in electronic consumer and real estate transactions. The online registrant will then supply an actual "wet" signature at the polling place. This is comparable to HAVA's requirement that first time voters who have registered by mail present identification at the polling place if they have not already done so.
6. **Handwritten signatures will also be accepted electronically in the future.** The Model Bill also gives the state one year from its effective date to implement the technology necessary to be able to accept an electronic copy of the applicant's handwritten signature, for example from an iPad or smart phone.
7. **Online registration is more efficient and reduces Election Day problems.** In addition to the obvious advantages of online voter registration, using a computer to *update* an existing voter file (for example, to reflect a change of address) is particularly easy and efficient. With appropriate security measures in place to prevent unauthorized access, online updates will help states to maintain current voter lists and mitigate Election Day problems, including the need for provisional ballots.